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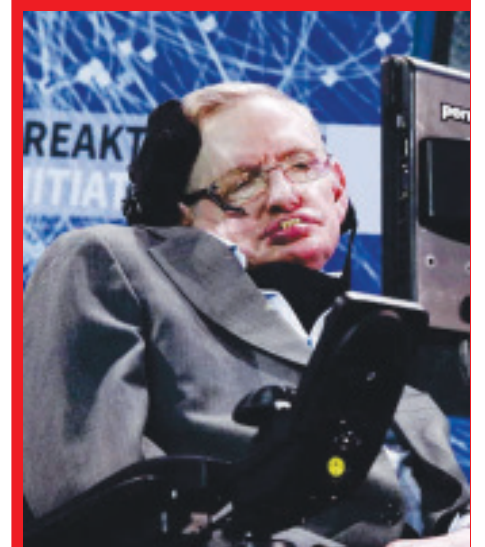
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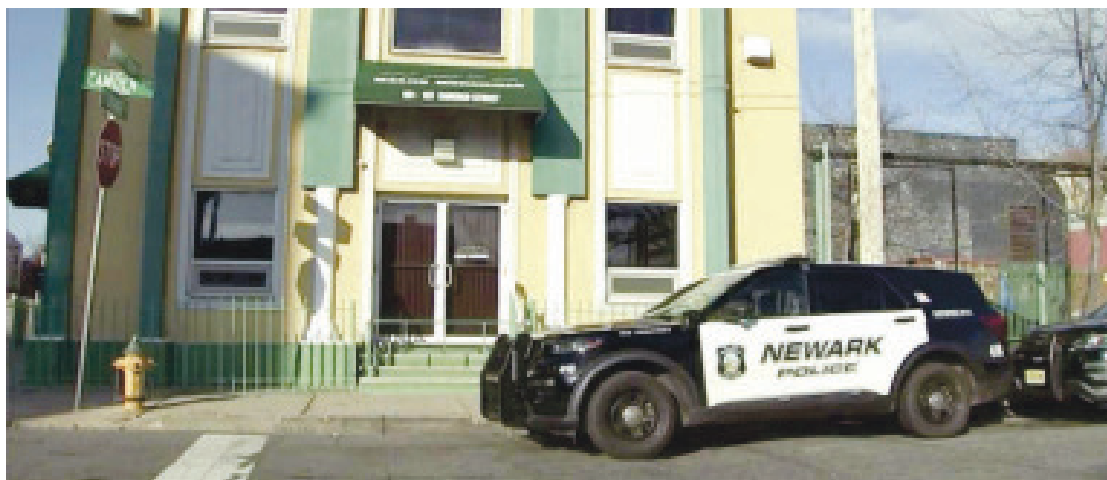
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Imam killed outside New Jersey mosque, and the shooter remains at large, authorities say

(Sai Bureau)- A New Jersey imam was gunned down outside his mosque before dawn Wednesday, leaving authorities hunting for a shooter and saying they've found no evidence yet that an anti-Muslim bias played a part in the shooting.

Imam Hassan Sharif was in his car when he was shot more than once at about 6 a.m. near the Masjid-Muhammad Mosque in Newark, the state's largest city, Essex County Prosecutor Ted Stephens said at a news conference.

He was taken to a nearby hospital but died in the afternoon. "I know that



Fragé said. He remembered the imam as a leader in the interfaith community who worked to keep the city safe. "We share your pain and we promise to utilize the full resources of those here and those who are continuing to partner with us to we make sure that this heinous crime is solved," he said. The New Jersey

Indian Mastermind in \$93M Florida Fraud

(Sai Bureau)- The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has acted swiftly in response to an alleged \$93 million real estate investment fraud led by Miami-based developer Rishi Kapoor. They've frozen assets and provided emergency relief.



investigation uncovered Kapoor's misuse of \$4.3 million in investor funds and improper mingling of around \$60 million among various entities. The complaint also claims Kapoor directed entities to pay excessive fees, understated costs, and misrepresented

Kapoor, along with entities like Location Ventures LLC and Urbin LLC, Florida, is accused of deceiving investors from January 2018 to at least March 2023. Allegations include misrepresentations about Kapoor's compensation, cash contributions, corporate governance, use of funds, and his background. The

returns to investors. SEC's Miami Regional Office Director described Kapoor as the mastermind of a complex real estate fraud affecting over 50 investors. The SEC is seeking permanent injunctions, fines, an officer-and-director bar against Kapoor, and the return of ill-gotten gains.

in light of global events and with a rise in bias directed at many communities we're experiencing across our state — particularly the Muslim community — there are many in New Jersey right now who are feeling a heightened sense of fear or anxiety at the news of this slaying," Attorney General Matt Platkin said. Despite that, Platkin said law enforcement has stepped up outreach to houses of worship, particularly Jewish and Muslim ones, explicitly acknowledging the tensions unfolding in many parts of the world amid the fighting in Gaza since the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel.

Sharif had been a resident imam at the local mosque for five years, Newark Public Safety Director Fritz

chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, called Sharif a "beacon of leadership and excellence." and said that while the shooter's motives are unknown, the group is advising all mosques to "remain cautious" while keeping their doors open. About 320,000 of the state's roughly 9 million residents are Muslim, Platkin said. After Wednesday's shooting, officials reached out to Muslim communities in the city and across the state. "We're asking everybody in our community and our partners to let us know if there's anything that they want to be done and anything that is making them feel unsafe so we can respond," he said.

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f t y i

8 Indian Navy Veterans In Qatar Get 60 Days To Appeal Against Prison Terms

The Ministry of External Affairs said it is in touch with the family members of the former Navy personnel, and the legal team.'

(Sai Buearu)-The eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel in Qatar have been given 60 days to appeal against the varying prison terms handed by a Qatari court last week, which came following the commutation of their death sentences, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday. On December 28, the Court of Appeal in Qatar commuted the death sentence handed down to the Indians in October and sentenced them to prison for varying durations, weeks after their family members filed an appeal against the earlier order by another court. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the legal team of the Indian nationals received a copy of the court order that he described as a "confidential document". "On December 28, the Court of Appeal had given a judgment. Thereafter, we issued a press release giving details (and) stating that the death penalty has been reduced. Now, we have the judgment order, which

is a confidential document," he said. Mr Jaiswal was responding to a question. "The court has given 60 days for the appeal to be made before the Court of Cassation, which is the highest court in Qatar. And it is for the legal team now to decide the next course of action. So, that is where we are," he added. The spokesperson further added: "What we can confirm to you is that the death penalty has now been converted into varying prison sentences for the eight Indian nationals." "We are in touch with the family members. We are also in touch with the legal team," he said. It is learnt that the prison terms handed to the former Indian Navy personnel ranged from three years to 25 years. The Navy veterans were given death sentences by Qatar's Court of First Instance on October 26. The Indian nationals, who worked with private company Al Dahra, were arrested in August last year. Neither the Qatari authorities nor New Delhi made the charges

against the Indian nationals public.

The charges were filed against the eight Indian navy veterans on March 25 and they were tried under Qatari law.

All of the former Navy officers had "unblemished stints" of up to 20 years in the Indian Navy and had held important positions including that of instructors in the force.

In May, Al-Dahra Global closed its operations in Doha and all those working there (primarily Indians) have since returned home. It is learnt that India is also looking at the possibility of invoking provisions of a bilateral pact on the transfer of sentenced persons. The pact signed between India and Qatar in 2015 provides for citizens of India and Qatar who have been convicted and sentenced for criminal offences to serve their sentences in their home country. However, there was no clarity on whether Qatar had ratified the agreement.

Indian-Origin Man, 43, Jailed For Masturbating On London Underground

Mukesh Shah, from Wembley in north London, was found guilty of indecent exposure at London Inner Crown Court last month and ordered to sign the sex offenders register for 10 years.

(Sai Buearu)- A 43-year-old Indian-origin man has been sentenced to nine months in prison in the UK after being found guilty of masturbating on board a London Underground train in front of a lone woman in the carriage.

Mukesh Shah, from Wembley in north London, was found guilty of indecent exposure at London Inner Crown Court last month and ordered to sign the sex offenders register for 10 years.

The British Transport Police (BTP) said he will be subjected to a 10-year Sexual Harm Prevention Order over the incident, which occurred on November 4, 2022, during a tube journey.

"This was a frightening and upsetting experience for the victim and I commend her bravery in confronting the offender, managing to capture an image of Shah and reporting this," said BTP Investigating Officer, Detective Constable Mark Luker.



"Shah's disgusting actions have not only secured him time behind bars but restrictions following his release to prevent him from repeating his actions in the future. We will always take reports of sexual offences seriously and will do everything in our power to bring offenders to justice," he said. The court heard how it

was around 11.40 pm when the victim was travelling alone in an empty Piccadilly Line carriage between Sudbury Town and Acton Town when Shah boarded the train. Despite the empty carriage, Shah sat diagonally opposite the victim and she noticed him staring at her, making her feel uncomfortable. It was then that she noticed he was exposing himself and masturbating," BTP said in a statement.

"Bravely, the victim captured Shah on camera hoping it would deter him, when he didn't, she confronted him and told him to stop and move away from her. He protested he hadn't done anything wrong but moved along the carriage. The victim reported the incident to BTP along with the video, which was circulated within the police and led to the identification of Shah," it added. The UK capital's transport police are also flagging its Railway Guardian app or the emergency 999 number for passengers to report crimes such as these on the network.

SEC Charges New York Businessman with Fraud and Unregistered Sales of Securities to Investors Seeking Permanent Residency in the U.S.

NY-based immigration attorney and her firm also charged for role in unregistered sales

Washington : The Securities and Exchange Commission today charged Nadim Ahmed, a New York-based businessman and his companies, NuRide Transportation Group, LLC and NYC Green Transportation Group, LLC, with making fraudulent misrepresentations in securities offerings to investors seeking permanent residency through the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program. The SEC also charged Ahmed along with Mehreen Shah a/k/a Mona Shah, a New York-based immigration attorney, and her law firm with offering unregistered securities to investors in offerings that raised more than \$66 million from more than 100 investors.



Under the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, investors are eligible for permanent residency status in the U.S. if they make a qualifying investment in a new commercial enterprise in the U.S. that creates a certain number of permanent full-time jobs for qualified U.S. workers. According to the SEC's complaint, from approximately June 2014 through December 2018, Ahmed, NuRide and NYC Green falsely told NYC Green investors that NYC Green would be operated in a manner consistent with the requirements of the EB-5 visa program and that NYC Green's principals had contributed \$11 million to the company. Further, Ahmed, NuRide, and NYC Green allegedly put key revenue-generating

contracts in NuRide's name despite telling investors that NYC Green would be the operating transportation business. Ahmed also allegedly used one investor's funds to pay a portion of a prior settlement between another one of his companies and the SEC.

In addition, from June 2014 through November 2022, Ahmed, NuRide, and NYC Green, along with Shah, her law firm, and three other entities associated with Ahmed and/or Shah, allegedly offered or sold unregistered securities, including to individuals residing in the United States, in three offerings, for which no exemption to the registration requirements was available. According to the complaint, to date, none of the investors in the offerings has received unconditional permanent residency status or a return of their investment.

Cash-for-job scam: 1,829 illegal recruitments in 17 Bengal municipalities, says CBI

(News Agency)- Investigation so far by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the cash-for-municipalities' job case in West Bengal has revealed that there had been a total of 1,829 illegal recruitments against payment of money in 17 urban civic bodies in the state, sources said on Wednesday. The central agency has also mentioned the figure in a confidential report submitted to the Calcutta High Court's single-judge bench of Justice Amrita Sinha.

As per the central agency sleuths all these recruitment were made through the outsourced agency owned by private promoter Ayan Sil, who



is currently in judicial custody for his alleged involvement in both the cash-for-job cases for state-run schools and municipalities in West Bengal.

In fact, Enforcement Directorate

(ED) sleuths, who are conducting a parallel probe along with CBI in both these cases, for the first time traced documents about recruitment irregularities in the municipalities while conducting

raid and search operations in relation to the school job case Sil's residence in March last year.

Meanwhile, as per estimates of the ED sleuths, whose probe is mainly circled around the money laundering angle in the case, estimated that the total fund involvement in municipalities' recruitment irregularities is to the tune of around Rs 100 crore.

The ED sleuths, sources said, have reached this figure drawing a rough calculation that on an average an amount of Rs 5,00,000 was paid for each irregular recruitment in these urban civic bodies.

As per the findings of the ED sleuths so far the municipalities' recruitment irregularities had been mainly for lower rank posts like drivers, clerks, lower grade computers operators and base-workers among others. As per the findings, the maximum number of irregular appointments had been detected in the case of municipalities in North 24 Parganas district.

The ED sleuths also to an extent have tracked the money-trail as regards the areas where the scam proceeds have been invested. As per ED's findings the scam proceeds were mainly invested in the real estate sector in certain districts.

Man jumps from moving police van, denied admission at multiple Delhi hospitals, succumbs to injuries

(News Agency)- A man, injured after jumping from a moving police van, was transferred from one hospital to another, where the unavailability of beds or equipment ultimately contributed to his death, an official said on Wednesday. The entire incident unfolded on Tuesday night when a police control room (PCR) call was received around 9 p.m. from a woman reporting a man in an inebriated condition engaged in a quarrel in northeast Delhi's New Usmanpur area.

"A police team promptly arrived at the scene where caller Kajal was present. She alleged that Pramod (47), a resident of the same



locality, had molested and abused her," said the Deputy Commissioner

of Police (northeast) Joy Tirkey. The Multi-Purpose Vehicle (MPV) staff was transporting them to the

New Usmanpur police station. "However, when they were nearing the police station, an inebriated and vomiting Pramod opened the glass window and jumped off the vehicle, landing on the road. He was immediately transported to the JPC Hospital," said the DCP. In connection with the incident, a case under sections 354, 354A, 506, 509, 323 IPC was registered.

Injured Pramod was transferred to GTB Hospital by B-30 Ambulance, but due to the unavailability of a CT-Scan, admission was not possible. "Consequently, he was referred to the LNJP Hospital. Unfortunately,

due to a lack of beds in the ICU Ventilator, admission at LNJP Hospital was also not feasible," said the DCP.

The injured was then taken to RML Hospital, where admission was denied by the hospital authorities. "Subsequently, the injured was brought back to JPC Hospital, where he was declared dead at 5.45 a.m.," said the DCP.

Pramod was previously involved in two criminal cases, including attempted murder. "A medical board is being constituted to conduct a post-mortem examination. Further investigation proceedings are in progress," the DCP added.

Adani-Hindenburg row: SC's no to SIT probe, says media reports not conclusive proof

(News Agency)- The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to form any SIT or group of experts to conduct an investigation into the Adani-Hindenburg controversy saying that the media and third party reports were not conclusive proof. "SEBI should take its investigation to its logical conclusion in accordance with law. The facts of this case do not warrant a transfer of investigation from SEBI," held a bench presided over by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud.

Taking note of the submission made by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that 22 out of 24

Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, asked the market regulator to complete the pending two investigations "expeditiously within a period of three months".

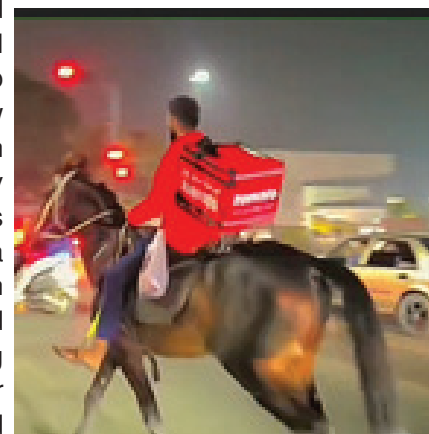
The top court said that reports prepared by third party organisations such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and Hindenburg Research cannot be regarded as "conclusive proof". It added: "The allegations against Adani group of companies have already been finalised, the bench, also expert committee are comprising Justices J.B. unsubstantiated and are rejected."



Delivery boy rides horse to deliver order in Hyderabad

(News Agency)- A delivery boy of Zomato took a horse ride to deliver an order in Hyderabad on Tuesday after petrol stations ran out of fuel due to strike by truckers over new law on hit-and-run accidents. The delivery boy wearing Zomato bag was seen riding the horse on a road near Imperial hotel in Chanchalguda area in the old city. The video of the young man riding the horse to deliver the order was widely shared on social media. He came with the innovative idea after his motorbike ran out of petrol. Petrol banks were either shut after

running out of stocks or there were long queues of customers. The



video reminded people of a visual of a Swiggy man riding a horse to deliver food in Mumbai in 2002 amid heavy rains.

Woman sexually assaulted over land dispute in K'taka; 20 booked

(News Agency)- In a shocking incident, a woman was allegedly confined and sexually assaulted over a land dispute in Karnataka's Belagavi district, and sudden 25 to 30 people attacked me. They pulled my hair and touched my private parts," she said. "They dragged me from the bus stop and locked me up in the panchayat office. They took away money and the mobile phone and got signatures on documents forcefully. Afterwards, the accused let me go by the evening," she told police.



20 people have been booked in this connection. In a complaint to Bailhongal police station, the woman said that she had moved the court in connection with the encroachment on her agricultural land. However, sources said that the accused also tore her clothes. Details are awaited.

"When I was at bus stop, all of a

NIA raids 15 places in Rajasthan in Gogamedi murder case

(News Agency)- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday was conducting raids in Rajasthan and Haryana in connection with Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi murder case. After receiving inputs from shooters Rohit Rathod and Nitin Fauji during the investigation, the NIA prepared the raid plan, said sources.

Officials said that there are some more people behind the murder with whom these shooters had been in direct and indirect contact.

At around 5 a.m., NIA teams began the raid.

According to sources, this raid is going on at 15 places in three districts of Rajasthan.

During the operation in Jaipur, the NIA team also interrogated



the mother and sister of shooter Rohit Rathod. At the same time, NIA has raided 10 places in Haryana. Further details were awaited. Lawrence Bishnoi gang, Sukhdev Singh claimed responsibility for Gogamedi's murder. The two shooters, Rohit Rathore and Sena chief, was shot dead Nitin Fauji, were arrested on December 5 at his residence in Jaipur by three shooters. Soon after the murder, gangster Rohit Godara, associated with the Gogamedi's murder. The two shooters, Rohit Rathore and Nitin Fauji, were arrested on December 9 in Chandigarh.

Sharmila merges YSR Telangana Party with Cong, says 'father's dream to see Rahul as PM'

(News Agency)- YSR Telangana Party (YSRTP) leader Y.S. Sharmila on Thursday merged her party with the Congress. Sharmila, daughter of former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y. Rajasekhara Reddy, joined the Congress in the presence of AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and top leader Rahul Gandhi.

Both the leaders welcomed her into Congress with party scarves. Supporters of Sharmila raised slogans at the programme held at AICC headquarters here.

Sharmila's husband Anil Kumar, AICC General Secretary K.C. Venugopal and Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president G. Rudra Raju were also present. Later, Sharmila told media persons that she was delighted to merge YSRTP with the Congress party.

Sharmila said whatever responsibility the Congress party gives her, she will try to fulfill with loyalty and integrity.

"It was my father's dream to see Mr Rahul



Gandhi as the Prime Minister and I am happy that I am going to be a part to make it happen," she said. "Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, the legendary leader of Telugu people not only served the Congress party all his life but also gave his life serving the Congress party. Today it will give him great joy that his daughter is following in his footsteps and going to be a part of the Congress party," she added. Sharmila, who

is sister of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, noted that Congress is still the largest secular party of the country. "The Congress party always upheld the true culture of India and unwaveringly served all communities, uniting all sections of people of India," she said. Sharmila also said that as a Christian she was pained over the cruelty that took

place in Manipur. "Two thousand churches were vandalised and 60,000 people became homeless," she said, adding that it struck her that this is what will happen if a secular party is not in power. "Therefore, I am merging YSR Telangana Party into the Congress party gladly today because I know the Congress party will uphold all sections of the society," she said.

YSR's daughter said that Rahul Gandhi through his Bharat Jodo Yatra gave immense confidence to most people in India. She claimed that since Congress stood a chance of winning in Telangana, she graciously withheld YSRTP from contesting Assembly elections as she did not want to divide anti-KCR votes. She said she was happy that they contributed to the Congress victory in Telangana.

Sharmila, who had actively campaigned for YSRCP in 2019 elections, felt sidelined by Jagan after the party came to power with a landslide victory.

In 2021, she entered politics in Telangana and floated the YSRTP.

Hiring expansion in India expected to be 8.3% this year: Report

(News Agency)- Hiring expansion in India is expected to be 8.3 per cent in 2024, with a growing demand for talent in AI/ML, data science, and cybersecurity, a new report said on Thursday.

Hiring activity in 2023 was 5 per cent lower than in 2022, indicating slowdown in the job market. However, in December last year, there was a 2 per cent increase in the hiring activity, suggesting a possible turnaround in the hiring scenario,

according to the talent management platform foundit (formerly Monster jobs). "Stepping into 2024 marks a shift from resilience to an era of remarkable growth in certain sectors. It is not merely about scaling up teams but fundamentally reimagining how we approach recruitment. In this dynamic landscape, the key to success lies in prioritising investments in cutting-edge technologies like AI, fostering sustainability practices, and seeking

strategic guidance," said Sekhar Garisa, CEO of foundit.

