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Is It Time To Retire The Debate? It's all about entertainment.



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Who is Ilhan Omar, US Congresswoman whose meeting with Rahul Gandhi sparked row

The BJP criticised Rahul Gandhi's meeting with Ilhan Omar, alleging her anti-India stance on issues including Kashmir and the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.



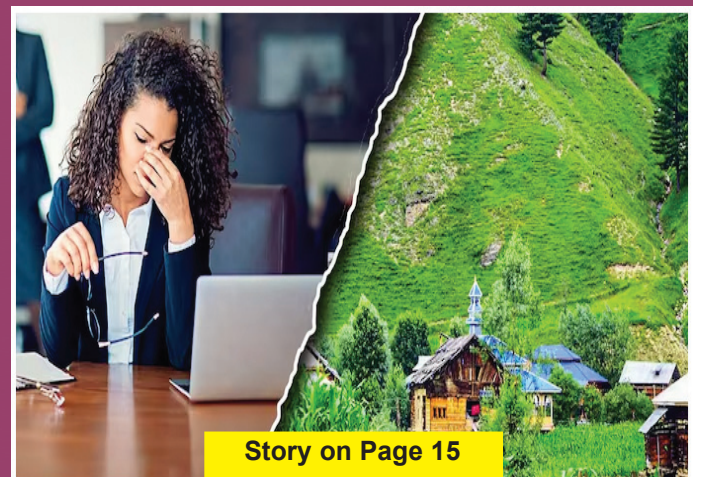
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RaaS: Rise of Ransomware-as-a- Service in Cybercrime



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Why Indians of all ages are logging out of the rat race to take up slow living



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Laura Loomer, far-right provocateur who spread 9/11 conspiracy theory, influencing Trump as he searches for a message



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Is It Time To Retire The Debate? It's all about entertainment.

Votaries of the US presidential debate - including many of our senior politicians - may want to hold their horses. The first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, after all, has not turned out to be the symposium of policy and polity ideas that some hoped it would be. It certainly was massively entertaining. Nobody still knows who will be the next president of the United States in November or what their plan of action will be at home and in the world. One is forced to examine, therefore, whether the purpose of these presidential debates is entertainment - poli-tainment.

The Post-9/11 Television

Interestingly, the Trump-Harris debate was telecast live on the eve of the 23rd anniversary of the 9/11 attacks - an event that set a new tone for decades to come for not just the US establishment but the media as well. Let's rewind to 2001. The television ably aided the military-industrial complex of the United States in the project of what Noam Chomsky calls manufacturing consent. This consent was built not just around military action on foreign land but also heightened security measures within. This was done via 'militainment' - cultural products revolving around the military. Think in terms of all the war films Hollywood churned out each time the US

soldiers engaged in military action on foreign soil. Post-9/11, the television brought all the fighting to the American living rooms with a renewed vigour. Heightened awareness of the enemies of the United States meant a better chance of convincing Americans about their government's decision to continue fighting them. And it was being done ostensibly under the garb of entertainment. Politainment, on the other hand, aims to serve entertainment in the name of politics. Entertainment often equals commercialism, and there seems to be no other form of entertainment bigger than the presidential polls in the US at the moment. The biggest names in the entertainment world have joined the fray, the latest being Taylor Swift, the biggest artist in the world of 2023, with her endorsement of Kamala Harris. Like TV, with a small hiatus in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, jumped right back into commercial programming and labelled it "public service," presidential polls become the public service events for artists and platforms every four years.

Is It Time To Retire The Debate?

The televised US presidential debate, initiated by the most showman-like of all American presidents, John F Kennedy and Richard Nixon, also turns sixty-four this month. Is it now time to retire it? The

supporters uphold it as the democratisation of political information. But what does it really mean in terms of electoral participation and outcome? Scholars like Markus Prior have demonstrated that "Cable TV and the Internet increase gaps in knowledge and turnout between people who prefer news and people who prefer entertainment". Political scientists have already analysed the Trump-Harris debate threadbare. Precious little has emerged about the policy direction that the most powerful country in the world will take in the next four years under a new president. Instead, it spawned industrial supplies of highly imaginative entertainment products like memes, parodies, and social media videos. Multimedia content creators are likely to have generated substantial wealth thanks to this debate, which was pretty low on political information. Even if it were high, there is no evidence that this debate would have elevated the average levels of political knowledge in the American population. Sure, Kennedy won the election after his super successful maiden debate with Nixon, but was it not owing more to his personality cult than any of his policy positions? Demagoguery 101 These days, one almost feels sorry for the poor television. It tries to do a tight-

rope walk between public service and entertainment. In the US, television is constantly trying to reprieve its respectable status as a regulated private industry originally thought to operate for the general welfare. It is also torn in the opposite direction by capitalist motives of profit maximisation. Events like the presidential debates allow television to make the two ends meet. Scholars like Roland Barthes have argued how history and memory create and further national narratives. Television serves as not just a creator but also an observer and a repository of both history and memory. At present, the national psyche of the US-bifurcated along party lines - lends itself to being exploited by television for the creation of a national narrative of fractured solidarities and policy chaos. There are deep disagreements among both Republican and Democrat supporters. Ongoing foreign wars have distilled these disagreements. The fact that both Trump and Harris were unable to offer any policy framework during the debate and mounted only personal attacks against each other leaves a discerning audience with a sense of impending doom. Politics of issues has been firmly pushed into the background while emotionally charged demagoguery takes centre stage.

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Nirav Modi's assets worth Rs 29 crore attached in bank fraud case

The Enforcement Directorate has attached assets worth Rs 29.75 crore belonging to fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi and his group of companies.



†(Sai Bureau)- The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) has intensified its crackdown on Nirav Modi, the fugitive diamond merchant involved in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud case. The agency has attached assets worth Rs 29.75 crore belonging to Nirav Modi and his group of companies. These attached assets include immovable properties and bank balances. This recent attachment adds to the previously attached assets valued at Rs 2,596 crore located in India and abroad. In addition, a Special Court in Mumbai has already confiscated assets worth Rs 692.90 crore under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018. The ED investigation into the PNB fraud case was initiated following an FIR by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The investigation resulted in the identification and attachment of several domestic assets belonging to Nirav Modi and his associates under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. Moreover, the ED has successfully restored assets worth Rs 1,052.42 crore to the PNB and other consortium banks affected by the fraud. Chargesheets have been filed against Nirav Modi and associated entities. Meanwhile, extradition proceedings are ongoing in London, UK, where Nirav Modi is currently lodged in jail after his bail was denied for the seventh time.

The Indian Panorama Endorses Kamala Harris for President & Walz for Vice President



(Press Release) Long Island-A major Indian American English Weekly has endorsed Kamla Harris for president and Walz for vice president. The Indian panorama which has been in publication since 2006 on the front page in its August 20 , 2024 edition published the endorsement, which is the first of a kind by any Indian American publication in the US. Earlier, The Indian Panorama had endorsed John Liu for Comptroller of the New York City , Melinda Katz for Queens County District Attorney, and Tom Suozzi for the US Congress who all won. The Indian Panorama endorsement of Kamala Harris and Walz speaks of the two as the best bet for Americans, given the situation in America which is unfortunately sought to be divided by those who are opposed to the present administration of the Democratic Party. Without going into the negative politics of the Republican Party candidates, the newspaper has sought to come up with an argument in favor of Kamala Harris and waltz, describing their strengths and what they are capable of doing and how they can bring about the unity among Americans,



and create conditions in which America will continue to follow on the path of growth and development, and happiness of all Americans. The two ñ Harris and Walz , The endorsement says, will work for an America which will be leading the world as it has been known to , and ensure America stays the strongest country and be an example of the shining democracy that it has been.

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Actor Malaika Arora's Father Jumps To Death From Mumbai Building: Police

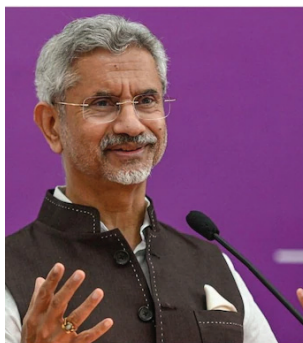


†(News Agency)- Mumbai: Bollywood actor Malaika Arora's father died by suicide this morning, police said. Anil Arora, 65, jumped from his apartment building in Mumbai's Bandra. The incident took place around 9 am today. The actor's ex-husband Arbaz Khan and senior police officers have reached her residence. The body has been sent for post-mortem and a probe is underway, police said. Malaika Arora was born in Maharashtra's Thane. Her parents divorced when she was 11 years old, and she moved to Chembur with her mother and sister Amrita Arora. Her mother, Joyce Polycarp, is a Malayali Christian, and her father, Anil Arora, was a Punjabi, who worked in the Indian Merchant Navy. In a recent interview with a fashion magazine, Malaika talked about how she was just 11 years old when her parents divorced. She had said that even though her childhood was "wonderful" it was "not easy" and said it was "tumultuous", reports news agency IANS. My parents' separation allowed me to observe my mother through a new lens," said the actress in the interview.

Life is not khata-khat: S Jaishankar's veiled dig at Rahul Gandhi in Geneva

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in an apparent swipe at Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, has said that life was not "khata-khat" (an easy job), and it required hard work and diligence. Rahul Gandhi had repeatedly used the "khata-khat" phrase during the Lok Sabha elections while promising swift transfer of money into the accounts of women if Congress was voted to power. Jaishankar made the remark while he was speaking on the infrastructural development undertaken by the Narendra Modi-led government at an event in Switzerland's Geneva.

Addressing the Indian community, Jaishankar said, "Until you build infrastructure and human resources, have those policies in place, it is hard work. Life is not 'khata-khat', life is hard work and diligence." "Anybody who's held a job and laboured at it, knows it. So that's my message to you, that we have to work hard at it," he further said. The Union Minister said that a country cannot be a major power without developing its manufacturing capabilities.



"And there are...people who say that we are incapable of it, we should not even attempt it. Can you actually be a major power in the world without manufacturing? Because a major power needs technology. Nobody can develop technology without developing



manufacturing," Jaishankar said.

Recently, Rahul Gandhi, during an interaction with students at the University of Texas, said China's dominance in global manufacturing had shielded it from an unemployment crisis, which plagues India and most Western countries.

"The West has an employment problem, as does India. But many countries, like China and Vietnam, don't face such a challenge because they are production hubs," Gandhi said.

Sikhs protest outside Rahul Gandhi's house in Delhi over remarks in US

Rahul Gandhi's remark on the Sikh community has drawn a sharp reaction. On Wednesday, a BJP-backed Sikh group protested outside his residence in Delhi.

†(News Agency)- A BJP-backed Sikh group held protest against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi outside his residence in Delhi over his statement on the conditions of the Sikh community in India. The agitators attempted to break police barricades at Janpath road. Sikh Prakosht of BJP Delhi holds protest against Lok Sabha LoP & Congress MP Rahul Gandhi outside his residence over his statement on the Sikh community. pic.twitter.com/JWateZ1J9B ó ANI (@ANI) September 11, 2024 This comes after Rahul Gandhi made a remark on religious freedom in the country. Gandhi, who is on four-day visit to US, addressed a gathering of several hundred Indian Americans in Herndon, a Virginia suburb of Washington DC, on Monday. "The fight is about whether a Sikh is going to be allowed to wear his turban in India or a kada in India.



Or he, as a Sikh, is going to be able to go to gurdwara. That's what the fight is about. And not just for him, for all religions," Gandhi said. The remark has drawn a sharp reaction from the BJP, who accused Gandhi of trying to create a "dangerous narrative" by speaking

on "sensitive issues" abroad. The BJP-backed Sikh group protested outside his residence in Delhi today. The agitators held placards saying "Why does Rahul Gandhi defame Sikhs after going abroad? shame on you, shame on you".

4 GST officers arrested for extorting Rs 1.5 crore from Bengaluru businessman

†(News Agency)- Four GST officials were arrested for allegedly extorting Rs 1.5 crore from a businessman in Bengaluru's Baiyappanahalli on Wednesday.

Based on his complaint, the police conducted an investigation and a case was registered against five people, including, Abhishek from Delhi, who introduced himself as an ED officer working in Bengaluru, Santosh, an assistant officer, and GST officer Manoj.

"The Bengaluru Police has arrested four officials regarding the kidnapping and extortion of a businessman. The person

alleged that around four to five people took him along, and demanded a huge amount of money from him. They let him go after obtaining Rs 1.5 crore," said Bengaluru Commissioner B Dayananda. During the investigation, police found that the officers from the Director General of GST Intelligence of Bengaluru Zonal Unit (Central GST), conducted the raid without authorisation, the Commissioner said. It was also found that several items were seized without approval. The police also found that Keshav was illegally detained for two days.



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Will a Sikh be allowed to wear turban in India?

Now, where did this come from?



†(News Agency)- That Sikhs can proudly wear a dastar (turban), a kara (steel bangle) and carry a kirpan (religious dagger) anywhere in India is a fact. Another fact is that the only time Sikhs faced an existential threat was in 1984, when the community witnessed a Congress-backed pogrom. So, if Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who is now the Leader of Opposition in the Laok Sabha, questions Sikh rights in India, it is certain to spark a massive backlash.x"The fight (in India) is about whether a Sikh is going to be allowed to wear a turban...whether a Sikh will be allowed to wear a kara or go to the gurdwara. That's what the fight is about, and it's not just for Sikhs, but for all religions," Rahul Gandhi said while speak-

ing at an event in Herndon, Virginia, on Monday.Kesh, for which Sikhs use the dastar or turban, and kara are two of the five kakar or the five Ks that all practising Khalsa are mandated to sport. Kirpan (symbolic dagger), kangha (comb) and kachchehra (underwear) are the other three.There have hardly been any claims that Sikhs haven't been allowed to sport the five kakars in India.Schools permit Sikh children to wear the dastar and airlines in India allow Sikhs to carry the kirpan. This even as toy kitchen knives of plastic are impounded by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnels at airports.Therefore, Rahul Gandhi's question if Sikhs would be allowed to wear the turban and kara is

Sikhs proudly wear the dastar (turban) and kara (steel bangle) in India. They are also allowed to carry a kirpan (sacred dagger) in domestic flights, while even plastic toy knives are confiscated at airports. So, where did Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's remarks on Sikh rights come from?

straight out of the blue, without any material substance.Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri called out Rahul for his statement and said "Sikhs have never felt safer and more honoured than they do now, under the current government".He contrasted it with the situation in 1984, after the assassination of then Prime


Minister Indira Gandhi, when the minority community felt a threat to its existence. Puri said, "3,000 innocent people were killed. People were pulled out of their homes and burnt alive." "The only time Sikhs in India have felt a sense of insecurity and existential threat was when statements were made "Jab

bada ped girta hain, tab dharti hilti hai," he said, alluding to the statement by Congress leader Rajiv Gandhi. The tree was a reference to Indira's killing by her Sikh bodyguards, and the quaking of the earth to the reprisal attacks on the Sikhs led by Congress leaders.

Forced to take out Yatra due to non-functioning democracy: Rahul Gandhi

†(News Agency)- Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, who is currently on a three-day visit to the US, on Wednesday described the party's Bharat Jodo Yatra and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra as necessary steps in response to what he claimed was the "failure of democratic institutions in India." Gandhi's remarks came during a press briefing, where he expressed that the decision to embark on the Yatra was driven by a need to connect directly with the people. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, in his remarks, suggested that the Yatra was a response to what he perceived as the non-functioning of democratic processes in the country. Addressing the press in Washington DC, he stated, iWe were forced

politically to take out the Yatra because all the instruments that normally work in a democracy were just not working."According to Gandhi, the party felt it had no choice but to engage with the populace directly, a move he believes resonated deeply with the public. "At a political and professional level, the Yatra was a necessity. But on a personal level, it was something I had always wanted to do. Since I was young, I had this idea that one day, I must walk across my country and truly see what it is about," the Congress leader stated. Speaking at the event, Gandhi described the contest between the Congress and the ruling BJP as a clash of fundamentally different visions for India's future.



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BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution - First Degree Murder, Second Degree Murder, First Degree Assault, Second Degree Assault, Dangerous Weapon with Intent to Injure



Photograph taken April 2015

DESCRIPTION	
Alias: Bhadreshkumar C. Patel	Place of Birth: Kantrodi Ta Viramgam, Gujarat, India
Date(s) of Birth Used: May 15, 1990	Eyes: Brown
Hair: Brown	Weight: 165 pounds
Height: 5'9"	Occupation: Employee of donut shop
Sex: Male	
Nationality: Indian	

REWARD

The FBI is offering a reward of up to \$250,000 for information leading to the arrest of Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel.

REMARKS

Patel was last known to be in the Newark, New Jersey, area.

CAUTION

Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel is wanted for allegedly killing his wife by striking her multiple times with an object while they were both working at a donut shop in Hanover, Maryland, on April 12, 2015. A local arrest warrant was issued in the District Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County on April 13, 2015, and Patel was charged with first degree murder, second degree murder, first degree assault, second degree assault, and dangerous weapon with intent to injure. A federal arrest warrant was issued in the United States District Court, District of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland, on April 20, 2015, after Patel was charged with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

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Field Office: Baltimore

Bengal government rejects doctors' demands for talks with Mamata Banerjee

In a statement on Wednesday night, the state's Health Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said the government remained open to discussion with the doctors, but also suggested that "political forces" might be influencing the agitations.



†(News Agency)- The West Bengal government has rejected the demands of protesting doctors for a meeting with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to end the month-long standoff in the wake of the rape and murder of the 31-year-old trainee doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. The demands included a live telecast of the meeting and the presence of a 30-member team of representatives. In a statement on Wednesday night, the state's Health Minister

Chandrima Bhattacharya said the government remained open to discussion with the doctors, while also suggesting that "political forces" might be influencing the agitations. The doctors, however, dismissed the minister's allegations as baseless and vowed to continue the protests until their demands were met. Citing the importance of a recent Supreme Court order asking the protesting doctors to resume their duties by September 10 evening, the government

on Tuesday invited the doctors to the meeting at Nabanna, the state secretariat, and asked them to send a delegation of 12 to 15 members. However, it was not clear if the Chief Minister would be in attendance at the meeting on Wednesday. While rejecting the doctors' demands, Bengal Health Minister

Chandrima Bhattacharya said, "We were quite hopeful that the doctors would participate in the meeting. But they did not. No meeting can be held with so many conditions. We waited for them to turn up with an open mind, but they did not take any proactive steps to resolve the situation."

Don't want to be known just as Mehbooba Mufti's daughter: Iltija Mufti

†(News Agency)- Iltija Mufti, who is contesting the upcoming Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir as a People's Democratic Party's (PDP) candidate from Bijbehara, said that she wants the people of the union territory to see her as an individual and not just the daughter of former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti. Speaking exclusively on Aaj Tak 'Panchayat', the 37-year-old said, "I did not only inherit my mother's looks but her stubbornness as well. I am strategic, she is emotional. This is my personality and I hope people discover this as time passes." "I want people to know me for who I am, for

my own identity, my personality. I just don't want to be known as Mehbooba Mufti's daughter or Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's grandfather. (We should) Listen to everyone, but do what you want. At the end of the day, one should do what one believes in," she added. Iltija Mufti said her political strategies were a blend of her mother's and her grandfather's. "What works for me is a blend of both their strategies. I am a mix of both." When asked about the political scenario in Jammu and Kashmir, she said, "It is very easy to gain votes via vote bank politics. But Kashmir is the graveyard of all reputations."

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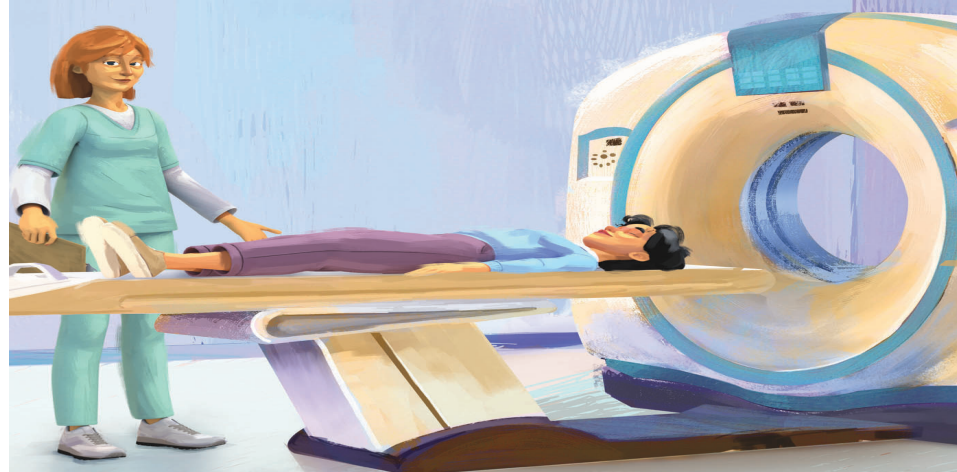


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Is the 2024 Presidential Election Over? Bridging Nations: Narendra Modi's US Trip

An election isn't over until it's over. Is the 2024 presidential election over?

