

The South Asian INSIDER

Voice of South Asian Community

Since March 2002

Vol. 22

Issue 21

Friday 14 July to 20 July, 2023

\$1

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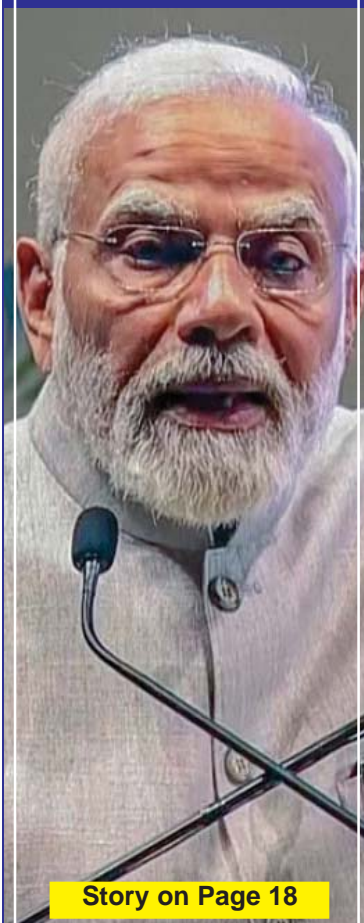
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The July 2023 Flooding in India: An In-depth Look

What is making India's monsoons more deadly?



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Today's China Isn't Real China, Can Be Broken Into Six Independent Nations

A journey of thousand
miles begins with a single
step" is a famous Chinese
proverb. And China has
practised it religiously.



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As Indian PM Lands In Paris,
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She Broke the News That the U.S. Catholic Church Sold Enslaved People. She's Still Going to Mass.

Rachel Swarns was astonished when she
uncovered that the Catholic Church sold
enslaved people in the United States. In her
new book, she explores the complicated
legacy they left behind.

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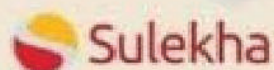
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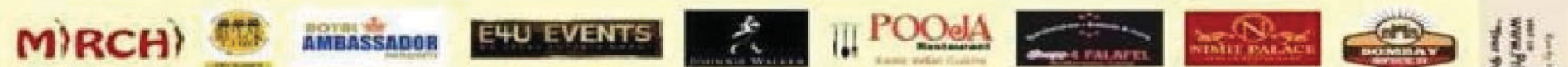
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Attorney and Former U.S. Congressional Candidate Indicted for Defrauding Clients of More Than \$5 Million in Escrow Funds

Defendant on federal pre-trial release for charges of federal Campaign Act violations and making false statements at time of alleged conduct



escrow funds from his clients' accounts to other accounts and used the funds for personal expenses – including expenses for his law firm, a yacht owned by one of his hotels, as well as \$2.7 million for his Boca Raton home. Das allegedly induced his clients to transfer funds to accounts he controlled in multi-step, layered transactions under the guise of legal advice about the risk of potential litigation and provided clients with fraudulent and forged account statements to conceal the scheme.

The indictment further alleges that Das committed nine of the 10 counts of wire fraud while on court mandated pre-trial release

conditions resulting from his June 2021 indictment. That earlier indictment charged Das with campaign finance violations, embezzlement of campaign funds and making materially false statements to the Federal Election Commission.

The charges of wire fraud each provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain or loss, whichever is greater. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy; Christopher DiMenna, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; and Joleen D. Simpson, Special Agent in Charge of the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigations in Boston made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorney Neil J. Gallagher Jr. of Levy's Public Corruption & Special Prosecutions Unit is prosecuting the case. The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

(By a staff reporter) BOSTON – An attorney and former candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives was arrested today in connection with a scheme to defraud a business-to-business supply company based in India of millions of dollars and using client funds for business and personal expenses, including the purchase of a \$2.7 million home in Boca Raton, Fla.

Abhijit Das, a/k/a "Beej," 50, of North Andover, was indicted by a federal grand jury in Boston on June 20, 2023 on 10 counts of wire fraud. Das was arrested today in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. and appeared in the Southern District of Florida this afternoon. In June 2021, Das was arrested for allegedly violating the Federal Election Campaign Act and false statements.

According to the indictment, Das was an attorney and principal manager of a boutique law and advisory firm called Troca Global Advisors with offices in Boston and New York. Beginning in or about May 2020, Das began providing legal representation and escrow services to two twin broth-

ers and their logistical supply company in India that was coordinating large shipments Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the pandemic.

The indictment alleges that Das diverted more than \$5 million in

Two Bronx Men Sentenced To Prison For Throwing Molotov Cocktails At Neighbors' Cars And Houses

(By a staff reporter) Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that NAYEEM AHMED CHOWDHURY and DAVID MENDEZ were sentenced by U.S. District Judge John P. Cronan to six years and 27 months in prison, respectively, in connection with using glass bottles with ignitable liquid and lit wicks, commonly known as "Molotov cocktails," in an attempt to set a car and an apartment building on fire in the Bronx, New York. CHOWDHURY previously pled guilty to possession of unregistered Molotov cocktails and was sentenced on June 15, 2023. MENDEZ previously pled guilty to conspiracy to possess unregistered Molotov cocktails and was sentenced today.

According to the allegations contained in the Complaint and court filings: Just after

2:00 a.m. on June 8, 2022, after circling the block for at least an hour, CHOWDHURY and MENDEZ approached a vehicle that was parked in the front yard of an apartment building in the defendants' neighborhood in the Bronx, New York. CHOWDHURY lit a Molotov cocktail and placed it underneath the vehicle as MENDEZ looked on. The defendants drove off to let the fire burn. Approximately 30 minutes later, CHOWDHURY and MENDEZ returned to the vehicle. MENDEZ lit a second Molotov cocktail and placed it under the vehicle as CHOWDHURY looked on. Approximately 30 minutes after the defendants drove away from the vehicle the second time, the owner of the vehicle observed the fire and, together with other individuals from the neighborhood, threw buckets of water

on and around the vehicle to put out the flames. Photographs of the June 2022 incident are below, with the defendants circled in green and the victims' buckets of water circled in red: Around 7:00 a.m. on July 24, 2022, CHOWDHURY approached another residence in his neighborhood, lit a third Molotov cocktail, and hurled it at the residence. The Molotov cocktail hit a window and fell onto the front porch, where it burst into flames. The family that was sleeping inside the residence, including a husband, his pregnant wife, and their toddler, woke up from the loud crash against the window and immediately poured buckets of water onto the Molotov cocktail to put out the flames. Photographs of CHOWDHURY throwing the third Molotov cocktail at the residence in July 2022 are below

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CFO, Controller, Corporate Officers Charged in \$53 Million Fraud Scheme Involving Pandemic Relief

(By a staff reporter) Fourteen people who allegedly bilked the Paycheck Protection Program, a COVID-era financial program, and numerous financial institutions out of more than \$53 million in loan proceeds have been federally charged, announced U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Leigha Simonton. This case is the largest investigated by the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) Fraud Task Force to date. The defendants were arrested Tuesday and Wednesday in Texas, California, and Oklahoma by special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Treasury Department's Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery (SIGPR), and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Office of Inspector General (FDIC-OIG).

"Defrauding the government is an affront to American taxpayers. Defrauding the government during a pandemic – at a time when millions of hardworking entrepreneurs struggled to make payroll and rent – is pouring salt in a wound," said U.S. Attorney Leigha Simonton. "These defendants allegedly conspired to steal tens of millions of

dollars from the Paycheck Protection Program – funds which could have helped legitimate businesses pay their bills and keep their employees afloat.

We are thankful to the officers and agents who meticulously investigated this case, especially the data scientists at the Pandemic Analytics Center of Excellence, whose sophisticated analysis ensures that those who abused the PPP will be brought to justice."

"These indictments charge another group of individuals with defrauding the taxpayers of millions of dollars as the group abused a federal program critical for struggling small businesses that were hit hard by the pandemic," said Brian Miller, the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery. "SIGPR is glad to have played a significant role teaming with other law enforcement agencies and the United States Attorney's Office to hold these individuals accountable."

"These individuals allegedly conspired to orchestrate multiple fraud schemes which exploited financial institutions and government programs,



solely to enrich themselves," said FBI Dallas Special Agent in Charge Chad Yarbrough. "We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that the American people do not fund the lifestyle of criminals with taxpayer dollars that were intended to protect the most susceptible from financial ruin and promote economic stabilization in a critical time of need." According to a series of indictments unsealed

Wednesday, several of the charged defendants purportedly operated a group of affiliated recycling companies, including Mammoth Metal Recycling, Elephant Recycling, Gulf Coast Scrap, 4G Metals, 4G Plastics, 5G Metals, Level Eight, Sunshine Recycling, L.K. Industries, , NTC Industries, West Texas Equipment, and West Texas Scrap. They allegedly submitted at least 29 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan applications that fraudulently inflated payroll expenses, doctoring bank statements and Internal Revenue Service tax forms to falsely reflect business income. They then routed PPP loan funds through a series of bank accounts to create a false paper trail of payroll expenses. At least two of the defendants also allegedly submitted false applications to financial institutions on behalf of their purported recycling companies to fraudulently obtain, in the aggregate, millions of dollars in business loan proceeds. And one defendant allegedly lied to the Federal Deposit Insurance Commission (FDIC) by stating that he did not know several of his other alleged co-conspirators.

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Ohio Financial Planner Pleads Guilty to Promoting Illegal Charitable Contribution Tax Scheme

(By a staff reporter) A financial planner from the Cleveland-area pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to defraud the United States and assisting in the filing of a false tax return. According to court documents and statements made in court, Rao Garuda, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Associated Concepts Agency, Inc. ("ACA"), engaged in a scheme -- known as the Advanced Legacy Plan or the Ultimate Tax Plan -- to assist high-income individuals in unlawfully reducing their taxes using a plan organized, marketed and sold by a co-conspirator, Individual A. ACA's former Chief Operating Officer previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the United States on Sept. 26, 2022.

To accomplish the scheme, Garuda, Individual A, and other coconspirators instructed clients to (a) transfer assets to an LLC in exchange for 100% ownership interest in the LLC, (b) assign the 100% ownership interest to a charity controlled by co-conspirators, and (c) claim a charitable contribution tax deduction for the purported dona-

tion. Garuda and others marketed the scheme as a way for clients to receive the tax deduction without relinquishing control over the LLC or its assets. After executing the scheme, clients could access the assets inside the LLCs through tax-free loans. Garuda marketed the scheme despite being warned by several attorneys over the years that the scheme was illegal, such as one attorney describing the scheme as "clearly fraudulent."

Garuda, Individual A, and others also assisted clients in claiming charitable contribution tax deductions after the close of the tax year by backdating documents to make it look as if clients executed the scheme in a prior year. To do so, Garuda and others directed clients to use preexisting LLCs (sometimes referred to as "Shelf LLCs") that Individual A had created and formed at the end of the prior

year and backdate documents to make it appear as if the clients owned and assigned ownership interests in the Shelf LLCs in the prior year.



For his role in the scheme, Garuda caused or intended to cause a tax loss of more than \$2.7 million, which he agreed to pay back as restitution to the United States.

After the Department of Justice filed a civil lawsuit against Individual A in 2018 to stop Individual A from organizing, marketing, and selling the scheme, Garuda, Individual A, and other coconspirators sought to ob-

struct the case by providing clients with false, backdated documents to turn over to the government in response to civil subpoenas.

Garuda is scheduled to be sentenced on Nov. 14, 2023, and faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison for conspiracy to defraud the United States and three years in prison for the false return count. He also faces a period of supervised release, restitution, and monetary penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Stuart M. Goldberg of the Justice Department's Tax Division and U.S. Attorney Michelle M. Baeppler of the Northern District of Ohio made the announcement.

IRS-Criminal Investigation is investigating the case. Assistant Chief Michael Boteler and Trial Attorneys Casey S. Smith and Andrew Ascencio of the Justice Department's Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Elliott Morrison of the Northern District of Ohio are prosecuting the case.

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As Delhi battles flood, AAP, BJP engage in war of words

The political slugfest between the ruling AAP and the BJP continues as Delhi faces a flood threat after the River Yamuna breached the danger mark.



The River Yamuna breached the danger mark on Thursday, spilling onto the roads and inundating low-lying areas. The floodwater has disrupted vehicular movement in central Delhi, with commuters stuck in traffic for hours. As the national capital battles monsoon woes, the Aam Aadmi Party and the

Bharatiya Janata Party have been trading barbs over the city's dire situation.

ON WHY DELHI GOT FLOODED

According to Delhi Minister and AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj, flooding is caused due to "uncontrolled volumes of water" being discharged from Haryana.

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal in his letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah had appealed that the water from the Hathnikund barrage in Haryana be released at limited speed, if possible.

Countering the Delhi government's allegation, Devender Singh, the irrigation advisor to the Haryana chief minister, said that the AAP's claim was completely false because Hathnikund is a barrage and there is no way to retain water there like a dam. Delhi Chief Minister and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal in his letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah had appealed that the water from the Hathnikund barrage in Haryana be released at limited speed, if possible. Countering the Delhi

government's allegation, Devender Singh, the irrigation advisor to the Haryana chief minister, said that the AAP's claim was completely false because Hathnikund is a barrage and there is no way to retain water there like a dam. Haryana Education Minister Kanwar Pal stated that the Hathnikund barrage lacks a system to hold huge amounts of water like a reservoir and that bigger damage could result if water were to be held in the barrage beyond a permissible limit. Meanwhile, in response to Arvind Kejriwal's letter to Home Minister Amit Shah, Delhi BJP leader Kapil Mishra said, "Hathnikund is not a dam, it is a barrage. Okhla barrage is fully open in Delhi too. Letter to close the barrage during a

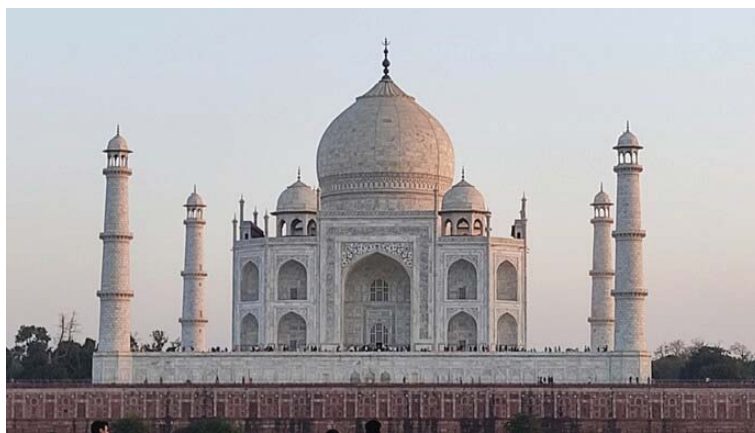
flood...Shutting down the Hathnikund Barrage at this time means death and destruction of thousands of people. This letter has been written with a very poor and toxic mindset. If what Kejriwal has written is done in reality, then there will be an orgy of death in Haryana and Punjab. Embarrassing." AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said that five of the 32 gates of the ITO barrage in Delhi, which is run by the Haryana government, were jammed, which in turn is disrupting the flow of the Yamuna water. Devender Singh, the irrigation advisor to the Haryana chief minister, countered his allegation, saying that the maximum number of gates necessary for the safe discharge of floodwaters had been opened.

Woman injured after fall from platform at Taj Mahal, locals say 'too slippery'

A woman from Delhi suffered a head injury after falling from a platform at Agra's Taj Mahal on Thursday. The tourist, identified as 50-year-old Manorama Devi, had come to visit the iconic monument with her husband and other family members. She slipped while getting down from the platform after having photos and videos taken in front of the Royal Gate. As blood gushed out of her

head, the Central Industrial Security Force personnel quickly rushed to help and provided first aid to her, witnesses said. She was immediately taken to a private hospital for further treatment.

Photographers present in the monument complex voiced their concern about the condition of the Royal Gate platform. They noted that the steps have become smooth and slippery due to wear and



tear, leading to frequent slips and falls among tourists. The incident comes in the wake

of ongoing efforts by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to enhance

safety measures at the Taj Mahal complex. In 2015, railings were installed on the main platform and its surroundings after a Japanese tourist fell down the steps and died of a heart attack. Nevertheless, incidents of tourists falling still persist. Officials from ASI attribute the slipperiness of the platform to wear and tear, especially during the rainy season. However, a permanent solution to the problem remains elusive.

Probe agency NIA files chargesheet against 3 for extortion in Manipur

The federal agency had filed a chargesheet against three cadres of banned terrorist organisations in Imphal's NIA Special Court court under various sections of the IPC and UAPA.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday filed a charge sheet against three persons, including a Myanmar national, in a case pertaining to extortion by members of banned terror outfits in Manipur. The chargesheet was filed in Imphal's NIA Special Court against the three cadres of the proscribed terrorist organisations, namely the People's Revolutionary Army (PRA), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and United National

of Manipur. Deepak has also been charged under the Foreigners Act of 1946. According to the NIA chargesheet, the accused were involved in raising and collecting funds to further the activities of their terrorist organisations. "Investigations so far have

revealed that the cadres of the banned outfits had been making extortion calls to the people in Imphal and the valley areas to raise funds for their organisations," NIA revealed in its press note. "These cadres also shared bank account details of their associates with

the victims and instructed them to deposit the extortion money in the same," the press note added. The federal agency registered the suo motu case in the matter on 9 March 2022. Investigations are still on to arrest other accused involved in the case.



Demo-crazy: Why West Bengal sees blood and fire even in panchayat polls

For people who have lived in Bengal or are aware of the state's history, the recent incidents of violence come as no surprise. The state has had a long tryst with violence, which even the bhadralok would not deny. Many would have hoped the cycle of violence would end with the fall of the Left Front government in 2011, but the trend has continued to this day.

Bengal witnessed several phases of violence in the pre-Independence era, with the Partition of Bengal in 1905 marking one of the darkest chapters in the region's history. However, once India gained Independence from British rule, the implementation of democracy in West Bengal became an arduous task. The origins of political violence can be traced back to the 1960s

when it saw politically motivated clashes after the rise of militant trade unions. The 1970s and 1980s saw significant violence during the heyday of the Left Front government, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M). This period was marked by clashes between the CPI(M) cadres and members of the opposition Congress, resulting in numerous casualties. A culture of fear and intimidation prevailed across the state.

The CPI(M) rule in Bengal lasted for over three decades, and the period saw violence become a political tool. The Marxists resorted to bullying and outright intimidation to curb any challenge to their supremacy, not even sparing their junior Left Front allies.

Bidenomics is an insult to millions of voters living paycheck to paycheck

Bidenomics is gaining no voter traction. To understand why, step back from all the technical economic indicators and look at economic life for key voters — the majority is falling farther and farther behind, faster and faster than ever.

On June 28, President Biden stood in front of Bidenomics banners to tout his achievements for the U.S. middle class. And, as he has done with any glimmer of good economic data, he followed that up on July 7 with what was effectively a self fist bump, touting new jobs numbers.

Still, two out of three voters disapprove of his economic performance, and no wonder — roughly two-thirds of American households are living paycheck to paycheck and/or skipping purchases they can no longer afford.

Is employment as good as the president claims? Yes, if you ask the Federal Reserve. No, if you look at the majority of Gen Xers who are still underemployed or can't find jobs that make ends meet. More than one-third of Americans are out of the workforce, with this problem particularly acute for women in general and minority women in particular. Will Black voters turn out for Biden or stay home as they did in 2016, when Hillary Clinton told them the economy was in a good place, but Black Americans didn't find themselves anywhere close to it?

"Robust" employment looks even worse when one looks at wages — the reason most people work. As of Wednesday, it cost \$121 to buy what once cost \$100 at the end of 2019. Looking at inflation-adjusted wages — not the nominal data

the president prefers — the bottom 50 percent of American households would need to earn \$5,000 more just to buy the same things it could the year before the pandemic.

