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'When will it end?'

- As the COVID-19 vaccination rollout gains speed, that's the question on the mind of many Americans. Unfortunately, the answer is less than clear-cut.
- Experts say we first need to reach "herd immunity," which is achieved when a significant proportion of the population becomes immune, mostly through vaccination, so the coronavirus can no longer spread easily.



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Biden Withdraws Indian-American Budget Chief Pick After Senate Pushback

"I have accepted Neera Tanden's request to withdraw her name from nomination for Director of the Office of Management and Budget," Biden said in a statement.

(Insider Bureau)-Joe Biden on Tuesday abandoned his plan for Neera Tanden to be White House budget director after pushback from key senators, marking the first cabinet defeat for the US president.

The nomination collapsed when centrists on both sides of the political aisle made clear they were not going to vote for Tanden thanks to several of her previous tweets in which she disparaged lawmakers, including some who

would have been charged with voting on her confirmation.

"I have accepted Neera Tanden's request to withdraw her name from nomination for Director of the Office of Management and Budget," Biden said in a statement.

"I have the utmost respect for her record of accomplishment, her experience and her counsel, and I look forward to having her serve in a role in my administration."

The announcement came amid growing recognition that Tanden, who currently heads a progressive think tank, did not have enough support after one Democrat and multiple moderate Republicans in the evenly divided Senate said they would not vote for her.

"Unfortunately, it now seems clear that there is no path forward to gain confirmation, and I do not want continued consideration of my nomination to be a distraction from your other priorities,"

Tanden, 50, wrote Biden in a letter withdrawing her nomination.

Several other Biden picks have made it into their posts with bipartisan support, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin.

Two more nominees were confirmed Tuesday: Council of



Economic Advisors chair Cecilia Rouse, the first Black person to serve in the position, and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. The Tanden defeat highlights the extraordinary power that now rests in the hands of a single moderate Democrat, Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who announced last week that he would oppose her.

With the chamber deadlocked at 50-50, Biden needs the entire Democratic caucus to hang together on nominations and critical pieces of legislation if they do not earn Republican support.

Later this week the Senate is expected to vote on the \$1.9 trillion Covid relief package. No Republican has offered their support for the bill.

Over \$1 Lakh Raised For Family Of Indian Who Died In Singapore Factory Blast



(Insider Bureau)- An online charity in Singapore has raised over USD 100,000 from donations for the India-based family of an Indian worker who died in a factory blast here on Wednesday.

Give.Asia, which is Asia's leading free platform for fundraisers to raise money for their causes, said in a post that as many as 2,141 people had donated by Sunday noon.

The charity, whose listing shows a goal of 200,000 Singapore dollars for the family of 38-year-old Marimuthu S, has so far raised 153,906 dollars (USD 115,510) from online donations.

Marimuthu, who worked as a site supervisor, never met his 10-month-old daughter. When his wife gave birth to their second child in India in April last year, Singapore was going through its circuit breaker period, The Straits Times reported on Sunday. Last time he was home in August 2019.

On Tuesday night, he spoke to his family over a video call. The next morning, he suffered serious

burns in the explosion at an industrial building and was one of three workers who succumbed to their injuries. Another five of the factory's workers are in a critical condition. The explosion occurred on the premises of Stars Engrg, a contractor dealing with fire protection systems. Stars Engrg is also the employer of the eight workers. Akash Mohapatra, a volunteer at the non-profit organisation ItsRaining Raincoats (IRR) which focuses on migrant worker issues, told the report that Marimuthu was the pillar of his family. Marimuthu worked in Singapore for the past 12 years to support his elderly mother, his four younger sisters, his wife Rajapriya, 28, and their daughters Riya Sri, 5, and Lithesaa, he said. Mohapatra, who is part of a team of volunteers coordinating efforts to help the victims of the explosion, said Marimuthu is the only one whose family IRR has been able to contact so far.



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Mars Rover's "Most Exciting Work" In Coming Weeks: Indian-American Techie

Vishnu Sridhar, who is from Queens, New York, is a lead system engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California for SuperCam on the Mars 2020 Perseverance rover.

(Insider Bureau)-Vishnu Sridhar, a 27-year-old Indian-American lead system engineer with NASA's Perseverance rover, has said that the most exciting work on the awe-inspiring Mars mission will happen in the coming weeks.

Mr Sridhar, who is from Queens, New York, is a lead system engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California for SuperCam on the Mars 2020 Perseverance rover, which is on a mission to search for signs of past life on the Red Planet.

He said some of the rover's most exciting work will be done in the coming weeks.

"We're going to be taking more images of Mars, we're going to be shooting lasers with the SuperCam instrument, we're going to be recording audio with our microphone, and eventually, soon in near future, we are going

to deploy our helicopter, and do the first powered flight on Mars," Mr Sridhar told ABC7 channel. SuperCam is a remote-sensing instrument that will use laser spectroscopy to analyse the chemical composition of rocks on the Martian surface. It analyses terrain that the rover cannot reach. It is an instrument designed to scan rocks and minerals from up to 20 feet away to determine their chemical makeup.

The Perseverance rover was launched on July 30 last year and successfully landed on Mars on February 18 this year. The rover, the SuperCam, and its other devices together will help scientists search for clues of past life on Mars. Its predecessor Curiosity is still functioning eight years after landing on Mars. The two-year Perseverance mission is NASA's latest and most advanced mission to find evidence

of past life on Mars.

Mr Sridhar said it was important that the mission was happening despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"NASA missions are clearly trying to explore and answer the basic question. Perseverance is also trying to seek that, and eventually answer the question that was there life on Mars, was there life outside Earth, and it was definitely a tough period for us during COVID-19 and for everyone else around the globe," he said.

"And that's why I love the name of Perseverance because we persevered through the pandemic and there was a paradigm shift, we learned a lot about how to do engineering remotely. And we went through all that we learned and now we are successful on Mars and it's a great achievement for humankind," he said.



Mr Sridhar's time at JPL over the past five years has been dedicated to Mars and is currently the instrument engineer for SuperCam on the Mars 2020 Rover.

"Summer 2019 was when instruments came in from France and as been dedicated to Mars and is currently the instrument engineer for SuperCam on the Los Alamos and when we physically integrated SuperCam with the Perseverance rover. That's something I will cherish for the rest of my life, to have touched and worked on a piece of hardware that's on its way to Mars," he reminisced.

The US space agency on

Monday released the first audio from Mars, a faint recording of a gust of wind captured by the Perseverance rover. Perseverance will attempt to collect 30 rock and soil samples in sealed tubes to be sent back to Earth sometime in the 2030s for lab analysis.

The rover is only the fifth to set its wheels down on Mars. The feat was first accomplished in 1997, and all of them have been American. The US is aiming for an eventual human mission to the planet, though planning remains preliminary.

Mr Sridhar attended Aviation High School in Queens and grew up in Rego Park.

Josh India WebTV



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

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

Stay home except to get medical care

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



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

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



Call ahead before visiting your doctor

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



Wear a facemask if you are sick

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



Cover your coughs and sneezes

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



Clean your hands often

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



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

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

Avoid sharing personal household items

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



CS 176129-A 03/26/2020

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

Indian-Origin Pharmacist Jailed For Year In UK For Illegal Sale Of Drugs

The sentence this week came after Balkeet Singh Khaira had pleaded guilty to five counts of supplying controlled Class C drugs at Birmingham Crown Court last month.

(Insider Bureau)-An Indian-origin pharmacist in Britain has been sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for selling hundreds of thousands of doses of addictive prescription drugs in the black market.

Balkeet Singh Khaira, who worked at his mother's Khaira Pharmacy on the high street in West Bromwich, was sentenced at Birmingham Crown Court on Tuesday. The court was informed that the 36-year-old sold the restricted medicines to be sold only with prescriptions at huge profit during 2016 and 2017, with the value of the pills on the black market estimated at over 1 million pounds.

"It is a serious criminal offence to sell controlled, unlicensed or

prescription-only medicines in this way," said Grant Powell, Enforcement Officer with the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA) who led the case.

"Anyone who sells medicines illegally could be exploiting vulnerable people and clearly has no regard for their health or welfare. Prescription-only medicines are potent and should only be taken under medical supervision. We work closely with regulatory and law enforcement partners to identify and prosecute those involved," he said.

The sentence this week came after Khaira had pleaded guilty to five counts of supplying controlled Class C drugs at Birmingham Crown Court last month.

The court heard that he had qualified as a pharmacist in 2008 and was working in the family business, Khaira Care Limited. His mother, whose pharmacy he worked at, was found not to be involved in any of the criminal activity.

Balkeet Singh Khaira made over 59,000 pounds from the Class C drugs, which are prescribed for pain relief and to treat conditions such as anxiety and insomnia. Following an investigation led by the MHRA, investigators and partners from West Midlands Police visited the pharmacy.

Records found on the premises showed that of hundreds of thousands of doses of diazepam, nitrazepam, tramadol, zolpidem and zopiclone purchased from



wholesalers, only a small percentage had been dispensed against prescription. This left more than 800,000 pills unaccounted for that Khaira later admitted he had sold to drug dealers.

The investigation began following allegations that the pharmacy was selling large quantities of prescription-only medicine without a prescription.

When contacted about the investigation by the General Pharma-

ceutical Council, Khaira pretended to be his mother and said he was "shocked and blindsided" by the accusations. He then went on to provide falsified evidence intended to disprove the allegations, the MHRA said.

While Khaira admitted to the charges, he maintains that after initially making a voluntary sale to drug dealers he was then forced to sell further medicines after he was threatened outside of his pharmacy.

Support Grows For Indian In US Who Alleged Discrimination At Tech Firm

California regulators last year sued Cisco Systems, saying an engineer faced discrimination at the company's Silicon Valley headquarters because he is a Dalit-Indian.



(Insider Bureau)-The Ambedkar International Center (AIC), a US-based organization fighting against caste discrimination on Tuesday approached the California Supreme Court to be admitted as an amicus curiae in a case that involves caste discrimination in the workplace.

Amicus curiae, literally meaning

"friend of the court", is a person or organization who is not party to the litigation at hand, but is allowed to advise the court on a point of law or fact directly concerning the lawsuit. The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) vs Cisco Systems Inc., Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella case of caste

discrimination in the workplace is scheduled for hearing on March 9. California regulators last year sued Cisco Systems, saying an engineer faced discrimination at the company's Silicon Valley headquarters because he is a Dalit Indian. The State of California alleges that a major tech-industry employer violated civil rights laws by discriminating against a worker of Indian-origin because he was born into a lower caste. "The Cisco caste discrimination case is a major milestone in the transnational anti-caste movement. In the US, it has forced the social and institutional

operations of caste out of the shadows," Ajantha Subramanian, chair, Department of Anthropology and professor of South Asian Studies, Harvard University said during an online news conference. The testimony of one courageous Dalit engineer has opened the floodgates with many more now willing to speak openly about their experiences of caste discrimination, she said. The AIC has submitted its amicus filing to provide expert, and extensive information on caste discrimination. Several Indian American groups have added their names in the brief: Ambedkar King Study Circle, Anti

Caste Discrimination Alliance, Boston Study Group Inc., Ambedkarite Buddhist Association of Texas, Dr B R Ambedkar International Mission Center, Ambedkar Educational Aid Society, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha - Bay Area, California, International Bahujan Organization CA, and Hindus for Human Rights, USA among others. Noting that the outcome of this case will materially impact the lives of untouchables the most, the AIC said it firmly believes that legal protection is the first and the most important step in the fight for justice for Dalits.

Indian-American Maju Varghese Appointed Deputy Assistant To Joe Biden

(Insider Bureau)- Indian-American Maju Varghese, who previously served as a key member of the Biden campaign and the inaugural committee, has been appointed as the deputy assistant to US President Joe Biden and director of the White House Military Office. Mr Varghese, a lawyer by training, had previously served as the chief operating officer of the Biden campaign during the 2020 presidential election

and later as the executive director of the inaugural committee. "Maju Varghese is now deputy assistant to the president and director of the White House Military Office," Mr Varghese tweeted the photo of the White House Arrival Lounge announcing his appointment. "The primaries, the general, the inaugural. Grateful for the journey, for great teammates and the history we made together. Honoured to serve the country

and the President. Proud to walk through those gates again and to take my family, their story and their hopes with me," Mr Varghese tweeted along with the photo on Tuesday.

The White House Military Office (WHMO) is a department within the White House Office that provides military support for White House functions, including food service, presidential transportation, medical support, emer-

gency medical services and hospitality services.

The WHMO Director oversees all military operations aboard Air Force One on Presidential missions worldwide. Mr Varghese was one of the four members of the presidential inaugural committee, which organised the activities surrounding the swearing-in of President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on January 20. He was the chief operat-

ing officer and senior advisor in the Biden-Harris campaign from the primaries through the general, overseeing the campaign's day-to-day operations and leading it through an unprecedented shift to remote working. He previously served in the White House under president Barack Obama in various roles, including as the assistant to the president for management and administration and deputy director of advance.

Content on Demand service in trains to be launched this month: Official

To ensure buffer-free services, media servers will be placed inside coaches, RailTel CMD Puneet Chawla said in a press briefing.

(News Agencies)-The much awaited Content on Demand (CoD) service in trains will be launched this month, a senior official of Railway PSU RailTel said on Thursday.

The service involves infotainment in moving trains by providing preloaded multilingual content which will include movies, news, music videos, and general entertainment.

To ensure buffer-free services, media servers will be placed inside coaches, RailTel CMD Puneet Chawla said in a press

briefing.

Passengers will be able to enjoy high-quality buffer-free streaming across personal devices and the content will be periodically refreshed.

The service will be rolled out onboard 8,731 trains including 5,723 suburban trains and more than 5,952 wi-fi-enabled railway stations.

Pilot implementation in a Rajdhani and an AC suburban rake over Western Railway is in the final stage of completion and testing.

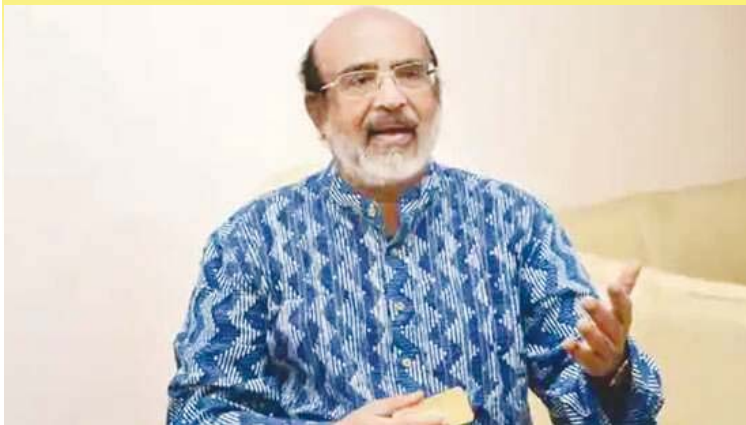
The revenue share of Railway and RailTel is 50:50 with the PSU expecting an annual revenue of at least ₹60 crore from the initiative. RailTel has roped in Margo Networks, a subsidiary of Zee Entertainment, to provide the CoD service in trains and railway stations. The project will be implemented in two years and the content will be made available both in paid and unpaid formats for a contract period of 10 years which includes first two years of implementation. With an aim to generate more non-fare revenue, the



Railway Board has entrusted RailTel with providing the CoD service to passengers in trains. "Content on Demand will be available from this month and it will

not only improve passenger experience but also increase non-fare revenue through multiple monetisation models," Chawla said.

Defiant Kerala govt says KIIFB officials won't appear for questioning by ED



Kerala Finance Minister Thomas Isaac said the timing of the ED's notice was deliberate since the masala bonds were floated two years ago.

Isaac also attributed political motive to the ED's notice ahead of the April 6 assembly election. "The ED top official in Kochi is the son of a senior BJP leader in Rajasthan and he was specially brought to Kerala to trouble the government," he said.

Isaac also said the timing of the ED's notice was deliberate while the masala bonds were floated two years ago.

The Left Front government is particularly riled that the ED notice came just two days after Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's public meeting in Ernakulam in which she criticised

the constitution of KIIFB and its budgetary provisions. "I don't know what this organization is. All money is going to it. We also present budgets, but we never give all money to a body and say 'we will see'. It seems quite weird," she had said.

The ED had sent notices to KIIFB CEO K M Abraham, also a retired additional chief secretary, officials of the Axis Bank (banking partner) and others to appear before it on Friday in connection with a case registered under the FEMA. The central agency said by raising external funds

through 'masala bonds' KIIFB had violated FEMA provisions.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan wrote to the Election Commission saying the latest action was a violation of the poll code of conduct. Kerala will vote on April 6 in the assembly election.

The CM in his letter to Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said the ED was acting at the behest of the Union finance minister and her statement during recent visit proved it. He sought the intervention of the EC as it was a clear violation of the poll code.

In Dhaka, Jaishankar stresses India's help during coronavirus pandemic

Jaishankar is in Bangladesh to prep for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the neighbouring country later this month.

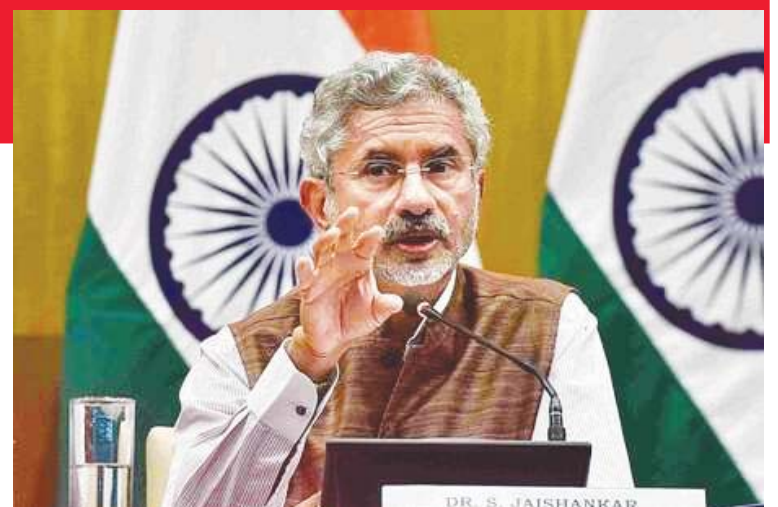
(News Agencies)-External affairs minister S Jaishankar on Thursday lauded the partnership between India Bangladesh during the coronavirus pandemic and highlighted the help New Delhi has extended to the neighbouring country. "This is a difficult time for all of us because of Covid. For us, it was important that we are partnering with you in your health and economic recovery. The largest number of vaccines shipped by India to any foreign country so far - nine million - has been to Bangladesh," Jaishankar said during his day-

long visit to Dhaka, according to news agency ANI.

After meeting his Bangladesh counterpart AK Abdul Momen, the foreign minister tweeted that the two held comprehensive discussions on bilateral ties. "Noted our steady progress, even during COVID. Shared my thoughts on the relationship & its prospects with the press," he added.

Jaishankar also pushed for 'no crime no death border' objective over the issue of killings along the border with Bangladesh. "Many of the deaths are fairly

deep inside India. We discussed it as neighbours and friends and agreed that our objective should be 'no crime no death border'. If we can get it right, we can address the problem effectively," he was quoted as saying by ANI. The external affairs minister also discussed the issue of the Teesta river and said that the two nations' water resources secretaries will meet soon over it, according to ANI. He asserted that India's position on the issue has not changed. Jaishankar is in Bangladesh to prep for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to



the neighbouring country later this month. The Prime Minister will visit Bangladesh to participate in celebrations on March 26 marking 50 years of the country's independence and the establishment of

diplomatic relations. This will be his first foreign visit since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. His earlier trip to Bangladesh in March last year was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Delhi HC dismisses plea claiming unsolicited emails sent by central govt depts, asks him to unsubscribe

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh said the simple mechanism available with the petitioner is to unsubscribe to those emails.

(News Agencies)-The Delhi High Court Thursday dismissed a plea claiming that unsolicited emails are being sent from various government departments and authorities, including the Prime Minister Office (PMO).

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh said the simple mechanism available with the petitioner is to unsubscribe to those emails.

The division bench said it was in full agreement with the reasons given by a single judge in the January 12 order by which the

man's plea was disposed of with a direction to him to write to sampark.support@gov.in in order to ensure that no further unsolicited e-mails are received by him.

Upon the said e-mail being sent, the authorities shall ensure that no unsolicited e-mails are sent to the petitioner, the single judge had said.

Petitioner Soibal Gupta challenged the single judge's order before the division bench on the ground that it was bad in facts of the case and in law. In his appeal, he said that in the absence of any data

protection/ anti-spam law in India the single judge's judgement has legalised email-address harvesting.

Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, representing the Centre, said that the simple mechanism for the petitioner was to unsubscribe himself from the emails being received by him.

The single judge had earlier asked the petitioner to send an email to

"mailto:sampark.support@gov.in" or "mailto:sampark.support@gov.in"



requesting not to be sent any emails under the 'e-sampark' mechanism of the government under which public service messages and various schemes are communicated to the general public.

The court had also directed the central government to ensure that on receipt of the request from the petitioner, no unsolicited emails be sent to him from any department or authority.

Ajit Pawar removes doctor who allegedly tried to molest patient



Maharashtra deputy CM Ajit Pawar said action was taken after a preliminary probe into the incident. The doctor allegedly tried to molest the patient at a Covid-19 care centre in Aurangabad.

(News Agencies)-Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday has removed a doctor who allegedly tried to molest a woman patient at a COVID-19 care centre in Aurangabad. Speaking during an

Assembly session, Pawar said, "A doctor who allegedly tried to molest a woman patient at a COVID-19 care centre in Aurangabad has been removed from service after a preliminary probe into the incident."

He added that Standard operating procedures SOPs for such facilities will be issued by this month-end. He made this statement during the Assembly session.

The issue was raised by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Manisha Chaudhary in the state Legislative Assembly.

Raising the issue, Leader of Opposition and former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis said that he had written four letters to the

chief minister on the rise in incidents of crime against women in COVID-19 care centres and sought standard operating procedures (SOPs) to curb them.

In response, Pawar said the SOPs for COVID-19 care centres will be published by March 31.

On the contrary, Neeta Padalkar, medical officer at corporation hospital Aurangabad said that there is "no case of physical assault."

The incident took place at Corona treatment center in Padampura,

Aurangabad.

"Woman admitted at Padampura COVID centre in Maharashtra's Aurangabad yesterday alleged physical assault against a doctor. We have dismissed him. In CCTV footage, the 2 are talking but no assault seen. We have found that both knew each other," she said.

"We received information regarding the said incident at Corona treatment center in Padampura, Aurangabad.

National Safety Day 2021: 'Sadak Suraksha' theme to be observed this year

This year, the focus of National Safety Day is on road safety and the theme is 'Sadak Suraksha' (road safety).

(News Agencies)-March 4 is observed every year as National Safety Day in India with the purpose of creating awareness among people with respect to safety measures. The day seeks to increase awareness about all guidelines, which includes road safety, workplace safety, the safety of human health as well as the environment. This year, the focus of National Safety Day is on road safety and the theme is 'Sadak Suraksha' (road safety). The celebrations this year have also been spread over a week and National Safety Week will be observed from March 4 to March

10, in order to highlight the importance of safety on the roads.

History of National Safety Day The Union ministry of labour and employment organised a conference on industrial safety for the first time from December 11 to 13, 1965. During the conference, a need was felt for safety councils on national and state levels and a proposal for a National Safety Council was then accepted in the 24th session of the standing labour committee. The campaign for the National Safety Day was born half a decade later, on March 4, 1972, to mark the National Safety

Council's day of formation. The National Safety Council is a non-profit, self-financing and tripartite apex body set up to generate, develop and sustain a voluntary movement on safety, health and environment at the national level.

Road safety in India

Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that 421,104 accidental human deaths occurred in the year 2019 out of which traffic accidents alone were 467,171 in number.

Last month, while inaugurating the Road Safety Month, Union road, transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said that the government is working on its



promise to ensure road safety and reduce accidental deaths as well. "We had promised to reduce road fatalities by 50 per cent. Tamil Nadu has done it, with a success rate of 53 per cent. If we wait till 2030, 6-7 lakh more

people will die. So, we've made a commitment that before 2025, road accidents and deaths due to it will be brought down by 50 per cent with help of people's participation," Gadkari said.

Tamil Nadu assembly election 2021

CM K Palaniswami calls for party workers to unite, work towards AIADMK govt

"We should make sure the AIADMK comes back to power. Even after 10 years, people of Tamil Nadu are with the AIADMK," the chief minister said.

(News Agencies)-Tamil Nadu chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami called on the workers of the AIADMK to make sure the party comes back to power in the upcoming assembly elections in the state. "Everyone should unite and work together for upcoming polls. This is the first state assembly polls after Amma's [J Jayalalitha] demise. We should make sure the AIADMK comes back to power. Even after 10 years, people of Tamil Nadu are with the AIADMK," news agency ANI quoted

Palaniswami as saying. The CM's remarks came a day after expelled party leader and Jayalalitha's close aide VK Sasikala announced that she would stay away from politics, ahead of the elections. Sasikala, in her statement, also called for the party cadre to stay united and work towards an AIADMK government in the state. Earlier in the day, Palaniswami and his deputy O Paneerselvam called for a meeting at the party headquarters in Chennai to interview candidates who have expressed their interest

to contest on behalf of the party in the assembly elections. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) along with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is facing the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Congress and allies in the upcoming polls. Seat sharing talks have been progressing in both camps. The DMK on Thursday sealed the deal with the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), who would now contest in six out of the 234 seats in the state. The two regional majors will be fighting the polls



scheduled for April 6 without their party veterans - former chief ministers M Karunanidhi and Jayalalitha - for the first time this year. The AIADMK has been in power for two terms now in the state, since winning the 2011 assembly elections.

'Just an employee of Amazon': What Aparna Purohit said in Supreme Court challenging HC order in 'Tandav' row



Earlier, the police had identified Singh as one of the persons who did a Facebook Live from the Red Fort during the violence on Republic Day.

(News Agencies)-The Allahabad high court rejected her plea seeking anticipatory bail in connection with cases against 'Tandav'. The high court highlighted the offensive language used in the web series.

Aparna Purohit, the creative head of Amazon Prime Video in India, has approached the Supreme Court challenging an order of the Allahabad high court, which denied her

anticipatory bail in a case linked to web series 'Tandav'. The series premiered on Amazon Prime on January 15 and Purohit has been named in multiple FIRs over controversies around it.

