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stabbing case**



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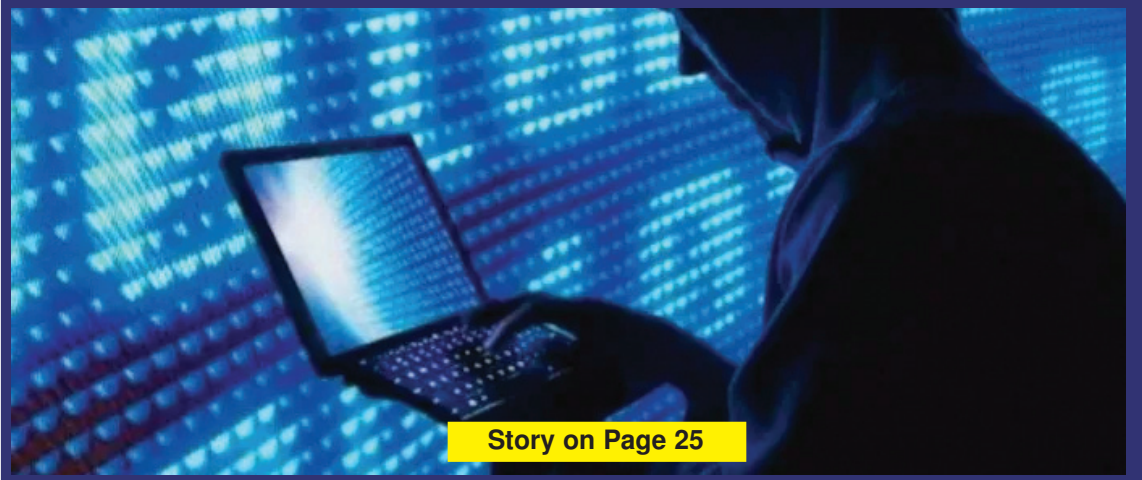
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Orange dupatta on head, Steve Jobs's wife Laurene attends Maha Kumbh

Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, attended the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. She is expected to take a holy dip at Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers.

(SAI Bureau) Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, attended the Maha Kumbh in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj on Monday. In a video, the 61-year-old American businesswoman was seen participating in the festivities, wearing an orange-coloured dupatta shawl over her head at the Maha Kumbh. She is expected to take

a holy dip at Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. The widow of Steve Jobs reached Prayagraj on Sunday evening. She was recently given the Hindu name of 'Kamala' by the Niranjani Akhara, a revered organisation of saints. Before ar-

living in Prayagraj, she visited the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi on January 11. At the temple in Varanasi, the 61-year-old philanthropist worshipped Baba Kashi Vishwanath, one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, and performed 'jalabhishek' (offering water to a deity), praying for the successful conduct of the Maha Kumbh. The 45-day Maha



Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, a once-in-144-year spiritual gathering, commenced today. The con- gregation is expected to draw 450 million devotees to the Triveni Sangam. Maha Kumbh will go on until February 26.

Over 5 million Indians currently hold American visas: US envoy Garcetti

Eric Garcetti, outgoing US Ambassador to India, highlighted a 60% surge in visa issuance, with over 5 million Indians now holding American visas, as he reflected on strengthening bilateral ties.

(SAI Bureau) The United States Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, on Monday revealed that over 5 million Indians currently hold American visas, noting that the issuance has surged by more than 60 per cent ever since he was appointed in New Delhi.

"Since becoming Ambassador, we have increased our visas by more than 60 per cent,

in four foreign students studying in American universities are proudly Indian students," he said.

Speaking about his tenure in New Delhi, Garcetti expressed pride in his role in advancing US-India relations.

"My time serving as the United States Ambassador to India has put me at the frontline to witness and help drive how compelling and consequential this relationship now is," he stated.

He also emphasised the shared purpose of the partnership, saying, "This last speech is about you, about us. People are connecting across oceans and cultures for a common purpose to better the



eliminated wait times for all visa types except for first-time visitor visas. For the second year in a row, we issued more than 1 million non-immigrant visas, including a record number of visitor visas. In fact, more than 5 million Indians currently hold United States visas," Garcetti said while addressing an event at Fulbright House in New Delhi.

Garcetti, whose term as the US ambassador to India is ending soon, also noted that India has become the number one source of higher education students in America. "I am proud that since becoming ambassador, India has become the number one source of higher education students in the USA. One

lives of our two nations and the world we inhabit". Eric Garcetti, a political appointee of President Joe Biden who is nearing the end of his tenure, addressed concerns about India-US relations during his final public lecture in a series of four discussions on bilateral ties. His remarks came amid growing apprehensions in India about potential shifts in US immigration policies under the incoming Trump administration. The H-1B visa program, which facilitates the entry of skilled foreign workers into the US, has drawn scrutiny for allegedly impacting American workers' job prospects. Indian nationals account for over 70 per cent of all H-1B visas issued.

2 Indian companies charged with smuggling chemicals used in making fentanyl



(SAI Bureau) NEW YORK — Two pharmaceutical companies based in India were charged Monday with smuggling chemicals used in the production of the deadly drug fentanyl, federal prosecutors in New York announced.

Raxuter Chemicals and Athos Chemicals were charged in separate indictments with criminal conspiracy to distribute and import chemicals into the U.S., Mexico and elsewhere knowing they would be used to manufacture the synthetic opioid, according to U.S. District Attorney for the Eastern District of New York Breon Peace's office. Bhavesh Lathiya, a founder

and senior executive of Raxuter Chemicals, was also indicted on similar charges.

The 36-year-old executive, who also goes by "Bhavesh Patel" and "Bhavesh Bhai," was arrested Saturday in New York City and ordered detained at his arraignment in Brooklyn federal court, prosecutors said.

His public defender declined to comment Monday. Representatives for the two companies didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment about the indictments.

Lathiya previously worked at Athos as a director until 2022 before leaving to start Raxuter, according to Peace's office.

New York-Based Businessman Admits \$5.3 Million Health Care Fraud And Kickback Conspiracy

(By Staff Reporter) NEWARK, N.J. — A New York-based businessman admitted his role in a health care fraud and illegal kickback conspiracy, Attorney for the United States Vikas Khanna announced today. Mansinh Chaudhari, aka "Monsi Koova," 55, of Illinois, pleaded guilty today before U.S. District Judge Michael E. Farbiarz in Newark federal court to an information charging him with conspiracy to commit health care fraud and conspiracy to violate the Federal Anti-Kickback statute.

According to documents filed in the case and statements made in court:

Chaudhari owned, operated, and had a financial interest in a New York-based consulting company that purchased in-

formation associated with prospective Medicare beneficiaries amounting to a guarantee that Medicare would reimburse the purchase of COVID-19 tests. Chaudhari then sold beneficiary information to medical providers in New Jersey, Tennessee, Colorado, Connecticut, Utah, and elsewhere, so the medical providers could use that information to submit or cause the submission to Medicare of claims for up to eight OTC COVID-19 tests per month that beneficiaries did not need and had not ordered.

Chaudhari and the medical providers attempted to conceal their arrangements by entering into sham agreements. He also issued fraudulent invoices to the medical providers that solicited payment

for marketing, consulting, or fulfillment. In total, Chaudhari and his conspirators caused a loss to Medicare of more than \$5.3 million.

Conspiracy to commit health care fraud is punishable by a maximum of 10 years in prison and conspiracy to violate the Federal Anti-Kickback Statute is punishable by a maximum of five years in prison. Each count is also punishable by a \$250,000 fine, or twice the gross gain or loss from the offense, whichever is greatest. Sentencing is scheduled for April 29, 2025.

Attorney for the United States Khanna credited special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Nelson I. Delgado in Newark; the

Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Naomi Gruchacz; the U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, Defense Criminal Investigative Service, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Patrick Hegarty; and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher F. Algieri with the investigation leading to the guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew Specht of the Special Prosecutions Division under the supervision of the Opioid Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Unit.

Indian-American Techie's Mother Demands FBI Probe Into Death, Musk Reacts

Suchir Balaji, a former employee at ChatGPT-parent OpenAI who accused the company of violating copyright laws, was found dead in his San Francisco apartment in November.

(By Staff Reporter) The mother of Suchir Balaji, a former employee at ChatGPT-parent OpenAI who accused the company of violating copyright laws in October and was found dead a month later, has demanded an FBI investigation into his death. The 26-year-old OpenAI whistleblower and researcher was found dead in his San Francisco apartment in California on November 26. Officials had ruled Mr Balaji's death a suicide. In a post on X on Sunday, his mother, Poornima Ramarao, said they hired a private investigator and did a second autopsy to throw light on the cause of death. The private autopsy "doesn't confirm" the cause of death stated by police, she said.



Ms Ramarao also alleged that Mr Balaji's apartment - which was reportedly on the Buchanan Street - was "ransacked". "There was a sign of struggle in the bathroom and it looks like someone hit him in the bathroom based on blood spots," she said. "It's a cold-blooded murder declared by authorities as suicide. Lobbying in SF city doesn't stop us from getting justice," Ms Ramarao said while demanding an FBI probe. In her post, she tagged billionaire Elon Musk and Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, who are set to be part of the incoming Donald Trump adminis-

tration. Mr Musk, who has a long-standing feud with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, responded to her post, saying "This doesn't seem like a suicide" According to media reports, Mr Balaji's father, Balaji Ramamurthy, while speaking at a vigil held for his son in Milpitas, California, said he was the last person to talk to him on November 22. During the 15-minute call, he said they talked about his Los Angeles trip which was part of his birthday celebration. "He was in LA and having a good time. So he sent us all the pictures," Guardian quoted Mr Ramamurthy as saying. "He was in a good mood."

What Suchir Balaji Said About OpenAI

Suchir Balaji had alleged that OpenAI's AI models were trained on copyrighted material scraped from the internet without authorisation, a practice he argued was harmful. "If you believe what I believe, you have to just leave the company," Mr Balaji told the New York Times in an interview this year. The Indian-origin techie quit the company in October 2023 after spending nearly four years in the company. At OpenAI, he contributed to data collection for the company's flagship product, ChatGPT. Mr Balaji explained

his concerns further on his personal website, claiming that the company's process of copying data for model training amounted to potential copyright infringement. He noted that while generative models rarely produce outputs identical to their training data, the act of replicating copyrighted material during training could violate laws if not protected under "fair use." "This is not a sustainable model for the internet ecosystem as a whole," he told the New York Times in October. OpenAI, however, disputed his claims, insisting that their data use adhered

to fair use principles and legal precedents. "We build our AI models using publicly available data, in a manner protected by fair use and related principles, and supported by longstanding and widely accepted legal precedents. We view this principle as fair to creators, necessary for innovators, and critical for US competitiveness," the company said in a statement. After its release in 2022, he began questioning the legal and ethical implications of OpenAI's practices. By mid-2023, he concluded that such AI technologies were damaging to the internet and society, prompting his resignation.

After High Court setback, Puja Khedkar moves Supreme Court for pre-arrest bail

Ex-IAS trainee Puja Khedkar, accused of cheating UPSC, has approached the Supreme Court, claiming that the case against her requires no custodial interrogation.



already in the possession of the prosecution.

Therefore, no further custodial interrogation is not required, the plea stated. An apex court bench, comprising Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma, is set to hear her plea on Wednesday, January 15. The former IAS trainee is challenging a Delhi High Court order dated December 23, 2024, which denied her anticipatory bail plea. The High Court had observed that a strong prima facie case existed against her, necessitating a thorough investigation to expose a "larger conspiracy" aimed at manipulating the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) ex-

amination system. It noted that granting pre-arrest bail would impede the investigation.

"The anticipatory bail plea is dismissed. Interim protection from arrest is vacated," the high court had ruled. It further described the case as a grave instance of fraud perpetrated against a constitutional body and society, underscoring the importance of preserving the integrity of the UPSC examination.

The UPSC revoked Khedkar's selection as a junior government officer and even banned her from appearing for the civil services examination in future. Two months later, the Union government sacked her. Khedkar had previ-

ously been granted interim protection from arrest after the High Court issued a notice on her anticipatory bail plea on August 12, 2024. This protection was extended periodically but ultimately vacated with the High Court's last ruling. The allegations against Khedkar include falsifying information in her 2022 UPSC civil services examination application to unlawfully claim reservation benefits. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) initiated criminal proceedings against her, accusing her of faking her identity to exploit quota advantages. The Delhi Police also lodged an FIR against her for multiple offences.

(By Staff Reporter) Former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) trainee officer, Puja Khedkar, accused of fraudulently availing reservation benefits under the OBC and disability quotas in the civil services examination, has moved the Supreme Court challenging

the Delhi High court order rejecting her pre-arrest bail plea.

Khedkar, in her plea before the apex court, called the High Court order 'erroneous', claiming that the case against her pertains to offences based on documents and application forms that are

ED gets nod to prosecute Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia in liquor policy case

In an order last November, the Supreme Court said that the ED has to take prior sanction before prosecuting public servants. The following month, the probe agency wrote to VK Saxena, saying that granting of a sanction should be given since Kejriwal was the "kingpin and key conspirator" of the scam.

(News Agency) The Union Home Ministry has granted approval to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to prosecute Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal and former minister

servants. The following month, the probe agency wrote to VK Saxena, saying that granting of a sanction should be given since Kejriwal was the "kingpin and key conspirator" of the

tion of the now-defunct Delhi excise policy for 2021-22. It is alleged that the former Chief Minister along with other AAP leaders, including Sisodia, intentionally created loopholes in the policy to receive kickbacks from liquor lobbyists. He was first arrested by the ED on March 21, 2024, in connection to the money laundering case. Later, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested Kejriwal on June 26, 2024 in a corruption case. In September 2024, the Supreme Court granted bail to the AAP chief. Just days after he secured bail, Kejriwal resigned as the Chief Minister of Delhi, paving the way for senior AAP leader Atishi to occupy the top post. Meanwhile, Sisodia walked out of jail in August 2024, 17 months after he was arrested by the ED and CBI in connection with the liquor policy case. The AAP has fielded the senior party leader from the Jangpura seat for the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections.



Manish Sisodia in a money laundering case connected to the Delhi liquor policy scam.

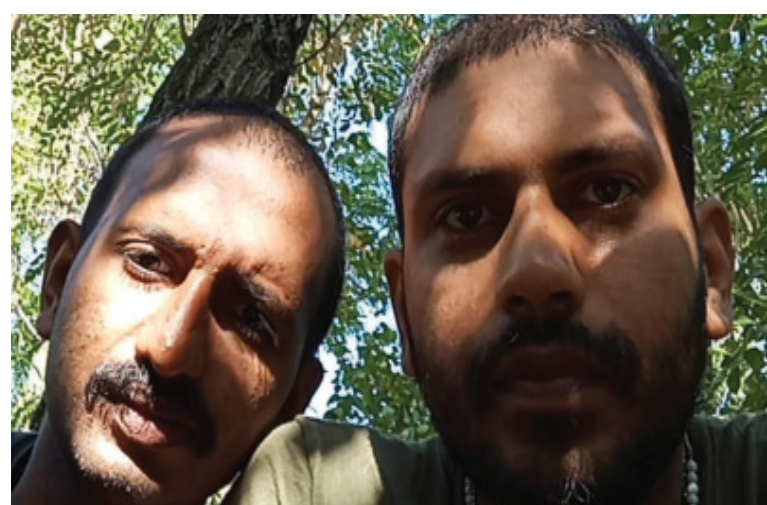
The Ministry's decision comes after Delhi Lt. Governor VK Saxena had given his nod to prosecute the former Delhi Chief Minister in the case.

In an order last November, the Supreme Court said that the ED has to take prior sanction before prosecuting public

On his part, the AAP chief approached the Delhi High Court, saying the probe agency's chargesheet against him and others in the case was illegal because no prior sanction of authorities was taken before filing the prosecution complaint. The case against Kejriwal centres on accusations of irregularities in the formula-

Kerala man forced to fight in Russia-Ukraine conflict, dies on warfront

A 32-year-old Malayali man died and another was injured after being forced to fight for a Russian mercenary group. Both were caught in the conflict even though they went there for work.



(News Agency) A 32-year-old man from Kerala, who was forced to enlist in a Russian mercenary force, died on the warfront after being shot. Binil Babu was a native of Kuttanellur in Kerala's Thrissur district. The Indian embassy officially informed his family about his death.

Meanwhile, another Malayali, also a resident of Thrissur, was wounded in a shell attack in Ukraine. Jain Kurien, who is from Kuranchery region, was in hospital under treatment for a while. Jain informed his family about his injury and ar-

rival in a Moscow hospital two days ago via a WhatsApp call. Binil and Jain, along with a few others, went to Russia through an agent in Chalakudy. These young men, who had gone to Russia to work in the canteen, found themselves caught in the war zone and forcibly fighting for Russia. They appealed for help through a video, requesting assistance to return home. In response to the situation, the head of the Orthodox Church, Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, made an urgent appeal to Russian Ambassador Denis Alipov, urging immediate action.

UP couple consume poison with their 3 children amid financial stress; two dead

A couple poisoned themselves and their children in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur district, over high debt. They were admitted to a hospital where the woman and a child died, while her husband and two other children were undergoing treatment.

(By Staff Reporter) A couple poisoned themselves and their children in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur district over high debt and repeated harassment by a finance company. During treatment, the woman and her son died, while her husband and two other children were undergoing treatment.

According to the police, all five members of the family were found unconscious on the Gagalhed-Deoband road in Saharanpur and were rushed to a hospital by another passerby in his car on Monday, January 13.

Commenting on the incident, the family relatives of the family said that Vikas (45), and Rajni (35) had taken a loan of four to five lakhs from a small finance company named Fusion. After being unable to pay the EMIs on time, the company officials harassed them and often visited their



home, threatening them, following which they took extreme step. Initially, the family was taken to a government hospital, from where the doctors referred them to another medical facility for better treatment. However, Rajni and her one-and-a-half-year-old son died during treat-

ment, while Vikas and the couple's two other children were undergoing treatment. Rajni's brother Gurmeet said, "When we arrived at the location, Vikas told me that he had a lot of debt. The company people were bothering them and threatening them. There was another person from

the village from whom they had borrowed 10,000-15,000 rupees at 12 per cent interest. They were being harassed by those people." After the incident, a probe was launched by the Saharanpur Police. Speaking on the incident, Saharanpur's SP City Vyom Bindal said, "Five members of the same family, including the husband, wife, and their three children, attempted suicide by consuming poison. All five of them were receiving treatment. Unfortunately, their one-and-a-half-year-old son died. The husband's wife, Rajni, also passed away during treatment." "An investigation will be conducted into all these facts. Our priority is to ensure that those who are hospitalised for treatment receive the best possible care. As for the other points raised by the authorities, an investigation will be carried out on all those matters as well," he added.

Unruly, disturbing: High Court on tourists cornering tigress, cubs at sanctuary

(News Agency) The Bombay High Court has expressed strong disapproval of the actions of tourists and safari operators involved in an incident that disrupted the movement of a tigress and her five cubs at the Umred Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary. Taking suo moto cognisance of the December 31, 2024, event, the bench of Justices Nitin Sambre and Vrushali Joshi emphasised the need for measures beyond mere penal actions to prevent such incidents.

The court's intervention followed viral videos on social media that revealed a distressing scenario: safari vehicles crowding the tigress, identified as F-2, and her cubs from both sides of the road in the buffer zone, forcing the animals into a state of agitation.

The tigress, trapped and unable to retreat, displayed aggression in response to the overwhelming intrusion. The bench described the situation as "shocking and disturbing", criticising the conduct of Gypsy drivers, guides, and tourists as not only unruly but also harmful to wildlife. The Forest Department responded by suspending the drivers and guides involved for three months and imposing fines of Rs 25,000.

Additionally, the Principal Chief Con-

servator of Forests (Wildlife) and the Field Director are considering restrictions on movement in areas frequented by the tigress and her cubs.

However, the court observed that these actions, though commendable, were insufficient to address the root of the problem.

"We appreciate the immediate steps taken not only by the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wild Life) but also by the Field Director in the matter of causing an enquiry and punishing the violators, viz. Gypsy drivers and the guides. However, there is something more required to be done at the end of the Forest Department," the bench observed.

The bench pointed to a critical intelligence failure on the part of the Forest Department, which learnt of the incident only through social media and news reports. It stressed the importance of proactive monitoring and preventive measures to protect wildlife from human interference. In its submission, the government informed the court about the formation of a committee headed by the Deputy Director of Bor Tiger Project, Wardha. The committee is tasked with drafting guidelines for the behaviour of safari operators, guides, and tourists in wildlife zones. A report is expected to be submitted this week.



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No wrongdoing by Jharkhand principal who forced girls to remove shirts: Official

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Tajesh Kumar said on Monday night that the probe team heard both sides of the issue. He added that the parents reviewed the CCTV footage alongside the team and that no objectionable evidence had been found so far.

(News Agency) The district administration team probing the case of the private school in Jharkhand's Dhanbad, whose principal allegedly forced Class 10 female students to remove their shirts, said that they didn't find anything objectionable in the case.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Tajesh Kumar, who led the investigation, said on Monday night that the probe team heard both sides of the issue. He added that the parents reviewed the CCTV footage alongside the team and that no objectionable evidence had been found so far.

However, investigations by the state legal service authority and the child welfare committee



are still ongoing. Notably, the incident occurred on Thursday in a reputed private school in "Pen Day", marking the students' final exam day. As part of

the celebration, students wrote good wishes on each other's shirts. Around 100 female students were part of the event.

However, the principal allegedly objected to this, scolding the students and not allowing them to put their shirts back on. They were sent home wearing only their blazers.

A video of the students has since surfaced on social media, with several describing the day as 'traumatic'. The incident has sparked outrage among parents, many of whom visited the Deputy Commissioner's office demanding strict action against the school principal. The principal of the school has apologised for the incident.