It had been reported for days that Kamala Harris would try to provoke Donald Trump in their Tuesday debate. She did, again and again and again. No surprise, ABC's David Muir and Linsey Davis went along. Ms. Harris repeatedly defined the former president in the darkest terms ever seen in a U.S. presidential campaign.

Given the Harris team's willingness to tip its debate strategy, one might have assumed Mr. Trump would have a game plan for dealing with the attacks. As debate prep, Mr. Trump should have asked Andrew Cuomo how to deal with such a barrage.

Earlier on debate day, the former New York governor sat before a congressional committee and endured an extended assault from New York Republican Rep. Elise Stefanik about his handling of patients in nursing homes during the pandemic. The granite-faced Mr. Cuomo merely let it roll off and moved on to his talking points. It wasn't admirable, but it was Politics 101.

Unlike the advisers to Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, the Harris team finally figured out the way Mr. Trump processes information. First in line is his determination to refute the details of any accusation (he said this week he was 'disappointed' in his lawyers). But in the tight debate format, that left little time for Mr. Trump to describe his policy ideas. Too often, his policy proposals came out as, well, a word salad.

Ms. Harris has famously 'adapted' her politics over the past several weeks from what they were during her 30 years as Mr. Biden's vice president and decades before. We will get to the implications of that adaptability in a moment. By contrast, the Trump political model hasn't budged, and that is hurting him.

Mr. Trump's political persona emerged in a series of Republican primary debates in 2015 and 2016. As an outsider, Mr. Trump's gruff, blunt style had appeal then because he caught the moment when many voters were souring on traditional politics and the major parties.

But that was eight years ago. The current Trump model is a caricature of the original, and Mr. Trump isn't someone who could withstand becoming a caricature. By the 30-minute mark of the debate, the former president was shouting his answers, as he does at rallies, or indeed as Mr. Biden does.

Mr. Trump chose not to expose himself to the critical pressure of the 2023 Republican primary debates against candidates like Nikki Haley, Ron DeSantis and Doug Burgum, choosing instead to hold mega-rallies.

But the rallies-only choice has eroded Mr. Trump's skills as a communicator of ideas.

Mr. Trump's current rally model assumes his audience is in on everything he's talking about. Now, no matter the venue, Mr. Trump forces listeners to fill in the blanks of policy substance that he leaves out. But for swing voters, what he is saying is often incoherent and confusing.

Mr. Trump's free-market energy plan is central to his campaign, but he never clearly described those energy policies during the debate, or contrasted them to Biden-Harris. Did Mr. Trump's debate prep actually include citing the support of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán? How many undecided voters know or care who Viktor Orbán is?

Mr. Trump was right to distrust ABC. But Ms. Harris and her colluding moderators may have overplayed their hands. Her relentless, sarcastic personal attacks may have come across as unseemly and excessive to undecided voters. As well, a fair number of these voters don't admire or trust mainstream media, and Tuesday evening they got a case study in why. The problem remains that Mr. Trump's response to it all was inadequate, again dumping the burden of interpretation onto these voters.

Despite Mr. Trump's bad night, the debate made something important clear to viewers: Kamala Harris has a character problem.

Her repeated ducking of questions about her past politics became impossible not to notice. Would she allow abortions in the third trimester? Has she ever met Vladimir Putin? Why was the border left open so long? Mr. Trump himself didn't emphasize that she wasn't answering these questions, but maybe he didn't have to. Her instinct to evade was obvious. Sen. Bernie Sanders said this week that her move to the center is largely opportunistic.

Ms. Harris's defenders will say she established in the debate that Mr. Trump is the one with the character problem. But the Trump reality is well known, and he's still tied with her in most polls. She is the new entity running for the nation's highest office, and a question is whether she is making consciously false promises to the American people.

Ms. Harris and her advisers, like Joe Biden in 2020, embraced 'adaptability' because they had to. Progressivism doesn't win presidential elections. But Ms. Harris's crafted flexibility is what many voters don't like about politics today and haven't since the 2016 election.

It isn't over. This election could still be Mr. Trump's to lose. If nothing changes after Tuesday night, he will.

By **Daniel Henninger**
(WSJ.com)

By **Susmita Ghosh**

Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, will visit the United States on September 2024, for a multidimensional trip. It highlights both strategic interests and cultural engagement. Central to this visit is Modi's address at a major community event in New York on September 22, a gathering expected to draw around 15,000 attendees. This event, themed 'Modi & US: Progress Together,' aims to celebrate the dynamic relationship between India and the US, while also reinforcing the shared cultural ethos of global unity and diversity. Organized by the Indian-American Diaspora Association (IADA), The New York event, marks Modi's fifth address to the Indian-American community in the US. This year's gathering promises a unique and innovative format, diverging from past events. Unlike previous high-profile events, this year's event is carefully designed to avoid political predicaments, particularly given its timing during the American election season. Modi's 2014 Madison Square Garden speech or the 2019 Houston rally with the then-President Donald Trump to name a few.

The thematic focus on 'Progress Together' is intended to emphasize the cultural and economic ties between India and the US, aligning with the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'—a Sanskrit phrase meaning 'the world is one family.' This framing reflects an aspiration to celebrate the Indian diaspora's achievements and reinforce the broader narrative of global cooperation and mutual respect.

Modi's visit comes at a pivotal moment in US politics, with Indian-American figures playing prominent roles. Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, and Usha Vance, the wife of the Republican vice-presidential nominee JD Vance, highlight the growing influence of the Indian-American community. Although this demographic has traditionally leaned Democratic, Harris's candidacy and Vance's connection to the community add layers of political significance to Modi's visit.

However, the event organizers are keen to

maintain its non-political stance, stressing that the gathering's purpose is to celebrate India-US relations rather than to engage in US domestic politics. This approach aims to focus on the bilateral relationship and the shared values of democracy and development, avoiding any potential for the event to be perceived as politically motivated.

Modi's visit to the US also encompasses his participation in the UN's Summit of the Future, an event organized by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. This summit, and Modi's expected address at the UN General Assembly on September 26, reflect India's growing role in global governance and its alignment with international efforts on climate change and sustainable development. Guterres has been a supporter of India's initiatives, including Modi's Mission LIFE aimed at promoting environmentally conscious lifestyles.

In addition to the summit, Modi is anticipated to engage in several bilateral meetings, which may include discussions related to the Quad Leaders' Summit. Given the geopolitical dynamics and the shifting political landscapes within Quad member states, including potential instability in Japan and scheduling uncertainties for US President Joe Biden, New York could serve as a strategic venue for these high-level dialogues. The official visit represents a significant opportunity to highlight and enhance the strategic and cultural bonds between India and the US. The New York community event stands out for its focus on celebrating the Indian diaspora and strengthening the shared values of global unity and mutual respect. Amidst the American election season and ongoing global challenges, Modi's trip underscores the multifaceted nature of international diplomacy. It blends cultural celebration with strategic engagement on the world stage. As both nations steer their evolving relationship, Modi's visit is graceful to leave a lasting impact on the bilateral partnership and the global discourse.

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SEBI'S CREDIBILITY AT STAKE

Allegations against chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch highlight deep systemic failures

THE integrity of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), which regulates the fifth largest capital market in the world, is under intense scrutiny. Revelations involving SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch are spilling out on a daily basis, raising significant concerns about conflict of interest and inadequate disclosures at the top of this critical institution. In fact, held to the standards of its own orders regarding disclosures by key management persons (KMP) of listed companies and insider trading, it is clear that the chairperson's transparency is woefully inadequate.

So far, three sets of entities are making these allegations: Hindenburg Research was the first to put out 'whistleblower' documents, alleging conflict of interest; the Congress party has held a series of press conferences, making a series of charges and demanding an independent inquiry; and Subhash Chandra Goel, founder of the Zee group and himself under SEBI's lens, has levied charges of corruption against Buch.

A few things stand out and beg clear answers. They are based on the very standards that SEBI has applied to market participants, financial intermediaries, market infrastructure institutions and listed companies while filing prosecution cases against them or levying serious penalties on them.

The first thing is by Hindenburg Research about Buch's failure to recuse herself from the Adani investigation although she and her husband had offshore derivative investments in the same set of nested entities that were under a high-profile investigation of the Adani group,

monitored by the Supreme Court. Hindenburg's second allegation is that she continues to hold a 99% stake in a private advisory entity which is admittedly being used by her husband since his retirement and has received income from 'well-known' Indian entities.

The Congress first said that during her current employment as a regulator, she earned five times as much as (Rs16.80 crore) she did in ICICI Bank. It turns out that Buch was exercising shares granted to her under the Employee Stock Options Plan (ESOPs). Given that SEBI has handled several regulatory issues pertaining to ICICI Bank, the fact that Buch exercised ESOPs almost every year and benefited from the price rise raises disclosure issues and questions about whether she had access to unpublished price-sensitive information when she exercised her ESOPs. The Congress has also released documents about the renting of her personal property to the associate of a listed entity which has been under SEBI's investigation.

A separate issue has simultaneously blown up. It pertains to SEBI employees' discontent over the unprofessional work culture, unreasonable productive expectations and issues relating to perks, housing allowances and compensation. Like the Hindenburg allegations, this was badly handled, leading to a public protest by a few hundred employees, asking the management to withdraw the inaccurate press release which claimed that employees were influenced by 'misguided external elements.' The SEBI employees claimed that the management was 'spreading lies about employees.' This backdrop sets the

stage for a deep dive into how these charges of the lack of adequate disclosures, appropriate recusal and the failure to sufficiently sever her financial ties upon transition to SEBI's leadership impact SEBI's credibility in regulating the capital market and expose the absence of a robust framework to deal with conflict.

In contrast, developed countries which have a revolving door between public and private sectors provide a sharp counterpoint. In the US, regulatory chiefs are required to divest themselves of holdings that could present potential conflicts or place such assets in a blind trust. Such stringent measures ensure that the individuals in public positions as heads of regulatory bodies are free from influences that could compromise their roles. This principle is underscored by the famous Pinochet case, which held that judges should not only avoid actual impropriety but also the appearance of it.

SEBI demands high standards of transparency from those it regulates. The same strictures don't seem to apply to its own leadership, a hypocrisy not lost on market observers. Even more surprising is the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's decision to pretend that it has seen and heard nothing. The government, including the Finance Minister, has buried its heads in the sand. In the process, the powerful SEBI board has been rendered meaningless. Apart from the chairperson and three whole-time members, the board includes the Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, the Secretary, Ministry of Economic Affairs, a Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank

of India and an academic, who is the public representative. There was a time, under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, when a joint secretary in charge of capital markets was a SEBI board member and wielded more power than the chairperson. This time around, the SEBI board is behaving like the proverbial three monkeys who 'see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.'

To my mind, their role as members of a regulatory body do not give them that choice. Contrast this with what SEBI expects from boards of listed companies. Over the past two decades, SEBI has repeatedly tightened corporate governance requirements and listed rules casting onerous responsibilities on independent directors in connection with corporate disclosures, price-sensitive information and fiduciary responsibility. Every time these directors fail to question the management, proxy advisory firms are quick to issue sanctimonious missives, highlighting their failure and advising institutional investors on how to respond. The government members on the SEBI board have an even greater responsibility to ensure that they meet a higher standard of transparency and accountability. By refusing to question the SEBI chairperson or conduct an impartial inquiry and take steps to protect SEBI's credibility, the SEBI board has clearly failed. This exposes an important loophole in the regulatory system. It shows that there is nothing that stakeholders can do to hold a regulator accountable if the administrative ministry and the government refuse to initiate corrective action. Most people seem to think litigation would also be futile.

In the Trump-Harris faceoff there was a clear winner but don't believe this election is over

It's pretty clear to me that on Tuesday night, Vice President Kamala Harris won what may be the only debate between herself and former President Trump. The vice president had some help, too. She was aided and abetted by two ABC News moderators who seemingly felt the need to fact-check virtually everything the former president said. The former president was clearly frustrated and became more strident and divisive as the nearly two-hour debate continued. And the vice president appeared to gain renewed confidence as she saw Trump faltering under relentless questioning from herself and moderators David Muir and Linsey Davis.

Although Harris clearly won the debate in my estimation, it isn't at all clear that this debate, just 56 days before the election, will fundamentally impact the outcome on Nov. 5. I say that because Trump did speak directly to his base on Tuesday night. His supporters understood, as well as anyone, how much bias ABC News introduced into the process. To be sure, Harris had better answers on abortion, health care, climate change and leadership for the future. That much is clear. But what is also clear is that what Trump said in his closing statement remains the case. Voters remain angry about the direction the country is headed, about the performance of both President Biden and Harris, as well as which candidate they trust more on

the top two or three issues facing the country: the economy, immigration and law and order. My best guess is that Harris will get a slight bump from her performance at this faceoff, which had Democrats cheering as soon as Trump began turning harsh and hostile within the first 45 minutes of the debate. Yet, elections rarely turn on a dime as completely as they did after the June 27 debate between Trump and Biden. And while Trump was a seemingly different man on Tuesday night than he was back in June, the points he made were the same. And many voters, indeed a majority of voters, agree with his core assessment of the current state of our nation.

I also believe that this is likely to be the last debate that the candidates engage in. For Harris, the calculus is simple: she will claim victory, her supporters will be emboldened, money will continue to flow into her coffers and there will be absolutely no reason for her to reengage in any shape, matter or form with the former president. The Harris campaign may claim that they want a second debate, but it will almost certainly be under conditions that the former president will never agree to. I doubt that Trump would ever agree to go back to ABC, much less NBC or CBS, and the chance that Harris will appear on Fox News is negligible at best. For the former president, the calculation is very different but reaches the same con-

clusion: his worst fears were confirmed on Tuesday night. The debate was hardly fair. And absent a debate on Fox News, there's little reason to believe he'll get a fair shake from any other network. He also knows that in both the 2016 and 2020 presidential contests, the first one a winning effort and the second one a losing effort, he was able to make up ground with voters separate and apart from any direct confrontation with his opponent. Trump, on the campaign trail, has a unique and compelling appeal. We have seen proof of that time and time again. He and his advisers will likely conclude that they can do a lot better with voters by eschewing direct confrontation with Harris. They will do that by sending him out on the campaign trail to do both interviews and rallies. That will be far more effective than taking the risks inherent in a night like the one we witnessed on Tuesday. But, it is important to note that Harris did reaffirm, for her supporters and potentially many swing voters, that she is the real deal. She's ready and able to govern. Still, at the same time, doubts about her as the next president of the United States remain strong and clear. Indeed, the great weakness of Trump's performance on Tuesday night was that he failed to underscore the issue of the economy and the contrast between his economic leadership and that of Joe Biden in a way that was clear and accessible to voters.

Rahul Gandhi Must Be Mindful Of His LoP Role-On Foreign Soil Too

Each time Rahul Gandhi travels abroad, especially to Western countries, he tends to stir controversy back home. His European or U.S. itineraries almost always include one or two addresses to various audiences, meetings with think tanks, and question-and-answer sessions at selected institutions.

Interestingly, it is often the BJP's support groups that pay closer attention to his remarks and amplify them with added commentary, rather than Gandhi's own party members or affiliated groups.

While this pattern continues with his current visit to the United States, it has garnered additional attention and significance. Rahul Gandhi is no longer just a Congress MP; he now holds the constitutional position of Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. This role entails greater responsibilities, and his statements are expected to be taken more seriously. This visit to the U.S. marks his first in this new role after the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections.

Audiences in the U.S. who may not be familiar with the nuances of Indian politics or have personal experiences of the situation might take his words at face value, potentially forming a negative opinion about India, a country that is rapidly making its presence felt as an emerging economic power in the world.

It is one thing for an opposition leader to criticize Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government domestically, but Gandhi often ends up disparaging his own country, its people, and its institutions on for-



foreign soil. He seems to aim at showcasing his deep understanding of not just Indian polity, economy, and society but also Hinduism, spirituality, and the global economy.

In doing so, he begins to praise China's advancements while downplaying India's achievements, as he did upon arriving in the U.S. He seems indifferent to whether he wants India to adopt a Chinese-style polity or if his portrayal of China's development and employment practices is factually accurate or merely his perception. This is where the BJP and its supporters become active, pointing out to anyone who will listen that Rahul Gandhi has once again made controversial statements abroad, almost as if he is a habitual of-

fender. The argument is that when he makes similar comments to a domestic audience, people can form their own judgments based on their experiences, whether right or wrong. However, the same does not apply when he makes such statements overseas.

During his visit to America, Gandhi questioned a Sikh in the audience about his name and then commented on the challenges faced by Sikhs in India regarding their religious symbols and practices. Rahul Gandhi said: "First of all, you have to understand what the fight is about. The fight is not about politics. It is superficial. What is your name? The fight is about whether he as a Sikh is going to be allowed to wear his turban in India. Or he

as a Sikh is going to be allowed to wear a Kada in India. Or a Sikh is going to be able to go to Gurdwara. That's what the fight is about and not just for him, for all religions."

This might lead some to believe that Sikhs and other minority communities in India face significant religious discrimination. In reality, such issues have been rare, with the notable exception of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, which followed the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Several Congress leaders have been accused of complicity in those riots.

Ironically, Gandhi's remarks received immediate support from Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a militant Khalistan proponent and founder of Sikh for Justice. Pannun, who usually gains media attention for his anti-India statements and threats, used Gandhi's words to further his own agenda. Gandhi's claim on American soil that recent parliamentary elections in India were "not free but heavily controlled" has not been well-received by many, especially since he had previously criticized the state of Indian democracy during his trip to London last year, urging the West and the U.S. to take note.

Gandhi also spoke about his current favourite topic, the caste survey, which he describes as an "x-ray" of Indian society and economy. However, he conveniently omitted discussing caste surveys and reservations during his recent visit to Jammu and Kashmir - a region where such benefits were denied until the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019.

Fall of Shivaji statue or collapse of political morality, which shall we mourn more?

In the politics of deification, there are demi-gods who can't be touched, much less allowed to crumble and fall. Every state has its iconic figures who are beyond the pale. In Maharashtra, there is no bigger hero than Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. I learnt my Shivaji Maharaj lesson in the 1990s when I wrote a column on the controversy over renaming Mumbai airport. I had pushed for JRD Tata to be given that honour for his pioneering role in Indian civil aviation. Instantly, the Shiv Sena wrote an angry editorial, insisting that the airport be named after the Maratha warrior-king and no one else. We even received a few threatening phone calls at the office demanding that the article be withdrawn.

The lesson I learnt all those years ago has come to haunt and embarrass the Maharashtra government today. The collapse of a new Shivaji Maharaj statue in Sindhudurg has led to a predictable emotional outburst and war of words. The Maharashtra government initially tried to pin the blame on the Indian Navy, which had commissioned the statue, only to hastily backtrack and promise to construct an even bigger statue at the same

location. The Opposition has led protest marches, accusing the government of corruption in the statue's construction. Elections in Maharashtra are only months away and the politicisation of the issue is inevitable.

Even the Prime Minister, not known for making public apologies, was left with little choice but to express regret. After all, it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had inaugurated the statue amidst much fanfare just last December. How a statue that was originally meant to be only six feet suddenly became 35 feet without proper materials being used is a matter of investigation. The suspicion remains that the speed of construction was tangled in a frantic desire to impress the national leadership without adequate regulatory oversight. If there was local corruption, only a proper inquiry could reveal more.

STATUES OVER SUBSTANCE

But look beyond the noisy blame game and reflect upon what a fallen statue of a legendary figure tells us about the state of our polity and its priorities.

There are hundreds of Shivaji statues, large and small, dotted across Maharashtra and the country. If Dr BR Ambedkar's statue

is a fixture in almost every town and village across the country, Shivaji Maharaj too occupies a prominent place in most Maharashtra towns. A statue or a memorial is often the easiest option for any ruling party seeking to appropriate the legacy of a revered figure. When Mayawati came to power in Uttar Pradesh, the construction of Ambedkar statues and memorials was one of the chief concerns of her government. The Bahujan Samaj Party leader wanted to align herself with the cult-like following of Babasaheb without necessarily embracing his unswerving constitutional values.