Appearing for Purohit, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi said that the cases against her are "shocking". He further said that Purohit is just an employee of Amazon; she is neither a producer nor an actor. Rohatgi

said that Purohit has been made accused in around 10 cases related to 'Tandav'. The lawyer contended that OTT regulations have come and the Allahabad high court order was not based on these regulations. "It's about freedom of speech and expression," he added. Rohatgi also said that 'Tandav' is not available for free, it can be only watched by payment. He called those who has filed the FIRs as "publicity seekers". The Supreme Court bench of justices Ashok Bhushan and RS Reddy then asked the Centre to present before it the regulations put in place by the government on Over The Top (OTT) platforms and adjourned the hearing till

Friday. Purohit was denied pre-arrest bail by the high court on February 25 in the ongoing investigation against 'Tandav' in connection with hurting religious sentiments and objectionable content. Dismissing her petition, the high court highlighted the offensive language used in the web series and said Purohit has scant respect for law and order.

The Uttar Pradesh Police filed an FIR against the top Amazon Prime Video executive, and the actors and makers of the web series for the derogatory depiction of Hindu deities and promoting religious enmity. "Such people make the

revered figures of the religion of majority community the source of earning money in a most brazen manner taking benefit of the liberal and tolerant tradition of the country," the high court said.

On January 27, the Supreme Court refused to grant interim protection from arrest to actors and makers of 'Tandav' and asked them to approach high courts for relief from arrest or quashing of FIRs. 'Tandav', a nine-episode web series, premiered on Amazon Prime Video on January 15. It stars Saif Ali Khan, Dimple Kapadia, Mohammad Zeeshan Ayyub and others.

Supreme Court rejects plea requesting extension of GST amnesty scheme

(News Agencies)-The Supreme Court on Thursday declined to issue directives on extending the Goods and Services Tax (GST) amnesty scheme, saying it was "a policy decision exclusively within the domain of the government".

A Supreme Court bench comprising justices Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud and MR Shah dismissed a petition by a trader from Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur who had urged the court to direct the Central government and the GST council to extend the amnesty

scheme, giving more time to small businesses and MSMEs to file their returns.

The petition by Satyakam Arya had assailed the notification issued by the GST council on June 24, 2020 which had given time till September 30, 2020 for filing of returns between July 2017 and July 2020, capping the late fee at ₹500. For any subsequent delay, a late fee of ₹50 per day had been prescribed as penalty. It asked for an extension of the scheme by two months, besides reimbursement of the late fee al-

ready collected. But the bench said in its order: "In our view, these reliefs, as sought in the petition, pertain in the realm of policy decisions. It would be inappropriate for this court to entertain a petition of this nature, such as extension of the amnesty scheme; a cap on the late fee to be collected; exemption of late fee paid for a period between March 25, 2020 and June 30, 2020 and refund of the amount already collected towards late fee." The court emphasised that the amnesty scheme was itself a "policy intervention" by the



government of India and that "the scheme was executed in the terms on which the amnesty realm of a policy decision."

'Ungliyon pe nachana': Rahul Gandhi slams I-T raids on Anurag Kashyap, Taapsee

Rahul Gandhi on Thursday tweeted using #Modiraidspofarmers and pointed out three trends of the current situation of the country using three Hindi idioms.

(News Agencies)- Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday launched a three-pronged attack on the government, a day after the income tax department raided the properties of Bollywood filmmaker Anurag Kashyap and actor Taapsee Pannu in an alleged tax evasion case linked with now dissolved Phantom Films.

While the searches are still on, the Congress leader took to Twitter and said the government

is making its departments like Income Tax, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Enforcement Directorate (ED) etc., dance to its tunes while "friendly media" crows down before the government and the government meanwhile takes out its anger on people who are supporting the farmers' protest.

In three popular Hindi idioms – 'Ungliyon pe nachana', 'Bheegi billi banna' and 'Khisiyani billi khamba noche' — Gandhi said this is what he believes the

current situation of the country is.

Though Rahul did not mention the names of Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu and all others who are on tax radar now, using hashtags 'Modi raids pro farmers', he made his target clear.

Both Anurag and Taapsee have been vocal about their political opinions, mostly against the government.

The raids have drawn sharp reaction from several opposition leaders and ministers of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government.

Maharashtra minister and NCP chief spokesperson Nawab Malik said, "Central agencies like ED, CBI, and Income Tax are being used to target those who take an anti-government stand and speak against the policies of the



regime." Maharashtra PWD minister Ashok Chavan said he did not find anything new in the raid. "We have been seeing this as happening often. Those who put forth facts are being pressurised in this way so that they don't speak up," he said. Union minister Prakash Javadekar, however, dismissed links between the I-T raids and the recent comments of Anurag and Taapsee and said this speculation is "too much".

"Probe agencies undertake investigations based on credible information and the matter later goes to courts as well," he added.

IT officials on Wednesday said all businesses, financial transactions, talent and event management contracts between Phantom and other entities are under scrutiny. The searches will now continue as I-T officials will look into the bank accounts and lockers of these personalities.

3 Jharkhand Jaguar force jawans killed in Maoist landmine blast



(News Agencies)- Three jawans of Jharkhand Jaguar (JJ) Special Assault Group-11, a special unit of the state police department, were killed and four others were injured in a landmine blast by the banned CPI (Maoist) in Langi jungle atop Langi hills under Toklo police station (PS) in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand early Thursday morning, said police. The encounter with the Maoists is still underway, it added.

"Three JJ AG-11 jawans have died while two others have been seriously injured in IED blasts triggered by Maoist in Langi jungle under Toklo PS in West Singhbhum district this morning. Two other jawans have also sustained minor splinter injuries and have been shifted to Chakradharpur hospital while two seriously injured jawans have been airlifted to Medica Hospital in Ranchi. Encounter with the Maoists is currently on," said

Niraj Sinha, Jharkhand director general of police (DGP).

As per sources, the landmines blasts were triggered by the Maoists when a joint team of district police, CRPF and JJ were on a search operation early this morning in and around Langi hills, the site of four encounters in three days between security forces and the Maoists last month.

Kokhan DIG Rajiv Ranjan Singh, West Singhbhum SP Ajay Linda, DSP Sudhir Kumar, with additional forces, had reached Chakradharpur and were on their way to the encounter site under Toklo PS. Two of the three killed jawans have been identified as constable Haridwar Shah (Palamu) and constable Kiran Surin (Simdega). Three of the four injured jawans have been identified as head constable Devendra Kumar Pandit (Godda), constable Deep Topno (Khunti), constable Nikku Oraon (Latehar).

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Mohammed bin Salman Is an Odious Murderer. Why the battle of Bengal matters

We Should Help Saudi Arabia Anyway.

It is easy to frame the release of the intelligence report on the gruesome murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul as an attempt by President Joe Biden to "reset" the U.S.-Saudi relationship. Biden has disdained the Trump administration's closeness with the Saudi kingdom, characterized by unquestioned support and limitless weapons sales, sometimes coordinated via WhatsApp between Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The report from the Director of National Intelligence provided almost no new information directly linking bin Salman to the murder, affirming only that he "approved an operation to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi." Still, that's a tougher line than the Trump administration ever used. Several top Saudi officials now face sanctions, including General Ahmed al-Asiri, previously the deputy head of Saudi intelligence, and the members of the Saudi Rapid Intervention Force who conducted the killing; notably, however, the crown prince—commonly referred to by his initials, MBS—will not be sanctioned. The only move that could affect him is that the State Department will now be empowered to revoke or restrict visas for individuals harassing dissidents and journalists extraterritorially, a fairly clear reference to the crown prince.

Yet, despite these moves, like so many aspects of his nascent presidency, Biden's approach to Saudi Arabia so far is mostly a reversion to the pre-Trump status quo, rather than an overdue and fundamental shift in policy.

But a fundamental shift in policy is needed. The status quo in Saudi Arabia is unsustainable. As the world shifts away from reliance on Saudi oil, leaders in Riyadh can no longer afford to pay male citizens to sit in an office and female citizens to sit at home, while the real work is done by expat laborers. MBS has accelerated an economic and social transition that is necessary and should be encouraged. Eventually moving toward "normality" will mean either revolution in Saudi Arabia, or a less authoritarian government. Biden should help support Saudi Arabia in this transition. But to avoid the Iran model, i.e., Saudi Arabia going through a violent revolution and 40 years of hostility toward the U.S., Biden should support Saudi normalization, despite MBS' murderous despotism. The dysfunction of the U.S.-Saudi relationship long predates Trump. The most glaring contemporary ignominy was the Obama administration's support for Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen, launched with the United Arab Emirates and seven other Arab coalition partners in

2015. The Obama administration backed the Saudi-led war because it hoped the Saudis would temper their objections to the Iran nuclear deal. The gamble did not pay off: The Saudis loudly condemned the deal, and Yemen was and is devastated. Over 2 million children under age 5 are in danger of acute malnutrition in the coming months because of the war and blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, on top of hundreds of thousands already killed. While internal warring factions, especially the Houthis rebels, share responsibility for Yemen's misery, two-thirds of civilian casualties are the result of Saudi airstrikes, conducted until recently with U.S. support.

The dysfunction of the U.S.-Saudi relationship also precedes MBS, although his actions have made the incompatibilities harder to overlook. 9/11 was motivated in part by Osama bin Laden's rage at the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia after the first Gulf War. The Saudi king's status as the guardian of the two holiest sites in Islam makes partnership with the U.S. likewise awkward for the Saudis, especially given their promotion of an intensely conservative and intolerant interpretation of Islam. Decades of U.S. support, predicated on America's dependence on Saudi oil, assured the ruling Saudis of their secure position, guaranteed by the might of the U.S. military, regardless of setbacks (such as the 1973 oil embargo). U.S. policy has typically been to reassure Saudi Arabia in hopes of encouraging good behavior, as Biden did earlier this month when he demanded an end to the war in Yemen but consoled Saudi Arabia with promises of defense against Iran. American protection has allowed Saudi Arabia, especially under MBS, to pursue reckless policies that destabilize the region. It was only after the Iranian attack on Saudi oil facilities in September 2019, when the response from the Trump administration was admirably muted, that Saudi Arabia toned down its bluster and quietly reached out to Iran to reduce tensions.

The projection of American military power over the region has traditionally been justified by the need to secure access to Persian Gulf oil; thanks to fracking and other changes in U.S. energy usage, that is no longer necessary. America's massive military presence in the region now reflects inertia rather than U.S. interests. U.S. security partners in the Middle East, including the UAE and Israel, want the United States to remain the military hegemon in the region to provide backup for their own regional ambitions. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel all want to fight Iran to the last American.

In West Bengal, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as the chief challenger to the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), which has ruled West Bengal for 10 years. This, in and of itself, is a major change in Bengal's politics, where the BJP had never been much of an electoral factor. Building on an astounding performance in the 2019 election, where it won 18 out of 42 seats, the BJP has a genuine opportunity to win in the upcoming state election. If it does win, it will have major reverberations across Indian politics.

To date, the vast majority of the BJP's electoral dominance has been built in areas where its chief opponent is the Congress, and in large Hindi-speaking states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. For the party, states such as Tamil Nadu or West Bengal ruled by "vernacular parties" - regional parties that use linguistic nationalism as part of their appeal - were once considered unattainable.

A careful look at how the BJP has risen in Bengal, and how the ruling TMC has sought to counteract its growth, is instructive in understanding the new dimensions of the BJP's appeal and possible templates to defeat it. If we calculate the 2019 Lok Sabha results by West Bengal's 294 assembly constituency (AC) segments, the BJP led in 121 ACs with an average of 40.6% constituency-wise vote share. The TMC won 164 ACs on a 43.6% average of constituency-wise vote share.

The Congress and the Left had a combined average constituency-wise vote share of just 13%, with the Congress winning nine ACs and the Left winning none. In addition to subsuming the vote share of the Left and the Congress, there were strong identity-based factors to the

BJP's rise. Unlike in other states, where the BJP has an upper-caste base, the BJP support has grown the fastest among West Bengal's marginalised communities. The BJP led in 46 (55%) of the state's 84 Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe reserved seats, while winning just 75 (36%) of the remaining 210 ACs. High levels of Hindu-Muslim polarisation were also observed. According to Lokniti's 2019 National Election Survey, 57% of Hindu voters selected the BJP as compared to 32% of Hindu voters supporting the TMC. By contrast, the TMC won 70% of Muslim voters with the BJP winning a negligible amount (4%). This identity-based polarisation is visible on the ground today and is the key demographic heuristic one can use to analyse the BJP's chances. Approximately 30% of West Bengal's voters are Muslims and, as a rule of thumb, we can classify the remaining 70% of the state's voters as Hindu. Given a negligible amount of Muslim support for the BJP, this implies that the BJP is likely to win if it can get about 60-65% support among the Hindu population. To tap this, the BJP has begun a poriborton yatra, one that looks strikingly similar to the rath yatra that yielded national electoral dividends for the BJP in 1990. The pattern of extreme Hindu-Muslim polarisation and campaign strategies that exacerbate the divide between these communities have been seen as a trump card for the BJP. To be sure, there are other concerns for the TMC, from a series of high-profile defections to concerns that its ground-level cadre is excessively dominant and violent. But the TMC's core challenge is to prevent an "identity-based" vote along caste, tribe, and religious lines.



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How Can India Avoid Jobless Growth?

Extreme automation is leading to massive job destruction globally. But can India escape this phenomenon through focused policy interventions such that, unlike in the past, GDP growth also leads to job creation?

Jobs come from the Primary sector, Secondary sector and Tertiary sector industries. Primary sector jobs consist of main agriculture and a bit of mining in India. Core agriculture has already seen a significant reduction in jobs. That leaves Manufacturing and Services as the expected growth engine for job creation. India's services sector holds enormous significance for the Indian economy; dynamic and endowed with a unique and distinct universe of its own. India has grown rapidly, formally and informally, in the last decade with almost 72.4% of the growth in India's GDP in 2014-15, coming solely from its services sector. The services sector has emerged to contribute majorly to national and states' incomes, job creation and contribution to the economy. This is unlike other developing economies

where manufacturing plays a key role in job creation.

A critical debate has now emerged on whether India can become the world's third-largest economy and if that can be achieved by revamping India's manufacturing. The underlying assumption is that manufacturing can generate significant jobs and that manufacturing is strategic for the economy. Whereas the latter is a policy decision, one has to be careful about the first assumption that manufacturing will lead to job creation.

Given the march of technology, there is no reason why manufacturing will not get even more automated with technologies such as 3D printing, not only replacing traditional manufacturing, but also laying jobless even handicraft craftsmen whose work could not be replicated by earlier manufacturing technologies, but

cannot be replicated by 3D scanners and 3D printers. We will soon see a tipping point where suddenly in a span of a few years, a vast amount of manufacturing will switch to low-cost 3D printers, leaving millions jobless in a short period.

So, should we, therefore, focus on services to create jobs. The answer is so but again, low-end services jobs, including the BPO industry, is already getting highly automated with software replacing humans. The lower end services industry is on the cusp of transformation with technologies such as Driverless cars, ATM's, automatic payment systems etc replacing service jobs in driving, ticketing, banking etc. For the longer run, we need to immediately create frameworks of training our workforce to perform very high-end services



jobs, else we would soon see massive job losses, followed by a collapse in demand and eventual collapse in the economy. Revisiting the government's current intent on structurally transforming the manufacturing sector through its flagship initiative 'Make in India' is blatant, we must note that manufacturing as a sector, offers the most complex interplay of labour and capital. Thus, many argue that Make in India is easier said than done. India has almost everything that China had to provide the boost to its manufacturing, in terms of

sound fundamentals and a massive pool of labour. To top it, it has a very large English-speaking population. So, what is stopping investments into manufacturing from pouring in? Among other reasons, India's poor ranking in ease of doing business has discouraged global investors. Acquiring land for a large-scale manufacturing facility teamed with stringent labour reforms are viewed as major roadblocks. Weak infrastructure deters India from replicating the low-cost high-volume manufacturing that China excels in.

Khashoggi was killed in cold-blood. Yet Biden refuses to hold culprits accountable



On Friday, Joe Biden's administration confirmed what the world knew: that Saudi Arabia's ruthless crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, approved the assassination of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. Biden followed through on a campaign promise to release a summary report of the US intelligence community's findings on the murder, and he undid two years of stonewalling by Donald Trump.

But Biden failed to keep a more important promise: to hold Khashoggi's killers accountable. Worried about disrupting the US-Saudi relationship, Biden decided not to impose sanctions on the crown prince. By giving the prince a pass, Biden skirted true justice for the murdered journalist and other dissidents who have suffered at Prince Mohammed's hands. And, in turn, the reckless prince is unlikely to be dissuaded from more repression and crimes.

Instead of targeting the prince, the Biden administration imposed travel bans and financial sanctions against some of his underlings who took part in Khashoggi's assassination at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018. The US also sanctioned the Rapid Intervention Force, an elite unit that protects Prince Mohammed and answers only to him. The US intelligence report released on Friday said that seven members of the force were part of the 15-man team that killed Khashoggi. The report directly blamed the crown prince, noting that since 2017, he "has had absolute control of the kingdom's security and intelligence organizations, making it highly unlikely that Saudi officials would have carried out an operation of this nature without the Crown Prince's authorization." Despite this evidence, Biden

and his aides decided that Prince Mohammed was too big to punish. While Biden had promised during the presidential campaign to change the US-Saudi relationship, he reverted to his cautious nature. In the name of pragmatism, Biden resorted to the longstanding US foreign policy that looks the other way as America's autocratic allies commit atrocities at home and abroad.

Biden's reluctance to hold Prince Mohammed accountable for Khashoggi's murder raises doubts about whether the new administration will follow through on its pledges to remake the US-Saudi relationship. During a campaign debate in November 2019, Biden said he would make the Saudis into "the pariah that they are", adding that there is "very little social redeeming value in the present government". He promised that his administration would not "sell

more weapons to them". On 4 February, in his first major foreign policy speech as president, Biden pledged to end US support for "offensive operations" in the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Days earlier, his administration announced it would freeze two new deals with the kingdom, totaling nearly \$800m in precision-guided bombs and other weapons, that were rushed by Trump in his final weeks in office. Biden pledged to end American complicity in a war that has killed more than 233,000 people and created the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

But Biden also promised to help Saudi Arabia defend itself against Yemen's Houthi rebels, who have attacked Saudi territory with missiles and drones. That means the US will continue to sell some weapons and provide military assistance to the Saudis for defensive purposes.

Proud To Fail The Standards Of New Patriotism

A new wave of patriotism is sweeping through the land. We have not seen the likes of it before. This new cult of patriotism does not merely stop at claiming loudly "I am a patriot", it extends to giving certificates of patriotism to others - and includes the right to brand them as anti-national. The definition of 'anti-national' applies with extra credit to all those who are against the government of the day, or critical of it. New terms have flooded the lexicon like 'Tukde Tukde Gang', 'Khan Market gang', 'Lutyens Lobby', 'Urban Naxal', 'Andolan Jeevi', etc. One set of people has acquired the monopoly over patriotism. According to them, they are the real patriots, and those before them were pseudos. So, if you want the nation to survive and flourish, these new patriots must be allowed to rule forever. Even our great freedom movement pales into insignificance before the bright light of this new patriotism. Let me therefore admit that according to this definition of patriotism, I am no patriot because I am critical of this government. Let me also admit that I belong to the 'Tukde Tukde Gang' and to all the other 'non-

patriotic' groups. Having settled this issue, let me proceed with the points I wish to make and let me begin with the most sensitive of them. We have just observed the second anniversary of the tragic Pulwama attack (February 14 2019) in which 40 CRPF personnel were martyred. This naturally led to a huge national uproar for revenge. And revenge we took by attacking Pakistani terrorist hideouts in Balakot and killing a large number of Pakistani terrorists. The nation was satisfied and the people of India returned to power the ruling coalition at the centre, led by the BJP, with an even bigger majority.

Can you imagine how elated we all felt post Balakot? I was at my home in Hazaribagh (Jharkhand) during the 2019 elections. One day, a family dropped in to see me. They had with them a young boy no older than ten. As generally happens on such occasions, the family was keen to show off the talent of the young lad. So they encouraged him to tell me whom he would vote for in the forthcoming elections. After

some prodding, the boy said shyly that he would vote for Modi. "And why" was the next question. "Because he defeated Pakistan" was the reply. I was stunned. This was the impact of the Balakot air strike and the way it was milked for electoral purposes by the Prime Minister personally and his party in general.

There were some questions, no doubt, about why the Pulwama attack was allowed to happen. They were all dismissed as the shenanigans of anti-nationals. The demand for an enquiry into the obvious intelligence failure which led to the attack had no takers. It all got lost in the huge upsurge of patriotic sentiment which followed the Balakot air strike. Now, Anando Bhakto of the Frontline magazine has done a great national service by putting together some of the facts relating to this unfortunate terrorist attack. He spent more than a year in Kashmir, did his research meticulously and has put out facts which should shame this government. According to Bhakto, there were at least eleven 'actionable' intelligence reports about such a terrorist strike. An



'actionable' intelligence report is one which is so specific that it can and must be acted upon. Why were these reports ignored? The question has never been answered, and perhaps never will be, because after all, these are the doubts created by anti-nationals. Modi turned to his advantage Rahul Gandhi's accusation of 'Chowkidar chor hai' (the watchman is a thief) by saying that he indeed was a 'chowkidar' of the nation, and look how he had guarded its interests by taking revenge for Pulwama. According to Bhakto, Modi used the word 'chowkidar' a whopping 106 times, 'terrorism' 24 times and 'Pakistan' 15 times during his election speeches. In comparison 'development' was used only 31 times. He thus exploited the

issue of Balakot to the hilt during the elections.

This, to my mind, raises a major issue which must be debated, 'Godi Media' notwithstanding. If raising national security issues for electoral gains is patriotic, how is it unpatriotic to raise doubts about the failures of the government on the national security front? 'Godi Media' rushes to attack people asking such questions as if they were questioning the valour and courage of our armed forces. This is far from true, but this is how such questions are sought to be rubbished. We should not allow ourselves to be deterred by such tactics and must continue to question the government on issues of national security in national interest.

by Yashwant Sinha

The Absolutely Justifiable Renaming Of Stadium After PM Modi



The largest stadium in the world by capacity is the "Rungrado 1st of May Stadium" in Pyongyang, North Korea. Oddly enough, it isn't named after Kim Jong-un, the Supreme Representative of the Korean People. Luckily for us, the Supreme Representative of the Indian People, unafflicted by bashfulness, stepped up to rename the second-largest stadium in the world (by capacity) after himself.

To make room for Narendra Modi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was taken off the marquee and given the important supporting

role of naming the sports enclave in which the stadium is set. There is a nice metaphor in that: Sardar Patel as the setting for the solitaire that is Modi, the Loh Purush as warm-up act for Non-Stick Narendra.

Napoleon Bonaparte famously crowned himself Emperor of France; Narendra Modi at Motera went one better: he had himself elevated in absentia with the President of the Republic in close attendance. To time the renaming of the stadium so it was done just before a Test match which 50,000 spectators and hundreds of millions of

television viewers had turned up to watch ranks as one of the great event-management coups of our time.

The extended Shah family commercials that played during the breaks were particularly well-made. There was Amit Shah genially leading the President through the team introductions. Even as the players stepped forward one by one to be greeted by the President, the Home Minister took the opportunity to wave, Caesar-style, at the assembled spectators. It was just as well that this was a captive audience with cricket in prospect; else, the sight of Shah surveying a crowd and benignly raising a hand might have emptied the stadium.

But it was his son, Jay Shah, who was the star of the 3rd Test between India and England. In the little documentary promo for the stadium, there was an extended shot where the camera panned around the magnificent stands,

empty, save for a solitary figure, the Secretary of the BCCI, surveying his surroundings. Its atmospherics were straight out of a Western: this could have been a shadowed Clint Eastwood at sundown, squinting at a desert landscape...different silhouette, but the same mood.

The criticism levelled at the Narendra Modi stadium for having its ends named after two of India's most distinguished business houses was entirely beside the point. The critics missed the self-aware symbolism of the naming. We should think of this stadium as a giant representation of India's political economy. The political figures who built and named this stadium are, so to speak, the means. Ambani and Adani are this enterprise's ends. The lovely, literal playfulness of the naming has been lost on the dour critics, who, unlike Modi and Shah, aren't used to thinking on this scale. There is a case for arguing that the logic of naming wasn't

followed through. This test could have been a landmark in cricket history. Given how arbitrarily cricket's fielding positions are named (backward point?), the BCCI could have Indianized them. The BCCI calls the shots on television commentary, and Jay Shah calls the shots at the BCCI, so the commentators could have been told to use a new fielding scheme. So, Info-slip, Wipro-slip and TC-slip; Backward-short Birla; Forward-short Tata; mid-Ambani, long-Adani; Backward Bajaj (for backward point), Silly Bennett Coleman; Fine Hinduja; Mallya (for cover); Third Murugappa; Square Muthoot...the possibilities are endless. What better way to stamp India's modern ownership of cricket into the very nomenclature of the game? There's still time; a beginning could be made in the second Test at this great venue next week.

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I love Texas but something's wrong

On March 2, 1836, Texas declared its independence from Mexico. Texas has the distinction of having been an independent nation before joining the United States. The history books say Texas joined the Union in 1845. Sometimes I wonder if Texas ever really, fully joined the Union -- especially on days like this, when while the US remains in the grips of a capricious, widespread lethal contagion, the governor ended Texas' mask mandate Tuesday and declared that all businesses in his state can be open -- 100% - in a matter of days. You see, Texas, my beloved home state, is just like America, only more so. And the same can be said of Texas politics, as is plain to see in two things that have been occupying my mind lately: the recent catastrophic power outage there, and an amazing documentary film from Texas called "Boys State."

As I read about the deadly Texas power loss, it became clear to me the crisis was not like a hurricane or an earthquake. This was a human-caused disaster, caused by a slavish devotion to a rigid, right-wing ideology of deregulation. How

can sensible people become so ossified in their views? How can policymakers sworn to protect the public sacrifice public safety in service of ideology?

In short, tribalism.

Being a one-party state, Texas politicians lacked the checks and balances they needed to guard against ideological overkill. This came to me when I considered the movie "Boys State," a film that explores the farm teams of Texas politics with humor, pathos and drama. Boys State is an immersive civics program run by the American Legion annually bringing about 1,100 17-year-old boys to Austin. Filmmakers Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine were given full access to the event, and they tell a remarkable story of young men coming of age politically. The cameras roll as the angel of idealism wrestles the devil of ambition. I attended Texas Boys State back when dinosaurs ruled the Earth, and I loved it. But today's Boys State, as depicted in the film, shows a politics that is more divisive, more dramatic, more intense than in my day. It is "The War Room" meets "Lord of the Flies."