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End of the Nation State?

The nation-state, a political entity that is distinguished by uniqueness in language, culture, experience, history and geography, verily most attributes of a people, was birthed in the Thirty Years War and the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. It is a peculiarly European creation, and came into adolescence with Klemens von Metternich and the 1815 Congress of Vienna. It matured into full adulthood in Versailles at the end of World War I and a welter of new countries started decorating the map of the world, each of them thinking that their political borders were inviolable and forever. It must not be forgotten that the modern nation-state was forged in the fires of the two world wars; World War II and its end was traumatic for most. After helplessly witnessing Hitler's contempt for the entire nation-state idea, the victors said Nie Wieder to the concept of changing political borders and under the supervision of the US and the UK came up with a new idea that they called a rules based order, or in cruder terms, the submission of the entire world to a new world order carefully managed by America to keep its political and economic interests paramount. Permanent borders were a natural corollary, even a condition of the modern nation-state. Indeed, apart from a few anomalies, political borders have largely remained fixed in the last 80 years because of the military and economic prowess of the USA, a feature which has been visibly aided by the US dollar's status as the world's reserve currency. It is sometimes forgotten that in their race to demarcate nation-state borders after 1815 and 1918, the great European powers started cutting up the entire world into entities that 'looked' like nation-states in the sense that they were shown in political maps as 'countries' shaded in bright colours. They did this of course only to advance their economic and geostrategic interests, but reality was far different. These political boundaries outside of Europe were essentially artificial lines drawn on a map and bore no relation to the people they were dividing, their culture, economy, history or background. One merely has to look at the number of straight lines separating these new 'countries' in Africa, West Asia and Central and South America to realize that these boundaries were merely matters of convenience to the European powers that drew them up. Paraguay, Iraq, Nicaragua, Burkina Faso—the list goes on—are 'countries' or shall we say, political constructs that bear no cogent relationship to the people who now inhabit them.

All these lines were not straight. Europeans, more specifically Britishers, were simply fond of drawing lines on maps, straight or crooked. This is their solution to complicated political problems. It just became a habit with them. We have today, the McMahon Line, the Radcliffe Line and the 38th Parallel. These bizarre

lines have caused nothing but havoc to the innocent residents of the lands thus vivisected. They even drew a line in the middle of Germany in 1945 and, absurdity of absurdities, Hitler's capital was shared among four countries. Possibly because these latter lines were in Europe, they were reversed in 1989, and while the affected territory might not quite be the Grossdeutschland of 1942, it may still be called Germany. However, the sanctity of these nation-state boundaries outside of the European heartland may be seriously questioned, for the vast bulk of the Eurasian landmass is civilizational, that is supra-national, and not national. India, China and Russia, the three great civilizational empires of the emerging world, are characterized by geographical regions of 'fuzziness' at their peripheries that buffer their core central areas. These regions include the entire Central Asian region, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh (or shall we call this East Pakistan?), the two Koreas, the Philippines, Myanmar, Chinese Taipei, Thailand and even Tibet, Sinkiang and Mongolia. Traditionally, before 1945, and certainly before 1914, there were no sharp borders separating most of these areas and people moved and travelled easily enough through them without passports and visas, mostly for economic and commercial purposes—the successors to the old Golden Road and Silk Routes. However, what would happen if the original guarantor(s) of these nation-state borders themselves decided to break their own rules—again for economic and geostrategic reasons? We do not think that any rational geopolitical observer or average political commentator would have imagined (till very recently) that such a situation could or would ever happen. This is why recent discourse in the US about renewed American territorial expansionism in the manner of Alaska, California and Puerto Rico should not be dismissed as mere filibusters. There might be a tendency to dismiss some of these utterances as delusions of an overenthusiastic far right Republican flank, but it must not be forgotten that a lot of it is being sanctioned by the very top of the Republican establishment which, in a matter of days, will be the new American establishment. Donald Trump has openly stated his intentions to buy (acquire through other means) Greenland, seize the Panama Canal, absorb Canada as the 51st state of the USA and rename the Gulf of Mexico. Such a statement has not been made by a US president since the Louisiana purchase in the early days of the Manifest Destiny which resulted in the US nearly doubling its land area. While the action (or inaction) of Trump in this regard will be debated to death by the commentariat in the Amerisphere, its true long term impact may lie elsewhere.

Maha Kumbh Mela: 'Dharmanomics' In Action

The Maha Kumbh this year is truly special. With more than 400 million people descending onto Prayagraj for this spectacle over the next two months, its significance is further enhanced by the grand arrangements under the Uttar Pradesh government to create such a marvellous atmosphere.

While many renowned Indic scholars have reiterated the religious significance and importance of the event, one question that people should ponder on is the economic contribution of the massive event not only to Uttar Pradesh but the rest of Bharat as well. The greatest confluence of culture and economics driven by the dharmic way of life in one place is taking place in these two months.

These numbers tell us a striking story – this year, it is bigger and better. The total budget allocated for the event is estimated to be about Rs 7,200 crore (\$1.3 billion), which includes Rs 5,100 crore from the state government and a grant of Rs 2,100 crore from the central government. For instance, a separate district called 'Mahakumbhnagar' has been created, and it has the capacity and infrastructure that could accommodate an estimated 40 crore pilgrims in a much bigger 40 sq km venue in 2025. Other key infrastructure parameters include 1.5 lakh toilets, 10,000 changing rooms for pilgrims, 7,500 buses and at least 3,000 special trains. Rs 400 crore has been allocated for energy infrastructure alongside a plethora of technological advancements to boost the consumer experience at the event. These include AI-generated systems, drones and other technological improvements.

For a common audience, what are the

most important economic and policy takeaways from this event? First, it's important to recognise that 400 million people are arriving at a particular location over a two-month period without any incentive or favour from the state or external entities. In turn, what it means is that all of these 400 million people will be making economic choices – for food, accommodation, travel, tourism, all the religious items required for their darshan, which includes flowers, petals, agarbattis among others, based exclusively on their dharmic 'way of life'. No one is thinking or bothering about the stock market or RBI (Reserve Bank of India) interest rates at this moment, are they? Most of the discretionary expenditure during this time is driven by people's pursuit of their dharmic 'way of life'. While I have been arguing that this has been the norm throughout the year in society, as culturally intertwined as we are, the Maha Kumbh brings this into stark perspective for us to absorb and contemplate in equal measure. Second, while I have shown all the economic investments made, there are many positive direct and indirect outcomes out of this entire exercise for the local economy. Direct effects are what you see as a direct correlation to the event. For instance, it's estimated that the revenues generated from the entire event could be closer to Rs 2.5 lakh crore in 2025. This was around Rs 1,200 crore in 2013 and the CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) estimated it at about Rs 1.2 lakh crores in the 2019 Kumbh Mela.

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What is happening in Los Angeles is our future

By Francine Prose

The news from California is clear, but we don't want to see it. It's too confounding, big, complex. But we can sense the danger. When I send anxious texts to friends in Los Angeles – friends who have been evacuated or who are waiting to leave, friends escaping a fire zone, wondering if their life's work has been destroyed, worrying about the smoke's effect on an asthmatic child – I always begin with the same three words: are you OK? But a continent away, watching photos and videos of a city I love being incinerated, overcome by waves of terror, grief and mourning, I have other questions. For example: when are we going to universally acknowledge that climate change is a current crisis and not (as even Elon Musk admits) a future possibility? When are we going to admit that the fires in California are not just "what happens in California". We've read our Joan Didion and Raymond Chandler, so we know that the Santa Ana winds are a thing. But when are we going to understand that this isn't just local – or normal?

When are people going to agree that the fires (not just this fire, but a plague of recent conflagrations) have been fueled, in speed and intensity, by our warming environment? When are we going to notice that climate disasters are happening not just in California but in Hawaii, North Carolina, Greece and Sudan? For how long can we continue to think that we are – that anywhere is –



immune? How are we not horrified when politicians deploy the misery and loss as ammunition aimed at the other team, blaming someone or something for a global disaster, much of it caused by carbon emissions?

It's not as if people haven't been saying this for a while. Thinking about Al Gore makes you realize how unfortunate it is that being concerned about our planet's future, about our children and grandchildren's future, suggests that we are all Debbie Downers, wimpy crybaby snowflakes.

Days ago, in the New York Times, a climate scientist explained his decision to leave Los Angeles, two years ago. The city had become frightening, unlivable. Its future was all too clear. The damage to the climate,

and its accelerating pace, he noted, has been obvious to the petrochemical industry for decades, but its executives have used their influence to block legislation that might have controlled it.

There's plenty of information out there about how dire our situation has already gotten. The (largely older) people who watch network evening news will surely have noticed how many broadcasts lead with houses swept away by a flood, with pans along the wreckage left by a tornado. To reporters and producers, the Los Angeles fires must seem like a godsend from hell. But the media know that the public has a short attention span. During the early days of the fire, Los Angeles was briefly displaced in the news by speculation about the supreme

court's ruling on the TikTok ban. Much of the press coverage focuses on what the city needs to do in order to be prepared for future disasters, with only a passing mention of the fact that they're part of a larger problem. It's a little like having a long, impassioned argument about how best to insulate the attic when the roof is caving in.

Maybe the widespread inability to focus on the root cause of the problem is part of the problem. Maybe our brains have been so effectively rewired by screens and scrolling that we've lost the ability to connect the dots. We view the fire and floods and mudslides as separate events, when the fact is that they're connected. And part of the population is so busy trying to keep food on the table that they don't have the time or energy

to think about the planet. The struggle for survival enables those who aren't struggling to do pretty much what they want.

In any case, our leaders and their friends in the oil and finance communities would rather we not connect the dots, rather we not get worked up about climate disaster. Offshore drilling looks good on the balance sheets. Let the future worry about the future. It's not hard to see that strict controls on emissions and fossil fuels are in conflict with personal greed, and that personal greed is winning.

We need a leader who can convince the American people (and actually, the world) that what is happening in Los Angeles today is a portent of the future. Instead, we have elected a president who blames the destruction on Governor Gavin Newsom and a program designed to protect an endangered species of fish. Is there anything more cynical and cruel than turning the intense suffering of so many into a joke about threatened smelt that your political base can snicker at?

The news from California is clear, but we don't want to see it. It's too confounding, too big, too complex. But we can sense the danger.

We can only hope against hope that the pain of the people of Los Angeles inspires us to find a way forward, to insist on a course more expansive and comprehensive than a plan to beef up fire hydrants and local emergency preparedness.

Why An India-Taliban Softening Irks Pakistan So



By Tara Kartha

The sight of Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri chatting with his Talibani counterpart, the Acting Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai, could not but have raised eyebrows in some capitals—Pakistan, particularly. The visit was followed by a rather delayed statement by Delhi on January 8, "condemning" Pakistan's "Christmas bombing" against Kabul using fighter aircraft. It seems the visit was a rather quick decision with requisite statements issued just days before.

Indian Aid Never Stopped

The simple reason could be that the visit was made as the result of a diplomatic jostling for space in what is likely to be a crowded calendar for the Foreign Secretary, given, among other things, the upcoming presidency of Trump, and several multilateral meetings. In any case, India has been slowly increasing its interaction with the Taliban, quietly

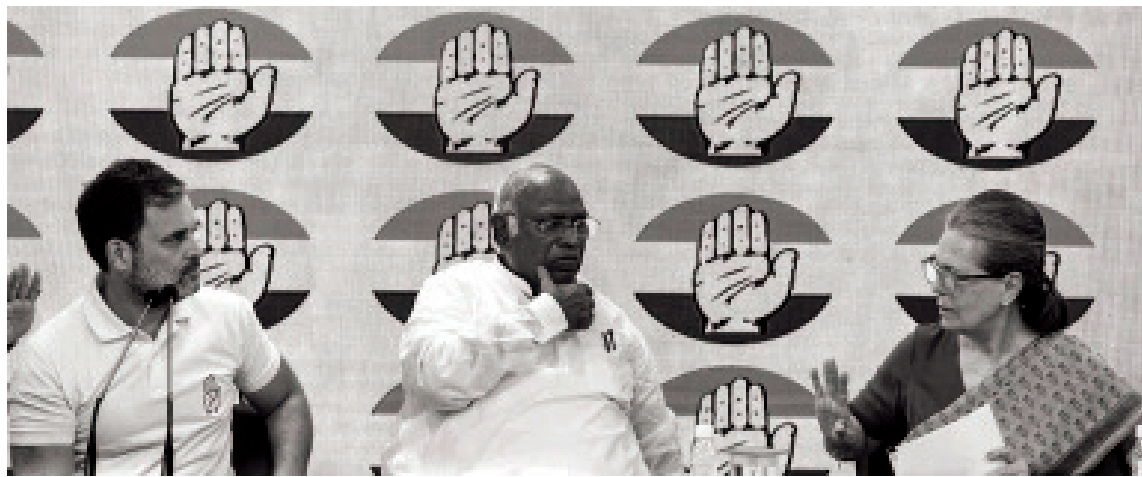
acknowledging their representatives in the embassy, and, recently, even sending JP Singh from the Ministry to make the first formal outreach in a long time. Not that Indian assistance for the beleaguered Afghan people ever stopped, as most people tend to believe. As the Taliban took over, Delhi allocated Rs 200 crore for aid and was the first responder in the massive earthquake that took place that year, with the Indian Air Force flying in tons of relief aid, including one shipment through Pakistan. But difficulties created by Islamabad—the insistence that Pakistani trucks be used, something presented as Pakistan's 'generosity' then—led to a revival of the Chabahar route in 2023 to deliver about 20,000 tons of wheat. Delhi's logic was simple. It had always been a friend to the Afghan people and wasn't going to desert them, Taliban or no Taliban.

(Contd. on page 26)

Congress: The Emperor Is Without Clothes

Strange but true. The Emperor is without clothes. The Congress, which has been projecting itself as the leader of the opposition bloc, has virtually been thrown in the dumps by regional parties, which are almost writing obituaries for the INDIA grouping these days.

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejaswi Yadav's statement, that the INDIA grouping was for the Lok Sabha elections, signals almost the end of the opposition alliance, whether Rahul Gandhi likes it or not. One swallow does not make a summer is the message to the Congress, which had been on cloud nine after reaching 99 seats in the Lok Sabha polls for the first time since May 2014. For diverse reasons, several members of the INDIA grouping have in recent months shown the mirror to the grand old party in the wake of its poll debacle in Haryana and Maharashtra. The Congress, which was once the greatest strength of the grouping, is now



being projected not only as a 'good-for-nothing' party but also as an obstacle to the grouping's unity.

AAP's Offensive

A few regional parties are rubbing salt into the Grand Old Party's wounds ahead of the Delhi polls by publicly declaring their support for Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), at a time when the Congress is making a determined effort to become relevant in the affairs of the national capital. Kejriwal, fighting with his back to the wall in his

tussle against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the national capital, has gone to the extreme, declaring that the Congress be removed from the INDIA Bloc.

The message is loud and clear. The Congress will have to constantly earn the goodwill and the confidence of its allies. It will have to keep them not only in good humour but also in constant dialogue and discussion on the way ahead, both inside and outside Parliament.

In politics, as also elsewhere, there are no free lunches. The

Congress has to earn the respect of its allies if it wants to lead the INDIA alliance. Any political force that is not a winning horse will be pushed to the sidelines. It can't claim the front seat only on the basis of its past glory. Herein lies the root of the crisis within the anti-BJP bloc, which has failed to stabilise after putting up a good show in the Lok Sabha polls just six months ago.

Jostling For Space

The situation in the INDIA alliance is more serious than it appears. Anyone and everyone wants to

have a place in the sun. They believe, rightly or wrongly, that the Congress is getting more than what it deserves and is not contributing adequately to the cause of the opposition unity.

For Rahul Gandhi, the problem is that the sheen of the Bharat Jodo Yatra as well as the Nyay Yatra is waning due to the failure of the party to build a credible organisation through large-scale public outreach. The situation has gone back to square one, where everyone is trying to merely survive in the face of a resurgent BJP. Maharashtra witnessed how the BJP vanquished the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), almost silently and coolly. Politics is never static, and the BJP knows how to work through patience and perseverance. After struggling for a decade, the BJP has not only stabilised in Maharashtra but has become the undisputed numero uno. This will have far-reaching effects.

(Contd. on page 26)

Are You 'Pretending' To Work? It's Not Entirely Your Fault

What is worse than an outrageous statement made by someone of note? Writing about it.

What is worse than writing about it? Researching about it.

What is worse than researching it? Thinking about it.

What is worse than thinking about it? Making sure that all this thinking is counted as 'work' that is being clocked on a daily basis.

Work. It's an agent of both Eros and Thanatos. We live for and love work, or we die doing work. An oft-repeated quote on work attributed to Robert Frost, "By working faithfully eight hours a day you may eventually get to be boss and work twelve hours a day", shows work to be the Janus-faced entity that it truly is. There are rewards and retributions attached to work and how we approach it.

When entrepreneurs and job creators extol the virtues of long work hours, it is imperative to examine the intent behind it. But let's look at the working habits of the rich and the poor before passing judgment on whether a 40-hour week needs to be buried in favour of a 90-hour week.

Brains Replace Hands

Factory workers are referred to as "hands" in *Hard Times*, Charles

Dickens's novel set in 19th-century England. They work hard for very little.

Their 'weekend' seems to come not from any assertion of labour rights but religious reasons—Sundays were a holy day in the Christian world. The holiness of the Jewish world contributed to a longer weekend, with a free Saturday for observing Shabbat. The Islamic world observes Friday as a holy day meant to be away from work.

It was much later that labour laws in various countries codified humane working hours for "hands". All of that has changed with the changing definition of the "hands". Brains are the new hands. In an era of technological dominance, the brain makes an appearance on the work floor as the uniformed worker. There is a case to be made against the pedestrianising of the brain: it is, after all, deemed the most superior organ. But an organ it is, and, sometimes, it's the only organ that a person can use to earn a livelihood. When a technology giant makes a case for working more hours than the mandated ones, it is essential to understand what it really means. Simply put, technology sweatshops need brains to work overtime without

paying them an overtime bonus.

To What End, Work?

Another idea emerging from this debate on work hours is the redefinition of the work the brain does.

Is work to be defined as something that gets done within the punch-in, punch-out timeframe? Or does it also include the off-floor preparation it takes to be logged in? And what about networking and working the net?

Let's talk about the latter, too. In an 'image' driven world, careful curations of personal life are put out to fetch professional gains. This 'work' is not exclusive to those who earn a livelihood on the internet. All the work that goes into presenting oneself as a wealthy, urbane, intellectually engaging, and creative thinker has clear rewards. Like lying on one's resume and spreading fake news about one's qualifications through the grapevine, social media feeds are intended to grab attention for career progression opportunities. How does one quantify the hours spent there?

Working vs Pretending

There's no place for laziness in a highly competitive, profit-driven world. What some of the 90-hour workweek supporters forget is that it takes two

to tango. Productivity and quality do not generally get negatively impacted because people work less-than-necessary hours, but because they put less of themselves in the necessary hours. That's where management's laziness and poor judgement play a significant role. Hiring people who appear to work or forcing people to appear to work are problems that are created by the heads of organisations, rarely by the hands.

If workers are not paid for the extra hours demanded, the stretched work schedule will become a self-limiting problem. People, without the commensurate reward, will pretend to work. It serves the greedy managers right. Additionally, those who actually 'work' in those extra hours may never be recognised for their contribution to the altar of productivity. They are the unsung martyrs.

Work has the bad habit of turning everything it touches into itself. Everything has the potential of becoming work. Even Rihanna's sexy song *Work*, which, according to Spencer Kornhaber, is "about working for a paycheck no matter what else is going on in your life".

How much of it do we need?

How Travel is Shaping the Future of India-US Relations

**Amit Kumar Sharma,
Head-Americas, VFS Global**

As we enter into 2025, the travel landscape is set for a transformative shift, especially shaped by renewed Indo-US relations. Both nations share a strong relationship deeply rooted in trade, culture, technology and business. The current sentiment, promised by announcements of renewed trade and business, has already bolstered more travel, reflecting strengthened bilateral relations. A new travel era is emerging—one marked by resilience, innovation and a renewed focus on cultural exchange. This demonstrates the essential role of travel in further strengthening a close bond between the United States of America and India.

The Resurgence of Travel

The travel industry is experiencing a robust recovery, with projections indicating that international travel will continue to gain momentum. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), India's tourism sector is expected to contribute nearly \$253 billion to its GDP in 2024, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. This resurgence is not just about numbers; it reflects a deeper desire for connection and exploration that transcends borders. As per the data released by the United States Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO), 15,54,020 Indians have visited the U.S. till August 2024. As India emerges as the second-largest travel market for the US in 2024, the opportunities for cultural exchange and economic collaboration are immense.

Economic Impact and Opportunities

Tourism serves as a significant economic driver for both nations. American tourists are projected to contribute substantially to the Indian economy, while Indian travellers are increasingly exploring the diverse landscapes and cultural experiences the US has to offer. According to the data released by the Tourism Ministry, Government of India, from January to June 2024, 17.56 per cent of foreign tourist arrivals were from the United States.

Additionally, niche sectors such as medical, wellness, and adventure tourism are gaining traction as many Indian travellers seek activities beyond traditional attractions. Add to this the new administration's chances of reviving earlier conversations in the defence, energy, agriculture, education and healthcare service – the business traffic between the two nations only sees a more promising time. According to reports Brian Beall, director of the National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) under the Department of Commerce, stated that the US aims to attract 9 crore visitors annually, with an estimated \$280 billion in spending, by 2027.

The U.S. continues to be the preferred destination for Indian students. And the accompanying family travel also significantly boosts tourism revenue.

Overall, the travel relationship between India and the USA presents substantial economic opportunities for both nations, fostering cultural exchange and mutual growth.