In Maharashtra too, leaders who push for even larger Shivaji Maharaj statues to be built, mostly at taxpayers' expense, won't look at making investments in quality schools and hospitals with the same urgency. For example, in 2004, a grand Shivaji Maharaj memorial was proposed to be built in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Mumbai by the then Congress-Nationalist Congress Party alliance government. Since then, every successive government in Maharashtra has promised to construct the statue, which was billed as Mumbai's answer to the Statue of Liberty in New

York.

Twenty years later, caught in court and environmental battles, the statue has still not been built, even as costs have risen exponentially. The estimated cost of the statue in 2018 was over Rs 3,600 crore. In a city where a Shivaji Maharaj statue already exists at the Gateway of India, is it really necessary to build another one off the coastline? But which Maharashtra leader or government would have the political courage to suggest that a Shivaji statue is a waste of taxpayers' money?

DEBT, DROUGHT, DISTRACTION

According to the recent Maharashtra Economic Survey 2023-24, the state's current debt stock has surpassed a whopping Rs 7 lakh crore while interest payment due was over Rs 48,000 crore. While the state remains an industrial powerhouse and the largest contributor to the GDP, there has been a slowdown, especially in agriculture. A subpar monsoon last year led to a marked decline in crop production and a worrying increase in rural distress. Last year, the Maharashtra government declared "drought-like" conditions in more than a thousand village clusters across several districts.

How our military can deter foreign conflicts and win future wars

'If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles,' Sun Tzu wrote



As a former DIA intelligence officer specializing in Russian war-fighting strategy and Russian President Vladimir Putin's mindset, I recently had the honor to brief one of the U.S. combatant commands on major security threats to our homeland. This briefing and my interaction with high-ranking officers and their staff prompted me to pen this piece.

As the world has become increasingly unstable under the Biden-Harris presidency, the risk of the U.S. military having to fight a three-theater war has never been higher. The United States is already involved in two conflicts — the Russia-Ukraine one, by proxy, in Europe and another one in the Middle East, as Israel is defending itself against the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance. A war with China over Taiwan also may erupt as early as next year, according to a high-ranking U.S. military officer who heads up U.S. Air Mobility Command.

But how can America win three simultaneous wars if it has struggled to win one single war in a quarter of a century? Think Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Libya. No decisive meaningful military victory has been achieved by U.S. forces in these conflicts, despite the fact that it has faced much smaller opponents who lack advanced weaponry and some don't even have a regular army. That is despite the fact that, tactically, our military is the best war-fighting force in military history.

Here are the top three actions the Pentagon and the national security apparatus must take in order to deter wars or start winning them.

Understand your adversary

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know nei-

ther the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." This guidance comes from the renowned ancient Chinese strategist and general Sun Tzu. In his seminal work, "The Art of War," the earliest known treatise on war and military science dating back to the fifth century B.C., Sun Tzu stressed the paramount importance of knowing your opponent when engaging in warfare.

To this day, contemporary Chinese and Russian military planners religiously adhere to Sun Tzu's precepts. Their entire warfare philosophy centers on the elements of deception and surprise. To win means to deceive your enemy. But to outplay your opponent, you must first understand how he thinks and how he fights.

It's my view that our military and intelligence lacks such understanding. Instead, the Pentagon relies on a one-size-fits-all approach, erroneously believing that superior weapons, advanced technology and masterful tactics will prevail in any war over any opposing force. Nowhere was this misguided belief more vividly disproven than in the U.S. failure in Afghanistan.

In December 2019, the so-called Afghanistan Papers, a trove of confidential government documents containing two thousand pages of impressions by four hundred direct participants in the war, ranging from generals to diplomats, revealed stunning facts. The Pentagon did not have the faintest idea about Afghanistan before invading it 2001 — the culture, mindset, and warfighting style of its adversary. And that is the simple reason for Washington's abysmal performance in Afghanistan. "We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan — we didn't know what we were doing," Douglas Lute, a three-star Army general who served as the White House's Afghan war czar during the

Bush and Obama administrations, told government interviewers in 2015, "What are we trying to do here? We didn't have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking."

After 20 years, the result of this was more than 2 trillion dollars spent on the war, and 7,000 deaths of American and allied servicemen and women. The Biden administration withdrew our forces and the same murderous regime, the Taliban, is ruling the country. Except now, these barbarians have billions of dollars worth of our top secret military hardware.

Close gaps and minimize vulnerabilities

Because our military is the best in the world in conventional warfare, no foreign power would dare challenge it in a head-to-head kinetic fight. Instead, our adversaries have developed asymmetric strategies to win a war against our military. These strategies seek to exploit vulnerabilities, such as over-reliance on technology. Indeed, we are dependent on satellites and access to the internet for every aspect of war-fighting and in our civilian life. Satellites are used for global navigation, water management, power grid monitoring, weather forecasting, broadband access and telecommunications for applications ranging from banking to education to telemedicine, among other things. Russia and China's military strategies include cyber strikes and anti-satellite attacks targeting our critical infrastructure, government networks and military systems. The Pentagon has known about the possibility of attacks on U.S. space systems since January 2001, when a commission led by the then Defense Secretary-designate Donald Rumsfeld issued a report warning about a space Pearl Harbor. Similarly, the Pentagon has been aware of gaps in our cybersecurity since

1999, when the Russians breached multiple U.S. government and military agencies, including weapons labs, and exfiltrated massive amounts of sensitive data.

Yet, our satellites remain unprotected. Even our weapons arsenal, including major advanced systems such as the Patriot missile system, are vulnerable to cyberattacks, according to a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office audit. Consequently, winning against China or Russia, both of whom have plans to inflict a Cyber Armageddon or a Space Pearl Harbor on our homeland, if we deploy forces into the theater to defend Taiwan or a former Soviet nation like Ukraine, would be highly problematic.

No plan survives contact with the enemy" is one of the most misquoted military wisdoms, which belongs to Prussian Chief of General Staff Helmut von Moltke the Elder. He is known for serving as the architect of Prussian military supremacy in mid-19th century Europe.

What von Moltke actually said was far more nuanced. "No plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main strength." A diligent and skillful planner, he stressed the importance of having an adaptable plan, which can be modified in rapidly-changing conditions. The proper plan, in his view, must include multiple options, factoring in various possible outcomes. And that can only be achieved through thorough preparation.

Regrettably, I don't believe such preparation exists in the Defense Department. In 2001, prior to the invasion of Afghanistan, the Pentagon had no pre-existing plan. Operation Enduring Freedom, seeking to destroy al Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power, was therefore, based on re-used elements of the CIA's previous contingency plans for collaboration with the Northern Alliance against the Taliban and some options hastily prepared by the U.S. military, including the Joint Special Operations Command. The Pentagon's lack of preparation and culturally ignorant approach to war has resulted in the failure to anticipate how the insurgents in Afghanistan (and subsequently in Iraq) would adapt, fight and stymie the world's most sophisticated and technologically advanced military. The insurgents' employment of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) enabled them, the weaker side, to gain advantage over U.S. forces. IEDs — which were responsible for 60% of all American fatalities and half of American casualties in Afghanistan — mitigated U.S. advantages in resources, technology, and ground combat. These homemade gadgets mangled our military hardware and maimed our service members.

India-Pak Peace Is Possible-Only If Pak Army Takes A Back Seat

Following the controversial February general election, it seems Pakistan is going through a period where a nominal civilian government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is working under the strict control of the army. But while the military exerts its influence behind the scenes without accountability, the government, involved in the day-to-day running of the country, is still answerable to its people.

The Pakistan military has directly ruled the country for over half of its existence, with generals such as Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf holding power for 43 years in total. For the remaining years, when the military was not in power, it maintained significant influence over political parties and indirectly controlled elected governments. Today, it is one of the most powerful, feared and unpopular institutions in Pakistan.

It may seem hard to explain how an army that was so badly humiliated on the battlefield, lost one big chunk of the country and was made to surrender en masse to its arch-rival in 1971, went on to become the country's main power centre. But, there is an explanation: the Pakistan army owes a lot to the US and China, both of which helped in rebuilding it. It also got a new fillip under General Zia, who began to Islamise the country and the armed forces. It got a boost when nuclear tests were conducted, and another shot in the arm when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The US poured arms and money into Pakistan and bolstered the army's capabilities, supplying its air force with F16 fighter jets. Following 9/11, the Pakistan army even joined the US-led global war on terror. For years, America paid the Pakistan army \$2 billion a year for being at the forefront of the global war on terrorism and supporting its operations and logistics in Afghanistan.

A Vice-Like Grip

In practice, much of Pakistan's security issues and foreign affairs are reported to be shaped not in the capital Islamabad but at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, where the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) plays the role of a kingmaker. The military has significant economic interests, with control over large sectors of real estate, agriculture, corporations and industry.

Pakistan's current political turmoil was triggered when Imran Khan, who came to power with the army's support, later began to defy its authority. Many believe that if India and Pakistan have tepid bilateral relations today, it is because the Pakistan army appears reluctant to allow civilian governments to build a warm relationship with India.

But the considered view in the West is that the military is the main institution



that holds Pakistan together. A few foreign policy think tank people I have interacted with in recent weeks are of the opinion that for all its faults, the Pakistan army is the one institution that can take on the forces endangering the country's future. They argue that the West needs a disciplined institution like the Pakistan military that can safeguard the big nuclear stockpile that Islamabad has amassed. They urge the military to mend relations with India and hope that it will respond positively because a disintegrated Pakistan, the argument goes, will create havoc in the region, which will severely affect India too.

Democratic Rule Is In Everyone's Interest

I, however, think this is a myopic view. The West should try to help strengthen political parties and push for the protection of the autonomy of national institutions. The restoration of true democracy should be everyone's objective. It will be easier for any country, more particularly a democratic India, to deal with an elected civilian government, with no direct or indirect interference by the Pakistani army. Former prime ministers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto felt immense pressure from the army when they tried to initiate dialogues with India. During the two full-scale wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, the country was ruled by the military.

The Kargil War in 1999 is widely seen as an attempt by the Pakistan army to undermine the civilian government's efforts to establish peace with India. The war highlighted the tensions between Pakistan's civilian and military leadership and the army's willingness to pursue its own agenda, even if it meant undermining the country's democratic institutions.

The Root Cause Of Terrorism In India

The public view in India, meanwhile, is that the root cause of terrorism here is the Pakistan army. The Indian government has largely been sceptical of a dialogue with Pakistan, which it accuses of exporting terrorism to its territories. It is, therefore, callous for the West to disregard the fact that over the past four de-

cadades, India has been at the receiving end of terrorism, which, India believes, is being perpetuated by Pakistan. India has shared evidence too with its Western allies and even with Pakistan, which reveals how the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan's army plans and trains young boys to commit acts of terrorism in India. Pakistan, expectedly, has always denied the allegations.

But the denial carries little weight. On May 16, 2011, David Coleman Headley, one of the main planners of the Mumbai terror attack, appeared in a federal court in Chicago and revealed how two ISI officers were present during the planning and training stages of the attack. I was present in the courtroom when he narrated this. In his long testimony, he gave graphic details of what instructions he got from the ISI men and which places in Mumbai he was told to target. In fact, the 10 heavily armed terrorists who attacked Mumbai had come from Pakistan. This is a well-known fact that none should dispute.

Terror Camps And Training

I have met scores of militants during my long years in reporting, who have shared with me details of their training routines in camps in and around Muzaffarabad. I have met a few journalists from Pakistan who have visited these camps, organised by authorities and Islamist outfits.

The civilian governments in Pakistan have largely not been averse to being friends with India. The people, too, admire the progress India has made. The two countries have had a history of Track-II diplomacy.

However, the Pakistan army's obsession with Kashmir and its desire for parity with India has led to hostilities and has hindered regional peace and stability. And thus, peaceful negotiations to normalise bilateral relations can be successful only if the army's influence is weakened.

India will have to take some steps too to achieve this non-combatant objective - something that will ultimately contribute to overall peace and stability in the Indian subcontinent. India will have to support Pakistan's civilian leadership and

democratic forces that seek to reduce the army's influence over the country's politics. This will include taking a stand against the Pakistan Army's human rights abuses in Kashmir and Balochistan and restructuring ties with countries like Iran and Afghanistan, which share concerns about Pakistan's military and its adventurism. India could also do more to invest in strategic communications to counter the Pakistan army's propaganda and disinformation campaigns. By pursuing these strategies, India can create an environment that undermines the Pakistan army's dominance and creates space for more constructive engagement between the two countries.

Weakening The Pak Army

These strategies are not new. During the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, India supported Mukti Bahini to weaken the Pakistani military's control over East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Several big powers adopt these strategies. The US has conducted cyber operations and supported opposition groups to weaken the Revolutionary Guards's influence in Iran, while Israel has taken similar actions against both the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Again, during the Cold War, the US engaged in a strategy of economic pressure, diplomatic isolation and ideological competition to weaken the Soviet military. Saudi Arabia's military is an example of how things can go horribly wrong if done in haste. Its military operations and support for opposition groups with a view to weakening the Houthi rebels' control over Yemen have not yielded any success at all.

India will thus have to pursue these strategies tactfully, without seeming to be interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs. Kashmir will always remain an issue for the two countries, but it's possible to agree to work on other bilateral issues to first normalise relations. If there is political will on both sides of the border and the Pakistan army takes a backseat, peace may not be so unachievable.

G20 Or COP29, West Will Keep Choosing Politics Over Climate

Come November and climate activists get excited as the annual United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP) takes place. This year, the COP (29th edition) will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to November 22. The month will also see the G20 Summit on November 18-19 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. With the G20 also focussed on sustainable development and climate change, there is every reason for expectations to be raised.

In 2021, the G20 met in Italy just before the Glasgow COP, and it would be fair to surmise that the G7 pressure within the G20 for "Net Zero by 2050" saw both China and India also sign on to the Net Zero pledge, albeit for 2060 and 2070, respectively.

NCGQ: The Next 'Big' Goal

Among Brazil's overarching G20 priorities is "energy transitions and sustainable development". They have already established the G20 Task Force on Global Mobilization against Climate Change. Furthermore, they will host the COP in 2025, where the updated (target date for submission is early 2025) Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the voluntary goals on climate action taken by all countries, will be subject to a global stocktake.

The big-ticket item at Baku is a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate financing. At the Copenhagen COP in 2009, developed countries agreed to provide \$100 billion a year for climate action to developing countries. A decade and a half later, and after stretching the data by all sorts of inclusions, the OECD has now declared that the developing countries met their target in 2022. Voila!

At its COP in Paris in 2015, the UNFCCC had agreed that a new and collective - not individual country commitments - quantified financing goal would be established. In the decade since, several key matters remain stalled, including the elusive number for the NCQG that developing countries want to know and are calling for. India has called for \$1 trillion a year, and the Azeris have proposed \$6 trillion till 2030.

Developed Nations Won't Assume Full Responsibility

Additionally, there are other critical unresolved issues, including who would contribute to this. Developed countries are unlikely to agree that it is their responsibility alone, putting China - rightly - on the mat, but also pressuring large developing countries like India to come on board the contributing side.

Presidential elections will be held in the US on November 5, and at this stage,

former President Donald Trump stands an even chance of coming back. In 2016, soon after becoming President, he pulled the US out of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. This despite Paris meeting the key US condition of jettisoning the cardinal UNFCCC principle of common and differentiated responsibilities and asking all countries to put forth NDCs. Years earlier, the US had not ratified the Kyoto Protocol on quantified emissions reductions by developed countries.

While US ambivalence on international commitments for climate change is known, the Europeans, who project themselves as champions of climate action, are now prevaricating too, with cutbacks on their domestic action and trade moves, all to penalise developing countries over their exports to the European Union (EU) for exceeding predetermined carbon limits in the products. The stress on their economies and energy security resulting from the Ukraine-Russia conflict are the articulated reasons for the European pull-back on climate. But their thrust joins the US in the shirking of historical and capacity responsibilities and trying to shift the burden for climate action onto large developing countries.

Politics And Climate Can't Be Divorced

The G20 meeting is a summit and is expected to be attended by member coun-

tries at the level of heads of state or governments. But no matter its economic focus, it is intertwined with politics, as evidenced by references to the Russia-Ukraine conflict being the make or break of its declarations at Bali and New Delhi. Russian President Vladimir Putin didn't attend the G20 summits in Bali and New Delhi, but the Brazilians have been public in their urging of his presence at Rio. They are similarly pursuing President Xi of China. The Brazilians have ace diplomats, but squaring their national, hemispheric and global interests could be a tall order. Indeed, with Ukraine being central to his administration's concern, could Rio see President Biden excuse himself? In any case, with US elections scheduled for November 5, Biden will either way be a "caretaker" till January 2025. At Copenhagen, former US President Barack Obama had demurred on \$30 billion per year till 2030 as the short-term financing goal, stating that budgets were Congress's domain. The world then got the expression "approaching" \$30 billion. The US team at Baku would have an even better way out. In such circumstances, it is understandable that countries may not reveal their climate hands this fall. Will politics trump climate? Only November will tell, but the key date is neither COP nor the G20 Summit.

The big US presidential debate-Lotus squelches former Potus

Republicans are morose, while Democrats are optimistic ñ in fact, so optimistic that they have offered a second debate. The biggest revelation of Tuesday night: Harris is a gun owner, something that was written about in 2019 but was not widely known.

Kamala Harris managed to bait, trigger and annoy Donald Trump during the highly anticipated presidential debate, putting the former president on the defensive and unable to exploit her vulnerabilities on the economy and illegal immigration.

Meanwhile, Harris was able to paint a somewhat coherent picture of what her presidency might look like, with a sunny-side-up view of an opportunity economy, a strong military, affordable healthcare, and women controlling their own bodies. Trump tried to turn every question into one about immigration ñ even bringing up outlandish claims that Haitian immigrants were stealing pets in a town in Ohio to eat them. Not only did Harris win the debate by most accounts, she also won an endorsement from Taylor Swift, the megastar whose one post on Instagram can potentially move thousands of young voters to follow her example. Trump, on the other hand, was forced to go to the Spin Room, where surrogates and journalists wait for interviews, apparently to try to spin his own debate performance. It was not a good sign. Republicans are morose, while Democrats are optimistic ñ in fact, so optimistic that they have of-

fered a second debate. The biggest revelation of Tuesday night: Harris is a gun owner, something that was written about in 2019 but was not widely known.

From the moment Harris walked on to the debate stage and determinedly shook Trump's hand to introduce herself, she established her I-am-taking-charge credentials. It was a smart and tone-setting move. Since the two had never met before, her decision to shake his hand made her seem mature. It is unlikely Trump would have done the same.

Michael Beschloss, a presidential historian and author of nine books, declared that Harris had delivered what is easily one of the most successful debate performances in all of American history.

Harris on offence, Trump on defence. Although Harris seemed nervous at the beginning ñ the very first question was on the economy ñ she soon settled in and used every opportunity to paint Trump as billionaire-friendly and grievance-filled. She performed as an adept politician, deflecting, parrying and changing the subject without actually answering the question. In the end, it seemed like Trump was defending his record and Harris didn't have

to even though she is the incumbent in a manner of speaking.

Harris reminded voters about the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters and the three conservative Supreme Court justices he appointed who scripted the end of abortion rights. She talked about how world leaders were laughing at him. When Trump raised the botched US withdrawal from Afghanistan which happened under Joe Biden, Harris managed to turn even that into an indictment of Trump, recalling how he had invited Taliban leaders to Camp David and defiled the historic retreat.

Republicans complained that ABC News moderators were biased because they fact-checked Trump several times but didn't call Harris out even once or pin her down. While that is largely true, the moderators did give equally tough questions to both candidates. If Harris was asked why her position on fracking changed, Trump was quizzed about his obsession with people's racial identity. Glowering and almost never looking directly at Harris during the debate, Trump was thrown off balance on the race question and tried to change the subject to inflation. When

asked about the 2020 election, he insisted there was fraud, giving Harris a punchline: iDonald Trump was fired by 81 million people. So, let's be clear about that. Clearly, he has had a very difficult time processing that.

On the foreign policy front, Trump refused to answer a yes or no question on whether he wanted Ukraine to win. Even Republican commentators on Fox News conceded that Trump had lost overall, missing many chances to weigh her down during the 90-minute encounter. Vivek Ramaswamy, an Indian-American supporter of Trump and a former presidential candidate, gave Harris a back-handed compliment: I think Kamala Harris exceeded the very low expectations that were purposed set for her.

Harris did well, but it's far from clear whether she has swung the pendulum decisively in her favour. The race remains close and on a razor's edge. However, she did manage to talk directly to voters who are still undecided and show herself as a confident, composed, and calm leader. Whether she convinced enough of them will be the big question over the next weeks.