In 2023, certain sectors showcased remarkable resilience and growth. The maritime and shipping industry surged by 28 per cent, capitalising on increased global trade, and adeptly managing supply chain disruptions. The Retail and Travel & Tourism sectors, both witnessed a 25 per cent uptick, reaping the benefits of the resurgence in consumer spending. The

Advertising, Market Research, and Public Relations (PR) sector saw an 18 per cent increase, attributed to the rise of digital marketing and e-commerce, according to the report. Conversely, certain sectors faced significant challenges, registering negative growth. IT-Hardware and Software experienced an 18 per cent decline, reflecting challenges from saturated markets, skill gaps, and global competition.

India must exploit its goodwill with Russia. Don't let multipolarity become 'messy-polarity'

India's diplomatic manoeuvres have touched all the right chords in the last few years. This is particularly true of the post-Ukraine times where horrors of conventional armed conflict have stumped the aspirations of the globalised world. Dense and AI-powered militarisation of state and non-state actors has rendered the world deeply insecure. 'Slowbalisation' has made the global economic outlook look its bleakest in decades. And there's more. The world is sailing in choppy waters of intensifying great power rivalry between the US and China with a geopolitical bifurcation underway. The premonition of yet another war in the straits and its cataclysmic impact has gripped our universe. From Ukraine and Gaza to the Indo-Pacific, semiconductors and outer space—geopolitics is throbbing anxiously.

Under deft leadership, India has managed to shine in dire times – unleashing a truly intersectional global moment that has ensured steady economic growth, expanded diplomatic heft and footprint and wondrous respect for commitment to the "global south". At the heart of this success, as many would argue, lies India's commitment to multi-alignment. It is imperative that an assessment ensues on what really substantiates this foreign policy tool. Fundamental here should be a re-iteration that ultimately it is a means to an end, not the end itself. Effective multi-alignment and relevant multipolarity should be moored in their utility with clearly defined national interests.

The India Way

When modern India revels, and rightly so, in transitioning from the romanticism of the Nehruvian epoch to the realism of the Modi era—the unmissable subtext here is about the optimal utilisation of India's civilisational strength and its elegant multi-aligned posture in the politics among nations. The aspiration is to ultimately make India a "vishwaguru", a world leader, a power centre. Long story short, it means an unwavering focus on amassing India's comprehensive national strength, namely hard power, economic power and techno-polar traction.

That is the quintessence of the India Way, a phrase made famous by external affairs minister S Jaishankar. The commentariat, however, often entangles itself in glorifying the means and losing sight of the end. That's where it defeats the purpose.

Nowhere was the disjunct most unobscure than in the recent visit by Jaishankar to Moscow. It appeared as if this one visit in two years alone has championed India's multi-alignment pathway. The only physical meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi had with President Vladimir Putin after the Russia-Ukraine war was on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in

Uzbekistan in 2022. The year 2023, however, neither saw a bilateral summit nor a physical meeting. By contrast, one cannot even count the number of high-profile bilateral leaders' meetings India has had with leaders of the US, EU, France, Germany etc despite disagreements.

In two years alone, defence and economic cooperation, critical and emerging tech and joint military exercises have all seen unparalleled growth because New Delhi understands where and how global security and economic and digital orders cross-cut. And I am not even starting with the G 20 'mahakumbh' that India pulled off with elan, defeating opposite apprehensions. Jaishankar's five-day visit to Russia was necessary but gravely delayed. The visit had raised expectations about substantive outcomes with futuristic overtones. The outcome statement talked of myriad plans, and therein lies the challenge. The real issues in the Russia-India relationship are too technical and complicated to be solved with conducive bilateral goodwill alone. There are at least two major roadblocks to substantiating India-Russia ties in a fast-changing world.

Economic and geopolitical hurdles
Economic first – India's purchase of Russian oil was done because, as emphasised repeatedly by the government, it was beneficial to India's economic interests and not to defy Western sanctions. However, unresolved payment issues, ballooning trade deficit and Russia's repeated production cuts have dented the discounted oil ecosystem. These problems do not stem from the state of bilateral ties, but purely technical issues that point to an unsustainable ecosystem. It gets aggravated by Russia's discomfort at investing nearly a trillion rupees lying in its recently opened Vostro accounts back into India. As pressure mounts on Moscow to increase defence spending back home, the priority is not to tackle trade deficits with New Delhi. It has become evident over the last two years that mini investments, such as an order of 24 cargo ships for Russia, likely import of Indian eggs or Russia's modest investment in Indian government securities, are but a tiny step in tackling the underlying problem.

Regardless of the debate on the efficacy of Western sanctions, the ecosystem in which India and Russia find their trade operating is fragile and susceptible to economic realities that go far beyond the matrix of historic friendship and generic goodwill. It must also be remembered that references to historic friendship are made in the context of the 1971 treaty with the USSR, before which a non-aligned India with excellent relations with the Soviet Union was left alone to face and manage its defeat in the 1962 war with China.

Jan 6 anniversary: Remember these leaders, values that unite us and protect our democracy

Jan. 6 marked a rupture in our country's history: The peaceful transfer of power was threatened and our Capitol – the seat of American democracy – was attacked by fellow Americans.

Three years have passed since that day, but the danger to our democracy has not. To respond to this challenge, Americans of all political stripes must stay grounded in our love of country and work to safeguard our democracy.

When George Washington refused to run for a third term, he made clear that the new republic would be grounded in the peaceful transition of power. Over time, our country built a civic and electoral system that supports campaigns of passion and purpose while also recognizing that the ultimate results of the election are final.

Candidates understood that the winner would need to heal the divisions and move forward in order to govern, and the loser would need to accept the results, knowing that they could stay involved in our democracy, and even choose to run for office again.

BIDEN SAYS 'NO QUESTION' TRUMP SUPPORTED INSURRECTION

Since Washington's time, our country has, of course, had moments of great division and turmoil, the most dangerous of which was the Civil War. But even then, Abraham Lincoln refused to give up on his belief in our democracy and the American people. Lincoln rejected calls from some members of his administration to cancel the 1864 presidential election – a re-election campaign many thought Lincoln would lose. Lincoln reportedly told his cabinet that to cancel our elections would be tantamount to allowing the Confederacy to win, and that

our democracy itself would be lost.

He also pledged to work with his opponent, George McClellan – who would likely make peace with the Confederacy – in the event that McClellan won. And despite criticism, Lincoln continued with plans for a transcontinental railroad and the completion of the new Capitol dome as the war raged, demonstrating that a nation "of the people, by the people, for the people" can withstand anything, as long as its core is protected.

That core, of course, is free and fair elections and the agreement by all Americans to accept their results.

My dad, a World War II veteran who survived the Battle of the Bulge, reminded our family often that "democracy is the alternative to violence." Other political systems rely on force and intimidation to stay in power, or offer constant chaos as rival factions use violence to obtain power. Our system is a whole, whole lot better. Dad was adamant: freedom is our most important priority. And our freedom depends on each and every American being free to cast a ballot, knowing that it will be counted and accepted. The preservation of freedom also relies on those running for office to understand that the country's survival depends on the acceptance of whatever the ultimate election results may be, regardless of the outcome. I first ran for office in 2002 and lost. I still remember standing at the polling place in my hometown, holding campaign signs with other candidates and supporters from both political parties, energized by the day – knowing that democracy was on the move, hoping that our candidates were winning, but sharing a love, regardless of party, for the process that we were witnessing.



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Editor in Chief & Publisher :

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Managing Editor :

Susmita Ghosh

Deputy Managing Editor :

Amaninder Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) : Aruna Singh

Special Correspondents: Gagandeep Singh (India)

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

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REGD & MAILING OFFICE :

P.O Box 7005 Hicksville New York 11801

Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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How AI is changing what sovereignty means

Disinformation, misleading information, and even hate speech, are the order of the day and the big question now is how to prevent these evils in governance and development so that some truth and accountability is ensured

Amidst competitive global politicking, as the world struggles to contain the toxic legacies of 2023 — cruel regional wars, civic conflicts and undeniable stories of anthropogenic harms — technocrats, ecocrats, and bureaucrats across the world continue to device and launch quiet initiatives portending a better and larger future for human rights.

One such initiative led, in early October 2023, to the Report of the High-Level Committee on Programmes and the High-Level Committee on Management joint session on the use and governance of AI and related frontier technologies hosted, significantly, by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Of course, the UN system had already begun its work on "frontier technologies" and artificial intelligence (AI), including the development, in 2019, of a United Nations system-wide strategic approach and road map for supporting capacity development of AI. The principles for the ethical use of AI in the United Nations system were adumbrated in the famous UNESCO declaration which prescribes many values and principles, chief being the following: Respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms and human dignity; ecological sustainability; diversity and inclusiveness. These range across eleven areas of specific concern that include good governance and just development. A "system-wide normative and operational framework on the use of AI in the United Nations system, based on these principles for the ethical use of AI" was finally

Important though these are for humanistic future development and applications of AI, they would be sheer flights of fancy if further work on this code were to ignore all talk of "digital sovereignty" and performances of digital diplomacy. In one way or another, the principle of territorial sovereignty is slowly but surely being transformed into that of digital sovereignty. Transborder, multilevel governance of AI is at the very heart of corporate governance, and sovereignty over peoples and nations is being transformed into masses of accumulated classified data. Disinformation, misleading information, and even hate speech, are the order of the day and the big question now is how to prevent these evils in governance and development so that some truth and accountability is ensured.

Karl Manheim and Lyric Kaplan, in a 2019 article in the Yale Journal of Law and Technology, portray in some macabre detail the threats "fuelled by growing deployment" of AI tools that lead to "[manipulation of] the

preconditions and levers of democracy" and "threats to decisional and informational privacy". AI "is the engine behind Big Data Analytics and the Internet of Things." While some consumer benefit ensues, their "principal function at present is to capture personal information, create detailed behavioural profiles and sell us goods and agenda." Privacy, anonymity and autonomy remain the "main casualties of AI's ability to manipulate choices in economic and political decisions" to the extent that, unless determined steps at global, regional, and national levels are taken now, privacy and democracy will rapidly become wonders of the past!

The present digital wars between the US and China, in fact, represent three different "digital empires" in complicity as well as collision, as Anu Bradford analyses in a book-length study of China, the US and EU law and regulation regimes (Digital Empires, 2023). She shows that the free digital model of the US, which amounts to complete freedom to the AI industry (the techno-optimistic model) revives the models of free speech and open markets, leaving the form and content entirely open to free market forces. Free market fundamentalism has nurtured the growth and global eminence of the social media

industry which (according to the Business Research Company) rose from \$193.52 billion in 2001 to \$231.1 billion in 2023, and is expected to grow to \$454.37 billion in 2027. All this techno-optimism run "wild" is yielding to the appeal of an "authoritarian" model of regulatory reach, based on state surveillance and hegemony over private AI companies. The Chinese state-driven regulatory model is on "the ascent worldwide, leading to growing concern in the US, the EU, and the rest of the democratic world about the implications of that ascent."

The worry that "China's regulatory model will prevail is real, both normatively and descriptively" because while China's technological development is impressive, its way of "harnessing that technology is often deeply oppressive". The Chinese state-driven model also "appeals to many developing authoritarian countries" because it "combines political control with tremendous technological success". In contrast, the very few actually existing "democratic" societies seem to prefer the EU model, seen as providing the "necessary building blocks of a more equitable and human-centric digital economy." The EU Declaration on Development on November 22, 2021, privileges a human rights-based approach

to development, postulating respect for human rights as "a precondition for the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development".

Bradford reminds us about the promise of an uncertain future of the technopolitical, although it remains open "whether surveillance capitalism, digital authoritarianism, or liberal democratic values will prevail as a foundation for human engagement and for our society as we advance further into the digital era".

We would need to go far afield to even begin to look at the uses of AI technologies for war or terror purposes or perspectives. But AI has now irreversibly "revolutionised" warfare. The use of unmanned lethal autonomous weapons systems, abbreviated in an unconscious irony by the US Defence Department as LAWS, illustrates complete machine-learning dependence and dehumanisation of the means of warfare, setting back the project of international humanitarian law. The overall project of "humanising" AI applications in all contexts, civil or military, must continue lest, as the poet T S Eliot said in *The Waste Land*, we lose it in the "awful daring of a moment's surrender which an age of prudence can never retract."

Bangladesh isn't Pakistan: Elections matter

The practice and tradition of democracy have been evolving in Bangladesh. But there is a new trend of the mainstreaming of Islamist forces that will need monitoring

The elections this weekend in Bangladesh, the first in a series of polls in 2024 across the world, will be significant. Unlike Pakistan, where the army will continue to rule irrespective of the electoral outcome, the Bangladesh elections can consolidate democratic practices and institutions, bring about a progressive development agenda and fuller participation in regional and global affairs. The support of the international community will be crucial for such an outcome.

The ruling Grand Alliance, led by Sheikh Hasina of Awami League (AL), seeking a fourth successive term, has delivered on economic growth, infrastructure development, social support network, improvement in SDGs and the fight against terrorism in its 15 years of governance. However, popular support declined when the nation's post-Covid recovery was impacted by the Ukraine war. It led to a macro-economic crisis, inflation and unemployment, and needed an IMF bailout.

To compound the challenges, the Opposition campaigned vigorously for a caretaker government, failing which it

threatened to boycott the polls. More worrisome for the government was criticism from the USA and Europe that called for free and fair elections, suggesting that processes were not democratic. For AL, these developments sought to undermine the legitimacy of the electoral outcome. Rather than debating on substantive issues, the single-point agenda of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was to question who should conduct the elections. It insisted that AL step down and hand over power to a caretaker government.

The experience of a neutral caretaker government, which began on an experimental basis in 1991, has been mixed. In 1996, the 13th Constitutional Amendment introduced the provision of a caretaker government as a compromise, to sustain democracy because of the deep mistrust between the political forces. In 2006, the caretaker government overstayed and even imprisoned political leaders from both sides. In 2011, the 15th Constitutional Amendment did away with caretaker governments and the Election Commission's role in the electoral process was strengthened, as per

Supreme Court rulings. When AL did not relent, the BNP decided to boycott the 2024 elections but continued to stage protests in the hope of stalling the process.

Violence has been a feature of elections in Bangladesh with its history of assassinations that created deep mistrust between AL and BNP. It came in the way of dialogue and consensus and led to zero-sum options. In 2014, the Opposition boycotted the elections on the caretaker issue. In 2018, it contested the elections, but amidst allegations of electoral violations, the ruling alliance received an overwhelming mandate.

The Opposition BNP entered the fray in 2023 with a depleted organisation, a weakened leadership in detention or overseas and dissension within the ranks. Its strategy of agitation to stall the elections led to further arrests of opposition workers. Many BNP local leaders wanted to contest elections, despite a diktat to boycott, and several broke away to form new parties. This reaffirmed the importance of electoral politics and the marginalisation of those who would not join elections.



Punjab Tableau Row: A Political Agenda or Vendetta?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN
CHANDIGARH

Punjab has always served as a shield against external or internal attacks on India. To forget the sacrifice of the heroes here is to forget Indian history. Here, while the youth had kissed the noose with a smile, the Gurus, who had always given the message of humanity, not only got their heads chopped off but had also gotten their innocent children stuck in the wall so that the religion and honour of the country could be kept intact. Even today the words of the Gurus provide coolness to the mind and give the message of peace and brotherhood. In such a situation, if the Government of India does not see any merit in the tableaux of Punjab for the Republic Day and these tableaux are not even considered worthy of display, then it is not only surprising but also saddening and forces one to think that after all, 'Why don't we see the qualities worthy of display in our sacrifices and culture?' Is this being done due to some special agenda or political discrimination as alleged by Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Singh Mann? Definitely the question will arise. Punjab government had submitted three ideas viz. Punjab-history of sacrifice and martyrdom, Mai Bhago- the First Lady warrior of Sikhism (women empowerment) and Rich heritage of Punjab. CM Mann said that these ideas were duly submitted on time with

the Union government for their approval, but the union government had ignored the immense contribution of the state by rejecting these ideas. Slamming the BJP led Union government for rejecting the

Minister in an official release on December 27.

Mann alleged that for the last two years, the Modi government has deliberately kept Punjab out of this mega national event. This year also more than 90% states



tableau of state for the Republic Day parade, the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, on December 27, alleged that the 'power mad' centre government is demeaning and humiliating the enormous sacrifices made by Punjabis in the national freedom struggle.

"This is not for the first time but last year also the BJP led Union government had done the same mischief and by rejecting the tableau this year too, centre has rubbed salt into wounds of the state" said the Chief

that have been selected for tableaux are being ruled by the BJP, which indicates the ongoing saffronisation of Republic Day and Independence Day by the Modi government.

Criticizing the action of the central government, Shiromani Akali Dal President and former Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab, Sukhbir Singh Badal, in a tweet on December 28, states, "How can any national event be deemed complete without highlighting the heritage of the great Guru Sahiban, the

Sahibzadas and countless heroes and martyrs of freedom struggle like Shaheed-E-Azam Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sardar Kartar Singh Sarabha, Sardar Udham Singh, Lala Lajpat Rai? Anyone responsible for this injustice to the land of martyrs deserves to be identified and held accountable."

He further adds, "I strongly urge Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi to intervene against discrimination against proud, patriotic and valorous Punjab and Punjabis through the exclusion of the state from R-Day parade." Punjab State Congress President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, while questioning the decision of non-inclusion of Punjab Tableaus, tweeted on December 29, "It is highly improbable that Punjab's Tableau has been denied for the 26th January parade. All Tableaus are inspected by a central team & released only if nothing is objectionable. The central govt could have suggested changes if any but outrightly rejecting our Tableau proves that they discriminate against Punjab. This is not in the spirit of COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM." Why the tableaux not considered? The Ministry of Defence on Sunday, December 31, clarified that the tableau proposal of Punjab was considered in the first three rounds of meeting of the expert

committee comprising eminent persons in the field of art, culture, painting, sculpture, music, architecture, choreography, etc. After the third round of meeting, the tableau of Punjab could not be taken forward by the committee for further consideration for not aligning to the broader themes of this year's tableau.

Explaining further an official with the Defence Ministry said, "As states have to be treated equally, it is essential that states should be given the opportunity to display their tableaux as per a formula. Hence, the criticism by these states (Punjab and West Bengal) is baseless."

To give further chance to the rejected category states, the MoD official divulged, "Moreover, the states and UTs not being selected for the Republic Day Parade are being invited to showcase their tableaux in Bharat Parv at Red Fort, New Delhi, during January 23-31."

Strongly criticizing the suggestion of MoD to the states that they can showcase their tableaux in Bharat Parv at Red Fort, New Delhi, during January 23-31, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann categorically said that the state government will not send its tableau in the rejected categories list of the Modi led Union government as the martyrs of the country do not need NoC from BJP. In a statement, the Chief Minister said that the great martyrs including Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Shaheed Rajguru, Shaheed Sukhdev, Lala Lajpat Rai, Shaheed Udham Singh, Shaheed Kartar Singh Sarabha, Mai Bhago, Ghadri Baabe and others cannot be kept in rejected category. He said that the union government is trying to belittle their contribution and sacrifice of these heroes by not including their tableaux in the Republic Day parade. Mann said that this cannot be tolerated as it is the grave insult of these great patriots and national leaders. Is the decision of MoD fair and free from biasedness?

Analysing both ends—MoD decision and criticism by all major political parties of Punjab—Congress, Aam Adami Party and Shiromani Akali Dal, one cannot ascertain up to the mark that the decision is biased, or vendetta based, but it does not sound fully transparent and beyond doubt even, as it has failed to satisfy the questions being raised in the public mind.

Claudine Gay is gone, but diversity ideology still plagues Harvard

The tide is turning in academia, but much still needs to be done

Numerous and compounding reasons led to Claudine Gay's removal as president of Harvard University. Her departure, while a necessary first step, does not solve the problems that required her departure and that continue to plague Harvard and much of higher education.

Gay was manifestly unqualified for the position, with only a fraction of the scholarly accomplishments of her predecessors at Harvard and peers at other universities. She was obviously selected as a symbol for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) ideology that Harvard wishes to promote, not because of her merit as a scholar. Gay even used DEI as a cudgel to eliminate rivals much more accomplished black professors, such as Roland Fryer and Ronald Sullivan, with manufactured charges that they had created hostile work environments.

But the use of DEI as a departure from academic merit and as a weapon for organizational combat are not eliminated with Gay's departure. The DEI bureaucracy that she helped build and use for her ascent remains intact at Harvard and throughout higher education. The growing number of plagiarism charges against Gay focused more attention on her lack of scholarly merit as Harvard's president. Like the old Catskills joke about the food being horrible and with such small portions, academic fraud characterized the meager research output Gay had produced. These plagiarism charges were more than sufficient reason for her removal as president, but the fact that she remains as a Harvard professor does not resolve the lowering of research standards that her misconduct represents. In addition, Harvard's willingness to keep Gay as president until the instances of plagiarism became too numerous raises concerns about the double-standards with which Harvard and other universities enforce their rules. They would have sanctioned a



student immediately – and for far less.