Cultural Exchange and People-to-People Ties

Travel is a powerful medium for fostering understanding and connection; it is not merely a transactional experience. The half-million-strong Indian diaspora enriches the Indo-US relationship and acts as a natural bridge that boosts travel. As more Indians travel to the US and vice versa, they



bring with them their unique cultures, traditions and perspectives. Both societies benefit from this interchange, which also establishes the foundation for future diplomatic ties. In 2025, it is anticipated that there will be a sustained focus on cultural tourism, where travellers will look for genuine opportunities that allow them to interact with local communities. Initiatives that promote cultural exchange, such as festivals, art exhibitions and culinary experiences, will play a pivotal role in enhancing mutual understanding.

The Role of Technology in Travel

Technological integration is expected to redefine travel experiences by 2025 and beyond. Innovations in AI are set to revolutionise the travel industry, enhancing customer experiences.

Technology is a driving force in shaping the future of travel and Indo-US relations. As both nations are working closely to innovate in fields like AI, cybersecurity, and aviation, the role of technology will play a pivotal role in their partnership. AI-driven tools can provide

personalised recommendations, streamline customer services, and improve operations efficiencies for airlines and hotels. Moreover, the rise of remote work has led to a new trend: 'workstations' where individuals combine work and leisure travel. This shift allows for longer stays and deeper engagement with destinations, further enriching the travel experience. As more professionals embrace this model, the demand for flexible travel options will grow, benefiting both the US and India.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Travel

The era of travel in 2025 heralds a new chapter in India-US relations, characterised by economic collaboration, cultural exchange and innovative travel experiences. The travel trajectory between India and the US appears promising in 2025 and beyond. The journey ahead, I believe, is not just about destinations; it is about building bridges between people, cultures and economies. As both nations navigate the evolving landscape of international travel, the emphasis on shared data, innovation in global travel systems, and processes will play a more pivotal role in fostering deeper connections and mutual understanding.

US Ban On TikTok Could Be Devastating

On Sunday, January 19, TikTok, the wildly popular video-sharing app that has become a cultural phenomenon in the US, could vanish into thin air—unless the Supreme Court orders on Friday to delay the hammer of a law passed last April by Congress with an overwhelming bipartisan majority.

Washington's legal, media and political circles are brimming with suspense as they await the judiciary's final word, likely to come on Friday. Speculation is rife. Will the justices uphold the law to ban TikTok, snatching it from the hands of its 170 million American users? Or will they put the ball into Donald Trump's court, who returns to the Oval Office on Monday?

The meteoric rise of TikTok is impressive indeed. Young people across the world adore the app as it has redefined the global social media landscape. TikTok, unlike its competitors, is unique in terms of a blend of short-form videos and intuitive algorithms. These qualities propelled it to unparalleled heights, captivating billions worldwide. Yet, this dizzying success has come with its share of problems. In the US, the platform has become a lightning

rod for controversy, with mounting concerns over data privacy and national security sparking fierce debates. Now, there is the very real prospect of a ban, which, once implemented, will have ripple effects across the world.

The Data Threat

But first, let's take a look at the arguments and counterarguments for TikTok. The US government argues that Congress is acting on pressing national security concerns. They have painted TikTok as a wolf in sheep's clothing, claiming that ByteDance, its parent company, is a puppet of the Chinese government, ready to hand over reams of sensitive data at Beijing's command. They have called TikTok a "grave threat" to US national security, a digital Trojan horse smuggling Chinese influence into American smartphones.

Even though the claims are not backed by hard evidence, the fears are genuine. ByteDance operates under China's ominous national security laws, which compel organisations to cooperate with intelligence agencies. The logic is simple: data is power, and TikTok's ocean of user

data could become a goldmine for China's global ambitions. Or at least that is what the US establishment's fear is.

However, TikTok isn't going down without a fight. Its defenders, alongside furious content creators, argue that the ban is an assault on the First Amendment. Shutting down the platform, they claim, stifles free speech and undermines the right of 170 million Americans to express themselves online.

Trump's Change Of Heart?

Ironically, though, Donald Trump, the same man who tried to ban TikTok in 2020, has now become its unlikely saviour, albeit for the short term. The incoming president has urged the Supreme Court to delay the ban. Why? Perhaps because he wants the glory of deciding TikTok's future, casting himself as the ultimate dealmaker. Forget Biden's administration or Congress, in Trump's world, only he can untangle the knot of national security and free speech wrapped around TikTok. It is believed that two billionaires who have already met Trump have plans in motion to buy TikTok, which will be brokered by Trump after he assumes office on Monday

For the first time in American tech history, the US has passed a law targeting a major Chinese tech giant. If the ban kicks in on Sunday, what lies ahead for the app and its millions of users?

Hints From The Indian Ban

The Indian ban on TikTok, instituted in 2020, offers a glimpse and serves as a cautionary tale. At the time, the app had amassed a staggering 200 million users in India—its largest global audience. TikTok was riding high, revolutionising digital content creation with an algorithm that empowered rural creators to achieve fame unimaginable on other platforms. For the first time, content creation felt truly democratic. TikTok holds a similar cultural power in the US. Niche communities thrive on the platform and countless small creators and businesses depend on the app for visibility and even livelihood. But, just as in India, American users are already beginning to adapt to life without TikTok. Over the past year, as whispers of a ban grew louder, many creators adopted a fallback strategy—duplicating their efforts on rival platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts.

A farmer leader's life at stake: Why the Indian Government is so adamant?

By Jag Mohan Thaken –
Chandigarh (India)

To save the life of the farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on fast unto death since November 26 last year, central govt should hold talks with struggling farmers organizations; raising the demand Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) Maha Panchayat held at Moga, Punjab on Thursday said that the draft National Policy Framework for Agriculture Marketing is a dangerous form of re-enforcing the repealed 3 black Farm Laws and it should be withdrawn immediately.

Noticing that the central government is not heeding towards the life of the farmer leader, whose breath line is hanging on a thread, and any untoward incident may happen any time, the major farmers' unions under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) have decided to launch an agitational program.

SKM strongly asserted that it is the central govt, especially Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Agriculture Minister Shivraj Chauhan who are responsible for the present impasse and condition of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on a fast unto death. SKM appealed to the central govt that to save the life of Dallewal they should hold talks with the struggling organizations. The Morcha warned the central govt that if anything untoward happens to Sri Dallewal, it will take strong action.

Having no personal interest, Dallewal is fighting for the common cause. Whether he will survive or not, but a stigma will stick forever on the face of the present government, the democratic institutions and the people responsible for turning no ear towards the issue, if something untoward happens with his life.

The farmer leader, Jagjit Singh Dallewal is on fast-unto-death since November 26 for the lifeline demands of the farmers, including MSP; more than one and half month has gone past, but the central government, the only capable authority to fulfil the demands of the farmers, is



behaving like a deaf and dumb clay sculpture.

Not to talk about the acceptance of the demands, the BJP led government not even extending hand to start a dialogue to resolve the issue. It seems to be taking the cover of the supreme court, as is evident that its union minister, Shivraj Singh Chauhan says that they will follow the court directions.

Media reports quote that Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan on January 1 said the government will abide by the Supreme Court's decision on the ongoing farmers protest at Punjab-Haryana border and will take steps accordingly.

Here arises a question—Whether the government is not competent to take decisions on such issues or the court will have to take notice and decision in each and every executive work?

However, keeping in mind the stack of a precious life, the honourable supreme court is monitoring the Dallewal's health issue and constituted a high-power committee, which on January 6 met the fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, but the farmer leader declined the medical aid.

Rather, the farmer leader Dallewal, who is camping at the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana, as per media reports, requested that the committee should press the Supreme Court for a direction to the Centre: "I respect Justice Surya Kant but how do I ask him why he does not give any direction to the Centre, when our issue is to be sorted by Centre? When the Punjab Advocate General (AG) asks him to direct the Centre, then Surya Kant ji

does not listen. The Union Minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan) says if the SC tells them, they will comply with orders. If SC is not ready to give this direction to the Centre, then we do not have hope from anywhere."

The farmer unions associated with Dallewal are clearly demanding that Dallewal will be ready to accept the medical aid, if the central government starts a dialogue.

India Today web portal on 31st December reported that the Punjab government on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court of a proposal that farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite fast since November 26, would accept medical aid if the Centre spoke to the protesting farmers.

Shouldn't the supreme court, as requested by Dallewal, direct the central government to have a dialogue with the agitating farmers?

Doesn't the response of the fasting leader to the high-power committee appeal to the court – "I respect Justice Surya Kant but how do I ask him why he does not give any direction to the Centre, when our issue is to be sorted by Centre?" Will the court heed towards the feeble but logical voice of the farmer leader?

Why is the centre not taking the agitation of the farmers seriously?

The farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha (KMM) are agitating at Punjab-Haryana border at two places since February 13, 2024 and the farmer leader Dallewal is on hunger strike since November 26, but the central government is not

heeding the voice of the farmers. Why it is not holding a dialogue with the agitating farmers, when it is clearly visible that the life of the fasting farmer can be saved by just holding a dialogue? Shouldn't the Prime Minister himself come into the fore? Shouldn't he intervene?

The Indian express web portal on January 6, 2025 quotes the case of hunger strike of Mamta Banerjee back in 2006, wherein to resolve the issue the then President and Prime Minister both appealed Mamta Banerjee to call off the fast.

"In 2006, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee used a hunger strike to protest against alleged forcible land acquisition by the Left government in West Bengal for the Tata Group's Nano factory. She called off her 25-day hunger strike following appeals by then President A P J Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and the Tatas eventually withdrew from the state. The incident proved to be a turning point for Bengal politics and catapulted Mamata to power five years later in the 2011 Assembly polls, which ended the Left's rule of over three decades." Shouldn't the present constitutional and executive heads of the nation follow the example and set another example?

Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann, in his tweet on January 2, has also advised the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to leave the stubborn attitude and talk to the farmers. "Punjab is a part of the country. Punjab contributes the most in

terms of agriculture. Modi Sahab, you are the Prime Minister of the country, farmers are also a part of the country. You should leave your stubborn attitude and talk to the farmers." Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, PPCC president on his tweet dated January 7 says, "The callous approach of PM @narendramodi ji and the Union Government towards the deteriorating health of Farm Leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal Ji is a testament to @BJP4India's disregard for farming issues. One cannot help but wonder if they would have responded similarly if it were a prominent businessman like Adani demanding tax cuts or loan relaxation."

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) senior leader Dr Daljit Singh Cheema, in a statement on January 7, said it was shocking that even though the Supreme Court was monitoring the fast unto death of the Kisan leader almost on a daily basis, both the union government as well as the State government in Punjab were resorting to a blame game and playing politics on such a sensitive issue.

Dr Daljit Cheema appealed to P M Modi to take the lead and create an atmosphere which could lead to the end of Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast. "For this to take place the Prime Minister should notify the guarantee on Minimum Support Price (MSP) immediately. This is in keeping with the assurance made to the people of the country when the Prime Minister withdrew the three agricultural laws which led to the end of the Kisan Andolan". Will PM Modi listen to the advice of the Punjab political leader?

Five Reasons Kejriwal May Run Into Trouble This Time



Riding on the wave of the Anna and Nirbhaya movements, Arvind Kejriwal entered politics over 12 years ago, taking the moral high ground by claiming that he had joined politics to “change politics, not to be a political alternative”. People didn't mind him going back on his earlier vow that he would never have anything to do with politics. In fact, an overwhelming number of residents in the national capital romanticised him as a hero—an anti-corruption crusader, a well-educated and well-placed person who consciously chose to toil hard to raise issues affecting ordinary people. He became their voice in their struggle against VIP culture and the established political

setup. Within months, he and his newly formed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) made history.

Over the last 12 years, Kejriwal has largely acted in a manner that is almost the opposite of what he initially preached. However, this has not significantly affected him, at least not electorally. His onward march has continued.

But now, the situation on the ground in Delhi appears to be different from what it was in 2015 and 2020. On February 5 this year, when Delhi goes to the polls, Kejriwal could face a tough fight to regain power. In short, this verdict will reflect whether people are willing to forget and forgive his deviations and failure to deliver on

his promises. There's a reason for this.

During his first term (2015-2020), Kejriwal introduced numerous initiatives and created a heavy buzz: free electricity up to 200 units, free water, Mohalla clinics, improvements in government-run hospitals, upgrades in the appearance of government school classrooms, and a seemingly genuine fight with the Union government over the division of power. He also made bold claims about ways to reduce Delhi's pollution, among other promises. Cut to the current term (2020-2025), Kejriwal has little substantive progress to showcase. This period has mostly been marked by negative news for the AAP.

Here are five reasons why Kejriwal could face a real challenge this time around:

One, the four main AAP leaders—Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendra Jain, and Sanjay Singh—are out on bail after spending considerable time in jail in relation to allegations of corruption. Kejriwal spent over five months in judicial custody at Tihar jail, Manish Sisodia

remained behind bars for 17 months, Satyendra Jain was in for more than two years, and Sanjay Singh was in custody for six months. It couldn't have got worse for Kejriwal, the 'anti-corruption' crusader. Both Kejriwal, as Chief Minister, and his Deputy, Sisodia, were named in the liquor scam. It will take a long time for the courts to reach a final verdict, with the process likely dragging out from the lower courts to the High Court, and ultimately to the Supreme Court. Kejriwal had to resign from the position of Chief Minister after being released on bail due to conditions imposed by the Supreme Court, which prevented him from attending office and signing official files.

Two, the renovation worth over ₹33 crore that Kejriwal got done for his official residence on 6 Flag Staff Road—at the expense of the public exchequer—could potentially become a glaring symbol of the contradiction between what Kejriwal practised and preached, or even once stated in an affidavit. The pictures of the fixtures and fittings in the toilets, gym, sauna, jacuzzi,

kitchen, living rooms, and corridors are beyond the comprehension of ordinary citizens. The CAG report has provided an itemised list of purchases for the renovation, including ₹96 lakh for curtains, ₹39 lakh for kitchen equipment, ₹4.80 lakh for a minibar, ₹16.27 lakh for silk carpets. The list goes on.

Three, Kejriwal's much-hyped claim, that he enhanced the public health sector and transformed Delhi's education system with world-class institutions, has come under significant scrutiny. The gap between the hype and reality is now too evident to overlook.

In January last year, a slew of irregularities were uncovered by the vigilance and health departments in the functioning of Mohalla clinics and some hospitals run by the city government. The Lieutenant Governor, VK Saxena, called for a CBI probe into these alleged frauds, involving fake lab tests and 'ghost patients' at Delhi Mohalla Clinics.

(Contd. on page 27)

How Seriously Should We Take Trump's Dreams Of A 'Bigger' America?

Less than two weeks before he begins his second term as the US President, Donald Trump has alarmed his neighbours and NATO allies by indicating an imperialist agenda for territorial expansion.

At a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida on Tuesday, Trump suggested that he could use even military force to acquire Greenland and the Panama Canal, and economic force to annex Canada. He also wants to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America". Trump's comments follow calls for regime change in Germany and Britain by tech billionaire Elon Musk, who is going to be a key member of the Trump administration. Musk is close to Trump, though it is not clear whether the incoming president shares Musk's ideas.

America's neighbours and European allies nevertheless are distraught and anxious about the intentions of the new US administration. European members of NATO remember how Trump threatened to quit the



alliance during his first term, asking why America provides funds and military support for Europe's security. He forced them to contribute more for their security.

But US allies are now more worried after his expansionist utterances. They were already unsure of whether they could trust him over what they saw as the growing Russian threat after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine three years ago.

Why Trump Wants Greenland Greenland, a semi-autonomous part of Denmark, is the world's largest island and has huge strategic importance. Located between Russia and the US, it is a part of the Arctic region, which hosts a key US military base, has vast oil and gas reserves, and produces vital minerals. It has also been attracting Russian and Chinese attention. Trump tried but failed to buy Greenland during his first term. He has argued that

the island is crucial to US military efforts to track Chinese and Russian ships. He also questioned the legitimacy of Denmark's claim to the island, without providing any evidence. During the Second World War, when Denmark was under Nazi occupation, Greenland was occupied by the United States. But the US handed the island back to Denmark after the war. Leaders of Greenland and Denmark—a longtime US ally

and a member of NATO—have made it clear that Greenland is not for sale. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has reiterated that "Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders" and that only the local population could determine its future. That comment was endorsed by Greenland's Prime Minister, Mute Egede.

The Importance Of Panama Canal

Trump has long been talking about taking over the Panama Canal, which has been under the control of the eponymous country since 1999. Although built by the US in early 1900 to facilitate the transit of its vessels, Washington relinquished the canal's control to Panama under a treaty signed by President Carter in 1977. Trump has been attacking that deal, and this week, when Carter's body was lying in state, he again criticised the former president for signing the treaty. He says the ownership of the Panama Canal is crucial for America's economic as well as defence interests.

(Contd. on page 27)

Work longer or smarter? India debates L&T chief's '90-hour' work-week

L&T chairman S.N. Subrahmanyam isn't the only corporate leader to have advocated longer work hours despite the proven detrimental impact on employee wellbeing and productivity

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) chairman S.N. Subrahmanyam's endorsement of 90-hour office-weeks has reignited the debate about working longer or smarter, just months after workplace stress was headlined in India by the death of a young employee of Ernst & Young Global member firm SR Batliboi in Pune.

Subrahmanyam's suggestion that employees work 90 hours a week, and even on Sundays, went viral on social media. When an employee asked why L&T expects its workforce to work on Saturdays, the chairman said: "I regret I am not able to make you work on Sundays, to be honest. If I can make you work on Sundays, I will be happier because I work on Sundays too." He further remarked, "What do you do sitting at home? How long can you stare at your wife?" Subrahmanyam isn't the only one advocating such views. Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy had proposed 70-hour work-weeks, drawing comparisons with post-World War recovery efforts in Japan and Germany. Ola founder Bhavish

Aggarwal backed the idea. The opinions not only reflect entrenched biases about productivity but also go against what is known about working hours and their link to employee health, both physical and mental. The issue is critical because the International Labour Organization (ILO) ranks India second among countries with the highest percentage of people working long hours. Over 51 per cent of Indian employees work more than 49 hours a week—that's nearly 10 hours daily in a five-day work-week. Pallavi Jha, chairperson and managing director of Dale Carnegie Training India, makes clear the global benchmark: companies that prioritise employee wellness, both professionally and personally, consistently outperform their peers with stronger results and higher retention rates. "The myth of marathon workdays blinds organisations to the toll of burnout: creativity withers, decision-making falters and innovation dies at the altar of exhaustion. Normalising such

cultures carries the high risk of workforce toxicity and complete disengagement," says Jha Aditya Narayan Mishra, managing director and CEO of CIEL HR, says history has shown that remarkable achievements require passion, focus, hard work and wisdom. However, he emphasises on the importance of recognising diversity in the workforce. "We work in a multigenerational, highly diverse workforce with varying beliefs and preferences, more so than ever before. So we cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach," argues Mishra.

The idea of a 90-hour work-week is not only unrealistic but also overlooks the responsibilities employees have toward their families. Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder of recruitment company TeamLease, warns of the societal consequences of extreme work cultures. "We know what happened in Japan, where the emphasis on working longer led to a society where people remain single and don't start families. And now, the country is ageing rapidly," she

points out.

Several India Inc. leaders voiced their disagreement with Subrahmanyam on social media. Harsh Goenka, chairman of RPG Enterprises, posted on X: "Why not rename Sunday to 'Sun-duty' and make 'day off' a mythical concept!...turning life into a perpetual office shift? That's a recipe for burnout, not success. Work-life balance isn't optional, it's essential. Well, that's my view! #WorkSmartNotSlave"

Harsh Mariwala, founder and chairman of Marico, acknowledged that hard work is the key to success but quality overrides quantity. "It's about the quality and passion one brings to those hours. For our youth to be truly engaged and motivated, we need to ensure they are placed in roles that not only challenge them but also foster growth and learning," he said. And Anand Mahindra, chairman of the Mahindra Group, underlined the complementary relationship between personal and professional life, noting: "If you're not spending time at home, with friends or reflecting,

how will you bring the right inputs into decision-making?" Experts have raised concerns about the implications of long work hours on mental health. The issue gained national attention last year after the death of 26-year-old chartered accountant Anna Sebastian Perayil just months into her first job at SR Batliboi. The family blamed her death on undue office pressures, unrealistic expectations and long working hours. It is now widely established that relentlessly putting in long hours at work takes a toll on both physical and mental health. Research by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the ILO, published in the journal *Environment International* in 2021, revealed that individuals who worked over 55 hours a week had a 35 per cent higher risk of suffering a stroke and a 17 per cent higher risk of dying from ischemic heart disease than those working 35-40 hours weekly. It is thus time for companies to start realising that valuing work-life balance and employee wellbeing is at the heart of long-term organisational success.

Nothing Changes This New Year

"Nothing changes on New Year's Day" are the lyrics of the song 'New Year's Day' by U2, the famous Irish rock band, from their album *War*. The lyrics were written as part of the Polish solidarity movement in the early 1980s. Fast forward to the present, the lyrics still ring true, at least in a general sense.

We eagerly wait for the new year. Weeks before December 31, our inboxes begin to fill up with greetings. As the day draws nearer, it becomes impossible to filter the important messages from the unread ones. When the new year dawns, one often feels guilty for not responding to all those messages – colourful, innovative, each conveying best wishes – health, wealth, longevity, success... the list goes on.

Despite all our anticipation for bright new beginnings and setting positive resolutions to discover the 'new me', we wake up on January 1 and find that everything is pretty much the same as it ever was.

In fact, it remains largely

unchanged throughout the year. There may be moments of euphoria, but the gloomy days seem longer. Happiness as a culture has long eluded us Indians. In 2024, India ranked 126th out of 146 countries on the global happiness index – behind Iraq and Palestine. We were classified as one of the world's least joyful nations. Our neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, and China ranked better than us. Why do we feel so melancholic?