Trump is On Top-Despite Everything

Giani Singh (name changed), 45, drives a yellow taxi in New York. David Brooks, 63, a New Yorker at heart, is among the most cerebral columnists of The New York Times. They may find little in common should they meet currently but will find themselves agreeing on the most vexatious question in the US today: who will win the Presidential election in November.

Gianni wants Trump to win. Originally from Ludhiana, he came to the US as a teenager and did all he needed to survive, including two local marriages. He finally landed a US citizenship three years ago. Today, he owns six taxis, drives one himself for a bare six hours a day, and owns a house in Queens.

"Immigrants Commit Crimes"

He voted Trump in 2020 and will do so again. Trump, he says, kept prices down. "Today, with 8% interest, I don't know how people live," he told us last week. Trump will be hard on immigration (he threatens to deport an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants). "I know I am one and I have my own stories but, Sirjee, these immigrants commit lots of crimes. We see it daily in New York." And, finally, "Trump will be good for India".

Brooks, a Republican, does not want Trump to win. But in a recent column, he clinically listed the "five turbines of Trumpism" which told his head differently. One, Americans favour dynamism over compassion. The fastest growing US states - Texas, Florida, Montana - are ruled by Republicans; the slowest and the stagnant by Democrats. "The red model gives you low housing costs, lower taxes and business vitality. The blue model gives you high housing costs, high taxes and high inequality." Democrats want to expand the welfare state like in Europe. But voters tell pollsters that the economy and immigration are their top concerns and Republicans score better on handling those.

Democrats, The 'Elite' Clique

Two, in a reversal from recent history, Democrats have become the party of the college graduate elite and Republicans of the working class. "The biggest divide in the US today is the diploma divide," Brooks has often written. One of his most perceptive recent columns was on how the educated elite in the US unwittingly conveys its contempt for the majority not with a college degree ("Deplorables," Hillary Clinton infamously described Trump supporters in 2016). And the "deplorable" deeply resent that the Democrats are the party of the ruling class.

Three, the less educated are in a funk because of growing social and moral immorality. As Brooks wrote: "The things that derail their lives are broken relationships, infidelity, out-of-wedlock births, addictions, family conflict and crime. When Republi-



cans talk about immigration, crime, faith, family and the flag, they are talking about ways to preserve the social and moral order. Democrats are great at talking about economic solidarity, but not moral and cultural solidarity."

Four, the general mood in the US is of distrust and dissatisfaction. According to Gallup and other pollsters, only 25% Americans are satisfied with the direction of the country; 60% feel the country is in decline and the "system is broken"; 69% agree that the "political and economic elite don't care about hard-working people", and 63% agree that "experts in this country don't understand the lives of people like me".

Trump Knows How To Harness Unhappiness

In this mood, people are disinclined to believe the Kamala Harris promise of a better life based on a more caring state. They believe that irrespective of the promises the elite make, in the end, it only adds to their growing power. And Trump knows better than any other populist how to harness this general dissatisfaction.

Five, Harris has been unlike Clinton and Obama, both of whom won two terms by sticking rigidly to the centrist median on major issues. They made sure they were never seen as a representative of the progressives in the Democratic party. Kamala Harris let her progressive side lean on the critical decision of the choice of the Vice-Presidential candidate.

Pennsylvania is likely to be the most critical swing state in this election. Harris could have chosen its popular governor, Josh Shapiro, to be her election mate, but Shapiro was seen as a moderate and Harris showed "over-confidence", says Brooks, in choosing a governor (Tim Walz) of a state she was winning anyway, Minnesota.

This is, of course, prime time for election punditry in the US, and one of the reigning gurus in this field is Nate Silver, poker player extraordinaire, baseball-statistician-turned-poll-predictor best known for predicting Obama's scale of victory in 2012 (332 electoral college votes out of 538) when it was widely seen as a close race and for naming the victor in all 50 US states. Silver too is leaning towards a

Trump victory at this time, because of the electoral college advantage of the Republicans, which effectively gives the smaller of the seven swing states (like Wisconsin) disproportionate weightage in shaping the final verdict, even negating the popular vote.

What Harris Will Really Need

Hillary Clinton polled 65 million votes to Trump's 62 million in 2016 but lost the electoral college vote by 227-304. This November too, it is not unlikely that the same fate visits Harris. According to Silver's latest prediction, Harris would need to lead Trump in the popular vote by more than 3% to have a statistical chance of getting 270 electoral college votes. Harris had a dream five-week run between Biden opting out on July 21 and the Democratic National Convention but the bounce has slowed down. According to the latest Real Clear Politics Nationwide Polling Average, Harris is only 1.8% ahead of Trump in the popular vote. More importantly, she has only a 0.8 lead over Trump in the seven swing states.

Repeated polling has shown that the two most important issues for the electorate are the economy and immigration and Trump continues to lead Harris on those issues, despite ground realities. Bipartisan economists have proved that Trump's plan to erect tariff walls on imports, with steep ones for Chinese imports, will raise prices and harm the poor. Trump stonewalled a bipartisan tough immigration in the Congress because it would have impaired his election rhetoric of deporting illegal immigrants, a plan that is logistically impossible and would wreck the economy.

'Unserious' Trump

Trump is, as Harris famously labelled him, "unserious"; labelling him a narcissist is doing disservice to that word; he is a misogynist who has little support among young women; everybody knows he does not have any values and beliefs except the most convenient ones, and the media knows he plays them because he craves publicity, positive or negative. And yet, because he is who he is, he can affirm contradictory beliefs and yet not lose any support. Abortion is one issue on which Harris has him on the run. The Supreme

Court that overturned the constitutional right to abortion was put together by Trump. He has often crowed about the verdict, which has led to anti-abortion statutes in 22 states. One out of seven voters rate abortion as the third most important electoral issue. Seeing Harris' growing lead on the issue which looms larger each day he has flip-flopped. One day he weighed against a Florida initiative to dramatically shorten the period for a legal abortion but seeing the pro-lifers' blowback, promptly affirmed support for the initiative the next day. Media in the US has been replete recently with revelations that should have made MAGA followers wince. A writer in The Atlantic profiled a key associate of Trump's presidency, Kashyap (Kash) Patel, who jeopardised the life of US Seals on a rescue mission in Nigeria by faking a go-ahead by Nigerian authorities for USAF planes to enter Nigerian air space. When exposed, Patel shrugged off his breathtaking lie with "Nobody got injured so how does it matter?" Trump acknowledges Kash is somewhat crazy, but says, "You need crazies".

Nothing Matters For Trump Loyalists

The NYT carried a column on how the Federal Election Commission has little oversight on how the hundreds of millions of dollars ostensibly raised for Trump's election campaign are actually used. The monies are sat over by Trump's family, and it is a reasonable inference from the money trails that significant sums are diverted toward fighting his many legal cases. But for Trump bhakts, nothing matters. Allan Lichtman is a historian who has correctly called all recent elections, including 2016 and 2020, on a proprietary 13-point scale, weighted towards serious issues (like how the economy has done in the period between the two elections and how the US is perceived internationally), in which the character of the candidate matters only for two of the points. On that template, which also totally ignores election polls and surveys, Harris wins by scoring seven points.

'Prosecutor' Harris vs 'Bully' Trump

It would be fair to say that with less than 60 days to go, the election is too close to call. Much will depend on the debate on Tuesday evening (Wednesday morning in India). This may sound unbelievable, but Trump and Harris have never formally met. Never. Ever. Their first face-to-face promises to be gladiatorial. Will Prosecutor Harris put Convicted Felon and Bully Trump in the dock? White men, 40% of the electorate, favour Trump overwhelmingly. Should Harris stand up to Trump, or dominate him, she could give the lie to Trump's taunt that Putin and the like will chew up Harris. That could nudge the critical white male vote in not only Wisconsin (10 electoral college votes) but, perhaps, more importantly in Pennsylvania with 20 electoral college votes.

Hindenburg questions Sebi chief Madhabi Buch's silence on Congress's new charge

US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research has questioned Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch's silence on new allegations about her consulting firm's financial dealings during her tenure as a regulator.

Hindenburg's statement comes after the Congress party raised fresh allegations about Buch's links to listed companies regulated by Sebi. The short-seller also said that Madhabi Puri Buch has remained silent on the accusations for weeks. In a post on X,

Hindenburg said, "New allegations have emerged that the private consulting entity, 99% owned by Sebi Chair Madhabi Buch, accepted payments from multiple listed companies regulated by Sebi during her time as Sebi Whole-Time Member." In a post on X, Hindenburg said, "New allegations have emerged that the private consulting entity, 99% owned by Sebi Chair Madhabi Buch, accepted payments from multiple listed companies regulated by Sebi during her time as Sebi Whole-Time

Member." Buch has maintained her complete silence for weeks on all of the emerging issues," Hindenburg added. A day ago, the Congress party claimed that Buch and her consulting firm Agora Private Limited received nearly Rs 2.95 crore between 2016 and 2024 from six companies, including Mahindra & Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Dr. Reddy's, and Pidilite. According to Congress, "Strangely, of the total Rs 2.95 crore, Rs 2.59 crore came from Mahindra & Mahindra Group alone, accounting for 88% of the revenue

Agora generated." Adding to the controversy, Congress also pointed out that Buch's husband, Dhaval Buch, received Rs 4.78 crore from Mahindra & Mahindra in a personal capacity, raising further questions about potential conflicts of interest. Mahindra Group and Dr Reddy's issued separate statements to the stock exchanges, rejecting the allegations raised by the Congress. However, Madhabi Puri Buch has not issued any fresh statement on the allegations levelled by Congress.

RaaS: Rise of Ransomware-as-a-Service in Cybercrime

Over the years, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) ó a business practice where software solutions providers offer cloud-based sophisticated solutions to their clients ó has transformed the industry. However, a similar and fast emerging trend is now slowly leaving its footprints in the dark world of organised cybercrime.

Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) has turned what was once the domain of skilled hackers into a marketplace where anyone can rent powerful ransomware tools. Recent trends show that cybercriminals have been adopting the same model, where anyone with malicious intent can purchase ransomware tools, eliminating the need for technical expertise or resources to develop malware. Ransomware can be termed as the digital kidnapper of digital resources. In other words, it is basically a type of malicious software designed to block access to a computer system or data until a ransom is paid. It works by encrypting files on the victim's system, rendering them unusable unless the decryption key is provided. The attacker typically demands a monetary payment, often in cryptocurrency, in exchange for the key to restore access. If victims fail to pay within a certain time, the attackers may threaten to delete the data or expose it publicly.

As per a report by UK based threat intelligence firm Searchlight Cyber, the number of ransomware groups has increased by more than 50 percent in the first half of 2024 as compared to the previous year.

Providing custom malware as a service mostly operates on the dark web, where expert developers provide ransomware tools and services to lesser capable threat actors known as affiliates. They usually put ads and promotional posts on dark web forums

to hire affiliates and sell the code.

Once the affiliate purchases or joins a program, they are provided with custom ransomware executables and the necessary infrastructure, such as command-and-control servers, payment portals, and data leak sites. Tasked with the responsibility of deploying the malware to a business or government victim's systems, these affiliates earn money from the RaaS operator in the form of commission once the ransom is paid.

Earlier this year, a well-known RaaS group named BlackCat (also known as ALPHV) carried out an attack on a big U.S. healthcare IT company Change Healthcare which serves 1 in every 3 American patients.

On 1st March 2024 the company reportedly paid a ransom of \$22 Million in the form of Bitcoins to prevent the leak of 6TB of stolen data affecting over 110 millions Americans. However, despite the payment, the hackers allegedly pulled an exit scam, pocketing the money without sharing it with the affiliate who conducted the attack. A new ransomware group called RansomHub then emerged, claiming to have acquired the stolen data and demanding additional payment from Change Healthcare to prevent further leaks. According to Group-IB, a US-based intelligence firm, the RaaS ecosystem primarily involves brokers who sell compromised access to corporate networks by exploiting weak credentials and unpatched systems. This access is then sold to RaaS affiliates, who play a crucial role in deploying the ransomware.

Affiliates start by gaining enterprise access, deleting backups to prevent recovery, and exfiltrating data for use in double extortion tactics. Operators manage the technical aspects of the operation,

including building unique ransomware executables, overseeing the infrastructure, and handling data leak sites used in double extortion attacks ñ where the victims data is not only encrypted but also stolen.

This trend in RaaS was first seen in ransomware groups like Maze and Snatch. Tactics like this puts extra pressure on victims with 83% of ransomware cases now involving data exfiltration.

RansomHub, an emerging RaaS group from mid-february 2024, has

already been involved in approximately 320 attacks worldwide. The group also recently claimed to have the access of 140Gb of data of IIIT-Delhi. Also, the most active RaaS group, LockBit carried out 1079 successful attacks in 2023 alone, the majority of attacks targeting U.S. companies. These groups continue to recruit affiliates on Russian dark web forums like RAMP, which currently hosts 60% of all new RaaS programs, states the report from Group-IB, a US-based intelligence firm.

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Who is Ilhan Omar, US Congresswoman whose meeting with Rahul Gandhi sparked row

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's meeting with Ilhan Omar, a US House of Representatives member, has stirred a row with the BJP condemning it over her alleged anti-India stance.

The BJP leaders cited Omar's comments on the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, her views on Kashmir, and her visit to Pakistan, among other actions, to criticise the Congress leader's meeting.

WHO IS ILHAN OMAR?

Ilhan Omar represents Minnesota's 5th Congressional District in the US House of Representatives, which includes Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs.

A policy analyst, organiser, public speaker and advocate, Omar was sworn into office in January 2019, making her the first African refugee to become a Member of Congress and the first woman of colour to represent Minnesota. She was one of the first two Muslim-American

women elected to Congress.

Born in Somalia, Omar and her family fled the country's civil war when she was eight. The family spent four years in a refugee camp in Kenya before coming to the United States in 1990s. In 1997, she moved to Minneapolis with her family. Before entering politics and running for office, she worked as a community educator at the University of Minnesota, was a Policy Fellow at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs and served as a Senior Policy Aide for the Minneapolis City Council.

Omar is the Vice-Ranking Member of the House Budget Committee. She also serves on the House Education and Workforce Committee, where she is a member of the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections and Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labour, Pensions (HELP).

She is the Deputy Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and Vice-Chair of the Medicare For All Caucus.

ILHAN OMAR'S 'ANTI-INDIA' STAND

In September 2023, Omar said the US must fully support the Canadian

investigation into India's alleged role in the assassination of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

She also introduced a resolution to condemn alleged human rights violations and violations of international religious freedom in India, including those targeting Muslims and other religious minorities.

In June 2023, Omar boycotted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the US Congress.

She introduced a resolution in June 2022 calling on the US Secretary of State to designate India as a country of particular concern for alleged violations of religious freedom. In April 2022, she visited Pakistan, met with top Pakistani leaders, including former Prime Minister Imran Khan, and travelled to Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK). India condemned the US Congresswoman's visit to POK. In 2019, she also criticised the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, calling it a part of the iHindu nationalism project of PM Modi. She has also been openly critical of the decision to abrogate Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

Why Indians of all ages are logging out of the rat race to take up slow living

When Pooja Vegesna, a psychologist, moved to her grandparents' house in the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh, she had only one motive: to appreciate the way her grandparents live and document her journey on her social media platforms. Her grandparents, who lived a simple life, away from the bustling and fast-paced metro cities, are living a 'slow life' and she is also trying to live one which includes cooking from scratch, connecting with nature and becoming spiritual.

Pooja is not alone. Recently, many Indians across all generations-Gen Z, millennials, boomers, or Gen X, like Pooja, are changing the way they perceive life. This shift is evident in various trends in social media, fashion, relationships or travel.

The subtle art of doing nothing

Hustling. 70 hours a week. 75 hard. If there is a group of Indians that appreciate working 18 hours a day, there is another group of people who are ditching the regular 9 to 5 or their fast-paced life to move into a slow, sustainable life. The latter is growing really fast, as people are getting tired of the former really quickly.

Sridhar Vembu, an Indian billionaire businessman and founder of Zoho, a tech company, is one well-known example.

In 2019, he moved to a village in the Tenkasi district of Tamil Nadu, leaving behind his high-profile job in the US. He chose a factory in Mathalamparai village as his office, rather than a metropolitan city. According to NBT, by 2022, Zoho Corporation's revenue had surpassed INR 8,300 crores, and Sridhar enjoys the calmness of village life while running a successful tech company.

"There has been a significant change in the choice of lifestyle people desire. Moving away from a fast-paced and high-intensity stress life, people are shifting towards slow living," says Aashmeen Munjaal, an ontologist, mental health & relationship expert.

According to Aashmeen, the main reason for this shift is the rising level of

pressure in modern life from constant connectivity, pursuit of success, and demanding work schedules, which has resulted in increasing stress and anxiety levels. And we all know what excess stress can do to our bodies. Don't we?

The culture also changed when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and many people started working from home, which made them realise the benefits of remote work rather than their regular 9 to 5. After the pandemic, a lot of these people became digital nomads, working from home while travelling and living a slow life.

Slow media

Siddhashrama is a mystical and secret land in the Himalayas, believed by Hindus to be the resting place for yogis, where they practice 'slow living'. However, the concept of slow living in the Himalayas isn't exclusive to Hindus; several places in the region hold religious significance for Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Muslims as well. Recently, slow living as a lifestyle has piqued the interest of many people.

Today, social media is filled with trends that reflect the principles of slow living. Terms like "lazy girl jobs" (jobs that require minimal effort), "quiet quitting" (doing the bare minimum at work without investing extra time or energy), and "anti-girl boss" have gained traction, promoting a slower pace of life in contrast to the fast-paced work culture.

Cherry Sin, an Indian influencer, has quickly risen to fame on social media for his slow living. With just 581 posts on Instagram, he has amassed over 3.5 million followers across generations.

His content? Living a simple life in the mountains, where he focuses on working out and maintaining a calm life. His comment section is filled with admirers, many remarking that he is living every guy's dream. Slow travel, which encourages savouring each moment and making travel purposeful and profound, is gaining popularity not only abroad but also in India.

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Laura Loomer, far-right provocateur who spread 9/11 conspiracy theory, influencing Trump as he searches for a message

As Donald Trump mingled and posed for pictures with firefighters on Wednesday ñ one of several stops to observe the anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States ñ a small entourage of the former president's inner circle looked on from outside Engine Company 4 Ladder Company 15 in New York City. The group included the two most powerful individuals in Trump's orbit, his co-campaign managers Chris LaCivita and Susie Wiles. Standing near them was another figure whose sway with the Republican nominee also cannot be discounted: the far-right provocateur Laura Loomer.

Of all the days to count Loomer as a travel companion, September 11 was notable. Last year, she posted a video on social media claiming that the attack on the World Trade Center towers was an "inside job," an illogical but pervasive conspiracy theory that continues to haunt the families of victims and survivors. Her anti-Muslim social media posts eventually earned her a ban from Twitter that lasted until billionaire Elon Musk bought the website, now known as X, and restored her account. Asked why Loomer joined Trump for his Patriot Day travels in New York and then Pennsylvania, a campaign official declined to directly address her presence and instead focused on the bipartisan appearance with Vice President Kamala Harris and President Joe Biden.

"The day wasn't about anyone other than the souls who are no longer with us, their families, and the heroes who courageously stepped up to save their fellow Americans on that fateful day," the official said. Loomer, in a phone interview with CNN, said, "I don't understand what the

issue is about me going to a 9/11 memorial. In fact, the people who greeted President Trump at the memorial, were very happy to see me, and they said, 'Thank you for coming.'"

She added, "I've never denied the fact that Islamic terrorists carried out the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In fact, the media calls me anti Muslim precisely for the reason that I spend so much time focusing on talking about the threats of Islamic terrorism in America."

Loomer's proximity on Wednesday was illustrative of her influence with Trump of late. She knows his personal number and has utilized it, one source familiar with the relationship told CNN. (Another source insisted she is respectful of his team and goes through the regular channels when she's trying to reach him.) She's been on a handful of trips with him, appears often at events where he is speaking and there have been times her bombastic social media posts have appeared to preview Trump's next line of attack.

The former president has long embraced conspiracy theories and has regularly aligned himself with those who peddle in them, especially if they support him. He entered the political arena as one of the leading purveyors of myths about President Barack Obama's birthplace. And after he lost the 2020 election, Trump surrounded himself with people who claimed with questionable or debunked evidence they could prove he won.

But several people close to the former president say Loomer has contributed to some of the unseemly conspiracy theories Trump has elevated since Harris replaced Biden on the ticket, a change that has left the GOP nominee increasingly unsettled by the political landscape he

now faces.