Most Americans also don't feel the "progress" against inflation on which rests Bidenomics' putative appeal. According to the Fed's most recent study of economic well-being, the percentage of Americans saying that they were doing worse than the year before rose to the highest level since the Fed's survey began in 2014. And no wonder. American wealth inequality is at one of its highest levels since the Fed began calculating it in 1989. Income inequality has improved a bit in recent years due to nominal increases in labor income, but overall income disparities remain pronounced. The top one percent takes home \$2 million in average post-tax income versus the bottom 50 percent's average of \$39,274. Even before inflation really took off, a survey in January 2022 found that Americans thought they needed \$128,000 in income to feel financially secure.

Biden is trying to persuade voters that happy times are here again. This was a hard campaign promise even from an orator as awesome as Franklin D. Roosevelt. Failing a sudden macroeconomic miracle, the only way Joe Biden can persuade Americans that he's on their economic side is to understand the side they're actually on and then target a critical source of persistent economic inequality by holding the Federal Reserve accountable for its manifest, manifold mistakes.

Global Firepower Index paints India poorly. But there are no medals for good performance

In an era of civil strife, conflicts, territorial expansions, and threats of resorting to arms, any global data on supposed worldwide conventional military capabilities is bound to draw attention. And that is precisely what the recently released Global Firepower Index has achieved—instant stardom, enormous curiosity, but forgotten as another internet stunt. Except that it may be a tad more than just a simple stunt. The Global Firepower Index website has all the signs of sustained research, although with a significant hint at military psychological operations. The index aims to analyse and grade the conventional military capabilities of 145 countries.

This makes the grading of the countries a very interesting exercise, considering the stated goal is to look only at conventional military capabilities. Nuclear weapons are not part of this capabilities chart since they are not just a purely military arsenal, but hugely political. So Global Firepower has rightly put them aside, for, if taken into calculation, Pakistan would surely have landed an even higher grade. The Cold War cicadas, seeing an opportunity with all the worldwide sabre rattling, can rest easy since their

plutonium fantasies are not a part of this capabilities chart.

So, the denial of using nuclear weapons capabilities in preparing this chart is stated very early in the data explanation. However, it is the negation of two other aspects of technology that truly catches attention. While one is hidden within the text of each nation's description, the other is worldwide contagion enunciated at the end of the text. The website declares its authenticity, so to say, when it ends with "No A.I. was used in the generation of this content; site is 100% curated by humans". Curious explanation at the end of a strange exercise.

Which brings the rejection, and denial, of another more vital and already inducted military platform into the picture — there is no data on the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) capabilities of the 145 countries. So the existence, integration, and combat deployment of drones were not part of the calculations when the 'researchers' of this website prepared the grading chart. This is more than simply curious, for drones have generated far more eyeballs of armchair analysts than the once favourite Special Forces.

India-France Strategic Partnership: A New Era of Global Cooperation

A few weeks after his state visit to the United States, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday embarked on an official visit to France where he will take part in the annual Bastille Day Parade as the guest of honour. An Indian tri-services contingent will also be part of the parade this year. The two-day visit comes as France and India have sought to deepen their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the defence, security, and technological domains.

India and France, two vibrant democracies, have cultivated a robust strategic partnership over the last two decades, fueled by shared democratic values and a commitment to multilateralism. Their partnership spans across various domains, including defense, space, nuclear energy, and climate change, bolstering the global influence of both nations.

Defense Collaboration: Strengthening Shared Security Interests

The India-France defense partnership has evolved significantly over the years, with both countries conducting regular joint military exercises such as 'Varuna', 'Shakti', and 'Garuda'. France's Rafale fighter jets, a cornerstone of this defense collaboration, not only enhances India's air power but also symbolizes the deep strategic trust between these two nations.

Space Cooperation: Forging Ahead in the Final Frontier

India and France have pursued stellar collaborations in space technology. Organizations like Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and France's Centre National d'Études Spatiales (CNES) have worked together on technological advancements, joint space missions, and capacity building. The planned launch of a joint thermal infrared earth-observation mission is a testament to their shared commitment to leveraging space for inclusive

development.

Nuclear Energy: Powering a Sustainable Future

France, a global leader in nuclear power, has been instrumental in helping India tap into the potential of this clean energy source. The upcoming Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant, built with French assistance, is a shining example of their nuclear collaboration that aims to balance energy needs with environmental concerns.

Climate Change: Spearheading Global Environment Conservation

The India-France partnership is a guiding force in the global fight against climate change. The International Solar Alliance (ISA), initiated by both countries, is a groundbreaking effort to harness the power of solar energy and reduce dependence on fossil fuels. Their joint commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement further underscores their pioneering role in environmental conservation.

The Future: An Unwavering Alliance

Looking towards the future, the India-France strategic partnership is poised to shape a resilient, balanced, and equitable world order. As they continue to collaborate on shared challenges and opportunities, this partnership stands as a beacon of hope and collaborative spirit in an increasingly uncertain global landscape. In conclusion, the India-France strategic partnership is far more than a diplomatic alliance. It's an embodiment of shared vision and mutual respect, a testament to the power of cooperation in addressing the pressing challenges of our time. The success of this partnership serves as a model for other nations, heralding a new era of global cooperation that transcends borders and cultures, promising a safer, more secure world for future generations.

By Sharanjit Thind



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

REGD & MAILING OFFICE :

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Welcome to the 'looking-glass' world of Putin's Russia



promised the rebel leader immunity, he would still be wise to watch his back. Others who have crossed the Kremlin later succumbed to rare poisons or suffered mysterious "accidents."

Prigozhin's mutiny and its still-unfolding aftermath have laid bare how peculiarly mendacious Russia's public life has become. To make sense of Kremlin politics these days often seems to require a polygraph.

When the jailed opposition leader, Alexey Navalny, first heard about Prigozhin's rebellion, it seemed so implausible he assumed it was "a joke or an Internet meme." Completely cut off from news in his punishment cell, he only learned of the mutiny from his lawyer in court.

All dictatorships traffic in contradictions. War is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength, as readers of Orwell know well. Putin's sloganeers might add a few more paradoxes to the list. Lies are truth. Illusion is reality.

In Russia today, spreading "false" information about the war — that is, reporting on it accurately — is punishable by up to 15 years in a penal colony. If, like the courageous pro-democracy campaigner Vladimir Kara-Murza, you also accuse Russian troops of war crimes, you risk getting an additional 10

— as the judge decided in Kara-Murza's case.

Putin's speeches create a mirror image of reality. As citizens in Rostov cheered the mutineers and booed the police, the president insisted that everyone was united behind him and the constitutional order. Later, he thanked the troops and security services for acting "in a firm and coordinated manner." In fact, they hardly acted at all.

Russia's president is also adept at subterfuge. To conceal his whereabouts, he is said to have built exact replicas of his Kremlin office in multiple locations. When TV shows Putin in Moscow, he may just as well be in Sochi or Valdai. To avoid being tracked by flight radar, he has taken to travelling in a secret train carriage, according to a defector from his guard service.

Amid all the lies, Prigozhin's most subversive act may have been not his march on Moscow but his moment of truth in a video released just before it. In an impassioned rant, he accused the Russian authorities of cooking up a pretext for the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. "On February 24th, nothing extraordinary happened," he said.

He was careful not to call Putin a liar. But — hardly better — he made him out to be a dupe, deceived by medal-hungry

generals and rapacious oligarchs into starting an unnecessary war that has cost many tens of thousands of Russian lives. Worse yet for the Kremlin, Prigozhin's claim — coming from a diehard nationalist — will seem quite believable to many Russians. That may be one reason Putin did not, at first, use force against him. Rather than risk creating a martyr for hardliners, he seems to have decided to start by destroying the warlord's credibility.

Investigations and leaks have already begun, with pictures of Prigozhin's lavish mansion appearing on state television. Equipped with gold bars, multiple passports, caches of weapons, a closet full of wigs and other disguises, the place is a model of gangster chic. In this looking-glass world, the president has no time for politics. He rarely appears in public. Visitors must often quarantine for days before he will sit with them — and then, usually only at the end of one of his famous elongated tables. Isolated in his self-built echo chamber, he relies on reports from his security services — the same ones that predicted quick victory in Ukraine and failed to anticipate and prevent Prigozhin's rebellion.

(Contd. on page 24)

A band of mercenaries seizes a major city, shoots down multiple aircrafts and drives a column of tanks to within 125 miles of Moscow, with the declared aim of ousting the defense minister. The president quickly pardons them and says their billionaire commander can withdraw, untouched, to Belarus.

An opposition politician leads peaceful protests and campaigns for honest elections. Branded a traitor and prosecuted for "extremism," he now spends his days in a concrete punishment cell, denied even a pen and paper. Welcome to the weird, through-the-looking-glass world of Vladimir Putin's Russia, where everything is its opposite and almost nothing is what it seems.

That may hold as well for the still-murky fate of last month's mutineer, Yevgeny Prigozhin,

head of the Wagner group. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko initially confirmed his arrival at an airbase near Minsk on June 27. But then, on July 6, he said the mercenary kingpin was actually in St. Petersburg.

Even more bizarrely, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov claimed to have no idea about the whereabouts of the man who had just shaken the regime to its core. The Kremlin had "neither the ability nor the desire" to track Prigozhin, he told journalists.

In the latest mind-boggling twist, Peskov admitted on Monday that Prigozhin had actually met with Putin in the Kremlin on June 29, just days after his revolt, and that the president had offered the Wagner boss and his men "further options for deployment." While Putin

Parties without ideology are endangered in the BJP-era. Even Congress needs a modernised doctrine

Does ideology still matter? If you look at the big picture, ideology has become a stronger force than it's been in decades. Except, it works only on one side — the BJP's.

The dramatic transformation in Maharashtra this last week gives us an intriguing view of the state of our national politics. Of where we stand now, how we got here and where do we go next. Some interesting questions follow. Does ideology still matter in our politics? You'd probably think it doesn't, if you look at the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party, for example.

However morally exalted, the promise of a corruption-free government and free-this and free-that do not make an ideology. Not even when backed by framed portraits of Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh on the wall. At the other end of the spectrum, the same conclusion can be reached by looking at the moves in Maharashtra: first, the Shiv Sena defected from the NDA to move to an alliance of ideological arch rivals, the NCP

and the Congress. In the course of time, two of the three split and saw a majority of their MLAs defect to the BJP. Where does that even leave the ideology and principle in politics?

NCP leader and former UPA cabinet minister Praful Patel gave us an insight into this when questioned by journalists to justify his switch to the BJP-led coalition.

If we (NCP) had no problem aligning with the Shiv Sena, he asked, why should there be a problem in aligning with the BJP now.

I did see a comment from Sharad Pawar somewhere that it was okay to embrace the inclusive Hindutva of the Shiv Sena but not the BJP's. Which, we know, and must dismiss as pure baloney.

The fact is, that if you look at the big picture with an open mind, ideology has

become a stronger force than it's been in decades. Except, it works only on one side — the BJP's. You may adore or detest it, but you can't deny that the party has moved closer to its core.

On the other hand, too many leaders and their parties have thrived for these same decades in an ideologically permissive environment where principles and philosophical commitments have always been fungible with power.

Developments in Maharashtra politics over the past four years are probably telling us that the era is now over. The Eknath Shinde Shiv Sena and the Ajit Pawar NCP may enjoy their short innings in power, but electorally and politically, they now represent forces in terminal decline. This could then spell the end of two mostly transactional political entities. That the Shiv Sena and

the NCP are almost entirely one-state parties does not matter as over the past 25 years, ruling coalitions in Delhi have almost always had one of the two as partners. In the pre-Modi past, especially after the 2009 elections, many of us (this columnist included, so guilty by self-incrimination) were quick to hail the arrival of an ideology-free Indian politics.

The increasingly younger voter, we had concluded, had only one thought while hitting the button on the voting machine: what's in it for me? Modi kept that in mind in his 2014 campaign, but his larger appeal was of hard, emotional, Hindutva-based nationalism. There were frequent references to Pakistan, and many indirect ones to Muslims, especially the questions over the justification for "pink revolution" (electoral code for meat exports).

These French Riots Are Different-and Far More Disturbing

It is extremely tempting to see the riots that spread across France recently as merely a sequel to the shocking events of 2005. Back then, 21 days of riots shook France's "banlieues" (code for largely impoverished multi-racial communities) and made international headlines. And there are indeed long-term political, economic and social issues in France that explain why things have not improved since. Why there is more, or even worse, police violence against rebellious — but usually defenseless — young men of Arab or non-Western descent.

But the stunning disorder that's plagued France in recent days is coming from a different place from what we've seen before. There is now a sense of humiliation and dispossession that crisscrosses French society, that transcends the banlieues, and transforms today's riots into a display of shared and paroxysmic frustration. That should be deeply worrying, not just for President Emmanuel Macron, but for democratic leaders across the West.

This time, the riots followed the point-blank police



shooting of 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk after a car chase. The cost of the riots in a mere week — over \$1 billion in damages to businesses — towers above that of 2005, but perhaps more notable is that the discussion of the banlieues has receded, or is mediated through, the lens of the police. (In fact, this echoes a different French film, Ladj Ly's 2019 crime thriller *Les Misérables*; the last prophetic image is of a young boy beside himself with trauma and anger

brandishing a Molotov cocktail in the face of a cop with a gun.) Today the majority of rioters don't have an immigrant background, and most of them are minors, some as young as 12 — in other words only a few years younger than the victim. It is their extreme youth combined with what has been characterized as their hyper violence that makes headlines. The images we see are shocking, yes. There's almost a one-upmanship on social

media that pits three burnt busses against one gutted city hall (and I'll raise you two looted McDonald's). The scale of the destruction is breathtaking; it's frequently symbolic, but often merely opportunistic — and sometimes downright incomprehensible in its perversity, like the assaults on the medical personnel trying to put some of these kids back together. But today, despite all that is dystopian in these scenes of enraged children

driven to trash their very own environment, almost everyone gets it. Few are actually surprised. This is why 2023 is different from 2005. Regardless of the mindlessness of some of the destruction, the young people rampaging across French cities and towns are also expressing a deep anger rooted in humiliation that is felt across the country, not just in the banlieues. You could argue that for many French people, regardless of where they live, the nature of governance and decision-making in the past few years means that they all feel like "riff-raff" now. What's important to remember is that Macron's governance is not incompetent — far from it. In comparison to the manner in which other major advanced democracies handled Covid, the energy crisis or inflation, France has done quite well. The trouble is that the people — the French rather than France — feel like they keep drawing the short straw when it comes to their voices and preferences being taken into account, their political and civic rights respected, their humanity protected.

(Contd. on page 24)

France Teetering on The Brink of Anarchy

Violent protests have become a common sight across France and are unlikely to cease in the near future. The horror will return in another form and another place. The protestors that turned violent asked for justice and not to be tranquillized. Since 2017, the French police have been heavily militarised in the name of serving the public but it has made the secular republic a republic of fear, at least for the people of colour concerned. The 17-year black African teenager, Nahel M, was from the town of Nanterre to the west of Paris. The only child of a single mother was a rugby enthusiast and had no criminal past — it truly mirrors the George Floyd moment that created havoc across the US and its treatment of citizens of colour.

But the turn of events of violent protests caught by mob culture looting eateries to Yamaha bikes and to the dismay, even burning libraries, caught attention across the world. Irrespective of emotive logic, this was another assault on the meaning of logical expression of protests and helping any immediate possibility of such repetitions. At times, protests often fail logic and its central concern is if protesters have been

dehumanised in a so-called civilised world. France is definitely at a crossroads, its colonial past is haunting its present policies and failing to integrate its citizens who were migrants and once sufferers of French colonialism. Protests have been a profound feature of the French Republic and most of the social movements and nature of protests across the world draw its logic and expression from 1968 new social movements.

The very core idea of protest is to bring the state to its senses that people matter, whether they are under authoritarian regimes or democracies. The cultural production of

grievances signifies the collective meaning of protests and France has been the hallmark of such protest culture; the only difference is the mob culture that has brought certain anarchy to its streets and fails to justify the value attached to protests. It rather deepens the structural problem and further

trivializes the question of racism, dehumanisation and lack of political will for integration.

In recent history, France has seen myriads of such events. The headscarves issues, the Charlie Hebdo moment and its aftermath, the usual sights of lone wolves' knife attacks, and



the killing of teachers on alleged charges of hurting religious sentiments have previously challenged the French government and its aggressive secular narratives. In 2005, a series of events brought the French state to call for a national emergency and in recent events, whether the Yellow Vests

movement or nationwide strikes by unions and other concerned institutions on passing pension bills through extra-constitutional mechanisms. Different protests have different reasons and despite being harrowingly violent at times, the coverage of black people and their Arab identity invite a communal tone calling it a 'Muslim Phenomenon'. Such absurdities won't comfort the truth that France has serious problems of social, economic and political integration. The arming of French police in 2017 defied the logic of protection of people on the street, rather it has given the police complete impunity against its own crime, more so when it comes to dehumanising black French citizens. In 2022, such events occurred on many occasions but the French police were never cautioned and no authentic justice was served. Police have been allowed to feed themselves with this act of violence on their own people in the name of secularisation and securitisation. If crimes don't meet justice, then response won't stop until you become a republic of fear.

(Contd. on page 24)

Key Sikh numbers that Trudeau likes to ignore

The absurdity of the Khalistan fantasy becomes abundantly clear when one examines the contemporary demographic data which explains the contrast of the so-called referendums done abroad with Sikh population even in smallest of Indian states here.

By Yashwant Deshmukh,
Sutanu Guru

The last few weeks have shown contrasting visuals that, in their own way, sum up the madness around the so-called Khalistan. On June 2, turban firmly over his head, Ajay Banga took over as President of World Bank for a five-year tenure. A few weeks after that, the bright turban of Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Indian Ambassador to the United States, could be seen often as Prime Minister Narendra Modi went on a state visit to that country. Around the same time, Sikh radicals in Canada (mainly in and around Toronto) and parts of the US (mainly around San Francisco) were busy chasing their Khalistan fantasy with provocative and incendiary posters and slogans. Recent events have given a clear signal that these radical advocates of Khalistan are determined to up the ante.

The Indian consulate in San Francisco was almost burnt down to the ground before a prompt response from fire fighters saved the building. Up north in Canada, the radicals have become even more dangerously provocative.

A few weeks back, a radical Khalistani separatist leader and designated terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar was shot dead by unidentified persons in



Surrey in the British Columbia province of Canada as he was leaving the Gurudwara. Khalistani separatists promptly blamed India for the death. In recent days, they have issued posters with 'Kill India' prominently displayed. Worse, the posters also have pictures of the Indian High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Verma and Toronto Consul General Apoorva Srivastava. A 'Freedom Rally' has been organised on July 8 in Toronto by Khalistanis. Much has already been written about the apparently lackadaisical manner in which authorities in the US, Canada, the UK and Australia have been dealing with Khalistanis with kid gloves. Not very long ago, they tried to storm the Indian embassy in London. Temples have been frequently defaced in Australia. The authors would let that be as a lot has already been written. Instead, it

would be interesting to focus on some historical facts and current demographic data to show how a small section of lunatic and murderous radical Sikhs backed by Pakistan's ISI are literally creating a Khalistani mountain of a molehill. A vast majority of Sikhs do not support the radicals and terrorists. Nothing much happened in Punjab in India when the cops eventually arrested separatist Amritpal Singh who fashions himself as a reincarnation of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Ideally, one could simply laugh away the antics of extremist Sikhs in Canada. But the danger posed by even a handful to Indian diplomats is real. In 1984, insurgency and terror were yet to haunt Jammu & Kashmir. Yet, in February 1984, a handful of terrorists kidnapped Indian diplomat Ravindra Mhatre in

Birmingham and subsequently, shot him dead. To that extent, it is important for India to tell Canada in no nonsense terms that enough is enough. But let's focus on some revealing historical and contemporary data. The accompanying chart makes something very interestingly clear.