Are We More Sensitive?

There are many areas of dissatisfaction felt by the average Indian, but this applies to people in other countries too. Citizens across the globe are confronted with challenges such as poverty, hunger, and climate change. Despite being embroiled in war, two West Asian nations, Israel (ranked 5th) and Kuwait (ranked 13th), made it to the Top 20 nations on the happiness index. Countries like Iraq and Palestine are ranked higher than us, despite being ravaged by continuous conflict in West Asia.

But why does the average Indian citizen struggle with life satisfaction? Perhaps we are more sensitive to the shortfalls in our lives. The Covid-19 pandemic only worsened this. Forget decent economic metrics – our perennial struggles for 'roti, kapda aur makaan' (food, clothing, and shelter) continue to make us anxious. The economic burden of the pandemic has further exacerbated the situation. Deprived of social and income security, there is little life satisfaction for the 'aam aadmi' (common man) – with three-fourths of the workforce employed in the informal sector. 'Khushi' (happiness) remains elusive.

Societal changes, such as the shrinking of social circles, have added to our unhappiness. There are few friends or relatives we can depend on in times of crisis – and this too causes distress. The New Year messages from our family and friends bring us momentary happiness and a sense of being wanted, but soon, this feeling dissipates.

Our Struggles

The absence of a basic safety net, in the form of healthcare, education, and social services like old age pensions, coupled with the multitude of daily struggles, ensures that we Indians never face life's challenges with confidence.

Even in large cities with higher incomes than before, people remain unhappy. Extreme weather events like urban flooding and drought, issues such as air and water pollution, inadequate housing, and traffic congestion have significantly impacted daily well-being and happiness. Then there is concern about law and order, with rising insecurity. Women and girls face increased vulnerability with growing cases of rape and harassment, while children are unsafe even in schools.

People also fear falling ill, as good hospitals are often scarce, and the cost of treatment is a concern for many. Even those who can afford big private hospitals worry about the lack of empathy and attention from

doctors.

We continue to battle corruption in our daily lives – whether for free rations, bribing the village sarpanch (head) and officials to access government schemes, or struggling to get a death certificate without paying a bribe. Corruption in government offices and the police force across India makes us unhappy.

Negative emotions run high – petty arguments over parking, pets, feeding strays, etc. We are unhappy being single, and sometimes, even in marriage.

The need for social media validation has heightened feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and isolation. So, where is happiness?

Suicide has become one of the largest public health crises facing people, both young and old, in India. Common stressors in life are related to work, studies, finances, relationship issues, and health. The suicide rate has increased to 12.4 per 100,000 – the highest rate ever recorded in India, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

How parental nod to join social media will protect Under-18 in India

Experts believe it will safeguard minors in the face of rising cyber-bullying, exposure to harmful content and privacy breaches while letting them tap their digital potential

Indian children under 18 will now need the consent of parents to join social media platforms. The draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, released by the Union ministry of electronics and information technology mandate that 'verifiable consent' be obtained from parents or legal guardians before processing the personal data of minors, ensuring that they are protected from exploitation.

The provisions are a step towards safeguarding the digital wellbeing of minors in India. "This move aligns with global trends, emphasising on child protection in the digital realm, particularly in the face of increasing cyber-bullying, exposure to harmful content and privacy breaches targeting young users," says Vinesh Menon, director general and CEO, ARISE (Association for Reinventing School Education), a non-profit organisation. "This rule could promote a safer environment for minors, reduce impulsive and harmful usage patterns, and encourage responsible digital habits by involving parents in their children's online choices," he adds.

Children might gravitate more towards platforms and activities considered educational or constructive when parents are overseeing them.

The draft regulations align with global trends in child protection in the digital realm. For example, COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, 1998) in the United States makes it necessary for parents to be consulted before the collection of any personal data on

children under the age of 13. For the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation established 16 as the threshold, although member states could lower it to 13. These laws have shaped safer digital landscapes while trying to balance the rights of children to information and expression.

Screens today fill up so many roles, right from learning, work, social connection, chilling and entertainment. Research has correlated screen-time to poor sleep, low self-esteem, higher anxiety, depression symptoms, sedentary lifestyle and lower psychological wellbeing.

"Today there is nothing stopping a 10- or 11-year-old to say they are 18 years old and open an account on social media. After that, it's difficult to keep tabs on what information the child is consuming. Most parents state it's a constant struggle to keep phone usage in check," explains Shalini Sharma, associate director (counselling and wellbeing), Plaksha University, Punjab.

Online problems such as cyber bullying, sexting, and exposure to inappropriate content and predators are some of the things children struggle with today. It helps to wait a bit longer in giving them access to phones and social media.

"There is no magical age for it however; as a psychologist, I suggest delaying social media usage till at least 14-15 years of age. Developmentally, by this age, scepticism and the need to question everything builds up. We want our kids to question and think about what they see on social media," says Sharma.

Below this age it is difficult, if not impossible, for a child to fully grasp the impact of their actions upon others, online or otherwise, and they are mostly taking in whatever they are seeing. "Most of the socialisation is happening online and group plans are being made through texts or chats. A child can feel sidelined or left out when others in the friend group have a phone, and this can feel like a huge thing to a 12- or 13-year-old," adds Sharma. So, it's important to weigh the socialisation bit when deciding about access to social media. As the internet expands rapidly and the interface becomes more user-friendly, experts believe it is imperative to have age-gating for children under 18 on social media, primarily to ensure their safety and to cater to their developmental needs and mental health.

Highlighting some key reasons, Menon says: "Children, due to their innate nature, do not fully understand the implications of sharing personal data online. Social media sites usually collect sensitive information, and minors are unaware of the risks involved in sharing details such as location, contact information, or other private data. Social media platforms often contain an overwhelming mix of unedited content." Children may lack the cognitive and emotional maturity to critically evaluate and filter this information. Early exposure may lead to skewed perceptions regarding body image, self-esteem and societal norms. Age-gating, combined with parental consent, creates a layer of accountability that might also

encourage social media platforms to implement stricter moderation. "For a country like India, where family values emphasise on strong parental oversight, this regulation may encourage a more supportive attitude toward digital engagement," explains Menon.

Agreeing that age-gating for children under 18 is essential, Sarah Anjum, head of IT at Stonehill International School, Bengaluru, points out: "Social media exposes children to inappropriate content, cyber bullying and privacy breaches, which can impact their mental health and emotional wellbeing. By implementing age-gating, platforms can limit access to harmful material and encourage safer interactions."

It will allow parents to play an active role in guiding their children's online behaviour. For example, parents can guide children to engage with educational or creative platforms instead of unrestricted or harmful ones.

In a country where more than 100 million adolescents are internet users, it may be challenging to implement verifiable parental consent, particularly in rural areas where digital literacy is not as advanced. The decision should be supported by full-fledged digital literacy programmes for both parents and children. Psycho education, digital literacy and skills to manage online presence safely, such as blocking certain content based on keywords, are areas to focus on, rather than depending only on the legal regulatory process. A one-size-fits-all approach may not work.

Musk Is Becoming A Menace For Europe

The UK opposition is so invisible these days you might be forgiven for thinking it hardly exists. Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer seems to have no one capable of holding his government to account. After last year's electoral thrashing, the Conservatives are a shipwreck without a captain—rudderless, clueless and still hungover from their 14-year binge on power. They do not appear to be sobering up anytime soon.

And yet, Starmer isn't exactly sleeping easy. Because, the vacuum left by Britain's hapless opposition has been enthusiastically filled by none other than the world's richest man, Elon Musk. Stepping in with a storm of tweets— or, should we say, an X-avalanche—on New Year's Day, Musk called for the King to dissolve Starmer's government and hold a fresh election. Then, for good measure, he accused Starmer of failing to prosecute grooming gangs and demanded that safeguarding minister Jess Phillips be locked up.

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Starmer Gets An Opposition

It looks like the opposition Starmer never asked for has arrived, with a tech billionaire's signature flair for political drama and, surely, a strong hint of disrupting British politics. Starmer responded to Musk's accusation against him that he had ignored child exploitation cases as chief prosecutor between 2008-13. Musk also stirred up interest in far-right activist

Tommy Robinson, calling for his release despite the latter's criminal record and controversial past. Currently, he is serving an 18-month jail term for defamation and being kept in solitary confinement.

Musk's posts have shifted public focus, sidelining the UK government's priorities, such as the NHS reforms. No doubt the Tesla owner seems fixated on UK politics. Musk had already declared the new British government his enemy last summer after riots broke out following fatal stabbings of children in Southport. Back then, he claimed "civil war was inevitable" in Britain and nicknamed the Prime Minister "TwoTierKeir", referring to a far-right conspiracy theory about unequal policing. His latest comments have sparked serious controversy in the UK, with Health Secretary (minister) Wes Streeting dismissing them as "misjudged and misinformed". Streeting emphasised Starmer's reforms in 2013 to improve prosecution standards for child abuse cases. The British media appears to be defending their prime minister. One columnist called Musk, "the South African anarchic tech-futurist", referring to his South African origin. Starmer, too, hit back at Musk and without naming him said,

"those that are spreading lies and misinformation as far and wide as possible, they're not interested in victims. They're interested in themselves." The Home Office is reportedly keeping a close eye on Elon Musk's social media activity to assess its reach, influence and potential harm. According to British media, this monitoring aims to stay ahead of any challenges posed by "non-state actors". The scrutiny of Musk's posts began after his controversial comments about safeguarding Minister Jess Phillips. The US tech billionaire labelled her a "rape genocide apologist" and called for her imprisonment. Phillips, a long-time advocate against violence towards women who previously ran a domestic abuse refuge, revealed that Musk's remarks have led to an increase in threats against her. Despite this, Musk demands a new public inquiry and immediate elections. The grooming gangs inquiry is an uncomfortable thorn in the government's side. Musk, ever the provocateur, has merely echoed what critics of the British establishment have been saying: why hasn't a fresh national inquiry into these networks been launched?

2 Bangladeshi nationals illegally living in India arrested in Bengal

Two Bangladeshi nationals were arrested in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district for living in India illegally with fake identity documents. They were sent to police custody for 14 days.

The West Bengal Police arrested two Bangladeshi nationals in North 24 Parganas district after they were found illegally living in India with forged documents.

Nurul Haque and Rafiqul Islam, who are both residents of Bangladesh, had arrived in Dattapukur in North 24 Parganas district several years ago and allegedly got fake identity cards like voter ID, Aadhaar card and PAN card by submitting forged documents.

Nurul Haque was using the name 'Narayan Adhikari' to avoid getting caught. On the other hand, Rafiqul Islam's original home is in Madarihahat in Bangladesh and had come to India, where he bought land and built a house in the area after obtaining a fake Aadhaar card and PAN card. The West Bengal Police arrested them after receiving input from district police about one Narayan Adhikari aka Haque living in a rented house owned by a land-



lord named Rafique Islam, also a Bangladeshi. During the course of the investigation, it was found that Haque ran a fishery business in North 24 Parganas district. Haque and Islam, whom locals knew as a so-called private doctor in the area, were under the police scanner for their suspi-

cious movements for quite some time.

On being confirmed about the identity of the accused, the police conducted a raid on Islam's house on Sunday and arrested him and Haque. It is believed that Haque was living in Islam's house for nearly four years. The police

are investigating how the two Bangladeshi nationals managed to get fake identity cards. The accused were produced before a court in Barasat on Sunday and were sent to police custody for 14 days. Police are also investigating whether more illegal Bangladeshis are living in the

area under false identity. The arrests of the two Bangladeshis came at a time when the number of people crossing the border illegally from Bangladesh to India has increased ever since the unrest began in Bangladesh last year. Almost half of the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal is still unfenced. As a result, infiltrations occur almost throughout the year through the unprotected section of the border. "More than 2,400 infiltrators were caught by the BSF in the south frontier area in West Bengal in 2024," a top source in the border force told India Today TV. The BSF and West Bengal Police have increased vigilance along the border since Bangladesh's interim government headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus took charge following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ouster in August last year.

Pakistan's Imran Khan defiant even as longer sentence looms

Imran Khan, Pakistan's most popular politician, is facing a 14-year prison term this month in a case his party says is being used to pressure him into silence.



The former prime minister, long a source of frustration for the powerful military, has been in custody since August 2023 and faces a slew of legal cases he says are politically motivated.

A looming verdict for graft linked to a welfare foundation he set up with his wife, the Al-Qadir Trust, is the longest-running of those cases, with a verdict postponed on Monday for a third time.

"The Al-Qadir Trust case, like previous cases, is being dragged on only to pressure me," Khan said this month in one of his frequent statements railing against au-

thorities and posted on social media by his team.

Analysts say the military establishment is using the sentence as a bargaining chip with Khan, whose popularity undermines a shaky coalition government that kept his party from power in elections last year.

"The establishment's deal is he comes out and stays quiet, stays decent, until the next election," said Ayesha Siddiqa, a London-based author and analyst on Pakistan's military. 'Politically motivated' -

Analysts say the military are

Pakistan's kingmakers, although the generals deny interfering in politics.

Khan said he had once been offered a three-year exile abroad and was also "indirectly approached" recently about the possibility of house arrest at his sprawling home on the outskirts of the capital.

"We can assume from the delays that this is a politically motivated judgement. It is a Damocles sword over him," Khan's legal adviser Faisal Fareed Chaudhry told AFP.

"The case has lost its credibility," he said, adding that Khan will not accept any deal to stay silent.

Khan has been convicted and sentenced four times in other cases. Two cases have been overturned by the Supreme Court, while judges have suspended the sentences from the other two.

The specialist anti-graft "accountability court" is set to announce the verdict and sentence in the welfare foundation case on Fri-

day, two days after government envoys are scheduled to meet leaders from Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to ease tensions.

The PTI has previously sworn to refuse talks with a government its leaders claim is illegitimate, alleging the coalition seized power by rigging February 2024 polls. They say they will only take part if political prisoners are released and an independent inquiry is launched into allegations of a heavy-handed response by authorities to PTI protests.

Otherwise, Khan has threatened to pull his party from the negotiations and continue with a campaign of civil disobedience that has frequently brought Islamabad to a standstill.

The most recent protests flared around November 26, when the PTI allege at least 10 of their activists were shot dead. The government says five security force members were killed in the chaos.

"The government would like to

appear legitimate, and for that they need PTI to sit down in talks with them," said Asma Faiz, associate professor of political science at Lahore University of Management Sciences.

"Ideally, they would be looking to offer some relief to Imran Khan and his party to appease the domestic and international criticism," she told AFP. - 'PTI won't budge' - For now, it appears to be a stalemate, said Michael Kugelman, South Asia Institute director at The Wilson Center in Washington. "The army might be willing to give Khan a deal that gets him out of jail, but Khan wouldn't accept the likely conditions of his freedom," he told AFP. "Another problem is I can't imagine the government agreeing to an investigation of November 26. But PTI won't budge on that demand." A stint in exile is common in the trajectory of political leaders in Pakistan who fall out of favour with the military and find themselves before the courts, only to return to power later.

Pakistan Sisters Set Father On Fire After Rape: Police

Two teenage sisters were arrested in Pakistan for killing their father by setting him on fire in revenge for rape, police said Wednesday.

(By Staff Reporter) The father was attacked in the Punjabi city of Gujranwala on January 1 and taken to hospital where he died on Tuesday. "The girls said that they decided amongst themselves to find a 'permanent solution'," Rizwan Tariq, a senior police official in the city, told AFP. They then took petrol from a motorcycle and set their father on fire as he slept, he added. The pair, who are step-sisters, said their father had been raping the eldest girl for a year, and had twice attempted to rape the younger girl. Their mothers -- who are both married to the man -- knew about the abuse but did not know of the revenge plan. AFP has not named the man in order to protect the identities of the girls, one of whom is from a previous marriage. One of the wives has also been arrested while the second is being questioned. "We expect to present them before the court in a few days, as soon as we finish the investigation," Tariq added.

After Keir Starmer-Musk Row, UK Plans "Rapid" Inquiry Into Grooming Gangs

The issue was at the centre of a political firestorm earlier this month when a war of words broke out between US tech billionaire Elon Musk and Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

(By Staff Reporter) London: The UK government on Thursday announced a "rapid" national review of the extent of sexual exploitation of children by grooming gangs and several new local inquiries into cases of abuse.

The issue was at the centre of a political firestorm earlier this month when a war of words broke out between US tech billionaire Elon Musk and Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The row relates to sex offences going back decades against British girls by men of mostly South Asian origin in various northern English towns.

Interior minister Yvette Cooper told parliament that she had ordered a three-month "rapid audit of the current scale and nature of gang-based exploitation across the country". The review will look at "cultural and societal drivers" of child sex abuse and "properly examine ethnicity data and the demographics of the gangs in-

involved and their victims", she added.

She added that several local reviews -- similar to ones that have already taken place -- would also be launched,



rejecting calls by the opposition Conservative party for a new national inquiry.

"As we have seen, effective local inquiries can delve into far more local detail and deliver more locally relevant answers, and change, than a lengthy nationwide inquiry can provide," Cooper said.

"It's Clear...": Why Sheikh Hasina's Niece Tulip Siddiq Quit As UK Minister

Ms Siddiq emphasised her loyalty to the Labour Government and its agenda of "national renewal and transformation."

(South Asian Insider Bureau) New Delhi: UK anti-corruption minister and ousted Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina's niece Tulip Siddiq tendered her resignation amid growing calls, in a set back to Prime Minister Keir Starmer. In her letter to the prime minister, Ms Siddiq wrote, "My family connections are a matter of public record, and when I became a Minister I provided the full details of my relationships and private interests to the Government. After extensive consultation with officials, I was advised to state in my declaration of interest that my aunt is the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh and to recuse myself from matters relating to Bangladesh to avoid any perception of a conflict of interest. I want to assure you that I acted and have continued to act with full transparency and on the advice of officials on these matters." She emphasised her loyalty to the Labour government in the UK and its agenda of



"national renewal and transformation". Her departure came after Bangladesh interim government head Muhammad Yunus condemned the use of properties gifted to her and her family by the regime under Ms Hasina. Further, serious concerns were raised about Ms Siddiq's links to a graft case. This comes amid an ongoing em-

bezzlement investigation against the previous regime in Bangladesh, as per New York Times.

Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission latest investigation is into an alleged land grab of lucrative plots in a suburb of the capital Dhaka. Earlier, Hasina, Siddiq and other family members were targets

of the commission's investigation into accusations of embezzlement of \$5 billion connected to a Russian-funded nuclear power plant.

A Sunday Times investigation also revealed that Ms Siddiq spent years living in a London flat bought by an offshore company connected to two Bangladeshi businessmen. The flat was eventually transferred as a gift to a Bangladeshi lawyer with links to Hasina, her family and her ousted government, according to the newspaper. It also reported Siddiq and her family were given or used several other London properties bought by members or associates of the Awami League party. Amid such allegations, calls for Ms Siddiq's resignation gained momentum. Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch accusing Starmer of appointing "his personal friend as anti-corruption minister" even though she has "accused herself of corruption."

North Korean Troops "Blowing Themselves Up" To Avoid Capture In Ukraine

The incident is the latest documentation of the lengths the North Korean troops are willing to go to avoid capture and become prisoners of war to be presented as proof of Pyongyang and Moscow's blatant military alliance.



(By Staff Reporter) Kyiv: After an intense battle with Russian forces this week, Ukrainian special forces were scouring dead bodies from the snowy western terrain of the Kursk region, where they discovered corpses of over a dozen North Korean enemy troops. Among them, they found one soldier was still alive.

But as Ukrainian soldiers approached him, the lone North Korean detonated his own grenade, blowing himself up to avoid being captured, Ukraine's Special Operations Forces said in a post on X, describing the intense fighting in the occupied Kursk region. According to Kyiv officials, their soldiers escaped the blast unin-

jured, but the suicide incident added to mounting evidence from the battlefield, intelligence reports and testimonies of defectors that some North Korean soldiers are resorting to extreme measures as they support Russia's three-year war with Ukraine.

'Soldiers Being Brainwashed'

The incident is the latest documentation of the lengths the North Korean troops are willing to go to avoid capture and become prisoners of war to be presented as proof of Pyongyang and Moscow's blatant military alliance. The "brainwashed" Hermit Kingdom troops, who are being told it is treason to be taken prisoner, are posing a new challenge

for Ukraine, officials said. "Self-detonation and suicides: that's the reality about North Korea," Kim, a 32-year-old former North Korean soldier who defected to the South in 2022, told Reuters.

"These soldiers who left home for a fight there have been brainwashed and are truly ready to sacrifice themselves for Kim Jong Un," he added, referring to the reclusive North Korean leader. Kim had reportedly worked for North Korea's military in Russia for about seven years up until 2021 on construction projects to earn foreign currency for the regime. According to him, for some North Korean soldiers, being captured and sent back to

Ukraine's North Korea Charge

Ukrainian and Western assessments say Pyongyang has deployed some 11,000 soldiers to support Moscow's forces in Russia's western Kursk region, which Ukraine seized in a surprise incursion last year. More than 3,000 have been killed or injured, according to Kyiv. Moscow and Pyongyang initially dismissed reports about the North's troop deployment as "fake news". But Russian president Vladimir Putin in October did not deny that North Korean soldiers were currently in Russia and a North Korean official said any such deployment would be lawful. Ukraine this week released videos of what it said were two captured North Korean soldiers. One of the soldiers expressed a desire to stay in Ukraine, and the other to return to North Korea, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said. Zelenskiy said Kyiv is ready to exchange those soldiers with Kim Jong Un if he agrees to push for the freedom of Ukrainian POWs in Russia. The Ukrainian President has gone as far as to claim that able-bodied Russian and North Korean troops scour the frontlines to finish off wounded Pyongyang troops to avoid their capture. He even shared photos online showing the two men on bunks in holding cells, the younger with both his hands bandaged and the older one with his head wrapped because of a jaw injury.