"He wasn't the one who came up with that talking point," an adviser said when Trump questioned Harris' ethnicity at an especially tense interview at the National Association of Black Journalists convention. The adviser pointed the finger at Loomer, who had baselessly accused Harris on X of hiding her Black heritage leading up to Trump's appearance. Others pushed back on the notion she was behind Trump's remarks.

"I don't think it's racist to mock the fact that Kamala Harris panders to every single group of people who she encounters in an effort to try to convince them that she shares their same identity," Loomer told CNN. She did not weigh in on whether she influenced Trump's remarks. When Trump landed in Philadelphia on Tuesday before his debate against Harris, Loomer was among the close allies seen debarking his private plane. Some saw it as no coincidence that hours later, an erratic Trump exclaimed from the debate stage that immigrants were "eating the pets" of Ohioans, referencing a fast-escalating rumor about Haitian migrants circulated this week by the online right, including Loomer. Trump's own running mate, Sen. JD Vance, had spread that false claim before acknowledging on Tuesday that it may not be true.

Trump surprised some of his advisers when he brought the rumors to the debate stage Tuesday night, sources familiar with the situation told CNN.

But while some Trump allies admitted post-debate that the back-and-forth wasn't helpful, Trump advisers doubled down, claiming the storyline aids their effort to put the spotlight on migrant crime in the US.

Two days before the debate, Loomer said that if Harris, who is half Indian, wins, "the White House will smell like curry & White House speeches will be facilitated via a call center."

It was a bridge too far even for Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a notorious firebrand herself known to promote conspiracy theories, who wrote on social media that Loomer's post was "appalling and extremely racist."

She added: "It does not represent who we are as Republicans or MAGA." Loomer told CNN of the post: "It's interesting how the media wants to, once again, falsely accuse me of being a racist. This is a woman who is on video cooking Indian food with Indian celebrities talking about how she likes cooking with curry." Trump's embrace of Loomer has baffled many conservatives who believe her antics are harmful to the mission of getting the Republican elected. Steve Deace, a conservative podcast host, told CNN that Loomer "offers absolutely nothing to Donald Trump other than a lot of collateral damage on social media that provokes people to not want to vote for him who should be." "She is the manifestation of the point of diminishing returns," he added. Loomer has made a career out of courting controversy. Rising out of the radical right-wing online ecosystem, she has regularly tested the willingness of internet companies to enforce their terms of service. She once described herself as a "proud Islamophobe" and tweeted in 2018 that "someone needs to create a non Islamic form of Uber or Lyft because I never want to support another Islamic immigrant driver." She was eventually banned from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

New York City's police commissioner resigns as investigations swirl around mayor's inner circle

New York Police Department Commissioner Edward Caban has resigned, he said Thursday in a statement, marking the first high-profile departure from Mayor Eric Adams' administration since the start of four separate federal investigations into Adams' office and the NYPD. Adams appointed a former FBI official as interim commissioner. Caban's departure comes days after it was first reported investigators with the US attorney's office for New York's Southern District had seized his electronic devices and phones.

The investigation involves Caban's brother and enforcement around nightclubs in New York City, a source familiar with the investigation told CNN. Details of the probe remain unclear.

Several other members of the mayor's staff are being investigated by the US attorneys in the Eastern and Southern Districts in New York.

In a statement Thursday, Caban said: "The news around recent developments has created a distraction for our department, and I am unwilling to let my attention be on anything other than our important work, or the safety of the men and women of the NYPD. I hold immense respect and gratitude for the brave officers who serve this department, and the NYPD deserves someone who can solely

focus on protecting and serving New York City, which is why ñ for the good of this city and this department ñ I have made the difficult decision to resign as Police Commissioner."

Caban's lawyers said in a statement Thursday they've been informed he is not a target of any investigation.

"Commissioner Caban is an accomplished public servant who has dedicated his life to the safety and security of the people of this great city and maintains unwavering respect for the women and men of the New York City Police Department. We have been informed by the government that he is not a target of any investigation being conducted by the Southern District of New York, and he expects to cooperate fully with the government," Russell Capone and Rebekah Donaleski wrote in a statement.

Caban's expected departure marks a major shakeup in the highest ranks of the Adams administration.

Caban, the son of Puerto Rican parents, served as commissioner for 13 months, making history as the NYPD's first Latino commissioner. He has been with the NYPD for 32 years.

Caban is not the only police commissioner to serve

for a short term under Adams: Keechant Sewell resigned after 18 months amid a power struggle over her control of the department and City Hall. Adams appointed Tom Donlon, a former FBI official, as interim NYPD commissioner after addressing Caban's resignation.

"A short time ago, I accepted the resignation of the NYPD Commissioner Edward Caban," Adams said at a news conference Thursday, adding it was the best decision at this time.

"I respect his decision and I wish him well," Adams said.

Donlon is a former intelligence official who served as New York's director of the Office of Homeland Security, ran the FBI's National Threat Center and the FBI and NYPD joint terrorist task force. "I am honored and humbled to be named interim-Commissioner of the New York City Police Department, the greatest law enforcement agency in the world," Donlon said in a statement Thursday. "My goals are clear: continue the historic progress decreasing crime and removing illegal guns from our communities, uphold the highest standards of integrity and transparency, and support our dedicated officers who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe," Donlon said.

China's only empress rose from harem to throne, used Buddhism to capture power



Transformed the World (Bloomsbury).

ORIGIN OF WU ZETIAN: 'FLOWER GIRL' REACHES ROYAL HAREM

Wu Zetian's father, Wu Shiyue, was a supporter of the Tang dynasty and gained their favour in turn. When the Tang Empire was founded, his father was rewarded by the founder of the Tang dynasty, Li Yuan. Wu Shiyue became the President of the Board of Works, a high official post for several years. He also became the Duke of Ying, a small kingdom.

Wu Shiyue's second wife, Lady Yang, had three daughters. Wu Zetian was the second of them and was born in 624 AD. Wu Zetian's father died when she was 10.

Wu's famed beauty made her popular in the Tang court. She was even called the 'flower girl'. She was welcomed into the imperial harem due to her father's loyalty and her beauty, but was a fifth-grade concubine in the harem. Her position was called 'Cairen' or talent. Wu Zetian's influence increased when she came in contact with the Crown Prince, Gaozong. That was when the emperor's health was failing. This was also the time when emperor Taizong became close to a Buddhist monk, Xuanzang, who had returned from India. The emperor discussed philosophy and religion at length with Xuanzang throughout the day.

†(News Agency)- Wu Zetian rose from the bottom of the hierarchy to become the only empress in China's history. Buddhism, a religion born in India, and Nalanda-trained scholars played an important role as Wu Zetian cleverly broke from the royal harem to capture and consolidate power. In her tale, unknown to the world, is also the story of how Buddhism became the court religion of China.

In the list of mighty queens, the names of Catherine the Great and Queen Elizabeth I always come up. Wu Zetian's name should also make it to this list. She was ambitious and outsmarted everyone. She toppled the ruling Tang dynasty, used Buddhism to legitimise her power, and ousted and killed anyone who she saw as a threat. The chronicles of history, how-

ever, have not been kind to her. They remember Wu Zetian as a cruel ruler who killed without mercy or pity. But Wu's steely side has to be seen in the context of her fight against the Tang dynasty. She propagated Mahayana Buddhism, instead of Confucianism, which was prevalent in China then. Confucianism considered women at a lower status than men. Records that survived the purge after Wu Zetian's demise reveal how history was re-written against her death, when her dynasty collapsed and Confucianism returned to power.

The fascinating story of Wu Zetian and how ancient India shaped world history has been documented by William Dalrymple in his recently-released book, The Golden Road: How Ancient India

35 dead as Asia's 'most powerful' Typhoon Yagi triggers landslides in Vietnam



†(News Agency)- Typhoon Yagi, Asia's most powerful storm this year, left dozens dead in northern Vietnam and widespread damage as it churned westwards, preliminary government estimates showed on Monday, while the weather agency warned of more floods and landslides. Thirty-five people have died and 24 are missing, mostly because of landslides and floods triggered by the typhoon, Vietnam's disaster management agency said. The typhoon made landfall on Saturday on Vietnam's northeastern coast, home to large manufacturing operations of domestic and foreign companies, and was downgraded to a tropical depression on Sunday by the meteorological agency. It cut power to millions of households and

companies, flooded highways, disrupted telecommunications networks, downed a medium-sized bridge and thousands of trees and brought to a halt economic activity in many industrial hubs. Managers and workers at industrial parks and factories in Haiphong, a coastal city of two million, said on Monday they had no electricity and were trying to salvage equipment from rain in plants whose metal sheets roofing had been blown away.

"Everyone is scrambling to make sites safe and stocks dry," said Bruno Jaspaert, head of DEEP C industrial zones, which host plants from more than 150 investors in Haiphong and the neighbouring province of Quang Ninh.

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14 killed in attack in Afghanistan, Islamic State claims responsibility

The Taliban administration condemned the attack, expressing sorrow for the victims and committing to finding and punishing those responsible.

†(News Agency)- Fourteen people were killed and six others injured in an attack by unknown armed individuals in central Afghanistan, the Taliban administration said on Friday.

The Islamic State terrorist group claimed responsibility for Thursday's attack in Daykundi province but has not provided evidence. Most people in that area are Shia Muslims and it was considered one of the safest provinces. "While we share our deep sorrow with the innocent vic-



tims of the incident, we are also making serious efforts to search for the corrupt perpetrators of this act and bring them to justice," Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement. Islamic State-Khorasan, a local affiliate of the Middle East-based Islamic State, has waged an insurgency against the Taliban, whom they see as their enemies. Taliban authorities say they have mostly crushed the group, even as it continues to carry out attacks in Afghanistan.

U.S. imposes sanctions on Chinese suppliers to Pakistan's ballistic missile program

Washington similarly targeted three China-based companies with sanctions in October 2023 for supplying missile-applicable items to Pakistan



†(News Agency)- The U.S. State Department on Thursday (September 12, 2024) imposed sanctions on a Chinese re-

search institute and several companies it said have been

involved in supplying Pakistan's ballistic missile program. Washington similarly targeted three China-based companies with sanctions in October 2023 for supplying missile-applicable items to Pakistan. Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement that the Beijing Research Institute of Automation for Machine Building Industry had worked with Pakistan to procure equipment for testing rocket motors for the Shaheen-3 and Ababeel systems and potentially for larger systems. The sanctions also targeted China-based firms Hubei Huachangda Intelligent Equipment Co, Universal Enterprise, and Xi'an Longde Technology Development Co, alongside Pakistan-based Innovative Equipment and a Chinese na-

tional, for knowingly transferring equipment under missile technology restrictions, Mr. Miller said.

"As today's actions demonstrate, the United States will continue to act against proliferation and associated procurement activities of concern, wherever they occur," Mr. Miller said. Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for China's embassy in Washington, said, "China firmly opposes unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction that have no basis in international law or authorization of the UN Security Council." China will "firmly protect" Chinese companies' and individuals' rights and interests, Ms. Liu said. Pakistan's embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Osama Bin Laden's Son Hamza Alive, Leading Al Qaeda In Afghanistan: Report

The report warned that "under his command, Al Qaeda is regrouping and preparing for future attacks on Western targets".

†(News Agency)- Hamza bin Laden, the son of Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, is alive and leading the terror outfit, according to intelligence reports cited by The Mirror. Hamza is secretly running Al Qaeda from Afghanistan along with his brother, Abdullah bin Laden, the publication says in an explosive report. The National Mobilisation Front (NMF), an anti-Taliban military alliance, also carried a report detailing the operations of Hamza and his associates. The outlet said that the man dubbed the 'crown prince of terror' is hiding in northern Afghanistan under the constant protection of 450 snipers.

The NMF has warned that since the 2021 fall of Kabul, Afghanistan has become a "training centre for various terror groups". "Hamza bin Laden has been moved to Dara Abdullah Khel district (in Panjshir),



where 450 Arabs and Pakistanis are protecting him," it said, warning that "under his command, Al Qaeda is regrouping and preparing for future attacks on Western targets".



The NMF report contradicted claims that Hamza was killed in a 2019 US airstrike. Hamza is believed to have worked closely with Ayman al-Zawahiri, who took over the affairs of Al Qaeda after Osama's kill-

ing. The news about Hamza's killing was released after his audio and video messages surfaced calling for attacks on the US and other countries.

However, the place and date of death was unclear, per an old BBC report. The Pentagon too did not comment on the issue. Hamza bin Laden was officially designated by the US as a global terrorist and was believed to have been under house arrest in Iran. Listen to the latest songs, only on JioSaavn.com

He is thought to have been born in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, before spending years with his mother in Iran.

Hamza's father Osama bin Laden was killed by US Special Forces in 2011, in a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. He had approved the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, in which nearly 3,000 people were killed.

Elon Musk's low blow to Taylor Swift: I'll give you a child, guard your cats

Elon Musk's remark came shortly after pop star Taylor Swift said she would be voting for Kamala Harris in the US presidential election in November following the latter's debate with Donald Trump.

†(News Agency)- Tesla CEO Elon Musk took a pot shot at pop star Taylor Swift for saying that she would vote for Democratic nominee Kamala Harris in the US presidential election in November. The tech billionaire said that "I will give you a child and guard your cats with my life", a dig at the singer signing off her endorsement post with, "Taylor Swift, Childless Cat Lady". The pop star's endorsement of Harris came moments after the US Vice President faced off with her Republican rival Donald Trump in their first-ever presidential debate on Tuesday night. In a post on Instagram, the singer told her 283 million followers that she was going to vote for Harris and her running mate Tim Walz in November's election. She said Harris "fights for the rights and causes. I believe (we) need a warrior to



champion them". "I think she is a steady-handed, gifted leader and I believe we can accomplish so much more in this country if we are led by calm and not chaos". The pop icon also posted a pic-



ture of herself carrying a cat and signed off the post with "Taylor Swift, Childless Cat Lady". This was an apparent dig at the "childless cat ladies" remark made by JD Vance, Trump's running mate,

against Harris. This is not the first time that the Tesla CEO has made sexist remarks. Late last year, Musk mocked socialite and entrepreneur Paris Hilton after she pulled off iBe an Icon kitchenware ads from X following the tech billionaire's backing of a post that contained anti-Semitic content. "The ad campaign wasn't super convincing tbh. I don't think Paris cooks a lot," he tweeted. Other major companies, including Disney, IBM, Paramount, and NBCUniversal, also followed suit and pulled off their ads from the microblogging site. Musk did apologise for insensitive content on X, but also asked advertisers to "go f**k yourself". Earlier this month, he promoted a post on X that claimed only high-status males should be decision makers.

kamala Harris vs Donald Trump: Who won presidential debate? What US media said

The first presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump was held on Tuesday, with Harris widely seen as the winner by US media outlets. Media analysis highlights Harris's strong performance, with many outlets noting that she effectively baited Trump and presented a clear and crisp message, while Trump appeared angry and defensive.

†(News Agency)- For 90 minutes on Tuesday night, ABC News hosted the first presidential debate between Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, 59, and her rival, former Republican President Donald Trump, 78. The debate featured sharp exchanges on key issues such as immigration, abortion rights, and foreign policy. Both candidates aimed to sway voters ahead of the upcoming election on November 5. Following the debate, US media outlets quickly began analysing the event, with many favouring Harris. Her composed and confident performance stood in contrast to her Republican rival, Trump. This was not Trump's first debate, as he had previously faced off against incumbent President Joe Biden. In that debate, Biden's performance was criticised, with US media largely declaring Trump the winner. However, the dynamic has shifted. In this second presidential debate for Trump, and his first with Kamala Harris, he appeared more defensive.



ing, "Kamala Harris baited Donald Trump for nearly all of the 1 hour and 45 minutes of their first and potentially only debate on Tuesday night and Trump took every bit of it."

The Washington Post analysed the debate between Harris and Trump, describing it as "a sharp, fiery case against Republican nominee Donald Trump during a freewheeling debate on Tuesday". They added that "Trump often strayed from the facts, embracing debunked conspiracy theories about immigration and the 2020 election."

The New York Times emphasised that Harris delivered "a crisp and clear message", while Trump appeared "angry and defensive".

Media discussions emphasise the importance of this debate in shaping voter opinions and impacting the 2024 election narrative.

Politico clearly declared Kamala Harris as the winner of the first presidential debate, stating, "Harris won the debate and it wasn't close." The outlet noted, "The vice president's performance against Donald Trump, in which she repeatedly baited him and knocked him off balance."

CNN echoed similar sentiments, say-



Fox News offered a more mixed analysis of the debate, stating, "It's pretty clear to me that on Tuesday night, Vice President Kamala Harris won what may be the only debate between herself and former President Trump."

However, they also noted that "Harris was aided by two ABC News moderators who felt the need to fact-check virtually everything the former president said."

The outlet further added that "Trump became more frustrated and divisive as the nearly two-hour debate continued."

MSNBC also declared Harris the winner, saying, "A win. Kamala Harris. Throughout Tuesday's debate, the vice president looked poised, qualified, and presidential."

They noted how "Harris repeatedly baited Trump, who appeared clearly frustrated."

USA Today commented that "Donald Trump knocked Joe Biden out of the 2024 presidential race in the last debate, but the Republican found himself repeatedly knocked on his heels Tuesday night when squaring off against his new Democratic opponent: Kamala Harris." The Wall Street Journal also highlighted how "Vice President Kamala Harris put former President Donald Trump on the defensive in their first presidential debate, provoking him over crowd sizes at his rallies and his felony convictions," signalling how the race has shifted with Harris's rise to the top of the ticket.

Ohio man slams Trump, Vance for politicising son's death in immigration row

An 11-year-old boy's death, caused when a minivan collided with a school bus in Ohio, has been used by Donald Trump to criticise immigration. The boy's father has slammed the use of his son's death for political gains.

†(News Agency)- During Tuesday's presidential debate, Donald Trump referenced Springfield, Ohio, as an example to criticise immigration and attack Kamala Harris. He alleged, "Look at Springfield, Ohio, or Aurora, Colorado. Immigrants are taking over towns, violently occupying buildings. These are the people Biden and Harris have allowed in, and they are destroying our country. They're dangerous and at the highest level of criminality." Meanwhile, in Springfield, just an hour before the debate, Nathan Clark, father of an 11-year-old boy named Aiden who died in a crash involving an immigrant's vehicle, spoke out against Trump and his ally JD Vance. Speaking at a Springfield City Commission meeting, Clark condemned the politicians for exploiting his son's death to spread hate. "This needs to stop now," he demanded. The 11-year-old had died after a car crossed the centreline on a two-lane road and struck a school bus carrying



dozens of children. Clark, who was thrown off the bus as it veered off the roadway and flipped, died on the spot. Hermanio Joseph, a 35-year-old Haitian national, was behind the wheels of the car that caused the accident. He was convicted of involuntary manslaughter in May and faces up to nine years in prison. The incident, which occurred over a year ago, became a flashpoint for growing

tensions about the influx of Haitian immigrants to the area. The debate intensified after JD Vance, a political ally of Trump, brought national attention to Springfield's demographic changes, labelling them as harmful consequences of Biden's border policies. These immigrants, who have legal status and work permits, have moved to Springfield to fill jobs in manufacturing

and other industries. However, Vance's remarks have stoked fears and amplified false narratives. The Trump campaign further escalated the issue by posting on social media about Aiden, featuring his picture alongside that of Hermanio Joseph, the Haitian immigrant involved in the crash. Vance went a step ahead and alleged that "a child was mur-

dered by a Haitian migrant." However, the politicisation of Aiden Clark's death is something that his parents never wanted and have now spoken against. During the meeting on Tuesday, Nathan Clark, standing beside his wife Danielle, expressed his heartbreak and frustration over the manipulation of his son's death. "I wish my son had been killed by a 60-year-old white man," he said, emphasizing that the family would have been spared from the hate-filled rhetoric. "My son was not murdered," he clarified. "He was accidentally killed by an immigrant from Haiti." Clark criticised four politicians, including Trump and Vance, describing them as morally bankrupt for using his son's name to further their political agendas. He called on them to stop exploiting his son's death for political gain, saying, "They are not allowed, nor have they ever been allowed to mention Aiden Clark from Springfield, Ohio."

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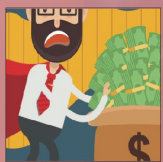
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 A festive poster for Diwali Mela. It features a central yellow Diya (oil lamp) with a flame, surrounded by decorative borders with floral and geometric patterns in blue, yellow, and orange. The text is in a mix of serif and script fonts.