The number of Sikhs living in major states of India other than Punjab is double than the number of Sikhs living in other countries.

In fact, there is not a single state in India that doesn't have a substantial Sikh population that is completely integrated culturally and often even linguistically. At an aggregate level, the number of Sikhs living in various states of India other than Punjab is more than 5.5 million. Look at it this way: Delhi is a small city state compared to the UK. Yet, Delhi is home to

almost same number of Sikhs residing in the UK. Uttarakhand, not be confused with the UK, is also a small state. Even this tiny state has Sikh population at par with their total population in entire EU. This Sikh population in Indian states outside Punjab is the biggest proof of the mainstreaming and seamless integration of a minority in any democratic set up whatsoever.

The absurdity of the Khalistan fantasy becomes abundantly clear when one examines the contemporary demographic data which explains the contrast of the so-called referendums done abroad with Sikh population even in smallest of Indian states here. For example: you must have read that Khalistani Group Sikhs For Justice arranged about 17,000 Sikhs signatures in the Khalistan referendum in Rome.

(Contd. on page 23)

Role of Artificial Intelligence in Modern Warfare: A Paradigm Shift in Warfare



The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into military operations has transformed the landscape of modern warfare. With advancements in machine learning, autonomous devices, and data analysis, AI has become a critical component of 21st-century military strategies. Experts

in military strategy are now looking at the role of AI in the military, from cyberattacks to data crunching and autonomous machines, and are now examining the potential implications and future prospects of this technology.

The integration of artificial intelligence into cyber war-

fare has revolutionised strategic intelligence gathering and provided militaries with unprecedented capabilities. The development of highly sophisticated cyber weapons, empowered by AI, has enabled military agencies to infiltrate and sabotage critical infrastructure with precision and effectiveness. The Stuxnet virus, infamous for its targeted attack on Iranian centrifuges, exemplifies the potential of AI in cyber warfare. Since then, AI-driven viruses have evolved to not only disrupt but also gather valuable strategic information, offering insights that were previously inaccessible.

The collection and analysis of vast amounts of data have been facilitated by AI-powered algorithms, transforming the land-

scape of intelligence gathering. Satellite surveillance, battlefield sensors, and cyber operations generate massive datasets that are processed using learning algorithms. These algorithms possess the ability to decipher complex patterns, uncover hidden relationships, and extract actionable intelligence from the data. By leveraging AI, military agencies can gain critical insights into adversary capabilities, intentions, and vulnerabilities, facilitating informed decision-making and proactive responses.

Beyond the Stuxnet virus, numerous other examples highlight the impact of AI in cyber warfare and strategic intelligence. For instance, AI algorithms have been utilised to detect and analyse patterns of

malicious activities in network traffic, enabling the identification and mitigation of cyber threats. Machine learning algorithms can also be employed to monitor social media platforms and other online channels, extracting valuable information about potential adversaries or monitoring public sentiment during conflicts.

Furthermore, AI-powered systems can augment traditional surveillance methods, enhancing the collection and analysis of intelligence in real time. Sophisticated satellite systems equipped with AI algorithms can process vast amounts of imagery data, identify patterns, detect anomalies, and track movements on the ground. (Contd. on page 23)

The right to protest and question: How much is too much?

The gift of modern democracy is that it affects the change of power through the ballot box. It is a great achievement that we have found a means of transferring power without bloodshed, to disrupt power non-violently.

By Sadhguru: Sadhguru

Someone asked me the other day if I was an uncritical believer in the existing political regime. I found the question amusing. Not just because, as a guru, I am constantly urging people to seek, not believe. But also, anyone who knows me is aware that I am capable of questioning vested interests unrelentingly. There are, however, many ways to question. Questioning can be constructive or destructive. Democracy is a powerful way of disrupting the status quo, challenging power equations, and shaking up cliques and cartels, pockets of monopoly and exclusivity. The gift of modern democracy is that it affects the change of power through the ballot box. It is a great achievement that we have found a means of transferring power without bloodshed, to disrupt power non-violently.

Retaining Freedom of Speech

However, once we choose to respect the ballot box, it means that we have tacitly agreed to subordinate our personal will to the will of the collective. Does this mean that we have lost our



right to protest? Far from it. It is vital to retain our individual freedom of speech and expression, our capacity to discern and dissent, to dialogue and debate. A democracy is only functional when these individual freedoms are proudly enshrined and robustly protected. Before we become vociferous champions of the cause of individual freedom, it is imperative that we first become individuals. A system that has found ways to manipulate groups to vote en masse – whether on the basis of caste, religion, gender, or even ideology – is not a true democracy. It is feudalism in democratic garb. A thriving democracy, like an au-

thentic spiritual process, is based on the notion of individual freedom. But only when individuals look beyond the lure of populist political and religious propaganda can true democracy and true spirituality be born. In both cases, the individual must emerge from peer pressure and cronyism, narrow group interests and power lobbies.

A true spiritual process is never authoritarian. It is always fluid, open-ended and open to debate. This has always been the view of spirituality in this subcontinent. This is a culture of quest, not commandment. Here, what we consider to be “sacred” can be debated. It does not have to be

obeyed. Even when beings believed to be divine appeared in this land – from Shiva to Krishna – we did not simply obey them. We questioned them, debated with them. Likewise, the Indian constitution is not a set of commandments. If it were, it would be the political equivalent of religious authoritarianism.

Constructive or Destructive Freedom?

Once you emerge as an individual, it is important to realize that your freedom has an impact on others. To live in a democracy means we have agreed to allow everyone the right to the same freedoms. You may choose to protest a policy, or denounce a

film, but if you shut down a city or state to express your rage, you are muzzling other people's liberties as well. This is personal whim masquerading as freedom, irresponsibility masquerading as individual initiative. The question we must ask ourselves as a nation is this: are we exercising our individual freedom constructively or destructively? Is our freedom truly empowering or is it sabotaging other citizens' right to wellbeing? Before we speak of individual freedom, we have to honestly ask a more fundamental question: have we truly become responsible individuals yet?

How Indira Gandhi lost a chance to solve Punjab tangle 40 years ago

As Khalistan bogey again raises its ugly head, a lot could have been different if a major peace initiative by Sardar Swaran Singh, having the blessings of the then PM Indira Gandhi, had not been scuttled.

By Rasheed Kidwai

In 1982, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was very close to brokering peace in Punjab, having brought many key players such as Akalis, Bhindranwale, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal and others on board, but a last-minute change in a draft statement that was read out in the Lok Sabha, ironically plotted by those close to Indira, acted as a spoiler. In a yet to be released book titled, “Sikh Separatism -- A History of Conflicts [Garuda Prakashan Private Limited], author-columnist Rajesh Singh painstakingly records significant nuggets to build a case of how noted diplomat Sardar Swaran Singh's efforts to work out peace in insurgency-hit Punjab were thwarted. Swaran Singh, who had served as Indian foreign minister, had then accused Giani Zail, M L Fotedar, Bhajan Lal and Arun Nehru of scuttling the peace initiative. Fotedar, Arun Nehru and Bhajan Lal were considered close to Indira's political heir, Rajiv Gandhi, who was calling the shots

as AICC general secretary.

Relying upon rich archival documents such as classified papers, books, and newspapers, author Rajesh Singh quotes Sardar Swaran Singh as saying that the then home minister P C Sethi was to make a statement in parliament that would have satisfied Akalis and taken peace initiative to its logical conclusion. Instead, Sethi, diluted it at the very last minute without his knowledge, forcing Singh to say,

“This is neither the same statement nor the same spirit.” Coming from a seasoned diplomat known to measure words, it was an admission of failure. Prior to this, in the midst of the escalating violence, Akalis had demanded a “sacred place” status to



Amritsar, a ban on the sale of alcohol and tobacco in the city precincts, the demand for the live broadcast of gurbani from Harmandir Sahib, enactment of an All India Sikh Gurdwara Act, Sikhs be allowed to carry their kirpans on board international flights, sharing of the waters of the Beas and Ravi Rivers between Punjab and Haryana. Indira then turned to Swaran Singh who still holds a record of serving the union cabinet for 23 years. Singh went on to meet the Akali trio of Longowal, G S Tohra and Prakash Singh Badal, Bhindranwale and others and submitted a confidential report to Indira about “doable things.” On the morning of 3 November 1982, the cabinet committee met in PV Narasimha Rao's room in Parliament House. Principal Sec-

retary to the Prime Minister, PC Alexander, Cabinet Secretary CR Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib, Home Secretary TN Chaturvedi and Special Secretary PP Nayyar, were also present. Swaran Singh also attended the meeting. His plea was that the Akalis should be given a way out to withdraw their agitation before their planned meeting on 4th November. He also argued that Sikh Separatism could be done away with by making a conciliatory announcement on the basis of what had been agreed upon with the Akali leaders. A draft statement was prepared, which, among other things, contained the following, “All religious demands would be met; a commission would be formed to study the devolution of more powers to the states; efforts would be made to compensate Punjab for the loss of water resulting from the December 1981 deal; the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab could be done with Haryana not insisting on the transfer of Fazilka and Abohar areas.”

(Contd. on page 24)



Politics of power brought Manipur ethnic violence. Time to move to justice

A separate administrative unit for Zomis and Kukis, with a Union Territory status and a separate legislature devoid of Meitei influence, is important for peace.

The changing contours of the Manipur conflict reveal contrasting realities. On the one hand, schools reopened in the Imphal Valley after a two-month hiatus, while on the other, more than 2,000 defence volunteers in Churachandpur protested the beheading of Langza village volunteer David Theik by Meitei militants. These incidents, coupled with the recent killing of mentally challenged Kuki-Zomi woman Debora Donngaihching Hangzo in Imphal, contradict the peace talks propagated by the majoritarian valley populous.

The Meira Paibis (Meitei women's group) stopping the Indian Army from stationing its troops in affected peripheral areas, a 'no-work, no-pay' rule amid massive displacement, and an indefinite internet shutdown show the inability – or the lack of will – of Manipur's political dispensation to stop the growing ethnic violence. The Narendra Modi government's silence is deafening, too.

Root cause of deepening fault lines

The 2005 burning of the state library of Imphal, where most of the historical data of Manipur's tribal communities was documented, combined with systematic radicalisation of the Meitei community, seems to have gradually caused the ethnic clashes targeting hill tribes, particularly in Zomi-Kuki inhabited areas. The attacks on Zomi-Kuki tribals, which began on 3 May this year, are the outcome of a systemic build-up and planning over several months at least.

This disturbance can also be traced to developments emerging from the controversial opening of the Chivu-Chandrakirti

Park in Behiang, Churachandpur, in October 2022. It remains a site of much controversy between the Zomi-Kuki tribes in Churachandpur and the valley's Meitei community. According to The Wire, "the stone inscriptions at Chivu misrepresent the victory of the -British over the Lushai [tribal chiefs] as a victory of the Manipur Maharaja" during the Lushai expedition of 1871-72. Commemorating the event in this way highlights the overriding predominance of majoritarian state history over local histories in a culturally diverse region like Manipur.

This controversy was followed by the state's 'immigrant hunting' programme, which alienated the Kuki-Zomi people and led to Manipur's own indigenous tribals being branded as 'refugees' and 'immigrants'. In January 2023, the Imphal Municipal Corporation initiated a survey of all Kuki-Zomi areas in and around the Manipur capital, marking them with paints and numbers. Subsequently, on 3 May, heinous mobs attacked these houses and properties. The state government had also demolished three Kuki-Zomi churches in Imphal, stating they were illegally built on government lands.

The Manipur government followed up on these events by evicting tribal villages accused of encroaching on reserved forests. This led to a protest rally on 10 March in various hill districts under the aegis of the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF).

Despite the rally being peaceful, Manipur CM N Biren Singh accused Kuki-Zomi insurgent groups of instigating unrest.

Harping on this claim, he withdrew the state government from the tripartite talks that had been going on since 2005 between underground hill groups, the state government, and the central government for the purpose of finding an administrative settlement for the relative autonomy of tribes in Manipur.

The hill-valley divide isn't imaginary Zomi-Kuki tribes have inhabited Manipur's hills since before British colonial rulers conquered the region in 1891. They were only separately annexed during the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889. The Maharaja of Manipur never controlled the hill tribes and their lands, and the British administered them separately.

After the Partition of India, the Manipur Merger Agreement of 1949 did not effectively include tribal areas and tribal administrations under chiefship. "Not even a single inch of hill area was covered under this agreement," wrote Brigadier Sushil Kumar Verma in *The Complexities of Tribal Land Rights and Conflict in Manipur: Issues and Recommendation*. The tribal chiefs, particularly the Zomi chiefs, dealt with the Raja of Manipur as an equal partner. When Raja Goukthothang Guite was treacherously captured and killed in an Imphal jail in 1872, tensions escalated between the Meitei and Zomi.

In 1873, John Butler, Deputy Commissioner of Cachar, recorded the Peace Treaty of Sanjenthong between Sumkam Guite – son of deceased Raja Guite – and Chandrakirti, incumbent Raja of Manipur: "The formula of the oath declared that peace should now last between the

two nations until the sun rose in the West, until rivers flowed up hill, until hair grew on stones..."

Another treaty, the Treaty of Moirang, was signed on 10 April 1875 between Maharaja Chandrakirti and Sumkam Guite. The terms of the agreement stated that "Sumkam's territorial jurisdiction will extend upto Moirang, and the Maharaja will rule over the rest of the plains. Both will collect revenues from their respective subjects..." This effectively entrenched Sumkam Guite's control over Moirang. Lasting peace was finally achieved with the conclusion of this treaty.

Article 371 (C) of the Constitution, added by the 27th Amendment Act of 1971, divided Manipur into hill and valley areas, giving special protection to territories with tribal settlements.

Without justice, there can be no peace

The central government should involve communities in Manipur to chart a concrete solution to the ongoing turmoil. Even if peace and normalcy, as defined by the majoritarian view, set in, unresolved issues will eventually erupt like a volcano. It is not uncommon for majorities to subvert marginalised voices to give precedence to their own manufactured narratives. Like French philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of 'power/knowledge', where power is shaped by accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding, and truth, the unbalanced viewpoint of media organisations suggests dominant valley politics continue to redefine history through structures of power.

Six killed in Nepal helicopter crash near Mount Everest



helicopter was carrying five Mexican passengers and a Nepali pilot, Teknath Sitoula told CNN. Reuters reported that Manang Air caters to tourists wanting a view of Nepal's peaks, including Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain.

It set off from Solukhumbu district, where Everest is situated, at 10:05 a.m. local time (12:20 a.m. ET) on Tuesday, heading for the capital, Kathmandu, according to a statement issued by the

Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal. The helicopter lost contact less than 10 minutes later, at 10:13 a.m., and was later found crashed in Solukhumbu's rural municipality of Likhupike, according to the authority. It added that locals and police who reached the crash site found the bodies of all on board. "All six bodies have been located. We are now starting the process to take them to Kathmandu. It will take some time because it means traveling by road from the crash site and

then flying to Kathmandu," Sitoula told CNN.

He added that the cause of the crash has not yet been determined. Nepal's inclement weather, low visibility and mountainous topography all contribute to its reputation as notoriously dangerous for aviation. In January, at least 68 people were killed when an aircraft went down near the city of Pokhara in central Nepal. This was the Himalayan nation's deadliest plane crash in more than 30 years.

(News Agency) Six people Kathmandu's Tribhuvan have died in a helicopter crash International Airport said in Nepal, a spokesperson for Tuesday. The Manang Air

Thailand's prime minister, who seized power in a 2014 coup, quits politics after losing election

(News Agency) BANGKOK — Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who served almost nine years in office after seizing power in a 2014 military coup, said Tuesday that he is leaving politics. His announcement came after the political party for which he served as a prime minister candidate this year finished fifth in May's general election, capturing just 36 seats in the 500-member House of Representatives.

Prayuth, 69, a former army commander, made the announcement on the Facebook page of Ruam Thai Sang Chart, or the United Thai Nation Party. He had been their nominee to return as prime minister.

"I would like to announce my

retirement from politics by resigning as a member of United Thai Nation," Prayuth wrote. "I'd like to ask the party leader, executives and members to continue their political activities with a strong ideology of protecting the institutions, the nation, the religion and the monarchy, and take care of the Thai people."

Parliament on Thursday is due to select a new prime minister. The nominee from the top-running, progressive Move Forward Party who has assembled a majority coalition of eight parties with 312 seats in the Lower House, must win a majority vote of at least 376 of the combined vote of the House and the non-elected Senate,

which has 250 members. Because of political differences with the conservative Senate, it is uncertain that the party's leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, can get approved.

After serving as prime minister in the unelected military government that came to power in the 2014 coup, Prayuth was returned to the job after the 2019 election as a candidate of the army-backed Palang Pracharath Party. Prime ministers do not need to be Members of Parliament, and Prayuth didn't contest the polls in 2019 or this year. Had Prayuth been returned to office this year, he would only have been able to serve two more years under



constitutional term limits. He said: "In these past nine years, I was already one of Thailand's longest-serving prime ministers.

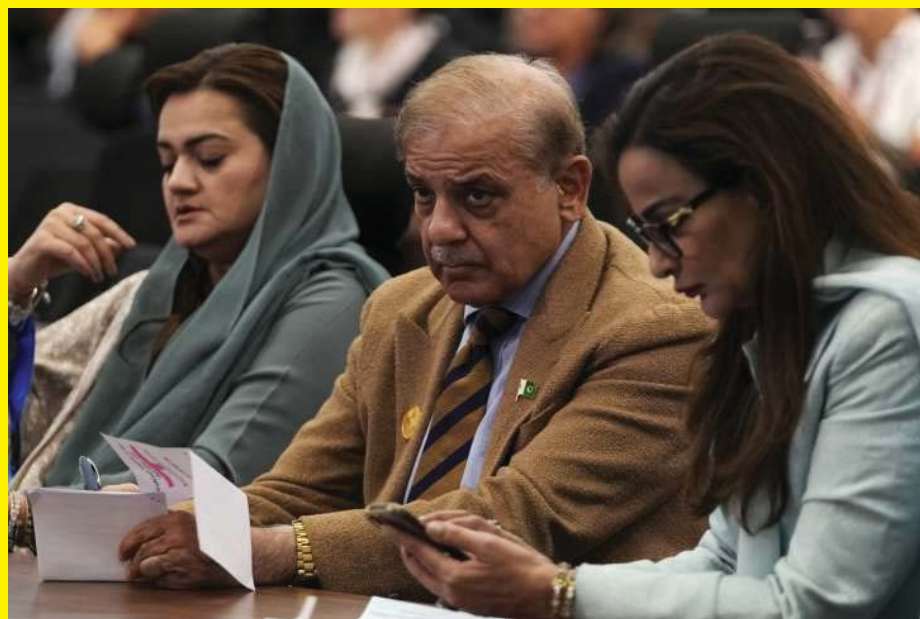
Prayuth did not specify a reason for leaving politics but listed what he considered his accomplishments in office and

as prime minister have worked with my full determination and strength to protect the nation, the religion and the monarchy, and for the best interest of the beloved people."

Media unable to work, journalist tells Pakistan PM. He was then fired

(News Agency) Azam Chaudhry reportedly told the Pakistan PM that the media is unable to function independently.

After a senior Pakistani journalist asked questions from the country's prime minister about freedom of expression, he was fired, ARY News reported. Azam Chaudhry was expelled from state-owned PTV after he enquired about "tacit" restrictions that the Pakistani media faces. He said that he was fired hours after raising the questions during a press conference on June 30 at Punjab governor's House during which Shehbaz Sharif was accompanied by two ministers- Ishaq Dar and Marriyum Aurangzeb. Azam Chaudhry



despite the ruling coalition parties, reportedly told the PM that the media including PML(N) and PPP, is unable to function independently supporting freedom of expression.