Critical attention on Gay gained momentum after her disastrous testimony before a House Committee investigating antisemitic protests on university campuses. Her unwillingness to say that chanting genocidal slogans would violate Harvard's code of conduct while the university regularly punishes much more benign speech highlighted Gay's own use of double standards. But Gay's removal does not resolve this double standard nor does it mitigate the rampant Jew-hatred found at Harvard and other elite

institutions. Lastly, it should be noted that there have been no sanctions for the members of the Harvard board that hired Gay despite her obvious lack of qualifications, defended her plagiarism, threatened those investigating the matter, and embraced the DEI ideology and double standards that foment Jew-hatred on campus. They should be held accountable too.

Progress toward resolving these issues at Harvard and elsewhere could not be done without the removal of bad actors like Gay and the board members who enabled her. But the public campaign to fire Gay has not really fixed any of

Harvard's serious problems. Bloated DEI bureaucracies continue to promote the discriminatory ideology that people deserve different treatment depending upon the racial, ethnic, or sexual identities that place them in "oppressor" or "oppressed" categories. Standards for research integrity continue to weaken and be upheld differently depending on the preferred status of researchers and their findings. And the selective enforcement of codes of conduct that make universities more hostile to anyone deemed to be an oppressor, including Jews, white men, and believing Christians. The

same public campaign that ousted Claudine Gay now needs to turn its attention to the policies and practices that allowed her to become Harvard president and produce enough disastrous publicity to force her removal. We need to dismantle DEI bureaucracies and uproot the ideology they promote on campus. We need to re-establish high and consistent standards for academic research. This would almost certainly require the elimination of academic departments that characterized more by political advocacy than rigorous inquiry, such as ethnic and gender studies departments. We also need to get universities to adopt and consistently enforce strong protections of free academic speech while also fully prosecuting violations of their codes of conduct, including physical harassment, trespassing, and the use of the heckler's veto to drown out disfavored speakers.

Claudine Gay's removal as the president of Harvard, following Liz Magill's departure at Penn, suggests that the tide is turning in academia. But much still needs to be done to bring these institutions back to serving their original and laudable missions.

Ambaji, Tirupati to Ayodhya invite - Sonia's tryst with Hinduism goes back a long way

By Rasheed Kidwai

Sonia Gandhi, along with AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, has been invited to attend the consecration ceremony of Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024.

The news of Sonia Gandhi being invited to the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024, has become a talking point. But those who personally know her are aware she is no stranger to the faith that her husband and mother-

in-law practised. She wrote as much in 1998 at the Tirupati Temple, Lord Venkateswara's abode, when she went to pay her respects to Lord Balaji. Her aide and the then chairman of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams which manages the Tirupati Temple, Subbarami Reddy, had arranged darshan amid protests. Since formally joining politics in 1998, Sonia had refused to be drawn into the controversy surrounding her faith. Some critics feel that political compulsions have drawn her more closely to Hinduism than her parents would

have liked.

In the 1999 general elections, when the Sangh Parivar launched a nationwide campaign for a 'Ram Rajya' versus 'Rome Rajya' on grounds of Sonia's foreign origins and Christian faith, the Roman Catholic Association in India took an unprecedented stance of denying that she was a practising Catholic. After Sonia and Rajiv's marriage, she was often seen accompanying him whenever he visited any place of worship. Her head covered with her pallu, she would even bend down and touch the feet of godmen. She was with

Rajiv when he called on Devraha Baba on the eve of the 1989 elections. The baba used to live on a wooden platform resting on stilts six feet above the ground, ostensibly to avoid human vibrations. His way of blessing was also unique: he would kick a devotee. Rajiv and Sonia then went to the Ambaji Temple in Gujarat. It was her second visit to Ambaji since Indira Gandhi had taken her there in 1979 when she was about to embark on the do-or-die election of 1979-80. Ambaji had then blessed Indira, who returned to power.

6 Reasons Why the Left's Attempt to Stigmatise Ram Lalla's Consecration Doesn't Add Up

By: Rahul Shivshankar

When it comes to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, nothing matters to the Left. Not the tide of evidence, the weight of history or even the stamp of the Supreme Court. The Left will never stop linking the consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya to Hindu supremacism.

The latest to yoke the symbol of Hindu ethos to the calumny of communalism is Karnataka senior Congress leader BK Hariprasad who says "there is no history of demolishing one religious place to construct another. Let me be clear, this (consecration ceremony) is not a religious programme. Don't exaggerate it. In Karnataka, the government must take all precautions...in Gujarat Kar Sewaks were burnt alive in Godhra. They are attempting to replicate the incident in Karnataka." Hariprasad's attempt to malign Ram bhakts is matched only by the paranoia

of Asaduddin Owaisi, the chief of the sectarian All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM). As the self-appointed grandee of all Indian Muslims, Owaisi has



darkly intoned, "Youngsters, I am telling you, we have lost our mosque and you are seeing what is being done there. Youngsters, don't you feel any pain in your hearts?... The place where we sat, and recited Quran-e-Kareem for 500 years is

not in our hands today. Youngsters, don't you see that a conspiracy is taking place regarding three-four more mosques, in which the Sunhari Mosque of Delhi is also there? These forces want to drive you out of here. Want to finish you off."

Hariprasad and Owaisi's ominous fulminations are in line with many others on the Left. Political scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta once put it, the consecration of the Ram temple is an act of "brute majoritarianism subordinating others".

But this is an unsubstantiated claim. The construction of the Ram Mandir is not the denouement of a project to build a Hindu Rashtra, but as once LK Advani, the progenitor of the BJP's Ram temple agitation, said, the beginning of an "integral part of the historical process of Hindu self-

renewal and self-affirmation".

This article will establish that what is being sought to be renewed is not, by any stretch of the imagination, an 'othering' or 'majoritarian' way of being. Much like after the completion of the construction of the Somnath temple in 1951, even the Hinduism actualized today through the construction of the Ram temple remains very much in sync with the syncretism that is at its civilizational core. First, it is easy to overlook that the construction of the Ram temple has been complemented by the Indian state with a grant of land measuring five acres to the Muslim community to build a grand mosque. This compensation is an acknowledgement of the wrong committed upon Muslims. No state machinery with a revanchist predilection would ever acquiesce in any gesture that seeks to make amends for a wrong done to the supposed other.

What 2024 Holds for Indian Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities

By: Harshil Mehta

2023 was an eventful year for Indiplomacy — a newly coined and merged word of 'India' and 'diplomacy', indicating diplomacy to advocate Indian interests. The year was anything but simple, from the G20 presidency to the first visit of S Jaishankar to four Latin American countries to the allegations of encounters on foreign land by India. But what challenges and opportunities will Indiplomacy face in 2024? Forecasting the future is a tricky business, as many known unknowns and some unknown unknowns make the world. However, certain events are pending this year that may undoubtedly impact the Indiplomacy. A reader should take this article as an exercise to summarise the potential events that may shape the Indiplomacy in the new year rather than a precise prediction.

India, the world's largest democracy, is undergoing general elections this year. First things first. PM Modi-led BJP won the 2023 assembly elections in three states, proving an unwavering public support for his leadership in the absence of credible alternatives by the Opposition alliance. Welfare schemes, development, and civilisational issues like Ram Mandir favour Prime Minister Narendra Modi over other candidates. The Lok Sabha elections 2024 are less than six months away — and as things stand now — it seems almost certain that PM Modi will return to the Centre. Thus, a nationalist and pragmatic foreign policy might likely prevail in 2024. Not just India but 50-odd countries contributing to half of the world's GDP are undergoing elections, including the United States of America, which will have



presidential elections in 2024. However, before these elections, the ill-advised Biden administration seemed unwilling to tolerate a multi-aligned and independent India, which was perceived to go against American interests. First, the US provided intelligence to Canada in the killings of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, followed by the Department of Justice (DoJ) inquiry on Nikhil Gupta. Second, the US declined India's invitation to join the Republic Day parade as a chief guest. Now, Paris has accepted New Delhi's invitation, and analysts can't rule out the prospect of an anti-China bloc, not subservient to the US, if Americans elect Biden again.

This year, the equations between India and Russia would also be interesting in the backdrop of America's attempts to meddle in India's strategic autonomy. In the last days of 2023, EAM Jaishankar visited Moscow to reaffirm 'strong and steady' ties and signed several deals on trade,

connectivity, energy, military, and collaboration of an Indian nuclear plant, possibly irking the Western establishment. During this visit, Russian President Putin invited PM Modi to Moscow for the annual summit this year. At this point, the dragon in the room must be addressed, as the elephant enters its fourth year in a frozen relationship with it. India remains an option for the 'China plus one' strategy for sourcing and supply chains for European and American companies. The Modi government has invited and incentivised manufacturing companies to produce more in India. A full-scale war is unlikely, but this can surely annoy China. Beijing may hit back by luring other South Asian countries and increasing its strategic positions. However, this, in turn, can increase the cooperation between New Delhi and Tokyo.

Another country that will have polls soon is Bangladesh. On January 7, the country will have elections where Sheikh Hasina and

her party, Awami League, are likely to win due to the absence of her rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) from the polls. Dhaka, under Hasina, is also going through a rough patch with Washington DC, and Beijing has all eyes on it. In this case, one challenge could be an engagement of India with Bangladesh, obviously in the absence of US support, to keep Indian interests safe by keeping China at arm's distance. However, in the case of Jamaat-backed candidates' win or prolonged socio-political instability, a fresh round of persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh may begin due to extremism. It can increase their exodus, and illegal infiltration by other communities in pursuit of economic prosperity may also increase. This situation also poses a different challenge for India to deal with. In our neighbourhood, Pakistan is undergoing the elections with results due in February, but as usual, the one favoured by the Army would win—the administration change in Islamabad yields little results as foreign policy operators sit in Rawalpindi. Sri Lanka is back on track for economic recovery, and Nepal's ruling party has reduced anti-India statements. Other than these dynamics, the continued conflict between Israel and Palestine will compel India to take measured and balanced steps. The US-Houthi confrontation may create troubles in the Red Sea in the coming days as well. In conclusion, 2024 holds a tapestry of diplomatic challenges and opportunities for Indiplomacy, shaped by elections, geopolitical realignments, and regional dynamics. Navigating these complexities requires a nuanced and proactive approach to secure India's interests on the global stage.

Changes due to alliance and form: BJP to contest more seats, Cong fewer in 2024

Change in circumstances, apart from the form of the two main players, has resulted in quite contrasting strategies for the BJP and Congress going into 2024 polls.



By Amitabh Tiwari

Battle lines for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections have been drawn with less than three months left for the Model Code of Conduct to be invoked. In 2019, election dates were announced on March 10. With both the NDA and INDIA blocs initiating seat distribution talks, the bugle for the grand finale has been blown.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, the captain of the NDA, enters the fray in good form having defeated Congress 3-0 in the Hindi heartland states that went to polls recently. The form of Congress, the uncrowned captain of the INDIA bloc, is of concern to the alliance partners, as it is going through a rough patch. Though, good news is that Congress is showing signs of revival in the crucial

Southern India pitch which sends a quarter of MPs to Lok Sabha. Changes in circumstances, apart from the form of the two main players, has resulted in quite contrasting strategies for the BJP and Congress going into the 2024 polls. To note, the BJP accounts for more than 90 per cent of seats and a vote share of the NDA, while the Congress have 50 per cent vote share and a third of seats of the INDIA bloc. In 2019, the BJP contested on 435 seats, leaving the rest for their allies in a house of 543. It won 303 seats, and was a runner-up in 72, and second runner-up with 31 seats. It did not contest 23 seats each in Maharashtra and Bihar, 34 in Tamil Nadu, and 10 in Punjab.

Four key allies, SAD (Punjab; 10 seats),

AIADMK (Tamil Nadu; 21 seats), JDU (Bihar; 17 seats), SHS (Uddhav Sena; 22 seats) and RLP (Rajasthan; 1 seat) have left the NDA. These parties contested 71 seats in 2019. Today, the party cannot boast of a single ally who has more than 10 seats in Lok Sabha except for Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde). In fact, it doesn't have many prominent allies left who opened their account in Lok Sabha in 2019, namely SHS (Eknath Shinde), NCP (Ajit Pawar), LJP (Paswan family), Apna Dal, and some parties from the North East.

The BJP has more or less compensated for the loss of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra by inducting a faction led by Eknath Shinde (now recognised as official Sena by ECI) and another led by Ajit Pawar from the NCP.

The majority of 22 seats which Sena contested in 2019 may be split between these two parties.

In Bihar, the BJP inducted HAM and RLSP, while all MLAs of VIP merged with the party. However, these smaller parties would not be able to contest all the 17 seats that fell vacant with the exit of Nitish Kumar's party from the NDA.

This implies that the BJP will have to contest more seats in 2024 vis-a-vis 2019. These seats are likely to be from Punjab, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh (depending upon Pawan Kalyan's call to tie up with the TDP), and a few seats in North East, Meghalaya, Mizoram. In 2019, Congress contested on 422 seats leaving the rest for their allies, in a house of 543. INC won 52 seats, and was a runner-up in 209, and second runner-up in 99 seats. The Congress, unlike the BJP, has expanded its bloc with the induction of new allies like TMC, SP, JD(U), AAP, SHS (Uddhav), and Left Parties. This is likely to change the electoral dynamics in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Delhi, and Kerala. The party will need to sacrifice seats as it is the junior partner in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, which account for 122 seats. In Maharashtra, where it contested 25 seats in 2019, it may have to settle for less as there are now three claimants SHS (Uddhav), NCP (Sharad Pawar).

Kharge mark missing in Congress rejig. Priyanka-Pilot to shore up 2024 prospects?

By Rasheed Kidwai

The revamped AICC (All India Congress Committee) secretariat indicates a key campaigner role for Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Sachin Pilot for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, while Rahul Gandhi has kept himself out of any formal responsibility in the party organisation.

Priyanka, while being retained as the AICC general secretary, has not been given any specific role or a cluster of states to look after. This unusual positioning signals a certain ambiguity about her exact role. Party insiders say AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge wants Priyanka to be a "campaigner at large" across the country. She is also expected to be an informal arbitrator, listening post and crisis manager, all clubbed into one. The lack of clear or specific roles for Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka and Rahul has been a constant feature since Kharge took over as the party president in October last year. Rahul has been

focussing on Bharat Jodo Yatra and issues of national importance. KC Venugopal, Jairam Ramesh and Randeep Singh Surjewala, Jitendra Singh, Manikam Tagore, Deepak Babaria and Ajay Maken claim to draw their strength from Rahul, calling shots in the party. Then, there are old timers like Mukul Wasnik, Avinash Pande, Kumari Selja, Rajiv Shukla and Mohan Prakash who continue to shine due to the "Sonia Gandhi factor".

Digvijaya Singh's omission from the AICC general secretary list is glaring, signalling the end of his political innings. It was not a coincidence that his colleague from Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath, came under severe criticism during a recently held meeting of the Congress Working Committee. Nath and Digvijaya were blamed for "overconfidence" and their failure to make the Congress win in the central state. Kharge in particular was reportedly scathing in criticising Nath, wondering why the AICC was kept in the

dark about the party's bleak prospects and why Nath ignored last-minute missives and wake-up calls from Kharge when elections were announced. Nath and Diggy Raja have been in the party since the Sanjay Gandhi era. Together they have battled on many fronts, often checkmating their friends and foes alike. But post-December 3, they are clearly out of luck and favour.

From the face of the recent and important reshuffle, it is evident that a "Team Kharge" is yet to emerge to consolidate its hold over the grand old party. Kharge has however, managed to get rid of non-performers like Tariq Anwar, Harish Choudhary, Rajni Patil and Manish Chathrath. There were several complaints relating to Chathrath who had the tag of an in-house "logistics man", particularly from Meghalaya where the party had performed miserably in the assembly polls. It's a mystery why Chathrath-like accountability has not been applied to those who were looking after Rajasthan,

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Kharge has adopted a lame-duck approach towards Rajasthan, refusing to punish Ashok Gehlot and his poll strategist who had made some tall claims. Clearly Kharge, for some inexplicable reasons, wants to retain or try out Gehlot till the Lok Sabha polls. His choice of Sachin Pilot as a high AICC functionary has been made to keep Pilot out of Rajasthan. Pilot has been given charge of Chhattisgarh but informed sources say bigger responsibilities are on the cards. Pilot, like Priyanka, has been earmarked to campaign across the party for the Lok Sabha polls. It is an open secret that Pilot gets along with Priyanka very well and she would want him to be an effective voice for the party. The big question is whether Priyanka-Pilot jodi is enough or effective to match Narendra Modi-Amit Shah? And more importantly would Priyanka and Pilot be contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha polls?

By: Tejusvi Shukla

The evolving landscape of international relations has witnessed the pervasive influence of cognitive warfare reaching into diplomatic realms. Particularly pronounced in heated geopolitical regions such as the Indo-Pacific, diplomatic engagements between nations often reverberate beyond immediate stakeholders, impacting the interests of other states. As the spectre of alleged Chinese interference looms over Taiwan's upcoming January 2024 elections, its transient influence on India's diplomatic engagements becomes a focal point.

This incident serves as a paradigmatic recurrence, showcasing the pitfalls of reactive responses instead of strategic foresight, echoing previous diplomatic missteps in regions like the Maldives and Oman.



Unravelling India-Taiwan Diplomatic Incident in the Spectrum of Cognitive Warfare

THE TRAJECTORY OF EVENTS

In the initial days of November 2023, discussions surrounding a mobility agreement between Taiwan and India took precedence. Confirmation from the official spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs on November 9, 2023, marked the commencement of the discourse. A subsequent Bloomberg report on November 10 speculated on the potential recruitment of up to

100,000 Indians by Taiwan under the proposed agreement. By November 13, as Taipei officially acknowledged ongoing negotiations, the report had already permeated both social and traditional media in Taiwan. Despite Taiwanese Labour Minister Hsu Ming Chun refuting claims, a racial undercurrent against Indians emerged, placing the Taiwanese government on the

defensive. Within a mere 15 days, India and Taiwan found themselves issuing clarifications and engaging in damage control, overshadowing the intended mobility agreement. As December came to a close, the Taiwanese government's categorical denial of a significant influx and the absence of clarity on the Memorandum of Understanding's finalisation were attributed to the prevailing anti-

mobility sentiment, shaping the government's stance in the lead-up to the January 2024 Presidential elections.

TRACING THE CHINESE INTERFERENCE

The genesis of the controversy surrounding the mobility agreement remains enigmatic—whether a meticulously crafted disinformation campaign or the release of genuine information out

of context remains uncertain. However, the diffusion and response to this claim warrant examination. The Taiwanese government labelled the panic-inducing claim as a “textbook example of cognitive warfare and information campaign.” Reports implicated the People's Republic of China (PRC) in fuelling confusion through modularised messages, with thousands of Facebook accounts following a distinct pattern. The China Times' publication of a racist backlash against Indian migrants, purchased by pro-China Taiwanese tycoon Tsai Eng-Meng in 2008, added another layer to the orchestrated campaign. This was complicated by official media accounts attached to China's Taiwan Affairs Office releasing videos questioning the Taiwanese government's decisions. Notably, the numerical claim entered Taiwan's media discourse even before official confirmation from the Taiwanese government.

UNDERSTANDING MANIPULATION OF COGNITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

These events underscore three pivotal aspects. First, cognitive warfare transcends mere disinformation, embracing a broader spectrum.

Ushering a New Era in India's Criminal Justice System

By: Tuhin A Sinha & Nishant Kumar

Former Congress stalwart and Constituent Assembly member K. Hanumanthaiah had said this on November 17, 1949 – “We hoped for the sweet melodies of veena or sitar, but what we got was the sound of an English band.” He was referring to “colonial continuity” in post-independence India. Over time, many systems embraced a more Indian identity, but unfortunately, the criminal justice system held on to the laws that the British used against Indians.

There was a need for an overhaul and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, in its 146th report published in 2010, suggested that it's essential to thoroughly review the country's criminal justice system. Earlier, in its 111th and 128th reports also, the Parliamentary Committee had emphasised the importance of improving criminal laws through comprehensive legislation rather than making small changes to existing acts. No government took an interest in shedding the shackles of the colonial past as the hangover of colonial continuity gave them comfort. However, as the architects of 'Naya Bharat', the government under PM Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, took it upon themselves to replace the Indian Penal



Code (IPC), the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), and the Indian Evidence Act with three new bills namely the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill, Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) Bill, and Bharatiya Sakshya Bill 2023. First introduced in August 2023, these were re-introduced after some amendments in the winter session of the parliament. Despite various changes, let's focus on a few key aspects. One major shift introduced by the bill is the concept of trial in absentia. According to the new BNSS Bill, if someone declared a proclaimed offender runs away to avoid trial and there's no immediate chance of arresting them, it will be considered a waiver of their right to be present for the trial in person. In simpler terms, the court

can proceed with the trial as if the person were there, including delivering the judgment. The Supreme Court, in the 2017 Hussain v. Union of India case, also observed that allowing trial in absentia could significantly reduce delays in cases where an accused person goes into hiding during the trial. This is a significant step forward, as India has faced challenges when fugitives flee abroad, leading the country to depend on other nations to extradite them and ensure their physical presence for trial.

Another significant change pertains to addressing the issue of mob lynching. The new BNS Bill now considers murder or causing serious harm by a group of five or more people on specific grounds, such as race, caste, sex, language, or personal belief, as a punishable offence. The prescribed punishment for such a crime is either life imprisonment or the death penalty.