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Kamala Harris confident, unscathed; Trump fails to deliver a knockout

An aggressive Kamala Harris managed to get under her rival Donald Trump's skin, hammering him over his criminal convictions, his views on abortion rights and the size of his rallies.

†(News Agency)- The second US presidential debate offered ample hints at how the race for the White House has changed in just two months as an aggressive Vice President Kamala Harris managed to get under her rival Donald Trump's skin, hammering him over his criminal convictions, his views on abortion rights and the size of his rallies.

Harris's debate performance is being seen by experts as a major win for Democrats after President Joe Biden dropped out following his miserable performance in June. Buoyed by her performance, Harris called for a second debate even as Trump remained non-committal. The debate lifted the spirits of the Democrats after a fumbling and shaky performance by Biden in June showed the party trailing behind the Republicans. However, on Tuesday night, the body language of the two leaders was a study in contrast. Harris was the first off the blocks as she walked to Trump's podium to extend her hand before the start of the debate. The Republican, taken aback by the sudden gesture, accepted the handshake. Interestingly, Trump and President Joe Biden did not shake hands when they met for their presidential debate two months ago. On several occasions during the debate, Harris was seen



looking directly at Trump while answering questions and countering him. She was also seen cracking a smile and shaking her head in disagreement whenever Trump made a baseless claim or resorted to personal attacks. At one point during the debate, Harris placed her hand on her chin when Trump referred to her as a Marxist. The Democratic presidential candidate also looked directly into the camera while speaking on core issues like the economy and abortion. It seemed as if Harris was speaking directly to the millions of voters tuning in. On the other hand, Trump, his usual

combative self, hardly looked at Harris in their first-ever face-to-face meeting. The former President became visibly agitated during an exchange on abortion and appeared to fumble when asked if he would veto a national abortion ban if elected as president. Harris also managed to get Trump irritated after she claimed that people left his rallies out of "exhaustion" and "boredom" as the former President brought up "fictional characters" like Hannibal Lecter. An irate Trump was seen ignoring the moderator's next question and mounted a defence of the attendance

'THIS WAS KAMALA HARRIS'S NIGHT'

Speaking on Trump's debate performance, former New Jersey Governor and ABC's political commentator Chris Christie said the former president was "unprepared".

"Whoever did the debate preparation for Donald Trump should be fired," Christie said and called the Republican's awkward remark about people eating pets "a huge fail".

"Trump better get to work, or he's going to lose this election," he further said. Fox News host and political analyst Brit Hume asserted that Kamala Harris got the better of the former President. "Make no mistake, Trump had a bad night. We heard so many of his old grievances. This was Kamala Harris' night," he said.

at his rallies. Trump also claimed that "no one" goes to Harris's rallies. The debate also saw ABC News' moderators fact-checking Donald Trump live on several occasions. While speaking on immigration, Trump made a bizarre claim that immigrants were eating pets in an Ohio town, forcing the moderator to tell him that there is no proof of that.

Haitian immigrants stealing, eating pets, says Trump. Where did this come from?

To bolster their anti-immigrant narrative, Republicans spread the myth that Haitians, who had illegally entered the US, were eating cats and dogs kept as pets. Trump repeated the claim in Tuesday night's debate. What is the origin of this claim that has gone viral now?

†(News Agency)- "They are eating the dogs -- the people that came in, they're eating the cats," said Donald Trump in the presidential debate about Haitians living in the US on September 10. This has been previously raised by Trump's running mate, JD Vance. Several reports have refuted this claim, but that hasn't stopped Trump and Vance from spreading the myth. But how did the claim start in the first place? "They're eating ó they're eating the pets of the people that live there and this is what's happening in our country, and it's a shame," Trump said during his presidential debate with Kamala Harris.

Many pictures are now circulating on X, where Trump is shown as the saviour of cats.

US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby called Vance's remarks "dangerous" and a "conspiracy theory... based on an element of racism", reports the BBC.

'THEY'RE EATING DOGS AND CATS', SAY DONALD TRUMP, JD VANCE

The ABC anchor David Muir, who moderated the presidential debate, said the city



officials had refuted these claims. Trump said he had seen people making these claims on television.

These claims garnered the attention of many when Vance discussed Haitian immigrants eating cats, ducks, geese on X. Vance's post has 10.7 million views.

Vance, who is the Republican senator from Ohio, said he had raised the issue of Haitian immigrants "causing chaos all over Springfield" earlier as well.

Both Senator Ted Cruz and Elon Musk, the owner of X, took to social media to

discuss these claims on September 9. Cruz, a Republican Senator from Texas, posted a meme on X with a picture where two cats are seen holding each other, with the text, "Please vote for Trump so Haitian immigrants don't eat us." But the city spokesperson of Springfield, a city in Ohio, told CBS News that no credible reports confirm the claim.

"People have contacted us to inquire, but we do not have any knowledge of this taking place," said Leann Castillo, executive director for the Clark County Park District.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CAT-AND DOG-EATING HAITIAN MYTH

But how did it start?

This might have started with a Springfield Facebook group's post which had gone viral, reports CBS News.

The post discussed how a person said a neighbour's daughter's friend could not find her cat, and it was found later hanging from a branch close to a Haitian neighbour's home, reported Springfield News-Sun.

The screenshots of the same have been circulating on the internet.

Other social media users have shared footage from another incident in which an Ohio woman was accused of killing and eating a cat in Canton, a city 170 miles away from Springfield.

These claims became even more popular after an AI-generated image of Trump holding a cat in each hand, running through a crowd of Black people. "The kittens of Springfield have only one hope," reads the caption. These attacks have to be seen in the context of an increasing number of immigrants in Springfield in the last few years.

After 155 years, the Campbell Soup company is changing its name



New York : No more soup for the Campbell's company.

The 155-year-old Campbell Soup Company plans to drop

Company. More consumers are reaching for snacks and ditching ready-to-serve soups, and the company has bought up other food lines to grab them.

In addition to its lineup of soups, Campbell now owns snack brands like Goldfish, Snyder's of Hanover, Cape Cod, Pepperidge Farm and others. Campbell also recently bought Sovos Brands, maker of popular Italian food brands like Rao's sauces. This subtle yet important change retains the company's iconic name

recognition, reputation and equity built over 155 years while better reflecting the full breadth of the company's portfolio, Campbell CEO Mark Clouse said Tuesday in a statement. The name change is subject to shareholder approval at the company's annual meeting in November. Although soup is an important part of Campbell's business, it's now a smaller portion of its sales. Last year, Campbell's snack sales grew 13%, while its soups grew 3%. Legacy food companies like Campbell are pivoting to gain a

larger share of the snack market, valued at more than \$200 billion by market research firm Circana.

Nearly half of Americans say they eat at least three snacks a day, according to Circana.

In August, Mars, the maker of M&M's, agreed to buy Kellanova, which owns Cheez-Its and Pringles, in a deal worth almost \$29 billion.

Snacking is a large, attractive, and durable category that continues to grow in importance with consumers, Kellanova said at the time.

Mahindra, Pidilite, Dr Reddy's refute conflict allegations involving Dhaval Buch

Mahindra & Mahindra, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, and Pidilite Industries on Tuesday said they had hired the services of Dhaval Buch for his expertise after the Congress accused his wife and Sebi Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch of conflict of interest.

The Congress on Tuesday claimed that Sebi Chairperson Buch had a 99 per cent stake in a firm when it provided consultancy services to the Mahindra and Mahindra Group and her husband received Rs 4.78 crore as income from the conglomerate while she was adjudicating cases of the same group.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh asked whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi was aware that Buch owns 99 per cent

of Agora Advisory Pvt Ltd and is receiving significant fees from listed entities.

The list of companies that availed consultancy service from Agora Advisory Pvt Ltd -- Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd, Dr. Reddy's, Pidilite, ICICI, Sembcorp and Visu Leasing and Finance, the Congress said.

In a regulatory filing, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd refuted allegations of conflict of interest on payments made to Dhaval Buch, describing the charges as "false and misleading in nature".

The company said Dhaval Buch joined Mahindra Group almost three years before Madhabi Buch was appointed the Sebi chairperson.

"Compensation has been specifically and only for Mr Buch's supply chain

expertise and management acumen, based on his global experience at Unilever," the company asserted.

Referring to the Congress' allegations on approvals by Sebi to the company, it said, "None of the five Sebi orders or approvals referenced in the allegations are relevant."

Three of the five approvals or orders of Sebi do not pertain to the company or any of its subsidiaries, it said.

Responding to the allegations, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories said it engaged Dhaval Buch of Agora Advisory Pvt Ltd for leadership coaching for a total remuneration of Rs 6.58 lakh for a limited period from October 2020 to April 2021.

"We routinely engage external coaches to enable significant role

transitions of our leaders. Mr. Dhaval Buch's work in India and globally for Unilever was well-suited to coach the identified leader in our Company, and the remuneration paid to Mr. Buch was in line with that of other coaches," Dr. Reddy's said.

The assignment started and ended well before Madhabi Buch's term as Sebi Chairperson, it said, adding, "any suggestion that the Company was treated differently by Sebi as a result of this would be baseless and malafide. The company has and continues to operate in compliance with all applicable laws".

Pidilite Industries, too, clarified that the company engages with multiple partners and consultants who are renowned professionals in their respective fields.

Starbucks' new CEO wants to make Starbucks a coffee shop again

Starbucks has been on the decline, with shrinking sales as it moved from a traditional sit-down coffee shop into one where people place orders on their phones and grab a drink from the counter. Its new CEO has a plan to fix it all. And it starts with comfortable chairs. Brian Niccol, on his second day as Starbucks' chief, said in a letter to employees and customers that he wants to return Starbucks to its roots as a community coffeehouse with comfortable seats, design and a clear distinction between to-go and for-here service.

There is a shared sense that we have drifted from our core, he said Tuesday. We're committed to elevating the in-store experience by ensuring our spaces reflect the sights, smells and sounds that define Starbucks. Niccol is considered the restaurant industry's Mr. Fix-It, having engineered turnarounds



at Chipotle and Taco Bell. He will be Starbucks' fourth CEO in two years, taking the helm amid a slump in Starbucks' business and pressure from employees and investors. Starbucks' sales have fallen for two straight quarters. Some customers have expressed frustration with high prices, slow

pickup orders on Starbucks' app and lackluster food options. The company, historically considered a progressive employer, has also seen a wave of union organizing at stores stemming from frustration with working conditions, pay and benefits. Starbucks is transitioning from a

primarily brick-and-mortar company to an online-driven business. Mobile app and drive-thru orders make up more than 70% of Starbucks' sales at its approximately 9,500 company-operated stores in the United States.

He said in the letter that in

recent weeks has been visiting stores and talking to employees and customers. He acknowledged in his letter that, in some stores, especially the United States, they can feel transactional, menus can feel overwhelming, product is inconsistent, the wait too long or the handoff too hectic.

He said Starbucks will focus on empowering baristas, ensuring they have tools and time to craft great drinks. Some employees have said mobile orders can pile up and overwhelm stores, taxing workers.

Niccol, who lives in Newport Beach, California, has garnered scrutiny for not permanently relocating to Starbucks' Seattle offices and using a corporate jet to commute back and forth.

According to the company, Niccol will spend time in stores, at headquarters in Seattle and with Starbucks employees around the world.

How to keep your cabin baggage safe during a flight

With the rise in in-flight thefts, are you concerned about someone sneaking your belongings out of your cabin baggage? By taking a few precautions, you can ensure your luggage stays secure.

Remember that train heist scene from the 1998 movie 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan', where Amitabh Bachchan and Govinda plan a whole gimmick to fool their fellow passengers and sweep away their luggage? Or more recently, in the movie 'Kill', where Raghav Juyal arranges an elaborate train theft with his gang?

We've always been told to take extra care of our luggage when travelling by train. But can you imagine having to do the same on a flight, not just domestically but internationally as well?

While we used to worry mainly about how our checked bags were handled (or thrown) by the airline crew, now there are growing concerns about cabin baggage as well. Imagine unpacking your luggage after a long flight, only to discover that your valuables are missing.

The curious case of in-flight thefts on social media is full of stories about valuable items being stolen from travellers' cabin bags. On X (formerly Twitter), a user shared how her valuables, including bags and jewellery, were stolen on an Emirates flight. Another user talked about how her scarf was stolen off her lap while she was asleep on a flight.

Several reports also detail incidents of in-flight theft. Earlier this year, a man was arrested for stealing valuables from co-passengers on over 200 flights in just over a year.

Another report states that jewellery worth lakhs went missing from the check-in bag of a Bengaluru-based couple. One more report mentions how a passenger's handbag containing a laptop was stolen from the flight's overhead luggage compartment.

Sharing his experience with India Today, Neeraj Mishra (name changed on request), a 45-year-old working professional from Pune, describes how an in-flight theft incident left him stunned.

"I am a frequent traveller, and because of this, I used to be a little casual about my cabin baggage, thinking no one would steal it. But a couple of months ago, on my flight from Dubai to New York, when I came out of the restroom, I saw a lady wander-



ing around my seat. Upon closer inspection, I noticed she was fiddling with my laptop bag. When I pointed this out from a distance, one of the crew members noticed she had a couple of credit cards and a smartwatch in her hand, items that all belonged to me," he says.

Blame the crowd

Louis D'Souza, director at Tamarind Global (a company specialising in bespoke travel solutions), suggests that the increasing number of passengers on international flights might be contributing to these incidents.

"Overhead cabin space is usually limited, so travellers often store their cabin luggage away from

their seats, making it harder to keep an eye on valuables. Long-haul international flights mean passengers may fall asleep and get distracted, providing a chance for thefts to go unnoticed.

Organised crime groups seeking high-value items like electronics, credit cards, cash, and luxury goods are becoming more adept at their methods. Moreover, the anonymity and confined nature of a plane cabin make it easier for them to blend in, making their activities harder to detect," he shares.

From train loot to cabin thefts

"While theft has traditionally been a problem on trains due to prolonged journeys, crowded condi-

tions, and lack of en-route security, the shift to international flights is certainly alarming," D'Souza adds.

This trend shows how wrongdoers are adapting their tricks to new settings, especially with so many wealthy travellers on international flights.

D'Souza continues, "Air travel usually involves passengers carrying high-value items, making them prime targets. The ease with which cabin baggage can be accessed on flights, combined with reduced passenger attentiveness during long-haul flights, has created a gap in in-flight security. As international travel increases, theft numbers are likely to rise if

security measures to address these issues are not implemented soon."

Before you check-in, know how to keep your baggage safe

To avoid in-flight theft of overhead cabin luggage, be vigilant about your belongings throughout the flight. Always avoid keeping valuable items like phones, wallets, and passports in overhead compartments. Pack them in small bags and store them under the seat in front of you.

If you need to use the restroom during the flight, inform your co-traveller about your valuables, or if travelling solo, keep your valuables with you at all times.

Remember, there are no CCTV cameras in the cabin, so once you lose your belongings, it can be very challenging to identify the thief.

Another tip is to use lockable luggage. You don't need to carry an old-fashioned chain and lock (train travel must-have), but a small lock can help keep your baggage secure. If you're a frequent traveller, consider investing in anti-theft accessories such as a Bluetooth smart padlock, a portable safe, a hidden shoulder wallet, or a travel belt. Anti-theft backpacks are also becoming increasingly popular.

Going to the gym on vacation is tough. You can still work out though

Planning a vacation but worried that your much-awaited trip might disrupt your fitness routine and set back your progress? Here's how you can stay on track while fully enjoying your getaway.

Who doesn't love a vacation? The excitement of planning every little detail, the indulgence of room service, the luxury of spacious showers and bathtubs, and, of course, the irresistible buffet. For many, sampling the endless options at the buffet is the highlight of any holiday.

While we enjoy a refreshing swim, leisurely strolls, or even a one-time 'just to see' visit to the gym, our regular fitness routine often takes a back seat. Even the most dedicated fitness enthusiasts, who typically stick to rigorous workouts and healthy eating, might find themselves

more relaxed about their routine during a vacation.

After all, it's the perfect time to indulge a little and embrace the break from daily discipline.

But why does that happen?

Talking to India Today about why people easily give up on their fitness routine while vacationing, Dr Sarthak Dave, an Ahmedabad-based psy-

chiatrist, says that human beings naturally seek out activities that provide a sense of pleasure and reward. "Regular exercise triggers the release of chemicals like dopamine

and norepinephrine, along with a boost in self-esteem as they reach their fitness goals and achieve a desired body shape. However, maintaining this routine requires consistent effort," he adds. The doctor goes on to share that, in contrast, a vacation offers a similar feel-good sensation with significantly less effort. Dr Dave mentions, "When people experience this dopamine surge without the usual exertion, they may lose the motivation to continue exercising. This tendency to seek out the easiest path to pleasure suggests a lack of consistency and commitment to the goals they've set for their own well-being. It also suggests that they see fitness as a routine tied to daily life, as a task, and not as a core part of their well-being."



Can post-partum hair loss push you into depression?

Post-partum hair loss can intensify the physical and emotional roller coaster that new moms experience, potentially leading to mental health challenges like anxiety and depression.

During pregnancy, women go through many physical and emotional changes due to hormones and various other reasons, and those changes continue after childbirth. What often changes is the care and attention that women receive during pregnancy shift to the baby once they're born, leaving new mamas alone.

We all know how challenging it can be to deal with post-pregnancy weight, but there's another problem many women face: post-partum hair loss. Just as new moms are adjusting to their new bodies, hair loss can become an added struggle, affecting their mental health along the way. Even celebrities like Anushka Sharma have dealt with it. After having her daughter Vamika, the actor wrote on Instagram, "When post-baby hair fall makes you appreciate a good haircut even more." Kareena Kapoor Khan also suffered extensive hair loss after having her son Taimur Ali Khan.

If you're a new mom reading this and thinking, 'I know exactly how that feels', experts are here to guide you.

Understanding post-partum hair loss

"Post-partum hair fall is the shedding of hair that occurs after giving birth, which is called telogen effluvium. It is a temporary condition caused by hormonal changes after delivery," Dr Chinjitha T Davis, asso-

ciate consultant, dermatology, Manipal Hospital, Goa, tells Media

The doctor adds that this type of hair loss is usually sudden and occurs three months after childbirth.

The condition may seem alarming due to excessive shedding (more than 100-150 hair strands per day) compared to regular hair loss (100 strands per day), but it typically reverses within 6 to 12 months.

Meanwhile, Dr Sandhya Rani, senior consultant, obstetrics and gynaecology, Aster Women and Children Hospital, Bengaluru, explains that high levels of estrogen during pregnancy contribute to faster hair growth, resulting in thicker and denser hair.

After delivery, however, estrogen levels decrease, leading to the shedding of the extra hair retained during pregnancy. Uncontrolled thyroid issues may also add to this problem.

Post-partum hair fall is different from other hair loss like androgenetic alopecia or male-pattern baldness, which stem from genetic factors, hormonal imbalances, or ageing. "This type affects males and females differently, depending on their genes and other health factors," says Dr Rani. It's important to note that post-partum hair loss is temporary and resolves on its own as hormones stabilise after pregnancy.



However, regular hair loss types may require medical treatment or intervention to suppress or reverse the condition.

Further, experts share that about 40-80 per cent of women experience post-partum hair loss, but the severity can vary from person to person.

It is reversible

Dr Sravya C Tipirneni, consultant dermatologist, cosmetologist, and trichologist at Manipal Hospitals in Bangalore, mentions that over time, the hair follicles recover and new hair growth begins.

When estrogen levels reduce and return to their pre-pregnancy state, normal hair growth resumes. This temporary phase can impact mental health. For some new mothers, dealing with post-partum hair loss can lead to emotional distress. "After childbirth, many women face challenges with body image, fatigue, and adjusting to their

new role as a mother. Sudden and visible hair loss can add to this burden, potentially contributing to feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem, or even depression," says Dr Davis. Dr Nikhil Nayar, psychiatrist at Sharda Hospital, NCR, also mentions that post-partum hair loss increases a new mother's risk of depression and other mental health problems as it can exacerbate post-partum emotional difficulties by damaging a woman's confidence and shifting her perception of herself. "Physically and psychologically, new moms frequently experience pressure to bounce back to their pre-pregnancy selves as soon as possible. Hair loss can make women feel like they have less control over their bodies, adding to the stress of adjusting to motherhood," he adds.

How we eat is more important than what we eat

You could be eating the most nutritious and balanced diet, but you might be going all wrong with how you're eating it.

We've become meticulous about what's on our plate, and that's a positive shift. Being mindful of what we consume is the first step towards a healthier, more conscious lifestyle. But while we've nailed down the *what*, it's equally important to focus on the *how*.