"The current period is the worst related to restrictions," he told the prime minister, asking when and how

the restrictions on the media will end. Shehbaz Sharif deflected the question and asked Azam Chaudhry to voice his concerns with the information minister. "If you have something legitimate to say, please speak up," he said.

Pakistan's information minister Marriyum Aurangzeb refuted the journalist's claims saying that he was never hired by PTV as a permanent or contract employee. "I know Azam Chaudhry and am aware of his views but despite this, he was invited to [PM Shehbaz] presser and allowed to ask a question," Marriyum Aurangzeb said adding that if the Shehbaz Sharif government had any problem with the journalist's views, he would not have been invited to the press conference.

Nepal becomes first South Asian country to allow same-sex marriage

Nepal's top court has ordered the legal registration of same-sex marriages, a first step towards marriage equality for LGBTQ+ people in conservative South Asia.



instructed the government to amend Nepalese legislation to recognise same-sex marriage for the sake of equal rights. Successive governments have so far failed to change the law.

One of the petitioners, Pinky Gurung, a trans woman who heads Nepal's Blue Diamond Society gay rights group, called the latest verdict historic. "I think it shows that there are people accepting us gradually," she said. A 2011 census estimated that 1,500 people identified as lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or other diverse sexual or gender identities in Nepal, but activists have claimed the queer community actually consists of 2.5 million Nepalese in the country of 30 million. Maya Gurung, a trans woman who married her partner Surendra Pandey six years ago in a Hindu ceremony that was not officially certified by authorities, said the legal battle wasn't over. "Now we can finally feel our marriage will be legally secure," the activist

said, adding that she would now seek privileges granted to all married couples.

Resistance

Western diplomats also hailed the ruling, which came during the global Pride month that celebrates LGBTQ+ people and their battle to overcome prejudice. "As we conclude Pride month, we are reminded that the freedom to marry means very little without the freedom to marry the person you love," said US ambassador Dean Thompson.

Former ISRO chief Kasturirangan suffers heart attack in Sri Lanka, to be airlifted to Bengaluru

Currently, efforts are underway to airlift him to Bengaluru, where he will be monitored by Dr Devi Shetty, founder of Narayana Health, at the Narayana Hrudyalaya Hospital.

(News Agency) BENGALURU: Former ISRO chairman and Padma Vibhushan awardee Dr K Kasturirangan has suffered a heart attack and is to be airlifted to Bengaluru from Sri Lanka. The eminent scientist, who is responsible for the formulation of the National Education Policy 2020, suffered a heart attack while in Sri Lanka on Monday.



Currently, efforts are underway to airlift him to Bengaluru, where he will be monitored by Dr Devi Shetty, founder of Narayana Health, at the Narayana Hrudyalaya Hospital. According to sources, the 83-year-old scientist is said to be in stable condition. Confirming the news, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah took to Twitter to offer his good wishes. "Sad to know that Indian Space Scientist

Shri Kasturi Rangan has suffered a heart attack in Sri Lanka. I wish him a speedy recovery and lead a healthy life," he said. Dr Kasturirangan is a prominent figure in both the science and education sectors. He has been awarded the second, third and fourth highest civilian awards - Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri - for his contributions to both fields.

(News Agency) Supreme Court judge Til Prasad Shrestha ruled marriages of same-sex and non-traditional couples must be registered as "temporary" until lawmakers come up with a new legal framework to uphold such unions permanently.

In an interim ruling on 28 June, the judge ordered Nepal's government to set up a separate register of marriages for same-sex couples, who lawyers say will have the same rights as heterosexual partners. The court also asked opponents of its

landmark order to file their objections within two weeks.

The ruling makes Nepal the first country to recognise same-sex marriages in South Asia, where Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have all opposed same-sex civil unions.

In the rest of Asia, only Taiwan has legalised same-sex marriage.

Gradual acceptance

The ruling followed a petition submitted by LGBTQ+ activists last month to enforce existing rulings, dating back to 2007, that

Day before IMF bailout approval meet, Pakistan gets \$2 billion from Saudi Arabia

(News Agency) Saudi Arabia pledged the funds to Pakistan in April, but had held off depositing the money until it was sure that the IMF bailout would be forthcoming. Pakistan has received \$2 billion in financial support from Saudi Arabia, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said on Tuesday, a day before the International Monetary Fund's board is expected to give final approval for a much-needed \$3 billion bailout. "I thank Saudi Arabia on behalf of the prime minister and



army chief," Dar said in a recorded video statement, terming it a "great gesture" from the longtime ally. Saudi Arabia deposited the funds with the central bank, Dar said, boosting foreign exchange reserves when Pakistan had been left with barely enough to cover a month of controlled imports. Saudi Arabia pledged the funds in April, but had held off depositing the money with the State Bank of Pakistan until it was sure that the

IMF bailout would be forthcoming. Under the nine-month arrangement, Pakistan will receive about \$1.1 billion upfront and the IMF will stagger disbursements of the rest. The IMF deal will unlock more bilateral and multilateral financing in addition

to the money from Saudi Arabia, and Dar has said that he expects Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves will have risen to \$15 billion by the end of this month. Fitch credit rating agency on Monday upgraded Pakistan's sovereign rating to CCC from CCC-, and the bailout has brought some relief to investors in the country's stocks and bonds. Sharif's coalition government, which is due to face a national election later this year, has to undertake more painful fiscal discipline measures to satisfy the IMF, and the central bank has raised its policy interest rate to a record high of 22% while ordinary Pakistanis are struggling with inflation running at about 29%.

10 family members killed in house fire in Pakistan

(News Agency) Lahore, As many as 10 members of a family, including six children, were burnt to death on Wednesday after a massive fire broke out in a house here, rescue officials said. The incident took place in Lahore's Bhati Gate area in the early hours of the day when a refrigerator's compressor exploded, the Geo News channel reported. The house had no ventilation to let the smoke out, the rescue officials said. Ten members of a

family — a man, his wife, two other women, five children and a seven-month-old infant — were killed in the blaze, while a single family member managed to escape the fire by jumping off the building, they said. The rescue team said the cooling process of the burnt building was underway. Interim Chief Minister of Punjab, Mohsin Naqvi, ordered a comprehensive investigation into the incident, the report said.

Putin met Prigozhin in Moscow after Wagner mutiny

Mercenary group 'ready to continue to fight' for Russia, Kremlin spokesperson says.



Prigozhin rebelled against the Russian military establishment on June 23, seizing the city of Rostov-on-Don the next morning and sending his Wagner Group mercenaries on a march to Moscow. The mutinous warlord only turned his tanks around as they came within 200 kilometers of the Russian capital and threatened to tip the country into civil war. Thirty-five people were invited to attend the high-stakes Moscow meeting, including "all the commanders of the military detachments" and Prigozhin, Peskov said. During the meeting in the Kremlin, Putin "gave an assessment of the company's actions" on the front line in Ukraine and of "the events of [the rebellion

on] June 24," the spokesperson said.

The Wagner commanders were then offered "further options for employment and further combat use," Peskov said, adding that the paramilitaries said they were "ready to continue to fight" for Russia. "Putin listened to the explanations of the commanders and offered them further options for employment and further combat use," Peskov added. Prigozhin and Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, who negotiated a climbdown from the mercenaries, the Wagner leader was supposed to be exiled to Belarus. He has not,

however, been seen in public since. Lukashenko initially confirmed that Prigozhin had popped up in Belarus, before later saying that he wasn't actually there — and could even be in Russia. Usually very active on social media, oligarch-turned warlord Prigozhin has been discreet since the mutiny ended — only appearing a couple times on Telegram. Wagner troops have been involved in some of the bloodiest fighting in Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including in the city of Bakhmut which was battered for months by invading Russian forces during the winter and spring.

(News Agency) Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin in the Kremlin after the paramilitary group's aborted mutiny last month, according to Russian media reports. "This meeting took place in the Kremlin on June 29. It lasted almost three hours," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Monday, according to state-owned newswire Ria Novosti.

Turkey agrees to back Sweden's NATO membership bid

Recep Tayyip Erdogan agrees to drop his resistance to Sweden joining the alliance.

(News Agency) VILNIUS — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday agreed to drop his resistance to Sweden joining the NATO alliance and to submit the ratification to the Turkish parliament "as soon as possible," the alliance's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters. "Sweden will become a full member of the alliance," Stoltenberg said ahead of a summit of NATO leaders starting Tuesday. He said Erdogan had given a "clear commitment" to move on Sweden's accession. The Turkish leader's change of position came after a meeting with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and Stoltenberg. In a joint statement following the talks, Turkey, Sweden and NATO underlined that Stockholm had changed laws, expanded counter-terrorism cooperation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and restarted arms exports to Turkey.

Ankara and Stockholm also agreed to create a "new bilateral Security Compact" and that Sweden will present a "roadmap as the basis of its continued fight against terrorism in all its forms," the statement said. As part of the deal, Stoltenberg has also agreed to create a new post of "Special Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism" at NATO. The announcement comes after over a year of wrangling to get Turkey and Hungary to sign off on admitting Sweden and Finland into the alliance, with NATO leaders publicly and privately lobbying the Turkish

leader to expand the alliance roster. Sweden and Finland both ditched their traditional neutrality in the wake of

linked a change of position on Sweden to a revival of his country's moribund effort to join the European Union. The

The next step, according to the agreement, is that Turkey "will transmit the Accession Protocol for Sweden to the Grand National Assembly, and work closely with the Assembly to ensure ratification." In a statement after the announcement, U.S. President Joe Biden welcomed the agreement and said: "I stand ready to work with President Erdogan and Turkey on enhancing defense and deterrence in the Euro-Atlantic area." Although Hungary has also refused to back Sweden's NATO bid, Stoltenberg noted that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had promised that his country would not be the last holdout against Sweden's membership. Sweden has one of the most capable militaries in Europe and its entry into NATO



Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and asked to join the alliance in May 2022. The accession of the two countries — which have long been close partners of the Western alliance — was easily approved by most NATO members, with Turkey holding out. Finland joined in April following approval by Turkey's parliament in March. But Sweden proved to be a thornier problem, with Erdogan denouncing the presence of Kurdish groups in Sweden. Relations were also inflamed when protesters in Sweden burned copies of the Quran.

Earlier on Monday, Erdogan

recently re-elected Turkish president also met with European Council President Charles Michel on Monday evening. The Council leader described the session as a "good meeting," tweeting that the two "explored opportunities ahead to bring" the EU's cooperation with Turkey "back to the forefront & re-energise our relations."

Sweden promised to "actively support efforts to reinvigorate" Turkey's EU membership bid in a seven-point agreement with Ankara. Stockholm also agreed it will not support other Kurdish militant groups and to boost economic cooperation with Turkey.

together with Finland will solidify the alliance's control of the Baltic Sea. The agreement on the night before the summit's official program starts removes a major headache for Stoltenberg and the alliance's leaders, who are also dealing with Ukrainian demands that Kyiv be given a clear path to membership. Opinions across NATO differ on how fast Ukraine could become a member. Those disagreements will likely be front and center on Wednesday when Biden holds one-on-one talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"Popular Tennessee soccer coach arrested"



Police say they have found "videos on his cell phone depicting" unconscious boys being raped

(News Agency) Police say they have arrested a "popular" Tennessee soccer coach after finding videos on his cell phone depicting unconscious boys being raped. Camilo Hurtado Campos is being held in Franklin, Tennessee, on charges of rape of a child and sexual exploitation of a minor with additional charges expected to be filed, according to a Sunday news release from the Franklin Police Department. Police say they were alerted after Campos left his phone at a restaurant and employees went through the device, looking for information about the owner so they could return it. "What they found, instead, were dozens of unconscionable videos and pictures of

children, and so they called police," authorities said in the news release. Authorities investigated and found hundreds of disturbing images and videos on the 63-year-old's phone, according to the release. Police say Campos "recorded himself raping unconscious boys between approximately 9 and 17 years old." So far, the rapes of "at least 10 children" were found on the phone, and detectives have managed to identify three of the victims, according to police. "Five more that we didn't know about have also come forward. We are nowhere close to the end of our review of the evidence in this horrific case," Franklin police said in a tweet Monday.

Detectives say victims may not even know they were raped due to being in an unconscious state. Campos has lived in Franklin, just south of Nashville, for the past two decades. The soccer coach would allegedly frequent school playgrounds where he would approach and recruit children to play soccer, many of whom he would later invite to his home after gaining their trust, authorities said in the release. Franklin police are still trying to identify the remaining children and want to hear from anyone that has been associated with Campos. Campos' bond has been set at \$525,000, a spokesperson for the Williamson County Sheriff's Office said.

Floods and mudslides kill six in Japan as scientists warn extreme rainfall events will get worse

(News Agency) Heavy rainfall in southwestern Japan has caused devastating flooding and mudslides that have left at least six people dead, five missing and 19 injured, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency on Tuesday.

Four people died in Japan's Kyushu region and two people in the Chugoku region. Japan's Kyushu region has been experiencing heavy rainfall since the beginning of the month and Monday saw record-breaking levels, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

Japan's weather agency issued heavy rain emergency warnings on Monday for the Fukuoka and Oita prefectures, on Kyushu, the country's third largest island.

Since Friday, some parts of Fukuoka have had more than 600 millimeters (23.6 inches) of rain, which is more than the area would usually expect for the whole of July, Reuters reported.

"It's raining like never before," the Japan Meteorological Agency said in a statement

on Monday, which called for maximum vigilance from residents. The alert was later downgraded to a standard warning. Japan is not the only country currently grappling with intense rainfall.

Northern India has been experiencing severe rains which have caused deadly flash floods and landslides, killing at least 22 people. On Sunday, Delhi had its wettest day in more than four decades, with 153 millimeters (6 inches) of rain falling.

In the US, intense rain and flash flooding left at least one person dead in southeastern New York. More than four million people were under flood alerts Tuesday across the Northeast – including parts of New York, Vermont, Massachusetts and Maine.

While heavy rainfall events will always

happen, scientists say that climate change means they are becoming more severe. "The increasing intensity of heavy rainfall events and associated flooding, such as those we are currently witnessing, is an expected



consequence of a warming climate due to our emissions of greenhouse gases," said Richard Allan, a professor in climate science at the UK's University of Reading.

A warmer atmosphere is able to store more water, leading to more intense

rainfall when it falls.

As the planet warms, the expectation is that we will see "more and more intense, more frequent, more severe rainfall events, leading also to more severe flooding," said Stefan Uhlenbrook, director of hydrology, water and cryosphere at the World Meteorological Organization. It's not possible to say exactly when and where extreme rainfall events will happen, Uhlenbrook told CNN. But what is clear is that the vulnerability of societies will be different – with poorer countries often more exposed, he added. "Countries like Japan are extremely alert, and they're also very well prepared when it comes to flood defense measures," Uhlenbrook said. "So even if it happens more frequently, they can probably manage this much better than low-income countries where there are no warnings in place, no flood defense structures [and] no integrated flood management plans."

Jury reaches verdict in battle over Aretha Franklin's estate

(News Agency) The jury hearing arguments surrounding the disposition of Aretha Franklin's estate on Tuesday determined a 2014 version of her will should stand as the document of record. After deliberating for almost one hour, jurors found that a handwritten will, discovered under a sofa cushion by Franklin's niece after the singer's death, was signed by the music legend in 2014 and does show her intent. At the heart of the legal dispute were two separate wills. Two of her sons, Kecalf Franklin and Edward Franklin, wanted the document dated March 31, 2014 to be determined as her legal will, while another son, Ted White II, advocated that a document from 2010 should stand. Franklin's fourth son, Clarence Franklin,



has special needs, is under legal guardianship and was not involved in the

case. Kecalf Franklin testified Monday that he believed the signature on the 2014

document is valid, particularly because it contains the smiley face "characteristic" of Franklin's signature. Referencing the first few lines of the document, attorney Craig Smith, who represented Edward Franklin, said, "She's speaking from the grave, folks: 'This is my will.'" During closing arguments, Smith also addressed royalties stemming from the Queen of Soul's iconic hits. "Now, we may all be dead from global warming, but if we're around, my belief is they'll be playing 'Respect' 300 years from now," he said. White's attorney Kurt Olson argued that evidence showed the 2010 document was "intended" to be Franklin's will because it was found in a cabinet where Franklin kept her "important documents."

Dutch government collapses over immigration policy dispute



(News Agency) Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Monday he would step down as leader of the country's ruling party and leave politics, after his government collapsed over immigration policy, Dutch national broadcaster and CNN affiliate NOS reported. Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Friday that his government would tender its resignation to the Dutch king, triggering new elections to be held in the fall. Rutte, who has been in power since 2010 and is Europe's second-

longest serving leader, said that disputes over measures to restrict immigration had caused his four-party coalition government to fracture.

"It's no secret that the coalition partners have differing opinions about immigration policy," Rutte said at a press conference late Friday night, claiming that "those differences have become insurmountable." King Willem-Alexander has returned early from his vacation to meet Rutte on Saturday, when the

Prime Minister will formally offer his resignation. The move was sparked by differences between Rutte's conservative VVD party and coalition counterparts over measures to limit the flow of asylum seekers to the country. Rutte said the coalition had "lost its political foundation" after the breakdown in negotiations. "That is extremely regrettable and at the same time a political reality we cannot avoid," he said. As well as VVD, the current coalition government consists of the liberal D66 party, the centrist Christian Union and more socially conservative Christian Democratic Appeal. VVD has proposed limiting entrance for the children of war refugees who are already in the country and making families wait for at least two years before they can be united.

Two of VVD's coalition parties – the Christian Union and D66 – refused to support the restrictions, leading to the split. "In the Netherlands we have a tradition of bridging differences. We

are a country of minorities. We take each other into account. That is the only way we can come up with supported solutions. That's why we made agreements with four parties," Dutch Finance Minister and leader of the DD6 party Sigrid Kaag said Friday. "After long and intense discussions, the cooperation in the coalition stopped today. D66 approached the talks constructively. The negotiations were tough. We have always sought the right tone, attitude, and content. Unfortunately, the differences turned out to be irreconcilable," she added. The number of applications the Netherlands received related to asylum jumped from 36,620 in 2021 to 47,991 last year, with most applicants coming from Syria, according to the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service. As of May this year, the country had received 16,097 applications. The government estimates applications could top 70,000 by the end of 2023. Wopke Hoekstra,

Dutch foreign minister and leader of the Christian Democratic Appeal, which supported Rutte's policies, said the Netherlands had to "get a grip on migration."

"The carrying capacity of our small, densely populated country is under pressure. People too often find themselves competing for housing, healthcare and education," Hoekstra said Friday. On Monday there will be a debate in parliament about the fall of the government. Parliament will return from its summer recess for that debate. Rutte, 56, has led four consecutive governments and is expected to lead VVD into the new elections. By law, the elections cannot be held within 90 days after the resignation of a government, and summer and autumn recesses are likely to push the date into November. With the issue of immigration rising in salience, some Dutch political analysts have speculated as to whether Rutte may be seizing on this issue in order to strengthen his own electoral position.

Under pressure, Tunisia takes back hundreds of migrants trapped in a border zone with Libya

(News Agency) TUNIS, - At least 500 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have been transferred back to Tunisia after being pushed into a dangerous no-man's-land on the Libyan border and trapped for a week there without access to basic necessities, aid agencies said Tuesday. The group was driven out earlier this month amid a spike in anti-migrant and racism-fueled tensions linked to a killing in the Tunisian port city of Sfax, a hub for traffickers organizing risky and sometimes deadly boat journeys across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy.