One of the deep lessons of the film is how easy it is to divide, how difficult it is to unite. The divisions at "Boys State" are wholly artificial. Each boy is assigned to a party -- Nationalist or Federalist -- at random. There is no ideological framework at all -- that's for the boys to work out.

Some of the boys give speeches crowing about guns or screaming about abortion. One boy even touts secession -- perhaps forgetting that the last time Texas seceded it didn't work out too well. But other young men cut against the hysterical masculinity.

Steven Garza, a Mexican-American, is nominated for governor based on his calls for unity and community; Rene Otero, an African-American, becomes his party's chair on the strength of a terrific speech in support of prison reform. On the other side, Ben Feinstein is the wheeler-dealer party chair and Robert MacDougall the pro-life, conservative gubernatorial candidate (who confesses to the camera that he is actually pro-choice).

Over the course of the film, you are drawn to these young men, and hope they can grow to be-



come real-world leaders who are more committed to changing the dominant political culture in Texas, and less interested in feeding it. The boys in the film are mimicking the divisive politics and rigid ideologies that have dominated Texas in past decades. And tragically, we saw the consequences of such reflexive adherence to right-wing ideology play out in real life with the Texas power outage. The electric grid failed. Millions lost heat. Countless families lacked clean water -- or any water at all. This was not simply an act of nature. Sure, the winter storm was the proximate cause, but the cold in Oklahoma or New Mexico was as record-breaking as it was in Texas, yet their power grids didn't suffer catastrophic fail-

ure.

As my colleague John Avlon noted, Texas politicians' right-wing ideology caused them to opt out of the national power grid in 1935, making it essentially impossible to bring in electricity from out of state when most in-state power plants froze up. Millions shivered without heat; pipes burst, water was cut off, roads were impassable. People died: an 11-year-old boy's family says he froze to death in his bed in Conroe, Texas. In Sugar Land, where I grew up, a house fire -- possibly caused by an attempt to heat the home after the power went out -- wiped out almost an entire family -- a grandmother and three young children: ages 11, 8 and 5, perished.

The Trumps are back, playing victims again

He lost the White House (big time), and (on his watch) his party lost the Senate and the House in the midterms. He lost Twitter and Facebook. Revenues are down across his business empire. What's a losing businessman-turned-politician to do? If he's former president Donald Trump, the answer is: use his principal assets -- fame and attitude -- to revive his brand through a "hostile takeover." He demonstrated this, for example, in his address to the Conservative Political Action Conference on Sunday. With the help of his son, Donald Jr., he claimed both the conference and the GOP as his own. After reports that he was privately considering starting a new political party, he ended weeks of speculation and declared that there was no need. "We have the Republican Party," he said, marking his territory. He also teased the crowd with musings about running for president again in 2024. The standing

ovation that followed, and the red "Make America Great Again" caps in the crowd, proved that the Trump marketing magic still works on some.

He will certainly need all the magic he can get, as his circumstances find him, and members of his family, pursued by the law (though his lawyers deny he or his family have committed any wrongdoing) and confronted by realities of a business marketplace that has largely had it with him. The deadly January 6 assault on the Capitol, which then-president Trump inspired, caused many companies in corporate America to sever ties with him. Faced with hundreds of millions of dollars in loans coming due -- loans Trump personally guaranteed -- many of the family properties have posted significant losses. The Trump hotel in Washington is for sale, but no one seems interested.

But a clan once enriched by their real estate business and empow-

ered by the presidency, can now offer as its stock in trade a combination of politics and entertainment. And both contribute to a certain type of fame, which Trump discovered could be quite valuable when he was the star of the TV show, "The Apprentice." According to The New York Times, Trump's ancillary fame-related revenues back then -- the licensing of the Trump name, the lucrative pitchman gigs, and more -- exceeded the \$197 million he made from the show itself.

Monetizing fame in the post-presidency world of Trump requires a good story with high stakes and compelling characters. Check and check: The Trumps as "characters" are riveting to both those who love them and those who hate them. And the stakes? They include control over the GOP, the future of the family fortune and the prospect of serious legal peril.

The latter was heightened days ago by a Supreme Court decision that gave New York prosecutors



access to business records, including Trump's tax forms, which will aid them in investigations that potentially could lead to civil and criminal charges against those in his orbit. Meanwhile, Donald Trump Jr. was deposed by District of Columbia prosecutors investigation possible fraud allegations as part of a lawsuit related to 2016 inauguration spending. (His sister Ivanka sat for her deposition in December.) The organization has said it complied with all laws, and the former president has called the investi-

gation a "witch hunt."

While anyone else might feel paralyzed by this kind of pressure, Trump has long shown he is quite comfortable turning it to his advantage. He likely sees an opportunity to once again play his familiar role: the powerful victim. The two parts of this construct may seem contradictory. Who would believe Wonder Woman as a damsel in distress? But Trump seems to know that a hero's journey must include encounters with evil opponents who almost defeat him.

Get over it, the media isn't going to give Joe Biden a free ride

Over the past few weeks, progressive activists have lit up Twitter over the media's criticism of President Joe Biden. There have even been loud complaints that the White House briefing is no longer consistently covered live by the cable networks, as if the media is somehow trying to silence the President and his spokesperson. I have some advice for my progressive friends -- get over it. If you expected the press to fall in love with President Biden because he is better than Trump -- he is -- you were always going to be disappointed. And for those who think the briefing should be on live every day, that would mean things were going badly at the White House, not well.

Let me take these two related things one at a time. The media was never going to fall in love with Biden. And, after a short period, they were not going to judge him against Trump's performance. There can be no real doubt that Biden is doing a better job as President than Trump. But what the media will judge him on going forward is how well does he do against the many promises he made in the campaign -- not his record compared to Trump. I often complain that some report-

ers who cover politics really don't understand how politics and government work. On the flip side, I have to admit that many political activists, especially progressive activists, don't understand how reporters work. It is that misunderstanding that foments much of the hostility between the media and activists. Further, I've never worked for a politician who thought they got good press, nor have I worked with a reporter who believed they were getting enough access to the President or other politicians.

The mainstream media, in my opinion, does not have a liberal or a conservative bent. Their ideology is an activist one. If there is a problem in this country, they assume the government should figure out how to fix it. The media is drawn to action and decisiveness and punishes dithering and, at times, thoughtful deliberation. In my time as press secretary, I was repeatedly pushed on why decisions had not yet been made, particularly on matters of foreign policy and national security -- our efforts behind the scenes, even when fruitful, could look ineffective during the process.

They are also trained to not believe what they are told and to demand proof of everything -- a

kind of guilty until proven innocent. Why are they like that? Because they don't always get it straight from politicians and government officials, including progressive ones.

Journalists are trained to be skeptical and look for multiple sources to confirm information. They seek evidence when possible, and do not rely on any one person's word. For those who think it's all like Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, meeting sources in a parking garage to take down former President Richard Nixon, take a closer look at history and see how they pieced together important information from an enormous number of sources.

The process, though, generally does not make for great movies or entertainment. It is painstaking and a lot like watching the sausage being made -- good results but not a process you want to see all the way through very often.

Not all reporters are good at their jobs. Some are more interested in click bait, front-page placement, or getting on TV to promote their careers. But most reporters I've known work hard, are fair and are in the business for the right reason -- to hold public officials accountable.



So, how does the briefing and live coverage fit into all this? Progressives were outraged that Trump's press secretaries were given a live television platform to lie for the then-President. They believed this helped him and his cause. So, they believe that when Jen Psaki gets up and tells the truth, that too should get live TV coverage. I think they are wrong on both accounts.

Kayleigh McEnany was worth live TV because every day was a crisis in the Trump White House. While her briefings may have served an audience of one, Trump's drubbing at the polls, losing by almost 7 million votes, demonstrated the communication strategy as flawed and inadequate in my opinion.

In fact, the briefings, when they were held, showed the media doing their jobs -- pinning her down on lies and holding them accountable.

For these reasons it's good news that news networks choose not to show Psaki every day (it should be noted that Psaki was a CNN political commentator. In reality, it means the media hasn't had to aggressively fact check her, and the inner workings of the government are not dramatic on a day-to-day basis. She does not approach it as 45 minutes of entertainment. Quite the opposite: she views it as a repeatable way to make sure the press and the public know what the President is up to.

School closures show triumph of equity over equality in America



Six weeks into the Biden administration and there still has been no solo press conference from the president. That is the longest stretch of silence from any new president in at least a century. By refusing to speak directly to the media, Joe Biden is attacking our most cherished democratic norms. Even CNN is complaining about it.

We would echo those complaints if we really cared, but we're happy to listen to Joe Biden's flacks and mouthpieces

explain why he bombed Syria, why he blocked the passage of a \$15 minimum wage, and why Dr. Seuss is racist.

In their spare time, Joe Biden's scribes produce an awful lot of presidential proclamations. One of his very first proclamation was entitled "An Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government."

This was the document that introduced the administration's

new equity plan, which is going to "eliminate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups." It's quite a mouthful, but what does it mean? Has anyone asked what it means or did everyone in Washington graduate from Yale and thus intuitively understands sloppy, meaningless words like this? The rest of us might still like to know what a "systemic" barrier is and how Joe Biden plans to eliminate it. That's easy, with equity, of course. But that raises a whole new question: What exactly is equity and how is it different from equality, the central principle this country was founded on?

Well, the first thing to know about equality is that it's designed to challenge power. Equity, by contrast, is designed to protect power. Equity is what the British monarchy had. Equality is what the American

colonists wanted. Equality is what allowed Andrew Jackson to rise from a childhood of bitter poverty in the Carolina woods and make it all the way to the White House. Andrew Jackson was tough, smart and energetic. He lived a remarkable life, and America rewarded him for it. That's equality.

Equity is the opposite. Equity is what allowed Kamala Harris, the privileged child of two PhDs, to stay privileged and become one of the most powerful people on the planet, despite having achieved nothing impressive or worthwhile over the span of 56 years.

So Andrew Jackson and Kamala Harris -- both Democrats, one the child of equality, the other the child of equity. That's the difference in a nutshell.

Equality challenges power. Equity protects power. That principle has never been on starker display than in the case of the

teachers unions, which are some of the most powerful institutions in America. They are using the term "equity" to justify their own prerogatives as they hurt the weak -- in this case, school children and their increasingly desperate parents.

For months, parents whose kids use public education in Los Angeles have been begging Cecily Myart-Cruz, the president of the local teachers' union and an equity promoter, to reopen the schools. Cruz responded by demanding that those parents shut up immediately. Those parents, she explained, have the wrong skin color.

CECILY MYART-CRUZ: Some voices are being allowed to speak louder than others. We have to call out the privilege behind the largely White wealthy parents driving the push for a rushed return. Their experience of this pandemic is not our students' families' experiences.

'The Future is Female, Multi-colored, and Marvelously Different'

Everyone can learn from the female energy in our lives and women's contributions as much as we have to learn from males, ungendered or multicultural, without it being mutually-exclusive, a diss on others, or descending into divisiveness, reparation for the past, or white male bashing. America is not perfect, but it's the only place in the world you can start with nothing and end up with your own thriving business, and despite the blemishes, get a fair chance. I know. I've lived around the world. And with gender and ethnic fluid GenZ on the horizon, the best is yet to come. Marvelously different is America.

Most of us have suffered our fair share of prejudice and struggles. As a woman and Cuban immigrant marked as a 'spick' growing up, I became Liz Castells, leaving part of Maria Isabel Cristina Castells de Garcia behind. I burned bras in protest for women's rights as a teenager, and later to wear pants to school. When I began my

career, the few women in the Fortune 500 or Madison Ave were 'secretaries'. I was taunted and dismissed by the Good old' boy network. I was 'too pretty to be smart', too smart 'for my own good', too loud, and worked 3X as hard to be where I am. Believe me, progress has been made.

This year's Women's History month theme 'Valiant Women of the Vote: Refusing to Be Silenced' extends the 100-year celebration of the 19th amendment. Each woman has a voice that we must own and use. We are inclusive, unlimited, and lead full spectrum lives. We run families, run companies, run marathons, run late, run wild — but never run away. We are living up to the champions that paved the way. Like Eleanor Roosevelt who held the first women's press conference in 1933, stating, 'Remember no one can make you feel inferior without your consent.' Or fiery Ruth Bader Ginsburg who enabled women to get credit cards in 1974, and when asked 'When will there be



By Liz Castells-Heard, CEO & Chief Strategy Officer, INFUSION

enough women on the Supreme Court?', said: 'When there are nine', continuing with raise eyebrows, 'there's always been nine men, and nobody questions that.' Rosa Parks and Claudette Colvin provoked the end of bus segregation; Jerrie Cobb our first astronaut albeit banned from travel and Ellen Ochoa, the first Latina to cross the space border; and Amelia Erhardt who spread her wings. There's Aretha, our

first female R&R Hall of Famer, Lucille Ball, first to own a film company and move us to tears as a defiant outspoken wife, and Mary Tyler Moore's portrayal of the first single working woman living alone. Gasp. Fast forward to Kamala Harris, and putting my personal feelings aside, she is our first woman VP. We've come a long way, baby.

Women are 57% of all college graduates, 36% of small-business owners and 49% among Hispanics, 27% of Congress, and 15% of our active military. 75% of all women work outside the home vs. 30% back when I started my career 40 years ago, from fashion and marketing to Wall Street and tech, thank you Alpha Girls. We've gone from ads depicting women as sex kittens or caregivers, serving rather than enjoying, and Latinas and Blacks not on the radar, to confident decision-makers, their enjoyment and freedom of expression, and beauty coming in any size, shape, form or color. We've changed the ageing narrative,

redefined Motherhood, and 'single does what single wants', and brands empower us like Always #Likeagirl and #biascorrect where 'persuasive is not pushy'.

Yes, there's still a ways to go with lingering sexism, racism and toxic masculinity. 67% still use the term 'powerful' positively to describe men while 92% use the same term negatively for women. There's still a 23% pay gap, even with half of women the primary breadwinners. 59% face daily gender discrimination at work rising to 73% for WOC and there's the 'motherhood penalty' and 'broken rung' problems. While women control 51% of U.S. wealth, we're only 7% of top Fortune 500 executives, and under 1% for WOC.

McKinsey indicated that 50% of Multicultural female executives are leaving corporations or considering it due to the double bias and lack of support, and starting their own businesses to have more control. I lived this experience years ago.

Avni The Tigress Was Shot Dead. Supreme Court Says Rules Were Followed

A contempt petition filed in the Supreme Court by animal rights activist Sunita Dongre was withdrawn by her after the court declared it invalid today and stated that the killing of tigress Avni was carried out as per court orders as she was a man-eater. Avni was shot dead on November 2, 2018 in the Yavatmal reserve forest in Maharashtra. She was killed by a private hunter Asgar Ali, whose father Shafath Ali was invited by the Maharashtra Forest Department to either tranquilise or shoot her. The tigress had been accused of killing 13 villagers. While the Forest Department and locals were insistent that she was a man-eater, several animal rights activists were equally convinced that she was being set up as the majority of her kills were made inside the forest in her territory. The activists claimed that she had not set out to deliberately hunt anyone and that she wasn't eating the bodies after killing them. They also alleged that the locals and the government wanted the tigress removed as large tracts of the forest had

been denotified to become a cement plant.

There was also confusion around several details - from how much DNA evidence there was on the bodies attributable to her, to whether she was a man-eater at all. India, unlike many countries around the world, is not trigger-happy when it comes to dealing with large carnivores in human-dominated spaces; but shrinking forests and growing development projects are forcing more people and wild animals into conflict. In the last few years, several leopards and tigers have been either shot or tranquilised and removed to solve problems. It has proven to be no solution. Only the consistent monitoring of situations, study, research and stringent environment action against many instructive and linear projects in forests, combined with sensitive dealing of local people, can bring about solutions. Moreover, unless an animal is caught in the act of killing, it's quite difficult to identify the correct animal. In this case, this particular area did not have many resident tigers except for

T1, making her the obvious choice.

The forests in question are degraded reserve forests without the stringent rules that govern national parks. For villagers in the area, most of whom are subsistent farmers, grazing their cattle inside the forest was something they had done for years. This reserve forest, located in the path of several well-known tiger reserves like Tipeswar, was not a regular tiger habitat, but several animals had moved through there over the years in their bid to move and find new territory. T1 was one of the few tigers who chose to settle there and, on having cubs 10 months before she was shot, had probably become more aggressive and territorial. For the local people who had to live with the fear of a large carnivore in their midst, her removal was the only option.

While T1 was her official designation, she quickly became known as Avni meaning Earth in public discourse. As the hunt for her



gathered speed and publicity, she became a cause celebre. The Forest Department was under mounting pressure from the locals and politicians to remove her, and from general public and activists to leave her alone as she was a mother. Many petitions challenging the shoot-at-sight orders, which was issued by the Maharashtra government in September, 2018 were filed in the Supreme Court. On September 11, 2018, the Supreme Court ruled that she could be shot if all attempts at tranquilisation failed. The order also stated that there could be no celebration after, nor could the shooter be given any

reward. The attempts to capture T1 grew into the theatre of the absurd. 150 personnel were deployed. Elephants were brought in (one of them ended up killing a local woman villager). Drones were flown above. Pedigreed and pampered pooches belonging to golfer Jyoti Randhawa were unleashed.

Calvin Klein perfume, apparently used in the South American jungles to attract jaguars with great success, was liberally sprayed near camera traps, and succulent little pigs were left tied up in the undergrowth.



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Rahul Gandhi vs G-23 Is Really What It's About. And India Doesn't Care

Hello and welcome to Episode 203 (or is it Episode 406?) of the Congress's civil war. Like some long-running serial that began with a flurry of excitement but has now settled down to daytime monotony, the Congress's version of "The Bald And The Boring" does attempt to deliver neardaily new twists. But nobody cares.

This week, the plot took us to Jammu. Why was cunning Ghulam Nabi planning a secret conclave there? And then to Calcutta. Was the Congress making seat-sharing deals with a fundamentalist cleric and betraying its ideology? Back to Delhi. Why is Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary communicating with his party colleagues on Twitter? Does he not know how to make a phone call? Has his WhatsApp/Telegram/Signal been disabled? Was the laughter you could hear in the background the sound of Amit Shah and Narendra Modi chortling? The Congress's internal battle has now got so tiresome and repetitive that even those who want

a political force to restrain this government no longer expect anything from the party. Instead, they look outside the opposition parties and consider how mass movements like the Farmers' Agitation seem to have worried Mr. Modi. They look to the courts, not to politicians, to combat the regime's more egregious assaults on civil liberties.

The Congress is not the first political party to try eating its own tail while in opposition. The British Labour Party did something similar in the decade after Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979. And the Congress itself did the same thing itself in the 1977-9 post-Emergency period with fights and splits.

But one intriguing parallel to what is happening today comes from the Congress split of 1969. That was when Indira Gandhi broke the party and two different Congresses went to the polls in 1971. Mrs Gandhi was supported by younger, more aggressive leaders, while the opposing faction comprised leaders from her father's era who had been in power for

decades. The press called these leaders "The Syndicate" and portrayed them as an older generation that was out of touch with contemporary India and would not give away to the new wave of Congressmen.

In reality, the battle was all about one person. The Syndicate resented Indira Gandhi and wanted her out.

And so it is today.

For all the pious rhetoric, the battle in today's Congress is about one person too: Rahul Gandhi. The rebels believe that he is incapable of leading the party, at least not without some collective leadership. Unfortunately, they say, his advisors seem to be a bunch of not-very-bright, super-loyal, (relatively) young Congressmen who want control of the party.

Over the last few months, much to the horror of the rebels who were initially hailed as a voice for inner-party democracy, they have now begun to be seen as this century's version of The Syndicate: old men who won't let go. This is an unfair characterisation



but it works because a) the rebels are mostly old and b) they won't let go. But while Indira Gandhi was able to turn her battle with The Syndicate into a national obsession, the Congress's soap opera has seen its ratings dip by the week.

Some of this has to do with the hollow centre of the Congress battle. In 1969, Indira Gandhi was fighting for survival. But she was shrewd enough to turn it into an ideological battle. She was fighting the stranglehold of the rich on behalf of the poor to introduce a leftist socialist system of governance, she declared.

The ideology option is not avail-

able to either side in the current Congress battle because Narendra Modi has already hijacked the party's pro-poor, welfare-measures platform and ridden home with it. As Arun Shourie has said, today's BJP is "Congress plus cow".

Given that its principal plank has already been appropriated, all that is left for the Congress is to embrace the cow, which for obvious reasons it will not do.

Shorn of any ideology, the New Syndicate versus Rahul's Stormtroopers battle has become only about control of the party; a subject that most Indians now find tiresome.

It would help, of course, if anyone saw the Congress as a sharp, shrewd party, capable of outwitting the BJP and its billions of rupees. But as the experience in Puducherry tells us, there is no one in the Congress capable of launching an effective guerrilla operation to counter Modi-Shah (with the possible exception of Ashok Gehlot who has held on to his government in Rajasthan against the odds).

The problem with Rahul Gandhi is that while his supporters are often right about him, these virtues will not help the Congress return to power. Yes, Rahul is perhaps the only national leader with the guts to attack the Modi-Shah duo by name and to hammer away at what he sees as their misdeeds. ("Hum Do, Hamare Do" for instance.) But the problem with vicious personal attacks is that they only appeal to people who are already opposed to Mr Modi. That may be a loud and articulate constituency. But it is a constituency that will never vote for the BJP anyway. For the Congress to get anywhere, it must win over uncommitted voters or those who are becoming disillusioned with Mr Modi. A few savage jokes will not help in that endeavour.

Dear G-23: An Open Letter By Salman Khurshid

The G-23 of the Congress has names with an impressive history of achievement in the party and beyond. But thousands of unknown and unnamed Congress cadres who gave to the party, but unavoidably received little or nothing in return, also believe in democracy. This statement is not one of denial, nor is it playing the proverbial ostrich. We thought the G-23 made their point and were suitably informed that party elections will be held when appropriate (something they agreed to in their interaction with the Congress President and later at the Congress Working Committee session in January. But are they moving the goalpost once again with their public display of disquiet (or reservations) in Jammu and as we are being told, very soon in Haryana?

Some home truths are imperative to bring into public discourse even though the party leadership remains patient and reflective. Our history of the last 50 years has not been an easy one, replete with complex challenges with the divisive politics of the



BJP-RSS combine being the latest and most grievous. We remain trapped between those whose perception is that we brought this upon ourselves by claiming to be uncompromisingly secular, and those who believe we failed to put our money where our mouth is on our professed secularism.

The growing and dark footprint of communal forces has pushed us into forced errors of becoming self-conscious. As a result, we shy away from speaking about minorities and put on a public display of identifying with the cultural sym-

bols of the majority that have largely been appropriated by the BJP. We have been forced to accept 'mistakes' made by our heroes because public mood appears to require it. Obviously, this calls for careful balancing of reality and perception, strategy and ideology. We need all leaders, old and young, happy and unhappy, ideologues and personally ambitious, favoured and neglected, to come together to deal with this challenge instead of cribbing about real and imagined democratic deficits. They must

not forget that democracy is a process, not static in time. Ultimately, it is a relevant question to ask whether it is fair to kick the very ladder you have climbed to the top storey of life - from where making speeches is easy. There are two ways of spending these dark moments: to count our blessings and the moments of joy and comfort our party has given us, or to whine about what we did not receive. If we choose the latter, what conviction will we carry with the innumerable workers who continue to hope that the darkness will give way. Besides, how will we be judged by history? It might be more important to worry about that than to seek a better place in the present.

Is it honourable to be asking what share we will have in the India of tomorrow and what credit our party will give us? Just as the names of national martyrs are engraved on India Gate, there are records in the Congress office where innumerable names are embossed as part of our history. For most of us, that is enough recognition.

There's what media ignores about Noem, DeSantis while touting Cuomo, Newsom

The liberal media continues to do what it does best: spin false narratives and attack conservatives

Last weekend I was thrilled to attend CPAC - one of the largest political gatherings in our nation - and what I saw was a unified conservative movement and Republican Party with successful policies, principled leaders and a clear vision for the future.

This is despite, or perhaps in spite of, the recent attacks by the biased media to portray the Republican Party as fractured and without leaders. That, as I saw in Orlando, couldn't be further from the truth.

Former President Donald Trump returned to the stage to thunderous applause as he excoriated the radical Biden agenda, pushed back on blue-state lockdowns, and hinted at the future of the party in 2022, 2024 and beyond.

Also speaking at the conference were rising star governors Ron DeSantis of Florida and Kristi Noem of South Dakota, who proudly declared that their states open for business and schooling. DeSantis and Noem gave reports on the positive

coronavirus mitigation achievements in their states, and responded to mainstream media's criticism that has falsely portrayed their bold handling of the pandemic.

Over the past five years, journalism's thin veneer of nonpartisanship has all but been abandoned as reporters-turned-political activists twist and frame stories to praise Democrats and attack Republicans, regardless of the facts. One glaring example of this naked political bias is demonstrated by the attempt to create coronavirus heroes and villains of our nation's governors. You can guess how their portrayal is split across party lines.

Let's consider the coverage of four governors: Noem and DeSantis and, by comparison, Democrats Andrew Cuomo of New York and Gavin Newsom of California.

We're all familiar with what the liberal media thought of Cuomo at the outset of this crisis. He's since written a

book, won an Emmy, and joked around with brother Chris on CNN about being "single and ready to mingle." Joe Biden has even described Cuomo's handling of the pandemic as a "lesson in leadership."

What we know now is that while he was joking around, touting himself as a hero and being praised as the model for the nation in terms of coronavirus response, he was engaged in an alleged coverup of information about the true death toll of nursing home residents in his state.

Cuomo's March 25 directive that nursing homes accept patients who were exposed to the coronavirus was a death warrant for tens of thousands of New York's most vulnerable residents.

While COVID cases skyrocketed and businesses and schools closed down in droves, the media was intent on lifting Cuomo up and spreading the false narrative that he was not responsible for his state's dismal pandemic situation. It



makes you wonder if lives could have been saved if the mainstream media had actually done its job instead of doing PR for a failed governor who now faces calls for his resignation or impeachment.

The liberal media's double standard in their treatment of the recent credible sexual harassment allegations by two former staffers against Cuomo compared to their brutal treatment of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh is only making matters more difficult for Cuomo. Newsom's handling of the coronavirus in California is another tale of brutal draconian lockdowns with very little actual coronavirus mitigation, although you wouldn't have known that from the liberal media's coverage.

As COVID spread and Newsom forced businesses to shutter, the biased media attacked red states for daring to try a different approach - an approach that both saved lives and kept economies and schools open. You can sense the disappointment in coverage that red states aren't suffering, a despicable indication of the national divide perpetuated by our liberal media. Of course, Newsom's pandemic leadership is not as popular inside the Golden State as the fake news media would have you believe. After months of devastating lockdowns, Newsom was pictured at a swanky restaurant - French Laundry - palling around with lobbyists and friends while Californians were losing their livelihoods.