Pyongyang would be seen as a fate worse than death.

"Becoming a prisoner of war means treason. Being captured means you are a traitor. Leave one last bullet, that's what we are talking about in the military," he said. Kim's claims were confirmed by Lee Seong-kweun, who sits on the South Korean parliament's intelligence committee. He said that recently, memos were recov-

ered from dead North Korean soldiers showing that authorities at home have emphasized self-destruction and suicide before capture. "Recently, it has been confirmed that a North Korean soldier was in danger of being captured by the Ukrainian military, so he shouted for General Kim Jong Un and pulled out a grenade to try to blow himself up, but was killed," Lee told Reuters.

Powerful Winds Pose New Challenge To Firefighters In Los Angeles: 10 Points

(South Asian Insider Bureau) Powerful winds threaten to worsen the situation in Los Angeles where the raging wildfires have claimed at least 25 lives and destroyed hundreds of luxury mansions belonging to millionaires and Hollywood stars.

Here are the top 10 points in this big story:

1. The National Weather Service has warned of powerful 'Santa Ana' winds gusting up to 110 km per hour in Los Angeles that threatens to reignite small sparks and spread the fire quickly.
2. The forecaster has asked residents to stay aware of their surroundings and be ready to evacuate. It has also marked parts of the Los Angeles and Ventura counties as facing a "particularly dangerous situation".
3. Experts say that the vegetation in the area is dry and face the risk of spreading the fire quickly. The fires have already

destroyed 24,000 acres in the Pacific Palisades and left about 14,000 acres Altadena community in ruins.

4. Eaton and Palisades fires, which are still raging in places, are now ranked the first and second-most destructive fires in the history of Southern California. Eaton fire has claimed at least 17 lives while eight lives have been lost in Palisades fire. The previous record was held by Cedar Fire in 2003.
5. Los Angeles fire chief Anthony Marrone insists that they are prepared for any renewed threats. "We have checked the water system in the Eaton fire area, and it is operational, meaning



that we have water and we have pressure," he said.

6. The winds not just threaten to spread the fire but also whip up the toxic ash and pose a health problem. Urging all to
7. California Governor Gavin Newsom has issued an order blocking "unsolicited cash offers" of under-market values to

wear a mask, a health official has warned that the ash can harm the respiratory system and other body parts.

8. A federal probe has begun into the wildfires with the social media exploding with conspiracy theories about what began the inferno that's raging for a week. Among causes that they would probe are downed power lines, arson, a stray firework and an earlier fire that would have reignited.

9. The fires forced at least 88,000 people out of their homes. Many, whose houses survived the devastating fires, couldn't return. The cost of the tragedy has been pegged at between \$250 billion and \$275 billion, according to AccuWeather.

10. Gold legend Tiger Woods has pledged support for those who are devastated by the wildfires. "My heart is with those We plan to provide an update on our own charitable efforts to help these communities in the coming weeks. Stay strong LA," he said in an online post.

Three Russians Charged for Running Cryptocurrency Mixers Linked to Ransomware Money Laundering



(South Asian Insider Bureau) The U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) announced on Friday criminal charges against three Russian nationals accused of managing cryptocurrency mixing services used to facilitate money laundering, including by ransomware operators. Roman Vitalyevich Ostapenko, Alexander Evgenievich Oleynik, and Anton Vyachlavovich Tarasov face charges of conspiracy to commit money laundering and operating an unlicensed money transmission business. According to the

DoJ, Oleynik and Ostapenko were apprehended on December 1, 2024, at an undisclosed location, while Tarasov remains at large. The three individuals are alleged to have operated Blender.io and Sinbad.io, cryptocurrency mixing platforms that enabled the laundering of illicit proceeds from criminal activities such as ransomware attacks, wire fraud, and cryptocurrency theft. Authorities revealed that Blender.io was active from 2018 until 2022, marketed as a service designed to ensure

anonymous cryptocurrency transactions. Following its shutdown, Sinbad.io emerged and operated until November 2023, when it was dismantled through a law enforcement operation. Both platforms were sanctioned by U.S. authorities, who highlighted their use by North Korean hackers to launder stolen funds. If convicted, Oleynik, Ostapenko, and Tarasov face up to 20 years in prison for money laundering charges and an additional five years for operating an unlicensed money transmission business.

YouTube, Google donate USD 15 million for LA fire relief

(SAI Bureau) Los Angeles [US], January 16 (ANI): Video-sharing company, YouTube on Thursday announced that Google and they are contributing USD 15 million to provide relief in Los Angeles in support of their creator community.

Emergency Network Los Angeles, American Red Cross, Center for Disaster Philanthropy and Institute for Nonprofit News would be recipients of the relief. In a post on X, YouTube announced, "YouTube and Google are contributing \$15 million to organizations via Google.org to provide immediate relief in LA in support of our creator community. Recipients include Emergency Network LA, Red Cross, Center for

Disaster Philanthropy, and the Institute for Nonprofit News, with more to come. <http://yt.be/LA>" Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and Alphabet, assured everyone in Los Angeles of his support. In a post on X, he said, "To all of our employees, the YouTube creator community, and everyone in LA, please stay safe and know we're here to support." California was granted more federal funding to help with public infrastructure repairs following a week of devastating wildfires, CNN reported, quoting the governor's office on Wednesday (local time). The Federal Emergency Management Agency grant

will help with debris removal, and with rebuilding roads and bridges, public utilities, and other public works projects damaged by the fires, the announcement said.

CNN reported that damage inspections for impact from the Palisades Fire are 30 per cent completed, but there's no confirmed dates for reopening closed areas where the teams are working. "We are in constant communication with relevant agencies to assess when repopulation will be feasible," Commander Christine Coles of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department at a Wednesday news conference. Winds are forecast to strengthen across



Southern California on Wednesday, exacerbating the already perilous wildfire conditions in Los Angeles. The National Weather Service warned that the gusts, which are

expected to peak between 3 am and 3 pm local time, could worsen ongoing fires that have claimed at least 25 lives and left 24 others missing, Voice of America (VOA) reported.

Ex US President Obama expresses gratitude to Biden for his leadership

(SAI Bureau) Washington DC [US], : Former US President Barack Obama on Thursday expressed his gratitude and admiration for US President Joe Biden's administration. Obama praised Biden for his way of recovering the US economy after the Covid 19 pandemic. "Four years ago, in the middle of a pandemic, we needed a leader with the character to put politics aside and do what was right. That's what Joe Biden did," he said. Obama said that Biden created 17 million new jobs and lowered healthcare costs, making it the world's strongest recovery. "At a time when our economy was reeling, he drove what would become the world's strongest recovery - with 17 million new jobs, historic wage gains, and lower health care costs. He passed landmark legislation to

rebuild our nation's infrastructure and address the threat of climate change," he said. "I'm grateful to Joe for his leadership, his friendship, and his lifetime of service to this country we love," Obama added. Notably, US President Joe Biden, who will be leaving office next week, negotiated a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas earlier in the day. Following the ceasefire and hostage deal between Joe Biden. During these



Israel and Hamas, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu engaged in discussions with US President-elect

conversations, Netanyahu expressed his gratitude for their support in facilitating the release of hostages. He reaffirmed Israel's commitment to securing the release of all hostages and praised President Trump for emphasizing the need to ensure Gaza does not become a haven for terrorism. Both leaders agreed to meet in Washington soon to further address these issues. The Israeli Prime Minister's Office in a post on X wrote, "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke this evening with US President-elect Donald Trump and thanked him for his assistance in advancing the release of the hostages and for helping Israel bring an end to the suffering of dozens of hostages and their families."

Why 55% of Indians are left wanting more sex

A recent survey involving over 10,000 respondents has revealed startling insights into modern relationships and intimacy.

A recent survey, Laid in India 2025 by MyMuse (a bedroom wellness brand), has sparked conversations about the evolving state of intimacy across the country. The survey, which drew insights from over 10,000 respondents, offers a refreshingly honest take on modern relationships, revealing surprising truths about how Indians approach love, desire, and connection.

What the findings say

The findings are as diverse as the country itself. While 87% of Indians no longer wait until marriage to explore intimacy, the survey says nearly 62% expressed a desire to break out of routine and try something new in the bedroom. The report also highlights a growing openness to sexual wellness products, with nearly half of the respondents either using or wanting to explore them. Emotional connection emerged as a critical factor for 87% of participants, showing that it's not just about the physical—it's also about meaningful bonds.

Despite these progressive shifts, one data stood out: 55% of Indians are left wanting more sex. This dissatisfaction spans across singles, couples, and even married individuals. The data busts myths about marriage as a fix for intimacy issues, with 59% of married respondents admitting



they still feel the lack of a thriving sex life. Interestingly, women reported slightly higher dissatisfaction (60%) compared to men (53%), challenging traditional narratives about who is more vocal about their needs.

Why though?

According to Srishati Singhal, a tantra and meditation coach, this intimacy deficit stems from deeply rooted socio-cultural factors.

"I believe the statistics might actually be higher than what is reported. There are several factors contributing to this. Indian couples often marry young, leaving little time for exploration. Children usually follow soon after, dis-

rupting intimacy," she explains. Another major issue is the lack of privacy, especially since many Indian couples live in joint families. "Even though this is gradually changing in metropolitan cities, the family dynamic often means couples have to be discreet. This constant involvement with family life leaves little time or space for couples to fully embrace their sexuality or maintain an active and fulfilling sex life," she adds.

Moreover, Singhal feels there is a collective cultural repression around sexuality in India. People don't learn about sexual intimacy, lovemaking, or tools to keep things exciting, which leads to a

monotonous and routine-driven sexual life. Without education and awareness, couples struggle to rekindle passion or put effort into their intimate lives.

Adding to this is the modern lifestyle—busy schedules and constant exhaustion push intimacy to the bottom of the priority list. Often, intimacy is reduced to a quick stress-relief activity at the end of the day, which doesn't sustain long-term relationships. While this may work in the honeymoon phase, it becomes increasingly difficult as the relationship matures, particularly after having children.

Content creator and sexual wellness expert Bhavjeet Sehgal

identifies communication as the critical missing element in Indian relationships. She states, "Intimacy flourishes when partners are open about their desires and fantasies. Without honest communication, relationships stagnate. Women especially face societal judgment, which makes expressing their needs even harder." Sehgal urges couples to prioritise transparent, judgment-free conversations to foster deeper emotional and physical connections.

Towards an intimate revolution There's no denying that there are problems, but Indians are increasingly willing to explore new avenues for intimacy. The report also highlights that discussions around sexual wellness are gaining acceptance, with nearly 48% eager to try tools that can enhance their experience.

Anushka Gupta, co-founder of MyMuse, says, "The report is more than just a snapshot of the country's sex lives. It doesn't just point to the desire for more sex; it reflects the broader challenge of creating spaces for connection, experimentation, and communication in relationships."

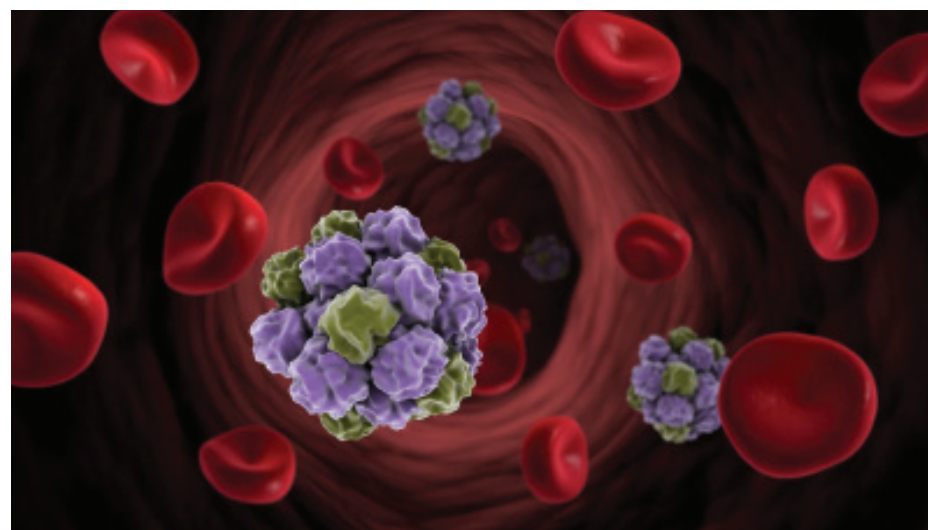
**The report covers 500+ cities and towns, from Tier 1 metros to smaller Tier 3 regions, which provides a comprehensive look at intimacy across urban and rural India.

Should norovirus outbreak in US worry India?

Highly contagious but typically not life-threatening, the virus causes 680 million diarrhoea cases globally every year

The United States is grappling with norovirus infections. Dr Tanu Singhal, consultant, paediatrics and infectious diseases at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai, explains whether the outbreak is any reason to worry in far-away India. Commonly causes diarrhoea: Norovirus is an RNA virus of the calciviridae family. It is responsible for approximately 680 million diarrhoea cases globally every year. Outbreaks are common in places where people live in close proximity, such as nursing homes, elderly care centres, schools, jails and cruise ships. The outbreaks often occur from shared food or water or close contact between individuals. With Norovirus tests not routine for diarrhoea cases in India, it's likely that there are many undetected cases. Highly infectious: Norovirus is highly contagious and spreads through ingestion of contaminated food or water, close contact with

infected individuals, or touching contaminated surfaces. Partially cooked or un-



cooked contaminated seafood give rise to infection. Symptoms and treatment: The incubation period is short, typically 24 hours. Symptoms include fever, vom-

iting, abdominal pain and diarrhoea, which can be severe. However, in most

cases the illness lasts only 1-2 days. Treatment is supportive and includes paracetamol for fever and bodyache, anti-nausea medication, and rehydration

therapy, which may be oral or intravenous. Not life-threatening: Norovirus can be dangerous for individuals with weakened immune systems, such as cancer patients or those who have undergone transplants. In such cases, the illness may last for weeks and cause significant complications. Otherwise, unlike Covid-19 or other severe viruses, Norovirus is not a cause for widespread alarm. However, affected individuals may be unable to work or attend to daily activities. In some cases, outbreaks can strain healthcare systems by filling hospital beds with patients suffering from extreme diarrhoea. Prevention: To avoid Norovirus infection, one should wash hands thoroughly before eating and after using the toilet, consume food and water from hygienic sources, avoid uncooked street food, wash raw fruits and vegetables thoroughly, heat food properly and avoid close contact with infected individuals.

Terrace tourism for kite-flying in Uttarayan: Old Ahmedabad's new business idea

There could be no better place to fly kites and celebrate Uttarayan than Old Ahmedabad with its high-density rooftops, believe many Gujaratis. That craze has kick-started terrace tourism and homeowners are renting out rooftops for up to Rs 1 lakh. Then there are packages that include food, music and even massages.

Streets abuzz with enthusiastic shouts of "Kai Po Che" (I cut the kite) and a sky dotted with kites of all possible colours -- this is Ahmedabad in the Uttarayan season on January 14-15. This mood is, however, unique to the walled city of Old Ahmedabad, which has a very high density of houses and rooftops are either interconnected or are just metres apart. If the congestion is what made many residents move out of Old Ahmedabad, it is the same reason that makes the area attractive during Uttarayan (Makar Sankranti). This craze to be in Old Ahmedabad has fuelled a new business, terrace tourism, and homeowners are renting out their rooftops for two days for kite-flying contests and some family time.

The new-age terrace bureaus and travel agents have jumped in to cash in on the opportunity. And then there are terrace-tourism packages that include welcome drinks, til-chikki, jalebi, puri and undhiyu, music and massagers to ease stressed hands and shoulders.

Though terrace tourism in Old Ahmedabad started some years ago, it is recently that it has gained traction with not just people from Gujarat but even from Maharashtra and Gujarati NRIs renting out the terraces for Uttarayan. There are Facebook pages that help connect kite-flying enthusiasts with homeowners, and queries on Reddit on how to get terraces on rent in Old Ahmedabad.

That it has gained popularity can be gauged from the fact that travel agents are making terrace-renting packages now, wherein people can rent out their terrace for a day or two during Makar Sankranti. The package comes with decorations and festive foods and drinks for people.

Depending on how many people aim to get a terrace on rent, they are connected with a houseowner. All this for the love of kites.

Kites are a big business in Gujarat. The state is the largest contributor to India's kite pro-



duction, with 40%, reports PTI. Therefore, it is no surprise that Gujarat's Old Ahmedabad, considered the best area for kite-flying, has a blooming terrace tourism. Old Ahmedabad has over 400-500 terraces which can be utilised for terrace tourism, and homeowners can earn up to Rs 1 lakh from just these two days, according to people involved in the terrace tourism business in the city.

CONNECT PEOPLE WITH HOUSEOWNERS, TERRACE BUREAU IN AHMEDABAD

For travel agent Ajay Modi one of the largest terrace-renting agents in Ahmedabad, Ajay Modi of Ajay Travels, this opportunity presented itself when he underwent knee-replacement surgery and had to shift homes. He decided to rent his terrace for additional income. He then started renting all three of his houses' terraces for the festival.

When he received positive response to this business, he started creating terrace packages for the Uttarayan season

for others too.

"I started the terrace tourism packages because the city is bustling with joy during Uttarayan," Ajay Modi told India Today Digital.

He is also trying to expand terrace tourism and open what he proudly calls, "a terrace bureau" on the lines of marriage bureaus, he added. That, he says, would help connect a big number of homeowners willing to rent out terraces with those seeking rooftops to fly kites during Uttarayan.

"People will see photos of the terrace and choose which one they would want. I want to develop this," he said.

The rates for terraces start from Rs 1,999 to Rs 2,999 per person, depending on the requirement and facilities.

"Each of my terraces can accommodate 12 people. They are available for Rs 3,000 per person on Uttarayan and Rs 2,000 per person on Vasi-Uttarayan (January 15)," he said.

QUERIES FOR TERRACE-

RENTING IN UTTARAYAN SEASON GROWING

While he has rented out all three of his houses, he has also connected many homeowners in Ahmedabad to those looking for terraces.

Modi has received over 100 que-



ries about renting a terrace this season, and he has helped with renting 25 other houses across the city.

Meeta Shah, a resident who rents out her terrace, said that the demand was higher this year. "I charge Rs 3,000 per person, and provide snacks and food," said Shah.

Mayur Dave, another Old

Ahmedabad resident who rents out his rooftop, said that he is seen good response this year, with queries from Maharashtra, including Pune, and even NRIs. The residents say that people who moved out to other parts of the city and are living in housing societies get nostalgic about the kite-flying experience provided by the interconnected balconies in the old city.

There are several online platforms where people are enquiring and booking balconies for Uttarayan celebration.

Platforms such as a Facebook group called My Terrace and local travel agents play a key role in helping people find a terrace. For Diwanji ni Haveli in Sankdi Sheri, Khadia, queries for terrace-renting also come each Uttarayan season.

"Our terrace can accommodate

100 people, but we limit it to 50 guests for a better experience. Packages range from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 lakh," Rupesh Salot, the haveli's owner, told Ahmedabad Mirror. "We provide a welcoming environment with drinks, snacks, decorations, and all the facilities needed for smooth kite contests," Salot added.

This Haveli can also be booked with an Airbnb and other travel websites.

These rented terraces have become a source of additional income for many aged couples living alone or those who have moved away from the city.

"Older couples, whose children live in other cities, can rent their terraces and earn up to Rs 1 lakh. This income helps them manage expenses," Ajay Modi pointed out. "It is a great way to do business, earn some more money," he said.



Under Trump, cryptocurrency is set to go mainstream – but that won't make it any safer for investors

As the United States prepares for Donald Trump's inauguration on 20 January, all eyes are on the cryptocurrency markets. After Bitcoin's price reached \$100,000 (£81,917) for the first time in history in December 2024, the cryptocurrency community is eagerly anticipating Trump's fulfilment of his campaign promise to make the US the "crypto capital of the planet". Some analysts predict that Bitcoin's price could range between \$78,000 and \$250,000 in 2025.

Blockchain technology has numerous applications beyond crypto payments – for example, in supply chain and logistics. But it is the price surges of Bitcoin, Ethereum and "meme coins" that capture the majority of public attention. Speculative demand and the potential for abnormal returns, which are rarely found in other financial markets, remain key drivers of their prices.

Investors are often motivated by the prospect of short-term profits rather than a belief in the asset's true or fundamental value. In the case of meme coins, speculative demand is primarily driven by social media culture and community enthusiasm, with little focus on the utility of the underlying technology or long-term success of the project.

Fuelled by expectations of a more favourable regulatory environment under the Trump administration, there is now increased institutional interest in cryptocurrencies. Major players such as BlackRock are entering the crypto derivatives market, increasing liquidity and drawing even more investors. This industry and political support for cryptocurrency demonstrates higher adoption and greater acceptance of crypto assets. At the same time, the speculative nature of crypto assets raises concerns that political endorsements could inflate a bubble, similar to the dotcom bubble that lasted between 1998 and 2000. Financial market bubbles occur when asset prices far exceed their fundamental values and no longer reflect actual risks. When these bubbles burst, they can trigger a contagion effect, causing the collapse of related securities – even in industries with no direct connection to the troubled assets.

In my research, alongside fellow authors, I analysed compa-



nies that had rebranded with crypto-related names to boost their stock prices, despite no changes to their business models. This superficial association made these companies susceptible to contagion from the broader crypto ecosystem. If investors did not investigate whether these companies genuinely adopted blockchain technology, they are likely to sell these stocks swiftly at the first sign of negative news or a crisis in the crypto market.