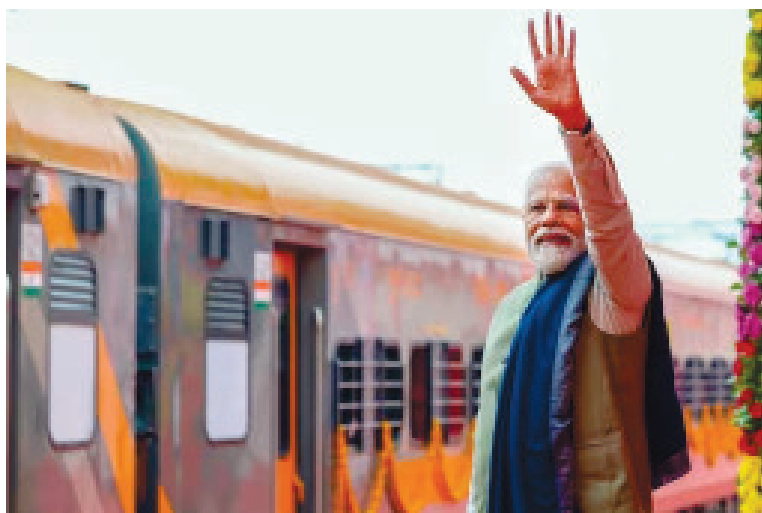
It's worth noting that despite Opposition parties previously using terms like “lynchistan” to criticise the country under

the BJP rule, they have been relatively silent when it comes to acknowledging the crime and advocating for laws against it. This law is expected to put an end to the hypocrisy of those who, in the past, defamed the country but never went ahead and made stringent laws against mob violence which could have been a deterrent. It will also set the record straight on whether a particular community has been the victim of mob lynching incidents or whether this was a vicious propaganda planted by certain Opposition parties to defame India globally. Another crucial change worth noting is that BNS introduces terrorism as an offence. Terrorism is now defined as an act with an intent likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security, or economic well-being of the country, causing terror among the people. Unlike before, where terrorism was mainly associated with organisations, individuals can now be prosecuted under the new BNS. In addition to the unambiguous terrorism definition, the bill also incorporates organised crime. This development is expected to significantly enhance the Indian legal system, and the specific classification of terrorism may serve as a model for other countries grappling with similar challenges.

Transforming India: Modi's Mega Infrastructure Push Powers Bharat's Economic Rise

By: Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra

2024 will be an extremely consequential year for India. Indians will elect a new government in less than five months, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains the frontrunner to win the polls by a wide margin. Morning Consult has once again found that Modi is the world's most popular leader, with a 76 per cent approval rating. PM Modi's lead in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls is not without good reason. From a country that accepted mediocrity in governance to one that now wants a lot more, India is transforming as we know it. Since 2014, the Modi government's primary focus has been on building resilient infrastructure that aids India's economic growth. The development on the ground is visible, and therefore, it is not odd that Modi remains the most-favoured Prime Ministerial candidate even after 10 years in power. The people want India's development trajectory to continue unscathed, and the



popular sentiment is that Modi is the man who can ensure that. Take the case of Ayodhya, for starters. As the nation gears up for the inauguration of the Ram Mandir, Ayodhya is the city at the centre of all attention. On December 30 last year, PM Modi dedicated a swanky new airport and a revamped railway station to Ayodhya. That was just the tip of the iceberg. The prime minister proceeded to dedicate development projects amounting to more than Rs 15,700 crore across Uttar Pradesh. Out of this sum, Rs 11,100 crore has been

tailored for Ayodhya's development alone. Roads leading up to the Ram Mandir have been expanded and beautified alongside old ashrams, ancient ponds and temples across the town. Vande Bharat and Amrit Bharat trains—symbols of a new India—will run to and from Ayodhya as well.

Ayodhya offers a sneak peek into the kind of development that is taking place across the country. Today, infrastructure building is happening across the length and breadth of India at a scale that was previously

deemed impossible, given the reputation India had prior to 2014. From being a country riddled not very long ago with insurmountable red-tapism, corruption and policy paralysis, India is today seen as a country determined to achieve glory. This year alone, India will see some mega infrastructure projects getting inaugurated, especially in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls. Reported by News18, at least five landmark projects are set to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the next two months. The five big projects on the PM's table are the world's highest rail bridge in J&K—Chenab Bridge, the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link, the stretch of Delhi-Mumbai expressway falling in Gujarat, the Dwarka Expressway in Delhi and the Agra Metro to the Taj Mahal.

Besides these, this year will also see the completion of big-ticket projects like the Navi Mumbai International Airport, Noida Airport, Aqua Line 3 of the Mumbai metro network and the Mumbai coastal road. Besides

these, the Trans-Arunachal Highway, Sela Tunnel and Ahmedabad-Dholera Expressway are also nearing completion.

INDIA'S ROAD REVOLUTION

A hallmark of India's incredible infrastructure push is the focus on not just expanding road networks across the country, but ensuring that they are among the best in the world. For a country to turn the fate of its economy around and ensure a 'developed' future for itself, it is a prerequisite to have a robust and high-quality network of roads. Today, India has the world's second-largest road network, behind only the United States. When it comes to road networks, India has left China behind—and that has been made possible by the work done over the past 10 years. The road network length in India at present stands at about 63.31 lakh km. The numbers speak for themselves. In 2014, the total length of National Highways was 91,287 km. In 2022-23, this length went up to 1,45,240 km, registering a staggering 59 per cent rise in just nine years.

A Numbing Effect On The Toolkit Nexus

By Sanjay Singh

In the past year, the Hindenburg and OCCRP reports against the Adani group were used as political ballistic ammunition against one of India's largest business conglomerates, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and regulatory institutions like SEBI.

The entire tool-kit ecosystem, including so-called investigative institutions based abroad, NGOs, aligned media outlets domestic and overseas, Left-liberal groups of all hues and sections of political parties in opposition, most significantly the Congress, has been in hyperactive mode since January 24 last year, the date when Hindenburg published its report.

Led by the Congress party, the opposition forced a washout of the Budget session of parliament. Unrealistic demands and imaginary accusations and claims were made. They didn't allow a discussion on President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint session of parliament. That too, when it was President Murmu's maiden address to parliament and MPs are free to speak their mind,

for or against, in these discussions. It led to a situation where the nation saw a different kind of competition between leaders, of who could use the most negative or abusive adjectives for business leader Gautam Adani, his group and his perceived proximity to PM Modi only because both are from Gujarat. It was also a convenient alibi for those caught violating the law of the land for immoral, unethical and illegal acts of omission and commission.

They had clearly not learnt lessons after two past failures - the Rafale and Pegasus controversies.

The Supreme Court's clean chit to the Adani group, reposing its trust in the market regulator and the Indian regulatory mechanism, has not just smashed the Hindenburg and OCCRP reports and their patrons like a maverick George Soros, but has also had a numbing effect on the Congress leadership and the party's allies.

In the last hearing on the case, the Supreme Court had practically indicted activist lawyer Prashant Bhushan on several counts.

The Supreme Court judgment, however, brings cheer not just to

the Adani Group but also to crores of small investors from across the country, besides institutional investors, public sector banks and institutions.

The one conclusive fact that emerges from the year-long, politically charged dust-raising exercise is simple—Hindenburg, which originally made accusations through a voluminous report, booked a huge profit by short selling before and after the publication of its report, and openly admitted it.

The controversy exposes the tool-kit nexus of Modi government haters and India baiters. Most prominently, it exposes the likes of Rahul Gandhi, Jairam Ramesh, Mahua Moitra and a host of others. The Supreme Court verdict has left them without an issue.

It will hurt the Congress most and further widen the conflict within the opposition I.N.D.I.A grouping. Sharad Pawar had openly rubbished Hindenburg and endorsed the Adani Group. Trinamool Congress leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok

Gehlot, CPM leader and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, and the Janata Dal (United) had also taken a soft position on Adani. Rahul Gandhi, known to narrate stories (his own version) of the rise of McDonald's and Coca Cola to party leaders and workers, has inadvertently painted himself as anti-industry and anti-entrepreneurship. That image is certainly not healthy for the Congress and opposition grouping. The likes of Rahul Gandhi would be better advised to read the 46-page Supreme Court order before venturing further on the issue, if they wish to keep making fanciful claims.

Consider what the bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said in the order -

No apparent regulatory failure can be attributed to SEBI based on the material before this court.

The court must refrain from substituting its own wisdom over the regulatory policies of SEBI. The scope of judicial review when examining a policy framed by a specialized regulator is to scrutinise whether it violates fundamental rights, any provision

of the Constitution, any statutory provision or is manifestly arbitrary. The facts of this case do not warrant a transfer of investigation from SEBI. In an appropriate case, this Court does have the power to transfer an investigation being carried out by the authorized agency to an SIT or CBI. Such a power is exercised in extraordinary circumstances when the competent authority portrays a glaring, wilful and deliberate inaction in carrying out the investigation. The threshold for the transfer of investigation has not been demonstrated to exist.

The reliance placed by the petitioner on the OCCPR report to suggest that SEBI was lackadaisical in conducting the investigation is rejected. A report by a third-party organization without any attempt to verify the authenticity of its allegations cannot be regarded as conclusive proof. Further, the petitioner's reliance on the letter by the DRI is misconceived as the issue has already been settled by concurrent findings of DRI's Additional Director General, the CESTAT and this Court.

Flight to the Future: A Decade of Transformation in Indian Aviation

By: Sohil Sinha

A yearly report from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) shows a 40 per cent increase in the licenses issued in 2023 in comparison to 2022. The Indian aviation industry is taking flight, and as the data suggests, so are Indians. In its annual report, DGCA revealed that a record 1,632 Commercial Pilot Licenses (CPL) were issued last year.

Most heartening is the increasing diversity unfolding. Female representation amongst pilots has tripled over the past decade to 18 per cent of the latest cohort, highlighting progressive societal changes. For a nation accounting for one of the world's highest percentages of female aviators even today, mainstreaming their greater participation further bodes exceptionally well. But that's not all.

To cater to the growing demand in civil aviation, domestic players such as Indigo and the now privatised Air India have ordered a record 1000 airplanes. A never-seen-before record in civil aviation history. The Indian aviation sector is the third-largest domestic market globally, surpassed only by the United States and China. The Mumbai to Delhi route is now the world's third busiest, and



according to India's Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA), the industry served approximately 200 million passengers in the financial year ending March 2023. Presently, there are 140 functional airports in India, and the government aims to add another 200 in the next five years.

At the core of this unprecedented growth is India's burgeoning aspirational middle class with rising incomes, deregulatory reforms unleashing entrepreneurial energies, and visionary policy actions aimed at inclusive development through universal air connectivity. The cumulative impact of these synergistic forces over the last decade has been nothing short of revolutionary.

DAWN OF A NEW ERA

Domestic flights in India began over eight decades ago but faced slow growth due to socialist controls and Air India's monopoly. The industry saw a significant shift from 2013-14 onwards with reforms, including the removal of price caps, leading to competitive dynamics and more affordable flying options.

Relaxations in ownership rules allowed low-cost carriers like IndiGo, SpiceJet, and GoAir to revolutionise the sector. These changes, along with the liberalisation of international operations and initiatives like the UDAN regional connectivity scheme, propelled India's civil aviation to become one of the fastest-growing sectors. Passenger traffic grew from 60 million in 2010 to an estimated

400 million by 2027.

To meet the growing demand, the Modi government is actively promoting flying training organisations (FTOs) to enable cadet pilots to undergo training within the country rather than going abroad for expensive programs. India is projected to need an additional 34,000 pilots and 45,000 aircraft technicians by 2040. In response, the government awarded nine initial contracts in 2021 to establish new FTOs at airports in Belagavi (Karnataka), Jalgaon (Maharashtra), Kalaburagi (Karnataka), Khajuraho (Madhya Pradesh), and Lilabari (Assam). As of now, six of these are operational. In the following year, six more contracts were awarded, with one currently operational. According to the Ministry of Civil Aviation in India, there are presently 36 FTOs operating at 57 bases across the country. Despite the opening of several new FTOs, challenges persist in India's flying training sector. Issues include the comparatively longer time required to accumulate the necessary flying hours for a Commercial Pilot License (CPL) compared to faster options abroad, albeit at a higher cost. Safety concerns and a perceived lack of desired training quality in certain locations are

also challenges.

A GIGANTIC SCALEUP

Indian carriers are making unprecedented commitments to aircraft purchases to meet the growing domestic and international demand. Air India's historic \$70 billion deal for 470 Airbus and Boeing planes, along with IndiGo's plan to add 500 aircraft to its fleet, stands out globally.

To support such substantial fleet expansions, infrastructure enhancements are crucial. Major airports are investing in additional runways and expanding terminals, aiming to quadruple capacities by 2030 to handle over 100 flight movements per hour. Advanced air navigation technologies, facilitating all-weather CAT III low visibility operations, are being progressively implemented. Across the country, thousands of acres are being allocated for integrated Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) clusters. These clusters aim to service over 500 planes locally by 2040. Greenfield projects like Jewar and Navi Mumbai international airports are underway to alleviate congestion in Delhi and Mumbai, boosting industrial development in their surrounding areas.

Why Aurangzeb's Bigotry And Temple Vandalism Must Not Be Negated

By: Monidipa Bose Dey

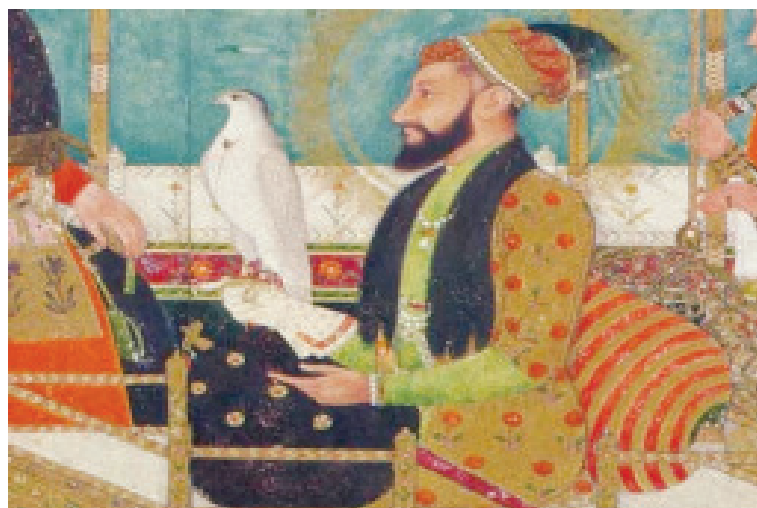
The controversy revolving around Aurangzeb is an old and seemingly unending one. The same old lines that Aurangzeb was not cruel and did not destroy temples were again repeated recently during the Gyan Vapi case in the Varanasi court, despite historical records clearly stating exactly the opposite. Keeping in mind the constant insistence of the white-left-Islamist "academicians" that Aurangzeb was not a bigot, in this article, I will look at the nature of the Muslim state, and religious policies of Aurangzeb (which were based on the Muslim state theory) to find if there was any scope for tolerance and secularism in his rulings and policies.

THE MUSLIM STATE: ITS THEORY AND CHARACTER

A Muslim state from its basic ideology of origin is a theocracy, where God is the true king, and the rulers are mere agents who are bound to enforce his law on all.

Thus, the ruler, his court, and all civil authorities exist only to spread and enforce the true faith of the true king. Under such an ideology, a

the worst sin is polytheism. Islamic theology, therefore, tells the true believer that his highest duty is to make 'exertion (jihad) in the path



state will view infidelity as equal to treason, because the non-believer or kafir does not acknowledge the authority of the true king and instead worships false deities. Thus, tolerating any sect outside orthodox Islam is almost equivalent to committing a sin, and

of God' by waging war against infidel lands (dar-u-harb) till they become a part of the realm of Islam (dar-ul-Islam), and their populations convert into true believers. After the conquest, the entire infidel population becomes slaves of the conquering army (Jihad fi sabih

ullah -Quran, ix. 29; For "Jihad" read Hughes, 243-248, 710: Encyclopaedia of Islam, i, 1041). The conversion of the entire population to Islam and the extinction of every form of dissent is the basic ideology of the Muslim state. If any infidel still exists in the community, it is seen as a necessary evil, and it must be so for a short period only. Political and social disabilities must be imposed on him and bribes offered to him from the public funds to hasten the day of his spiritual enlightenment and the addition of his to the role of true believer (ref: Jadunath Sarkar, 'A Short History of Aurangzeb'). A non-Muslim thus cannot be a citizen of a Muslim state; he is a member of a depressed class, and his status is at par with a slave. He lives under a contract known as zimma with the state; and for the life and property being spared to him, he must face political and social disabilities, and pay a commutation money known as

jizya. He must also pay a tax for his land (kharaj), pay for the maintenance of the army in which he cannot enlist, and he must show humility in dress and behaviour that he belongs to a subject class (non-Muslims cannot wear fine dresses, ride on horseback or carry arms; he must behave respectfully and submissively to all Muslims) [Encyclopaedia of Islam, I, 917 ~ dar-ul-harb].

As the learned Qazi Mughis-ud-din had advised Alaaddin Khalji in accordance with the teaching of the books on Canon Law: "By these acts of degradation are shown the extreme obedience of the zimmi, the glorification of the true faith of Islam, and the abasement of true faith...according to all other theologians, the rule for Hindus is 'Either Islam or death'" (Sarkar, 119). The zimmi is under certain legal disabilities with regard to testimony in the law courts, protection under the criminal law, and marriage.

A New Survey Shows the GOP Presidential Race Shifting Ahead of the Iowa Caucuses

Heading into the first contest of the 2024 GOP presidential race, Donald Trump maintains a dominant lead among Republican grassroots leaders — and Nikki Haley has eclipsed Ron DeSantis for second place.

That's according to a new poll of GOP county chairs from across the country, with those seeking an alternative to Trump flocking to Haley rather than DeSantis in the final weeks before the Iowa caucuses. Among Republican chairs committed to a candidate, Trump has 37 percent, Haley has 16 percent and DeSantis has 9 percent. The candidate who chairs are most vehemently against? Chris Christie.

I began surveying county chairs nearly one year ago in an effort to track the so-called "invisible primary" for the 2024 campaign — the crucial coordination and jockeying that occurs before anyone starts voting or caucusing, but which will do much to determine the eventual winner. County chairs are figures who play a key role in shaping the race. They are highly attentive to the party's internal dynamics and are influential in local GOP circles; they offer the kind of endorsements that candidates are eager to collect. They're also still close to the rank-and-file grassroots, and their shifts are likely to signal where the rest of the party is going. Their shifting sentiment over the last year, captured in an ongoing series for POLITICO Magazine, tells the story of the GOP presidential race until now, which has been far more fluid than the conventional wisdom suggests. In early 2023, it looked like Trump would have a real fight on his hands against DeSantis. But over the following months, Trump's support grew while DeSantis' waned. All the while, many county chairs remained undecided. But lately, they've been coming off the sidelines, first moving to Trump and now to Haley, though she is almost certain to fall short in catching up to the former president. In follow-up questions to the county chairs who were surveyed, Trump supporters made clear they were resolute in their stance. Trump also appeared to be vindicated by his decision to skip the 2024 candidate debates.

"The debates highlighted the inexperience and pettiness of the also-rans," said Lynn Bogle, chair of the Republican Committee of Patrick County, Virginia, and a Trump backer. "I was looking for another Republican with less drama, but ... unfairness, double standards and deep state [opposition] solidified my support of President Trump," added a county Republican chair in upstate New York, who was granted anonymity to speak candidly.

As director of the Center on American Politics at the University of Denver, I sent this survey to roughly 2,300 GOP chairs, in nearly every county in the country; 106 Republican chairs responded at the end

of December, about the same number who responded last time in October.

The first question I asked was simply whether the county chairs had committed to supporting a candidate, and if so, whom that might be. When I launched my first survey in February, Trump was looking vulnerable and at 16 percent was roughly tied with DeSantis. Trump's support rose to 24 percent in April and surged between August and October, jumping from 27 to 37 percent. In the most recent survey in December, his support stayed at 37 percent.

Notably, the percent of undecided chairs has continued to drop over the past two surveys, from 47 to 39 percent between August and October and then down to 32 percent in December. That's likely an acknowledgement that the first voting will soon start. And in the most recent survey, it is Haley, rather than Trump, who has taken support from the previously undecided. Haley's support rose from 5 to 16 percent between October and December. DeSantis, meanwhile, stayed at 9 percent across the last two surveys.

Among those who said they were supporting Trump, they tended to indicate that they'd done so for a long time; 82 percent of Trump-backers said they'd been backing him all year. Haley backers, however, were relatively new to supporting her, with more than half saying they'd just started backing her this fall.

According to Timothy Smyth Jr., who is on the Massachusetts Republican Central Committee, "Nikki Haley has been the best candidate that the GOP has to move our party and nation forward. She offers a new and fresh vision for the U.S."

Percent of Chairs Committed to Candidate

For the survey's second measure of candidate support, I asked chairs which candidates they are considering, and they can name as many as they want. DeSantis had dominated this category for most of 2023, but he's seen a steady decline with each passing month. In this latest survey, a majority of chairs is no longer considering him, as his share fell from 56 percent to 48 percent.