If you're someone who stays on top of your fitness game, you've probably followed advice from celebrity nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar at some point, who is a strong advocate for mindful eating. She often emphasises the importance of putting your phone or any distractions away during meals. And it turns out, this simple act can do wonders for your health, weight loss being just one of the benefits.

The importance of mindful eating

Mindful eating isn't just about savouring each bite; it's about being fully present during meals. When we slow down and pay attention to what we're eating, we tend to make better food choices and experience greater satisfaction. Mindful-



ness helps us recognise hunger cues, preventing overeating and helps in better digestion.

Delhi-based lifestyle coach and yoga instructor Lakshika Vaid explains, "When we're aware of the eating process, we chew our food properly, focus on how much our body actually needs, and avoid overeating. We pay attention to the ingredients, assessing whether they are healthy for us. This mindfulness only

comes when we're completely focused on the meal and not distracted by our phone, laptop, or television. Ideally, it's even suggested that we shouldn't talk while eating; the entire focus should be on the meal."

Lakshika also notes that even if someone cannot afford a very balanced or healthy meal and is simply eating what they have been served or what they can make, the emotions with which they eat

play an important role.

The hunger you feel before a meal is important, especially today, when we tend to overconsume. We're often so full that we eat our next meal without actually feeling hungry. Even if you're not getting a balanced meal, it can be more deeply absorbed into your body if you genuinely feel the hunger. In contrast, eating a balanced meal when you're not hungry may not be properly digested, and your body may not absorb the nutrients and convert them into energy effectively," she adds.

Social connections at the table

For the longest time, the joint family was a defining feature of a typical Indian household. Families stayed together, with one kitchen serving the entire family, and meal time was a vibrant affair. As joint families gave way to nuclear ones, this practice gradually faded, to the point where now many families living under the same roof rarely see each other, even during meal times.

IIFA Festival 2024 Kicks Off With A Spectacular Showcase Of Stardom At The Official IIFA India Press Conference In Mumbai



(By our staff reporter): Under the esteemed patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance & Coexistence, the world's biggest celebration of Indian cinema—the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards—triumphantly returns for an unprecedented third showcase to Yas Island Abu Dhabi, the leading leisure and entertainment destination from September 27th-29th 2024 at the iconic Etihad Arena. The highly anticipated IIFA Festival is held in partnership with the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi, and Miral, the leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences in Abu Dhabi. The IIFA Festival 2024 features a set of iconic events:

Σ September 27: NEXA IIFA Utsavam Awards

Σ September 28: NEXA IIFA Awards co-presented by Sobha

Σ September 29: Sobha IIFA Rocks co-presented by NEXA

The IIFA 2024 kicked off with a dazzling showcase of stardom at its official India press conference, featuring the 'King Khan' Shah Rukh Khan and celebrated filmmaker Karan Johar. They will be hosting the highly anticipated NEXA IIFA Awards extravaganza co-presented by Sobha Realty on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, at the iconic Etihad Arena.

Joining the impressive line-up are the dynamic duo Siddhant Chaturvedi and Abhishek Banerjee, set to dazzle as hosts of IIFA Rocks 2024. Also in attendance at the press conference was Telugu and Hindi cinema's superstar Rana Daggubati.

Heralding an extraordinary journey over 24 glorious years, IIFA 2024 is set to bring together the finest in Indian cinema in a breath-taking display of brilliance across five iconic industries. The three-day extravaganza is all set to showcase the rich diversity of Indian cinema by bringing together the glamour of the IIFA Awards with

the vibrant South Indian cinema through the IIFA Utsavam Awards (Celebrating Cinema of the South). Set to take place from September 27th to 29th, 2024, at Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, the festivities will kick start on Friday, 27th September, with IIFA Utsavam Awards, a grand celebration of the four vibrant South Indian film industries. The excitement continues on Saturday, 28th September, with the prestigious IIFA Awards. The festival concludes on Sunday, 29th September, with the exclusive, IIFA Rocks. The 24th Edition of IIFA promises to be a magnificent celebration of cinematic excellence, featuring a stellar array of talent and industry luminaries, from the brilliance of Hindi cinema to the dynamic South Indian film industry, OTT platforms, global stars, international dignitaries, cinema enthusiasts and media houses from around the world, this will be the largest and most memorable IIFA Festival to date.

Mr Partho Banerjee, Senior Executive Officer Marketing & Sales, NEXA commented, "As the NEXA IIFA Awards return to Yas Island, Abu Dhabi this September, we reaffirm our commitment to our 8-year partnership. NEXA and IIFA symbolize the pursuit of innovation, challenging the status quo to create novel and inspiring experiences. By combining global design, sophisticated style, and innovative technology, NEXA crafts premium experiences that align perfectly with IIFA's mission to build lifetime experiences and celebrate excellence in Indian cinema globally."

Mr Ashish Parakh, Chief Sales Controller and Chief Marketing Officer at Sobha Realty, expressed his excitement about the partnership, stating, "IIFA has always been a shining example of cinematic excellence, bringing people together from across the globe—much like how Sobha Realty creates homes that resonate with the global Indian community. We're

thrilled to continue the journey with Sobha Realty IIFA Weekend and Rocks at Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, and are eager to be part of another remarkable event that showcases creativity and excellence on the world stage."

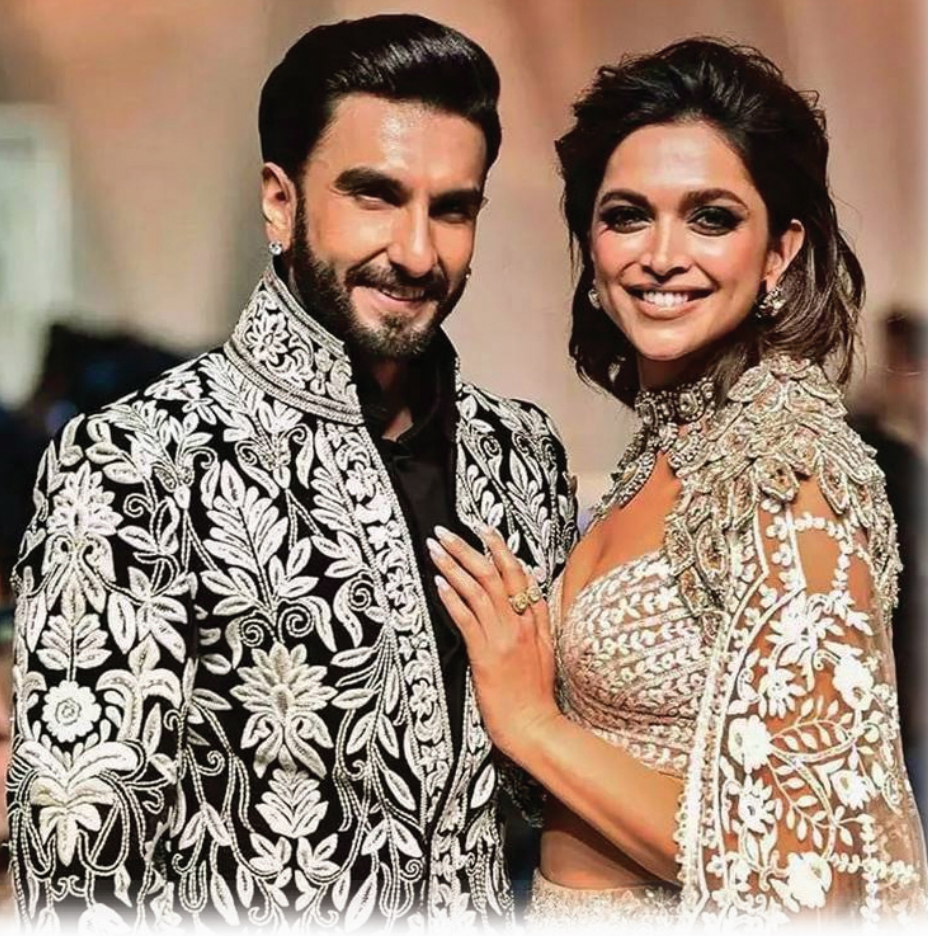
Mr Andre Timmins, Founder/Director, IIFA stated, "As we approach IIFA's Silver Jubilee in 2025, we're thrilled to announce the biggest and most spectacular IIFA Festival yet, set for September 27-29 at Yas Island. This year's IIFA will be a celebration of unprecedented scale, transcending cinematic boundaries with the convergence of Hindi Cinema and South Indian cinema, set against Yas Island's unmatched hospitality and breath-taking backdrop as a premier international destination. He added, "Expect mesmerizing performances and cultural extravaganzas during the three-day celebration that will not only captivate audiences worldwide but also make a profound global impact. A true testament to the unparalleled appeal of Yas Island, IIFA 2024 festival will foster meaningful connections, offer unique networking opportunities, and celebrate the visionaries who have shaped the global entertainment landscape, setting the stage for an extraordinary journey to 2025."

Taghrid AlSaeed, Miral's Executive Director of Marketing, Communications & Events, said, "We are proud to welcome the world's biggest celebration of Indian film for a historic third time to Yas Island. This year's IIFA Festival promises to be an extraordinary spectacle of cinematic excellence and vibrant culture with the welcome of IIFA Utsavam to the Island for the first time. We can't wait to transform Yas Island, the leading entertainment and leisure destination into a global stage for Indian cinema. This year's event will unite Bollywood's brightest stars with their most passionate fans for an unforgettable experience in Abu Dhabi. Let's get ready for an event like never before!"

H.E. Nouf Mohamed Al-Bushlaibi, Executive Director of Strategic Marketing and Communications, DCT Abu Dhabi says, "We are delighted that Abu Dhabi will host the International Indian Film Academy Awards for an unprecedented third consecutive year. As a city steeped in culture and creativity, this continued partnership highlights Abu Dhabi's reputation as a leading destination for global events. We look forward to sharing our city with the luminaries of Indian cinema and the IIFA audience, celebrating the best of Indian cinema together with the finest Emirati hospitality."

Mr Ashish Sehgal - Chief Growth Officer - Digital & Broadcast Revenue, Zee Entertainment Enterprise Limited, expressed his excitement about this association - "ZEE is thrilled to bring the magic of the IIFA to millions of households across the globe and celebrate the brilliance of Indian Cinema and its talented artists. This prestigious property is a natural fit for our portfolio and reaffirms ZEE's audience-first strategy of delivering premium entertainment that resonates deeply with our diverse viewers. We are confident that this association will not only elevate the viewer experience but also strengthen our leadership in delivering the best of Indian Cinema to the world and set new benchmarks in engagement, viewership and entertainment."

Mr Praveen Sharma, Group CEO & Partner Maisour & Meteora Group expressed his happiness, "We are absolutely thrilled to partner with the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards as the Investment Partners of IIFA Weekend & Awards. This collaboration marks a monumental milestone for Maisour, a crowdfunding platform for fractional ownership in Real Estate in Dubai with a global platform like IIFA that unites and celebrates the best of Indian cinema in a dazzling showcase of stardom."



'Laxmi aayi hai'

B-Town congratulates Ranveer, Deepika on arrival of their 'queen'

After Bollywood's star couple Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone officially announced that they have welcomed a baby girl, a string of personalities including Arjun Kapoor, Sharvari and Ananya Panday among many others congratulated the new parents and said that the 'queen is here.' Ranveer and Deepika in a shared post on Sunday made the announcement on Instagram. The post read: 'Welcome baby girl 8.9.2024 Ö Deepika and Ranveer.' Taking to the comment section, their friends and colleagues from the industry congratulated the two, who are fondly called as DeepVeer by their fans. Actor Arjun Kapoor, who is a close friend of

Ranveer and Deepika, wrote: 'Laxmi aayi hai! The queen is here.'

Deepika's 'Gehraiyaan' co-star wrote: 'Baby girl! Congratulations.' Saif Ali Khan's son and Sara Ali Khan's brother Ibrahim penned: 'Congratulations.' Actress Sharvari simply congratulated the stars. Actor and comedian Sunil Grover said 'Badhai ho!! Best.' Social media sensation and the bestie of B-Townies Orry said: 'Biggest biggest.' It was on September 7, when Deepika was photographed going to the H. N. Reliance Hospital in the Girgaon area of Mumbai. Ahead of her going to the hospital, the couple and their families had visited the Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai on September 6.

In February, Deepika and Ranveer had announced that they were all set to be welcoming their first bundle of joy. The actress was in her second trimester when they announced to the world about stepping into parenthood. They shared a post on Instagram, which read: 'September 2024. with cute motifs of baby clothes, baby shoes and balloons.' Ranveer and Deepika got married in November 2018 at a private and intimate ceremony at Lake Como and shared some pictures with fans on Instagram, and five years later on 'Koffee With Karan', their wedding video was shown to the world. They married in traditional Konkani Hindu and Sikh Anand Karaj.

The star couple first met on the sets of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 'Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela' in 2012, where they fell in love. The film was a take on English playwright William Shakespeare's tragic epic 'Romeo and Juliet'. The two were then seen in films such as 'Bajirao Mastani' and 'Padmaavati'. On the professional front, the two will be seen in the upcoming Rohit Shetty directorial 'Singham Again'. While Deepika is a new entrant into Shetty's cop universe, Ranveer will be seen in a cameo avatar as Simmba.

Ananya Panday talks about how she actually had 'aloo' in 'real life'

Bollywood actress Ananya Panday shared a photo dump from the behind-the-scenes moment from 'Call Me Bae' and even shared some details about how she actually ate aloo in 'real life'.

Ananya revealed that her character Bae has a scarf hidden in almost every look she wears and that she actually ate 'aloo' and her co-star Gurfateh Singh Pirzada chose not to as she shared a picture of the vada pav. After sharing a string of pictures from the sets of 'Call Me Bae', Ananya shared anecdotes in the caption.

She wrote: 'Some #CallMeBAE moments

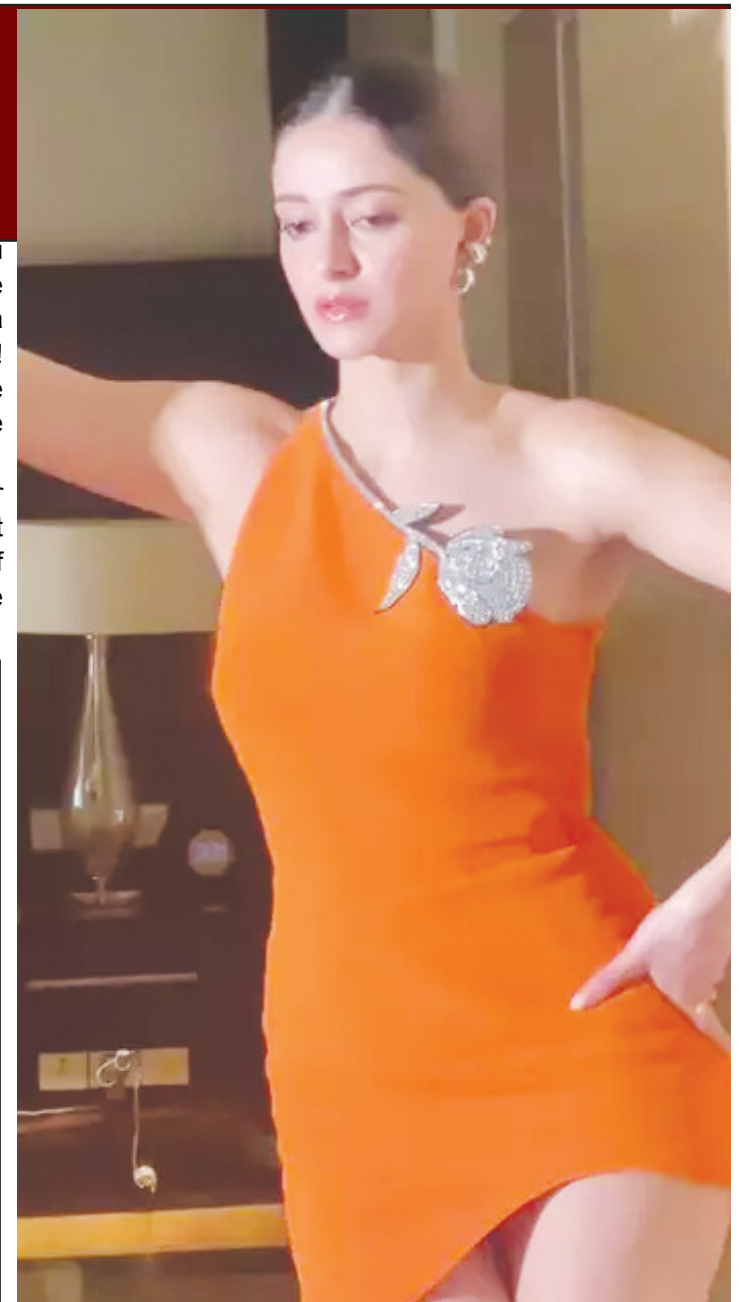
(binge now on @primevideo in) 1. GUTS if you haven't seen the show yet, 2. & 3. bae's face before and after you see the show, 4. Bae has a scarf hidden in almost every look she wears!! How many can you spot? 5. First shot of the shoot! Right before I tripped and fell over all the LV bags!

The actress shared a picture with her co-star Muskkaan Jaferi, who plays the role of her best friend Saira, a picture of the vada pav, which itself has an significant role in the show and a picture of her mother Bhavna Panday on the sets.

Hina Khan finds a reason to 'smile through pain'



Actress Hina Khan, who is currently undergoing chemotherapy for stage three breast cancer has shared that no matter what one must always 'smile through pain'. Taking to Instagram, Hina, who has 20.3 million followers shared a selfie, wearing a black hoodie and a white tee-shirt. She captioned the post as: 'Everything Hurts, Lekin smile nahi jaani chahiye.. Haina? So many problems, can't even Eat properly without feeling pain. But that's No reason to be negative. I choose to Smile and encourage myself. I tell myself that all this will be over and we will get through this (InshaAllah) One Smile at a Time. DUA.' Earlier, Hina had revealed that she is through her fifth chemo infusion. Best known for her role as Akshara in 'Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai', Hina has participated in 'Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 8', 'Bigg Boss 11', and 'Bigg Boss 14'. She has also been a part of movies like 'Hacked', 'Wishlist', and the short film 'Smartphone'.



Why real-life matchmaking is coming back in vogue

Radha Patel, founder of the US-based Single To Shaadi platform, shares how personalised matchmaking is gaining traction again

Marriages may or may not be made in heaven, but there is now a growing trend of falling back on real-life matchmaking to find the most suitable partner. Radha Patel, founder of the US-based Single To Shaadi platform, shares what American-Indians are looking for in relationships and why real-life matchmaking services are in demand again. Community-based matchmaking matters: Indians today seek genuine connections with partners who share a similar cultural and religious background. However, the challenge lies in the broad spectrum of how individuals in the diaspora perceive their own cultural and religious identities. A significant issue we see is of US-born singles of Indian origin wanting to meet only other US-born singles, highlighting the contrast in perceived lifestyle choices and expectations between those raised in the US

and those from the motherland. Indians like personalised matchmaking: We operate by sending you profiles and connecting you only on mutual matches, the goal being of progressing from a match to a meeting. The true value of our service, however, lies in the personalised support offered, such as having a friend or older sister who understands the complexities of today's dating landscape. We provide our clients with the confidence and motivation to keep meeting new people until they find their perfect match. Gap in matchmaking services in US: The market is saturated, especially for a niche group like ours. Despite the large Indian population in America, when it comes to finding a suitable match, the options can feel limited. Many services try to stand out by creating apps that claim to offer something new, but often, it's the same pool

of singles circulating from one platform to another. Real-life matchmaking rules: Our annual speed-dating event is application-based, ensuring that participants meet others who align with their preferences in age, ethnicity, religion and lifestyle. The event kicks off with a keynote speaker, typically a renowned coach or relationship expert within the South Asian community, providing a motivating talk. Attendees then engage in an hour-long speed-dating session where they rotate to meet around 20 individuals within their age group. After the speed dating, we offer opportunities for further mingling and deeper connection. This year, we're introducing an official Singles Gala at a separate venue, allowing for participants to showcase multiple aspects of their personality and style in a more relaxed setting. Our clients look forward to this event ev-



ery year, and with an impressive 75 per cent mutual match rate, it's a great way to start the cuffing season. Matchmaking is a complex skill: As someone deeply embedded in the Indian American experience and known for networking skills, connecting like-minded South Asians for the purpose of marriage felt like a natural extension of my abilities. I began by cataloging these inquiries in a Google spreadsheet, listing the critical variables in matchmaking: age, gender, location, preferences like diet and education, and, within the Indian community, factors such as reli-

gion and regional background. Realising the complexity and the need for a broader pool of singles, Single to Shaadi was conceived to offer a community-based approach to matchmaking for those serious about marriage. Our matchmaking database now boasts of over a thousand active clients, but our reach extends far beyond. Through event attendees, social media followers, WhatsApp communities, and our monthly book club, we interact with approximately 10,000 unique South Asian singles each month.