One such boat sank Sunday off the Tunisian coast. Coast guard officers retrieved one body, rescued 11 people and declared 10 others as missing, the Sfax prosecutor's office said. The fate of hundreds of migrants pushed into the Tunisia-Libya border region drew concern from international humanitarian groups. It also raised questions about Tunisia's migration policies, weeks after the European Union offered Tunisia's increasingly authoritarian government \$1 billion to help its slumping economy — and to beef up border services to stop migrant boats from crossing to Europe. A 29-year-old man from Ivory Coast said that uniformed men had taken migrants from their homes in Sfax in the middle of the night in early July and brought some 600 people to the border area be-

tween the Mediterranean Sea and the Tunisian-Libyan land border near Ben Guerdane.

Speaking to The Associated Press last week, he accused the Tunisian National Guard of beating them "like animals, like slaves," and assaulting women in the group. He claimed that Libyan security at the border fired shots into the air to keep the civilians at bay. The name of the man, who said he entered Tunisia legally in 2019 and works on a golf course, is being withheld for safety reasons.

On Tuesday, he said that he and 100 others have now been transferred away from the border to the inland Tunisian town of Medenine, where they are sleeping in a courtyard. Temperatures in the area climbed above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) on Tuesday. Tunisian Red Crescent spokesperson Mounir Ksiksi said Tuesday that about 500 people from sub-Saharan Africa who had been trapped in the border zone were transferred Monday to other regions

of Tunisia. A spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration said 158 migrants were transferred to a shelter in the town of Tataouine and another 353 people transferred to public structures in Medenine. The IOM said Tunisian authori-

ties have not provided information about next steps for the migrants.

Under pressure from humanitarian agencies, Tunisian President Kais Saied on Sunday ordered the Tunisian Red Crescent to bring aid to the migrants. Saied stoked racist incidents earlier this year by railing at Black Africans who transit through Tunisia toward Europe. On Monday, Saied denied mistreatment of mi-



grants by Tunisian authorities, and lashed out at migrant traffickers he said were seeking to "destabilize Tunisia." He called for coordinated efforts to "tackle the origins, sources and causes of the problem" in addition to security measures.

Tunisian Red Crescent head Abdellatif Chabou said he headed to the border region to oversee an operation to bring food and water to the migrants and allow them to contact their families. Three people needing medical aid were transferred to a local hospital, including a pregnant woman, Chabou told local broadcaster Radio Mosaïque on Monday. The president of the Tunisian Human Rights Observatory, Mustapha Abdelkebir, said the migrants had no access to basic sanitation and were trapped between armed forces on either side of the border, exposed to extreme heat without shelter. The International Organization for Migration said it was working with Tunisian authorities to ensure humanitarian assistance, and called on Tunisia to respect "the dignity and rights of all migrants" and to counter "harmful and negative rhetoric, hate speech and hate crimes." The Tunisian Human Rights League called for a crisis center to address the tensions in Sfax.

Why West Finds It Difficult To Swallow India's Success Story

India was not supposed to be a success story. China, yes. Western think tanks knew as far back as the 1990s that the Communist giant would, as one recent book (*The World in 2050: How to Think About the Future*) by Hamish McRae put it, claim its rightful place in the world.

But India? It was a colony. It was not meant for greatness. It was poor, chaotic and unmanageable. How on earth is a country, where millions still live in poverty, suddenly going to be the third-largest economy in the world by 2027?

The Western elite didn't believe India had it in her to succeed. After all, the West had lifted itself out of relative poverty in the 1500s and into great wealth by the 1900s through colonial conquest, transatlantic slavery, and the occupation of two continents, the Americas and Australia.

India hadn't done any of that. Instead, it had survived economically ruinous colonisation, indentured labour, and foreign atrocities for centuries.

The West acquired wealth at the expense of Asia and Africa. Its great institutions of learning, from Oxford to Harvard, benefitted from the resources that flowed from the Industrial Revolution. Science fuelled industrial growth. But so did tax revenues extorted from the colonies. Free land usurped in the Americas and Australia and free slave labour shipped from Africa completed the West's business model: land, labour and lucre.

How could such a business model lead to anything but prosperity? Through the 1800s and 1900s, the West steadily grew rich.

Extrapolating economic historian Angus Maddison's estimates, the average Englishman in 1500 had a per capita income (measured in 1990 US dollars) of around \$600. The average Indian, in pre-Mughal, pre-British India in 1500, had a similar per capita income of \$550.

By the end of British rule in 1947, the average Englishman had a per capita income of \$7,000. The average Indian in 1947, after 190 years of British colonial rule, had a per capita income of \$60. From near parity in the 1500s, the average Indian had sunk in the mid-1900s to 1/100th the wealth of the average Englishman.

How could a country that had been reduced to penury by colo-

nial rule rise to great power status? Of course, it couldn't.

That was the accepted thesis in the West. It was of course privately accepted that its own prosperity was partly, perhaps largely, based on invasive colonialism, slavery and the permanent occupation of others' continental territories in the Americas and Australia.

But that acceptance was rarely publicly acknowledged. The Palestinian-American writer Edward Said, a critic of the postcolonial Western narrative, was quickly discredited by the powerful Anglophone media. The moment Shashi Tharoor's 2017 book exposing Britain's cruel, thieving empire was published internationally, the West swung into action with a counter-narrative.

But the truth has an inconvenient habit of bursting through. In the United States, Senator Elizabeth Warren began a debate on paying slavery reparations to the 42 million African-Americans who are descendants of African slaves

shipped across the Atlantic Ocean by European, mostly British, slave traders from Africa to North America for over 200 years. Rattled, British apologists of colonialism and slavery launched subtle counter-attacks. Historians like Niall Ferguson, an apologist, wisely kept silent allowing non-historians like Nigel Biggar to mount a defence of colonialism and slavery.

Biggar is an Anglican priest. He was Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford University from 2017-2022. His 2023 book *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* (the manuscript was rejected by Bloomsbury before finding a saviour in HarperCollins) argues that Britain did Asia and Africa a favour by colonising them. Historian Alan Lester, a professor at the University of Sussex, has engaged Biggar in a long academic debate on Biggar's central thesis. Professor Lester writes: "Biggar consistently presents African people as unfit to govern themselves; as requiring

British rule for their own sakes — even to the extent of repeating slave-owners' original arguments against emancipation: 'Can we be sure that [descendants of enslaved people] would have been better off had their ancestors remained in West Africa — some as slaves and sacrificial funeral fodder?' Biggar's methods of establishing the necessity for British rule in Africa include frequent, seemingly innocuous asides, which have the cumulative effect of reinforcing tropes of African savagery.

"Biggar does not see himself, or the liberal imperialists whom he defends, as racist, because they do not believe Black or Brown peoples are biologically inferior to White people. They simply 'observe' that these people's cultures were backward compared to that of the British and other Europeans. By Biggar's definition, the attribution of 'cultural inferiority to a lack of development, rather than biological nature' is not racist. Failing to ac-

knowledge everyday colonial racism is like examining Nazi Germany without the antisemitism, or modern Russia without the communism. Racism was a 'common sense' belief system that fundamentally underpinned the British Empire, and it is deeply concerning, to me at least, that there is now such an appetite to deny this with semantic differences between 'race' and 'culture'." The Anglospheric establishment, including embedded media like *The Economist*, has grudgingly recognised India's emergence as a leading power. But it cannot bring itself to acknowledge that India is emerging to power from poverty imposed on her for 190 years by systematic colonial economic abuse.

Such an admission would reveal the shame the West feels — but does not publicly acknowledge — about its history. The rise of India without resorting to the crimes of colonialism and slavery that made the rich world rich is a bitter pill to swallow.

Credit where credit's due Modi govt has scripted an unbelievable banking success story

Indian banks, regulators, and investors weren't worried when crises began exploding in US and European banks earlier this year. This resilience has been a long time coming.

It's rare for any government to claim an economic success story uncluttered by ifs and buts—there are always some qualifiers to that success. However, the Narendra Modi government has come as close to achieving an unqualified success in the banking sector as is reasonably possible. Whether you look at non-performing assets (NPAs), profits, growth in credit, or resilience to external shocks, the Indian banking sector is significantly stronger today compared to just five years ago.

It is also rare to be able to pinpoint a clear source of an entire sector's problems. Usually, a combination of factors weigh a sector down. With the banking sector, though, it's pretty clear that its problems began due to the profligate lending practices 'encouraged' during the UPA government's tenure.

There's more than enough anecdotal evidence to show that the quality of bank lending went from bad to worse during the UPA period, with huge loans being given to government-friendly corporates without proper due diligence regarding the necessity of such loans or the borrowers' ability to repay them. Back in 2015, a former chairman of the National Highways Association of India (NHAI) had lamented privately about the situation. What used to apparently happen was that NHAI would award a contract to a company to build a stretch of a highway, say, for Rs

300 crore. That company would approach the banks and ask for a loan of twice that amount. The banks, without doing due diligence, and often encouraged by political leaders, would issue the loan. At the best of times, it takes decades for developers to recover their investments in highway projects. With loan sizes double the cost of the project, it was naturally only a matter of time before they turned sour.

And this was just one sector. This kind of lending was taking place across sectors. If you're wary about taking my word for it, maybe listen to two former RBI governors, one appointed by the UPA and another by the Modi government. Raghuram Rajan, when asked by a parliamentary committee on why bank NPAs had risen so sharply, had said in 2021 that "a larger number of bad loans originated in the period 2006-2008". He added that too many loans had been given to "well-connected promoters who have a history of defaulting on their loans". Damning words.

His successor at the RBI, Urjit Patel, was not much kinder to the UPA. In a book published in 2020, after he left office, Patel wrote that the UPA government "didn't question risk controls in government banks even as it received significant dividends", and also blamed the RBI for not having done rigorous enough stress tests.

Gross bank credit grew a whopping 20 per cent in 2012-13 and another 14 per cent in 2014-15. This in itself wouldn't have been a problem if the quality of the loans were good. But this wasn't the case.

Gross NPAs had already started climbing in 2011-12, but this quickened in the next few years. The ratio of gross NPAs rose quickly from 2.8 per cent in 2011-12 to 3.8 per cent in 2013-14, the UPA's final year. It didn't stop there, as more and more loans started turning bad, raising the ratio of bad loans to 4.3 per cent in 2014-15.

It was at this time that the RBI—with Rajan still at the helm—and the government began to realise the seriousness of the problem. They began an Asset Quality Review, which was completed in 2015 and brought to light the scope of the problem. Just the act of recognising all the previously undetected bad loans caused the gross NPA ratio to soar to 7.5 per cent within a year. The next few years were spent bringing more and more bad loans into the official NPA category, which meant that by March 2018, the NPA ratio had risen to an eye-watering 11.2 per cent. And that's when the cleanup began in earnest. One of the steps was to consolidate the banking sector by merging weaker public sector banks with stronger ones. So, where there were 20 public sector banks at the end of 2017, there are now just 12.

She Broke the News That the U.S. Catholic Church Sold Enslaved People. She's Still Going to Mass.

When Rachel Swarns first learned of the sale, she was “flabbergasted.”

The former New York Times correspondent had been writing about the legacy of slavery when she discovered something that shocked her as a Black Catholic woman: In 1838, the Jesuit order in Maryland — the first major Catholic institution in the U.S. — sold almost 300 enslaved people to fund its new school, what is now Georgetown University, alma mater of several members of Congress, as well as late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and former President Bill Clinton.

Swarns, who first broke the news about Georgetown's past in 2016, recounts the story of the people enslaved on the St. Inigoes plantation in southern Maryland in her new book, *The 272: The Families Who Were Enslaved and Sold to Build the American Catholic Church*. The book focuses on the lives of the Mahoneys, one of many families enslaved and sold by the Jesuit priests.

In recent years, Georgetown and the Maryland Jesuits became an early example of an institution attempting to atone for its past in the slave trade. In 2019, the school announced it would provide preferential admissions to descendants of enslaved people, and its Jesuit operators announced millions in funding for racial reconciliation and education programs.

It's uncertain whether last week's Supreme Court decision overturning race-conscious affirmative action in college admissions will affect Georgetown's program for descendants of enslaved people. Georgetown president John J. DeGioia wrote in a statement that the university was “deeply disappointed” in the decision, and that the university will “remain committed to our efforts to recruit, enroll, and support students from all backgrounds.”

As the college system braces for the fallout of that Supreme Court decision — and amid a simmering cultural debate about how, or even whether, to teach the kind of history Swarns has unearthed in schools — we had a wide-ranging discussion about book bans, the history of the Catholic Church (and her own connection to it) and the future of campus diversity.

Naranjo: Obviously the Catholic Church is not the only institution involved in slavery in the U.S. Do you think all institutions with a history of enslaving people have a duty to provide a full accounting of their involvement in doing so?

Swarns: You're absolutely right. My book is about the Catholic Church and Georgetown University and their roots in slavery, but they are far from alone. Slavery drove the growth of many of our contemporary institutions — universities, religious institutions, banks, insurance companies. Many of those institutions are grappling with this history and I think it's really important and urgent for them to do that work. I think it helps us understand more clearly how slavery shaped



Americans, many American families and many of the institutions that are around us today. So to me, this is critical work.

Naranjo: I understand you are Catholic yourself. Has your personal relationship with the church been affected during your research?

Swarns: I had been writing about slavery and the legacy of slavery, and so I stumbled across the story in this book about the Catholic Church and Georgetown. But it just so happened that I also happen to be a Black, practicing Catholic, and when I first heard about this slave sale that prominent Catholic priests organized to help save Georgetown University, I was flabbergasted. I had never known that Catholic priests had participated in the American slave trade. I had never heard of Catholic priests enslaving people. I was really astounded, and I've been doing this research, going through archival records of the buying and selling of people by Catholic priests to sustain and help the church expand, even as I am going to Mass and doing all of that. And so it has been an interesting time for me because of that.

One of the things, though, that has been fascinating is that, as I tracked some of the people who had been enslaved and sold by the church, I learned that many of them — even after the Civil War, even after they were free people — they remained in the church that had betrayed them and sold them. And they remained in the church because they felt that the priests, the white sinful men who had sold them who had done these things, did not own this church. The church — God, the Holy Spirit, the Son — they did not control that. And their faith that had sustained them through all of this difficult period of enslavement continued to sustain them. And not only that, many of these individuals became lay leaders and some even became religious leaders in the church and worked to make the church more reflective of and responsive to Black Catholics and more true to its universal ideals. And so, in a strange way, learning that history, learning about these people and their endurance and their resilience and their commitment to their

faith has been really inspiring to me. So, I'm still practicing, I'm still going to Mass.

Naranjo: As you note in the book, Catholicism in the U.S. has often been perceived as a Northern religion. And you show us how that's not necessarily the case. But what do you think its role in enslaving people means for conversations about culpability and reparations, given that many people view slavery as a Southern thing?

slaveholding state and relied on slavery to help build the very underpinnings of the church. So the nation's first Catholic institution of higher learning, Georgetown, first archdiocese, the first cathedral, priests who operated a plantation and enslaved and sold people established the first seminary. So this was foundational to the emergence of the Catholic Church in the United States, but it's history that I certainly didn't know and most Catholics don't know. And most Americans don't know.

In terms of grappling with this history, the institutions have taken a number of steps. Georgetown and the Jesuit order priests, who were the priests who established the early Catholic Church in the United States, they've apologized for their participation in slavery and the slave trade. Georgetown has offered preference in admissions to descendants of people who were enslaved by the church, and it's created a fund — a \$400,000 fund — which they've committed to raising annually to fund projects that will benefit descendants. They've also renamed buildings and created an institute to study slavery.

The Jesuits, for their part, partnered with descendants to create a foundation and committed to raising \$100 million toward racial reconciliation projects and projects that would benefit descendants. So those are the steps that have been taken so far by the institutions that I write about in my book.

Descendants, I think, have different feelings about whether or not this is adequate, whether or not more should be done. Most of the people that I speak to believe that these are good first steps, but that more needs to be done.

Naranjo: In your reporting process, did

you experience any pushback into looking into a history that maybe some would like to have forgotten?

Swarns: In this instance, I was dealing with institutions that were trying to be transparent and trying to address this history. For both institutions, I would say there are more records that I wish I had that I don't have. And that's often what we journalists encounter. And part of the challenge, frankly, beyond institutional willingness or unwillingness, is just the marginalization of enslaved people during our history. Enslaved people were barred by law and practice from learning to read and write. So the records that would give great insight into their lives, letters and journals that historians and writers used to document the lives of other people, say, in the 1800s, are really, really, really, really scarce. And so that's an enormous challenge for anyone trying to unearth the lives of enslaved people.

Naranjo: I was reading the book last week, after the Supreme Court struck down race-based affirmative action in college admissions. Years before that, Georgetown had embarked on this process and, as noted in the book, implemented a program for preferential admission for descendants of people enslaved by its Jesuit founders. What responsibilities do you think institutions with similar histories of enslaving people have to descendants?

Swarns: Universities all across the country are obviously grappling with the implications of the Supreme Court's affirmative action decision. More than 90 universities have already identified historic ties to slavery and have committed to addressing that history. There's actually a consortium of universities studying slavery. And what the Supreme Court decision means for them and for their efforts, I think, remains uncertain.

Georgetown issued a statement last week like many universities did, saying that they remain committed to ensuring diversity on campus and valuing diversity. How this will all play out — I mean, I think we're all going to have to wait and see. In terms of the responsibilities for universities that have identified their roots in slavery? I'm a journalist, so to me, I think it's so important to document this history. To search in the archives, to make materials available and easily available to families to identify descendants. And to reach out and to work with descendants. I'm a journalist, I'm not a policymaker, and so there will be others who can hammer out what policies institutions feel are best and what policies that the descendants, if there are any identified, feel would be best. But for me as a journalist and as a professor, I feel the urgency of documenting this history and making sure that it is known. And collaborating with descendant communities, when those communities are identified, in terms of deciding on policies and programs.

Today's China Isn't Real China, Can Be Broken Into Six Independent Nations

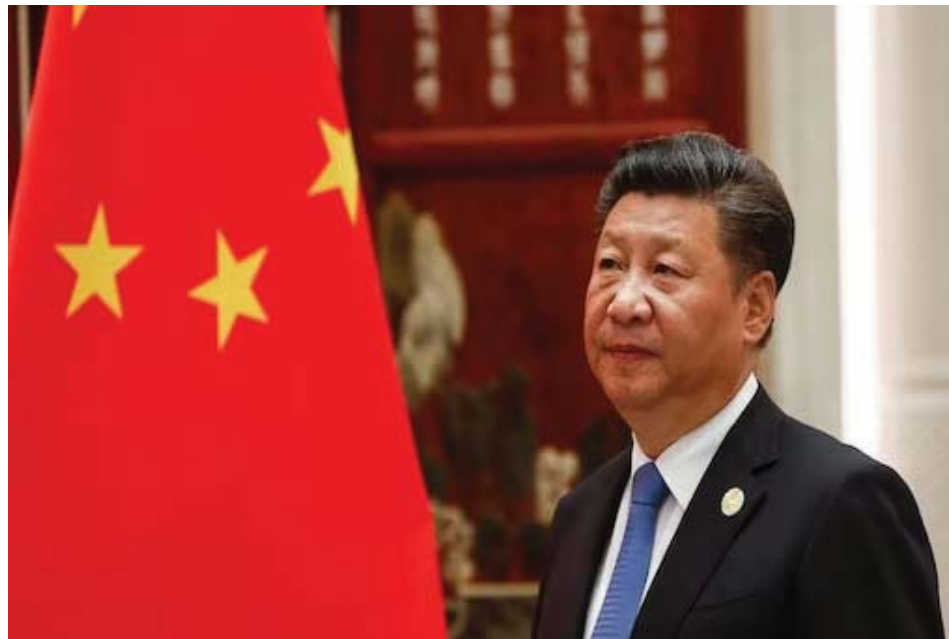
It has doubled its territory in less than 50 years through the incursion of neighbouring countries. China is causing trouble for all its neighbours each passing day. India is facing the heat in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh every now and then. Nepal is being squeezed and bumped with economic might. The South China Sea is the cause of trouble for Japan, Korea and Vietnam, with other Pacific Rim countries. Pakistan has already gifted Gilgit and Baltistan to China. The other neighbours — Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Magnolia and Afghanistan — are also on Chinese radar for border expansion through incursions.