With growing institutional involvement, including investment management companies and banks, other industries are becoming increasingly exposed to the risks of a crypto market crash, such as those caused by the Terra Luna and FTX collapses in 2022. Silicon Valley Bank's (SVB) bankruptcy in 2023 serves as a notable example of how interconnected vulnerabilities in tech, venture capital and speculative markets can destabilise banks, particularly those with concentrated exposure to high-risk sectors. In 2025, contagion threat is getting stronger than in the early days when crypto markets were more isolated.

Contagion flows in both directions. After SVB collapsed, crypto company Circle, the issuer of the popular stablecoin USDC, reported that it held \$3.3bn of its reserves in SVB. As a result, USDC temporarily lost its peg to the US dollar, as

markets feared the company might face liquidity issues, making it impossible to redeem USDC for US dollars. This incident highlights that those closer linkages between the crypto sector and traditional finance increase vulnerabilities in both sectors, raising concerns about overall financial stability.

Even if supposedly stable crypto assets such as USDC, Tether and Terra Luna are not immune to depegging or collapse, then meme coins – driven purely by social media hype and celebrity endorsements – are even more prone to speculative bubbles.

Trump ally Elon Musk has endorsed numerous meme coins via Twitter/X and recently the billionaire changed his name to "Kekius Maximus" on X, causing the price of the respective token, Kekius, to surge by over 700%. Social media influencer Logan Paul has been investigated by the BBC for endorsing multiple meme coins on his YouTube channel. Paul denies any wrongdoing.

Crypto promotion, particularly by influential figures, is a key component of pump-and-dump schemes that involve artificially inflating the coin's price through hype or occasionally even false information ("pump") and then selling off large holdings at the peak, leaving other investors with losses as the price

crashes ("dump"). In the case of Paul and other celebrities, there are allegations of undisclosed financial interests in meme coins. Celebrities should refrain from encouraging their followers to invest in any cryptocurrency without transparently disclosing their financial involvement – especially if there are some plans to sell the asset later, potentially causing financial losses for their followers.

A core part of the cryptocurrency ethos is the aspiration for financial liberty: enabling peer-to-peer transactions without reliance on central banks or financial intermediaries, and promoting higher financial freedom. Yet, paradoxically, crypto investors often blindly trust the opinions of influential figures on social media, investing in high-risk, speculative assets with often disastrous consequences for investors. During the crypto market crash of 2022, many amateur investors lost their investments, and in some cases, their life savings, which had a drastic impact on their lives and mental health.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the US financial market regulator, has launched several investigations into celebrities promoting cryptocurrencies without disclosing their financial interests in the projects. However, the

former head of the SEC, Gary Gensler, has resigned, and Trump intends to nominate Paul Atkins, a known crypto enthusiast, to chair the SEC.

Such changes would be welcomed by the crypto community for potentially driving up crypto asset prices and boosting their profits. At the same time, it is concerning since it might change how regulators view and act on market manipulation and insider trading happening in crypto markets with the help of social media. If, in 2025, the SEC turns a blind eye, consumers could be left entirely unprotected from financial losses – especially when another meme coin bubble bursts. Easing cryptocurrency regulations would not advance the ideal of financial freedom. Instead, it would mark a significant step backward in the pursuit of transparency and accountability in addressing financial misconduct by the wealthy and powerful. Strong political and government endorsements of crypto, paradoxically, pose a threat to its decentralisation ethos and could ultimately undermine the appeal of crypto assets.

This year, the crypto market is likely to go mainstream, but those who dabble at the fringes may be met with unmet expectations at best and challenges at worst.

Trump's Return Has Laid Bare Europe's Weaknesses

Europe had experienced a great deal of heat from Donald Trump during his first term as president. He had cast doubt on the continuing relevance of NATO, viewed it as a financial burden on the US because the Europeans were not spending enough on their own defence, and demanded that they spend 2% of their GDP on defence. He showed his disdain towards the EU by supporting Brexit.

The belief that Russia had interfered in the US presidential election in Trump's favour had created misgivings that he might pursue a more flexible policy towards Moscow over the Ukraine conflict. His right-wing, nationalistic political orientation clashed with Europe's left-leaning liberalism. His Make America Great Again (MAGA) slogan created anxiety as it was considered inward-looking, protectionist and tending towards isolationism. European politicians were concluding that Europe and Trump's America no longer shared the same values. Can Europe Cope?

Trump has now come back to power with a thumping majority. The Republicans have also won control of both houses of the US Congress. Trump is undoubtedly convinced that his re-election, despite all the legal and other efforts of the Democrats to disqualify and prevent him from fighting the election, has vindicated his proclaimed domestic and foreign policy agendas. Europe and others will have to cope with the unpredictability, impetuosity and self-assertion of this maverick president.

Trump, even before his inauguration, has put Europe under stress by his power play in questioning the continent's territorial integrity by laying claim to Greenland. During his first term, too, he had laid his eyes on Greenland, but this time, he is brazen about acquiring it on grounds of "national security" and access to its natural resources such as oil, gas, lithium etc. Trump has threatened to pursue his claim with economic coercion or use of force, if necessary, as he considers ownership of Greenland an "absolute necessity".

The president-elect clearly wants the US to become a major Arctic power in anticipation of the melting of the Arctic ice, which would open up a vital trade route between Europe/Asia and the Americas and allow mining of the oceans' rich resources of oil, gas and other minerals as well. At present, Russia dominates the Arctic geographically, and China is eyeing it too for its potential for trade connectivity. This is reminiscent of the ruthless great power politics of the 19th century.

This attack on Europe's territorial



integrity puts Europe against the wall. Its dependence on the US for its security provides it no real option to resist. The response of European leaders has been to temporise and avoid challenging Trump head-on. The Danish prime minister recognises America's "security concerns", while also stating that Greenland is not up for sale. The US already has a military base in Greenland, which can be expanded, and hence, the argument of security concerns seems debatable. The autonomous Greenland government has made hedging statements. The German Chancellor has resorted to a non-specific statement to the effect that the "inviolability of borders applies to all". The French foreign minister has avoided mentioning the US by name while remarking that the EU would "not let other nations of the world attack its sovereign borders, whoever they are".

Lost For Answers

The European Commission has refused to "go into the specifics" when asked to comment on Trump's claims. Van der Leyen, the head of the European Commission and Antonia Costa, the head of the European Council, stated evasively that the "EU will always protect our citizens and the integrity of our democracies and freedoms" and, rather pointlessly, that "we look forward to a positive engagement with the incoming US administration, based on our common values and shared interests. In a rough world, Europe and the US are stronger together".

Europe is embarrassed and does not quite know how to respond adequately. Its geopolitical weakness has been exposed, diminishing its status as a collective power. It sees itself threatened by Russian power from the East and now by American power from the West—one an enemy and the other an ally. In Russia's case—which is unlike that of the US seeking to seize Greenland—it is not a territory belonging to an EU state that is being annexed or under threat of annexation. The message from all this is that Europe is unable to look after its own security. It depends on US-led NATO for

protection, but it is the leader of NATO that is weakening NATO solidarity, with an uncomfortable message that Trump's America sees Europe as quasi-dispensable.

A Double Bind

The quandary for Europe is that if it were to react strongly and decide to condemn the US territorial bid, it would need an internal consensus, and seeking one could divide NATO. The NATO edifice, which is considered vital for Europe's security by member states, especially in East and Central Europe, could well begin to crack, given Trump's known disdain for the transatlantic alliance. A strong anti-US reaction could also weaken Europe politically against Russia. Europe's no-holds-barred discourse against Russia for seeking to annex the territory of a sovereign state and allegedly altering the map of Europe for the first time since the Second World War, as against a compliant attitude towards the US for a somewhat similar goal, could well become unsustainable.

Europe's problem is that it cannot build its security simply on the basis of countries increasing their defence budgets individually. The smaller European countries—and there are many—increasing their defence budgets means little. To be autonomously secure, Europe needs to rely on its own arms industry, European countries to buy European-produced arms, and Europe to have some kind of a centralised European chain of command. This will require a deepening of the EU as a sovereign entity, on which there is no political consensus amongst Europeans.

As things are, European security has remained frozen in the Cold War matrix, with Russia being an enduring threat and the US standing as a bulwark against it. Although France and the UK are nuclear powers, their nuclear umbrellas are not politically acceptable to many European countries. They would prefer to rely only on the US nuclear umbrella, especially in the face

of Russia's formidable nuclear arsenal.

Narrative Wars

European public opinion could get confused if tensions between the EU and the US over the Greenland issue become acrimonious, and could well begin to affect public attitudes towards Russia, with mounting support for some compromise with Russia over Ukraine instead of a complete refusal to engage in a dialogue with Moscow. The discourse, in some circles, could well turn into one of US imperialism versus Russian imperialism. On the Ukraine issue, Trump's repeated declarations on engaging in a dialogue with Russia to find a solution, the statement by the incoming US National Security Adviser that Russia cannot be expelled from all the territory it holds, and the implied message that Ukraine will have to yield territory, as well as talk of arranging a Trump-Putin meeting, are huge political blows to Europe, whose leadership has persistently demonised Russia and Putin and closed doors to any dialogue with Moscow. Trump is upending Europe's position of complete alignment with the Biden administration's position on the Ukraine conflict. There is reported concern in Brussels that Trump may lift some sanctions on Russia as part of a potential deal. Other than security issues, Trump's presidency could increase economic pressures on the EU. This will come in addition to the economic costs paid by the EU because of Ukraine-related economic sanctions on Russia. During his first term, Trump had targeted Germany for its mercantilist trade policies. Germany's current economic woes add to Europe's vulnerability to US economic pressures.

Clash Of Values

Trump's personal deep antipathy to 'wokeism', DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and gender identity issues will be another clash of "values" with Europe. Elon Musk, who is amplifying many of Trump's political and social views, has already become a major headache for the European political class. He is openly interfering in European politics by, for instance, supporting the right-wing nationalist party (AfD) in Germany, and the right-wing Reform Party in the UK. He has brutally targeted prime minister Keith Starmer on the "grooming gangs" scandal, calling him "complicit in the rape of Britain". Vice-president-elect J.D. Vance has also attacked the UK over not suppressing Islamism in the country. Trump Jr has joined in criticising the Labour Party too. This bodes ill for the US-UK special relationship. All in all, Europe's dependence on the US and its limited margin of manoeuvre have been brutally exposed with Trump's coming ascension to the White House.

The chronicle of a fire foretold

The fires raging in and around Los Angeles are huge, and they're terrible, and they're also the latest in a series of catastrophic fires in Los Angeles county and the region, the latest consequence of heat and drought and wind that have long created the region's volatile fire weather.

The climate crisis has made it hotter and drier and made wildfire worse here and across the west and around the world, but this region's ecology has always been wedded to fire. Homes built in and around natural landscapes – canyons, chaparral coastal hills, forests, mountainsides – with a history of wildfire that are pretty much guaranteed to burn again sooner or later create the personal tragedies and losses and the pressure for fire crews to try to contain the blazes. But suppressing the blazes lets the fuel load build up, meaning that fire will be worse when it comes.

It was only last month that the Franklin fire, fanned by the dry Santa Ana winds from the east gusting up to 50 miles an hour, burned 4,000 acres around Malibu in 48 hours. The Station fire burned 160,577 acres in 2009 to set the record as LA's largest and the Woolsey fire in 2018 burned 96,949 acres and destroyed 1,643 structures, while the 1970 Malibu fire destroyed 31,000 acres, incinerated hundreds of structures, and killed 10 people, fed in part by six months of no rain. Los Angeles has a history of catastrophic fire.

As Mike Davis, in his bluntly titled 1998 essay *The Case for Letting Malibu Burn*, noted: "Malibu, meanwhile, is the wildfire capital of North America and, possibly, the world. Fire here has a relentless staccato rhythm, syncopated by landslides and floods. The rugged 22-mile-long coastline is scourged, on the average, by a large fire (one thousand acres plus) every two and a half years, and the entire surface area of the western Santa Monica Mountains has been burnt three times over the twentieth century." The case for letting Malibu burn is that it is inevitably going to burn, over and over, but fire departments protect structures as long as they can. None of these facts make what is happening now less terrible. And it is terrible – to me personally as well; people I know have lost not just their homes but their neighborhoods; friends and family have had to evacuate not knowing if they'll have homes to return to. But these facts do per-



haps make it all less surprising. A friend in Santa Monica writes 'Beloved friends' homes – torched, vanished. My children's first elementary school – gone. My favorite grocery stores and some of the loveliest places to walk in LA – gone. My family – packed and ready to go...' While central and northern California has been soaked by successive storms since November, LA remained parched, dry season being pretty much the same as fire-vulnerable season in California.

When you're a coastal Californian almost all your weather blows in from the Pacific, but in the fall with the Bay Area's Diablo winds and LA's famous Santa Ana winds, the weather comes as dry wind from the deserts to the east. This is a dangerous time, especially if the winds from the east come before the rains from the west. I remember the October 1991 fire that raged across the Oakland Hills, destroying 3,000 homes in two days. The dry winds fanning the flames reportedly reached 65mph. In 2011, Santa Ana gusts in the LA region were reported to have reached a record 167mph. The winds that fed the current fires were not record speed, but they were scary fast – up to 100mph.

California's catastrophic autumn fires since 2017 are in some ways not a repeat of history –

they're the violent arrival of a new era, just as Hurricane Helene was when it swept hundreds of miles inland to smash into western North Carolina only four months ago. But you could remember the warnings, which have been abundant from climate scientists, fire experts and climate journalists. And remember that this place was already prone to fire and how the suppression of the natural fire cycle set up fire to be devastating rather than renewing.

I say that not to blame the devastated who have lost their homes or evacuated from them – if anyone's to blame, it's the civic institutions that allowed development in dangerous places and, according to the LA city councilwoman serving the Pacific Palisades region, underinvested in infrastructure, including water systems, to fight such fires, and had vehicles out of service due to lack of mechanics.

On 17 December, the city's fire chief complained in writing that cuts for "variable staffing hours" were undermining the department's ability to "prepare for, train for, and respond to large-scale emergencies". Decisions about institutions and budgets that seem boring in ordinary times are life-and-death matters in a crisis.

Stephen Pyne, a scientist who has devoted his career to study-

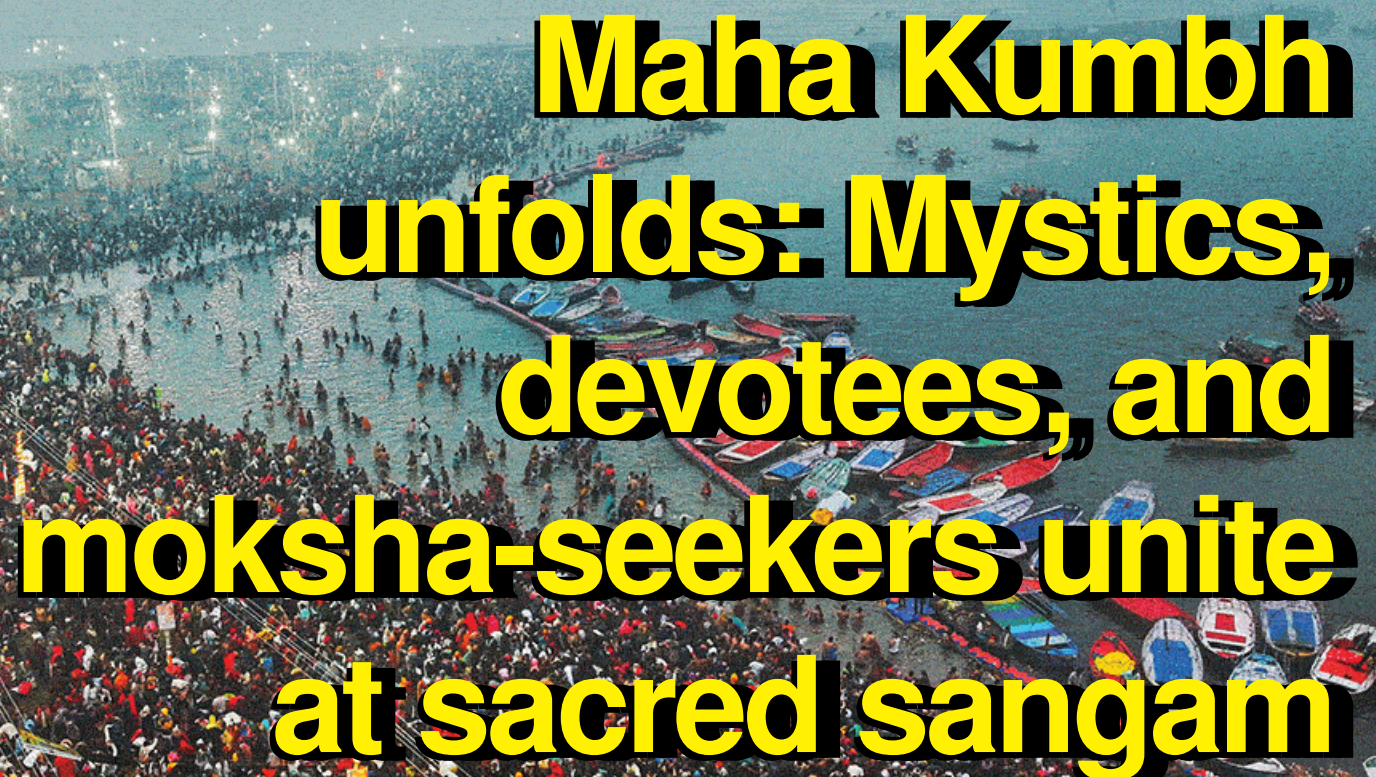
ing fire, writes of the current blazes in Los Angeles county: "The unholy mingling of built and natural landscapes guaranteed that fire protection was compromised in its very constitution. Cities want no fire; many countrysides need fire, and if mild fires are suppressed, the unburned fuel encourages monsters. If every urban fire that is put out is a problem solved, many wildland fires put out are problems put off."

In places we built in, we suppressed fire to protect structures. In wild places, the managing agencies, including the Forest Service and National Park Service and many state agencies, suppressed fire throughout much of the 20th century because they forgot that Native Californians and nature itself burned these places regularly. The suppression of fire builds up the fuel loads so that when fire comes it is devastating. Fire belongs here.

Catastrophic fire erases what was there before. So does forgetting. Memory is a resource for facing the future; it's equipment for imagining, planning, preparing. Forgetting creates terrible vulnerabilities to the return of foreseen disasters, to misinformation (including Trump's social media blasts blaming Joe Biden and Gavin Newsom for the fires), and vulnerability to unrealistic expect-

tations – including that each disaster at least since Hurricane Katrina will be the "wake-up call" that will change everything. "Weather can't do the work of politics," declares Daniel Aldana Cohen, a climate sociologist in a study of New York City's response to 2012's Hurricane Sandy. We cannot know the future, but remembering the past with care and accuracy equips us to navigate it.

That past includes decades of warnings from climate scientists that we are heading into a more turbulent and destructive era. They and climate activists have offered not just warnings but clear knowledge of what to do to limit how bad it gets. We are deciding whether or not to act on that knowledge now, including with who we elect and what we support. We know that the future is being reshaped by human-caused climate change, and we do know exactly what to do about it and who is preventing us from doing it. We are often urged to be prepared for our local disaster, be it blizzard, earthquake, hurricane or fire, but no personal preparation can compensate for the lack of the collective preparation that is meaningful international climate action. The current fires are reminders of the costs of forgetting.



Maha Kumbh unfolds: Mystics, devotees, and moksha-seekers unite at sacred sangam

Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 has begun in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, marked by vibrant religious processions, sacred rituals, and an overwhelming influx of Hindu pilgrims.

The Maha Kumbh Mela stands as a testament to the enduring power of faith, drawing believers from all walks of life to this unparalleled spiritual gathering.

On the first day of the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, the festival opens with a rush of activity as pilgrims arrive in droves, carrying offerings and their unwavering faith. The sprawling banks of the Sangam fill with collective prayer and hope. A Sadhu, a Hindu holy man from Panchayati Bada Udasin Akhara, leads the ceremonial procession of "Peshwai", marking the formal arrival of his akhara in Prayagraj. Adorned with vibrant garlands and ashes, the Sadhus march through the streets with solemn dignity, their presence symbolising the spiritual

fervour and rich cultural heritage of the Maha Kumbh Mela. The "Peshwai" sets the tone for the festival, creating an aura of devotion.

Amidst this sacred atmosphere, the joyous energy of dancing ascetics fills the air. Their celebratory spirit reflects the festival's unique combination of ritualistic solemnity and vibrant exuberance. The streets of Prayagraj come alive as these holy men prepare to welcome millions of pilgrims, their rituals and blessings setting the stage for the grand spiritual gathering.

On misty winter mornings, streams of pilgrims arrive with their belongings, making their way to the Sangam—the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and

the mythical Saraswati rivers. For these devotees, the journey culminates in a holy dip believed to cleanse sins and offer spiritual merit. The sight of believers braving the chilly waters, performing sacred ablutions, underscores the profound devotion that characterises the Maha Kumbh.

As Sadhus from various akharas, including Panchayati Bada Udasin Akhara, parade through the streets, they showcase their distinct spiritual disciplines and traditions. These grand processions highlight the diversity of ascetic orders while reinforcing the unity of purpose that binds them in faith. The "Peshwai" is a powerful reminder of the festival's cultural and spiritual

significance.

By the riverbank, devotees pause to pray, hands folded in reverence. The confluence of the sacred rivers becomes a site of quiet meditation and collective faith, where believers seek blessings and redemption. Among them, a Sadhu sits in serene contemplation, embodying the spiritual essence of the Maha Kumbh. This profound stillness contrasts with the teeming throngs of pilgrims, each participant bringing their hopes, dreams, and prayers to the sacred waters.

With every holy dip and whispered prayer, the devotees connect to a tradition that transcends time, uniting millions in the pursuit of spiritual cleansing and divine blessings.