Trump largely maintained his level of potential support from the last survey, with 61 percent of chairs saying they were considering his candidacy. Haley's numbers rose in this measure, as well, jumping from 39 percent to 45 percent. Vivek Ramaswamy's numbers in this category jumped during the summer, peaking at 32 percent of chairs expressing openness to his candidacy in August; in recent months, his potential support has slid and now a mere 19 percent of chairs are considering him. That's just slightly above the 16 percent who are open to Christie.

Percent of Chairs Considering Candidate
For another take on this question, I asked the county chairs whom they do

not want to see become their party's nominee.

As he has during each survey, Christie came in at the top, with 60 percent of chairs opposed to him. He was followed closely by the other most vocally anti-Trump candidate, Asa Hutchinson, at 52 percent, who only narrowly edged out Ramaswamy, at 51 percent. Ramaswamy's negatives here shot up considerably since October, when 36 percent of chairs said they were opposed to him. His particularly belligerent approach to debating doesn't appear to have gained him many friends, but it has won him a number of detractors.

Trump, while not facing as much resistance as he was back in the summer, still saw his negatives notch up into the 30s. Haley's opposition held at about 30 percent, while DeSantis' opposition remained among the lowest in the field at 17 percent of chairs set against his candidacy.

Percent of Chairs Who Do Not Want Candidate
This is my final survey of the "invisible" portion of this contest — voting in the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary begins in a few weeks — and it appears the county chairs are increasingly locked into their choices.

I tried to get a sense of just how strong the chairs' preferences were by asking them what might cause them to change their support. What was striking was how few of them thought any information would cause them to shift.

For instance, I asked if a candidate being convicted of a crime would alter their preferences; just eight of the 106 respondents said this would change their mind about their chosen candidate — and seven of those were Haley supporters. Only six said they would shift if their candidate performed poorly in Iowa or New Hampshire. None said they would change their support if their candidate was rejected by many prominent endorsers or newspapers, or if their candidate had a significant medical crisis. The majority said they would not change their support no matter what. At this point, judging from this survey, Trump still holds a monumental lead in the Republican presidential nomination contest, and little seems likely to steer local GOP leaders away from him. It is certainly plausible that another candidate could do better than expected in the early contests and at least shake up the campaign a bit. What's different from previous surveys is that Nikki Haley is that candidate now.

TSA director arrested by US Customs and Border Protection

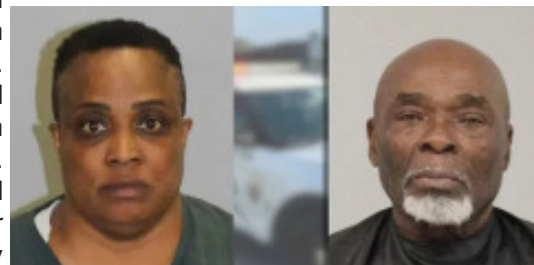
An official with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has been arrested on an outstanding warrant, according to local reports. TSA Assistant Federal Security Director Maxine McManaman

was arrested in Atlanta by U.S. Customs and Border Protection on Dec. 28. McManaman had a warrant for her arrest posted by the St. Lucie County (Florida) Sheriff's Office, which claimed she and an alleged accomplice named Delroy Chambers Sr. exploited a relative suffering from dementia by falsifying documents in their name, according to Port St. Lucie Police. The Florida authorities allege that the duo forged signatures on a quitclaim deed transferring ownership of a property in the relative's name over to themselves. The relative whose property was transferred to McManaman and Chambers allegedly could not have signed the quitclaim deed, because the individual was found to have been in Atlanta on the date listed, according to police. Chambers was previously arrested on Dec. 20 in Port St. Lucie, charged with two counts of exploitation of an elderly or disabled adult, simple neglect and two counts of forgery. He

eventually bonded out of jail. McManaman is facing a third-degree felony charge of forgery. The Florida authorities allege that the duo forged signatures on a quitclaim deed

transferring ownership of a property in the relative's name over to themselves. The relative whose property was transferred to

McManaman and Chambers allegedly could not have signed the quitclaim deed, because the individual was found to have been in Atlanta on the date listed, according to police. Chambers was previously arrested on Dec. 20 in Port St. Lucie, charged with two counts of exploitation of an elderly or disabled adult, simple neglect and two counts of forgery. He eventually bonded out of jail. McManaman is facing a third-degree felony charge of forgery. McManaman has been an employee of the TSA since November 2002 and held a management-level position at the airport, according to local reports. "TSA holds its employees to the highest professional and ethical standards and has no tolerance for misconduct on or off duty," a TSA spokesperson said in the statement to local outlet FOX 5 Atlanta.



India And US At Odds Over Bangladesh Poll

Pragmatism and self-interest influence the Indian attitude while the US sees the Bangladesh elections through the lens of democracy and human rights. Despite their burgeoning strategic partnership, India and the US have divergent positions on the impending general election in Bangladesh. Their virtually polar opposite positions have been a subject of discussion in the region and in Bangladesh itself. The Bangladesh government has been trying to portray the January 7 general elections as multi-party and inclusive. A closer look shows an entirely different picture.

The electoral landscape of Bangladesh is defined by two large political parties - the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The BNP, along with 14 smaller parties, is boycotting the elections. These parties believe that under the AL government, seeking a fourth consecutive term in office, there is no possibility of free and fair polls. The near complete absence of the opposition from the elections severely undermines the credibility of the democratic process. The international community, however, is divided in its response to the one-sided election.

India and China, have put their faith in the AL government of Sheikh Hasina to hold peaceful, free and fair elections. The US has been the sole critical voice, questioning the repressive and anti-opposition measures of the government. It has repeatedly called for democratic norms and standards to be respected in Bangladesh.

Russia and Iran have also lent support to Bangladesh's electoral process. Russia has even accused the US and Europe of exporting 'neocolonialism' and 'blatant interference' in the internal affairs of Bangladesh.

The EU had sent a mission to Bangladesh to assess the prospects of a fair and free election in July 2023. In December a delegation from the EU met with various political leaders including government officials but there has been no clarity on whether the EU will be sending election observers to Bangladesh. While Bangladesh has invited foreign envoys as election observers, just 25 foreigners have so far applied to the election commission to observe the poll. Former Jamaican prime minister, Bruce Golding, will lead a 10-person Commonwealth team, including India, to observe the polls.

The US is apprehensive that the polls will not be free or fair. It has threatened visa sanctions against those in Bangladesh who are found "complicit" in or "responsible" for "undermining the democratic election process".

The response of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been sharp: "So Bangladeshis wouldn't be able to come to America if sanctions are imposed. So be it. ... We've enough employment opportunities in our country now."

It was generally accepted that the US and India shared similar views about South Asia. However, their position on the Bangladesh polls has disproved that assumption. Their perceptions about the electoral situation unfolding in Bangladesh are diametrically opposite. Given the strong Indo-Bangladesh ties as well as India's traditional friendship with the AL leaders, Delhi's support for the elections is not unexpected.

Indian support for the Hasina government may be due to its rather difficult experience with the BNP government when it was in power from 2001-2006. Bangladesh at that time harboured several anti-Indian insurgent groups and there were terrorist attacks in India originating in Bangladesh. In the famous Chittagong Arms Haul case, several truckloads of arms seized were apparently intended for insurgent groups operating in India's northeastern states.

With the memories of terrorist attacks continuing to haunt India, Delhi believes the only hope for stability and secularism lies in the re-election of Sheikh Hasina. The turnaround in bilateral ties since 2010 has further strengthened India's faith in the Hasina government. Delhi believes that the Hasina government understands India's core security concerns better than the opposition BNP. The Hasina government has reciprocated this faith by forging partnerships and expanding border logistics infrastructure to boost bilateral trade.

For India, any non-Awami League government will upset the positive bilateral dynamics that exist today. That is why pragmatism rather than upholding democratic norms seems to determine the Indian attitude to the impending elections in Bangladesh.

India would, therefore, much rather support a dispensation that it believes will preserve political stability than democratic norms. As the US continues to examine Bangladesh through the lens of democracy, for the present, the Indian and the US perceptions of Bangladeshi politics are unlikely to converge.

Bill Clinton, referred to as "Doe 36" in court documents, is mentioned 50 times in sealed records. Although Virginia

Giuffre didn't accuse Clinton, she claimed to have seen him with two young women on Epstein's island, which he denies ever visiting. Despite Clinton's denial, flight records show he used Epstein's plane for international trips after his presidency, going to places like Paris, Bangkok, and Brunei.

According to the records, another victim, Johanna Sjoberg testified that Epstein once told her that Bill Clinton "likes them young," referring to girls. Bill Clinton also had an affair with a 22-year-old White House intern during his time as the U.S. president.

Stephen Hawking's Connection To Jeffrey Epstein

In 2015, shortly after Virginia Giuffre filed a civil claim in the U.S., an email from Jeffrey Epstein to the disgraced British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell revealed that Epstein had asked her to "issue a reward" to any of Giuffre's friends as a means to counter her claims of Professor Stephen Hawking participating in an underage orgy.

"You can issue a reward to any of Virginia's friends, acquaints, family that come forward and help prove her allegations are false. The strongest is the Clinton dinner, and the new version in the Virgin Islands that Stephen Hawking participated in an underage orgy," the email read, as per Irish News.

Prince Andrew's Connection To Jeffrey Epstein

To Jeffrey Epstein

Virginia Giuffre mentioned a disturbing incident in March 2001 when she claimed to be trafficked to Prince Andrew, describing it as a "wicked" and "really scary time." She claimed that after a nightclub visit, Ghislaine Maxwell instructed her to "do for Andrew what I do for Jeffrey." Prince Andrew said he never met Virginia Giuffre and denied her claims.

The files also mention Johanna Sjoberg, who has claimed that Prince Andrew groped her breast while they were seated on a couch inside Jeffrey Epstein's Manhattan apartment in 2001. In one reported deposition, Sjoberg claimed Prince Andrew placed his hand on her breast for a photo, reports BBC.

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Larry Page's Connection To Jeffrey Epstein - The US Virgin Islands government attempted to serve a subpoena on Google co-founder Larry Page to obtain documents for its civil lawsuit against JPMorgan Chase. The lawsuit is connected to allegations of sex trafficking by the bank's longtime customer, Jeffrey Epstein. "Larry Page — the co-founder and co-owner of Alphabet Inc. (Google LLC's parent company)—is a high-net-worth individual who Epstein may have referred or attempted to refer

to JPMorgan" as a customer, lawyers said in their court filing.

Glenn Dubin's Connection To Jeffrey Epstein

In her lawsuit, Virginia Giuffre stated that Ghislaine Maxwell had asked her to give Billionaire hedge fund manager Glenn Dubin a "massage". She said, "And when they say massage, that means erotic, okay? That's their term for it. I think there are plenty of other witnesses who can attest to what massage actually means. And I'm telling you that Ghislaine told me to go to Glenn Dubin and give him a massage, which means sex," as per court documents, released by Forbes.

In addition to the mentioned figures, other personalities such as Nobel laureate Lawrence Krauss, Michael Jackson, magician David Copperfield, comedian Chris Tucker, actor Kevin Spacey, Victoria's Secret magnate Les Wexner and model Naomi Campbell were reported to have visited Jeffrey Epstein's island.

In court documents from a civil suit unsealed in 2019, Virginia Giuffre named several individuals whom she claims Epstein and Maxwell instructed her to have sex with, including attorney Alan Dershowitz, politician Bill Richardson, the late MIT scientist Marvin Minsky, lawyer George J. Mitchell, and MC2 modelling agent Jean-Luc Brunel. Many of the accused have denied Giuffre's allegations.

Bill Clinton, Donald Trump, Stephen Hawking: Who Are Named In Epstein Files

India in 2024: Dreams, Aspirations, Agendas and Actions

ROCKETRY BANG

The year 2024 has just begun. But India is already on the prowl with the country having gotten off to high trajectory with a rocketry bang. On January 1, India pole-vaulted to become the second country in the world after the US to launch XPoSat (X-ray Polarimeter Satellite) to study astronomical objects like black holes.

With a projected GDP growth rate between 6.5-7 per cent, i.e. more than double of the global growth rate, India is on the fast lane to become a \$4 trillion economy this year. With a whopping Rs 1,64,882 crore collection of GST in December (a 10 per cent increase), the country is set to beat the FY2024 budget estimates.

'Pushpak Viman' touched the tarmac of Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram Airport well ahead of time and well in time for Ram Mandir's consecration ceremony that will usher in a new era of domestic and international religious and spiritual tourism. Prime Minister Modi has eschewed populism in the election year, with the government doggedly refusing to increase the interest rate of small savings schemes.

Above is a good omen for India in the year 2024.

THE VERDICT TIME

2024 is going to be an election year with the Lok Sabha elections scheduled in April-May. I possess no political punditry and the Indian electorate is capable of springing surprises. Nonetheless, as a keen observer of the changing national scenario, my informed guess — based on the performance perception of 10 years of Modi Raj, fractured Opposition, recent survey reports and some hard data crunching — is that the return of Modi 3.0 is a near certainty, whether BJP's new slogan 'Teesri baar Modi sarkar, abki baar 400 paar' fructifies, whether it gets simple majority like 2014 or cobbles together a government with NDA partners.

My dreams, aspirations, and agenda for India in 2024 have factored in Modi 3.0. Also, in the most unlikely scenario of the Opposition becoming victorious, what I present below, remains my blueprint for making 2024 the defining year to jumpstart the journey to make India a developed country by 2050, if not 2047. DREAMS, ASPIRATIONS AND AGENDA The fulcrum of my audacious dreams (25-year horizon), aspirational aspirations (5-year horizon) and doable blueprint agenda (1-year horizon) are six-fold. And these revolve around-

Breakthrough economic growth

The minimum requirement to become a developed nation must be weaved around making true the dream of continuous 25 years of sustained annual GDP growth of more than 10 per cent. And the pathway begins with India breaking the mould with more than 8 per cent GDP growth in 2024 and over 9 per cent aspirational growth over the next five years.

On to the high road to high per-capita income

Notwithstanding the fact that India is sure to surpass the latest IMF prediction of becoming the world's fourth largest

economy in 2025 and third largest in 2027 (with projected economy size of \$5.4 trillion), when it comes to the per capita income, India ranks 139th by GDP (nominal) and 127th by GDP (PPP). The dream must be to catapult the rank of per-capita income to 25th in 25 years with the five-year aspiration to enter the league of the top 100. This will need a manifold increase from the present \$2,450 per capita income to \$12,670 of China and \$47,232.27 of the UK. It is a long, tortuous untravelled road and the purposive journey with a resolute action plan must begin in 2024.

Bridging the yawning inequality gap India with a 144 crore population just turned or is about to turn the most populous country in the world. And the population is set to continue to grow to 166.8 crore by 2050. This means that the per capita income growth will be under severe pressure unless there is a deliberate calibrated well-defined pathway to massive reduction of poverty with well-targeted distributive justice. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and India has done well by bringing 415 million people out of the dungeon of poverty in the last 15 years. Still, the country is home to the world's largest population of poor, surviving daily at an income of \$2.15 or below. 2024 must be the Shankhnaad year to eliminate absolute poverty by 2050.

Reaping the population dividend

Much of the globally developed North and the population of China, Japan, and South Korea in Asia, is both ageing and shrinking, while India is a country of youth and will witness an extraordinary population dividend for many decades, the longest such seen by any country. It is this population dividend that holds the key to converting India into a developed country in the next 25 years. But the pathway to reap the benefit of population dividend is full of headwinds. The year 2024 must create a modular achievable pathway to reach where the country must, — by converting headwinds into tailwinds.

From employment seekers to wealth generators

Ever since Macaulay's education system got a tee-hold in India, the country turned into an ocean of illiterate unemployed, literate unemployed, educated unemployable and unemployable job seekers. A cursory look at CSSO and CMIE statistics indicate that despite the relative reduction in unemployment, an unemployment rate of around 10 per cent is always around the corner. In an era of shrinking governmental and public sector jobs, India must become the hub of millions of youth disruptors, who change the tide from millions of jobseekers to millions of wealth creators and job givers. That is the pathway to the actualisation of a developed country's dream in the next 25 years.

Environmental and ecological sustainability

If the 25-year dream is to become Samarth, Atma-Nirbhar Viksit Bharat, the road begins with integrating growth with

intragenerational and intergenerational environmental and ecological sustainability. There has been too much huff and puff, sabre-rattling, and fits and starts noises around the subject. But sustainability is no longer the desirability issue, it is the survival issue. The time starts now.

ACTION POINTS

If the above-mentioned dreams, aspirations, and agenda must turn into reality, India must at once get going on the war footing on the following 11 action points-

Fourth generation reforms

India lost decades to socialism and the license permit raj. Despite the three generations of reforms initiated by Manmohan Singh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and two terms of Narendra Modi, the country is not yet fully out of the yoke of the past. It is time now to unleash the fourth-generation multi-pronged reforms cutting across sectors. And the time begins on February 1, when the present government presents its last budget-cum vote of accounts. Undeterred by Kaun Banega Pradhan Mantri imbroglio eschewing all populism, it is time to showcase the new reform agenda to unleash the animal spirit.

Infrastructure

As India entered the new millennium, its creaky infrastructure was the biggest sore point. Infra rejuvenation began in the Vajpayee era, crawled in the UPA era and transformed in the last ten years. But the truth beckons that if the country must become a developed nation in 25 years, multiple infrastructure dreams must be weaved and actualised. Infrastructure has the capability to add an additional 2 per cent annual growth to the GDP. The infra push needed is myriad and the selected three are here-

Multimodal long-distance transport

Fast upgradation of the cross-country transport infrastructure holds the key to fast, efficient, and effective mobility of people and goods. The last two decades of growth in transport infrastructure has been lop-sided and more tilted towards roads and highways. In 2024, India must overturn the paradigm and take the vow to triple the length of railways, from 70,000 km to 210,000 km in the next 25 years, including 20,000 km of dedicated freight corridors and 2,000 km of high-speed passenger corridors (300-350 kmph) and 60,000 km of semi high-speed 250 kmph corridor.

During the same period, the country also needs to increase operational public airports from 150 (Ayodhya is the latest) to 1,000 (America has 5,000 public airports and 10,000 plus private airports). It also has to double if not triple four-lane highways and expressways and substantially up the capacity of ports and coastal waterways.

For these to happen, the country will need a new time-bound ultrafast execution discipline and the construction in record time of Ayodhya's Ram Temple and before that, the new Parliament building has shown that where there is a will there is a way.

Sustainable urban transport

At present, more than 50 crore Indians living in cities and towns contribute 66 per cent of the national GDP, this number will radically change to around 85 crore city dwellers contributing around 80 per cent of GDP. Apart from a massive increase in the population of current cities, India will need hundreds of new cities. Indian cities are transport gridlocked. The biggest sufferers are pedestrians and cyclists (who account for around 50 per cent of trips), who are devoid of any infrastructure. The entire paradigm of urban transport must be changed to symbiotic development and integration of multimodal sustainable urban mobility.

It does not merely mean more metro rail, but every city depending upon the city size and the mobility pattern to have a complete hierarchy of sustainable, comfortable, and affordable infrastructure. Water, water everywhere, water, water nowhere

Make no mistake, India, the biggest user of groundwater in the world, faces an existential water crisis. The country, which is home to 18 per cent of the world's population, has fresh water to cater to the needs of merely 4 per cent. The groundwater table is severely depleted and polluted. And global warming means either too much rain (flood) or too little rain (drought). The country needs to redream and recalibrate its water future and let 2024 show the way. Water crisis not only affects agriculture and drinking water, but it is also critical for every sector of the economy.

Agriculture

Agriculture with forestry and fishery accounts for 18 per cent of the GDP but more than 60 per cent of the country's population depends on it. Worse, agriculture is at a subsistence level with massive rural unemployment and underemployment. India not only has to drastically transform its agricultural practices to feed 160 crore Indians in the next 25 years but also will have to be an export hub. Rome was not built in a day, and nothing big has happened to Indian agriculture since the Green Revolution of the 1960s. The year 2024 must begin rebooting of the agriculture and the economy.

Manufacturing

The Gross Value added of the industry in FY23 was 28.25 per cent and the breakup was mining and quarrying at 2.36 per cent, construction at 8.19 per cent and manufacturing a piteous 14.7 per cent. It does not sound too good for India's dreams and aspirations. There is an opportunity here. The Chinese population is shrinking and greying, and its economy has been under stress even since Covid-19. Westerners are taking their money and factories out of China. But there is intense competition among developing nations, from Bangladesh to Vietnam, every country is in the race to become the factory of the world. Let 2024 lay the pathway and red carpet for India's dream to be the factory of the world.

Services

Services with a massive contribution of

53.34 per cent to the GDP are the toast of the Indian nation. And the relative contribution of different subsectors of the services is – public administration, defences, and other services (13.91 per cent), financial real estate and professional services (21.42 per cent) and trade, hotels, transport, communications, and services related to broadcasting (17.98 per cent). The die is cast here. This is one area where the Indian economy can truly leapfrog and grow fast. The country has the raw materials, trained workforce and the whole world is the market.