China is equipped not only with biological weaponry like Covid viruses but a bigger worry is its autocratic regime. Absolute power with no democracy is deadlier than anything under the Sun, that this very world has seen with Stalin, Mao & Hitler, not too long ago. It's time to tame the dragon before it blows the entire world with its never-ending quest for supremacy and expansion spree. President Xi Jinping is the new Hitler and will remain at the helm of affairs until death.

Post-World War II, the entire world aligned into NATO and Warsaw treaties — the US and its friendly nations and the mighty USSR and its allies. The Cold War has created so many never-ending crises in the world but at the same time, it has opened new horizons of technology. The Cold War was fought on many levels e.g., weaponry, artillery, space science and of course, the most important thing that has changed our lives permanently — the internet. The Cold War was a covert operation between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB). The might of the USSR was such that espionage became difficult, and to enter its territory came the invention of the internet inside the Pentagon — the US defence strategy base. But the traces of the Cold War are still alive in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Vietnam etc.

This Cold War ended with the complete disintegration of the USSR. How was this achieved by the US and its allies? Remember the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)? This was the first weapon deployed by the US to harm the USSR. This was done by encouraging Saudi Arabia to increase its exploration capacities manifold.

The second weapon that the US deployed was that of sub-nationalism or ethnic nationalism that existed among satellite states of the USSR. These states were Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Chechnya, Ukraine, Belarus, and nine more. The US encouraged the rise of ethnic nationalism in these USSR states



and encouraged their people to become independent. This was done through Glasnost and Perestroika. The strategy worked.

The US is a federation of 50 states but it's not easy to separate them because they have a common language, culture, and ethnicity (almost all are immigrants from Europe, Asia, Africa etc) so have no ethnic element which can bring them or break them out. Countries like India are less prone to fall to it despite efforts from China in Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh UTs. India shares the same ethnicity thousands of years back in history. Cultural nationalism has brought the country together even after centuries of oppression by invaders, philosophies, and religious aggression.

NOW LET US LOOK AT CHINA

China was a relatively small country of 4.5 million sq km till 1911, called Mainland China, and today stands at 9.597 million sq km. The rest of the area is the result of incursion and invasion of the neighbouring countries. Manchuria in the Northeast, Inner Mongolia or South Mongolia in the North, Tibet in the South, East Turkestan in the West and Yunnan in the far Southeast. The mode of invasion was agrarian incursion in those days. Millions of farmers (of the Chinese Han tribe) were forcibly settled into Manchuria and South Mongolia to increase the Mandarin-speaking people in those countries in the first decade of the 19th century. Today, the native Mongols or Manchurians are a minority. Mainland China is only 50 percent of the total area in Chinese control as on date.

The Qing dynasty of Manchuria ruled Mainland China for over three centuries (1644-1912) before China took control of it in 1912 and is still in control of it. Manchuria has a different language, culture and ethnicity.

People of East Turkistan (now Xinjiang)

are ethnically connected to Turkey and Kazakh people. China took over its territory in 1882. The Uyghur Muslims are fighting today for their independence from the Chinese autocracy. Uyghur ethnic Muslims are the talk of the moment in terms of human rights issues.

South Mongolia or Inner Mongolia was an integral part of the mighty Mongol Khanate of Genghis Khan. He and his successors ruled all over Mainland China for centuries. After the fall of the Khanate, China took over it in 1911. The ethnicity and cultural attachment and belongingness of the people of Inner Mongolia is with Mongolia, not China.

Tibet (known as Trivishtap in ancient Vedic scriptures) was once part of Indian kingdoms. Tibet was the centre of Bodhi practitioners of the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years and shared cultural and emotional bonding along with ethnicity. China invaded it in 1951. Tibet government-in-exile has its capital at Dharmshala in Himachal Pradesh and H H Dalai Lama took refuge in India.

Yunnan is down South of present-day China and was invaded in the year 1274. It still has more than 25 ethnic languages spoken and they relate to Burmese culture.

These are the area-wise details of the five major countries currently under Chinese occupation except Hong Kong, Macau and Taipei-

Mainland China is only about 50 percent of the total area governed by the PRC.

COURSE OF ACTION

Looking into the present-day aggression of China in Eurasia and the Far East, it's time for the rest of the world to act in tandem to tame this dragon before it becomes more monstrous and formidable. China's biggest weakness is its autocracy. People are being deprived of their basic rights like freedom of speech, the right to pray and practice their

faith, the right to protest against the government, etc, the list is long. The Tiananmen Square student agitation and massacre of thousands of students is evidence of this autocratic and ruthless regime. People are fed up with the curbs on their basic rights. It's time for the ethnic nationalism movement to usher in to end this 100-year-long oppression of more than 1.5 billion people.

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is fighting at both internal and external fronts. The Uyghur Muslim unrest in Xingjian (former East Turkestan) can easily escalate with the help of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries. East Turkestan being a former part of the Turkish Ottoman empire under Ertugrul and subsequent Islamic regimes can be disintegrated with the collective efforts of these countries with the help of Russia and the US.

The Tibetan government-in-exile operates from India and the world needs to recognise it. Former US President Donald Trump passed a resolution regarding the status of Tibet during his stint. India can play a pivotal role in the religious connection with Buddha and Kailash Mansarovar. The freedom of Tibet has seen many violent protests and incidents of self-immolation by Tibetan youth for freedom from China. India needs to work on it and settle the border issues with China once and for all as the present-day leadership has the guts and people's mandate to do it.

Japan ruled Manchuria briefly in the early 20th century. Manchuria has a separate culture, language and ethnicity from Chinese Mandarin. Manchuria can ask for freedom from Chinese occupation with the help of Japan and Korea. It will be strategically strong positioning for the rest of the world as a huge cost line comes under Manchuria.

Inner Mongolia or South Mongolia, the names themselves are reasons for them to be with Mongolia. Russia and Japan can play a big role with the help of Mongolia to move out of the People's Republic of China.

The world is witnessing growing cultural and ethnic nationalism from all parts. People rejected the leftist theory of communism. The world's biggest democracies have elected pro-nationalist leaders. Narendra Modi in India, Putin in Russia, Trump in the US, Shinzo Abe in Japan, Boris Johnson in England, and Netanyahu in Israel have won the elections on the issues of nationalism and preserving ethnic values. These world leaders can sync in collective energies and expertise to come along and break China into six parts to make this planet happy and liveable again.

The July 2023 Flooding in India: An In-depth Look

The monsoon season of July 2023 in India witnessed an unprecedented level of flooding, leading to a humanitarian crisis that reverberated across the globe. The heavy rainfall, a phenomenon attributed to climate change, resulted in disastrous flooding that affected millions of lives.

The Advent of the Crisis

In the early weeks of July 2023, a sudden increase in monsoon activity led to intense rainfall, particularly in the northern and northeastern states. Overflowing rivers breached embankments, inundating entire villages and towns. The region of Bihar was amongst the worst affected, with the heavy downpour leading to an alarming rise in the water levels of the Ganges.

The Impact and Aftermath

The floods claimed hundreds of lives and displaced millions from their homes. Infrastructure damage was significant, with roads and bridges washed away, and thousands of hectares of agricultural land destroyed. The immediate aftermath saw a desperate need for rescue operations, food, clean water, and medical aid.

Response and Relief Efforts

The Indian Government, alongside international organizations and NGOs, launched extensive relief efforts. Rescue operations were conducted, and temporary relief camps were set up for those displaced. Aid packages, including food, water, and essential medical supplies, were distributed among the affected population.

Long-term Consequences

The long-term consequences of the flooding are devastating. Many lost their livelihoods as farmlands were washed away. Schools were destroyed, disrupting the education of thousands of children. The risk of waterborne diseases also increased, posing a significant threat to public health.

Moving Forward

This calamity raises critical questions about disaster preparedness and climate change mitigation strategies. There is a pressing need for sustainable solutions – from bolstering flood defenses to implementing effective early warning systems. The July 2023 floods stand as a stark reminder of the devastating impact of environmental changes, emphasizing the need to prioritize climate change mitigation and disaster management in policymaking. India's deadly monsoon is due to a unique alignment in weather systems, but experts reveal there to be a familiar reason behind it all. Torrential downpours this week have led to the deaths of 100



people and unleashed havoc in northern India in what officials have described as the worst monsoon the country has experienced in decades. The deadly monsoon comes as several other nations across the world grapple with similar extreme weather.

The northeastern US is under a state of emergency, China is evacuating thousands of people, and Japan has reported its "heaviest rain ever experienced", according to its weather department officials.

Rains have battered neighbouring Pakistan as well, and the death toll there as of Tuesday evening had reached 86 since 25 June. The deaths have been a reminder of the deadly deluge that devastated the country just a year ago. In India, downpours have lashed several areas, from western Rajasthan to northern Jammu and Kashmir, and have killed at least 100, with thousands more left stranded as key highways were damaged.

A massive downpour in Delhi has left large swathes of the national capital submerged, including the central area around Connaught Place, while several key government buildings are also affected. On Sunday, Delhi received its highest amount of rain on a single day in July since the 1980s. People were seen wading through knee-deep water, and several motorists became stuck on roads that had turned into rivers. The Yamuna River, which cuts across Delhi, passed the danger mark of 205 metres above mean sea level, as incessant rain combined with dam water released from neighbouring Haryana prompted evacuations.

On Wednesday, the river flowed close to 207.25m, precariously close to the all-time record of 207.49m reached in 1978, government officials said.

The rains were far deadlier in the fragile mountainous states of

Himachal Pradesh, the northern state most severely affected, and Uttarakhand, where they triggered severe floods and deadly landslides, killing dozens.

Shocking images showed floods washing away villages and key highways, disrupting essential services, in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab.

Floodwaters blocked the Indo-Tibet border road, while contact was lost with more than a dozen border villages.

Heavy rain and falling boulders killed four people and injured seven others in Uttarakhand on Tuesday. At least 20 people died in flash floods and other rain-related disasters in just one province of Himachal Pradesh.

State chief minister Sukhvinder Sukhu on Monday said Himachal had not witnessed such widespread heavy rains in more than 50 years. This year's monsoon has raised concern among experts, who warn that the climate crisis is playing a significant role in the intensification of such extreme weather. "It rains fewer hours, but when it rains, it rains very heavily," observed M Rajeevan, a former secretary of India's Ministry of Earth Sciences, according to the Hindustan Times. "Recent heavy

rains and flash floods remind us of one of the important impacts of climate change on the monsoon," he said. South Asia receives approximately 70-80 per cent of its annual rainfall during the monsoon season, which normally starts in late June. This weather event often has severe consequences for a region that is vulnerable to flash floods because of its lack of adequate infrastructure. This year's monsoon, however, which began on 1 June, has brought significantly higher levels of rainfall in Delhi, Punjab and Himachal, with the regions seeing an increase of 112 per cent, 100 per cent and 70 per cent respectively, according to the India Meteorological Department. Climate scientists have raised the alarm over the monsoon's changing patterns, which are making rain more erratic, resulting in much more falling in a short period and leading to flash floods.

"The ongoing spell of extremely heavy rains is due to the alignment of three weather systems: western disturbance over Western Himalayas, cyclonic circulation over north-western plains, and axis of monsoon trough running across Indo-Gangetic Plains,"

explained Mahesh Palawat, vice-president of meteorology and climate change at private weather agency Skymet.

"This alignment is not happening for the first time, and is the usual pattern during the monsoon. However, global-warming-led changes in monsoon patterns have made a difference," he added.

"There has been a constant rise in both land and sea temperatures, which has increased the capacity of the air to hold moisture for a longer time. Thus, the role of climate change in the increasing extreme weather events in India has been strengthening with each passing year." Research has already established the impact of the climate crisis on south Asia's monsoon patterns. Last year's devastating floods in Pakistan were also found to be a result of the effect of the climate crisis on monsoon patterns. But with this year's record-shattering global warming, experts have said that heat is also meddling with atmospheric and oceanic phenomena. "There have been extreme weather events earlier as well, but 2023 has been a unique year," said Raghu Murtugudde, professor of atmospheric and oceanic science at the University of Maryland. "Global warming is making a significant contribution, but there are some other factors as well," Dr Murtugudde explained, adding that the El Nino pattern, record North Atlantic Ocean temperatures, and exceptional warming in the Arabian Sea in recent years are among the contributing factors. He also said that with wildfires being three times larger, more carbon is being released into the atmosphere, increasing greenhouse gases. A recent report by India's earth sciences ministry found that overall monsoon rainfall, which already leads to repeated flooding, is projected to become more intense in the future and will affect larger areas, driven by the climate crisis.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Milestone Visit to France

July 2023 marked a significant milestone in Indo-French relations, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarked on a diplomatic visit to France. This journey demonstrated a vision of strategic harmony, enhancing bilateral trade, addressing climate change, and bolstering global security - all key areas of interest for both nations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit coincides with the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership and his invitation for the Bastille Day celebrations indicates a deepening of the Indo-French ties. The visit was characterized by a mutual commitment to scientific advancement, as evidenced by the agreement on cooperation in space exploration. This decision underscores the blending of Indian resourcefulness and French technological prowess. The exploration of outer space has long been a frontier for human curiosity and innovation, and this agreement signifies an important step in combining the scientific capacities of both nations for the betterment of humanity. This visit was marked by a warmth and camaraderie reflective of the historical ties India and France share. The diplomatic conversation was rich, productive, and future-oriented, signaling a new era in Indo-French

relations. Such visits not only strengthen the ties between countries but also set a tone for constructive global alliances. As we delve deeper into the various facets of Modi's visit to France, we uncover the nuances of this diplomatic endeavor and its implications for the future of Indo-French relations. In the following sections, we explore each aspect of this monumental visit and its broader implications, setting the stage for a comprehensive understanding of this complex narrative. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in Paris on a two-day visit that will firm up crucial defence deals and deepen the India-France strategic ties. Tomorrow, he will join the Bastille Day celebrations, where he is the Guest of Honour. Here are top 10 points on this big story:

1 PM Modi's visit will focus on strengthening India-France ties in various domains including defence and space, infrastructure and culture. The visit coincides with the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership and his invitation for the Bastille Day indicates a new high in the bilateral relations.

2 Later today, PM Modi will meet the French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne –

who received him at the airport -- visit the Senate and meet President of the Senate Gerard Larcher. The opportunity to engage with the entire French political leadership indicates a shared commitment to the bilateral ties.

3 Around 11 PM Indian time, PM Modi will address an Indian community event at the iconic La Seine Musicale. Later, he would attend a private dinner hosted by the French President at his residence.

4 Tomorrow, the Bastille Day celebrations will be followed by bilateral talks.

A range of topics is on agenda, including cooperation in the spheres of security, technology, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, climate change and space. The visit will conclude with a grand state banquet at the iconic Louvre Museum.

5 Before departing for France, PM Modi said he would hold wide-ranging discussions with President Emmanuel Macron to take forward the time-tested partnership. "Rooted in deep trust and commitment, our two countries cooperate closely across various domains including defence, space, civil nuclear, blue economy, trade, investment, education, culture and people to people ties," PM Modi said in a statement.

6 A few big-ticket announcements are

expected during the visit, which includes the acquisition of another 26 Rafale jets and three Scorpene submarines. The Defence Acquisition Committee headed by Union defence minister Rajnath Singh has cleared the process and negotiations are likely to follow.

7 Bastille Day, also known as Fete Nationale Francaise, is celebrated on July 14 and commemorates the storming of the French prison in 1789, which marks the beginning of the French Revolution.

8 The Indian tri-services are going to be an integral part of tomorrow's celebration. A 269-member contingent of the Indian Army, Navy and the Air Force will march alongside their French counterparts at the grand parade. The alliance between the two armies go back to World War 1.

9 France has been one of India's closest allies in Europe for decades. It was the only country not to impose sanctions on New Delhi after India conducted nuclear tests in 1998 and went on to become one of the staunchest defence partners. Over the years, India has replaced its aging Russian fleet with French Mirages, Rafales and Scorpene.

10. From France, PM Modi will visit the United Arab Emirates and meet President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who is also the ruler of Abu Dhabi.

Sharanjit Singh Thind



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Key Sikh numbers that Trudeau likes to ignore

Contd from page 10

One needs to highlight here that the total number of Sikh living in West Bengal and speaking fluent Bengali is 10 times over the number of “voters” in Italian “referendum”. They should try debating the idea of Khalistan with a certain turban-wearing SS Ahluwalia, who is sitting MP from Asansol. Even West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee would vouch for him, notwithstanding the fact that Ahluwalia is a BJP MP.

Or for that matter, Gujarati speaking Sikhs living in the state of Gujarat are double the total number of “voters” in Khalistani referendum carried out in the UK. No, we are not talking about the much-discussed Gujju population living in the UK, we are talking about the dhokla-eating Sikh population living in Gujarat. Heck, the Tamilian Sikhs are three times the size of the Khalistani “voters” in so-called Geneva referendum. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin can get more Tamil-speaking Sikhs in his Chennai rally than the total electorate size of bogus Geneva referendum.

Even Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have more Sikhs living there for ages than the total number of Khalistani voters taking part in Canada referendum under the leadership of Justin Trudeau. We would love to imagine a meeting of turban clad Inder Singh Namdhari, the first ever speaker of Jharkhand Assembly, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

That brings us to the question:

why Canada has become the epicentre for extremist Sikh radicals? It becomes amply clear when the demographic data is examined. The total population of Sikhs in Canada is not much: about 7.7 lakh. That would be a neighbourhood in the National Capital Region of India. But then, the total population of Canada is about 38 million. Though comprising a small minority of 2%, Sikhs have become a “vote bank” in Canadian politics. As it happens, when a community becomes a vote bank, politicians tend to look the other way even when a small fraction of that vote bank does outrageous things. Justin Trudeau, apart from being a “liberal”, is also a hard-nosed cynical politician. No wonder Khalistan fantasies bloom and blossom under his benign watch. But one thing that even a politician like him forget to underline: even majority, a huge majority of Canadian Sikhs don’t really sympathise with Khalistani extremists. Less than 20 per cent Canadian Sikhs participated in the so-called referendum. More than 80 per cent just didn’t want to touch it even with a ten-foot pole. Who can forget how Khalistani terrorists blew up an Air India plane in mid-flight from Canada to India with 329 passengers, killing everyone on board, a huge number of them being Canadian citizens. While sleeping with the ISI, the Khalistanis seem to have forgotten so many historical facts. Anyone with even a schoolbook level of history education could very well recount all those historic events which

would easily puncture the malignant Pakistani-Khalistani communal propaganda that Sikhs and Muslims were historically united against Hindus. Quite simply, that’s a whole lot of balderdash.

When it comes to historical events, facts and data, virtually everything that advocates of Khalistan say loudly is a white lie. Virtually anyone who has followed the Khalistan propaganda madness would have seen “maps” of Khalistan being displayed by separatist and terrorism groups. Somehow, not an inch of Pakistan is featured in these maps that cover large swathes of north India, including Delhi. The Sikh Empire was the last indigenous empire to be absorbed by the Imperial British in 1858. Prior to that, during the pinnacle of Sikh power, Maharaja Ranjit Singh reigned supreme from his capital city Lahore.