Pakistan Woos Bangladesh, But Will Dhaka Accept The Olive Branch?

Despite obvious economic and strategic benefits for both nations in case of a thaw, Dhaka is adamant that Islamabad formally apologise for the genocide that preceded the 1971 war of Independence.

Fifty years have gone by, yet the deep-seated animosity between Bangladesh and Pakistan has not eased the memories of the massacres - some call it genocide - by the Pakistan Army still haunt Bangladesh, albeit most of them who witnessed the carnage during the Liberation War of 1971 are no longer alive. Bangladesh is yet to come out of her traumatic past, and the gruesome killing of almost 3 million Bangladeshis and rape of more than 400,000 Bengali women by Pakistani troops is a scar that is yet to heal. Meanwhile, the linguistic state scales newer heights gaining huge reputation and respect worldwide. Touching the \$300 billion mark in GDP, the youngest state of South Asia has leapfrogged Pakistan in economic and many other social development parameters and indexes.

Since the middle of 2020, a few moves by Islamabad led to speculation and debate over the defrosting of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. In a stunning move, Pakistan has lifted all the restrictions on visas for Bangladeshi applicants in January. Another significant development is the telephonic dialogue between Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan and Sheikh



Hasina Wajed of Bangladesh. Hasina's political rival, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Khaleda Zia, maintains cordial relations with Pakistan. During their terms, they even sheltered anti-Indian insurgent groups in Bangladesh. The temperature of Dhaka-Islamabad bonhomie started decreasing since the Hasina-led Awami League assumed office in 2009. In December 2013, the International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh convicted nine persons of genocide and war crimes and hanged Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Molla, which irked Islamabad immensely. All the criminals

were sympathizers of Pakistan.

Soon after assuming office in 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan sought to smooth relations with Bangladesh. Two years later, his attempts and efforts brought some amount of satisfaction. After rounds of email exchanges between the foreign ministries of Bangladesh and Pakistan, Imran Khan finally rang up and conversed with his Bangladeshi counterpart over the telephone in July 2020. Signalling Pakistan's eagerness to strengthen relations with Bangladesh, Khan invited Hasina to visit Pakistan and discussed Covid management as well as revitalizing SAARC.

Pakistan initiated the process of creating harmony at a time when anger mounted in Bangladesh against India's decision to rescind Article 370 in Kashmir, the Ayodhya verdict and the citizenship revision plan NRC-CAA announcement.

Speculation and suspicion have harmed the diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Over a long period, there was no Pakistani High Commissioner in Bangladesh. Even in the past, Pakistani diplomats were allegedly involved in unlawful activities in Bangladesh.

Who is Ramesh Jarkiholi, Karnataka minister now embroiled in sex CD controversy?



Ramesh Jarkiholi, who is currently embroiled in the sex CD controversy, was a powerful minister in the Karnataka government and was among the 17 MLAs who defected from Congress to the BJP in 2019.

Dinesh Kallahalli, a social activist who sent the 'sex CD' to news channels, said that the victim's family had approached him last week seeking justice for their daughter. Dinesh Kallahalli on Tuesday also filed an FIR in the matter against Ramesh Jarkiholi.

Ramesh Jarkiholi has claimed that the videos are "fake" and said the release of the 'sex CD' was part of a "political conspiracy". "This is a political conspiracy. The video is fake. Let there be a full investigation. Culprits should be booked. I don't know anyone," he said.

While the Congress-Jarkiholi's former party-demanded his immediate resignation, the BJP government jumped to his defence and said that a thorough

investigation will reveal the truth. "We have seen treachery, vendetta, honey trap, blackmailing as the motive behind such videos. The truth will come out after an investigation," Karnataka Deputy CM CN Ashwath Narayan said.

Who is Ramesh Jarkiholi?

A six-time MLA, Ramesh Jarkiholi is a powerful minister and was among the 17 MLAs who defected from Congress to the BJP in 2019. He is considered to be instrumental in the fall of the Congress-JDS government and is believed to have played a key role in engineering defections of other MLAs, helping BJP come to power. The Jarkiholis are politically active for decades. Ramesh Jarkiholi has four brothers -- Satish,

Balachandra, Bhimsi and Lakhan Jarkiholi. Ramesh is the eldest among the five. The family belongs to the Nayaka community.

Ramesh Jarkiholi is known as "Sahukara [Rich person]" in Belgaum. He and his family are into sugar mills businesses and so, they are called the sugar barons of Karnataka.

A senior bureaucrat, who has worked in Belgaum, said. "The Belgaum sugar barons are much stronger and active than the Bellary mining barons. They have control over the district. Farmers are with them because of their sugar mills business."

Ramesh was with the Congress till 2019 and later defected to the BJP. He held a ministerial post in earlier governments as well.

(News Agencies)- Ramesh Jarkiholi, the water resources minister in the BS Yediyurappa-led Karnataka government, has been forced to resign from his post after being accused of demanding sexual favours from an unidentified woman in exchange for a job. In his resignation letter, Jarkiholi claimed that the allegations against him were far from the truth, but he is resigning on moral ground.

"Allegations against me are far from the truth. A clear investigation is needed. I will come out as innocent and I am confident about it. I am resigning on moral grounds and I request you to accept this," Jarkiholi's resignation letter said.

The controversy which forced him to resign erupted after video clips purportedly showing Ramesh Jarkiholi getting intimate with the woman aired on Kannada news channels.

Mumbai Police arrests BMC officer for molesting junior colleague

The arrested BMC officer, identified as Prakash Sable, called the junior colleague to his cabin on March 3 after which he touched her inappropriately, police said.

(News Agencies)- Mumbai Police has arrested a BMC officer for allegedly molesting a junior colleague. The BMC officer arrested by the police is head of department in the solid waste management department of BMC's G North Ward office. The accused BMC officer, identified as Prakash Sable, also has few more complaints against him which are pending in the departmental inquiry. "The woman, who is a junior colleague, filed a complaint with Shivaji Park police station on March 3. Based on the complaint, we immediately filed an FIR and today the accused is arrested and further investigations are on," said DCP Pranay

Ashok. According to police, Sable called the junior colleague to his cabin on March 3 after which he touched her inappropriately. The woman immediately left the cabin and went to Shivaji Park police station to file a complaint. Primary investigations have found that Sable has similar complaints against him made by other female colleagues in the office, inquiries of which are pending with the BMC. BMC is yet to take any action against Sable. Sable will be produced in the court on Friday for police custody in the matter. Police officials said that if more women come forward to file complainant against Sable, they will file fresh cases against him.



Police custody of Pamela Goswami, other accused in drugs case extended till March 18

An NDPS court in Kolkata has extended the police custody of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) leader Pamela Goswami and other accused in the drugs case till March 18.

(News Agencies)-An NDPS court in Kolkata has extended the police custody of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) leader Pamela Goswami and other accused in the drugs case till March 18. The BJP youth leader was arrested last month for allegedly possessing cocaine in her car in Kolkata. Pamela Goswami was found with 100 grams of cocaine in her bag and the car seat. Social worker and politician, BJP youth leader, Goswami joined the

party in 2019 and was enlisted in the BJP camp at a press conference held by state BJP president Dilip Ghosh. This was shortly after Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee's July 21 meeting in 2019. Goswami was also a model before joining politics. She was also an air hostess and a Bengali television actress. Pamela Goswami had alleged that she was "framed" as part of a "conspiracy". The BJYM leader also accused BJP's

Rakesh Singh, considered to be a close aide of Kailash Vijayvargiya, of "sending his men to plant" the pouches of cocaine recovered from her vehicle by Kolkata Police. West Bengal Police on February 23 arrested BJP leader Rakesh Singh from Galsi in Purba Bardhaman district in connection with the drugs case. The arrest was made by the Detective Department as Rakesh Singh was apparently trying to flee the state.



Biden celebrates House passing HR 1, Dems' campaign bill, vows work to 'refine and advance' legislation



(News Agencies)-President Biden on Thursday celebrated the House passing a sweeping election reform bill, saying he would sign it if it passes the Senate.

Biden called it "urgently needed" to protect the right to vote and to "strengthen" democracy, and

vowed to work with Congress to "refine and advance" the legislation.

The For the People Act of 2021, known as H.R. 1, passed Wednesday by a vote of 220 to 210. No Republicans joined with Democrats in approving the bill, H.R. 1. "In the wake of an unprecedented

assault on our democracy; a coordinated attempt to ignore, undermine, and undo the will of the American people never before seen in our history; and a new wave of aggressive attacks on voting rights taking place in states across the country, I applaud Speaker Pelosi and the House of Representatives for passing H.R. 1, the For the People Act of 2021," Biden said in a statement Thursday.

Biden called the right to vote "sacred and fundamental," adding that it is "the right from which all of our other rights as Americans spring."

"It will rein in the outrageous gerrymandering that distorts our democracy," Biden said. "It will empower the Justice Department to crack down on laws that curtail voting rights along racial lines. It will reform our campaign finance system to amplify the voices of

the people - not the powerful. And it will modernize and secure our future elections against all manner of threats."

"I look forward to working with Congress to refine and advance this important bill," Biden continued. "And I look forward to signing it into law after it has passed through the legislative process, so that together we can strengthen and restore American democracy for the next election and all those to come."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said the legislation is needed to combat voter suppression efforts in states, crack down on corruption and diminish the influence of big donors in politics. The bill would create automatic voter registration across the country and allow felons who have served their sentences to vote. The bill would also expand early voting and enhance absent-

tee voting by simplifying voting by mail.

The bill would also require more online political ad disclosures and force all organizations involved in political activity to disclose their large donors.

A major pillar of the legislation is setting up a new public financing system for congressional and presidential elections to incentivize small-dollar donations. The legislation would establish a 6:1 match using taxpayer money for each grassroots contribution to a candidate up to \$200. For example, a \$200 donation to a House candidate would garner a \$1,200 match in public funds for a total contribution of \$1,400. The public match program would be funded by a new 4.75% surcharge on criminal and civil penalties and settlements that corporations pay to the U.S. government.

Search for Bengal's daughter and the casual sexism in a poll-bound state

The bid to promote Mamata Banerjee for a third term as Bengal's chief minister has ended up exposing ageism and casual sexism that punctuate poll speak.

(News Agencies)-Bengal wants her own daughter. Reactions to this slogan from the Trinamool Congress in poll-bound West Bengal have brought to the fore the intellectual wasteland that the state has become. The bid to promote Mamata Banerjee for a third term as Bengal's chief minister has ended up exposing ageism and casual sexism that punctuate poll speak. Even among those who talk down to others during TV debates and on Twitter by using highfalutin jargon.

A recent Facebook post says: "Yes, Bengal wants its own daughter. But not a 65-year-old woman. Bengal wants the 28-year-old Aishwarya (Ghosh, who is currently the president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union) and the 30-year-old Minakshi (Mukherjee, who is currently the president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union).

The Bengali news portal sangbadpratidin.in has reported that the post was by a certain Pradip Dastidar who shared it on the Facebook page 'Lal Salaam Comrade'. The post was shared by the famous filmmaker Anik

Datta, a rather serious gentleman who makes satirical films on the state of the eastern state.

This has (thankfully) created a controversy among netizens and Datta is being taken to the cleaners for sharing a post that is clearly problematic. The fact that Datta and the person who originally put up the post are part of the Left-liberal ecosystem makes it worse. For long, the Left-liberals have attacked those who subscribe to different political ideologies by setting the moral/ethical bar high (again, a good

thing). But more often than not they are themselves found wanting.

Anil Basu, then CPI(M) MP from Arambagh, in Hooghly district, had launched an abusive attack on Mamata Banerjee in 2011 invoking prostitution and linking her party's funds to the US, the Indian Express had reported. Addressing an election rally, Basu had spoken about Sonagachi - Kolkata's red-light area. "Where is she getting the money from?" he had asked. "From which bhatar (Bengali



slang for a male partner) did she get Rs 24 crore to fund the Trinamool Congress's poll expenses?"

He went on to say prostitutes in Sonagachi "do not even look at smaller clients" when they get a "big client", Basu said now that the Trinamool has got a "big

client" - the USA - to fund its poll expenses, it is not interested in the "smaller clients" from Chennai, Andhra Pradesh and other places in the country.

The latest post on Facebook shows how little has changed since then.

Mamata Banerjee Needs B-Team To Stop Modi

(News Agencies)-When Mamata Banerjee was a young firebrand, still in the Congress, she routinely accused her senior party colleagues in West Bengal, of acting like the CPIM's 'B-team' - transferring votes to the Left Front in return for assured wins in their own pocket-boroughs. Mamata believed this underhand deal kept the Congress from reaching the critical mass of votes needed to topple the Left. Now, with the BJP threatening to acquire the necessary critical mass that could unseat her, Didi desperately needs a B-team of her own.

The BJP's spectacular performance in West Bengal in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections may well have given Mamata a sense of déjà vu. This is exactly what happened to the Left ten years earlier. Although the CPIM-led government was in deep trouble because of the fiasco over land acquisition in Singur, no one expected the Mamata-Congress alliance to win 25 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state. The BJP's massive gains in 2019 were equally unexpected.

To gauge the significance of

the Lok Sabha results, we need to understand what the political scientist Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya called 'party-society', a term that is now widely used by those who study West Bengal. It stands for the particular institutional structure that the Left established in rural Bengal, through which people accessed governmental power and benefits, and in turn were organised and disciplined by it.

It began when the Left Front came to power in 1977 at the end

of years of violent peasant struggles against big landlords. The gains made by poor farmers were extended by the most extensive land reforms undertaken in any Indian state. In a short albeit bloody period of six years, the entire power structure of rural Bengal had been turned upside down. Older institutions that resolved disputes and provided a social support system - the landlord's house, caste-councils, market associations, religious communities - were all but dismantled.

Northern Irish loyalist paramilitaries withdraw support for 1998 peace deal

(News Agencies)- Northern Irish loyalist paramilitary groups have told British Prime Minister Boris Johnson they are temporarily withdrawing support for the 1998 peace agreement due to concerns over the Brexit deal. While the groups pledged "peaceful and democratic" opposition to the deal, such a stark warning increases the pressure on Johnson, his Irish counterpart Micheál Martin and the European Union over Brexit. Northern Ireland's 1998 peace deal, known as the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement, ended three decades of violence between mostly Catholic nationalists fighting for a united Ireland and mostly Protestant unionists, or loyalists, who want Northern Ireland to stay part of

the United Kingdom. The loyalist paramilitaries including the Ulster Volunteer Force, Ulster Defence Association and Red Hand Commando said they were concerned about the disruption to trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland due to the Brexit deal.

"The loyalist groupings are herewith withdrawing their support for the Belfast Agreement," they said in a March 3 letter to Johnson from Loyalist Communities Council chairman David Campbell.

Reuters has seen a copy of the letter. A similar letter has been sent to the Irish leader and copies were sent to the European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic. The paramilitary groups said they were

determined that unionist opposition to the Northern Irish Protocol was peaceful but added a warning.

"Please do not underestimate the strength of feeling on this issue right across the unionist family," the letter said.

"If you or the EU is not prepared to honour the entirety of the agreement then you will be responsible for the permanent destruction of the agreement," it said. They said they would not return to the deal until their rights were restored and the Northern Irish Protocol - part of the 2020 Brexit Treaty - was amended to ensure unfettered trade between Britain and Northern Ireland.

But, they said, their core disagreement was more fundamental: that Britain, Ireland



and the European Union had in the Northern Irish Protocol breached their commitments to the 1998 peace deal and the two communities. Asked about the warning, Johnson's spokesman said: "We are fully committed to the Belfast, Good Friday, Agreement. We will continue to work to safeguard Northern Ireland's integral place in the United Kingdom ... We are

determined to protect the agreement in all of its dimensions." **PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND** - Preserving the delicate peace in Northern Ireland without allowing the United Kingdom a back door into the EU's markets through the 310-mile (500 km) UK-Irish land border was one of the most difficult issues of the Brexit divorce talks.

Senate delays debate on Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 bill while it is read aloud



(News Agencies)-The U.S. Senate voted on Thursday to take up President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid bill, but put off the start of a contentious debate until the full text of the 628-page bill is read aloud. The party-line vote of 51-50, with Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris

breaking the tie, illustrated that Democrats who narrowly control the chamber can expect little, if any, Republican support.

A vote on final passage could come over the weekend. Republicans, who are expected to use procedural tricks to drag out the process, began by forcing Senate clerks to read the

entire bill - a process expected to take up to 10 hours.

Republican Senator Ron Johnson, who had demanded the reading, was the sole member present in the chamber through most of the evening except for a rotating series of Democrats who served as the body's presiding officer.

With no votes to spare, Democrats tweaked the bill to ensure all 50 of their members would support it. They said they would steer more aid to smaller U.S. states and add money for infrastructure projects, among other changes.

But efforts by some senators to alter temporary federal unemployment benefits failed. The Senate bill keeps the House

of Representatives' plan for \$400 per-week payments through Aug. 29. It was unclear whether any senators would try to change that, possibly to \$300, during the lengthy amendment process in coming days.

"The time is now to move forward with big, bold, strong relief for the American people," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said.

Security was tight at the U.S. Capitol, the scene of a deadly assault in January by followers of then-President Donald Trump, a Republican. Police warned that a militia group might try to attack on Thursday, but there were few protesters around the complex. The relief bill, Biden's top legislative priority, includes

funding for vaccines and medical supplies, extends jobless assistance and provides a new round of emergency financial aid to households, small businesses and state and local governments. Opinion polls indicate broad public support.

Senate Democrats on Wednesday tightened criteria for stimulus checks so fewer high-income households would qualify.

The compromise means that 9 million fewer households would receive a stimulus payment than in the last tranche of payouts in 2020. It also lowers the cost of the legislation by \$12 billion, according to Senate Democrats.

Oil scales 1-year peak as OPEC+ rolls over output for April

(News Agencies)-Oil rallied more than 4% on Thursday, hitting its highest in over a year, after OPEC and its allies agreed to keep production unchanged into April, reasoning that the demand recovery from the coronavirus pandemic was still fragile. Brent crude rose \$2.67, or 4.2%, to settle at \$66.74 a barrel, after rising to \$67.75, its highest since January 2020.

U.S. crude futures ended \$2.55, or 4.2%, higher at \$63.83, having also scaled a January 2020 peak, at \$64.86.

"OPEC surprised us... The message OPEC is sending market is they're quite willing to see oil prices run hot and ultimately, go a long way in reducing the inventory overhang built last year because of COVID-19," said Bart Melek, head of commodity strategies at TD Securities.

Some analysts had predicted OPEC+, an alliance of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other major producers, would increase output by about 500,000 bpd.

The group's leader Saudi Arabia said it would extend its voluntary oil output cut of 1 million barrels per day (bpd), and decide in coming months when to gradually phase it out.

"There is one thorn to the bullish cocktail though and very few are surprised. Russia wants to boost output," head of oil markets at Rystad Energy, Bjornar Tonhaugen said in a note.

Russia was allowed to raise output by 130,000 bpd in April and Kazakhstan by another 20,000 bpd.



"Russia aside, the biggest winner of an OPEC+ rollover is the U.S.. With such price levels, which are now boosted even more after the news of a possible rollover consensus, the U.S. can comfortably increase production,

even from costly break-even projects," Tonhaugen added. Also supporting sentiment, Yemen's Houthi forces said they had fired a missile at a Saudi Aramco facility in Jeddah.



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Beyond election promises, 5 assembly polls see a soft campaign of optics

The poll campaign is in full swing for all five assembly elections in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Promises are rolling out in abundance, from doubling the tea garden workers' wages in Assam to bringing down petrol prices to Rs 60 in Tamil Nadu.

(News Agencies)-But beyond high-octane speeches filled with seemingly non-deliverable poll promises, a soft campaign is going on to generate goodwill among the voters. It is not limited this time to temple run.

PM MODI'S SHOT IN THE ARM Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the first Covid-19 vaccine shot in the second phase of vaccination launched on March 1. It was described as a bold move to allay any fears concerning the safety of the vaccine.

However, the vaccine shot in PM Modi's left arm was also loaded with a soft election campaign, even if unplanned. PM Modi was wearing an Assamese gamocha (scarf) at a time when his party, the BJP is facing strong opposition in Assam over the Citizenship Amendment Act

(CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) that was prepared under the orders of the Supreme Court.

The two nurses, who attended to PM Modi during the Covid-19 vaccine shot were from poll-bound Kerala and Puducherry.

RAHUL GANDHI'S SIX-PACK AND PUSHUPS In both the assembly polls, the BJP looks to expand its base.

If PM Modi rolled up his sleeves at the AIIMS as he reached out to three of the five poll-bound places, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi showed his biceps, six-pack muscles, swimming prowess and aikido martial arts in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

First, Rahul Gandhi jumped into the sea holding the hand of a fisherman in Keala on February 24. When he came out, his "abs of a boxer" (described by former India boxer and Congress leader

Vijender Singh) became the talk of Twitter town. On the same Kerala trip, Rahul Gandhi erroneously demanded a separate fishery ministry at the Centre drawing GK lessons from the rivals.

A few days later, Rahul Gandhi was in Tamil Nadu, where he first accepted the challenge of doing 15 pushups during his interaction with students. Then he showed his aikido martial art skills, and challenged the competitor to do one-hand pushups.

The Congress is on a sticky ground in Tamil Nadu finding it difficult to push for more seats in the alliance headed by the DMK of MK Stalin. In Kerala, from where Rahul Gandhi is an MP, the Congress is facing internal dissension as CPM-led LDF seems to have strengthened its position. The BJP is also



claiming growing popular support in Kerala.

PRIYANKA GANDHI IN TEA GARDEN

Days after Rahul Gandhi's "abs of boxer" video went viral on social media, his sister and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was seen working briefly as a leaf plucker in a tea garden of Assam. A video showed her cracking jokes with 'fellow' tea garden workers.

Officially, Priyanka Gandhi interacted with the workers to "understand their worries and apprehensions, their hopes and

aspirations". She did not talk about the Assam Assembly election with the tea garden workers.

Assam goes to the polls in three phases on March 27, April 1 and April 6. The Congress is hoping to cash in on anti-incumbency votes to come back to power in Assam.

Rahul Gandhi had earlier told the tea garden workers that if his party was voted to power, it would raise the daily income from Rs 167 to Rs 350 by taking money from the Gujarati traders, who own chai bagaans of Assam.

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.



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Three female journalists killed by gunmen in Afghanistan in latest wave of violence

(News Agencies)-Three female media workers were shot dead in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad on Tuesday, government officials said, amid a wave of killings that is spreading fear among professional workers in urban centers.

Zalmai Latifi, head of local broadcaster Enikass TV, said the three women were recent high school graduates aged between 18 and 20 who worked in the station's dubbing department.

Government sources said the women were killed on their way home from work, and witnesses said gunmen shot the women in the head before fleeing. A fourth woman was injured, and a hospital spokesman said she had been admitted to hospital and was fighting for her life. Provincial police chief Juma Gul Hemat

said that the suspected lead attacker had been arrested and that he was connected to the insurgent Taliban. A Taliban spokesman denied the group had any involvement in the attack. A wave of shootings and small bombs attached to vehicles in



Afghanistan have targeted journalists, civil society workers and mid-level government employees in recent months, as the government and Taliban negotiators try to broker a peace deal and the United States withdraws some of its troops. The director of Enikass-TV, Zalmai Latifi, was kidnapped for ransom in 2018. In November 2020, two

journalists -- Elyas Dayee at Radio Azadi, and former TOLO news presenter Yama Siawash - were killed in two separate bomb blasts. Also in November, gunmen stormed Kabul University, killing over a dozen people, including students.

In December 2020, female journalist Malalai Maiwand, who also worked for Enikass-TV, was killed alongside her driver in Jalalabad on her way to the office. Her mother, who was an activist for women's rights, was also killed five years earlier by unknown gunmen. Enikass TV's Latifi said the channel, which was set up in 2018, had employed 10 women but four had now been killed. The Afghan government and some foreign powers have blamed the attacks largely on the Taliban, which denies involvement.

Hundreds rally in Bangladesh over writer's death in prison

(News Agencies)-About 300 students and activists have rallied in Bangladesh's capital to denounce the death in prison of a writer and commentator who was arrested last year on charges of violating a sweeping digital security law that critics say limits free speech. Protesters on Monday marched through the Dhaka University campus and Dhaka's streets demanding the release of seven student activists arrested during recent protests denouncing the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed. Ahmed, 53, was arrested in Dhaka in May last year for making comments on social media that criticised the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. He was denied bail at least six times. Ahmed's death on Thursday night sparked protests on the streets and on social media, and prompted global human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, to urge Bangladesh's government to conduct a thorough investigation. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) demanded the government cancel the 2018 Digital Security Act. The protesters marched towards the country's home ministry on Monday, also demanding the annulment of the controversial Digital Security Act under which Ahmed was arrested last year. They broke a barricade by removing barbed wire fences on the way to the ministry but were intercepted by a few hundred police officers outside the ministry's building in downtown Dhaka. "The state must take responsibility. He has been killed, it was not a natural death. How come he was held for nine months in jail without any justice?" said one protester, Mahfuza Akhter. "We want justice," she said. At least 10 other people were charged with sedition under the digital security law in the same case Ahmed faced, including political cartoonist Kabir Kishore, who was arrested in the case last year.

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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.



[illegible]

India FM visits Bangladesh amid Rohingya repatriation crisis

Visit comes amid efforts to resolve the fate of 81 Rohingya refugees adrift in international waters for more than two weeks.

(News Agencies)-India's foreign minister has arrived in Bangladesh ahead of a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi amid efforts to resolve the fate of 81 Rohingya refugees who are on a boat adrift in international waters.

Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar will hold talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart on water sharing, trade and border issues, two Indian officials in New Delhi said on Thursday.

"Of course, the Rohingya refugee issue will come up during the Indian minister's day-long visit but the prime agenda will remain around Modi's upcoming visit," a senior foreign ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Last month, the Indian coastguard rescued 81 Rohingya, a minority who fled mostly to Bangladesh to escape violence in

Buddhist-majority Myanmar, whose boat had been drifting in the Andaman Sea for over two weeks after they left Bangladesh. Eight people on the boat had already died of dehydration.

The fate of the refugees remains unclear as India, so far, has not allowed their entry into its territory and wants Bangladesh to take them back.

But Bangladesh's Minister of Foreign Affairs AK Abdul Momen last week told Reuters news agency his government expects India, the closest country, or Myanmar, the Rohingyas' country of origin, to accept the 81 survivors.