The caveat is that in the growing pie, the share of administration and defence must come down. And if India must retain its primacy as the world's capital of the services industry, it has to reinvent the wheel and can no longer compete in the "knowledge economy" merely on cost. India also must turn magnet for trade and tourism. These are the areas where 2024 must recalibrate the dream for Circa 2050.

Consumption

In an uncertain world and the era of growing nationalism and dying globalisation, the major impetus to growth must come from domestic consumption. But there is no magic bullet to increasing consumption. The only way to increase the consumption basket is to fast increase the disposable income and to that end, an increase in real wages both in cities and towns holds the key.

Innovation

India cannot become a developed country with incremental growth, it needs sustainable disruptive double-digit growth for decades. And it is where my innovation dream fits in. The US and China are world beaters in innovation. China has effortlessly transitioned from being the world's main manufacturing hub to an innovation ecosystem. India has not only to ape China but go a step further on the innovation superhighway with India's own "next practices," to paraphrase the world's noted management Guru, Late

Coimbatore Krishnarao (CK) Prahalad.

Education

It does not need rocket science to decipher that despite some centres of excellence here and there, the country's education system sucks. Skilling, which started with much fanfare, is yet to make a real dent. India needs to drastically up the ante to provide high-quality education to both poor and rich alike, to annually make available the required number with adequate quality of human capital, to populate India's dream to remain the world capital for the knowledge industry, to become a factory of the world and export maximum number of well-trained Indian professionals to run the economy of greying and shrinking developed nations.

Health

The health of the Indian nation is in existential crisis if not altogether in a coma. Last year's health budget of Rs 88,956 crore is peanut for its 143-crore population. If we remove the

establishment expenditure from the budget, the discrepancy is further glaring. The crisis is across sectors – primary, secondary, tertiary and research and in all the areas of preventive, curative and palliative care. There is a gross shortage of human capital, infrastructure, machinery, and materials.

Unsurprisingly then, even with the unreliable governmental data, the out-of-pocket health expenditure in the country has come down to 47.1 per cent in 2019-20 from 62.6 per cent in 2014-15. Its time is up.

Combating pollution

Air pollution (both ambient and indoor) is killing India, the consensus estimate is more than 2.1 million deaths per annum. Pollutants are known, and so are the effects. Our problem is we don't even know the extent of pollution nor are we interested in knowing it. The entire 144 crore Indian population is exposed to unhealthy levels of ambient PM2.5 – the most harmful pollutant.

'Rich Dad, Poor Dad' Author Robert Kiyosaki Says He Is \$1.2 Billion In Debt

A bestselling personal finance author and entrepreneur Robert Kiyosaki recently shared that he is more than \$1 billion in debt but it's "not my problem", he claims.

In an Instagram reel, Mr Kiyosaki talks about his debt philosophy, highlighting a critical distinction between assets and liabilities. He explains that many people use debt to buy liabilities but he buys assets. Citing an example, he shared that his luxury

vehicles, like a Ferrari and a Rolls Royce, are fully paid off, categorising them as liabilities, not assets.

In the video, Mr Kiyosaki voiced doubt about the act of saving cash, pointing to the US dollar's detachment from the gold standard during President Richard Nixon's tenure in 1971. Rather than saving cash, he opts to store gold and convert his earnings into silver and gold. Mr Kiyosaki credits this strategy for amassing a debt of \$1.2 billion,

an amount he openly acknowledges.

He said, "If I go bust, the bank goes bust. Not my problem." During the "Disruptors" podcast, Mr Kiyosaki again admitted to having been in debt of a billion dollars. "I'm a billion dollars in debt because debt is money," he said in the podcast.

Further in the podcast, Mr Kiyosaki differentiated debt into good debt and bad debt. He shared that good debt helped him generate wealth such as loans used to

acquire income.

He also said that people should debt as leverage in investments, especially in real estate.

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Mr Kiyosaki is one of the best-selling author and well-known personal finance personalities. His 1997 book "Rich Dad, Poor Dad," has sold more than 40 million copies.

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Gunman arrested for breaking into Colorado Supreme Court, firing shots

(News Agency)-- A gunman broke into the Colorado Supreme Court and took a security guard hostage while firing multiple gunshots before being arrested by the local police. According to the Colorado State Patrol (CSP), the incident occurred at 1.15 a.m. on Tuesday after the suspect, identified the suspect as 44-year-old Brandon Olsen, broke into the court from a window after being involved in a two-car crash outside the building, reports Xinhua news agency.



The suspect allegedly held an unarmed guard with the CSP's

Capitol Security Unit at gunpoint after entering the building, then obtained keys from the hostage and proceeded into other parts of the building. He then fired multiple shots inside the building before voluntarily surrendering at around 3 a.m. No injuries were reported. The suspect's motive is still unclear. An arrest affidavit provided by police indicated Olsen cooperated with interviews, but all of his statements were redacted. The break-in was most likely not related to a 4-3 ruling from

Colorado's highest court on December 19, 2023 which ordered to remove former President Donald Trump's name from the state's presidential primary ballot, Colorado police said, citing a preliminary investigation led by the Denver Police Department. The FBI had previously said it was working with Colorado law enforcement to investigate reports of violent threats against the Colorado Supreme Court justices following their ruling to remove Trump from the presidential ballot.

Police to seek warrant for suspect who stabbed S.Korean oppn leader



Wednesday, the Busan Metropolitan Police Agency said they plan to seek a warrant to formally arrest Kim, most likely on charges of attempted murder.

Earlier, the police revealed that Kim had confessed to intending to kill Lee.

Additionally, a district court issued a warrant to search Kim's house and office as part of the investigation.

Police said they will focus on finding the exact motive behind the attack.

Lee, who suffered an injury to his jugular vein, was flown by helicopter to Seoul and underwent surgery at Seoul National University Hospital.

He is currently recovering in the intensive care unit.

The attack occurred just 100 days before the country holds parliamentary elections in April.

(News Agency)- South Korean Police said on Wednesday that they plan to seek an arrest warrant for the suspect who stabbed opposition leader Lee Jae-myung during a visit to the southeastern port city of Busan. The suspect, identified only by his surname Kim (66), is accused of stabbing Lee, the chairman of the main opposition

Democratic Party (DP), in the neck while posing as an autograph-seeker on Tuesday morning, reports Yonhap News Agency.

The attack occurred after Lee toured the construction site of a new airport on Busan's Gadeok Island.

Kim was immediately overpowered and detained at the scene. On

Shia militia claims attacks on US bases in Iraq, Syria

(News Agency)-An Iraqi Shia militia has claimed responsibility for launching attacks on US military bases in Iraq and Syria. The militia, named Islamic Resistance in Iraq, claimed in an online statement that

to attack a base near the Erbil Airport.

Also on Tuesday, the armed group claimed responsibility for launching drone and rocket attacks on four US military bases in neighbouring Syria during the day.

In separate statements, the group said that its fighters carried out three drone attacks on the American bases in al-Malikiyah and Rumailan in the al-Hasakah province, as well as the



its fighters launched a bomb-laden drone on Tuesday on a base housing S-led coalition forces near the Erbil Airport in the northern semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region, reports Xinhua news agency.

A statement by the regional Counter-Terrorism Service confirmed the attack and said that a booby-trapped drone was shot down in the morning while trying

US Green Village military base at the al-Omar oilfield in Deir al-Zour province, while the fourth attack was a rocket barrage on the al-Shaddadi US base in the al-Hasakah province. The attacks by the Iraqi armed group are part of a series of retaliatory measures against the US forces amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, according to the statements.

UN humanitarian warn against increasing famine risk in Gaza

(News Agency)- The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has warned against an increasing risk of famine in the Gaza Strip "amid intense conflict and restricted access". In its latest situation update, the UN agency said that the Famine Review Committee (FRC) was activated due to evidence surpassing the acute food insecurity Phase 5 (Catastrophic threshold)" in the Hamas-controlled enclave.

"The committee added that, to eliminate the famine risk, it is imperative to halt the deterioration of health, nutrition, food security, and mortality situation through the



restoration of health, water, sanitation, and hygiene services," the OCHA said in its update.

It further said that the FRC "has called for the cessation of hostilities and the restoration of

humanitarian space for delivering multisectoral assistance, noting these were vital first steps to eliminate any risk of famine".

In its update, the OCHA also said that the spread of diseases in Gaza has reportedly intensified, particularly due to the recent mass displacements across the southern part of the war-torn enclave.

Close to 180,000 people are suffering from upper respiratory infections; there are 136,400 cases of diarrhoea (half of these among children under the age of five); 55,400 cases of lice and scabies; 5,330 cases of chickenpox; 42,700 cases of skin

rash (including 4,722 cases of impetigo); 4,683 cases of Acute Jaundice Syndrome; and 126 cases of meningitis.

Since the Israel-Hamas war erupted on October 7, 2023, at least 22,185 Palestinians have been killed, with 57,035 injured persons and up to 7,000 others reportedly missing.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza estimates that about 70 per cent of the total fatalities are women and children. By the end of 2023, 1.9 million people, or nearly 85 per cent of the total population of Gaza, were estimated to be internally displaced, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

Another Israeli soldier killed in Gaza fighting, total reaches 175



(News Agency)-The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on Wednesday announced the death of another soldier while fighting Hamas militants in northern Gaza Strip, taking the total number of troopers killed in the ground offensive to 175. The IDF identified the soldier as Sgt. First Class Meiron Moshe Gersch (21) from Petah Tikva.

Gersch was a member of the Combat Engineering Corps' elite Yahalom unit, it added.

Since Israel launched its ground offensive in Gaza, nearly 1,000 soldiers have also been injured. More than 1,200 people, including foreign nationals, have died in Israel

as a result of the massive October 7, 2023 Hamas assault.

The militant group had also kidnapped some 240 people and took them to Gaza. During the humanitarian pause from November 24-30, 2023, 86 Israeli and 24 foreign national hostages were released. Israeli authorities estimate that about 128 people remain captive in Gaza. In exchange, Israel had also released 324 Palestinian prisoners.

A new round of ceasefire talks were being held in Cairo but the killing of Hamas Deputy head Saleh Al-Aroui allegedly in an Israeli drone attack in Beirut on Tuesday, has led to the militant group withdraw from the mediatory negotiations.

5 nations assume responsibilities as elected members of UNSC

(News Agency)-Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia have started their roles as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC). Although their two-year term officially commenced on Monday, Tuesday was the first working day of the Council for 2024, following the Christmas and New Year holiday break, reports Xinhua news agency.

A flag installation ceremony was held to mark the start of their responsibilities.

The five newly-elected members have replaced the non-permanent members of Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana, and the United Arab Emirates for the 2024-2025 period.

The Permanent Representative of France to the UN, Nicolas de Riviere, who has taken over the presidency of the UNSC for the month of January, welcomed the news members to the Security Council.

"Sitting in the Security Council is both an honor and responsibility, especially at a time when regional crises are



multiplying, particularly the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa.

"We are looking forward to working with you for the two coming years, to implement the mandate of this council, preserving international peace and security, and to defend multilateralism respectful of the values of the UN Charter," the Security Council president said. Guyana's Permanent Representative to the UN, Carloyn Rodrigues-Birkett, promised the nation will be one of the "leading voices" in the Council to ensure that peace and security are maintained across the world.

The Security Council has 15 members, five of which -- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the US -- are permanent ones.

The 10 non-permanent seats of the UNSC are allocated by geographic region, with five replaced each year.

The Security Council is considered to be the most powerful body of the UN.

The Council, which is tasked to maintain international peace and security, can make legally binding decisions and has the power to impose sanctions and authorise the use of force against states.

2 Indian-origin men indicted for kidnapping, murder of aircraft mechanic in US

New York- A federal grand jury in the US state of Florida has charged three people, including two Indian-origin men, for the violent kidnapping and murder of an airplane mechanic who went missing last month. The body of Suren Seetal (36), who worked at Opa-locka Airport and Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport, was found in Big Cypress National Preserve on November 21, 2023, the US Attorney's Office Southern District of Florida said in a recent release.

Avin "smalls" Seetaram (24), Somjeet Christopher "Lil Chris" Singh (29), and Gavin Hunter (18) from Broward County were charged with murder for hire, kidnapping conspiracy, kidnapping, and obstruction of justice.

According to allegations contained in the previously filed criminal complaint, Seetal was last seen alive on November 2, 2023, when he was leaving work. After leaving work, his telephone was in the vicinity of Dr HVAC, Singh's air



conditioning business, before going off network shortly thereafter.

The Miami-Dade resident was

supposed to be running errands before heading out on a trip to Trinidad two days later, but when

he never returned home, his family said on a GoFundMe page. Authorities alleged in a criminal report that Singh owed Seetal approximately \$315,000, and Seetal's girlfriend told law enforcement that her partner was "trying to collect his debts", the WPTV news channel reported.

Citing court documents, the news channel said that Seetal and Somjeet knew each other from working in the fireworks business. The documents further claimed that the three suspects had been

communicating until Seetal's phone lost signal the night he disappeared. It also alleged that Seetaram lured Seetal to Somjeet's business, where Hunter was waiting with a firearm and shot Seetal. While Seetaram and Hunter's arraignment hearing have already concluded, Somjeet's arraignment hearing is scheduled for Wednesday. If convicted of the charges contained in the federal indictment, Seetaram, Somjeet, and Hunter each face a mandatory sentence of life in prison or the death penalty.

1 killed, 5 injured in Iowa school shooting: US authorities

- A shooting that happened at a high school in Perry Town, Iowa, killed a 6th-grade student and injured five others, while the shooter, a 17-year-old student, died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, according to US law enforcement officials. The five injured, including four students and an administrator, are in Des Moines hospitals for treatment, Xinhua news agency reported, citing local media. Dallas County Sheriff Adam Infante said at a news conference that local authorities were called to Perry High School



at 7:37 a.m. Thursday on the report of shooting, and there was no further danger to

the public. In response to the shooting, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called on Congress to pass legislation to combat gun violence. The President is tracking the shooting, and senior White House staff has been in touch with the Iowa Governor's office, she added. Thursday was the first day back to school for Perry students after the winter break, and the shooting happened before the school day began, local media reported. Several nearby school districts have taken security precautions after the shooting.

Economy Hangs In The Balance As Sheikh Hasina Hangs On To Power

Some had hoped Bangladesh would be Asia's next tiger economy. Instead, it may be heading for a deep economic crisis, reversing years of gains. Bangladesh, one of Asia's most promising cases of growth under democracy, will head to the polls on 7 January.

The country has become a test case for electoral democracy, with the election marked by descriptions of being "staged" and a "farce" even before the actual voting begins. With tens of thousands of opposition leaders and activists arrested in a crackdown ahead of the election, Sheikh Hasina - leader of the Awami League political party - is all set to serve as Bangladesh's Prime Minister for the fourth consecutive time.

Bangladesh already has a long legacy of election controversies.

Two consecutive rigged national elections since 2014 have been sustained by a hidden alliance of power elites that cuts across all key institutions - civil and military bureaucracy as well as the judiciary and business elites.

Each of these key power groups has become highly partisan and stands to benefit from political continuity.

In the aftermath of the last election in 2018, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party waited out Sheikh Hasina's new government, hoping they would bring about their own downfall as cronies crippled financial and other market-enabling institutions, pushing the economy on the edge.

Despite decades of sustained GDP growth and improvements in social indicators, Bangladesh's economy is now on a fragile footing.

The incumbent government faces a moderate risk of running out of reserves. A series of negotiated loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank recently helped avoid a Sri Lanka-like fate. Despite those multilateral concessional loans, Bangladesh's financial crisis is not over; the structural fault lines remain clear. The International Monetary Fund has expressed concerns over risks of capital flight. In September 2023, the US government also intensified external pressure by issuing a visa embargo on those engaged in suppressing opposition and labour leaders.

Further foreign sanctions could lead to costly fallouts. In 2013, the US government punished Bangladesh for its failure to protect worker rights by leaving it out of the generalised system of preference list of countries.

This subsequently hurt Bangladesh's export diversification efforts. That legacy remains: Bangladesh's sole reliance on readymade garments exports leaves it extremely vulnerable to external shocks. The gravity of new sanctions must not be



ignored - especially considering that Bangladesh's economy is at a crossroads. As the country is set to graduate out of Least Developed Country status, it will lose the duty-free benefits under preferential tariffs.

At the same time, it has to phase out the existing export subsidies for readymade garment factory owners while reducing protection afforded to import-substituting businesses.

The latter is owing to unusually high nominal tariffs on the import of raw materials. This means a potential double negative shock to export earnings and import duty revenue.

With every branch of the government already deeply politicised and led by individuals loyal to the prime minister, there is little political accountability left.

Another sham election will further weaken bureaucracy, judiciary and financial institutions. All these also will mean reduced state capacity.

On the domestic front, the unholy alliance with oligarchs will further constrain the government's ability to implement tariff and subsidy reform as well as restore fiscal discipline.

As the repayment schedule for many of the costly loans to finance controversial mega projects begins, the tax-to-GDP ratio will need to increase while local banks need to recover bad loans. Fighting tax evasion and bringing loan defaulters to book will only become harder.

On the external front, the risk of external debt distress remains low given the high share of concessional loans. Yet prominent Bangladeshi think tank Centre

for Policy Dialogue warns that Bangladesh's external debt situation may soon slip into the yellow zone in 2024-2025.

According to one projection, the debt-to-GDP ratio will cross the 100 percent mark in 2024. By lowering export receipts, a trade sanction may further add to popular concerns over debt sustainability.

Other related risks involve increase in speculative behaviour by foreign traders in anticipation of further depreciation of Bangladeshi currency. This may worsen the ongoing dollar crisis.

Ultimately, another election without choice in Bangladesh is likely to come at a hefty cost. What some had hoped would be Asia's next tiger economy may be soon heading for a deeper economic crisis, reversing years of gains.

After 15 years of continuous rule by Awami League, Bangladesh's culture of election engineering has coincided with cronyism and institutionalised corruption.

Most worryingly, this has polarised Bangladeshi society and weakened all key institutions including the parliament. With the enduring absence of a credible opposition party, a free press and an independent judiciary, prospects of economic recovery from further shocks look grim as critical reforms will become increasingly challenging.

It will be something of a miracle if Bangladesh's economy continues to thrive within a democratic autocracy without experiencing a major social and economic collapse by 2025.

N.Korea provided ballistic missiles to Russia to be used in Ukraine: WH official

A White House official has said that North Korea recently provided Russia with several ballistic missiles and launchers which were used in the repeated waves of aerial attacks against Ukraine. Addressing a press briefing on Thursday, White House National Security Council

spokesperson John Kirby said that as Moscow continues to "launch these brutal attacks", the US has "new information to share about the support that Russia is receiving from third countries". "Due in part to our sanctions and export controls, Russia has become increasingly isolated on the world stage and they've been forced to look to likeminded states for military equipment. As we've been warning publicly, one of those states is North Korea," Kirby said. The

spokesperson said that on December 30, 2023, Russian forces launched at least one of these North Korean ballistic missiles into Ukraine. The missile appeared to have landed in an open field in the Zaporizhzhia region, he claimed. Kirby further said on January 2, Russia launched multiple North Korean ballistic missiles into Ukraine, including as part of its overnight aerial attack. "We're still assessing the impacts of these additional missiles."

The North Korean ballistic missiles are capable of ranges of approximately 900 km. The White House official also warned the US anticipates that "Russia will use additional North Korean missiles to target Ukraine's civilian infrastructure and to kill innocent Ukrainian civilians".



"This is a significant and concerning escalation in the DPRK's support for Russia," he said referring to North Korea by its official name, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Kirby went on to say that North Korea is likely seeking military assistance from Russia in return for its support.

The assistance include "fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles,

armoured vehicles, ballistic missile production equipment or materials, and other advanced technologies", he said, adding that this will have "concerning security implications for the Korean Peninsula and the Indo-Pacific region". The White House official also said the US believed Russia is seeking to acquire close-range ballistic missiles from Iran. However, "we do not believe that Iran has delivered close-range ballistic missiles to Russia".

Bobby Deol, son Aryaman take internet by storm with their 'handsome' looks

Actor Bobby Deol, who is basking in the success of his recently released action thriller 'Animal', on Wednesday shared some strikingly handsome pictures with his son Aryaman.

Bobby often shares pictures with his family and friends on social media. And these fresh pictures with Aryaman Deol have left the internet in awe of the father-son duo. The 'Soldier' actor, who enjoys 2.9 million followers on Instagram, shared two pictures with his son, wherein we can see

Bobby wearing a blue formal coat and white shirt. His son is looking dapper in a black formal coat and white shirt. The duo are gazing right into the camera.

The photos instantly attracted the attention of the netizens, and they wrote: "All handsome genes in one family." Preity Zinta dropped red heart and fire emojis. 'Animal' is co-written, edited, and directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga of 'Kabir Singh' fame. 'Animal' stars Ranbir Kapoor, Anil Kapoor, Bobby, and Rashmika Mandanna in lead

roles. The flick revolves around the complex relationship of a business magnate Balbir Singh (Anil) and his son Arjun Singh (Ranbir). After tragedy befalls Balbir, Arjun sets out to exact vengeance against his rival Viraj Surve (Bobby) and pledges to never leave his family, leading to a gruesome gang war.