Fact Checkers Fight Los Angeles Wildfire Myths As Their Jobs Face Extinction

New Delhi: As wildfires raged through Los Angeles, so did the conspiracy theories and misinformation about the natural disaster on social media. This happened even as Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced plans to end its US-based fact-checking programme. From false claims of looting to AI-generated images of the Hollywood sign engulfed in flames, fact-checking teams still working under Meta's programme scrambled to combat the surge in misleading content. Alan Duke, co-founder of fact-checking outlet Lead

Stories, warned of the dangers, saying, "Cutting fact-checkers from social platforms is like disbanding your fire department." Mr Duke, a former CNN journalist and a Los Angeles resident, said. He said could see the fires — which killed at least 24 people — from his home as his team debunked viral made-up stories. One Instagram video falsely claimed looters were stealing from homes amid the fires. Fact-checkers from Lead Stories clarified the video actually showed family members rescuing belongings. Meta

labelled the post as misleading and reduced its reach. PolitiFact, another fact-checking partner, tackled claims on Threads that linked the fires to political conspiracies. One viral post falsely accused MAGA supporters of setting fires, while an AI-generated image showed the Hollywood sign in flames. PolitiFact debunked both. Partisan narratives further amplified the chaos. Incoming president Donald Trump used his platform to blame Democrats for the fires, while Elon Musk criticised diversity, equity, and

inclusion (DEI) policies, claiming, "DEI means people will DIE." Conspiracy theorist Alex Jones escalated the rhetoric with baseless theories of a globalist plot, which Musk endorsed, writing, "True." The conspiracy theories echoed previous disasters like the Maui wildfires in 2023, where claims about "space lasers" were used to spread fear and distrust. Mr Duke explained to CNN the impact saying that these false claims "create distrust of emergency agencies that are actively

responding to the disaster, making it more difficult for them during the crisis." Meta CEO Zuckerberg announced plans to replace professional fact-checkers with a community-based system similar to X's Community Notes. But unlike journalists, Community Notes users aren't bound by ethical guidelines, raising concerns about them being accurate. While some X notes have effectively flagged false posts, many conspiracy theories, like Jones' "globalist plot" claim, remain unmarked.

3 Madhya Pradesh men arrested for sending 400 SIM cards to Laos fraud network

Madhya Pradesh Police uncover a gang linked to Laos-based online fraud. A trio were arrested for sending 400 SIM cards; victims were scammed through "digital arrest" tactics, including a woman losing Rs 1.6 crore.



Madhya Pradesh Police exposed the purported link between a gang and an online fraud network operated from Laos by arresting three persons who sent around 400 SIM cards to the suspected mastermind based in the Southeast Asian country, an official said.

The arrested persons, identified as Gaurav Tiwari, 22, Yogesh Patel, 24, and Sujal Suryavanshi, 21, are all residents of Seoni district in Madhya Pradesh.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (ADCP) Rajesh Dandotia said on Tuesday that the trio misused the identity documents of local villagers to obtain approximately 450 duplicate SIM cards in their names. "Around 400 SIM cards were sent to a person named Kalis, a native of Firozpur district in Punjab, who is currently operating a gang of online frauds from Laos," he said. Dandotia said Kalis and his gang defrauded a 59-year-old woman from Indore in December

2024. The woman was tricked into believing she was "digitally arrested" and was scammed out of Rs 1.60 crore.

"We have got clues that a video call was made from Laos to trap this woman in the fraud," he said.

In connection with this case, 13 persons have already been arrested across various states for their involvement in the scam. Authorities are continuing their investigation into the growing phenomenon of "digital arrest" frauds, the police officer added. The "digital arrest" is a new form of cybercrime in which fraudsters impersonate law enforcement officials and use video or audio calls to falsely claim the victim is involved in criminal activity.

The criminals then exploit their victims by threatening them with "legal actions", and holding them "digitally hostage" until they pay large sums of money.

Scam links on government sites: How SEO poisoning threatens public trust

- **Cybercriminals target government websites to spread scams**
- **Scammers exploit high authority of government sites for SEO poisoning**
- **Weak security and site structures help cybercriminals**

For crores of Indians, the word "government" is synonymous with trust. However, this trust is under attack from cybercriminals who are constantly seeking new tactics to entrap more people – particularly the unemployed – into scams, as the government intensifies its push against digital crimes and awareness rises.

Around a dozen government websites have been found "poisoned" with malicious links promoting scams, often themed around betting, investment, and cryptocurrency. In what appears to be a well-organised criminal enterprise, poorly secured government websites are injected with keywords and phrases related to popular online search topics, such as growing a YouTube channel, finding work-from-home jobs, affiliate product reviewing, self-improvement, digital marketing, blockchain,

cloud computing, and ways to generate passive income. When a person searches for these subjects on Google, tainted pages from government sites appear among the top search results. Since these pages belong to government domains, users are more likely to trust them and click on them, only to end up in scams, resulting in financial losses.

COMPROMISED SITES

Websites belonging to state governments, municipal corporations, research and educational institutes, and electoral officials are among the victims.

The Online Building Permission System of the Assam government, Maharashtra's Chief Electoral Officer, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Uttar Pradesh National Health Mission, Nagpur Municipal

Corporation, the Centre for Excellence in Postal Technology of India Post, and Maharashtra's Registrar of Firms are among the notable victims of SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) poisoning.

SEO POISONING This tactic addresses a fundamental problem faced by scammers: reaching a larger audience online. This is often a significant challenge because search engines use algorithms that rank sites in search results based on their authority. These algorithms aim to reduce the likelihood of users encountering illegitimate sites. As government websites enjoy very high authority scores, the poisoned pages rank high on the search results page.

However, these pages take users through a maze of sites leading to scams and fraudulent investments.



For example, a search for "how to increase likes on YouTube" yields several results. Among them is a link to Delhi University, which is categorised as "safe" by McAfee WebAdvisor, but it leads to a dubious investment website with all the hallmarks of a scam. India Today found posts on some forums selling SEO poisoning as a service. On BreachForums, one such post advertised delivering high-quality links with Domain Authority (DA) scores reaching up to 98, sourced from "high-authority sites", with a promise to comply with Google's standards.

EXPLOITING WEAKNESSES Cybercriminals exploit weak site structures, poor security, and

other technical vulnerabilities to insert illicit content and links into many government websites. Some of the prominent manipulation techniques include stuffing keywords and phrases into open directories and cloaking – a technique that shows one version of a webpage to search engines and a completely different version to users.

In a recent report, British cybersecurity firm Sophos revealed that the notorious ransomware group "Revil" also uses SEO manipulation techniques to spread malware. In one such case, attackers used the phrase "Are Bengal Cats legal in Australia?" to deliver malware.

A New Dawn Awaits US And India

On Monday, January 20, the eyes of the world will turn to the far eastern end of the National Mall in Washington DC, and gaze with great interest upon the 232-year-old neoclassical-style structure bordered by Constitution Avenue to the north and Independence Avenue to the south. The People's House, known more commonly as the US Capitol Building, will play host to this year's inauguration, as it has for every presidential inauguration since 1945. And when President Trump places his left hand on the King James Bible, possibly the one belonging to Abraham Lincoln as he did in 2017, and swears to "...support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies", it will, among many other things, mark a significant and mutually beneficial step towards a greater socio-economic partnership with India. As the new presidential administration takes office, the future of US-India relations appears poised for a significant leap forward. This burgeoning partnership, anchored by shared democratic values, economic synergies and strategic interests holds immense promise for both nations, strengthening not only bilateral ties but also fostering stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

Establishing A Rules-Based Order

One of the key pillars of US-India relations has always been their shared commitment to democracy. As two of the world's largest democracies, the US and India have long championed the values of freedom, pluralism and rule of law. The new administration's emphasis on reinvigorating alliances and partnerships with democracies worldwide surely aligns seamlessly with India's own aspirations for a rules-based international order.

The Trump administration has been adamant in its commitment to hosting and participating in democratic fora, such as the Summit for Democracy, which will provide a platform for the US and India to collaborate on global challenges like authoritarianism, corruption and human rights abuses. By aligning their diplomatic efforts, the two great countries can strengthen the global democratic fabric, while setting an example for other nations.

Of course, the relationship also has a significant economic component as the new administration's focus on fostering fair trade, promoting clean energy, and revitalising supply chains offers a fertile ground for deeper economic engagement with India. India's fast-growing economy, the world's fifth-largest by nominal GDP, and its position as a hub

for technology and innovation, present vast opportunities for US businesses. Furthermore, American investments in sectors such as renewable energy and healthcare can drive India's dedication to sustainable growth. It is extremely likely that Trump's policies encouraging the diversification of global supply chains will also align with India's vision of becoming a global manufacturing hub, thereby reducing dependence on any single country and opening up avenues of expansion.

Trade Focus

Additionally, the renewed push for comprehensive trade agreements could also address any long-lingering issues like market access, intellectual property rights and tariffs, which would ultimately serve to pave the way for a more robust economic partnership.

The Indo-Pacific region should (and has) emerged as a focal point of US-India strategic convergence. Both nations share concerns about maintaining a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific amid rising challenges, including maritime security threats and economic coercion. Trump's strategic commitment to strengthening the Quad, a socio-economic partnership made up of the US, India, Japan and Australia, underscores the administration's

recognition of India's pivotal role in the region. Collaborative efforts, such as joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and infrastructure development, will enhance regional stability and counterbalance any destabilizing influences that may materialise over time.

Moreover, the administration's focus on countering cyber threats and securing critical technologies including but not limited to its legal push to ban the uber-popular Chinese-owned social media platform TikTok aligns with India's own cybersecurity priorities. Strengthened defence cooperation, particularly through initiatives like the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), will also further solidify the partnership.

As the world shifts to a smaller and more global community, the international landscape is increasingly characterised by complex challenges that demand multilateral solutions. The new administration's emphasis on international cooperation resonates with India's approach to global governance. Although the COVID-19 era will not go down in history as a period of time most people will fondly recall, what it surely did was underscore the importance of collaboration in vaccine production and distribution. India's role as the "pharmacy of

the world" combined with the US' technological and financial resources make them natural partners in strengthening global health security.

Human Connection

Perhaps the most enduring aspect of US-India relations is the deep connection between the people. The Indian diaspora in the US, now over 4 million strong, plays a vital role in fostering cultural, economic and political ties. Indian-Americans have excelled in diverse fields, from technology and medicine to public service, exemplifying the best of both nations. By facilitating educational exchanges, work opportunities, and community partnerships, the US and India can cultivate a new generation of leaders committed to the bilateral relationship, something that the President-Elect has emphasised in his campaign messaging.

So, as we welcome the 47th President of the US, let's also welcome the opportunity to grow our relationship with India to new heights. This partnership can serve as a beacon of hope for future administrative transitions, demonstrating how nations with shared values and complementary strengths can tackle the challenges of the 21st century. The road ahead is filled with opportunities, and the time to seize them is now.

High Court seeks report on action against illegal loudspeakers at religious places

The Bombay High Court has directed the Director General of Police and the Principal Secretary, Department of Home, to submit affidavits detailing actions taken against approximately 2,940 illegal loudspeakers operating without permission.

The Bombay High Court has directed the Director General of Police and the Additional Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary, Department of Home, Maharashtra, to submit affidavits detailing actions taken against approximately 2,940 illegal loudspeakers operating without permission. The revelations came to light through a Right to Information (RTI) response.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar ordered that the affidavits should include

specifics about any penal or other actions initiated against violators. The court also instructed the authorities to present the information in a district-wise format, organised in a comprehensive chart. The case stems from a contempt petition filed by Santosh Shrikrishna Pachalag, who alleged that the authorities failed to comply with a 2016 High Court order.

The earlier judgment was issued in response to a Public Interest Litigation addressing the use of temporary booths and pandals on streets and sidewalks during

festivals. The court had also emphasised the need to curb noise pollution and directed authorities to ensure that no loudspeakers or public address systems were used at places of worship without proper permission. Pachalag first approached the High Court in 2014, seeking the removal of illegally installed loudspeakers at mosques in Navi Mumbai. His subsequent contempt petition was driven by frustration over non-compliance with the 2016 ruling. He highlighted, through RTI findings, that illegal



loudspeakers had been installed at 2,940 religious institutions, including temples, mosques, dargahs, churches, gurdwaras, and Buddha Viharas. In its latest order, the bench instructed the authorities to

file a separate affidavit detailing the measures undertaken to enforce the 2016 judgment and ensure compliance with its directives. The High Court will hear the matter again on March 18, 2025.

Why An India-Taliban Softening Irks Pakistan So

(Contd from page 7)

In fact, Taliban leaders even met with Indian officials regarding aid and requested that small projects be restarted, among a bevy of other projects that India had been backing. There was a time when India was providing Afghanistan extensive assistance—some 400 projects across Afghanistan's 34 provinces, including large infrastructure projects like the Salma dam, three Airbus aircraft for Ariana airways, roads, telecommunication, schools, banking expertise, and even \$20,000 for restoration of the shrine of Imam Hazrat Ali. Defence aid included supply of vehicles for the army and over 1,000 training slots with the Indian army, the largest for any country.

Naturally, Pakistan was deeply insecure. The Islamic State Khorasan suddenly turned anti-India. It attacked a gurdwara that killed dozens and claimed the attacks in Coimbatore and Mangalore in 2022. Al Qaeda chief Al Zawahiri, too, was seen praising a Karnataka girl for defending the hijab. But then, the IS-K always had a Pakistan hand. Remember the arrest of Aslam Farooqi earlier, along with a Pakistan-trained Bangladeshi, and another from Islamabad? Farooqi had earlier been part of the fight in Kashmir. When Islamabad pressed for his extradition, Kabul refused. In sum, the long tail of accountability indicates a strong Pakistani link with at least one part of IS-K.

The Pakistani Reaction

This brings us back to the Foreign Secretary's visit. Islamabad is likely to see the trip through the lens of the recent crisis in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. The wording of

Delhi's protest note is also interesting, since it echoes almost exactly what the Taliban have been saying, that "it is an old practice of Pakistan to blame its neighbours for its own internal failures". It adds, "We have also noted the response of an Afghan spokesperson in this regard". The response in question, from the Defence Ministry, was unequivocal in noting that the blatant attack on Afghan sovereignty would not be left unanswered.

This sounds dangerous. Afghanistan doesn't have much of an army, but it does have the capability to launch exactly what Pakistan trained it in, for decades: low-intensity, high-stakes, conflict. Pakistan witnessed a 40% rise in terrorism last year, according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies. That's not all. There's been a 21% rise in casualties, indicating more capability for violence.

There's also a second "decisive" shift. The Pakistan army is killing more (51%) and arresting less. That can't be pleasant for the locals. Which is also how the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) emerged. An entirely peaceful movement under the leadership of the charismatic Manzoor Pashteen, it has been demanding an end to the depredations of the Pakistan army, including bombing houses and blowing off roofs, and humiliating checks and search operations. It held a massive jirga calling for an open border and stated its determination to deal with the TTP in its own way. Rawalpindi reacted by banning it and arresting its leaders.

Further down the border, a full-blown conflict in Kurram, once the main

infiltration point to Kabul, has created another set of issues. Lakki Marwat in the Bannu division has seen a police uprising demanding that the Pakistan army remove themselves and leave operations to locals. That's the key. The TTP is almost entirely from tribal areas and was driven out by the Pakistan army in one of its innumerable operations, only to then fight alongside the Taliban. The present TTP is an amalgam of some seven to eight disparate groups that straddle the border. So, the Taliban's plea—backed by India—that the terrorism issue is wholly a Pakistani problem, is legitimate, not just regarding the TTP but also about the long-festering Baloch issue.

A Dangerous Clash

After the Christmas air attacks, the TTP reacted dangerously. First, it issued a warning that it would not allow any transactions with Pakistan-army owned entities or fronts, including Fauji Cement Company Ltd., Askari Bank Ltd., Fauji Fertilizer Company Ltd., Fauji Foods Ltd., Askari Cement Ltd., Askari Fuels, National Logistic Cell, Frontier Works Organization, Pakistan Ordnance Factory, Fauji Foundation and the Defence Housing Authority, among others. All of these entities contribute, quietly, to the vast wealth of the Pakistan army. The TTP has given shopkeepers two months to get rid of their stocks. A video circulating online also seems to show that the TTP has kidnapped some 16 persons working at the Qabul Khel mining site in Lakki Marwat. While some have reportedly been rescued, it's still a bad sign.

Meanwhile, some 800 Afghans have been picked up in Islamabad. The

army doesn't seem to know where to stop, even after it arbitrarily pushed out hundreds of Afghans from its country. The strife is unlikely to end well.

However, India seems set on a stabilisation route. Delhi in its statement has committed aid to refugees and other areas. India doesn't need to supply weapons, given that the Afghans have plenty of their own, 'gifted' by a departing US military. What Muttaqi has been really stressing instead is economic development, and, more importantly, a regional thrust to stop Islamic state recruitment. That is going to sit well with Russia, which has called for a dialling down of tensions, as well as China, which has an abiding fear of religious extremism. Oddly, all three have similar objectives in Afghanistan, which centre around stability for the country. While India recently invited Afghan businessmen to use the Chabahar port as a way to bypass Pakistani tantrums, China is said to be developing a route through the Wakhan corridor, with possibly the same objective. Also, both Russia and China can use the Central Asian route to move Afghan trade. Amid all this, Islamabad has seemingly lost the plot. Everyone is moving on, towards connectivity and trade, areas where Islamabad could excel if it wanted to. But it does not. Instead, it is intent on blaming everyone and anyone for a dangerously spiralling conflict that could see tribal areas parting ways with an ungenerous and suspicious Punjabi state.

That's the bottom line that Pakistani leaders need to recognise. They can either have their country at peace or a group of insurgents at war. They can't have both.

Congress: The Emperor Is Without Clothes

Another aspect of the rumblings within the INDIA bloc is that many of its constituents have aligned with the BJP at some point. This means that there is no urgent need for them to promote an opposition grouping if it only helps the Congress get primacy. As for parties like the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the RJD, which never had any alliance with the BJP, the problem is different. They feel that the growing demands of the Congress for a larger share of the pie in their respective home turfs of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar would ultimately affect their own primacy.

Abandoned By Friends

There is a section in Bihar that feels that a leader like Lalu Yadav would, justly, have his reservations about the Congress; Rahul Gandhi was squarely responsible for the end of his electoral journey over a decade ago when he tore a bill brought forward by the Manmohan Singh government that would have helped the controversial RJD leader. On the other hand, Akhilesh Yadav is eyeing the chief ministerial seat mainly and has no ambitions at the Centre, at least for now. Despite being snuffed out in the recent assembly polls in Maharashtra,

Sharad Pawar also has no plans to merge his Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) with the Congress. Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena, which had become one of the closest allies of the Congress after he was made the Chief Minister, is singing a different tune too now. The problem for the Congress is that it hardly puts on its thinking cap. It is bereft of any strategy that would give its detractors a run for their money. Despite facing the harshest dry spell in its history, India's oldest party has for the past decade not undertaken any serious soul-searching exercise. There

have been many missed opportunities, all of which have contributed to making the BJP the world's largest party. It's Rahul Gandhi who has to bear this cross now. It is said not without reason that a team is only as good as its leader. The leader must be a role model who "lives" and communicates the values that make the organisation. How the Congress puts its house in order will decide which way the opposition alliance will proceed. There are no shortcuts. No one likes to befriend a weak man, while a strong man hardly needs allies. What he gets is umpteen followers.

Five Reasons Kejriwal May Run Into Trouble This Time

(Contd. from page 9)

A CBI investigation was also recommended into substandard drug samples collected from three government hospitals. These irregularities were identified through investigations conducted in 2023. It was found that patients at these Mohalla clinics were given consultations and medicines by unauthorised staff in the absence of doctors.

Further investigation revealed that fake mobile numbers were used to register patients and conduct lab tests. The health department's inquiry report showed that over 3,000 records of different patients had the same mobile number—9999999999—while for 999 patients, their mobile numbers were repeated 15 or more times. Similarly, 11,657 patients had the mobile number “zero” registered against their names, while over 8,000 patients had blank



mobile number fields in their registration records. The AAP's claims about improving education are also under strain. Fourth, two departments of the Delhi government published public advertisements debunking the claims made by incumbent Chief Minister Atishi and her political boss Arvind Kejriwal

about the Sanjeevni and Mahila Samman Yojna. This is the first time government departments have publicly challenged their own chief minister's position. The AAP is also facing a challenge to several unfulfilled promises, such as cleaning the Yamuna, riverfront development, the Gazipur dump

yard, pollution control, and providing tap water to all. Inflated electricity and water bills have raised concerns among certain sections of Delhi's residents. Though Kejriwal has urged people not to pay the bills and promised to waive them off if he returns to power, the question remains: why were inflated bills issued in the first place, and if they were issued, why weren't they corrected before the Election Commission announced the poll schedule? Fifth, Chief Minister Atishi's public statement, that she is holding the post temporarily until the elections, may not add value to the AAP's campaign. There is a lingering question about whether Kejriwal, if the AAP manages to win again, can assume office as Chief Minister. The bail conditions imposed by the Supreme Court on Kejriwal clearly stated that he could not enter the office of the Chief Minister or sign official files in that capacity.

How Seriously Should We Take Trump's Dreams Of A 'Bigger' America?

Trump claims that the canal is being operated by China and thus has become an important security issue. Panama has dismissed the charge and insisted the canal will not be handed back to the US. Although China is indeed the second largest user of the Panama Canal after the US, there is no evidence that Beijing controls it.

Will Canada Join The US?