Aid agencies are demanding that governments stop passing the buck and pluck the 81 survivors immediately from the Andaman sea.

India has in recent weeks provided two million doses of COVID-19 vaccines shots to Bangladesh and could use that

goodwill to press Dhaka to accept the refugees.

Modi will be visiting Dhaka as part of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence later this month.

More Rohingya moved to a remote island

Meanwhile, Bangladesh on Wednesday began moving nearly 4,000 more Rohingya refugees to a remote Bay of Bengal island, officials said, despite complaints from rights groups concerned about the site's vulnerability to storms and flooding.

"Today 2,254 Rohingya people arrived and tomorrow [Thursday], we are expecting 1,700 plus," navy official Rashed Sattar said from the island on Wednesday. Dhaka has relocated more than 10,000 people to the island of Bhasan Char since early December from border camps where more than a million refugees live in ramshackle huts perched on hillsides.



Bangladesh says the relocation is voluntary, but some refugees from the first group spoke of being coerced. The government has dismissed safety concerns about the island, citing the building of flood defences as well as housing for 100,000 people, hospitals and cyclone shelters. It also says overcrowding in refugee camps fuels crime, while some Rohingya said frequent violence in the camps had driven them to relocate. Once they arrive on Bhasan Char, the Rohingyas are not allowed to leave the island, which is several hours' journey from the southern port of

Chittagong. Bangladesh has also drawn criticism for a reluctance to consult with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other aid bodies over the transfers, with the UNHCR saying it has not been allowed to evaluate the safety and sustainability of life on the island. "The process of relocating the Rohingya will continue... they are going there voluntarily for a better life," Mohammad Shamsud Douza, a Bangladesh government official in charge of refugees, said by phone from Cox's Bazaar in southeastern Bangladesh.

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US Capitol police warn of possible militia plot to breach Congress

(News Agencies)-Security has been ramped up at the US Capitol in Washington in response to "a possible plot to breach" the building.

The move was prompted by intelligence that a militia group planned the attack for 4 March - the day conspiracy theorist group QAnon believes Donald Trump will return for a second term.

The House of Representatives cancelled Thursday's session, but the Senate will continue with its agenda.

A mob loyal to Mr Trump stormed the Congress building in January. That attack came as lawmakers were inside, moving to certify Democrat Joe Biden's election

victory. Mr Trump still refuses to admit losing the election.

The riot saw five people including a police officer killed and shook the foundations of American democracy. The head of the Capitol police force later resigned.

"What is QAnon and where did it come from?"

"Capitol rioters 'came prepared for war'

Meanwhile, Capitol police have reportedly asked the Pentagon for the National Guard to remain in place around Congress for another two months.

Some 5,000 National Guards, drafted in after the riots, are due to leave on 12 March. One unnamed defence official told

Reuters it was highly likely the Pentagon would grant the Capitol police's extension request.

What does the intelligence say?

"As of late February, an unidentified group of militia violent extremists discussed plans to take control of the US Capitol and remove Democratic lawmakers on or about 4 March and discussed aspirational plans to persuade thousands to travel to Washington DC to participate," a new intelligence bulletin issued by the FBI and Department of Homeland Security says.

Following that assessment, the US Capitol Police referred in a statement to "a possible plot to breach the Capitol by an identified



militia group on Thursday, March 4".

"We have already made significant security upgrades to include establishing a physical structure and increasing manpower to ensure the

protection of Congress, the public and our police officers.

"Due to the sensitive nature of this information, we cannot provide additional details at this time."

Why is Thursday significant for QAnon?

Coronavirus: Texas and other states ease rules despite warnings



(News Agencies)-Texas will lift its mask requirement and allow businesses to reopen at full capacity next week, Governor Greg Abbott has announced.

"It is now time to open Texas 100%," the Republican said on Tuesday.

Texas is the largest US state to end its mask mandate. Mr Abbott has faced criticism from his party over the measure, which was imposed last July. But the administration of US President

Joe Biden has made it clear coronavirus restrictions are still necessary.

The announcement in Texas came as similar rules were lifted in other states, including Michigan, Louisiana, and Mississippi, which also ended its mask mandate.

The roll-out of vaccinations against Covid-19 has boosted confidence in a return to pre-pandemic life in the US. On Tuesday, President Biden said

the US was on track to have enough vaccines for every adult in the country by the end of May.

Yet the wave of reopenings has put states at odds with the Biden administration and its senior health officials, who have reacted with dismay to the relaxation of coronavirus measures at a precarious time in the pandemic.

"Covid-19 variants pose 'real threat' to vaccine progress, CDC warns

"Biden calls 500,000 death toll a heartbreaking milestone

On Monday the director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned of a "potential fourth surge of cases" if the country lapsed into complacency. Covid-19 data shows that, while infections and

deaths have declined in recent weeks, they are still at high levels relative to other countries. In total, the US has recorded more than 28 million infections and 516,000 deaths related to Covid-19, according to data collated by Johns Hopkins University.

What did the Texas governor announce?

Mr Abbott issued an executive order that rescinded most of the coronavirus measures he imposed earlier in the pandemic.

The new executive order, which is to take effect on 10 March, lifts all mask requirements and forbids local authorities from penalising residents who do not wear a face covering.

It removes all restrictions on businesses in counties

without a high number of Covid-19 patients in hospital. "Too many Texans have been sidelined from employment opportunities," Mr Abbott said in a speech at the Chamber of Commerce in the city of Lubbock. "Too many small business owners have struggled to pay their bills. This must end."

He said that with increased vaccinations and improved treatment for Covid-19, the state was "in a far better position now".

But, he added, "Covid has not suddenly disappeared".

Following weeks of decline, coronavirus infections and related deaths are creeping up again in Texas, data from the Covid Tracking Project showed. Texas has recorded more than 43,000 deaths related to Covid-19, the third-highest state toll in the US.

Ronny Jackson: Ex-White House doctor denies drinking on the job

(News Agencies)- The White House physician to US presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump has denied allegations that he drank on the job.

Ronny Jackson, a medical doctor and former US Navy admiral, dismissed findings of misconduct detailed in a Pentagon watchdog report.

"That is not me and what is alleged did not happen," Mr Jackson, now a pro-Trump congressman, said. He said the report was politically motivated.

The Pentagon report summarised findings from a years-long review launched in 2018 and examines allegations against Mr Jackson from as far back as 2012.

It found that the former White House doctor, who joined the White House medical team under George W Bush in 2006, disparaged colleagues, improperly used sleeping pills and was repeatedly found to have been drinking on duty. As White House physician in 2017, he was ridiculed for a glowing medical assessment of former president

Trump on live television. The doctor claimed that then-president had "incredibly good genes, and it's just the way God made him".

Mr Trump later nominated him to be his Veterans Affairs secretary, but Mr Jackson withdrew his name amid allegations that he created a hostile work environment, drank on the job and handed out prescription drugs like "they were candy". The watchdog report released on Wednesday corroborates several of those allegations, with Mr Jackson's subordinates describing him as a



"control freak" prone to allegations of alcohol use "meltdowns" and a "tyrant" by Mr Jackson on presidential trips under Mr Obama, harassing certain and intimidation". It also laid out specific female colleagues while drunk.

Andrew Cuomo: 'I never touched anyone inappropriately'

(News Agencies)-The New York Governor has said he is "so sorry" for making women uncomfortable but denied touching anyone inappropriately.

Three women have recently come forward with accusations of sexual harassment against Democrat Andrew Cuomo.

In his first public comments on the allegations, Mr Cuomo said he felt "embarrassed" that his actions made the women feel uncomfortable at work.

Mr Cuomo asked the public to wait for the "facts" before drawing conclusions.

The New York attorney general has opened an investigation into the allegations and will file a report on the findings.

The governor said he would not resign, despite calls from within his own party for him to step down.

What is Cuomo accused of?

A former top-level aide to Mr

Cuomo, Lindsey Boylan, claimed the governor touched her without consent and frequently made inappropriate comments about her appearance.

In an essay published last month, Ms Boylan accused Mr Cuomo of kissing her on the lips and asking her to play strip poker while on his private jet.

"New allegations pile pressure on Cuomo

A second former aide, Charlotte Bennett, told the New York Times that the governor peppered her with personal questions that were clear overtures to a sexual relationship.

"I understood the governor wanted to sleep with me," she said.

In a statement following Mr Cuomo's press conference, Ms Bennett's lawyer described the governor's statement as "full of falsehoods and inaccurate information". Debra Katz disputed

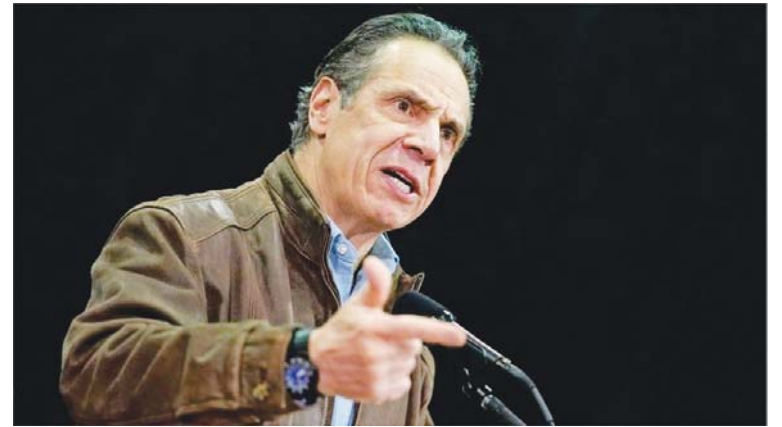
Mr Cuomo's claim that he was unaware he had made any of the women uncomfortable, saying Ms Bennett reported the "sexually harassing behaviour immediately" to the governor's chief of staff and chief counsel. "We are confident that they made him aware of her complaint", Ms Katz said.

A third woman, photographer Anna Ruch, said the politician touched her face and asked to kiss her at a wedding. The exchange was captured on camera.

A #MeToo moment for Democrats

Analysis - Nada Tawfik, BBC News, New York

When asked what assurances Mr Cuomo could give that there weren't more women who would lodge complaints, he didn't really answer directly, instead repeating that he never intended to



make anyone feel uncomfortable. But that is a question probably weighing heavily on Democrats who, having taken a strict view of these kinds of allegations in the past, are now facing their own #metoo test in relation to one of the biggest stars in the party.

Mr Cuomo had been praised and admired globally for his response to the pandemic and his daily informative briefings. Now he's being cast in a different light and many are

questioning his authenticity.

Not only is he facing an investigation into sexual harassment claims by the NY Attorney General's office, but also a federal investigation into how he handled data on nursing home deaths, undercounting the true toll. Now that his Covid response doesn't look so sterling, and more women are coming forward, the political future of this three-term governor in the Democratic party may be in peril.

Woman Finds Whale Vomit Worth Crores While Walking On Beach

(News Agencies)-A woman in Thailand stumbled upon a very lucky find while walking on a beach recently. Siriporn Niamrin, 49, had been walking along a beach on the coast of Nakhon Si Thammarat when she noticed a strange lump in the sand. Ms Niamrin reportedly noticed that the lump smelled a bit like fish and, thinking that it could be worth something, took it back home with her. This happened on February 23, reports The Sun. Once she was back home, Ms Niamrin asked her neighbours for

help in identifying the object she had stumbled upon. She was shocked when told that the misshapen lump was actually whale vomit, also known as ambergris.

According to the Daily Mail, the 12 inches wide and 24 inches long lump of ambergris has an estimated value of 1.86 lakh pounds - or approximately ? 1.8 crore.

Ambergris is produced in the system of sperm whales and is highly valued by perfumers since it works as a fixative, allowing fragrance to endure for longer.

To check the authenticity of the ambergris she found, Ms Niamrin held a naked flame to it, causing part of it to melt and harden again after cooling down.

She is now waiting for experts to visit her house and check the authenticity of the ambergris. "If I really have the genuine ambergris, I can help my community once I find a buyer for it," she says. "I feel lucky to have found such a large piece. I hope it will bring me money. I'm keeping it safe in my house and I have asked the local council to visit to check it."



Yikes. Hunt For Crocodiles After Unknown Number Go Missing



(News Agencies)- South African police on Thursday were on a crocodile hunt after an unknown number of reptiles escaped from a commercial breeding farm in the south of the country, conservation officials said. Young Nile crocodiles measuring 1.2-1.5 metres (four to five feet) long sneaked out of a farm in Cape Winelands, a district 150 kilometres (90 miles) east of

Cape Town. Police have set up a "dedicated task team" to deal with the escape, a government conservation department, CapeNature, said.

James-Brent Styan, the spokesman for Western Cape's provincial environmental affairs ministry, told AFP the farmer on Wednesday morning "realised there was a hole in the fence and an unknown number of

crocodiles had escaped." Police, local nature authorities, landowners and the farmer have been searching around the Breede River, which runs close to the farm, he said. Twenty-seven of the juvenile crocs have been recovered so far. Recapture efforts entail setting up "humane trap cages" on the river banks with bait inside to lure the animals, Razeena Omar, CEO of CapeNature, said.

Pakistan learns the cost of an alliance with China

as the cash-strapped South Asian country drifted away from its traditional ally: the United States. Beyond the geostrategic satisfaction of outflanking India, the traditional mutual archenemy of both China and Pakistan, there have been plenty of tangible economic benefits too.

Thanks to Chinese money and expertise, Pakistan has added more electricity to its faltering grid and is now better connecting its own cities with new roads and public transit systems. In international forums, Islamabad has a more reliable backer than the U.S., especially when it comes to the issue Pakistan cares about most: berating India.

"They're all in," said Uzair Younus, a U.S.-based consultant who hosts a podcast on Pakistan's economy, referring to Islamabad's alliance with Beijing. "There is broad consensus that this the path forward for the country."

For Pakistan, the alliance has also meant relying on China for everything from fighter jets to coronavirus vaccines. In January, Islamabad said it would receive a "gift" of 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine. It is currently in talks with Beijing to secure more doses of both the Sinopharm vaccine and the Cansino vaccine.

"We ... value our unassailable friendship and strategic partnership," Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said last year.

The U.S. has had some cautious words about Pakistan's deepening romance with Beijing. A State Department spokesperson said Washington remained "concerned that some CPEC projects lack transparency and impose unsustainable levels of debt on Pakistan, with Chinese state-owned enterprises benefitting disproportionately." It's not just the Americans who are worried. Many Pakistanis

debt relief on the projects it splashed out on. Between 2018 and 2020, Pakistan added \$17 billion to its external debt, totaling \$113 billion last year. Even in the best of times, Pakistan's finances are notoriously unstable. It's currently in a \$6 billion International Monetary Fund bailout program - its 13th - but the size and terms of China's investment have meant an even

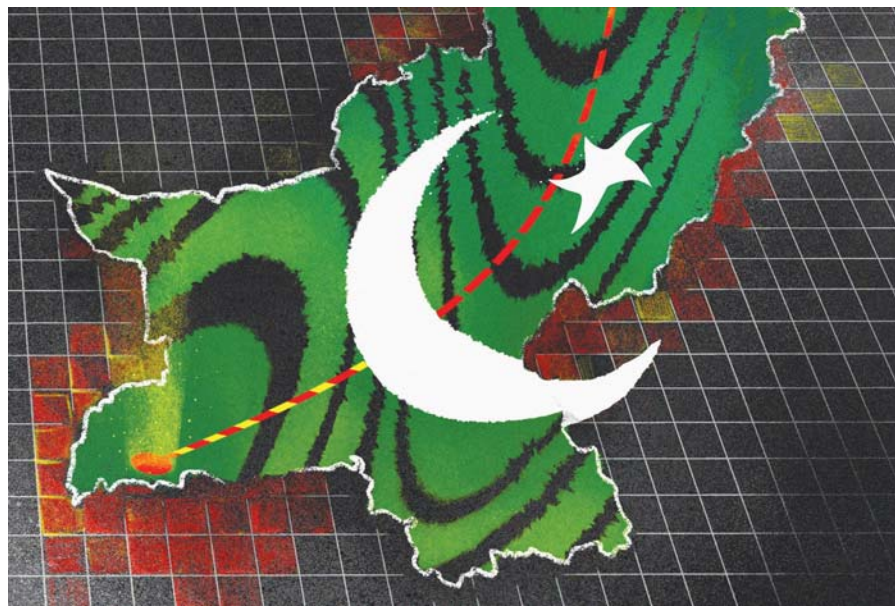
the director for South and Central Asia at the Hudson Institute, a Washington-based think tank, and a former Pakistani ambassador to the U.S.

Khan issued a public plea for debt assistance last year as the pandemic halted Pakistan's economy. Younus, the consultant, said Pakistan's debt trap alone hardly tipped the scale against China. "The business community will say, yes we have

If you don't give them what they want in the economic realm, they push back in the military realm. To keep the military relationship going, they have to give up the economic realm," he said. China is now Pakistan's biggest arms supplier, and with Pakistan's military playing an oversized role in its politics, the civilian government has to be wary it doesn't upset its generals in addition to Beijing. "In the end Pakistan ends up giving everything," Haqqani said. The "one window operation" partially explains Islamabad's reluctance to criticize Beijing for the human rights abuses being reported in China's western region of Xinjiang, which borders Pakistan. Khan, the prime minister, sees himself as a spokesperson for Muslims worldwide. He has accused French President Emmanuel Macron of peddling Islamophobia and has written to Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg about banning anti-Muslim sentiment on his platforms. But on the plight of Uighur Muslims who report systematic rape and forced labor, the Pakistani prime minister has been less vocal.

Experts say there is reluctance within the government and the military about the relationship, but that contrasts with both countries' official statements. Last year the governments announced an additional \$11 billion in infrastructure projects, and the countries routinely talk up the partnership. That's partly because Pakistan can't get itself out, explains Khurram Husain, a journalist who has written extensively about CPEC. "There is concern, but the space to do anything about it is very limited. They have very little room for maneuver." Meanwhile Pakistan's relations with the West continue to unravel. With the U.S. winding down its military presence in Afghanistan, Islamabad's importance to Washington has diminished. Pakistan was not a party to the Muslim countries who recognized Israel last year, despite Washington's efforts.

The EU, meanwhile, is an important importer of Pakistani goods, but that trading relationship has not evolved into a deeper partnership - especially as the bloc prepares to host India for a top-level summit in Porto in May. Pakistan has maintained that it's still open for business with Brussels and Washington, but Younus said the country's leaders "haven't articulated that vision clearly and concisely." Accusing the French of "hate-mongering" hasn't helped the high-wire act.



also observe that the alliance has been exacting on their country's resources, people and international reputation. Money problems

For one thing, Islamabad simply isn't able to pay China back. Bloomberg reported earlier this month that the Pakistani government will ask China for

greater cash crunch at a time when its economy is squeezed by the coronavirus pandemic. As a consequence, its debt has ballooned, its currency has nosedived and inflation has skyrocketed.

"They find themselves in a bit of a trap, but it's a trap of their own making," said Husain Haqqani,

Lankan port of Hambantota after the island nation ran out of cash. "The terms of loans with a Western country are predictable and realistic," he said. "It's not the same with China. There's less transparency."

Experts warn that the port of Gwadar, near Pakistan's border with Iran, has the potential to become a new Hambantota. Recent work on a fence around the port was only paused after local residents protested. It is unclear whether the order to build it came from the Pakistani government or at China's request, which is concerned about the province's security issues.

Neither the Chinese nor Pakistani government responded to requests for comment.

The projects have not boosted local employment either, with the Chinese construction companies preferring to ship their labor from China rather than hire local workers, fueling tensions further. And Haqqani points out that stronger trade and road links have helped Chinese goods be sold in Pakistan, but not the other way round.

Bundled together

The problem, Haqqani said, is that the various aspects of Pakistan's relationship with China are intertwined. While European politicians can strike an investment deal with China while simultaneously criticizing its human rights record, Pakistan has a "one window operation."

India shall remain in sunrise sector of growth, says Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant

(News Agencies)-Niti Ayog CEO Amitabh Kant on Wednesday said that India shall remain in the 'sunrise sector' of growth as technology is evolving.

Kant was speaking at the inauguration ceremony of a robot manufacturing unit of Addverb Technologies in Sector 156, Noida. He said that 75 per cent of India's export is in those sectors where global trade is merely 25 per cent.

"The world is evolving and we need to evolve

as well, technologically. Remaining the sunrise sector of growth means evolving in the new technology, which is going to be the future of global trade and demands of which are rising," said Kant. "Disruption can happen anytime to the ongoing technologies as it is replaced by

new ones. However, if we focus on sectors like robotics, drones, 5G, battery storage, solar manufacturing, satellites, genome sequencing

and other modern technologies, it will give us huge potential," Kant told India Today. He said we need to emphasize Make in India products for the world, for which we have to ensure quality. "Indians should know that Make in India is a 'zero effect, zero defect' product for the world. Factories like

these have huge potential as quality control is very crucial for becoming a global exporter. Robotics is a field of opportunities, there will be disruptions due to new technology but if we continue evolving with world-class products, we will lead," he said.



Adityanath's Growing Campaign To Be Seen As Successor To Modi

Before Modi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani had such a long innings that others found it hard to aspire to the top job. Their own status was built slowly and carefully. Vajpayee was cultivated by the RSS starting the mid-50s for prime position, Advani was thrown to the top by the Ram Mandir movement. Modi was neither prepared by the RSS nor was he a product of a movement. Unlike Atal and Advani, he rose on account of careful planning, projection and positioning. When he was made the prime ministerial candidate of the party in 2013, there were many in the rank and file like Sushma Swaraj, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari and Arun Jaitley who aspired to be Prime Minister; none could match his shrewd manoeuvres or the countrywide hold he was forming over voters, glimpses of which were apparent even then. There is no denying the fact that Amit Shah, thanks to Modi, is today seen as the second most powerful leader within the party. He is his boss' eyes and ears and it is assumed that he is being trained by Modi to succeed him. On the other hand, Yogi Adityanath, like Modi, is self-made and owes his rise to no one. In 2017, when he was made Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, it was a surprise to many. By then, he had been elected five times as an MP from Gorakhpur. He was seen as a staunch Hindutva leader who had



his own army of Hindu youth, called the Hindu Yuva Vahini. As a Chief Minister, he may not be liked by the liberal middle class and the English-spouting elite, but he is very secure in his post and has emerged as an icon of the Hindutva middle class. Among BJP Chief Ministers, he is the most envied and imitated leader. Last month I was in Madhya Pradesh and asked many friends why Shivraj Singh Chouhan, now serving his fourth term, has changed his image and become very aggressive as he flaunts his Hindutva credentials, which he never did earlier. He was always known as soft-spoken, mild-mannered, a consensus builder who did not discriminate between communities or play the Hindu-Muslim card. I was told he is feeling intimidated by the sudden rise of Yogi; he feels that

he is being upstaged by a first-time Chief Minister. Therefore, he is now espousing the Hindu cause, pursuing discriminatory politics, call it "The Yogi Effect". Shivraj Singh's anguish can be understood. Like Modi, in the present ideological ecosystem, Yogi has the 'right' credentials to lead the party in the future. The era of Atal and Advani has passed. Since 2014, politics and society has changed. Moderate Hindutva has given way to aggressive Hindutva. Leaders like Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Raman Singh, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Rajnath Singh and Nitin Gadkari seem antique in the present maize of Hindutva ideology. Modi in 2013, when he aspired to be Prime Minister, did talk about development, but the 2002 riots had given him the aura of a strong Hindutva leader who

could teach the 'enemies' of Hindus a lesson. And after becoming Prime Minister, he has invested more acuity in his Hindutva image.

Yogi, even before he became Chief Minister, was a rabble-rouser who never minced words while attacking Muslims. He was booked by the UP government for his provocative speech against Muslims in 2007. It is no coincidence that after becoming Chief Minister, his first order was to close all abattoirs, overwhelmingly run by Muslims. Even as an MP, he was extremely aggressive on the issue of "Love Jihad". He was the first Chief Minister to promulgate a "Love Jihad" ordinance, followed by other BJP-ruled states, including Madhya Pradesh. When the Shaheen Bagh movement

spread to UP, he retaliated with immense force. Activists were randomly put behind bars; so was former IPS officer, SR Darapuri, nearly 80 years old; pregnant women activists were not spared. Anti-CAA protesters were treated like hardened criminals; their faces and addresses were displayed on public hoardings.

Yogi's past as Mahant or chief priest of the Gorakhpur Peeth or sect is an added advantage. He wears saffron attire like Sadhus in the Hindu religious tradition. Like Modi, he lives alone. He is unmarried and can't be faulted for wanting to earn money or privileges for a family. He does not live with his parents either. When he was adopted by his guru, he renounced familial ties and has since then lived like a 'saint'. Other BJP leaders have to prove their Hindu credentials, but it comes naturally to him.

As Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath has had to prove that he is a tough administrator and can run the government effectively and efficiently. In the last four years he has not only neutralized his opponents in the party but also shown a vice-like grip over the administration. Like Modi, nothing moves without his consent, and nobody can afford to cross his path. The press is not spared either.

As a tough-talking Chief Minister, he is also eager to prove that he means business; he is equally at ease with big corporates, part of his plan and ambitions to turn UP into a model of development, much like Modi successfully sold the Gujarat dream. Apparently, he has hired a team of professionals to build his image and turn him into a saleable commodity at the national and international fora. His so-called development stories are adorning the pages of newspapers and TV screens (including via ads paid for by his government). As he positions himself as a replacement for Modi, he is the most sought-after leader for state elections, even outside the northern belt. His demand as a star campaigner is infectious. He is seen making speeches from Tripura to Kerala and from Hyderabad to Assam and West Bengal. So among 'Hindutva' voters, his appeal is universal.

Need regulation of OTT content as some platforms even show pornography, says Supreme Court

The Supreme Court on Thursday observed that there should be some screening of the web shows, films and other content that are telecast on OTT platforms and asked the Centre to place the recently framed regulation before the court by Friday.

The Supreme Court was hearing a plea on the controversy surrounding Amazon Prime Video's latest show 'Tandav'.

The Supreme Court has said that some regulation is needed for web content as some cases have shown even pornography is being telecast on such platforms and a "balance has to be maintained". The court has



further said that it would examine the Centre's regulation on Friday and also hear the anticipatory bail plea of Amazon's Aparna Purohit. On Tuesday, Amazon Prime Video apologised over the

controversy over 'Tandav' and said that it respects its viewers' "diverse beliefs". Amazon Prime Video apologised "unconditionally to anyone who felt hurt by scenes" in 'Tandav'. The government last

week brought new guidelines for social media and OTT platforms to ensure compliance with local laws. The new regulations for social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter as well as OTT players such as Netflix require them to remove any content flagged by authorities within 36 hours and setting up a complaint redressal mechanism with an officer being based in the country. The regulations also make it mandatory for platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp to identify the originator of a message that authorities consider to be anti-national and against the security and sovereignty of the country.