It also stars Triptii Dimri, Shakti Kapoor, Prem Chopra, and Suresh Oberoi, among others.

Bobby next has 'Kanguva', and 'NBK 109'.



Cardi B says she and Offset haven't reconciled despite having sex on New Year's eve

Los Angeles- Rappers Cardi B and Offset celebrated the new year together amid their ongoing relationship drama. However, they are not together as yet. After fans captured footage of the two celebrating New Year's Eve together at a club in Miami, Cardi B took to social media to clarify the status of their relationship, since she previously confirmed their split in December, reports People magazine. In a now-expired Spaces livestream on X (formerly Twitter) that fans recorded, the 'WAP' rapper confirmed that they did spend the holiday together, but admitted that she won't consider their relationship to be reconciled until they work on their issues as a couple and individually.

As per People, the Grammy winner began the live chat by referring to the



viral clip of her dancing next to the 'Set It Off' artiste, with whom she

tied the knot in 2017. "I want to be clear to you guys because you guys are making your assumptions and I just wanted you to hear it from the horse's mouth. Was I clubbing with my baby father

yesterday? Yes. Did I got d***** down yesterday? Absolutely, baby."

Cardi B (whose real name is Belcalis Marlenis Almánzar) added that she and Offset were "vibing" and "had a good time," and then opened up about how the two — who both performed at different Miami Beach venues earlier that night — ended up partying together.

"We was both in the same club and it was just really awkward. Like, I'm in my section, he's in his section (sic)," she explained. "So it's like, 'Man, just f***** come over here. Let's just chill. We're having a good time.'"

'Karmma Calling' director Ruchi Narain didn't know Varun Sood before casting him

Mumbai- The director of 'Karmma Calling' Ruchi Narain has revealed that she was not aware of actor Varun Sood before casting him for the show. She shared how his innocence appealed to her. Varun plays the character of Ahaan Kothari in the show. Ruchi spilled the beans on the details of the casting process of Ahaan Kothari. She said: "I haven't been able to watch a lot of stuff, ever since I became a working mother. So, I wasn't really aware of Varun Sood. When we started the casting for Karmma Calling, Panchami Ghavri, the casting director, sent me the tests for Ahaan Kothari." Ruchi said Varun was the second test she saw and then she stopped.

"I was like this is the guy and called

for him. When I met him, what appealed to me about him was



that he had a lot of innocence. He looks like this really attractive, young man but what jumps out at you is the pureness in him which was imperative for

the character of Ahaan," shared Ruchi.

"After working with him and getting to know him, I can say he is just a really good guy with a pure heart. He is funny and has a self-deprecatory sense of humour and all of those things work for Ahaan," she conclude.

'Karmma Calling' is a glimpse into the unapologetically rich world of glitz and glamour, filled with deceit and betrayal. Throned in Alibaug, the Kotharis are the center of this world that revolves around them and Indrani Kothari.

Portraying the powerful character of Indrani is the actress Raveena Tandon. Produced by R.A.T Films, the series is releasing on January 26 on Disney+ Hotstar.



Janhvi Kapoor calls dating actors 'chaotic': They get very weird

Mumbai- Actress Janhvi Kapoor has opened up on dating actors and called it "chaotic," adding that actors often get very "competitive and weird."

Dating actors can be tricky at times and looks like Janhvi has had enough of it. The gorgeous diva spilled the beans on the Koffee couch.

Bollywood sibling pair Janhvi and Khushi Kapoor will be appearing on the upcoming episode of the streaming chat show 'Koffee with Karan'. The two will be seen spilling beans on their careers, family and love life.

Host and filmmaker Karan Johar asked: "You also have a philosophy which we have spoken about that you don't really want to date actors, because you think it is somewhere or the other turbulent."

Opening up about it, Janhvi said: "It is chaotic for sure. Vanity is such a big part of this profession. I am extremely vain, this profession is where you need to be obsessed with yourself at all times. It consumes you."

"You need to be with someone who is okay to let you have your moments also. But I find with actors, they get very competitive and very weird," said the 'Dhadak' actress.

Janhvi has reportedly dated her 'Dhadak' co-star Ishaan Khattar. After that she was rumoured to be dating handsome hunk Kartik Aaryan.

KJo asked: "You would never date an actor because where you are right now, you are comfortable?"

To this, the 'Mili' actress replied: "There is always tension when there is an actor, I am telling you. I can't deal with that tension because I like to be undyingly devoted and expect that devotion. When you are in the same profession, it is difficult. Specifically in this profession."

Reportedly, the actress is currently dating Chikkar Pahariya.

Koffee with Karan Season 8 is streaming on Disney+ Hotstar.



Preity Zinta kicks off 2024 on a 'colourful' note



Mumbai- Actress Preity Zinta on Wednesday shared picture of herself from the New Year celebrations, and shared that she is starting the year 2024 on a colourful note. The 'Veer Zaara' actress is an ardent social media user, and enjoys 10.8 million followers on Instagram. Taking to the photo-sharing application, Preity dropped a happy selfie, wearing a colourful hat, and an orange coloured tee shirt.

With black sunglasses, the actress is flaunting her dimpled smile. She captioned the post: "Starting 2024 on a colourful note #pztravel #ting." Though, the 'Koi Mil Gaya' actress did not disclose the location where the photograph was clicked, her fans commented on the post, saying that it is Peru.

On February 29, 2016, Zinta married Gene Goodenough at a private ceremony in Los Angeles. In 2021, she and her husband became parents to twins, a boy and a girl, through surrogacy.

On the work front, Preity was last seen in 2018 film 'Bhaiaji

Jack Black joins Jason Momoa in 'Minecraft'

Actor Jack Black has joined the cast of 'Minecraft', a live-action adaptation of the popular eponymous video game. As previously announced, Jason Momoa is starring in the movie alongside Emma Myers and 'The Color Purple' actor Danielle Brooks. Production is expected to begin imminently in New Zealand. 'Napoleon Dynamite' filmmaker Jared Hess, who previously worked with Black on the 2006 comedy 'Nacho Libre', is



directing the project, reports Variety. Warner Bros. and Legendary are backing 'Minecraft', which is slated to

open in theatres on April 4, 2025. It's unclear what the 'Minecraft' movie will be about, or who is writing the screenplay.

As per Variety, a film version of the game has been in the works for years, with Shawn Levy, Rob McElhenney and Peter Sollett all at one point in talks to direct.

'Minecraft', which debuted in 2011, is one of the best-selling video games in history and boasts more than 140

million monthly users. The sandbox-style game allows players to use colourful blocks to create 3D worlds. It has also spawned numerous spinoffs, like 'Minecraft: Story Mode', 'Minecraft Earth', 'Minecraft Dungeons' and 'Minecraft Legends'. Mojang Studios, the Swedish developer behind the game, was acquired by Microsoft in 2014 and will serve as a producer on the movie adaptation.

'Killer Soup' trailer gives a glimpse into twisted world of deceit, lies and secrets

Mumbai- The trailer of the upcoming streaming series 'Killer Soup' was unveiled on Wednesday, and by the looks of it, the series is a promising blend of genres. Set in the fictitious town of Mainjur, it follows Swathi Shetty, an aspiring chef who wants the world to enjoy her paya soup. An accident sets off a series of mishaps and hasty cover-ups that land her and her lover in hot soup.

'Killer Soup' stars Manoj Bajpayee in dual roles, Konkona Sen Sharma, Nasser, Sayaji Shinde, Lal, Anbuthasan, Anula Navlekar and Kani Kusruti.

The trailer starts off with Manoj Bajpayee's character being wounded and singing 'Tu Hi Re' as the events in the trailer unravel. Swathi, played by Konkona, hatches a plan to murder and replace her husband with her lover who looks exactly the same. What follows is a cocktail of comedy, thrill and high-voltage drama.

Talking about the series, Manoj Bajpayee shared: "For the first time in my career, I will be playing a double role, both starkly different from each other. I trusted Abhishek Chaubey's directorial prowess, and a stellar cast that breathed life into characters to create a surreal pot-boiler unlike any other stemming from an accidental crime. At its heart, 'Killer Soup' is a crime thriller that blends multiple genres, making it a delicious serving that everyone can enjoy."

Konkana Sen Sharma said: "Stepping into Swathi Shetty's shoes was a unique experience for me as the character has depth, darkness and packs a lot of punch. Working on the series



with Abhishek Chaubey and a talented set of actors was a delight. The trailer offers a glimpse into the quirky world we've created set against the background of a sleepy town. With hints of suspense peppered through the series, it really makes you wonder, 'Will she or won't she get caught and will the soup boil over?' I eagerly await the audience's reaction when they watch 'Killer Soup'." Produced by Chetana Kowshik and Honey Trehan, 'Killer Soup' drop on January 11, 2024 on Netflix.

Rakul Preet Singh sweats away New Year's feasts, drops glimpse of first workout



Mumbai- Actress Rakul Preet Singh, who was on New Year vacation with her boyfriend and filmmaker Jacky Bhagnani, is back in town, and kicked off her 'first' workout of the year 2024. Rakul Preet and Jackky

went to a picturesque foreign land for their holidays, and celebrated the 39th birthday of the latter.

Taking to Instagram Stories, the 'Yaariyan' actress shared a smiling selfie, wearing a pastel blue tank top, and her hair tied in a ponytail.

She captioned it: "Finally first workout of the year after all the food debauchery."

The 'De De Pyaar De' actress has been treating fans with her photographs from the holidays, wherein she can be seen enjoying by the beach side.

The actress gave major fashion and holiday goals with her scintillating beach outfits.

Meanwhile, on the film front, Rakul has 'Meri Patni Ka' remake, 'Ayalaan', and 'Indian 2'



Katrina Kaif, Vicky Kaushal spend 'teen khoobsurat din' full of 'pyaar, araam, sunsets'

Actress Katrina Kaif on Wednesday shared glimpses of her "teen khoobsurat din" with husband and actor Vicky Kaushal from their New Year getaway to Rajasthan. On December 31, Katrina and Vicky were seen walking hand in hand at the airport, as they were flying for new year's eve.

Taking to Instagram, the 'Race' actress shared her holiday album wherein she can be seen playfully basking in the winter sun. Katrina is wearing a checkered print dress with bell sleeves. She is sporting a no-



makeup look, and her hair is kept open. One

picture shows Katrina sitting on the lap of Vicky, and the 'URI' actor is looking at his ladylove. He is wearing a pine green coloured sweater, black cap and sunglasses.

Another photo features the lovebirds sitting in the midst of a desert and romantically gazing at the mesmerising sunset.

The post was captioned as: "Teen khoobsurat din... pyaar, araam, sunsets aur thand! New Year mana liya..."

now it's time for #MerryChristmas !!!" It was liked by Alia Bhatt and Ananya Panday. Meanwhile, on the work front, Vicky was last seen in 'Dunki'. The comedy drama stars Shah Rukh Khan in the lead. He next has 'Mere Mehboob Mere Sanam', and 'Chhaava' in the pipeline. Katrina was last seen as Zoya in Salman Khan-starrer 'Tiger 3'. She next has 'Merry Christmas' in her kitty. The romantic thriller film is directed by Sriram Raghavan, and stars Vijay Sethupathi, alongside Katrina.

Taylor Swift breaks Elvis Presley's record as solo artiste with most weeks at top spot on album chart

Singer-songwriter Taylor Swift has broken Elvis Presley's long standing record for the most weeks spent atop the Billboard 200 album chart by a solo artiste. She set a new mark of 68 total weeks, as '1989 (Taylor's Version)' landed on top of the chart for a fifth time in the final full tracking week of 2023, reports Variety.

Although Swift set a new record for an individual, the ultimate high-water mark among all artistes is still held by the Beatles, whose albums have spent 132 weeks on top of the Billboard 200. Presley's 67 weeks now puts him in second place among solo recording artistes and third place among all acts. As per Variety, '1989 (Taylor's Version)' registered 98,000 album-equivalent units for the week ending December 28, which was roughly half-in and half-out of the peak holiday buying season, marking a

28 percent decline from the previous week, per Luminate, and as reported by Billboard. Of those 98,000 units for the week, 61,000 were in full-album sales, boosted by a last-minute surge of Christmas gift purchases.

Filling out the top 10 of the album chart beyond Swift's leader were Michael Buble's 2011 Christmas album rising two places to Number 2, Nicki Minaj's 'Pink Friday' slipping a spot to Number 3, Nat King Cole's seasonal album at Number 4 (its historical peak to date), Morgan Wallen's 2023 blockbuster 'One Thing at a Time' holding on at Number 5, Drake also holding steady at Number 6 with 'For All the Dogs', 'A Christmas Gift for You From Phil Spector' at Number 7 (another historic peak), Mariah Carey's Christmas album at Number 8, Swift's 2022 release 'Midnights' at Number 9 and Pentatonix's 'Greatest Christmas Hits' at Number 10.



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Combine mindfulness, exercise to boost mental health: Study

Want to start 2024 with a new workout routine to feel fitter and happier? A new study suggests combining mindfulness with exercise. The study, published in the journal *Mental Health and Physical Activity*, suggests that life changes which combine both physical activity and mindfulness are most effective at lifting mood and improving health and well-being.

Both physical activity and mindfulness practice have well-established psychological benefits.

However, by reviewing existing research studies, this is one of the first to show how the positive effects can be increased when the

two are combined, said researchers at the University of Bath in the UK.

The findings suggest that mindfulness can help to unlock exercise by helping to motivate people to start in the first place, while overcoming minor pain, discomfort or feelings of failure when exercising gets hard.

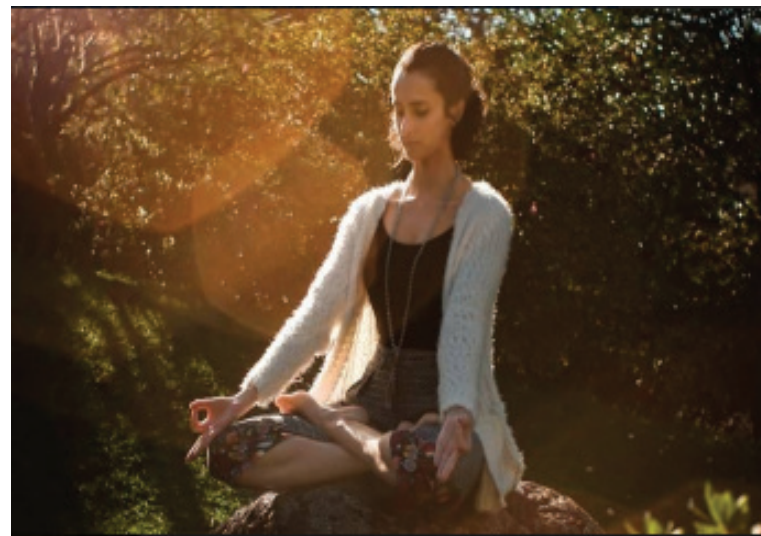
"Starting 2024 with a resolution to exercise more can have really positive physical and mental health benefits. But we know that starting out can be tough and that it can also be hard to stick with it over time," said Masha Remskar, an expert in behaviour change, mindfulness

and exercise at the University's Department of Health.

Mindfulness is an approach that can help us 'train up' the psychological strengths we need to exercise and be more in tune with our bodies, as well as make exercising more interesting and help us recognise its benefits.

Remskar explained that "becoming more mindful prompts us to think differently about our lifestyle, makes us more accepting and less judgmental of our own shortcomings, which can help to build healthy habits".

"There is a huge potential to use mindfulness to unlock the positive



benefits exercise can bring," she noted.

The team now aims to start conducting a larger trial to

determine the effectiveness and optimal intervention moments for

combining exercise and mindfulness.

Here's a tasty, nutritious veg salad for long-term male space travellers

growing food in a sustainable, circular way within the spacecraft or space colonies. While researchers have explored methods of growing food in space and what nutrients astronauts require to stay healthy, specific fresh meals have not been developed.

In the study, detailed in the journal *ACS Food Science & Technology*, Volker Hessel and his team from the varsity wanted to optimise a space meal that meets those unique requirements of spaceflight and tastes good. First, the researchers assessed combinations of fresh ingredients, using a method

called linear programming, which computationally balances different variables to meet a specific goal.

In this case, their model identified how well the combinations of different foods could meet a male astronaut's daily nutritional needs while minimising the water required to grow the foods. The team was also concerned about the sustainability of the foods in space, selecting ingredients that needed little fertiliser, time and area to grow and whether inedible portions could be recycled.

Of the 10 scenarios the researchers examined, they

found that a vegetarian meal made up of soybeans, poppy seeds, barley, kale, peanuts, sweet potato and/or sunflower seeds provided the most efficient balance of maximal nutrients and minimal farming inputs.

While this combination couldn't quite provide all the micronutrients an astronaut needs, those missing could be added in a supplement, the researchers suggest.

To make sure that the identified combination was tasty, the team whipped up the ideal space meal as a salad for four people to taste test here on Earth.



A tasty and nutritious vegetarian salad made up of soybeans, poppy seeds, barley, kale, peanuts, sweet potato and/or sunflower seeds could be the optimal "space meal", suggests a study. As space agencies plan for longer missions, they're grappling with the challenge of how to best feed people.

Researchers at the University of Adelaide designed the

vegetarian salad with fresh ingredients that meet male astronauts' specialised nutritional needs and can be grown in space.

Astronauts in space burn more calories than humans on Earth and require extra micronutrients, such as calcium, to stay healthy during extended exposure to microgravity. Additionally, future long-term missions will require

Study finds new gene mutation that protects against Parkinson's

A team of US researchers have identified a previously unknown genetic mutation in a small protein that provides significant protection against Parkinson's disease. The study, led by the team at the University of Southern California (USC) offers a new direction for exploring potential treatments.

The variant, located in a mitochondrial microprotein dubbed SHLP2, was found to be highly protective against Parkinson's disease; individuals with this mutation are half as likely to develop the disease as those who do not carry it.

The variant form of the protein is relatively rare and is found

primarily in people of European descent, reveals the study, appearing in the journal *Molecular Psychiatry*.

"This study advances our understanding of why people might get Parkinson's and how we might develop new therapies for this devastating disease," said Pinchas Cohen, Professor of gerontology, medicine and biological sciences at the USC Leonard Davis School.

"Also, because most research is done on well-established protein-coding genes in the nucleus, it underscores the relevance of exploring mitochondrial-derived microproteins as a new approach

to the prevention and treatment of diseases of ageing," Cohen said.

For the study, the team led a series of experiments where they compared genetic variants in the mitochondrial DNA in patients with Parkinson's disease and in controls. The researchers found a highly protective variant found in 1 per cent of Europeans, that reduced risk of Parkinson's disease by twofold, to 50 per cent of average.

Next, they demonstrated that this naturally occurring variant results in a change to the amino acid sequence and protein structure of SHLP2.

The mutation -- a single

nucleotide polymorphism (SNP), or a change to a single letter of the protein's genetic code -- is essentially a "gain-of-function" variant that is associated with higher expression of SHLP2 and also makes the microprotein more stable.

According to their findings, the SHLP2 variant has high stability compared to the more common type and provides enhanced protection against mitochondrial dysfunction.

The research team was able to use targeted mass spectrometry techniques to identify the tiny peptide's presence in neurons and found that SHLP2 specifically binds to an enzyme in

mitochondria called mitochondrial complex 1.

This enzyme is essential for life, and declines in its function have been linked not only to Parkinson's disease but also to strokes and heart attacks.

The increased stability of the SHLP2 variant means that the microprotein binds to mitochondrial complex 1 more stably, prevents the decline of the enzyme's activity, and thus reduces mitochondrial dysfunction. The benefits of the mutant form of SHLP2 were observed in both in vitro experiments in human tissue samples as well as in mouse models of Parkinson's disease.

Digital news startup The Messenger to lay off about 24 employees

San Francisco- Digital news startup The Messenger is reportedly laying off about 24 employees amid severe cash crunch, as its president Richard Beckman has announced to leave the company. The employees were likely to be laid off this week as part of a cost-cutting



measure, reports The New York Times, citing sources.

"The company is facing financial headwinds in a tough digital ad market that have put a squeeze on its operations," said the report.

The Messenger said in a statement that it was "in the midst of a second-round raise".

However, the startup, which has nearly 300

employees, did not reveal the number of people it has laid off.

The Messenger publishes articles on politics, culture and general-interest news.

Meanwhile, Beckman, a former executive at Conde Nast, who served as The Messenger's president, announced that he was leaving the company, citing "short-term health issues".

Prior to The Messenger's launch, Beckman had claimed that the website would generate more than \$100 million in revenue in 2024 with 100 million monthly readers.

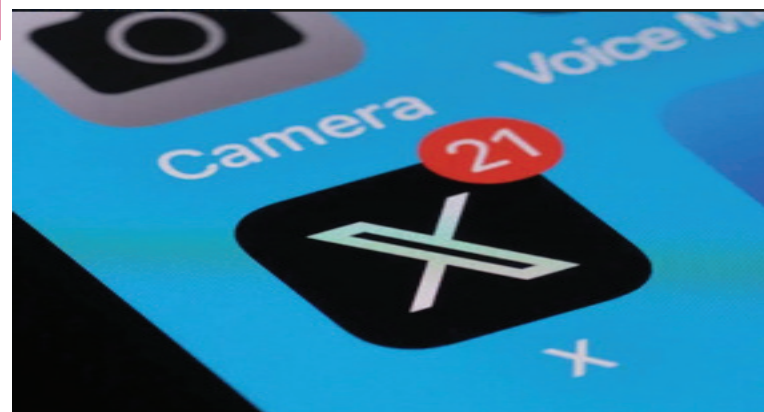
Veteran media executive Jimmy Finkelstein started The Messenger last year.