Logically, any attempt to reclaim the lost glory of the Sikh Empire must include Lahore and the birthplace of the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak at Nankana Sahib, currently in Pakistan. But these Khalistanis living in Canada, the US, the UK and Australia don’t want that. This itself shows how serious the Khalistanis are about their “cause”. The last census conducted by the British was in 1941. Back then, the total population of the Punjab province that is now in Pakistan was about 35 million. Of these, about 15 per cent were Sikhs. Taking into account the population

growth, close to 5 million Sikhs were living in Pakistani Punjab in 1947 when India was partitioned. It will be difficult to find more than a handful of Sikhs there now. It’s funny, but the Khalistanis seem to have completely forgotten or ignored this historical fact. They can continue to worship Bhindranwale in select places overseas with ISI funding; the terror-marked extremists can never find place of respect in homes of overwhelming majority of Sikhs, neither in Punjab, nor outside Punjab. Bogus referendums notwithstanding. But being democratic to the core, the authors along with 1.4 billion Indians would certainly love to support formation of Khalistan in Canada, as the referendums are happening on grounds over there. Hope Trudeau values and respects the overwhelming support of Indians for the same. Till that happens, even the citizens of Republic of Brompton are welcome to pilgrimages across India, not just at Harmandir Sahib in Punjab, but also at Patna Sahib in Bihar, Hemkunt Sahib in Uttarakhand, Huzur Sahib in Maharashtra, Jhira Sahib in Karnataka, Lakhpat Sahib in Gujarat or Paonta Sahib in Himachal. There are hundreds of pilgrimage sites scanning across literally all Indian states which are marked sacred being birthplaces, martyrdom places or sermon places of all the Gurus. There is no scope for Khalistan; simply because India is and will always remain the land of Khalsa. Wahe Guru Da Khalsa, Wahe Guru Di Fateh.

Role of Artificial Intelligence in Modern Warfare: A Paradigm Shift in Warfare

Contd from page 10

This enables military agencies to monitor regions of interest, track potential threats, and gain valuable situational awareness. As AI continues to advance, it holds the potential to transform strategic intelligence gathering even further. For instance, natural language processing algorithms combined with AI can analyse vast amounts of textual information, such as intercepted communications or open-source intelligence, providing insights into enemy plans, intentions, and networks. Similarly, AI algorithms can be employed to analyse and detect patterns in financial transactions, enabling the identification of illicit funding sources supporting hostile activities. The utilisation of AI algorithms for data crunching and decision-making has transformed military operations, allowing analysts to effectively navigate through vast amounts of information. These algorithms, akin to those employed by industry giants like Amazon, possess the capacity to process and extract patterns from extensive datasets. Remarkably, AI algorithms have exhibited decision-making prowess that surpasses human capabilities in specific domains. The victory of the AlphaGo program against a human grandmaster in the in-

tricate ‘Game of Go’ serves as a prime example, showcasing AI’s capacity to make unexpectedly bold moves that catch opponents off guard.

In the military realm, AI-driven mass surveillance and counterinsurgency operations have yielded remarkable results, empowering real-time analysis of imagery captured by CCTV cameras and drones. This capability enables military agencies to efficiently monitor and track multiple potential targets, a task that would have been inconceivable without the aid of AI. The integration of AI algorithms with surveillance systems allows for the swift processing and interpretation of visual data, facilitating enhanced targeting and rapid response capabilities. The ability to analyse vast amounts of imagery data enables military analysts to detect potential threats, identify suspicious activities, and gain valuable situational awareness. Moreover, AI algorithms have demonstrated their utility in enhancing decision-making processes within military operations. By processing and analysing extensive datasets, these algorithms can identify trends, correlations, and insights that human analysts might overlook. For instance, AI algorithms can be employed to analyse his-

torical military data, identify patterns of enemy tactics, and predict their future moves. This empowers military decision-makers with valuable information to formulate effective strategies and responses.

The impact of AI algorithms on decision-making extends beyond the battlefield. Military logistics and resource allocation can also benefit from the data-driven capabilities of AI. By analysing supply chain data, AI algorithms can optimise resource distribution, anticipate maintenance needs, and streamline operations. This ultimately enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of military logistics, ensuring that resources are allocated in the most optimal manner. Autonomous machines have emerged as a significant area of focus within military AI, offering a glimpse into the future of warfare. As the capabilities of AI continue to advance, the development of autonomous systems has gained momentum, aiming to minimise the reliance on human intervention. While human decision-making is currently preferred, the inherent vulnerability of communication links during wartime has spurred the exploration of autonomous technologies. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) like the Global Hawk exemplify

the potential of autonomous machines in military operations. These UAVs can execute missions independently, eliminating the need for constant reliance on data links and enhancing their survivability in hostile environments. Governments across the globe recognise the strategic importance of autonomous systems and are actively investing in their development. France’s Dassault nEUROn and Russia’s Sukhoi S-70 serve as prime examples of cutting-edge autonomous platforms. These advanced systems have the capacity to execute complex missions with minimal human oversight, marking a paradigm shift in military capabilities. Collaborative efforts between countries, such as Australia’s collaboration with Boeing to create the “loyal wingman” demonstrate the potential of AI as a force multiplier alongside human pilots. The “loyal wingman” concept envisions an unmanned aircraft operating in tandem with a manned aircraft, providing support, defence, and completing missions either independently or in coordination with the human pilot. This collaborative approach not only enhances operational efficiency but also acts as an AI bodyguard, safeguarding the human pilot while sacrificing itself if necessary.

How Indira Gandhi lost a chance to solve Punjab tangle 40 years ago

Contd. from page 11

Interestingly, the statement was informally shown to the Akali leaders, who expressed satisfaction with the contents. Now, everybody is waiting for the government to make the announcement based on the agreed deal in Parliament. But then, Swaran Singh learnt that certain changes of a substantial nature had been made to the draft agreement; the Akalis too got wind of it, and Longowal had it conveyed to Swaran Singh that "in the light of the development it would not be possible for them to postpone or withdraw their Dharam Yudh Morcha. When Union Home Minister P C Sethi read out the revised statement in Parliament, an otherwise sober and discreet Swaran Singh

angrily pulled himself out of the negotiations as a group close to Rajiv Gandhi had prevailed upon Indira Gandhi to make the changes. "This group was a great supporter of the then Haryana Chief Minister, Bhajan Lal, who was a great Negotiations and Subterfuge villain in the whole episode. Haryana Assembly elections were due in another few months and this group had impressed upon Indira Gandhi that the statement prepared by the Cabinet Committee with the help of Sardar Swaran Singh would amount to surrender before Akalis and the Congress would lose Haryana elections."

Bizarrely, Giani Zail Singh, who was elevated as the president of the republic, in July 1982, played a role in the

sabotage. "Another person who had done great harm to the Punjab cause because of his personal ambitions and his old rivalry with Sardar Swaran Singh and Darbara Singh was Giani Zail Singh, who had become President of the country but he never lost interest in Punjab politics. Three people — Giani Zail Singh, Bhindranwale and Balwant Singh, an Akali leader — have done immense damage to Punjab and in particular to the Sikh cause," concludes Rajesh Singh. Once the Swaran Singh initiative collapsed, the Akali leadership felt betrayed and stepped up its demands and remained belligerent. Its members talked of discrimination against the Sikhs.

"We, the officials present at the meeting, furnished relevant facts and figures to prove that there had been no discrimination against the Sikhs on any of the points raised by them, but they were unwilling to accept our data and explanation," Singh quotes Indira's principal secretary P C Alexander from his memoirs titled "Through the Corridors of Power." Indira did not give up and took several other initiatives to reach out to Akalis, but Swaran Singh's experience had made them cagey. Moreover, there were powerful elements in both the Congress party and in the Akali Dal—who did not want a solution, thus rendering the Sikh community to be viewed with suspicion across the country.

France Teetering on The Brink of Anarchy

(Contd. from page 09)

The chaos is much deeper in France and the racism question has been a structural challenge. Despite the violent responses on the streets that can't be justified in the name of any cause, this won't stop. Anarchy is unacceptable in a civilised society but the state also can't remain in Hobbesian logic over the monopoly of violence. For some form or reason, it will catch another suburb sooner or later. And that is exactly the burning streets across France and the responses post Nehal events that have been sending messages. Emmanuel Macron's second term is full of miscalculations, its policies under a no-

majority government have invited major challenges back home but it has been giving more attention to foreign policies than to domestic challenges. Macron's logic of first implementing the policy and then creating consensus has brought more chaos inside France. With rising populism in France, the recent proclaims of police unions of giving the protest a civil war situation would further trivialize the matter and might deepen the existing structural problems of integrations. Half-baked narratives such as giving it a religious, racial and cultural angle won't provide any solution to burning streets in France nor the policymakers if still they believe the logic of surveillance can cover the

schism in the society. The UN has raised alarm and cautioned the French government and so have the political opponents of Macron who might be ready to use the hate industry to further feed its populism politics but such regressive thinking won't help the French Republic and its secular logic. On the contrary, the violence on the streets will further damage the needy applicants who wish to come to France for their future. This is a flux and a dead end and in the long run, only people will suffer more. Macron's logic of inexcusable and unjustifiable over violent protests can only help his party and the republic if he addresses the structural problems with consensus

across political ideologies. There is an economic cost to anarchy which would damage the state, society and citizens. The Olympic games are going to be held next year in France and this would be the test of whether the government can prevent such episodic turmoil which is costing its image and capability.

Aggressive secularism and failures of social integrations under the infrastructure of colonial logic will bleed France more than any war outside. Nelson Mandela once wrote "Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all" and that could help Macron and the French Republic to address those grievances that, at times, fall into anarchy on the street.

These French Riots Are Different-and Far More Disturbing

(Contd. from page 09)

From the often violent repression of the gilets jaunes (yellow vest movement) and Macron's broken promises of a changed governing style, to the ramming through of pension reform (without a vote) in the face of massive, violent protests, the current government, despite its technocratic prowess, has given nearly every segment of French society, across all demographics and regions, cause to feel that they are governed sometimes competently but almost always with humiliating impunity. And too many have been injured or killed by police in the process; statistics show that French police kill four times more today than they did in 2010, fueling cycles of protest and repression. That's

not to diminish the hardship and injustice faced far too often by some in French society rather than others. But the reality is, the oxygen behind these waves of increasingly frequent and increasingly violent displays is in part the fact that everyone in France has had at least a small taste of the humiliation that many have endured for decades — aside from those whose thirst for an order based exclusively on exaction and punishment drives them to the harder edges of the right. In these early days of summer 2023, what floats above the smoldering remains of the riots, is the shared sense across French society that their problems re being

systematically exacerbated by the actions of the police — and by those of a judiciary that tends to criminalize the victims and treat their families with disdain. It is an irony that this is what may finally provide a shared point of reference across French towns, communities, classes and creeds: That enough is enough and that root-and-branch police reform is not only necessary but urgent after decades of combined neglect and empowerment. But instead, as already pointed out by some, France has systematically passed legislation to further arm the police year after year over the last two decades. The cycle of violence, from police and rioters, is taking place in a fragmented political

landscape that is only going to get tougher to navigate. The riots are driving the right and far-right closer together — a tendency that is present across many European democracies and that will have profound consequences for next year's European Parliament elections. But they also create pressures on a deeply-divided left — torn between their desires for social justice and the demands of a base that is increasingly receptive to the far-right's promises of order. Macron must confront this dilemma or risk making injustice and humiliation the exclusive drivers of French politics — an outcome that will only lead to further destruction and potentially catastrophic results in the presidential election of 2027.

Welcome to the 'looking-glass' world of Putin's Russia

(Contd from page 08)

It's a sign of how badly Prigozhin rattled him that Putin briefly broke out of his comfort zone after the mutiny to telegraph that he was still in control. On a visit to Dagestan, he mingled in-person and posed for selfies with a crowd of presumably carefully vetted admirers, awkwardly kissing one teenage girl on the forehead. This was followed by a clearly scripted visit to the Kremlin by an eight-year-old girl, who joined the grandfatherly president in a bizarre phone call to the

Russian finance minister. No one expects the new friendly Putin to last long. The real politician in Russia today, despite all obstacles, is Alexey Navalny. Even from jail, he has continued campaigning and commenting on events, doing interviews, and posting on social media via his lawyers

With a mix of millennial humor and folksy irony, he reaches out to ordinary Russians with scenes from prison life. Watching prices soar last year in the prison store, he sympathized with pensioners on the

outside struggling with inflation. Every holiday, he sends greetings to supporters, and he even appealed to French voters last year to reelect President Emmanuel Macron over the Putin-friendly Marine Le Pen. After the war started, Navalny offered a 15-point program for ending it and rebuilding a democratic Russia. And now, in between battling the prosecutors' new charges, he has called for IT specialists, sociologists, donors and volunteers to sign up for a "long, stubborn, exhausting but fundamentally important campaign" to

sway public opinion against the war. It remains to be seen whether this will prove more effective than Navalny's previous campaigns while at liberty. But as reality begins to break through the Kremlin's filter, the timing may finally be right. Putin seems less and less able to grasp the challenges before him. After the 2014 invasion of Crimea, then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel described Putin as living in "another world." An open question now is whether he can find the way back.

Pakistan's auto industry in crisis; Only 6,034 cars sold in June this year

(News Agency) The auto industry of Pakistan is reeling from one of the most severe crises ever with only a handful number of cars got sold in June this year. According to data by the Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers (PAMA), a total of 6,034 cars were sold in Pakistan last month. While the sales in June have improved slightly (10%) as compared to May, the car sale plummeted to 82% as against the same month last year. In the fiscal year 2022-23, car sales in Pakistan dived by around 56% to 126,879 units and this fall is likely to continue this year too. The key reason behind the drop in care sales could be attributed to Pakistan's economy which is wading through troubled water and the automotive industry is feeling its pressure. There has been a massive fall in the availability of



completely knocked-down kits (CKDs) while high prices of existing inventories have hurt buying sentiments as well. Pak Suzuki, one of the prominent automakers in Pakistan, witnessed merely 2% growth in June with 3,009 units sold. Indus

Motor Company, responsible for assembling Toyota vehicles saw a 7% growth in sales at 1,846 units last month. Whereas Hyundai Nishat Motors registered 11% growth in June with Tuscon SUV being the most-purchased model.

Meanwhile, as many as 3,27,487 units of passenger vehicles were sold in India in June, industry body SIAM said on Wednesday. Pakistan's economy has been in a free fall mode for the last many years, bringing untold pressure on the

poor masses in the form of unchecked inflation, making it almost impossible for a vast number of people to make ends meet. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, the cash-strapped country lost over \$4 billion in remittances sent by expatriates to illegal channels in the current fiscal year, much higher than the amount the government struggled to secure from the IMF as a bailout. The country received a total of \$27.024 billion in remittances during FY23, against a record \$31.278 billion in FY22, a decline of 13.6 or \$4.254 billion, the Dawn newspaper reported. Pakistan and the IMF reached a long-awaited staff-level agreement on June 29 to inject \$3 billion Standby Arrangement into the ailing economy after months-long negotiations that pushed the country to the brink of default.

MyPillow auctions off equipment amid 'massive cancellation,' CEO Lindell says



(News Agency) MyPillow is auctioning off hundreds of pieces of equipment and subleasing some manufacturing spaces amid what founder and CEO Mike Lindell calls "a massive, massive cancellation."

Lindell, in an interview with the Star Tribune, said MyPillow lost \$100 million from "attacks by box stores, the shopping networks, the shopping channels, all of them did cancel culture on us."

Several retailers, including Walmart, Bed Bath & Beyond and Kohl's, pulled MyPillow products from their shelves after Lindell continued to claim the 2020 presidential election was stolen from former President Trump.

The Minnesota-based manufacturing company

appears to be using the website K-BID Online Auctions to sell items

including forklifts, conveyors belts, printers, electronics and commercial supplies.

Lindell said he can replace any auctioned items if the retailers "ever came back."

He told the Star Tribune that the company is subleasing some of its manufacturing spaces in Shakopee, Minn., as its demands are different for direct sales than what was needed with retailers.

"If the box stores ever came back we could have it if we needed it, but we don't need that," Lindell told the

Star Tribune. "It affected a lot of things when you lose that big of a chunk [of revenue]."

Lindell is currently facing a \$1.3 billion defamation suit from Dominion Voting Systems, which claims Lindell's accusations of fraud, election rigging and conspiracy have hurt the company's brand. Lindell was ordered in April to pay \$5 million to a software developer who debunked Lindell's data about the election after the MyPillow CEO vowed to pay that amount to anyone who could debunk his data allegedly proving election fraud. An arbitration

panel ruled that software expert Robert Zeidman successfully disproved Lindell's claims and ordered the payment within 30 days. Lindell refused to pay and filed a motion in May to have the ruling tossed out. Zeidman responded and filed a petition in a federal court in Minnesota to get Lindell to pay the \$5 million plus 10 percent interest per year until it's paid. According to reporting from The Washington Post, vacating the award would require the court to determine the panel committed misconduct, exceeded its powers or that the process was corrupt.

Microsoft, Activision defeat FTC's bid to block \$69B deal

(News Agency) Microsoft's fortunes in its hotly contested takeover of video game company Activision Blizzard dramatically improved Tuesday after a federal judge sided with the companies over the Federal Trade Commission's attempt to block the deal, and after a U.K. antitrust regulator signaled its receptiveness to reversing its own decision against the merger.

Tuesday's ruling from U.S. District Judge Jacqueline Scott Corley is a stinging rebuke for the FTC in the biggest test yet of its ability to police competition in fast-moving technology markets, a key priority for agency Chair Lina Khan, an antitrust hawk appointed by President Joe Biden in 2021. The FTC initially challenged the

deal in its in-house court in December. The companies are not yet fully in the clear, with the U.K.'s Competition and Markets Authority blocking the deal in April, saying it would harm competition in the burgeoning cloud gaming market. Microsoft makes the Xbox gaming console, which competes with Sony's Playstation and the Nintendo Switch. Activision makes games, including the blockbuster hit Call of Duty.

However, after Tuesday's ruling, the CMA issued a statement saying the companies' appeal of that ruling was put on hold while they continue settlement negotiations. "We stand ready to consider any proposals from Microsoft to restructure the

transaction in a way that would address the concerns set out in our Final Report," the CMA said. An appeal hearing had been scheduled for late July. The ruling follows a five-day hearing before Corley in late June, in which the FTC sought to temporarily delay the deal pending a full trial in its administrative court, currently scheduled for August. "The FTC has not shown it is likely to succeed on its assertion the combined firm will probably pull Call of Duty from Sony PlayStation, or that its ownership of Activision content will substantially lessen competition in the video game library subscription and cloud gaming markets," Corley wrote in the 53-page, heavily redacted ruling.

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It's time to fix housing in America: Start with financing and zoning

(By a staff reporter) The belief that reaching the American dream starts with owning a home is at the heart of an idea that emerged with post-World War II prosperity and has remained a standard ever since. But the reality is that millions of Americans in cities and states around the country struggle to afford housing, either to own or to rent. For nearly a century, homeownership has been the largest source of wealth for most American families. Safe, traditional mortgages have been pivotal to achieving financial security and independence. But as home prices and rents skyrocket — and because outdated policies make small mortgages expensive for lenders and often unavailable for borrowers seeking low-cost homes — many families are struggling to afford reliable housing. This is a serious problem for people across all demographics, but Black, Hispanic, rural and Indigenous households are particularly affected. And some have turned to riskier and more costly alternative financing arrangements, such as land contracts, seller-financed mortgages, lease purchases and personal property loans.

Approximately 36 million Americans have used such arrangements to purchase a home. They are pitched to potential



homebuyers as a pathway to homeownership when traditional mortgages are not available. But they often result in borrowers not achieving their goal of owning and can hurt their future homeownership and wealth-building opportunities.