"Crores" Hidden, Say Officials On Anurag Kashyap, Tapsee Pannu Raids: 10 Points

Here are the top 10 points in this big story:

1. The Income Tax Department on Wednesday began searches at the homes and offices of Ms Pannu and Mr Kashyap and his partners who launched the now-defunct production house Phantom Films.

2. The searches, part of a tax evasion probe against Phantom Films and carried out across 28 locations in Mumbai and Pune, also covered Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shibhasish Sarkar and some executives of celebrity

and talent management companies KWAN and Exceed.

3. WhatsApp chat logs, emails, documents and computer peripherals were seized from various locations. Ms Pannu, 33, and Mr Kashyap, 48, who were shooting in Pune, have been questioned by the tax officers.

4. The others searched include some employees of Phantom, which was dissolved in 2018, and its other promoters director-producer Vikramaditya Motwane, producer Vikas Bahl and producer-distributor Madhu Mantena.

5. "During the search, evidence of huge suppression of income by the leading film production house compared to the actual box office collections has been unearthed. The company officials have not been able to explain discrepancy of around ? 300 crore," the Income Tax Department said in a news release.

6. "Evidence related to manipulation and under-valuation of share transactions of the production house amongst the film directors and shareholders, having tax

implication of about ? 350 crore has been found and is being further investigated," it said.

7. "Evidence of cash receipts by the leading actress amounting to ? 5 crore has been recovered. Further investigation is going on," the department said, without naming Ms Pannu.

8. "Apart from this, non-genuine/bogus expenditure to related concerns by the leading producers/director having tax implication of about ? 20 crore has been detected. Similar findings have been made in the case of the leading actress

also," it added. +9. Both Anurag Kashyap and Tapsee Pannu are outspoken critics of the government and have lent their voice to various causes, including the ongoing farmer protests and last year's protests against the controversial citizenship law that challenged PM Modi.

10. A string of opposition leaders have criticised the raids since Wednesday. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi used three popular Hindi idioms on Thursday to hit out at the government and the hashtag "ModiRaidsProFarmers".

Anti-national or anti-government, what is sedition?

In Disha Ravi's case, the Delhi court said, "The offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the governments." It also said the government could not put citizens "behind bars simply because they chose to disagree with the state policies".

In Farooq Abdullah's case, the Supreme Court said, "Expression of views which is dissent and different from the opinion of the government cannot be termed seditious." The Supreme Court also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the petitioners for making an unsubstantiated charge of sedition. The sedition law has been in controversy for far too long. Often the governments are criticized for using the law - Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) - against vocal critics of their policies. In the popular narrative, sedition is taken as "deshdroh" or an anti-national act as against "rajdroh" or an anti-government act.

The sedition law says, "Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law in India, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which a fine may be added; or, with fine." Clearly, the law does not say that sedition is an act

against the country or the nation. So, what is sedition in law? In law, sedition is certainly an act of spreading disaffection against the government. But it is not so simple," Supreme Court lawyer Atul Kumar told indiatoday.in. He said, "There is a thin line between criticizing the government, making a false propaganda against the government and trying to destabilise the government. Destabilising a democratically elected government certainly falls under the purview of sedition law." The sedition law has been in debate ever since it was brought into force by the colonial British rulers in 1860s. Several top freedom movement leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were booked under the sedition law.

Mahatma Gandhi described it as the "prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen." Nehru had described it as "highly objectionable and obnoxious" which "should have no place in any body of laws that we might pass". Nehru said, "The sooner we get rid of it the better."

Still, the law has survived in India through governments headed by from Nehru to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Does sedition law curb free speech? "The law has become synonymous with being anti-national," said Kumar adding that the courts have to interpret it in terms of Article 19, which

guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression but also provides riders.

"The riders are that you have to give a free passage to the government to function in a proper way. You can protest, you can agitate against the government and criticize its policies but you cannot do it in a way that jeopardizes the functioning of the government. Running a government smoothly is also democracy and a constitutional obligation," Kumar explained. The Supreme Court on numerous occasions in the past has ruled that raising slogans against the government or criticizing its policies is not sedition. In a 1962 case, the Supreme Court had ruled "citizen has a right to say or write whatever he likes about the government". The five-judge bench had added a rider that



while criticizing, a citizen could "incite people to violence against the government". In yet another case in which two persons had raised slogans of "Khalistan Zindabad" and "Raj Karega Khalsa" outside a cinema hall in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Supreme Court had dismissed the sedition charge.

"the raising some slogans only a couple of times by the two lonesome appellants, which neither evoked any response nor any reaction from anyone in the public can not attract the provisions of Section 124A or Section 153A IPC [promoting enmity between two groups]," the Supreme Court had said.

"200 Plus Seats In Bengal, BJP Chief Minister On May 3": Tejasvi Surya

The Bharatiya Janata Party will have its first ever chief minister in West Bengal on May 3, when the results for the assembly election are expected to be declared, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya has promised, adding the party will win at least 200 of the Trinamool-ruled state's 294 seats.

"BJP will win more than 200 seats in West Bengal. (Chief Minister) Mamata Banerjee's

days as a chief minister are numbered. On the 3rd of May, West Bengal will have a BJP chief minister," Mr Surya was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

"This is the legacy of the communists which Mamata Banerjee has carried forward but there will be no more bloodshed and political murder politics in West Bengal because BJP will have its chief minister," he added.

Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh said the party will win much more than 200 seats as they had begun preparing for the elections five years ago, when Ms Banerjee had retained power with a massive mandate.

"We will not get less than 200 (seats). It will definitely be more than 200. We did not begin preparations today, we had started five years back," Mr Ghosh said.

'When will it end?': How a changing virus is reshaping scientists' views on COVID-19

Chris Murray, a University of Washington disease expert whose projections on COVID-19 infections and deaths are closely followed worldwide, is changing his assumptions about the course of the pandemic. Murray had until recently been hopeful that the discovery of several effective vaccines could help countries achieve herd immunity, or nearly eliminate transmission through a combination of inoculation and previous infection. But in the last month, data from a vaccine trial in South Africa showed not only that a rapidly-spreading coronavirus variant could dampen the effect of the vaccine, it could also evade natural immunity in people who had been previously infected.

"I couldn't sleep" after seeing the data, Murray, director of the Seattle-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, told Reuters. "When will it end?" he asked himself, referring to the pandemic. He is currently updating his model to account for variants' ability to escape natural immunity and expects to provide new projections as early as this week.

A new consensus is emerging among scientists, according to Reuters interviews with 18 specialists who closely track the pandemic or are working to curb its impact. Many described how the breakthrough late last year of two vaccines with around 95% efficacy against COVID-19 had initially sparked hope that the virus could be largely contained, similar to the way measles has been.

But, they say, data in recent weeks on new variants from South Africa and Brazil has undercut that optimism. They now believe that SARS-CoV-2 will not only remain with us as an endemic virus, continuing to circulate in communities, but will likely cause a significant burden of illness and death for years to come. As a result, the scientists said, people could expect to



continue to take measures such as routine mask-wearing and avoiding crowded places during COVID-19 surges, especially for people at high risk.

Even after vaccination, "I still would want to wear a mask if there was a variant out there," Dr. Anthony Fauci, chief medical advisor to U.S. President Joe Biden, said in an interview. "All you need is one little flick of a variant (sparking) another surge, and there goes your prediction" about when life gets back to normal.

Some scientists, including Murray, acknowledge that the outlook could improve. The new vaccines, which have been developed at record speed, still appear to prevent hospitalizations and death even when new variants are the cause of infection. Many vaccine developers are working on booster shots and new inoculations that could preserve a high level of efficacy against the variants. And, scientists say there is still much to be learned about the immune system's ability to combat the virus.

Already, COVID-19 infection rates have declined in many countries since the start of 2021, with some dramatic reductions in severe illness

and hospitalizations among the first groups of people to be vaccinated.

WORSE THAN FLU

Murray said if the South African variant, or similar mutants, continue to spread rapidly, the number of COVID-19 cases resulting in hospitalization or death this coming winter could be four times higher than the flu. The rough estimate assumes a 65% effective vaccine given to half of a country's population. In a worst-case scenario, that could represent as many as 200,000 U.S. deaths related to COVID-19 over the winter period, based on federal government estimates of annual flu fatalities.

His institute's current forecast, which runs to June 1, assumes there will be an additional 62,000 U.S. deaths and 690,000 global deaths from COVID-19 by that point. The model includes assumptions about vaccination rates as well as the transmissibility of the South African and Brazilian variants.

The shift in thinking among scientists has influenced more cautious government statements about when the pandemic will end. Britain last week said it expects a slow emergence from one of the

world's strictest lockdowns, despite having one of the fastest vaccination drives.

U.S. government predictions of a return to a more normal lifestyle have been repeatedly pushed back, most recently from late summer to Christmas, and then to March 2022. Israel issues "Green Pass" immunity documents to people who have recovered from COVID-19 or been vaccinated, allowing them back into hotels or theaters. The documents are only valid for six months because it's not clear how long immunity will last.

"What does it mean to be past the emergency phase of this pandemic?," said Stefan Baral, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. While some experts have asked whether countries could completely eradicate any case of COVID-19 through vaccines and stringent lockdowns, Baral sees the goals as more modest, but still meaningful. "In my mind, it's that hospitals aren't full, the ICUs aren't full, and people aren't tragically passing," he said.

"SCIENTIFIC WHIPLASH" From the beginning, the new coronavirus has been a moving target. Early in the pandemic, leading scientists warned that

the virus could become endemic and "may never go away," including Dr. Michael Ryan, head of the World Health Organization's emergencies programme.

Yet they had much to learn, including whether it would be possible to develop a vaccine against the virus and how quickly it would mutate. Would it be more like measles, which can be kept almost entirely at bay in communities with high rates of inoculation, or flu, which infects millions globally each year? For much of 2020, many scientists were surprised and reassured that the coronavirus had not changed significantly enough to become more transmissible, or deadly.

A major breakthrough came in November. Pfizer Inc and its German partner BioNTech SE as well as Moderna Inc said their vaccines were around 95% effective at preventing COVID-19 in clinical trials, an efficacy rate that is much higher than any flu shot.

At least a few of the scientists Reuters interviewed said even in the wake of those results, they hadn't expected the vaccines to wipe out the virus. But many told Reuters that the data raised hope within the scientific community that it would be possible to virtually eliminate COVID-19, if only the world could be vaccinated quickly enough.

"We all felt quite optimistic before Christmas with those first vaccines," said Azra Ghani, chair in infectious disease epidemiology at Imperial College London. "We didn't necessarily expect such high-efficacy vaccines to be possible in that first generation."

The optimism proved short-lived. In late December, the UK warned of a new, more transmissible variant that was quickly becoming the dominant form of the coronavirus in the country. Around the same time, researchers learned of the impact of the faster-spreading variants in South Africa and in Brazil.

Phil Dormitzer, a top vaccine scientist at Pfizer, told Reuters in November that the U.S. drugmaker's vaccine success signaled the virus was "vulnerable to immunization" in what he called "a breakthrough for humanity." By early January, he acknowledged the

variants heralded "a new chapter" in which companies will have to constantly monitor for mutations that could dampen the effect of vaccines. In late January, the impact on vaccines became even clearer. Novavax's clinical trial data showed its vaccine was 89% effective in

a UK trial, but just 50% effective at preventing COVID-19 in South Africa. That was followed a week later by data showing the AstraZeneca PLC vaccine offered only limited protection from mild disease against the South African variant. The most recent

change of heart was considerable, several of the scientists told Reuters. Shane Crotty, a virologist at the La Jolla Institute for Immunology in San Diego, described it as "scientific whiplash": In December, he had believed it was plausible to achieve so-called "functional eradication"

of the coronavirus, similar to measles. Now, "getting as many people vaccinated as possible is still the same answer and the same path forward as it was on December 1 or January 1," Crotty said, "but the expected outcome isn't the same."

Has Covid Changed Our Definition of 'Intimacy'?

Reena was thrilled when she realized Covid lockdown would result in spending time with her husband. Ravi and she were married some time ago and had been unable to spend time with each other. Like all couples they had been overtaken by the demands to earn money, take care of the family and the lockdown would help them to be with each other 24 hours a day and give them enough privacy to discover what they had lost. She felt it was an opportunity, god-given and one that comes in a lifetime. Both of them worked in high-profile jobs. The isolation of Covid was a boon, a gift that could be used to be together and discover intimacy, the most missed and valued attribute of modern life. They were with each other 24x7 and she felt the time they spent together being intimate both emotionally and sexually, had enhanced many folds. Yet, there was something missing, a vacuum that she could not identify. One day it came as a crushing blow when routinely going through his laptop for an old account she found that he was spending time watching pornography and spending time on adult websites when he had told her he was busy in office work and could not be with her. On another portal she found him chatting at pornographic sites. He had never been like this, she knew. What had happened to him, most of all at a time when she needed him the most emotionally and physically? Her body had reacted to him like never before and Covid was the gift. She had even told him in so many words.

Confronted, Ravi broke down and shared that he had indeed turned to pornography after the lockdown. "So, all the moments you told me your attention was on me and I was the focus of your desire, you were fantasizing about other women," she said, feeling devastated. Looking

Many were quick to share that discussing intimacy, once a side issue relegated to the background, now occupied the central hour.



away he said, "Yes."

Reena came for therapy soon after. She had felt betrayed that her world had turned upside down and what she thought would create a new beginning for both of them, had actually made her aware of a sad reality she didn't want to believe. While speaking to me in therapy she shared that she had made a rough estimate of how many hours he must have spent watching pornography daily and it came to almost 21 hours in the last week. "For the first time I feel I don't know him," she said. Ravi's story was not unique either. Many psychologists who see couples in therapy share that the Covid pandemic brought an increase in the use of pornography by men. It was not aided by the fact that few clients felt comfortable discussing this issue. Sexual intimacy and its discussion have remained closeted for long. The use of pornography, its impact, and any discussion draw strong

responses from mental health professionals and clients alike ranging from utter liberalism to conservative reactions of disgust. It is not one that has a reasonable, coherent or clinical perspective of what constitutes a pornography problem and how to approach it like depression, anxiety and traumatic reaction. According to a Nielson study done a few years ago, a massive 70 per cent of all users of pornography, especially men keep it a secret and nearly 20 per cent out of them report developing compulsive behavior that impacts their lives negatively. As a result, many mental health professionals call the addiction to pornography the most challenging and emerging mental health problem. Those affected by its use and are feeling disturbed by it can be either a nine-year-old girl to a 90-year-old grandfather.

Covid gave mankind a choice to discover intimacy again or lose

it. In Shakespeare's words, it was to be or not to be. By giving men and women an opportunity to be in proximity with each other never before known so far in human history, it gave a choice to be intimate once again, break the barriers that inhibited spontaneity that the digital world had snatched from our experience.

Has pornography then taken an insidious and silent route during the pandemic and wandered into the deep recesses of our psyche and its impact felt on the most sacred citadel of human experience, otherwise known as intimacy. As I hear client after client in therapy, mostly women and sometimes with their partners, it seems that the pandemic has destroyed the hopes of many creating a labyrinth, a monster that none of us imagined would overwhelm us this way.

Intimacy as psychiatrist, Eric Berne, defined is one of the six major ways in which human beings structure time. For

intimacy to take place between two adults, all psychic defenses drop and they relate dropping all masks. This is a moment they become vulnerable, letting each other know who they are as a person as a sexual being.

Why did men, like Ravi, turn to pornography instead of the intimacy that their partner so desperately needed? Wasn't he aware of his partner's longing and needs? In a session, he revealed why he turned to pornography. "It was the collective fear, the paranoia of the times that got into me and made me almost childlike wanting to withdraw from the world." So, did he see it as an opportunity like his newly married wife did, a chance for discovery and exploring the body, the inner self. "Sadly, no," he shook his head. Was he aware that his relationship would ever take such a turn?

Intimacy is experienced by being fully in the moment. The feel of your partner's skin against your skin, the joy of holding hands for a couple that melts into a feeling of union where your focus is on the other and the sensory processes it involves.

What Covid has painfully brought to the fore that many of us and especially men have forgotten to feel, the sensory beings that we were. We have replaced it with artificial constructs that has taken over the feeling of intimacy that our ancestors felt far deeper than us. The pandemic gave us a chance to regain it and we lost that chance to regain that space with us. In one of the sessions, Ravi shared he was surprised that Reena had felt like questioning him and saying she felt an emptiness. On his own, he had felt watching pornography had made him a more involved lover. Reena had violently disagreed. What I had increasingly felt was conditions necessary for healthy sexuality; consent, equality, trust, safety were increasingly missing from his behavior.

What CDC guidelines will likely say (and not say) to do if you're vaccinated

As more patients and friends get fully vaccinated, Dr. William Schaffner's phone has been ringing constantly, his email box flooded.

The fully vaccinated -- people who are two weeks past their second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer Covid-19 vaccines, or after a single dose of Johnson & Johnson's -- have many questions for the professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University.

They ask if it's OK to hug their grandkids now. Can they play cards with their vaccinated friends? Can they host a small indoor dinner party, but should they forget to invite Uncle Frank who has been unmasked at the bar a lot? "I try to answer as many of those questions as I possibly can, because these are very thoughtful people," Schaffner said. "These are the people who are trying to do the best in these circumstances." For others who don't happen to have a favorite infectious disease expert on speed dial, the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention will soon publish guidelines for the fully vaccinated.

More than 82 million vaccine



about delayed guidelines

The Biden administration has been saying it's been working on these guidelines for weeks. They were widely expected to come out Thursday, but they're still in the works, according to an official involved in the drafting process.

During the Trump administration, White House

sent to the White House and the Department of Health and Human Services so staff there could be aware ahead of time of what they said.

"I don't envy the writers of those guidelines," Schaffner said. "You can paint some pictures with a fairly broad brush, but people want to apply general guidelines to specific life, and

that gets very, very nitty gritty. There's no way to capture everything." Vaccines offer really good protection for the vaccinated, research shows, and there's good evidence they help prevent the spread of

"We don't want people who are not fully vaccinated to think that that everything has been lifted and already we can put things behind us, and the pandemic is over, because it's not," the official said.

There were more than 64,000 newly diagnosed cases of Covid-19 in the US just on Thursday.

It's not like going back to 2019. While the guidelines will not give the vaccinated permission to start living like it's 2019 again, according to a Biden administration official, the guidelines do offer some hope that the end of total social isolation is near.

For instance, you will finally be able to show your vaccinated friends all your home DIY projects from the past year.

The CDC confirmed that a Politico article accurately characterized the guidelines as recommending that the vaccinated can have social interactions at small home gatherings with other fully vaccinated people.

"I think that's certainly a very reasonable first step," said Dr. Aaron Richterman, an infectious disease physician at the University of Pennsylvania. Don't however, throw away that cloth mask yet. The guidelines will advise the vaccinated to continue to wear masks in

public and keep a good physical distance from others.

"While we're still vaccinating everyone, our primary societal goal remains to protect the unvaccinated," Richterman said.

Masks help do just that. And there's no guarantee that vaccinated people may not still carry virus in their noses or throats -- virus that may not make the carrier sick, but that could be spewed out and infect someone yet unvaccinated.

"Masks continue to work, and we need them against the variants," Schaffner said. Public health experts worry that the spread of the more contagious variants could prolong the pandemic.

The guidelines should also help the vaccinated navigate interactions with loved ones at their nursing homes who have been kept behind locked doors for more than a year. They should also include travel advice.

Unfortunately, vaccination is not a "free pass to travel," Dr. Anthony Fauci said at a CNN Global Town Hall in early February. The director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases said "essential" travel is a yes, "but we don't want people to think because they got vaccinated, then other public health recommendations just don't apply."

The guidelines won't be totally prescriptive and tell you exactly what you can and cannot do once you are fully vaccinated.

The guidelines won't tell you if you can or can't bowl with Auntie Mary, for example, nor will it tell you if you can or can't meet grandpa at the coffee shop for a game of Settlers of Catan with the new "sheep strategy" you learned while stuck at home.

It's impossible to get to that level of detail. We can't predict every situation that human beings will be in," the Biden official explained. "What we can do is give principles for people to think through. It will give people the means to think through it and then they can choose what level of risk they wish to take."



doses have been given out in the US, and after a year of takeout and Zoom-only visits with mom, the vaccinated want direction.

"I think people need practical advice about how to go about their everyday lives," said Julia Marcus, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Harvard. "I think without guidance, people may make decisions that are not informed."

Official: Nothing 'nefarious'

officials sometimes had a heavy hand with CDC guidelines, dictating what the agency could and could not say, according to CDC officials.

But that is not what is currently happening with these new guidelines, according to the Biden administration official.

"I don't think anything nefarious is going on," said the official.

The official said a draft of the new guidelines likely has been

Covid-19, but the vaccines are not total "armor," Schaffner said. People still need to make informed decisions about risk. The CDC needs to strike a tricky balance with these guidelines, the experts said.

Guidelines need to encourage people to get vaccinated, help the vaccinated understand that they still need to be careful, and manage the expectations of the unvaccinated.

How One Looted Artifact Tells the Story of Modern Afghanistan

Many of the country's finest antiquities were stolen under cover of war, ending up in elite museums all over the globe. Should they be returned?

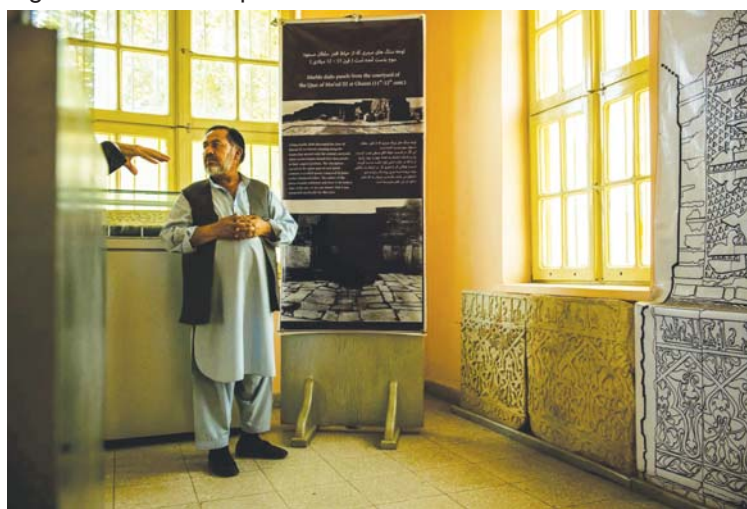


In November 2013, Nora von Achenbach, curator at the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Hamburg, Germany, examined the catalog for an upcoming auction by the Paris-based dealer Boisgirard-Antonini. The glossy pages offered a bevy of antiquities for sale: bronze figurines, jewelry and a statue from ancient Egypt estimated at more than 300,000 euros, or almost half a million dollars. But von Achenbach was interested in a pale marble tablet, carved with arabesques, vines and Persian script. Lot 104, an "important epigraphic panel with interlacings from the palace of Mas'ud III," was dated to the 12th century,

from the capital of the Ghaznavid Empire, in what is today Afghanistan. Curators must be wary of buying fake or stolen art, particularly when it comes to ancient artifacts, which may have been illegally excavated in countries plagued by war and corruption.

Boisgirard-Antonini's catalog simply stated that the marble's provenance was "a private French collection." But von Achenbach - who did not respond to requests for an interview - may have been reassured by the lengthy description of the archaeological site where the marble was originally found, the royal palace in Ghazni, where a legal Italian-led excavation broke ground in the 1950s. Moreover, as the catalog noted, three panels from the same site were held by the Brooklyn Museum, San Francisco's Asian Art Museum and the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris. Von Achenbach decided that the marble could form part of her museum's collection in Hamburg. She sent in a bid, the equivalent of around \$50,000, and won.

Boisgirard-Antonini shipped the panel to Germany. While it was still in storage at the museum, von Achenbach invited Stefan Heidemann, an expert on Islamic art at Hamburg University, to view the panel. Heidemann thought it was magnificent, but unease crept over him as he wondered how, exactly, it had come from Afghanistan to Europe. He had



worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where, as chance would have it, a colleague of his, Martina Rugiadi, wrote her doctoral thesis on the Italian excavation in Ghazni, and the fate of the marbles during the war years that followed.

When Heidemann got in touch, Rugiadi told him the Hamburg marble had indeed been stolen from the Afghan government. Numbered C3733 during the excavation, the marble disappeared during Afghanistan's civil war, when the country's museums were robbed by guerrillas. Moreover, Rugiadi had already heard about the auction, and had emailed Pierre Antonini to warn him around the time of the sale. He replied asking for more infor-

mation. But the auction house shipped the panel to Hamburg anyway, without informing the museum of the evidence that it was stolen.

"This I find quite a scandal," Heidemann told me.

As it so happened, Claude Boisgirard was being investigated in connection with a series of thefts from the venerable Parisian auction house Hotel Drouot, where he spent decades as an auctioneer; he would be given a 10-month suspended sentence for fraud and conspiracy in 2016. (Boisgirard-Antonini did not respond to requests for comment.) The Hamburg museum notified German authorities, but did not pursue legal action against Boisgirard-Antonini; it kept the marble in storage and out of sight. In August 2018, I received an email from Tobias Mörike, a curator of Islamic Art, introducing himself and the marble. Von Achenbach had retired in 2017; the museum was now planning to exhibit the marble as part of a series called "Looted Art?" - a mea culpa, of sorts - and wanted to return the artifact to the Afghan government. There were still many unanswered questions that surrounded the marble, he told

me. How had it gone from the hands of looters to the showrooms of Paris? And what did this say about the other Ghazni marbles held by prestigious institutions? "It appears that not only none of these museums cared about the provenance of their objects," he wrote. "They all might go back to the same source." Mörike had read my stories on smugglers and corruption in Afghanistan. Would I be interested in visiting for the opening of the exhibition? Two months later, I stood in central Hamburg in front of the three-story former vocational school that housed the MKG, as it is known by its German initials. The museum was founded in the late 19th cen-

tury, when Hamburg was a thriving entrepôt for the expanding German empire, importing raw materials like rubber, sugar and ivory from colonies around the globe. Silke Reuther, the museum's provenance researcher, led me on a tour of the collection. Dressed in a rakish jacket and trousers with piping, she explained that, like the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the MKG was intended, in an era before Wikipedia and Google, as a reference for design and manufacturing, illustrated with a collection of masterworks spanning geography and time: Kashan tiles, Etruscan vases, Coptic funerary-cloth embroidery. Occasionally, she pointed out the little orange tags she had affixed to certain exhibits - much to the irritation of some of her fellow curators - intended as footnotes about how that artifact came to the museum. "The question I ask of every object," she said, "is, 'Are you stolen or not?'"