In a post on LinkedIn, Beckman said that he told Finkelstein in November that he would be stepping down on January 31 but would remain an investor in the

company.

"Back in November I had advised Jimmy Finkelstein of my decision to step down based on short term health issues I have endured this past year and will be subsequently retiring from the corporate world at the end of this month," he wrote, adding that he will be "helping with the transition" in the next few weeks.

Musk's X launches paid basic tier for verified organisations



New Delhi - Elon Musk-run X on Wednesday announced a new basic paid tier for verified organisations that is now available for \$200 per month or \$2,000 per year. The basic tier for verified organisations now gives them a gold check-mark badge, along with a few other benefits, for \$200 per month instead of \$1,000 per month for "full access". "Designed for smaller businesses, subscribers receive ad credits and priority support to enable faster growth on X," the company posted. According to reports, while X claims this new tier is "designed for smaller businesses", the affordable plan is likely because the platform has not been able to attract businesses to

pay for the more expensive plan. Meanwhile, after removing headlines from URLs on X, the platform has started to add them back in some ways on the web.

The headlines and website title pages are now appearing over the images that link to those pages, according to The Verge.

X had stopped showing headlines last year because Musk thought it would make posts look atheistically better. In November last year, he said that headlines would reappear over URL cards in an "upcoming release". "In an upcoming release, X will overlay the title in the upper portion of the image of a URL card," he had posted.

AI will be at the forefront of smartphone tech transformation: Industry

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will significantly transform the IT and technology sector, including upcoming smartphones, in India and will play a crucial role in enhancing battery life, improving camera quality and boosting voice assistant capabilities in future devices, industry leaders and experts said on Wednesday. Madhav Sheth, CEO of homegrown company HonorTech, said that the smartphone industry is evolving at a rapid pace, and AI is at the forefront of this transformation. "The strategic use of AI is aimed at making future smartphones more robust, versatile, and user-friendly," he told IANS.

HONOR has integrated AI into the camera system of its innovative HONOR 90, catering specifically to the needs of vloggers. "As vlogging gains more popularity in today's digital age, more people are creating and sharing video content. With the HONOR 90's AI Vlog Master, video settings are simplified, as it identifies filming scenes and recommends optimal modes," Sheth added.

Indians are spending a staggering 2,300 hours annually on their smartphones and till now, consumers have largely adapted to



an app-driven world.

"With the rise of AI, smartphones are transforming to intelligent attuned digital companions. In 2024 and beyond, AI will increasingly integrate seamlessly as a personalised layer around smartphone

operating systems, contributing to more intuitive user conversations, customised imaging, tailored content, content recommendations, and much more," Prabhu Ram who heads the Industry Intelligence Group (IIG) at CyberMedia Research (CMR), told IANS.

While smartphone apps will remain dominant for now, features such as facial recognition and voice-activated assistants posit to potential alternative interfaces on the horizon. "All said, this seismic shift in smartphones raises privacy

concerns. Local data processing could be a potential solution, but memory constraints may necessitate hybrid approaches. Striking the optimal

balance between user experience, personalisation, and privacy will become key in an AI-powered smartphone era," Ram added. According to Chocko Valliappa, CEO, Vee Technologies, by harnessing the capabilities of AI, the technology and IT industry can foster a culture of innovation, streamline processes, and unlock new possibilities that may not be achievable through traditional approaches.

"The synergy between human creativity and AI's analytical prowess has the potential to drive

transformative changes and advancements in IT. As the data processing and analysing capabilities of Generative AI technologies accelerate innovation, they will lead to new discoveries and advancements in various fields such as healthcare, finance, and manufacturing," Valliappa informed.

AI-powered tools will augment human capabilities, enabling professionals to focus on more complex and creative tasks in the coming years and smartphones will not lag behind, he added.

Samsung to unveil flagship Galaxy S24 series in heart of Silicon Valley

Samsung on Wednesday announced to launch its next flagship Galaxy S24 series, powered by AI, during the 'Unpacked' event in the heart of Silicon Valley in the US this month. The Galaxy S24 series launch will happen at the SAP Center in San Jose, California, on January 17. "A revolutionary mobile experience is coming. Get ready to discover a new era full of possibilities with the latest Galaxy



innovations, designed to transform how you live, connect and create," according to the company. The new Galaxy S series will set a higher standard for the most intelligent mobile experience yet, Samsung said in a statement. Rumours have pointed towards the Galaxy S24 Ultra getting a new titanium build. Samsung has also reportedly opened up "reservations" for device preorders with a \$50 credit.

Hyundai, Kia and Samsung Electronics to Collaborate on Connecting Mobility and Residential Spaces

Hyundai Motor and Kia will link Samsung's 'SmartThings' IoT (Internet of Things) platform to their connected car services. The three companies aim to break the boundaries between living spaces and mobility spaces, enhancing the time value of driving before, during and after.

Car-to-Home service to provide remote and touch-based control of various home appliances through voice commands while driving. Home-to-Car service to check vehicle status, control functions and manage charging before and after driving. Customers can also experience seamless connectivity with OTA and USB-based updates.



announced that they have signed an agreement on January 3 with Samsung Electronics for a Car-to-Home and Home-to-Car service partnership, aiming to

enhance the connectivity between residential and mobility spaces. Under this agreement, Hyundai and Kia customers will be able to remotely control digital appliances

via touch and voice commands through their cars' in-car infotainment systems. Conversely, they will have remote vehicle control via AI speakers,

TVs and smartphone apps to control various vehicle functions. This is made possible through the organic integration of Hyundai and Kia's connected car services and Samsung's Internet of Things (IoT) platform, 'SmartThings'. Customers are expected to use it in various ways in their daily lives, enjoying uninterrupted connectivity experiences.

View original content to download multimedia: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/hyundai-kia-and-samsung-electronics-to-collaborate-on-connecting-mobility-and-residential-spaces-302025800>

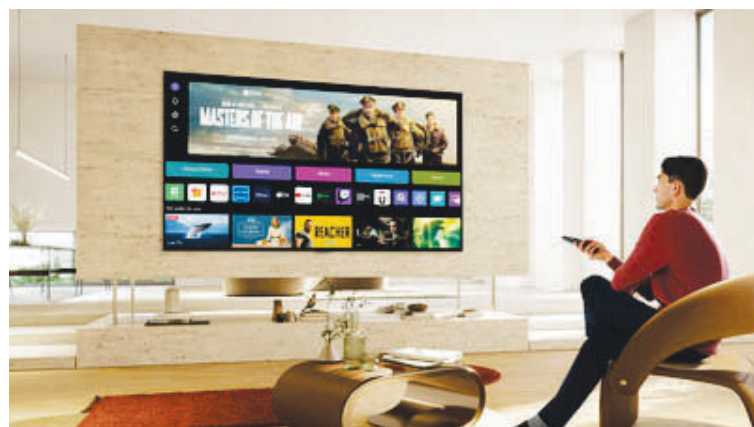
MORE LG SMART TV OWNERS SET TO ENJOY THE LATEST WEBOS UPGRADE, MAKING THEIR TVS FEEL BRAND NEW

Coming to Earlier LG Smart TV Models, webOS Re:New Program Gives More Users Access to the Elevated Home Entertainment Experience the Most Recent Platform Provides

SEOUL, South Korea, Jan. 3, 2024 /CNW/ – LG Electronics (LG) announced that it is offering the latest upgrade* of the webOS smart TV platform to owners of older LG Smart TVs, effectively evolving their smart TV into the ultimate home entertainment hub.

In early 2024, the webOS Re:New program will bring the latest webOS upgrade to every model in LG's 2022 OLED TV lineup, LG OLED Flex, LG OLED Objet Collection Posé, as well as LG's 2022 QNED Mini LED 8K (QNED99/95 series), promising users the joy of a new TV experience for the next five years. This upgrade will be extended to more LG TVs worldwide in the future to add more entertainment and versatility to the TV experience.

With the latest version of webOS, LG Smart TV owners can enjoy an even more personalized TV experience with a Home Screen that greets users with recommendations according to their tastes. The user interface is highly customizable, which means viewers can personalize the selection of content and services and access them with even greater ease. And



to make the process even more seamless, the Quick Card UI intuitively sorts diverse content and services into categories like music, games and sports within a user-centric interface that resembles mobile user interface design.

What's more, courtesy of advanced security technology and an optimized operating system,

users are protected with a high level of stability, security and seamlessness throughout the entire viewing experience.

With more LG Smart TVs adopting the latest webOS upgrade, content providers and service developers will have more opportunities to spread new content, services and features to a wider audience. LG has shared

its bold vision to become a media and entertainment platform, a business transformation that will enrich customers' lives by delivering valuable services and a unique collection of curated content across its wide-ranging products. Powering more than 200 million LG Smart TVs worldwide, webOS will continue to evolve through significant upgrades to constantly revolutionize the customer experience. LG is poised to invest heavily in its webOS business to secure a vast library of content and services so that it can cater to the diverse lifestyles and preferences of consumers, strengthening its competitive edge in content selection and convenience.

"Demonstrated by the constant improvement to the webOS

platform's UX and UI, LG is firmly dedicated to elevating convenience and security, ensuring that users benefit from a hassle-free and secure experience when using our products," said Baik Seon-pil, leader of the LG Home Entertainment Company's Product Planning Division. "We strive to provide life-enriching experiences for our customers by delivering a wide range of content and services on our TVs."

The LG Home Entertainment Company's latest innovations will be on show at CES 2024 from January 9-12 at the LG booth (#16008, Las Vegas Convention Center).

To keep up with all of LG's exciting announcements at CES, visit www.lg.com/ces2024 and LG Global YouTube channel.

Arun Subramaniyan becomes CEO as Intel unveils GenAI software firm for enterprise sector

Chip giant Intel has announced a new enterprise-focused generative AI (GenAI) software company called Articulate with global investment firm DigitalBridge Group. Articulate is an independent company offering enterprise customers a full-stack, vertically-optimized and secure GenAI software platform. Arun Subramaniyan, formerly

vice president and general manager in Intel's Data Center and AI Group, has assumed leadership of Articulate as its CEO. The platform delivers AI capabilities that keep customer data, training and inference within the enterprise security perimeter. The platform also provides customers the choice of cloud, on-prem or hybrid deployment, Intel

said in a statement late on Wednesday.

"With its deep AI and HPC domain knowledge and enterprise-grade GenAI deployments, Articulate is well positioned to deliver tangible business outcomes for Intel and our broader ecosystem of customers and partners," said Pat Gelsinger, Intel CEO.

The two companies will remain strategically aligned on go-to-market opportunities and collaborate on driving GenAI adoption in the enterprise.

"We see GenAI as a pivotal force driving digital infrastructure, and we are pleased to collaborate with Intel to support Articulate's growth," said Marc Ganzi, DigitalBridge CEO.

Vedic Saraswati Civilisation: Let's Stop Calling It 'Harappan'

By: David Frawley

It is time to remove the term 'Harappan' from designating the ancient civilisation of India, as it is inaccurate and ignores the nature and continuity of India's civilisation as a whole. Harappan is an artificial and incidental term deriving from the archaeological site of Harappa in Pakistan along with Mohenjo-Daro, which were the major ancient urban sites in greater India discovered in the early 20th century (1921-22) before the partition of the country. Western archaeologists arbitrarily chose it to designate an entire urban civilisation going back to 3500 BCE, which they viewed more as a lost civilisation than connected to the later history of India.

The term Harappa does not suggest any continuity in India's history since the ancient period or give the Vedas any place in it. Those who proposed the name were proponents of the Aryan Invasion theory like Mortimer Wheeler, and such a non-Vedic term was useful in perpetuating that theory. Wheeler also promoted the false theory of the massacre at Mohenjo-Daro by invading Aryans, which has been archaeologically disproved.

IMPORTANCE OF RAKHIGARHI

Today, the site of Rakhigarhi in Haryana, located in the Saraswati river region of Kurukshetra and traditionally regarded as the home of the Vedas, has been proven to be larger and older than Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro that were on the Indus. As Rakhigarhi is the largest Harappan site, it



would be more accurate to associate this ancient Indian civilisation with Rakhigarhi rather than Harappa. It better reveals the geographical connections of these sites to later India and its prime historical regions. The Harappan civilisation has also been called the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) as the Indus River (Sindhu in Indian languages) was the main location of the initial sites discovered. However, further excavations have revealed the majority of the so-called Harappan or Indus sites were located by the Saraswati River, famous in Vedic texts, which dried up around 4,000 years ago, showing its antiquity.

ANCIENT MARITIME CIVILISATION

In addition, Harappan sites have been

found in Gujarat by the ocean in what was then the delta region of the Saraswati river, indicating it was a maritime culture from the Saraswati to the sea. Vedic civilisation was also maritime, with 150 references to the ocean in the oldest Rigveda alone, including noting the Saraswati river as flowing from the mountains to the sea. Using nondescript terms like 'Harappan' fits in with the terminology of the Aryan Invasion theory that separates the Vedas from the origins of India's civilisation, which colonial scholars also maintained. Harappans are often called pre-Vedic or non-Vedic, which the Rakhigarhi finds also disprove.

The rivers of Northwest India on which so-called Harappan sites have been found have

ancient Vedic names, including Sindhu, Saraswati, Vitasta, Parushni (Ravi), Vipasa (Beas), Shutudri (Sutlej), Yamuna and Ganga. Vedic texts show a similar culture, artefacts and geography to what has been called Harappan, extending from fire altars to shivlings. We see a continuity of civilisation in India from sites as old as 8,000 years ago like Rakhigarhi or Bhirrana, another such ancient site in the Kurukshetra region in Haryana. **SARASWATI-SINDHU VEDIC CIVILISATION-** In place of 'Harappan', the civilisation should be better called "Vedic Saraswati Civilisation", or "Saraswati-Sindhu-Civilisation". Using the term 'Harappan' is misleading for the study of India's history as it does not suggest the actual centre of the civilisation on the Saraswati river, along with its Vedic and Bharatiya connections.

RAMIFICATIONS FOR INDIA'S TEXTBOOK ACCOUNTS OF HISTORY Indian Marxist scholars like Romila Thapar and Irfan Habib who opposed the idea of the Saraswati civilisation were also, not surprisingly, the main academic opponents of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. They denied that there ever was any Hindu temple at the Babri Masjid site, even after Prof BB Lal, director general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), showed the evidence. Lal also wrote extensively on the Harappan as a Saraswati and Vedic culture and was involved in the excavation of Harappan sites.

Impact Of Supreme Court Backing SEBI Clean Chit To Adani

By Bharti Mishra Nath

In a major relief to the Adani Group, the Supreme Court bench led by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud today directed the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to complete its investigations into the two (out of 24) pending cases per law. The Supreme Court also said that independent reports or newspaper stories cannot be used to start a SEBI investigation. Questioning the credibility of the George Soros-linked OCCRP report and Hindenburg report, the Supreme Court ruled that these cannot be independently verified and so can't be treated as dependable evidence. The court warned petitioners against filing pleas without adequate research. The top court decision is counter to a flurry of allegations against the Adani group since January last year, which negatively impacted the market cap of the conglomerate as a result of the bloodbath in India's stock market a year ago. The judgment made crystal clear that OCCRP cannot be the basis for doubting the capital markets regulator SEBI's investigation into the Hindenburg case. The Supreme Court found no merit in allegations of a conflict of interest against members of the court-appointed panel, as highlighted



by the petitioner. The Supreme Court delivered the verdict on a batch of petitions seeking a probe into allegations of stock manipulation and other irregularities against the Adani group made by US-based short-seller Hindenburg last year. The impact of the judgment was seen on the Indian stock market, with Adani stocks rallying up to 10 per cent and the conglomerate's market capitalisation crossing the ₹15 lakh crore mark. "The Hindenburg report had halted further capital raise of Adani group and crashed its stocks by about USD 120 billion. It impacted the pace at which India

was rolling out energy and logistics infrastructure in the country as well as globally. It is now clear from the SEBI investigations that there was no basis for the Hindenburg report, and it appears to be concocted. However, its impact on the Indian economy and jobs has been significant," says Jaimit Bhattacharya, President, Centre for Digital Economy Policy Research. AI comes for the journalists. The judgment reinforces the power and importance of regulatory bodies like SEBI, whose impartiality and legal stand was questioned by opposition parties

and the government's critics. By not intervening in the investigation by SEBI, the Supreme Court has highlighted the importance of independence and respect for autonomous statutory regulatory bodies like SEBI. In this case, the bench didn't find any deliberate or intentional violation of the rules and regulations by SEBI to help the Adani Group. The Supreme Court ordered SEBI to complete the pending investigations in three months. The Supreme Court also upheld the foreign portfolio investors (FPI) regulations alleged to have been used by the Adani group to inflate its stock prices. Dismissing calls of petitioners for SEBI to revoke amendments in FPI and LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) regulations, the court said that these regulations were free from any flaws. "The judgment maintains the exclusive domain of specialised regulators like SEBI. It is a settled legal proposition that judicial review is of the decision-making process and not an appeal against the decision. Once a constitutional court is satisfied with the decision-making process, there is no room for the court to supplant the actions of any specialised regulators with its own view," says Manish Mohan, advocate, Supreme Court.



What Lies Ahead For Economy In 2024?

By Madan Sabnavis

There is a definite air of optimism as we begin 2024; almost every economic parameter looks better than last year. It can be said with confidence that the economy is on a take-off mode in 2024, in the absence of any external or weather shock. Even if there is any external shock, the Indian economy has done well in the last two years and was buffered against two wars through the adept use of policy tools.

What lies ahead?

All attention will be on the national election and the outcome. Many believe the result is more or less known, but investors may like to wait before taking any fresh action. So, till May, when the elections are due, it will be business as usual. The government has indicated that there will be no surprises in the budget, which will be a vote on account. The full budget is like to be presented only around June, along with new policies. Going by the track record of the current dispensation - its commitment to fiscal prudence is known - there will be movement along the glide path already laid down. Let us crystal gaze into what the numbers could look like in 2024-25. GDP growth is likely to be closer to 7%, after the 6.5-7% growth recorded for FY24. The conditions for sustained growth are in place. Two missing links that will warrant a change in direction are rural consumption and private investment. The former has slowed due to the unfavourable kharif crop and possibly lower rabi harvest this year. This should change.

Private investment has been concentrated largely in industries tuned to infrastructure and this may become

broader in 2024. Companies are waiting for the elections to be over before taking a call, which is a habit now. This year will be exciting for private investment. In fact, the revival in rural demand will provide a push to capacity utilization in sectors such as two wheelers, FMCG, consumer durables and tractors, which



should lead to higher investment. With a bit of luck the gross fixed capital formation rate, which is in the region of 29% of GDP, should be able to touch the 30% mark.

The second variable of interest is inflation. The RBI has already indicated that inflation will come down to 4% in July-September and then rise in October-December, but remain below 5%. This is significant because the industry is counting on repo rate cuts in the coming year. It looks like that the second quarter of the next fiscal or third of calendar 2024

will witness the start of the rate cuts. Here too, we must be moderate in expectations as there will probably be a cut of 50 basis points at most, assuming a normal monsoon. Decisions will be taken based on inflation numbers. What is certain is that the RBI will continue targeting 4% inflation and even 5% will

be accepted only in the interim term. Third, from the point of view of savers, the days of high interest rate on deposits will be over as any reduction in repo rate means lower deposit rates. Borrowers can be happy as almost 53-55% of borrowing is based on the external benchmark rate. Therefore, the balance will tilt towards the borrowers from deposit holders. This will pose a further challenge to banks as they compete with mutual funds for the savings wallet. The assets under management of AMC's has increased to closer to ₹ 50 lakh crore this

year. As the Sensex has been moving relentlessly northwards and scaling new peaks, it is but natural for savers to become investors, especially when interest rates come down.

Fourth, the stock market has behaved in a remarkable manner with corporate profitability improving sharply this year. Now with the economy expected to do better in 2024, which will go along with the performance of companies, valuations will be healthy, leading to a further rise in the stock indices. This, incidentally, has been a more global phenomenon and not restricted to just India.

Fifth, the currency will be another variable to watch. We have seen that the two factors which drive the rupee have worked in favour of a stronger currency in the last month. The first is the weakening dollar. This will continue as the Fed keeps lowering rates and the dollar becomes weaker against the euro. Second, the external fundamentals will tend to improve for us as the current account deficit shrinks. This has already been seen in Q2 of this year. More importantly, capital flows are expected to be buoyant, with an expected boost coming from the inclusion of Indian bonds in the global bond index. Therefore, a stable rupee in the range of ₹ 82-84 per dollar can be expected for the year. 2024 promises better economic tidings and more stability. This chain will also help to create more jobs, which has been the Achilles heel when it comes to consumption. If we do manage to cross the 7% level this year, at a time when the global economy takes a breather, India can be well set to move down the 8% path that will help accelerate the process of moving towards the \$5 trillion economy.