To examine the barriers that borrowers face when trying to purchase safe and affordable homes, The Pew Charitable Trusts studied various alternative financing arrangements. One of the most important differences among these arrangements is the question of when the buyer receives full legal ownership of a property.

In mortgage transactions, the deed — and therefore, full ownership — is typically given to the buyer at closing. However, in a land contract, for example, the seller keeps the deed and retains legal title to the property for the duration of the financing term, while the borrower typically holds what is called “equitable title.” This can create ambiguity about the buyer’s rights and responsibilities, such as who pays for taxes and upkeep, and lead to quick evictions that strip buyers of any potential home equity. Financing challenges aren’t the only roadblock to homeownership. Many Americans who

want to own a home are only able to rent for now. And as rents continue to climb, many of these are finding it difficult to save for a down payment in order to get on the path toward ownership. This comes against the backdrop of a national housing shortage, stemming largely from strict zoning and land-use policies that make it harder and more expensive to build new housing, which results in higher rents and puts homeownership further out of reach. Pew has examined several jurisdictions that updated their zoning codes to allow more housing and found that this flexibility helped these jurisdictions add new housing stock faster than new households were being formed. And while rent remains detrimentally high in many communities throughout the country, this research shows that communities updating their zoning laws in this manner kept rent growth to less than 7 percent over the most recent six-year period, even as rents rose by 31 percent nationally.

Zoning reform that allows more housing to be built is also a necessary step in solving the housing crisis and ensuring that everyone has a roof over their heads. Alex Horowitz is a project director with The Pew Charitable Trusts’ housing policy initiative.



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Thanks to AI, the Wagner mutiny will only briefly hamper Russian disinformation

(By a staff reporter) For more than two decades, Vladimir Putin has effectively maintained a firm grip on power in Russia, projecting an image of invincibility. But on June 24, a mutiny within the Wagner mercenary force brought Russia perilously close to witnessing the collapse of Putin's authority.

Remarkably, Russia's own internal challenges posed a significant threat to Putin's rule, and the U.S. did not need to actively intervene to achieve this outcome. With the recent downfall of Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, it is probable that Russia's disinformation operations will decrease in the foreseeable future.

Prigozhin, a former chef turned confidant to Putin and the founder of the Wagner Group, has been at the heart of Russia's covert disinformation efforts. His Internet Research Agency (IRA), a troll farm known for its interference in the 2016 U.S. election, and his wider Patriot Media Group, have significantly shaped the digital landscape, amplifying the Kremlin's messages across the globe.

However, recent events have thrown a wrench into Russia's disinformation machinery. Prigozhin's media empire is collapsing, following a raid on its St. Petersburg headquarters and the blocking of several Patriot group websites by Russia's media watchdog, Roskomnadzor. The result: Prigozhin has announced the closure of his media holding, marking an unexpected potential downturn in Russia's disinformation operations.

The magnitude of this sudden change is hard to overstate. For years, Prigozhin's IRA has operated out of St. Petersburg, serving as a fundamental pillar of Russia's online influence operations. The agency has employed hundreds of skilled "trolls" to advance Kremlin interests both domestically and internationally. Through their targeted and deceitful strategies, they have effectively reached millions of individuals, skillfully manipulating public opinion, undermining democratic processes and exacerbating societal divisions.

By 2015, the IRA had expanded its workforce to an estimated 400 staff members, working grueling 12-hour shifts. Among them, 80 trolls were dedicated solely to disrupting the U.S. political system. Their activities spanned numerous social media platforms, including VKontakte, often regarded as Russia's equivalent of Facebook. According to a U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee report, the IRA's managers meticulously monitored the workplace using CCTV cameras and had a relentless obsession with pageviews, posts, clicks and overall web traffic.

In particular, the IRA's tactics have targeted the U.S. Ahead of the 2016



elections, the IRA worked tirelessly to disrupt our political process. By the following year, it had over 80 employees focused exclusively on the U.S., weaponizing every major social media platform to spread propaganda. Such tactics are far from innocent internet trolling. They are concerted efforts to destabilize nations and their political structures. This is a modern form of warfare that has been increasingly adopted by state actors.

Yet with the upcoming 2024 U.S. elections, the closure of Prigozhin's media empire could signify a critical shift. If Russia's current internal chaos continues, there's a possibility that the West will see a reduction in the influence of Russian troll farms, thereby curbing the scale of disinformation campaigns.

The impact of these troll farms has been remarkable, as evinced by their content reaching 140 million U.S. users per month. Seventy-five percent of these users had never even engaged with any of the pages. Rather, they encountered the content through Facebook's content-recommendation system, which pushed it into their news feeds.

Although certain troll farms in Russia may be shutting down, the emergence of advanced language models such as ChatGPT presents a potential avenue for the remaining actors to amplify their operations.

Researchers from Stanford and Georgetown utilized a predecessor of ChatGPT to generate fictional narratives, demonstrating their ability to influence the perspectives of American readers nearly as effectively as real Russian and Iranian propaganda. The model-generated articles, with minor human editing, had a more pronounced impact on reader opinion than the foreign propaganda that initially trained the computer model, according to the findings.

emphasized that foreign actors have even more motivation to interfere compared to 2020, both in terms of shaping public opinion (influence) and attacking election infrastructure (interference). He also noted that increased tensions between Washington and Beijing could prompt China to re-engage in influence operations, whereas Iran might make another attempt, given its active involvement in the previous election.

Therefore, the West must understand that Russia is not the sole purveyor of disinformation. Other actors will likely attempt to fill the void left by the dissolution of Prigozhin's empire. Our responses must be flexible and adaptable to tackle the ever-evolving threat of disinformation.

Although the turbulence within Russia could limit its disinformation activities temporarily, we should consider it a reprieve rather than a victory. This situation presents an opportunity to prepare and strengthen our systems against future disinformation attacks. To neglect this opportunity would be to our detriment. After all, the digital battlefield is as crucial as the physical one in this age of information.

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Indian Abroad: Home And Homesickness

The Indian diaspora is dealing with a tricky situation-how to be homesick when various sicknesses are afflicting the homeland

(By a staff reporter) Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently visited the US, and as it happens with all his visits to foreign shores, the 'Indian diaspora' is in focus again. A carefully curated set of its members donned traditional finery, performed dances and kirtans, and lined up at various venues where they chanted slogans eulogising Modi and India, the homeland.

Indian media has gushingly covered these events to claim that the diaspora adores Modi, and that 'Indian culture' is alive and well in the far-flung corners of the world. Isn't it charming that the coverage is encouraging us to think how much love the diaspora has for the motherland, and how they express it in song and dance and spirited slogan-shouting? Cynics may well insinuate that some of this crowd was 'flown from India' or was rustled by overseas front organisations of the ruling party, but that raises a very interesting question—why does the diaspora matter to the homeland, as much as the homeland to the diaspora? The same question is raised by the other subset of the diaspora which, as in the visits of many previous prime ministers abroad, will protest against the visit, raising issues concerning human rights abuses, restrictions on press and civil society, and democratic deficits back in India.

In media coverage and the perception of a sizeable population back home, these will be called traitors who have 'sold out' to 'breaking India forces'. The diaspora as uncritically affirming the goodness of the motherland, and as implacably critical of political figures and conditions back home, represents two broad streams of people who left India years, decades, even centuries ago, who long for 'home' even as they make other homes elsewhere.

Becoming Diaspora

The literal meaning of 'diaspora' as 'scattered seeds' lends a sense of natu-

ralness to the global spread of culturally-specific people. Yes, we too were carried by wind and water to distant places, much as seeds are, but other things were at play—history and political economy, for example.

Once, indentured labour was hoodwinked into making perilous journeys to the sugar islands from where it had little chance to return. Then, workers and small traders went to East Africa under the aegis of the Empire, and then moved on to the UK and Canada after the racist attacks of the 1970s. Then, there were waves of guest workers coming to the Anglosphere in the aftermath of World War II, when Britain "needed" manual and white collar workers. This was followed by the infamous 'brain drain' starting in the 1970s, when 'Indian talent' did not find outlets in a stagnant economy and went abroad to explore its potential. More recently, techies and finance sector workers, farm workers, students and, increasingly, migrants and asylum seekers have made tracks to distant shores. Some journeys are perilous, others luxurious. The 18 million people of the Indian diaspora contain within them different stories of mobility and settlement.

As I prepared for my diasporic life in the late-1980s, packing my bags in Patna to leave for Philadelphia, an aged relative, who for the most part confined herself to her bedroom, made a point to visit us. "Rok le Bachhiya, jaito ta laut ke naa aito!" (Stop him, Bacchi, if he leaves, he will never come back), she said to my mother. Her own much-loved son had gone to a remote town in Canada, married locally and was raising his family there—she had not seen him in 23 years.

In the days of bad telephone connectivity, well before the global communication revolution, time and space had reduced their once-intense love to the

thinnest of bonds, the occasional letter arriving with reducing frequency. She equated his not coming back to the motherland with his abandonment of his mother.

Between his time of departure and my time of leaving, returning home had become more common, and my mother was reassured on that front. She was anxious, of course, about the usual things. Will I marry someone there? She remembered a story from Dharmayug, the literary Hindi magazine, in which an Indian student was seduced by an older woman from whom he had rented a room, but was aware enough about my personal life to not worry about that. Will I eat beef, try drugs? She knew I already had. Will I 'return home' or become 'diasporic', how will this key dilemma be resolved?

Until they passed, even though I returned to them several times a year, my parents hoped I would 'return for good' to India, though, with Modi coming to power, knowing my thoughts about him and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), they had taken to saying, "Be where you are happy, be happy where you are". They were proud, though also considerably worried, that I was slipping into the 'bad' diaspora, the one more likely to protest against the Indian government and its leadership than dance and chant slogans in their praise. How will this affect my travels home?

The Official Diaspora

At 18 million, the Indian diaspora is the largest of any country. I have now been a member of this diaspora for considerably longer than I have been a resident of India. This diaspora now boasts of heads of governments, famously, Rishi Sunak in the United Kingdom, but also sometimes in countries that seem surprising—Portugal and Ireland.

People of Indian Origin, the famed PIOs, hold important positions in governments of many countries, are leaders in busi-

ness and technology, represent international sports, work as chefs and are other sorts of luminaries. The bulk of the Indian diaspora, though, is made up of ordinary people living mundane lives across the world, as varied as India, the homeland is. They have created replicas of the homeland—Jackson Heights in the US and Southall and Leicester in the UK could pass for a neighbourhood in many Indian cities.

When I am homesick and long for the warm smell of streets, of trains, of fruit and vegetables, of mutton as I wait at my favourite butcher's shop in Patna, my hometown, these 'little Indias' take away some of the edges but can never substitute fully for what I have left behind. But, to the disappointment of many friends and family 'back home', I now feel less 'at home' in India. With my parents gone and politics having taken the turn it has, I am increasingly homesick for a home that no longer exists—the quintessential diasporic condition. "Tum Angreziya gaye ho", close friends and relations say in gentle, amused mockery. I now get it when those who are 'second generation' in the diaspora say that they have other identities that come from their new locations, based on new affiliations of religion, caste, region, but also of political solidarity born out of chance encounters in a world beyond the homeland and its emotional and material tugging. Those of the diaspora are expected to have intense emotional ties to the homeland. Governments have tried to harvest these emotions. Since the official celebrations of Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas started in 2003, the government has tried to use them as a form of soft power, capitalising on the success in the new homelands of many members of that diaspora, lobbying politicians and civil and business leaders of Indian origin to push the economic and geopolitical agendas of the party in power.

Paycheck Protection Program fraud claims are misplaced



(By a staff reporter) The Paycheck Protection Program is one of the most successful government programs ever created. It distributed \$800 billion of forgivable loans during the once-in-a-century pandemic to over six million small businesses, supporting 55 million jobs. The PPP was a lifeline for small businesses that government officials forcibly closed for two weeks, then two months, and then, in some areas, nearly two years.

The PPP helped stave off a second Great Depression that many forecasters predicted and set the stage for the fastest economic recovery in history. It was historically responsive, distributing loans within three weeks of a national emergency declaration. Former Congressional Budget Office Director Doug Holtz-Eakin called the PPP “the single most effective fiscal policy ever undertaken by the United States Government.”

Unfortunately, the PPP has come under recent undeserved criticism for supposed widespread fraud. Former U.S. attorney Matthew Schneider claims, “It is the biggest fraud in a generation.” Sam Kruger, a University of Texas at Austin professor, says, “Fraud on this scale is enormously costly.” The House Small Business Committee is holding a hearing on this issue on Thursday.

While some scammers certainly took advantage of the program, a new Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General fraud report finds widespread fraud concerns are largely misplaced. The study

estimates that there was \$64 billion worth of fraud in the \$800 billion program. This 8 percent fraud rate is lower than many standard government programs. For instance, the IRS estimates that around 25 percent of Earned Income Tax Credit payments are made in error.

Most PPP fraud was committed with loans distributed by fintech — online lenders generally not associated with banks. Many of these tech upstarts did not have the proper guardrails in place and did not have the same strong relationships with small business borrowers as traditional banks. One study estimates that just two fintech lenders made one in every three PPP loans in 2021. These bad actors, not the PPP program as a whole, deserve criticism. When you exclude fintech, the PPP fraud rate falls to only about 4 percent.

One reason PPP is getting a bad rap is because the SBA’s alternate relief program, Economic Injury Disaster Loans, was rife with fraud. The SBA OIG report estimates \$136 billion of this \$400 billion program was fraud, a 34 percent fraud rate. Many commentators — and even the SBA — are improperly conflating the fraud in these two programs.

The significant fraud discrepancy between these two programs is partly due to how the loans were distributed. PPP loans were given out by third-party lenders, mostly community banks, while EIDL loans were distributed by the SBA itself. Banks have far more robust fraud controls than government

agencies.

President Biden and congressional Democrats have also repeatedly criticized PPP loans from a different angle. They have claimed PPP backers who oppose the Biden administration’s student loan bailout are hypocritical. This attack was Biden’s go-to response after the Supreme Court struck down his student loan bailout.

But there is no comparison between Biden’s bailout and the PPP lifeline. The bailout was illegal executive overreach, while the PPP was overwhelmingly passed by Congress. Student loans were never meant to be forgiven, while PPP loans were designed to turn into grants. PPP loans were a necessary response to forced government shutdowns of businesses, while the student loan bailout was unfair and failed to address the root of this problem: unaccountable colleges that overcharge students.

We now know that the government’s forced business closures during the pandemic did little-to-nothing to stop the spread of the disease. But that information is cold comfort for the millions of shutdown small business owners. Even with the benefit of hindsight, the PPP performed exactly as intended, saving America’s small business economy. It accomplished this feat with a relatively low level of fraud, making its success even more remarkable.

Alfredo Ortiz is president and CEO of Job Creators Network and author of “The Real Race Revolutionaries: How Minority Entrepreneurship Can Overcome America’s Racial and Economic Divides.”



California has spent billions to fight homelessness. The problem has gotten worse

(By a staff reporter) California has spent a stunning \$17.5 billion trying to combat homelessness over just four years. But, in the same time frame, from 2018 to 2022, the state's homeless population actually grew. Half of all Americans living outside on the streets, federal data shows, live in California. Across the country, homelessness is on the rise. But California is adding more homeless people every year than any other state. More than 170,000 unhoused people now live here. "The problem would be so much worse, absent these interventions," Jason Elliott, senior adviser on homelessness to Gov. Gavin Newsom, told CNN. "And that's not what people want to hear. I get it, we get it." But with \$17.5 billion, the state could, theoretically, have just paid the rent for every unhoused person in California for those four years, even at the state's high home costs.

"That is reductive ... Perhaps that would work for me, because I don't have significant behavioral health challenges," said Elliott. "If two thirds of people on the streets right now are experiencing mental health symptoms, we can't just pay their rent." The admittedly reductive math would leave nearly \$4 billion for services like mental health treatment. But even if California did want to pay rent for every homeless person, there just isn't enough affordable housing to go around. "We need 2.5 million more units in California," said Elliott. "This is a problem that is decades and decades in the making because of policy choices that we've made. We are not blameless. And when I say we, I mean Republicans and Democrats alike."

A total of \$20.6 billion has been allocated through 2024 to combat homelessness. Nearly \$4 billion went to local governments to spend on anti-homelessness initiatives. \$3.7 billion went to a program called Project Homekey, which also funds local governments, but

"Nine out of 10 people lost their stable housing here. These are Californians," she said. "We have to create the housing for all Californians."

specifically to buy properties like motels and commercial buildings to turn into permanent, affordable housing. So far 13,500 units have been finished. "It's not enough," said Elliott. "But reversing the slide is the first step to creating an increase." Cristina Smith recently moved into one of the new affordable units in Los Angeles. After five years without a home she had, like many, given up hope. "I thought it was fake," she told CNN affiliate KCBS. "Until they gave me the keys and then I was like this is real. You don't believe it after a while."

A further \$2 billion from the huge pot went toward tax credits for developers to build affordable housing, which has seen 481 new units completed so far, with thousands more anticipated. Another \$2 billion went to kick-start affordable housing projects, stalled by funding shortfalls. And nearly \$2 billion was spent on emergency rental assistance. California has, in recent years, suffered devastating wildfire seasons and, of course, the Covid pandemic. Both put extra pressure on housing. "It's frustrating, it's frustrating ... It's frustrating for us," said Elliott. "At the end of the day if we want to truly solve homelessness in America. We need to build more housing." Dr. Margot Kushel, who worked with Elliott to formulate a pandemic plan for the state's homeless population, just published a hefty report, the results of a survey of nearly 3,200 unhoused people across California she hails as "the largest representative study of homelessness since the mid-1990s." Kushel, who is director of the UCSF Center for Vulnerable Populations, was commissioned by the

elsewhere, and come to California for the weather and the more liberal approach to homelessness. And therefore, California does not owe them anything. Not true, says Kushel.

"Nine out of 10 people lost their stable housing here. These are Californians," she said. "We have to create the housing for all Californians."

Myth number 3: that mental illness is the driving force behind homelessness. Yes, 66% of respondents did report, "symptoms of mental health conditions currently," which is the statistic quoted by Elliott, the governor's adviser, to argue a solution is more complicated than just writing rent checks. But Kushel questioned if mental health problems led to homelessness, or the other way round. "Most of that, half of people, had severe depression or severe anxiety – not surprising if you were experiencing homelessness," she said. Still, tackling mental health issues among the unhoused is a major plank in the Newsom administration's effort. "We're taking a new approach," he said last spring when unveiling his mental health plan, "Rather than reforming in the margins a system that is foundationally and fundamentally broken."



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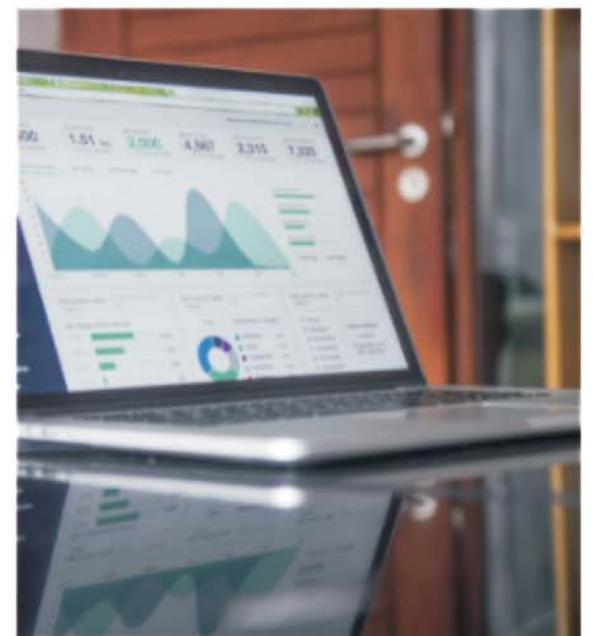
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