Raising a toast for the spirit of India

The country's alcohol sector is all set to assert its position of dominance, led by its favourite brown spirit whisky

Amrut Distilleries, the great Indian whisky, recently captured international acclaim by winning a slew of global awards, including at ISC, London. Amrut managed five golds, setting a new standard for Indian Whisky globally. Interestingly, six out of the top 10 whisky brands in the world are from India; a third of the 30 fastest growing spirits brands in the world are Indian, according to the latest report by Drinks International. With Indri and Rampur also gaining ground and winning global awards, the case for Indian whiskies as a new globally-competitive category is a compelling one.

While Whisky has always been the country's favourite spirit, it has only just started to offer cultural and regional products that have proved popular and beneficial for the Indian alcohol market. The last five years has seen a gradual acceptance and appreciation for Indian products. The trend has demonstrated that Indian products have surpassed global counterparts in terms of brand love in the last year, avers Thiruvikram Nikam, Joint MD Amrut Distilleries. A lot of this deep appreciation for authenticity and locally crafted products is driven by an increasingly exploratory Indian consumer, which



in turn, has fostered a culture of experimentation and driven demand for quality, locally-produced alternatives that offer unique narratives and celebrate India's heritage.

Caspar MacRae, President and CEO, The Glenmorangie Company attributes this trend to the rise of at-home consumption of Scotch whisky during the pandemic, which has continued. While single malt continues to be a popular choice among Indian consumers, there is an appreciation for quality and craftsmanship to which this category caters perfectly. We've also seen a rise in demand for single malts in the premium-plus segment in India as

consumers seek out limited-editions and rarer creations, in addition to core favourites, he adds.

Movers and Shakers

It is the younger demographic that is playing a leading role in the Indian whisky narrative, according to Neeraj Kumar, Managing Director, Suntory Global Spirits: The younger audience today not only looks out for products that are unique but also those that promote the correct values and bring out whiskies that are fully understood in depth. With a preference for experimentation and novelty, as well as health and wellness, trends and recommendations heavily influence the drink-

ing styles of these younger consumers. Above all, they value authenticity, quality, and storytelling, explains the spokesperson for Nikka Whisky, Japan. Another reason driving this trend is the democratisation of whisky production beyond the five major whisky countries and the globalisation of the whisky industry.

Premiumisation is one of the bigger trends outlining India's alcohol market, which is poised to grow by 7 per cent CAGR over the next decade. As more consumers opt for luxury spirits, particularly those made in India, local craftsmanship and small batch production has mushroomed, with homegrown and artisanal brands, gaining both international recognition and a rising, loyal, domestic fan base. Today, the Indian single malt whisky space has over 140 expressions across 10 market players, compared to just 2-3 options available a decade ago, indicating a clear preference towards premium single malt offerings. Rosy as the scenario is, there needs to be a push for consumer education on reading labels and understanding the finer points of product differentiation, cautions Nikam of Amrut Distilleries.

What's the mystery fever in Gujarat's Kutch that has claimed 14 lives in five days?

Gujarat recently battled fatal outbreaks of the Chandipura Virus and Acute Encephalitis Syndrome. The government has rushed 27 medical teams to control the new round of infections

A mysterious fever has claimed 14 lives in Lakhpat taluka of Gujarat's Kutch district within five days since September 3. The deaths have shocked both the people and the administration alike as infections like H1N1, dengue, malaria, Covid-19 and Crimean-Congo fever have been ruled out. Sources said the symptoms are pneumonia-like, but there is no official confirmation yet.

The deceased are in the age group of 5 to 50 years. The symptoms began with the victims developing fever, chills, cough and, within hours, pneumonia-like conditions, difficulty in breathing eventually resulting in multi-organ failure and death within days.

Lakhpat is the last taluka before the vast expanse of arid desert, which ends in Pakistan on the other side of the border. The Gujarat government has sent 27 teams of medical experts to identify the cause of the infection and recommend preventive measures.

A team of animal husbandry officials has also been sent to investigate the possibility of a zoonotic infection as the mysterious deaths have occurred in the Jat Maldhari herder community. The infection, which was first noticed in Lakhpat, has spread to Abdasa taluka as well, encompassing seven villages. At least half a dozen samples have been sent to the National Institute of Virology, Pune. The results are awaited. A state-level epidemic and vector borne diseases team along with



a rapid response team of the Gujarat Adani Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhuj, and PDU Medical College, Rajkot, have undertaken a door-to-door survey of 2,234 citizens from 318 households of Abdasa and Lakhpat talukas.

Health minister Rushikesh Patel said this was being done on a war footing. Forty eight suspected fever cases were found. A malaria rapid test was done on every febrile patient, out of which two were positive for toxic malaria and one for dengue, he said Patel.

Besides the presence of medical teams in Kutch, facilities at the Rajkot civil hospital have also been boosted and epidemiology teams have been kept on standby. At the outset, the infection does not appear to be communicable. As the infection spread after the rain deluge that has

lashed the entire state, restoring cleanliness once the rain waters recede has been given a priority.

Gujarat recently battled another outbreak of Chandipura Virus (CHPV) and Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES), which infected young children and turned fatal within days. Some 140 cases and 59 fatalities were reported from 24 districts by the end of July.

Between early June and mid-August, 245 cases of AES and resultant 82 deaths were reported from around the country. Of these, 64 cases were of CHPV. Though CHPV is endemic in India, and sporadic outbreaks have occurred, especially in monsoon, the latest outbreak was the largest in the past 20 years. It is transmitted by vectors such as sandflies, mosquitoes and ticks. According to the World

Health Organization (WHO), the case-fatality ratio from CHPV infection is high (56-75 per cent), and there is no specific treatment or vaccine available. Although authorities are working to control CHPV transmission, further transmission of the virus is possible in the coming weeks as the monsoon season is creating favourable conditions for vector populations in the affected areas, the WHO has warned.

Meanwhile, in the latest cases of fever and deaths in Kutch, the Congress has termed the breakout an epidemic and sought immediate identification of the mysterious fever, making drinking water available in the affected villages and stopping mosquito infestation.

It is the responsibility of the government to protect the lives and health of people. I drew the attention of the government when this disease started, as soon as people started going to the hospital and two deaths occurred. The attention of officials was also drawn, but no one took it seriously. Within a matter of days, the infection spread to Bhekhda, Sandro, Mornagar, Bedi, Bharawan and Walavari villages of Lakhpat, state Congress state president Shaktisinh Gohil said.

Gohil added that drinking water was not available in these villages and there was heavy infestation of mosquitoes. Primary health centres also have AYUSH doctors; the post of allopathic doctors is not filled there. The health centre of the taluka also has only one doctor, he added.

After India, how Chinese misinformation campaign is targeting US elections

The influence apparatus is impersonating US voters on social media and using AI-based content to spread divisive narratives and target both parties and politicians

In April, a report from Microsoft had warned that China could be using AI-generated content to disrupt India's Lok Sabha elections, polls in South Korea and potentially even influence the upcoming US presidential election.

False information and narratives were found to be in circulation across the political spectrum during the Indian parliamentary polls. Now, as the US presidential election campaign heats up, similar misinformation campaigns allegedly primarily orchestrated by China are flooding the internet and social media. According to a report prepared by a European open-source intelligence firm, the China-linked influence operation has become increasingly aggressive in attempting to shape the US political discourse ahead of the November election. It allegedly focuses on impersonating US voters on social media and spreading di-

visive narratives on sensitive social issues of the country. Spambot accounts, using AI-generated content, target both parties and politicians, exploiting political polarisation across platforms, warned the report.

According to the report prepared by Graphika of Atlas Intelligence, 15 spambot accounts have been identified on X and one on TikTok that impersonate US citizens and advocates for peace, human rights and information integrity. These accounts act as inauthentic media outlets focused on spreading disinformation. The report claims that in the run-up to the 2024 US election, these accounts have seeded and amplified content denigrating Democratic and Republican candidates, sowing doubt in the very legitimacy of the US electoral process and spreading divisive narratives about sensitive social issues, such as gun control,

homelessness, drug abuse, racial inequality and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

This content, some of which was almost certainly AI-generated, has targeted US president Joe Biden, former president and Biden's challenger Donald Trump and, more recently, US vice-president Kamala Harris. The Chinese influence operation continues to exploit a polarised information environment, portraying the US as a weakening global power with failing leadership. It is expected to employ new techniques like generative AI to create and scale up deceptive content, the report stated.

China observers have found that since mid-2023, Spambot accounts have intensified efforts to discredit US electoral candidates through impersonated US voters or activists. These operations had begun by engaging with election topics before the 2022 US midterm elections. Some

accounts also pushed pro-Trump and conservative narratives while attempting to exacerbate social divisions. While spreading manipulated connects, accounts used red flags like fake bios, stock images for profile pictures, and coordinated content-sharing within the spam network. Some accounts are posted in Chinese, indicating the use of AI or accidental generation. Certain spam personas, such as Deep Red, rebranded to impersonate US users, marking a shift in tactics. Another persona, Harlan Report, presents itself as a US conservative news outlet across TikTok and X platforms, supporting Trump and criticising Biden.

Spam personas maintain consistent branding across platforms like TikTok and X, utilising AI-generated avatars, recycling content and coordinating posts. Videos targeting US politicians have gained significant views, especially mocking Biden.

How Rajasthan busted its 'Jamtara' of cyber fraud

Into the concerted crackdown that helped Deeg district drastically curb the menace of online fraud within months

It is a brand new district, carved out of Bharatpur, home district of Rajasthan chief minister Bhajan Lal Sharma, only last year. But Deeg has already gained notoriety as the cybercrime capital of India, overtaking erstwhile hotspots such as Deoghar and Jamtara in Jharkhand; Nawada and Nalanda in Bihar; Nuh in Haryana; and Alwar next door in Rajasthan. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) found that 19 per cent of all reported cases of fraud in February 2024 originated from this outpost in the Mewat region. The anti-cybercrime units of different states were mapping some 225 locations in the district on a daily basis, which stood in first place for four months in a row for the highest number of cybercrime calls originating in India. The crimes range from the usual phishing scams using fake mobile numbers/ caller IDs and ATM cards, online scams promising financial rewards, sextortion, to such ingenious schemes as fraudulently offering illegal arms and housing on rent and, the most startling of all, money in exchange for a promise to impregnate young women. Embarrassed by this surfeit of cybercrime riches, CM Sharma deputed Rahul Prakash, Inspector General of Police, Bharatpur Range, to end this expanding web of crime. And so Operation Anti Virus was launched on February 29, focusing on Deeg. The CM called me thrice, saying he gets complaints of cyber fraud emanating from Deeg whenever he goes to other states. He asked us to curtail it on priority, says Prakash.

Six months down the line, a proactive approach and careful tracking, along with a ruthless pursuit of criminals, have yielded a sort of a turnaround for the district. At a webinar on July 19, I4C demonstrated that Deeg's share of reported fraudulent calls had fallen to 2,546 by June-end from the February high of 6,530. They had fallen further to 1,501 by August-end. From March to July, Operation Anti Virus saw 189 FIRs being filed against alleged cyber criminals in Deeg, 743 persons arrested and Rs 49.48 lakh recovered in cash. Seven properties on government land, built allegedly with ill-begotten money, were demolished. The police blocked 21,070 SIM cards used to commit fraud and blacklisted 17,935 IMEI numbers, the unique 15-digit identification for a device. Proud of what they have accomplished so far, IG Prakash says the Deeg model could be worth emulating.

Deeg's descent into cybercrime

Deeg typified the wider Mewat region, overlapping with Haryana and proximate to Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, with an old notoriety for petty crime and highway robberies. Then came trade in illicit liquor and stolen vehicles. And when some Deeg criminals discovered the low-risk, high-return business of online



crime, they quickly picked up the skills for executing scams involving jobs, relationships, and OLX crimes, where they would copy documents uploaded online for the sale of, say, vehicles and use these to sell the vehicles as their own. They also became adept at ATM card-swapping and the use of imule accounts to bank accounts used to park money earned through fraudulent activity where the account holder is either duped into letting criminals use their account or is a willing participant. In the region around Deeg, traditional sex work had scaled up to modern trafficking of women; so the transition to online sextortion scams too was smooth. Recent arrests reveal how much more sophisticated and daring operations have become.

In early August, Prakash received a tip-off from the Intelligence Bureau regarding a threat issued to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A suspect who had threatened to kill the PM on Instagram was in touch with two persons, Rahul and Sakir Meo, whose cellphone locations were in Deeg. The duo was arrested, and confessed to something else altogether of posing as arms traders on social media to cheat would-be buyers. On August 23, police in Pahadi (Deeg) arrested four youths and a minor with 14 country-made guns and 24 cartridges which they had put on sale on social media, aiming to commit fraud.

Meanwhile another kind of scam came to light with the arrest of Khalid, Raju and Rahul. The three were part of a gang that offered a reward of Rs 25 lakh for impregnating an unfortunate childless woman. At least 20 gullible men fell for the ruse and deposited Rs 25,000 each as registration fees. To lure the men, fraudsters had posted pictures of a woman on their social media accounts and even took thousands of rupees as advance GST for a minimum reward of a few lakh rupees payable for merely trying to impregnate the woman which they said they had transferred by sending fake messages. Another arrest of Saad and five others led police to a gang that specialised in luring victims through

advertisements for flats on rent in metros. Twenty-nine mobile phone sets and seven SIMs activated through stolen/ forged identities and linked to bank accounts where illegal money was transferred were recovered from them. The entire gang was found to have been involved in 5,447 cases, with frauds amounting to Rs 20.31 crore. There were 5,620 complaints against the phone numbers traced to this gang, resulting in 197 FIRs with the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.

How far the web has spread was proved with the arrest of Meena, 40, a resi-

dent of Barpeta district in Assam. She had befriended and married Ali Mohammad, alias Jhabbu, of Gaondi village in Deeg some years ago, and begun sourcing fake/ forged SIM cards from Assam. After eluding the police for three years, she was arrested finally in May and reportedly confessed to selling 10,000 SIMs mostly to criminals enabling cyber fraud for Rs 2,000-5,000 each, earning about Rs 1 crore. Among the most alarming developments the police found was that adolescents were taking over the operation as the experienced hands fell to the police net. And since the Juvenile Act hands light punishment to minors, they are a handy resource for fraudsters. On August 7, the police detained a 13-year-old boy in Deeg who had been blackmailing Suresh Chaurasia, a school teacher in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, by threatening to make public a sex reel and chat, so much so that the elderly person was driven to suicide in June. Next, the youngster impersonated a cybercrime official and demanded money from the family till the police zeroed in on him and ended his nefarious business. There are 15 more minors that the police have arrested, several of them experts in online fraud.



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Who won Kamala Harris and Donald Trump's first debate?

Moustafa Bayoumi, LaTosha Brown, Ben Davis, Lloyd Green, Arwa Mahdawi, and Bhaskar Sunkara



For the entirety of this debate, Donald Trump never once uttered Kamala Harris's name, a sign of enormous disrespect. What he did do was try to shush Harris with a "quiet, please," silence her with an "I'm talking now. Does that sound familiar?" (an apparent reference to her famous line during the vice-presidential debate four years ago), and brazenly state that President Biden "hates her. He can't stand her." Harris smiled confidently at the ludicrous barbs.

Meanwhile, Trump reacted to his own statement that he lost the 2020 election "by a whisker" first by stating: "I said that?" and then by saying he was "being sarcastic." Asked about his ideas for healthcare for Americans, he replied with: "I have concepts of a plan." Challenged on his role in the January 6 attack on the Capitol, he responded with: "I had nothing to do with that except they asked me to make a speech."

Trump was flailing. Under pressure, he took no responsibility for his past actions and instead threw invective and invented facts as he went along.

Harris prevailed. She came out swinging, pointed her attacks on Trump's record, and presented a future that wasn't based on fear but on opportunity. She intelligently called Trump "someone who would rather run on a problem rather than fixing the problem."

But her policy positions were also clearly leaning to the right of the Democratic agenda. She called for many more agents patrolling the border (rather than real and comprehensive immigration reform), defended the right to abortion by extreme examples of injury (such as incest) rather than an ordinary woman's right to choose, and offered no policy change for Palestinians beyond "working round the clock" for a ceasefire. In other words, more of the same.

Harris won the debate. Her performance and ideas are better. But many of those ideas, shared by both parties, need rethinking.

This debate was a defining moment for the American people, as the stark contrast between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump was laid bare. From the start, Harris commanded the stage, demonstrating poise, preparation, and a clear vision for

the future of the country. She didn't just introduce herself to Trump — she reintroduced herself to the American public as a strong, competent leader ready to serve as commander-in-chief.

In contrast, Trump appeared undisciplined and unhinged, offering a reminder of the chaotic leadership that defined his time in office. His performance highlighted a lack of preparation and an inability to engage thoughtfully on critical issues. While Harris sought to uplift and empower, Trump resorted to divisive rhetoric, further alienating a nation in need of healing.

The American people witnessed the difference between a steady hand and reckless impulsiveness. The choice could not be clearer; according to Trump himself, he has no plan. She has a plan and represents a new generation of leadership moving us forward. As the vice-president says: we are not going back.

This debate will not be anywhere near as consequential as the last one, between Biden and Trump, which reoriented an election overnight. It remains to be seen how much a debate like this can move voters. That said, Kamala Harris won easily. Trump was at his most narcissistic, impulsive and racist, lashing out incoherently.

In the past, while he was, of course, narcissistic, impulsive and racist, he was at least relentlessly on message, setting the tempo of the debate with attacks and forcing his opponents to adopt his framing. With this debate, he was on the defensive and seemed angry and confused throughout. Much of the credit for this goes to Harris, who clearly prepared well and expertly baited Trump into his worst areas. Every time the question was about an issue where Trump has a polling advantage over Harris, like the economy, foreign policy and the Biden administration's record, she would sneak in a line about him and his past that he couldn't help but chase.

His most memorable lines were mostly notable for being bizarre and nonsensical. All in all, Trump showed who he was: a rightwing authoritarian, and a confused and incompetent one at that.

This was a deeply sad debate. Harris didn't sketch out much in the way of a governing agenda, and the aspects she did expound on, like her policies on the

border, fracking and Israel, were bad, politically and morally. Instead of a debate about policy and plans, what we saw was a debate about Trump, with Harris dancing around her own record and policies to skillfully prosecute the case against Trump instead. It's a dark time for the country when the choice we are presented is a referendum on a dangerous narcissist. Hopefully, Americans will choose not to put Trump back in the White House, but no matter how bad his performance, he still has a serious chance of winning.

Kamala Harris won the evening and the debate. By the end, the betting markets had shifted back to a coin-toss. Trump no longer led. The vice-president stayed on offense. He flailed and scowled all night. Trump garnered the majority of speaking time, but it did him no favor.

The former president attacked Harris over immigration and inflation. He labeled her a Marxist, and bragged about the size of his rallies. He paid tribute to Hungary's Viktor Orbán, and accused immigrants of chowing down on Fido: "They're eating the pets of the people that live there."

Harris chivied Trump on abortion and democracy and lambasted him over China and Covid. "He actually thanked President Xi for what he did during Covid," she said.

"When we know that Xi was responsible for not giving us transparency about the origins of Covid."

Harris played prosecutor, Trump self-pitying victim. She reminded him of his rap-sheet, January 6, and his affinity for the Proud Boys: "Stand back and stand by." The election is a footrace. Trump and Harris appear tied in Pennsylvania while the Democrats hold narrow leads in Michigan and Wisconsin. Post-convention excitement recedes. The attempt on Trump's life is history. Brat summer has yielded to political trench warfare. Election day is less than two months away, in politics an eternity. Have you ever wondered whether men might be too emotional to be president? Because Donald Trump was extremely emotional on Tuesday night. And by "emotional," I mean unhinged. In contrast, Kamala Harris was in full-on prosecutor mode and pushed all the convicted felon's buttons. She mocked the size of Trump's rallies — a sore spot — and he immediately unraveled. Lacking serious policy points, he clutched at bigoted straws. He referenced a wild and unsubstantiated rumor about immigrants eating dogs. He said: "Prices are quadrupling and doubling!" And he called Harris a "communist."

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