If we listen, objects have their own stories to tell. Even the phones in our pockets could testify to oceans crossed and hands that labored. But works of art speak as individuals. The question of provenance - the chain of ownership from creation to the present - was originally concerned with establishing authenticity, and therefore value. You might know that a painting was really a Velázquez, say, if you could find its original bill of sale, or that a desk was a genuine antique if it was recorded in a 17th-century will. But in recent decades, provenance research has come to be wielded against the perceived wrongs of the past. Like many professions pushed by a new generation of activists and scholars, the museum world is coming to grips with thorny issues of power and inequality. One of them is the concentration of valuable antiquities from around the world in the hands of Western museums. A fierce debate is underway about whether some of these objects should be returned to their former owners or places of origin, in what is known as "restitution." The paradigmatic case for restitution is the Nazis' extensive looting and expropriation of art during World War II, some of it for a grand museum that Adolf Hitler dreamed of establishing after the war in his hometown, Linz - one that would demonstrate, in a line of masterpieces beginning with classical Greece, the evolution of world civilization into its Aryan apex.



Millions in the US don't feel seen by either political party. My dad is one of them

Afew days after the insurrection at the Capitol, my father Jack started sending emails from his Lincoln, Kansas, home to his representative and senators in Congress. For some reason, he was also cc-ing me on these exchanges.

There was a new email almost every day, and the tone swung between pleading, angry, bewildered and frustrated. There were emails asking his senators to vote to impeach Trump, emails demanding proof supporting the allegations that the election had been stolen, emails trying to untangle their twisted logic.

One such email read, in part: "Your actions, and the actions of other Republicans like you, are destroying the Republican party. As I have been a lifelong Republican, I hate what has happened to the party of Lincoln and Reagan and the ideals of the past, to see it reduced to a personality cult."

The politicians' responses made it absolutely clear no one was taking my father's criticisms seriously. Kansas representative Tracey Mann sent a form letter response, saying "we must unify as a nation", which presumably meant moving on, forgetting the extravagant misdeeds of the Trump administration and voting against impeachment. When I asked my father if he had any expectation that his representatives would take responsibility for their involvement in the insurrection (Kansas junior senator Roger Marshall joined with those who claimed there was fraud during the election), he said, "No. Well ... no."

My father's frustration with the Republican party had been building for years, but something seemed to break with him after the insurrection. The riot at the Capitol was, he believed, stoked by unscrupulous politicians who for four years cared more about power than rule of law and who, when that power slipped, would rather let the country continue to fall apart than work to rebuild.

The Republican party is in the midst of an identity crisis, brought on by a big shift in voting demographics and a new generation of more radical and paranoid politicians. As Democrats move away from their historically working-



class constituency to become instead the party of the urban, college-educated liberal, Republicans find themselves attracting the loyalty of the religious, those not formally educated and the rural. The institutions which previously cultivated Republican voters - the university system and white-collar employment - now lead Americans to the political left, leaving conservative leaders and thinktanks scrambling to figure out how to accommodate their new, more blue-collar base. Many Republican politicians clearly find it easier to appeal to their base's fears and resentments than to provide working-class Americans with stability and resources. This has led to some strange pageantry, like the Yale Law graduate and Missouri Republican senator Josh Hawley cosplaying as a man-of-the-people populist.

The Bulwark podcast, which is one of the few conservative media outlets my father still listens to, and which prides itself on its "civil" discourse, has been monitoring this identity crisis daily. In its episode "Post-Impeachment GOP", host Charlie Sykes described the slow decline that seemed to accelerate once Republican voters believed the lie that the Trump's re-election had been stolen and their politicians refused to deny or disavow it. "The Republican party has been willing to look the other way over lies, racism, all the corruption and xenophobia, but now it's willing to look the other way [on] violence, extremism and anti-democratic authoritarianism."

My father Jack likens his estrangement from the Republican party to the rise of the recently deceased Rush Limbaugh. He had listened to him in the 80s for about a year, at first finding funny his jokes about the hypocrisy of Democrats. But soon Rush's tone changed. "He had been saying outrageous things about people and then laughing - but then he started to sound like he was really believing it. He wasn't entertaining any more; he was vicious." He was further turned off from Limbaugh, who exploded in popularity during the Clinton administration, by his reliance on cheap misogynist and homophobic jokes.

The Republican party as a whole was going down a similar path - choosing culture war battles over ideological integrity, and war-mongering over supporting the institutions of family, religious freedom, strong communities, and small business the party professed to value. This was particularly visible in the politics of our home state of Kansas, which is often portrayed as hardline conservative, but whose local politics are far more nuanced than outsiders perceive. It's worth remembering that the state has a strong local Democratic party, a history of far-left progressive politics, and that the current governor is Democrat Laura Kelly.

But back in 2011, Sam Brownback was elected governor and decided to make the most radical tax slashes the state had ever seen. This decimated the budgets of hospitals, schools, and other agencies, and they be-

gan to fall apart. Politicians ran against Brownback promising to raise taxes, something almost unheard of. The "Kansas experiment", as it was called, revealed the emptiness of Republican rhetoric and their lack of new ideas beyond "cut taxes".

Clearly my father is not the only conservative feeling estranged from the Republican party. Gerald Russello, editor of the conservative cultural journal the University Bookman, echoed the feeling. "The political conservatives you see on TV or in Congress are either Trump clowns or Reagan-era old guys who believe the free market solves everything," he told me recently. "Who speaks for me? I can't associate myself with clownish racists." It's not yet clear how extensive the fallout from Trumpism will be, but a larger number of Republicans are changing their official political affiliation than Democrats, and there is talk of the possibility of forming a splinter political party, called the Integrity party. (The Lincoln Project founders were involved in this idea before the organization was racked by sexual harassment accusations and larger questions about its financial and political purpose.) Building a new political party into something that can attain power and influence is a long-term goal, but it would strive to give a voice to fiscal conservatives and social moderates, occupying a center-right position, left of where the Republicans currently sit. When I asked my father if he

could ever be persuaded to vote Democratic, he thought for a while. "I doubt it. I get this feeling from the Democrats of 'We're from the government and we're here to help you' that I don't like. I want to know how can we best solve [a] problem instead of just throwing money at it." What he considers problems - things like the national debt and overspending on military - the Democrats don't seem to acknowledge, nor do the Republicans acknowledge what my father believes are looming disasters, like climate change and the broken healthcare system. But my father has no faith in the ideas Democrats have put forth to solve these issues.

Both my father and Russello expressed frustration with Republicans claiming to be a pro-family party while allowing families to suffer on their own through a pandemic. "Give the people money!" Russello said. "It's not socialism - that's an argument from the 80s." And he's worried about the future if the party continues to abandon what should be its primary concern. "There's a strain of conservatism with men and women in their 20s and 30s who have given up on politics. They say, you don't know how bad things are for us." The Republicans have little to offer them, as small towns and the middle of the country are allowed to decay into unemployment, de-industrialization and addiction, but these places are also Republicans' strongholds. For now, change looks unlikely to come from the top. Conservatives are still intellectually reliant on thinktanks in Washington, which have been spitting out the same ideas about the free market for decades. There are writers and intellectuals on the right who are trying to plot a course forward, but they are frequently drowned out by media personalities on Fox News and alt-right podcasts. Russello pointed out that after the media was so surprised by the election of Donald Trump in 2016, many publications pledged to go into these neglected regions and give coverage to their concerns. Very little of that coverage materialized; there have been few big splashy books on so-called "Trump country" apart from, say, *Strangers in Their Own Land* or *Hillbilly Elegy*.

Pandemic spurs Canada to offer path to citizenship to more temporary residents

Canada's recent move to offer permanent residency to more foreigners living and working in the country is a short-term solution to the economic problems spurred by a pandemic-related immigration slowdown, analysts say, while critics argue the strategy excludes too many vulnerable people. With travel restrictions in place, visa offices closed and immigration applications stalled, the Canadian government finds itself on the back foot as it attempts to reach its target of attracting a record 401,000 new permanent residents in 2021.

The country, which admitted 184,370 people in that category last year, the lowest number since 1998, is turning its attention to the more than 1 million temporary residents within its borders to boost the numbers, inviting some to apply for permanent residency.

Economists, however, say the move will not have a noticeable impact on Canada's economic growth and is not a fix to the country's long-term demographic challenges, including an aging population.



"In the short-term, it's nice that they're targeting these sorts of people. It's really just a change of status," said Andrew Agopsowicz, a senior economist at the Royal Bank of Canada. Without any immigration, Canada's average annual rate of economic growth by 2034 would shrink by 0.6 percentage points, the Conference Board of Canada said in 2018.

Canadian Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino told Reuters in an interview last week that the limitations posed by the pandemic mean "we need to look at the talent pool that is already within our borders."

In January, Canada welcomed 26,600 new permanent residents, most of whom were already in the country. That was 10% more than in the same period a year

ago. Last month, the Canadian government invited 27,000 temporary workers who met certain conditions to apply for permanent residency. (Graphic: New Permanent Residents to Canada -)

NOT A BOTTOMLESS WELL' Mendicino said January's numbers indicate the country can meet its 2021 target, but others disagree. "We might still end up

seeing a slowdown heading into the spring and summer. ... There is a large temporary pool and it's something Canada can draw from, but it's not a bottomless well," Agopsowicz said.

Canada has relied for decades on temporary workers to help meet the needs of its labor market. There have been pathways for these people to remain in the country, but they have tended to be narrow. Mendicino argues the push to boost the numbers of permanent residents by drawing on temporary ones is more than cosmetic. "The real benefits are derived once they put roots down and become more established in these jobs." The emergence of COVID-19 revealed gaps in Canada's immigration system when it came to temporary residents who are uniquely exploitable but also essential, said Harald Bauder, a professor at Ryerson University in Toronto. A path to permanent residency for them is needed, he added. Mendicino said Canada may offer such a path for agricultural workers, who are frequently marginalized or excluded from such routes to immigration.

As Sasikala Quits Politics, Here's How The BJP Got Chinnamma To Step Back

Sasikala Natarajan, the aide of former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, on Wednesday announced that she was quitting politics.

Since January BJP's top leaders in Delhi had been nudging Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to make peace with Sasikala to consolidate the AIADMK votes against the DMK, especially in the Southern Districts and Cauvery Delta. It is in these areas Sasikala's Thevar community has a substantial base and her nephew TTV Dhinakaran's AMMK would eat into the anti-DMK votes especially if caste-based voting happens. Home Minister Amit Shah too sold the same line to EPS with supporting data last week. But the Chief Minister refused to budge even though his deputy O. Panneerselvam was not averse to such an arrangement. Having hit a wall, the BJP shifted its focus to Sasikala, hoping she would be willing to untangle the stalemate. According to BJP sources, Sasikala was asked to step back with the promise that she could make a re-entry after the elections - especially if the AIADMK does poorly. If that was the carrot she was also shown the stick in the form of multiple ED and IT cases against her and her relatives.

By taking political sanyas Sasikala would live up to her title of "Thyaga Thalaivi" (a mother who sacrificed) given by her supporters. If she could play the



unity card now to stop the DMK and if that works she could take some of the credit if the AIADMK retains power. Even if that doesn't happen and the AIADMK loses, there would be demands for her to take back control and revive the party. Either way, she could make a political comeback, this time with the blessings of the BJP.

"There is also the realisation within the AMMK that the party's vote base has shrunk from its 6 per cent in 2019, which was why Sasikala did not go aggressively after her release from prison. She made some general call for unity of Jayalalithaa's followers but

preferred to stay silent. Even her call for unity was seen as a sign of weakness, something that EPS spotted and rejected any rapprochement between the two sides," pointed out political commentator Raveenthiran Thuraiamy.

Sasikala's retirement, rather than help the AIADMK, could help the DMK, say a few observers. "Her supporters will blame the BJP and EPS for pushing her to take this decision and may end up voting for the DMK to teach these two a lesson. To that extent the BJP's game plan could be counter-productive," observed S.J. Idhaya, a journalist based in Madurai. But a close confidant of TTV Dhinakaran says that if the merger or even seat-sharing happens in the next ten days the cadres would be enthused and would take on the DMK with greater confidence. "More than Sasikala or Dhinakaran, EPS was the stumbling block. The BJP should have brought him around much earlier," he said. But AIADMK leaders feel that while prison might have chastened Sasikala, tackling Dhinakaran could be more difficult. "If the BJP can rein him in, then the merger would be smoother," said a senior Minister.

Whisky a go go: US suspends tariffs on UK exports including scotch

Move raises hopes of post-Brexit trade deal and relates to dispute over state support for Boeing and Airbus

(News Agencies)-The White House has agreed to suspend retaliatory US tariffs on UK exports including scotch whisky, raising hopes of improved relations as talks continue about a post-Brexit transatlantic trade deal.

In 2019, then US president Donald Trump imposed a 25% tariff on a range of EU exports, as part of a 16-year trade dispute over state support for aerospace rivals Boeing and Airbus.

Estimates released last month suggested the duty had led to a £500m dropoff in sales of Scottish single malt alone. But the Department for International Trade (DIT) said on Thursday the Biden administration had suspended the tariff. The move followed the UK scrapping punitive measures against Boeing in January.

"The easier it is for Americans to buy a bottle of Macallan, Talisker or Glenfiddich, the more money those producers will have to invest in their

businesses, their staff and futures," said the trade minister Liz Truss. "Today's agreement shows that both the UK and the US are determined to work together to build back better and take our trading relationship to new heights."

The rapprochement, which was first reported by the Spectator, will also result in tariffs being lifted on a range of goods, including £11m of cashmere, £38m of pork products and £45m of cheese, the DIT said.

"From scotch whisky distillers to stilton-makers, businesses across the UK will benefit from the US decision today to suspend tariffs in this dispute," said Boris Johnson.

The government said it would continue to seek a "fair settlement" with the White House that removed all remaining punitive tariffs related to the dispute to boost the UK's aerospace industry.

It added that officials on both sides of the Atlantic were working on an ambitious trade deal that could remove £500m

of tariffs.

Business lobby group the Confederation of British Industry said it hoped the decision would pave the way for more cordial trade relations between the US and the post-Brexit UK.

"The duties on these goods were harming business and consumers on both sides of the Atlantic," said director general Tony Danker.

"This positive step must now lay the foundations for talks at pace to resolve the dispute once and for all. This dispute is lose-lose for all involved at a time when business is suffering from the pandemic, global trade and investment is crucial for economic recovery."

The move puts the UK at odds with the EU, which imposed retaliatory tariffs on US imports worth \$4bn (£3bn) after the World Trade Organization ruled the US had given illegal state aid to Boeing. The dispute stretches back to 2006, when the US complained that Airbus was receiving subsidies that put Boeing at a competitive



disadvantage.

Drinks industry figures welcomed an end to tariffs that have proved a drag on sales.

"Today is a very good day for Scotch and Scotland," said Ivan Menezes, the chief executive of Diageo, which owns brands including Johnnie Walker and Talisker. "Final resolution of the aerospace dispute, combined with the announcement of a continued freeze on spirits duty in yesterday's budget, will safeguard thousands of jobs across Scotland and the UK." The Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) said tariffs had done "severe damage" to distillers over the 16 months they were in place. "Today, everyone in our industry - from small companies

to large - is breathing a sigh of relief," said the SWA chief executive, Karen Betts.

But while British drinks firms celebrated, the Distilled Spirits Council of the US said American whiskey distillers were still losing out and called for further action to prevent lost sales. "While we welcome the US decision to suspend the retaliatory tariffs on UK distilled spirits for four months, we are greatly disappointed that the UK's debilitating tariff on American whiskey remains in place," said a spokesperson.

"American whiskey exports to the UK, our fourth largest market, have declined by 53%, from \$150m to \$71m, since the imposition of tariffs."

Away From Bezos Vs Ambani, A Startup Is Changing Indian Retail



A bruising battle for supremacy between two of the world's richest men is hogging the limelight, but the silent changes in India's retail landscape deserve equal attention. The ongoing digital transformation of the corner kirana stores, tens of millions of shops catering to 1.3 billion consumers, will matter for everyone from Unilever NV and Procter & Gamble Co. to State Bank of India, the country's largest lender. It will also be important to Amazon.com Inc. boss Jeff Bezos and Reliance Industries Ltd. Chairman Mukesh Ambani. The two billionaires are

circling each other over an Indian retailer in crisis. The founder of Future Group took Bezos's money, but sold his debt-laden business to Ambani when the pressure from the pandemic became too much. Amazon is in India's courts to scuttle the \$3.4 billion sale, which could end up making Reliance's dominance over the consumer economy unshakeable. Away from this high-profile fight for the ordinary Indian's wallet, a different contest is shaping up for control of what goes on shop shelves. Reaching small stores in a country of more than 660,000 villages and 8,000 cities and towns has traditionally

been an uphill struggle for brands. Even Unilever, which has been in India for almost a century, can barely tap 15% of all retailers directly. It needs wholesalers to boost that reach to 80%-plus, according to investment research and asset management company Sanford C. Bernstein & Co.

The wholesalers rely on their knowledge of (and trust in) retailers in their vicinity. But these relationship-oriented networks are small and expensive. Throwing them wide open with digitization is the big opportunity. Leading the charge is Udaan, a startup that in five years has taken 80% of the business-to-business e-commerce market, delivering goods it stocks in 200 warehouses nationwide to more than 1.7 million retail stores in 900 cities every day.

Suppliers receive their cash on time after Udaan takes their products. Retailers get credit they would have otherwise obtained at high interest rates from wholesalers. Everything happens on a smartphone app, which

helps small shopkeepers build a history of reliability in payments. Banks and financiers gain the confidence to lend the required working capital, and brands get less convoluted access. From manufacturers and millers to farmers, pharmacists, hotels, restaurants and grocers, the platform has 3 million registered buyers and sellers. As Vaibhav Gupta, one of Udaan's three co-founders, says, "We've solved the problem of trust on the internet." The firm is backed, among others, by Lightspeed Venture Partners, an early investor in Snap Inc., and Yuri Milner's DST Global. It's one of India's fastest-growing unicorns, as startups valued at \$1 billion or more are known.

Sujeet Kumar, another co-founder, credits some of the success to the 2017 goods-and-services tax. With multiple rates and high compliance costs, GST is a cumbersome consumption tax, but it's uniform across India. Warehousing decisions that used to be driven by a confusing smorgasbord of local levies are

now guided by efficiency. Mobile internet is undoubtedly the centerpiece. Ambani entered the Indian telecom industry with his 4G network in 2016 and crunched expensive data prices to where they're the cheapest in the world. The average kirana owner has a smartphone now, and isn't shy about using it. With a little training, lack of education isn't a barrier to reshaping sclerotic business practices. Disruption doesn't mean aping the West. Kumar and Gupta were part of the team that built Flipkart as India's answer to Amazon and left it two years before Walmart Inc. bought the e-commerce site for \$16 billion. Amod Malviya, their third partner, was Flipkart's chief technology officer. At Udaan, though, the founders haven't copied a global template. That's because none exists. While affluent e-commerce consumers may have preferences similar to their Western counterparts, the vast majority of price-conscious customers buy everyday items in tiny quantities.

Pushed out by pandemic, women struggle to regain footing in U.S. job market

Katy McAvoy hoped she would have more time for her job search after her 5-year-old daughter started in-person kindergarten in mid-November after months of virtual learning due to the pandemic. But the school near Grand Rapids, Michigan closed again a week later as COVID-19 infections surged there and across much of the country.

The unpredictable schedule made it difficult for McAvoy to find time for interviews and networking or to figure out a feasible work schedule.

So even though school opened again in January, McAvoy, who was furloughed from her job with a local arts organization last June and permanently laid off in November, decided to stop searching. "What do you say to an employer in that situation?" said McAvoy, 41. "They're going to hire someone who doesn't need a bunch of exceptions."

After being hit disproportionately by pandemic-related job losses last year, women in the United States are struggling to get back to work. A slowdown in the jobs recovery, obstacles to securing child care and concerns about workplace flexibility are making it difficult for women to recoup the jobs they lost - and threaten to undo some of the economic gains women made before the pandemic. The U.S. Labor Department will issue another

update Friday when it releases the jobs report for February, but as of January, women accounted for slightly more than half of the 10 million jobs that were lost during the crisis, even though they typically make up a little less than half the work force.

The hurdles are pushing women to abandon the workplace at higher rates than men: More than 2.5 million women left the labor force between February 2020 and January of this year, compared to 1.8 million men. Vice President Kamala Harris called the exodus a "national emergency" during a video call in February with Democratic lawmakers and activists. "Our economy cannot fully recover unless women can participate fully," she said.

(Graphic: Women leaving the labor force at higher rates than men. Women leaving the labor force at higher rates:)

WOMEN NEED SUPPORT

With labor market gains slowing and employment in some industries where women are overrepresented - including leisure and hospitality - recovering more slowly, some women may need help moving into different lines of work, said C. Nicole Mason, the chief executive of the Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Some women are not going to be able to return to jobs that were lost," said Mason.

School closures and the shift to virtual learning also disproportionately affect working

moms, research shows. An analysis by researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago found that the share of women who were either employed or looking for work, known as the labor force participation rate, dropped more severely in the spring and fall of 2020 for mothers between the ages of 25 and 54 than it did for people without children. Black women, single mothers and those without college educations saw the biggest impact.

"Given the persistence of the effects thus far, it would be somewhat surprising to see much of a reversal until schools and day care facilities normalize their operations," the Chicago Fed researchers wrote in a letter published in January.

President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid bill, which was passed by the House, included funding for schools, subsidies for child care costs and support for the child care industry, which is struggling with higher costs and reduced revenue during the crisis. The bill still needs Senate approval.

AFRAID TO BE JUDGED

When Alisha Zucker has job interviews, she tries not to bring up being a parent.

Before the pandemic, Zucker, 41, spent more than 10 years working in educational publishing, most recently as an executive editor designing the curriculum that teachers and students use in classrooms. After being laid off in September,



Zucker is now freelancing and looking for a full-time job.

"I'm worried that I will be judged for having to take care of my kids, or maybe they'll think that I'm unreliable," said Zucker, who has seven-year-old boy and girl twins and a three-year-old boy. "I try not to mention it, even though I think it's a huge asset. Moms get stuff done."

Flexibility will be key to helping women who need to oversee their children's virtual schooling get back to work.

For jobs with easily adjustable work schedules, such as positions in management, the ratio of mothers working did not change significantly during the pandemic, according to a research paper published in February by the San Francisco Federal Reserve. But for occupations with stricter schedules, such as those in education, women with children saw a "pronounced decline" in employment compared to women without

children. Zucker says she is grateful that her husband, a computer programmer, is still working and they have the help of a nanny. But finding long periods of time to work uninterrupted in their two-bedroom apartment in New York City has been difficult, especially with school alternating frequently between in person and virtual.

When Zucker has a meeting or interview, she locks herself in the bedroom, using an ironing board as a desk. She is also productive after her children are asleep.

Zucker said she hopes to find an employer that trusts her to complete tasks on her own schedule. "I can get my work done," she said.

McAvoy said that when her daughter was doing remote schooling, she worked with her from 9 a.m. to about 1 p.m., helping with assignments and making sure the 5-year-old was engaged in the virtual lessons.

SpaceX Starship rocket prototype nails landing... then blows up



The third time appeared to be the charm for Elon Musk's Starship rocket - until it wasn't. The latest heavy-duty launch vehicle prototype from SpaceX soared flawlessly into the sky

in a high-altitude test blast-off on Wednesday from Boca Chica, Texas, then flew itself back to Earth to achieve the first upright landing for a Starship model. But the triumph was

short-lived. Listing slightly to one side as an automated fire-suppression system trained a stream of water on flames still burning at the base of the rocket, the spacecraft blew itself to pieces about eight minutes after touchdown.

It was the third such landing attempt to end in a fireball after an otherwise successful test flight for the Starship, being developed by SpaceX to carry humans and 100 tons of cargo on future missions to the moon and Mars.

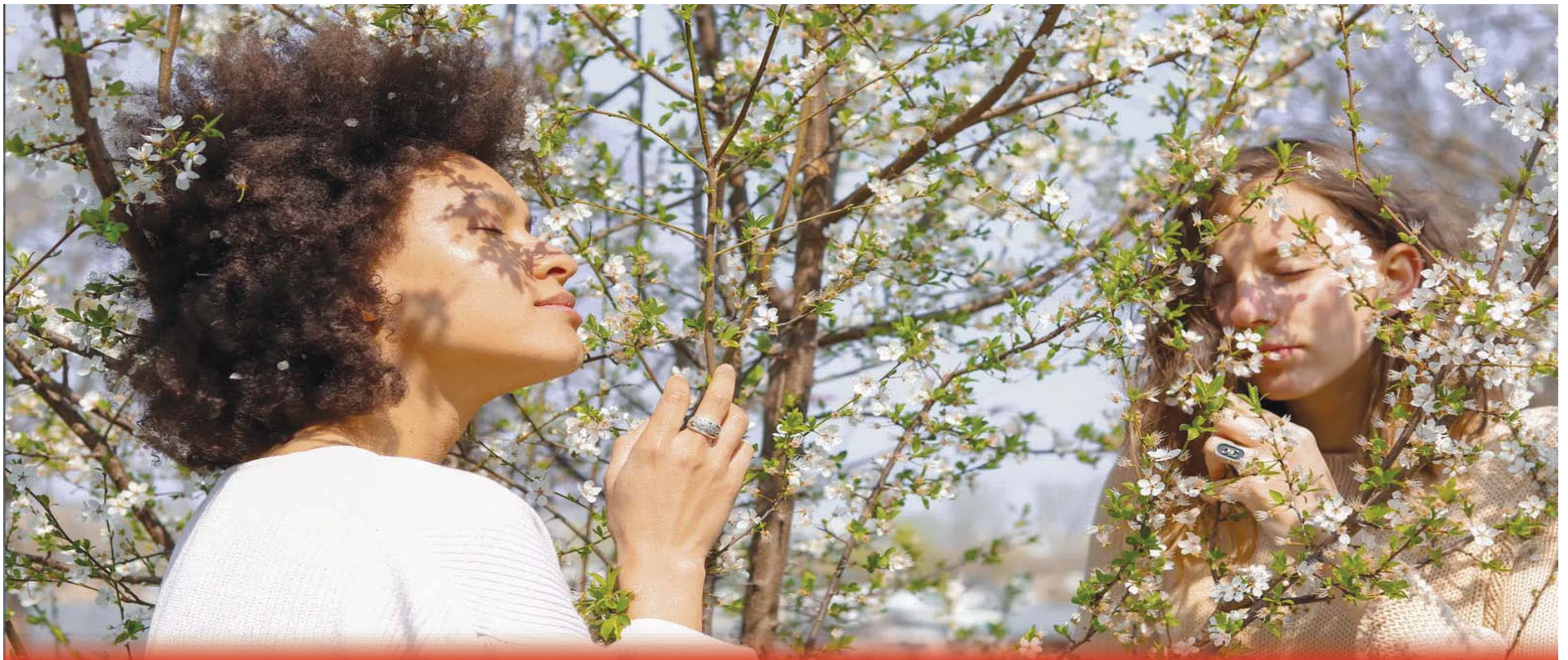
For Musk, the billionaire SpaceX founder who also heads the electric carmaker Tesla Inc, the

outcome was mixed news. The Starship SN10 came far closer to achieving a safe, vertical touchdown than two previous models - SN8 in December and SN9 in February. In a tweet responding to tempered congratulations from an admirer of his work, Musk replied, "RIP SN10, honorable discharge."

The video feed provided by SpaceX on the company's YouTube channel cut off moments after the landing. But separate fan feeds streamed over the same social media platform showed an explosion suddenly erupting at the base of the rocket, hurling the SN10

into the air before it crashed to the ground and became engulfed in flames. The complete Starship rocket, which will stand 394-feet (120 metres) tall when mated with its super-heavy first-stage booster, is SpaceX's next-generation fully reusable launch vehicle - the center of Musk's ambitions to make human space travel more affordable and routine.

A first orbital Starship flight is planned for year's end. Musk has said he intends to fly Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa around the moon with the Starship in 2023.



How your sense of smell predicts your overall health

Barrie Smith was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in his 50s, but 18 years before he was given his diagnosis, he developed a very strange and permanent symptom. One day he detected "a strong smoky smell, like burning wires", he says. Since then, he has never smelt anything again. At the time, flummoxed, Smith's doctor attributed the loss of his sense of smell to his scuba diving, as deep diving is known to sometimes cause smell impairments.

If only the doctor was right. Smell loss can have sinister origins beyond scuba diving, and in Smith's case, that proved to be true. In today's world, most would automatically attribute the loss of smell to Covid-19, but it is also a common symptom of neurodegenerative diseases, including Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease. Research has found that up to 38% of those suffering from Multiple Sclerosis while almost half of older adults diagnosed with dementia showed signs of smell loss five years earlier. In Parkinson's disease 45-96% of patients show smell impairment. For years, smell loss - or anosmia as it is also known - has been largely ignored as a marker for diseases such as Parkinson's, but now some scientists believe using it as a tool of diagnosis could come with big advantages.

The pathology of diseases such

as Parkinson's is present in the olfactory area of the brain long before other areas, and this is thought to be the reason why Smith lost his sense of smell 18 years before his first tremor. An accurate smell test might have identified his disease almost two decades before his official diagnosis, and that could potentially have given him much more time to slow the disease's progression.

Predict-PD is one such initiative. According to Alastair Noyce, a clinical senior lecturer at Queen Mary University of London, who leads the project, it has developed a smell test called Scratch and Sniff. This is a quick test that presents six smells to the patient that we commonly encounter throughout the day, based off a larger roster of 40 odours.

The hope is the data they collect could be used to predict who is going to develop Parkinson's, which might lead to new early treatments that could prevent the disease from progressing or slow it down. And with up to 0.45-3.4% of individuals (depending on the test) apparently unaware of their own smell loss, tools such as Predict-PD could help people to identify it.

The catch is that such tests are currently expensive. "The standard smell test costs on average £25 [\$34.88] to undertake but only a few pence to produce," says Noyce. Whilst cost may not be a barrier for the many private clinics that are

using smell tests as a tool for diagnosis, it would limit its usefulness for public healthcare systems with limited resources. Of course, smell impairment does not only develop as a result of neurodegenerative diseases. Around 19% of the population have some sort of olfactory dysfunction, with 0.3% losing their sense of smell entirely (anosmia) and 19.1% suffering from reduced ability to detect odours (hyposomia). Recent studies have found that smell loss may be linked to mental health conditions such as depression, schizophrenia and dystonia, a movement disorder in which a person's muscles contract uncontrollably.

A study from 2016 found that men (but not women) with symptoms of depression also tended to have a poor sense of smell, while those who felt lonely were generally less good at identifying different smells. Other research has linked a defective sense of smell to increased mortality, suggesting it could be a "bellweather" for aging or illness. One study of more than 2,200 people aged 71-82 years old found that those with a poor sense of smell had a 46% higher risk of dying within a ten year period than those with an ordinary sense of smell. But how is it that smell can have such a powerful link to our health?

Carl Philpott, professor of rhinology and olfactology at the University of East Anglia, believes

there could be a link to what we eat. According to his research, "one-third of patients with smell loss overconsume and another one-third of patients under-consume", he says. Since a healthy diet is one of the pillars of good health, it is easy to see why this would lead to increased mortality.

Philpott says "that our sense of smell makes up more than 70%" of the flavours we experience (although the exact proportion is contested), which could explain why losing this sense can affect a person's appetite. This fits with the personal experiences of Clara O'Brien, an independent clinical neuropsychiatrist who helps individuals who have been diagnosed with neurological illnesses and brain injuries.

"Smell plays an important part in a patient's lives many lose the enjoyment from activities that are a core part of their daily routine," she says, explaining that she often finds that those close to her patients with smell loss say they have changed their behaviour, becoming more inward-looking, angry or withdrawn.

Honglei Chen, a professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at Michigan State University, has identified another reason why smell may lead to increased mortality, that smell impairments are linked to an increased exposure to adverse environments.

If you have a sense of smell,

just think about those times you have found yourself walking alongside a road when you smell particularly repugnant car fumes, hurrying up as a result. In this situation, the person lacking the ability to smell would continue to inhale the toxic fumes. Smith describes how he had once been sitting in his room for hours which had been full of smoke from his neighbours' wood fire, but had not noticed until his wife came in.

On a neurological level, impairments in a person's sense of smell can lead to long-lasting changes in the make-up of the brain. Areas of the brain that are involved in smell such as the olfactory bulb and piriform cortices shrink, but so do less obvious ones such as the anterior cingulate cortex which is important for motor control and rational thought, and the limbic system which is important for emotional processing.

The good news is that the areas of the brain which shrink due to smell loss can regrow, should the person regain their sense of smell. When this happens, the olfactory bulb, piriform cortices, anterior cingulate cortex and limbic system would all expand, and the person's diet would also improve. This means that smell restoration therapies can be a very effective technique. There are currently researchers who are designing techniques that would enable them to do this.

Coming 2 America movie review

Eddie Murphy gets more woke and more boring in sequel fit for 2021, but not for watching

Coming 2 America movie review: Eddie Murphy and Arsenio Hall reunite for the dull and boring sequel to their cult hit.

At its heart, Eddie Murphy's *Coming to America* (1988) has always been a fairytale about a prince searching for true love. A hopeful heir to an African kingdom comes to America, looking for a bride 'who will arouse his intellect as well as his loins'. In between the search for love, run-ins with beat-boxing twins, a minimum wage job at McDonald's, and making elderly friends at the barbershop, the film forgot to mention what happens after the prince finds his bride. What are the political realities of the fictional nation of Zamunda? Are women considered secondary citizens there? Whatever happened to the barking woman? Tell me truthfully, have these questions not plagued you for 33 years as well? Well lucky for us, Eddie felt a bout of gener-

osity, rewarding his fans with yet another sequel in his long and patchy list of follow-ups to cult classics. *Coming 2 American* joins the likes of *Beverly Hill Cop 2*, *Nutty Professor II: The Klumps*, and *Dr Dolittle 2* in providing employment to yet another batch of bad makeup artists and Arsenio Hall. At some point in the film, one person, in a moment of self awareness, asks another about Hollywood, "What do we have besides superhero sh*t, remakes, and sequels to old movies nobody asked for?" A satisfying answer is never found. Neither in their conversation, nor in *Coming 2 America*. The film, as if having woken up from a coma that spanned 33 years, suddenly finds itself plagued with the responsibility of doing the right thing. Taking corrective measures fit for the post MeToo world,

themes of patriarchy and sexism are brought up. These ideas not only dictate the larger plot of the movie, but also make small but stark changes in its flavour. Three decades later, Eddie's Prince Akeem has become the king of Zamunda, after his father, played by James Earl Jones in 2020 work from home mode, passes away. But now, he is troubled with another desperate situation: he does not have a male heir. His queen Lisa gave him three daughters, all bright and wise beyond their years, but with the wrong genitals. Luckily for him, Prince Akeem has just been told of his 'bastard' son Lavelle (Jermaine Fowler) in New York, the outcome of a crazy, drug-fuelled night with Leslie Jones. Akeem must retrieve this son, test his grace, intellect and courage, and seat him on the throne



if he wishes to secure the future of his kingdom and save his family from a dancey-groovy villain named General Izzi, played by Wesley Snipes. The fairytale themes continue, to the point of laziness. After getting his worthiness tested, Lavelle must find the right woman for himself. He has to choose between one who would bark and hop for him if he so commands, and another who could help him meet his true self. Gee, I wish he had an example to look up for some help.

Back at the household, Queen Lisa has realised her angelic husband is not all that he had

promised. The kingdom runs as it always did, the daughters are as good as ornaments for the palace, and women aren't allowed to run businesses. Even though he isn't one, Akeem, too, displays the traits of an elected politician, and forgets promises that he'd previously made. The resentment from the women of the family may just be a facet, but it also shows up in smaller details. Rather than laughing along with the men at the barbershop, Akeem and Semmi (Arsenio Hall) tell the oldies that women aren't play-things for men.

Raya and the Last Dragon movie review:

Kelly Marie Tran is radiant in Disney's rip-roaring adventure



Raya and the Last Dragon movie review: Kelly Marie Tran and Awkwafina put their own twist on the Mulan-Mushu dynamic in Disney's latest animated adventure.

Call it an act of repentance on Disney's part for throwing Kelly Marie Tran under the bus, or call it another excuse for Alan Tudyk to make animal noises for a couple of hours in exchange of equity, but nothing should take away from the fact that *Raya and the Last Dragon* is another step in the right direction for the Mouse House. And in a happy coincidence, it might just be the most 'unremakable' film that the studio has produced in a while. Part *Tomb Raider* and part *The Legend of Korra*, Disney Animation's latest feature film tells the mythic story of Raya, a

young woman who goes on an epic adventure to secure shiny McGuffins which will help her unite the five warring tribes of her world. That's about as much as you need to know, even though the 'world' of *Raya and the Last Dragon* is rich with lore and vibrantly detailed. And as you'd imagine, there is a dragon in it, but not the sort you're thinking of. Sisu isn't a scaly, fire-breathing monster out of *Game of Thrones*, but a furry, horse-like creature with the attitude of a sassy Asian-American comedian. Played by Awkwafina, Sisu is milked for humour in the film, foreshadowing, perhaps, the

manner in which Disney will squeeze millions out of the character through plushy sales. Kelly Marie Tran, meanwhile, plays the titular Raya (pronounced Rye-uh). The actor was dealt such a cruel blow after *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, when she was essentially written out of the series in a clear instance of the world's biggest movie studio bowing down to racist trolls. Who knows, perhaps the deal for her to star in *Raya* was struck back then, as fair compensation for what studio was about to do. In any case, Tran deserves all the starring roles and more - not only because of what she represents, but also because she has such a unique combination of grit and gentleness; and an innate ability to draw audiences in. In another world, she'd be leading big-budget movies that didn't feel the need to hide her face

behind ones and zeroes. Some things can only be achieved in animation, though. What worked in the cartoon *Mulan* failed miserably in the live-action remake. What worked best - Mushu the dragon - was left out completely. It would be impossible to do a live-action version of *Raya and the Last Dragon*, not only because it would probably cost a gazillion dollars, but also because your suspension of disbelief works double shifts while watching cartoons.

Take, for instance, the 'fellowship' of heroes that comes together in the film's excellent third act. There's Raya, of course; a 'regular' person, all things said and done. But there's also a fast-talking dragon, a middle-aged warrior, an enterprising boy, a baby, three monkeys, and a giant bug. I had a harder time buying Parineeti Chopra as an alcoholic last week.

Directors Don Hall and Carlos Lopez Estrada, along with co-directors Paul Briggs and John Ripa, craft some truly imaginative action set-pieces, the most memorable of which involves farting insects. There's a mission-oriented structure to the plot - a video game-inspired approach that ends with the requisite 'boss fight' - but even though it's slightly simplistic, crucially, it's never patronising. Similarly, the film is political, but never preachy.

Raya and the Last Dragon does, however, have a slight whiff of the agenda-driven moviemaking that most Hollywood studios are dabbling in, especially these days. Here, the filmmakers have cast actors of East Asian descent to play characters clearly rooted in Southeast Asian culture - this is like hiring Priyanka Chopra to play a Latina, which is also something that actually happened.

FIRE ALERT!

Janhvi sets temperatures soaring in Nadiyon Paar

Can't live with it, can't do without it, a mere sniff can get you hooked. What are we talking about? That sweet sweet smell of nostalgia!

The makers of Roohi bring us the most sensational song from the west, giving it their own desi twist. Nadiyon Paar is a swaggalicious rendition of Let the Music Play, the famous English track by Shamur that thumped the whole nation.

In a dazzling display of her masala moves, Janhvi Kapoor sizzles and shines in the latest version of the song. Dressed in shimmering gold, the actress looks drop dead gorgeous as she grooves to the foot tapping number. Adding to her sexy avatar, the melody is sure to cause mayhem on dance floors all over! Composers Sachin- Jigar say, "Let the Music Play is a cult



tune, and the opportunity to generation was irresistible! elements that made the original present this song to a new *Nadiyon Paar* absorbs the so special and sprinkles a bit of

Roohi's magic, to bring that extra tadka."

Apart from composing the track, Sachin - Jigar also helm the mic for the updated version, singing it along with Shamur, Rashmeet Kaur and IP Singh. The lyrics are penned by Shamur, IP Singh and Jigar Saraiya.

While retaining the funky essence of the original tune, the number also gives itself a fresh zing for gen next. Well, Nadiyon Paar looks like the perfect track to start any party! The song goes live on 3rd March Jio Studios & Dinesh Vijan present, Roohi. A Maddock Films production, Produced by Dinesh Vijan and Mrighdeep Singh Lamba, directed by Hardik Mehta starring Rajkumar Rao, Janhvi Kapoor, and Varun Sharma releasing in theaters on 11th March 2021.

Abhishek Bachchan as Ganga Ram Chaudhary on Dasvi ka dusva din. New still

Abhishek Bachchan looks absolutely regal in a new still from the upcoming film Dasvi. The actor took to Instagram to share the photograph.

Abhishek Bachchan, who is currently shooting for his next, Dasvi, took to social media on March 4 to share a new still from the film. In the still, Junior Bachchan can be seen dressed regally - in a kurta-pyjama, a Nehru jacket, a turban and matching jooties. And AB's swag as Ganga Ram Chaudhary is just unmissable.

ABHISHEK BACHCHAN AS GANGA RAM CHAUDHARY
Abhishek Bachchan will be seen as Ganga Ram Chaudhary in Dasvi. Team Dasvi started filming on February

22. Today, after 10 days of Dasvi shoot, Abhishek took to share a still from the film, and wrote, "Dasvi ka dusva din (10th day of Dasvi)."

Though it is unclear if the still is from a song sequence or from Abhishek Bachchan's entry scene, the shot certainly looks very powerful. Abhishek Bachchan is seen sitting on palki-like chair and several people are carrying him on their shoulders. Everyone seems to be in a happy mood, but Abhishek Bachchan's

swag takes the cake.

ABHISHEK TEAMS UP WITH YAMI,

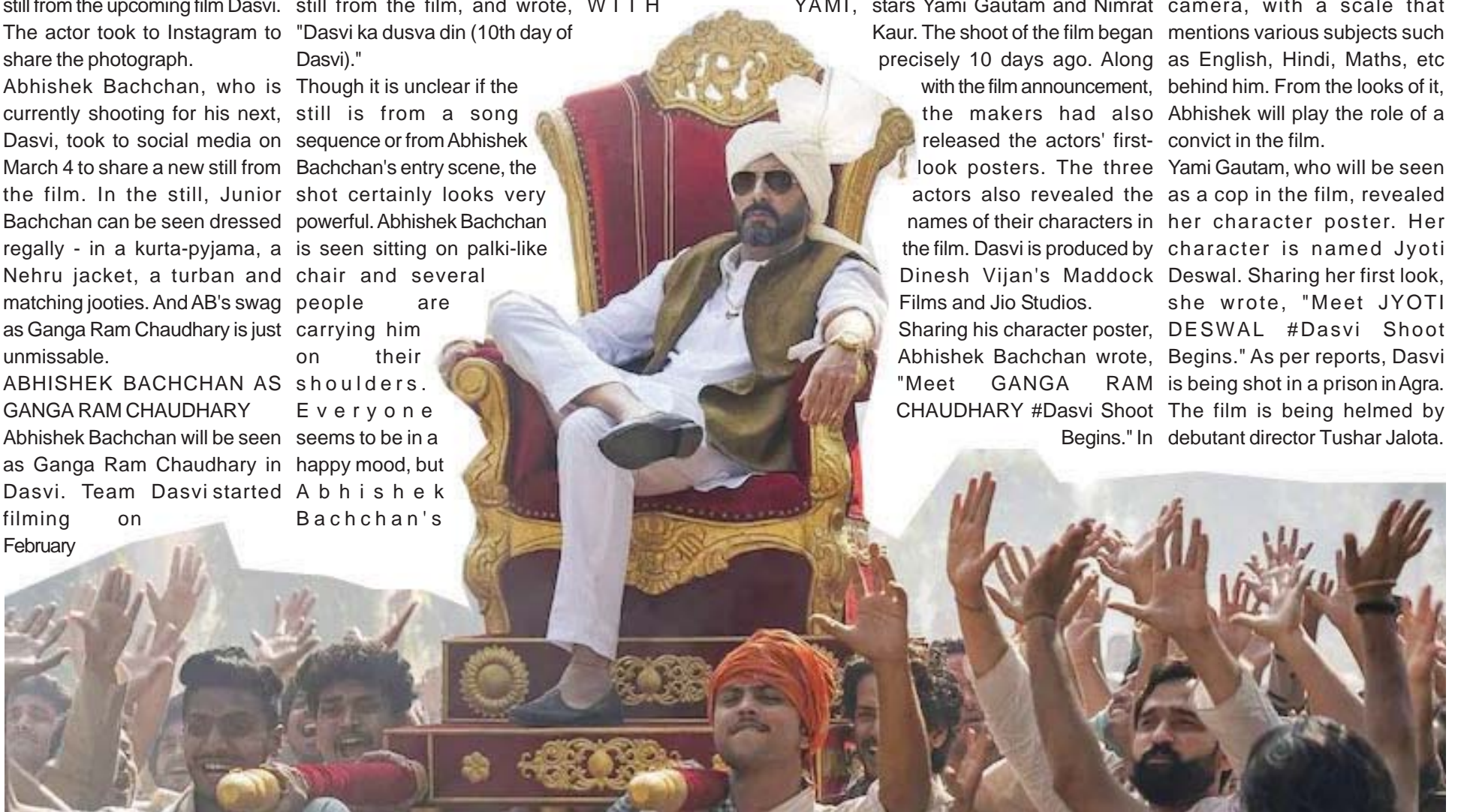
NIMRAT FOR DASVI

Abhishek Bachchan's Dasvi also stars Yami Gautam and Nimrat Kaur. The shoot of the film began precisely 10 days ago. Along with the film announcement, the makers had also released the actors' first-look posters. The three actors also revealed the names of their characters in the film. Dasvi is produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films and Jio Studios.

Sharing his character poster, Abhishek Bachchan wrote, "Meet GANGA RAM CHAUDHARY #Dasvi Shoot Begins." In

the poster, Abhishek Bachchan can be seen looking towards the camera, with a scale that mentions various subjects such as English, Hindi, Maths, etc behind him. From the looks of it, Abhishek will play the role of a convict in the film.

Yami Gautam, who will be seen as a cop in the film, revealed her character poster. Her character is named Jyoti Deswal. Sharing her first look, she wrote, "Meet JYOTI DESWAL #Dasvi Shoot Begins." As per reports, Dasvi is being shot in a prison in Agra. The film is being helmed by debutant director Tushar Jalota.



Janhvi lauds Kartik for taking up a role most actors would shy away from in Dostana 2

Janhvi Kapoor praised Kartik Aaryan for taking up the lead role in Dostana 2. The film is backed by Karan Johar and is directed by Collin D'Cunha. Janhvi Kapoor is currently busy with the promotions of her upcoming film Roohi. The horror-comedy, which also stars Rajkumar Rao and Varun Sharma, will hit the theatres on March 11. Apart from Roohi, Janhvi is also awaiting the release of Dostana



2, opposite Kartik Aaryan. JANHVI KAPOOR LAUDS KARTIKAARYAN

Dostana (2008) had received flak from the critics for conforming to stereotypes

about homosexuality. However, makers have assured that there will be no cringe elements in Dostana 2. In her recent interview with PTI, Janhvi

Kapoor confirmed the same. The actress also lauded her co-star, Kartik Aaryan, for taking up the role. She said, "Dostana 2 looks at normalising homosexuality. There's still a

stigma around it. Honestly, kudos to Kartik who is mainstream and is known for being the heartthrob of the nation to take on a role that I think most actors would shy away from because it is about homosexuality."

J A N H V I
P R O M O T E S
R O O H I

Today, Janhvi was clicked at Delhi's Connaught Place. She was in the city

to promote Roohi with Varun Sharma.

Apart from Roohi and Dostana 2, Janhvi will also be seen in Good Luck Jerry and Karan Johar's Takht.



Ali Fazal and Richa Chadha announce production house, 1st film titled Girls Will Be Girls



Ali Fazal and Richa Chadha have announced their own production house, Pushing Buttons Studios. The first film of the production house is titled Girls Will Be Girls and it will be helmed by Brooklyn-based filmmaker Shuchi Talati. The film is the only Indian film invited to the on-going Berlinale Script Station this year and has also been invited by the prestigious Jerusalem Script Lab.

ALI FAZAL AND RICHACHADHA'S PRODUCTION HOUSE

Ali Fazal took to Twitter and expressed his excitement over his first film as a producer with Richa Chadha. He wrote,

"Humbled and cannot wait to kickstart our first venture. It's a first full-length feature for us. Dir #ShuchiTalati's script is the Indian entry at the #Berlinale2021 script station. Much more to come from us. Hope to champion all artists from ground up and ground below (sic)." **ABOUT GIRLS WILL BE GIRLS** - The film will be an Indo-French co-production since Claire Chassagne of Dolce Vita Films will also be a co-producer of Girls Will Be Girls. The film will challenge taboos about sexuality and is set in a boarding school in a small town in the Himalayas. It tells the story of a teenager named Mira, and her relationship with her mother.

ALI FAZAL AND RICHACHADHA TALK ABOUT THE FILM

Talking about the film, Ali Fazal said, "This is the first time that Richa and I are collaborating on a film as producers and the experience so far has been very rewarding. This film being our first is close to our hearts. I am also excited that our studio will enter the market with such a progressive, female-led story. We hope to be able to tell thought-provoking and universal stories with humour and love." Richa Chadha, talking about the film's story, said, "The world that Shuchi has created is relatable, often cruel but never hopeless or nihilistic."

Amazon Prime deletes V. Sakshi Malik says she lost films due to illicit use of photo



Amazon Prime Video informed the Bombay High Court that it has deleted the Telugu film titled V, which illicitly portrayed actor Sakshi Malik's photo. The OTT platform said that Malik's photo also has been cropped out because of which they had to face litigation. Nani and Sudheer Babu's V, directed by Mohan Krishna Indraganti released directly on Amazon Prime Video on September 5. **SAKSHI MALIK SAYS SHE LOST FILMS BECAUSE OF THIS INCIDENT**

After making the necessary changes, the OTT platform has now been allowed to release the

new version. The court has made it clear that Malik's photo cannot be used without her express approval. Malik requested permission to address the court, so Justice Gautam Patel spoke to her on video call on Thursday (March 4). She told the court about the trauma, trials and tribulations that she had to face on account of the illicit use of her photo in a defamatory manner in the film. Malik said, "I had gotten many offers last year. It is embarrassing for me what had happened. It is difficult to say how I felt. I could have been doing so many projects by now, but now I have lost all that."



Adityanath's Growing Campaign To Be Seen As Successor To Modi



(SAI Bureau)- Will Yogi Adityanath succeed Narendra Modi as the supreme leader of the BJP and of the government? This question may seem premature, but it's certainly doing the rounds in the ruling party, and outside. Modi remains strong and within the Hindutva fold, he is a respected and feared leader; his grip on the party and government is unchallenged. But in the manner of his ascension lie lessons that can be adapted by other leaders looking for a how-to guide. **(Contd on page 30)**

Pakistan learns the cost of an alliance with China



(SAI Bureau)- Protests, massive debt, dwindling cash reserves. Those are the consequences of Pakistan's increasing reliance on China - but the country has still decided it's all worth it. It's not what Pakistan anticipated when it happily embraced a \$60 billion handout from China in 2013, when the countries formalized the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), part of Beijing's international infrastructure strategy known as the Belt and Road Initiative. Initially, the realignment with Beijing seemed a win-win situation, **(Contd on page 29)**

Anti-national or anti-government, what is sedition?



(SAI Bureau)- Sedition law is back in controversy again with the Supreme Court reiterating that taking a stand against the government's policies is not sedition. So, is sedition an anti-national act or an anti-government agitation? In a space of 10 days, courts have given two significant rulings cautioning that criticism of the government cannot not grounds for invoking the sedition law. On February 23, a Delhi court granted bail to activist Disha Ravi in a sedition case. On March 3, the Supreme Court dismissed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah demanding he be charged with sedition. **(Contd on page 30)**

"Crores" Hidden, Say Officials On Anurag Kashyap, Tapsee Pannu Raids: 10 Points

(SAI Bureau)- The Income Tax Department began searches at the homes and offices of Taapsee Pannu and Anurag Kashyap and his partners who launched the now-shuttered production house Phantom Films on Wednesday.

Irregularities worth crores of rupees have been found in ongoing raids on filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, actor Tapsee Pannu and others, the Income Tax Department said on Thursday, countering allegations of a crackdown on some of the biggest critics of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration in Bollywood. According to tax officials, their searches so far have found issues with ? 5 crore in cash received by Ms



Pannu and ? 300 crore income by Mr Kashyap's former production house among other problems. Neither of them have responded to the charges yet.

(Contd on page 30)