In recent weeks, Trump has also been calling for the merger of Canada—a founder of NATO and a prominent American trading and military partner—with the United States. Canada shares with the US the largest land border in the world, drawn in the late 1700. "You get rid of that artificially drawn line, and you take a look at what that looks like, and it would also be much better for national security," declared Trump at his news conference on Tuesday. Trump did not suggest the use of military force to annex Canada, though he did say that he could use economic force to press his idea. The outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reacted that there is not "a snowball's chance in hell" of the two countries merging. Over 200 years ago, there were attempts by the US to annex Canada, but none in recent



times. The issue was reignited by Trump last month when he called Trudeau the Governor of Canada after their meeting in Florida. The comment was initially seen as a joke, but since then, Trump has repeated his demand a few times that Canada should be part of the United States. There is no evidence that Canadians want to join the US. But, undoubtedly, they are worried that Trump's threat of economic tariffs will make Canada's already strained economy worse and their lives harder.

Musk's Meddling In Europe

Musk, who helped Trump win his election in November, has for the past few months been supporting far-right political

parties and activists in Europe in the name of free speech, much to the resentment of traditional centrist and leftist parties. He obviously believes that he could help far-right parties win in countries where elections are due. They are already in power in half a dozen European countries and have been gaining ground in others. The billionaire businessman has used his X network to back the far-right AfD party in Germany, which is going to the polls later this month. This has angered people not only in Germany but elsewhere in Europe too. The French President, Emmanuel Macron, accused Musk of meddling in European politics and backing a “reactionary

movement” across the world. Musk has also repeatedly attacked Britain's prime minister, Keir Starmer, who came to power after a landslide victory last summer. On Monday, he said on X that “America should liberate the people of Britain from their tyrannical government”. He wants the far-right Reform Party led by Nigel Farage to come to power in Britain. Musk has called for Starmer to be imprisoned, accusing him of failing young white girls when as chief prosecutor he did not take action against men of Pakistani origin for political reasons—a charge dismissed by Starmer. The Tesla boss's intervention, however, has revived a prominent issue in the UK, prompting the

British government to announce new measures to tackle such crimes in future.

Trump Can Embolden Others

It remains to be seen whether Trump will back Musk's calls for regime change in European countries. Given his unpredictable nature, no one can be sure how serious he will be in implementing his stated imperialist agenda. His threats and instincts cannot be dismissed and need to be taken seriously. As the new leader of the world's only real superpower, Trump can be unstoppable. This will be his second and final term, and he would not be too worried about American public opinion, though his imperialist agenda will be popular among a large section of people in his country. If Trump does put through his expansionist threats, it will be easier for other powers to do the same, altogether putting at risk the current global order. China has not ruled out using force to take over Taiwan. It is also in dispute with almost all its neighbours over territorial claims. Russia is unlikely to pull out of Ukraine without forcing it to cede territory, making its other neighbours nervous. Trump's action could also embolden Israel and other powers in the Middle East.

Gujarat unveils new tourism policy

focus on 'high priority' areas

The Gujarat government on Tuesday announced its new tourism policy for 2020-25 with special focus on attracting new investments in the state's "high priority tourism centres" by offering lucrative incentives to entrepreneurs.



The Gujarat government on Tuesday announced its new tourism policy for 2020-25 with special focus on attracting new investments in the state's "high priority tourism centres" by offering lucrative incentives to entrepreneurs. Unveiling the policy here on Tuesday, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani said tourism projects, such as hotels and resorts, which would come up in these high priority centres will qualify for subsidies on investment and other incentives.

Some of these high priority centres are Kutch, Devbhumi-Dwarka, Narmada, Gir-Somnath, Porbandar, Junagadh and Dang districts. Some specific talukas of other districts, such as Dhari in Amreli and Dabhoi in Vadodara, are also included in the list of high priority tourism centres.

"Instead of focusing on the entire state, our aim is to develop tourism infrastructure in these high priority areas. Under the new policy, incentives will be given where it was needed the most," Rupani said.

"Some of the new avenues which we are targeting are beach tourism, caravans and rural experience-based



tourism," he said. Under the policy, the government will give



subsidy of 20 per cent on capital investment for setting up a hotel

in the designated high priority centres. While the minimum investment required is ₹1 crore, there is no cap on maximum investment, which excludes the cost of land, as per the policy document.

For setting up theme parks or amusement parks in these priority centres, the subsidy will be 15 per cent for an investment in the range of ₹50 crore to ₹500 crore.

To attract large investments in this avenue, the state government will provide land on lease, in addition to the 15 per cent subsidy, for projects of more than ₹500 crore proposed investment, according to the policy. Other tourism projects which would be eligible for 15 per cent subsidy on investment are - convention centres with a seating capacity of over 2,500

people, NABH-accredited wellness centres, tourism hospitality and training centres, tents, cottages and container accommodation.

To encourage caravan rental services, the state government has announced to give 15 per cent subsidy on investment up to ₹10 lakh, for starting such projects in high priority centres. To encourage new investment in the adventure tourism sectors, entrepreneurs will be offered 15 per cent subsidy, with the limit of ₹15 lakh, for buying various adventure sport equipment, said the policy document.

Under the new policy, foreign tourists will be offered a 5 per cent discount if they stay at a state government registered hotel. Rupani said to guide foreign tourists arriving in Gujarat, the state tourism department will set up a dedicated tourism desk at the Ahmedabad international airport. To promote rural tourism, fair organisers will get an assistance of ₹5 lakh per year to organise "all inclusive annual fairs and festivals showcasing indigenous culture, dance, handlooms and handicrafts", the policy document said.

US regulator sues Elon Musk for late disclosure of Twitter stake before buying it

Elon Musk was sued on Tuesday by the US Securities and Exchange Commission for waiting too long to disclose in 2022 he had amassed a large stake in Twitter, the social media company he later bought.

Elon Musk was sued on Tuesday by the US Securities and Exchange Commission, which accused the world's richest person of waiting too long to disclose in 2022 he had amassed a large stake in Twitter, the social media company he later bought.

In a complaint filed in Washington, DC federal court, the SEC said Musk violated federal securities law by waiting 11 days too long to disclose his initial purchase of 5 per cent of Twitter's common shares.

An SEC rule requires investors to disclose within 10 calendar days, or by March 24, 2022 in Musk's case, when they cross a 5 per cent ownership threshold. The SEC said that at the expense of unsuspecting investors, Musk instead bought more than USD 500 million of Twitter shares at artificially low prices before finally revealing his purchases on April 4, 2022, by which time he owned a 9.2 per cent stake.

Twitter's share price rose more than 27 per cent following that disclosure, the SEC said.

Tuesday's lawsuit seeks to force



Musk to pay a civil fine and disgorge profits he didn't deserve. Musk eventually purchased Twitter for USD 44 billion in October 2022, and renamed it X.

Alex Spiro, a lawyer for Musk, in an email called the SEC lawsuit the culmination of the regulator's "multi-year campaign of harassment" against his client. "Today's action is an admission by the SEC that they cannot bring an actual case," he said. "Mr Musk has done nothing wrong and ev-

eryone sees this sham for what it is." Spiro added that the lawsuit addresses a mere "alleged administrative failure to file a single form--an offence that, even if proven, carries a nominal penalty."

OTHER LAWSUITS OVER TWITTER PURCHASE

Musk, an adviser to US President-elect Donald Trump, is worth USD 417 billion according to Forbes magazine, through businesses such as

the electric carmaker Tesla TSLA.O and rocket company SpaceX. He is worth nearly twice as much as Amazon.com AMZN.O founder Jeff Bezos, the world's second-richest person at USD 232 billion, Forbes said. The SEC sued Musk six days before Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration. SEC Chair Gary Gensler is stepping down that day, and Paul Atkins, who Trump nominated to succeed him, is expected to review many of

Gensler's rules and enforcement actions. Musk has also been sued in Manhattan federal court by former Twitter shareholders over the late disclosure. In that case, Musk has said it was implausible to believe he wanted to defraud other shareholders, and that "all indications" were that his delay was a mistake.

Musk has long feuded with the SEC, including after it sued him in 2018 over his Twitter posts about possibly taking Tesla private and having secured funding to do so. He settled that lawsuit by paying a USD 20 million civil fine, agreeing to have Tesla lawyers review some Twitter posts in advance, and giving up his role as Tesla's chairman. The SEC also sought sanctions from Musk after he missed court-ordered testimony last September for the Twitter probe, so he could attend the launch of SpaceX's Polaris Dawn mission at Florida's Cape Canaveral. A federal judge in San Francisco rejected that request, because Musk later testified and agreed to pay the SEC's travel costs.

Meta layoffs: 3,600 to lose jobs as Mark Zuckerberg targets low performers

Meta layoffs: The decision, shared in an internal memo by CEO Mark Zuckerberg, focusses on improving overall performance by moving out those not meeting expectations more quickly than before. Meta Platforms Inc. has announced plans to cut about 5% of its lowest-performing employees this year, reported Bloomberg. The decision, shared in an internal memo by CEO Mark Zuckerberg, focusses on improving overall performance by moving out those not meeting expectations more quickly than before. By September, Meta's workforce stood at approximately 72,000 employees. If the company were to implement a 5% cut in jobs, it could result in the loss of around 3,600 positions.

In the memo, Zuckerberg said, "I've decided to raise the bar on performance management and move out low performers faster. We typically manage out people who aren't meeting expectations

over the course of a year, but now we're going to do more extensive performance-based cuts during this cycle."

The planned reduction, according to the memo, is part of Meta's effort to achieve 10% "non-regrettable" attrition by the end of the current performance cycle. This includes around 5% from 2024 alone. Employees who have been with Meta long enough to receive a performance review and are deemed underperforming will be impacted. The company assured affected employ-

ees that they would receive "generous severance."

This announcement comes as Meta continues to restructure its policies and operations under Zuckerberg's "Year of Efficiency" initiative, which was launched to optimise costs and streamline the organisation. Over the past year, Meta has already laid off thousands of employees, focusing on team realignment and cutting costs to enhance profitability.

The layoffs coincide with several strategic and policy shifts at Meta, some of which have sparked internal and exter-

nal discussions. Meta recently made changes to its content moderation policies, loosening rules on posts related to controversial topics such as immigration and transgender rights. The company framed these changes as a step towards encouraging "free expression." However, the move faced criticism from employees and external groups, who expressed concerns about potential harm to marginalised communities. The company also announced the end of its third-party fact-checking programme in the United States. This decision raised fears about the possible spread of misinformation on Meta's platforms, especially given its influence on public discourse. Meta has reduced internal programmes aimed at improving workforce diversity. The scaling back of these initiatives has drawn criticism, with some viewing it as a departure from its previously stated commitment to inclusivity.



Sunny Deol Spends Time With Jawans On Army Day, Salutes Their 'Courage And Sacrifice'



On the occasion of Army Day on Wednesday, Bollywood star Sunny Deol spent some time with the jawans and even saluted the courage, sacrifice and unwavering dedication of the "heroes." Sunny took to Instagram, where he shared a string of videos and pictures. The first featured a clip, where the actor and the soldiers are heard saying "Bharat Mata Ki Jai". Other pictures featured the Bollywood actor posing for pictures with the soldiers and playing games with them. He captioned the post: "Then, Now and Forever Saluting the courage, sacrifice, and unwavering

dedication of our heroes. Happy Indian Army Day! #HindustanZindabad #ArmyDay." Furthermore, the Pathaan actor also delighted his fans by giving him a warm hug.

John opted for an all-black laidback look as he was wearing a t-shirt, a pyjama and a matching cap, while his fan wore a pink shirt paired with blue pants.

As soon as the video was shared online, several fans lauded John for his kind gesture. An Instagram user wrote, "Truly a man with a heart of Gold." Another one commented, "So cute."

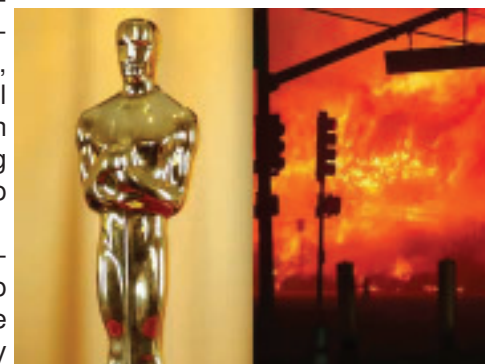
Oscars 2025 To Be Cancelled? Ceremony Likely To Be Called Off Due To Los Angeles Wildfires

For the first time in the history of the Oscars, the prestigious ceremony is likely to be cancelled. As reported by The Sun, the Academy Awards 2025 are likely to be called off due to the devastating Los Angeles wildfires. Reportedly, the official Academy Awards ceremony, led by stars including Tom Hanks, Emma Stone, Meryl Streep, and Steven Spielberg, is monitoring the situation in LA to make a final decision.

"The board's main concern at this time is to not appear as if they are celebrating while many Angelenos are dealing with heartbreak and unimaginable loss. Even if the fires were to subside in the next week, the reality is that the city is still hurting and will continue to deal with that pain for months. Therefore, the hierarchy has decided that the focus will shift toward support and fundraising when the right opportunities present themselves," a source cited by the portal claimed. For now, the ceremony is scheduled to take place on March 2.

Earlier this month, Oscar nominations were also delayed in

light of the wildfire. The announcement of nominees for the 97th Academy Awards was originally scheduled for January 17. It will now take place on January 19. Additionally, voting for nominations was also extended by two days to January



14. Chief Executive Bill Kramer wrote in a letter which read, "We want to offer our deepest condolences to those who have been impacted by the devastating fires across Southern California... So many of our members and industry colleagues live and work in the Los Angeles area, and we are thinking of you." Besides this, the British Academy of Film and TV Arts Tea Party, the AFI Awards luncheon and the Critics Choice Awards have also been postponed.

Aamir Khan Felt Son Junaid's Performance In Maharaj Was 'Kachcha': 'Maine Jis Level Ka Kaam Kiya...'

While Aamir Khan's son Junaid Khan made his debut in 2024 with the film 'Maharaj' which released on Netflix, he is all set to make his big-screen debut soon with 'Loveyapa', co-starring Khushi Kapoor. Recently, during the trailer launch of 'Loveyapa', Aamir Khan shared his honest review of his son's performance in 'Maharaj', saying that it lacked finesse in some parts, and that he wouldn't call it a flawless performance. While Aamir really liked Junaid's performance, he felt like it was more or less at the same level of work that he did in his debut film Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, which released in 1988.

During the trailer launch, Aamir Khan said, "Junaid ki pehli film Maharaj mujhe badi pasand aayi, iska kaam bhi pasand aaya. Lekin agar main dil pe haath rakhke sach bolu toh mujhe laga uski pehli film aur meri pehli film mein hum log ka kaam ka level more or less same tha. (I really liked Junaid's first film,



Maharaj, and his work in it as well. But if I speak honestly, with my hand on my heart, I felt that his performance in the first film and mine in my first film were more or less at the same level). He also praised Junaid's

work in Maharaj, adding that some scenes, especially the climax were brilliant. However, he felt that some other parts seemed a bit raw. "Mujhe bhi laga usne kai scenes bohot ache kiye. Like climax. But kahi pe mujhe

laga, ki ye scene wo better kar sakta tha. Yaha pe thoda kachcha hai. Toh I could not say it was a flawless performance. As a father also I'm telling you. It was very similar. Mujhe laga maine jis level ka kaam kiya hai pehli film mein, more or less wohi kiya hai. So hopefully aage badhke wo bhi seekhega aur better ho jayega. (I also felt that he did many scenes very well, like the climax. But at certain points, I felt that he could have done those scenes better. Some parts seemed a bit raw. So, I couldn't say it was a flawless performance. As a father, I'm telling you, it was quite similar. I felt that the level of work I did in my first film, he more or less did the same. So, hopefully, as time passes, he'll learn and get better)," said Aamir. 'Maharaj', directed by Siddharth P. Malhotra, stars Junaid Khan, Jaideep Ahlawat, Shalini Pandey and Sharvari. It released in June 2024 on Netflix. Meanwhile, Junaid's upcoming film 'Loveyapa' is set to hit theatres on February 7, 2025.



Priyanka grateful for her 'family's safety', expresses sadness over devastation caused by LA fires

Mumbai, Indian actress Priyanka Chopra has said that her heart is "so heavy" after the devastation the Los Angeles wildfires has caused and shared that she is deeply grateful for her family's safety. Priyanka took to her Instagram, where she posted a string of pictures of the destruction caused by the wildfires. She wrote: "I (heart emoji) you LA. My heart is so heavy. While I'm deeply grateful for my family's safety, so many of our friends, colleagues, and fellow Angelenos have lost so much. These fires have displaced countless families and devastated entire communities, leaving an overwhelming need for rebuilding and support." The actress added: "To the firefighters, first responders, and volunteers risking everything—you are true heroes." "Over the past week, I've come across countless GoFundMe pages and organizations working tirelessly to provide relief. If you're able, please consider donating to those who have lost everything or supporting organizations like @cafirefound, @baby2baby, @americanredcross and so many more making a difference on the ground. Every contribution, no matter the size, truly helps. I'll keep adding pages as I come across them.

Keerthy Suresh reveals the film with which she was to make her Hindi debut long before 'Baby John'



in more Hindi films while continuing her dominance in South cinema. In a recent media interaction, Keerthy Suresh discussed her experience working across various industries and also revealed exciting details about her upcoming projects, including 'Mahanati', but I still feel really more Bollywood films and South Indian ventures, leaving fans thrilled. The actress shared, "It was a film called 'Maidaan'. I was supposed to do it but I had to step out of it because of a few reasons. But it was a mutual agreement. I was approached for it 5 years ago, right after 'Mahanati', but I still feel really glad that Baby John was my Bollywood debut". The actress' role in 'Maidaan' eventually went to Priya Mani, who is known for her work in the superhit streaming series 'The Family Man'. Talking about the seismic shift in the Indian film industry, the actress said, "It's a very exciting process. You are now able to move around industries.

Vikram Prabhu's first look as Desi Raju from pan-Indian film 'Ghaati' released

The first look of actor Vikram Prabhu's character in director Krish Jagarlamudi's explosive action entertainer 'Ghaati' was released on the occasion of his birthday on Wednesday. Along with the first look poster, the unit of 'Ghaati', which features Anushka Shetty in the lead, also released an electrifying glimpse of Vikram Prabhu's character in the film. Presented by UV Creations and produced by Rajeev Reddy and Sai Babu Jagarlamudi, 'Ghaati' is the second collaboration between Anushka and Krish, following the success of the blockbuster film 'Vedam'. Interestingly, the film will be Anushka's fourth film with UV Creations. Vikram Prabhu plays the male lead character Desi Raju. In the glimpse, Vikram is seen being chased by the police through dense forests and rugged ghat areas.



Mumbai, Actress Keerthy Suresh, who was recently seen in the movie 'Baby John', has shared that she was set to make her debut in Hindi cinema long ago. However, she had to step out of the film with which she was supposed to make her Hindi debut. Recently, she made her Bollywood debut with 'Baby John', directed by Atlee. Her Bollywood debut has left fans eagerly awaiting her next projects, hoping to see her shine

Sofia Vergara sparks dating rumours with F1 champ Lewis Hamilton after flirty date



With this, a hot new Hollywood couple could be in the marking, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'. The 'Modern Family' actress, 52, and the F1 legend, 40, enjoyed a lunch date in New York City recently and were all smiles as they grabbed a bite to eat. According to TMZ, Sofia and Lewis sat next to each other for the meal, joined by friends at some point, and mum-of-one Sofia was said to be so engaged in the conversation she only picked at her food. As per 'Mirror.co.uk', Sofia and Lewis left the restaurant and engaged in some flirting outside the eatery before Sofia hopped in the back of a black SUV and headed home. However, no official

confirmation has been furnished by either parties so far. Lewis, who switched teams from Mercedes to Ferrari at the end of last year, was in an on-and-off relationship with Nicole Scherzinger from 2007 until 2015. Over the years, the British driver has been linked to huge celebrities like Rihanna and model Gigi Hadid. Sofia shares a 32-year-old son with his first husband Joe Gonzalez. Sofia and True Blood star Joe Manganiello, 48, tied the knot in Palm Beach, Florida in 2015 but announced their separation in July 2023, with their divorce settled at the start of last year.

was finalised, Sofia opened up about her split from "younger husband" Joe Manganiello, revealing a disagreement over children led to their separation. At the time of announcing their split, Sofia and Joe described it as a "difficult decision" without delving into the details behind their unexpected breakup. In an interview with Spanish newspaper 'El Pais', Sofia got candid about the end of her relationship with the Magic Mike actor, citing their differing views on starting a family as the cause for their split. "My marriage broke up because my husband was younger; he wanted to have kids and I didn't want to be an old mom", she said.

Los Angeles, Actress Sofia drifting towards a new romance Vergara seems to be racing as she has been linked to F1 down the track, and perhaps champion Lewis Hamilton.

However, no official

Speaking in January 2024, one month before her divorce

Yo Yo Honey Singh refers to Rhea Chakraborty, himself as fighters who have come out strong

Mumbai, Actress Rhea Chakraborty will be seen unraveling the journey of rapper Yo Yo Honey Singh on the upcoming episode of her podcast 'Chapter 2'. During the episode, Honey referred to himself and Rhea as fighters who have come out strong on the other end of the battle. Honey also opened up about his struggle with bipolar disorder as per the trailer of the show which was unveiled on Wednesday. Sharing the trailer on her Instagram, Rhea wrote in the caption, "It's okay to not be okay. I love, you love, we all love @yoyohoneysingh. Resonated with every word you said. Salute



to your fight. #chapter2 (sic)". The trailer also shows Honey referring to himself and Rhea as fighters. While Honey had his shares of struggle with the mental health and continues to put up a brave front in front of the mental disorder, Rhea suffered a barrage of criticism and media trial after the suicide of actor Sushant Singh Rajput during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Rhea's

podcast has become a platform for heartfelt and candid conversations. The actress' podcast journey began with an insightful conversation with Sushmita Sen in the first episode, which was met with widespread appreciation for its natural and engaging dialogue.

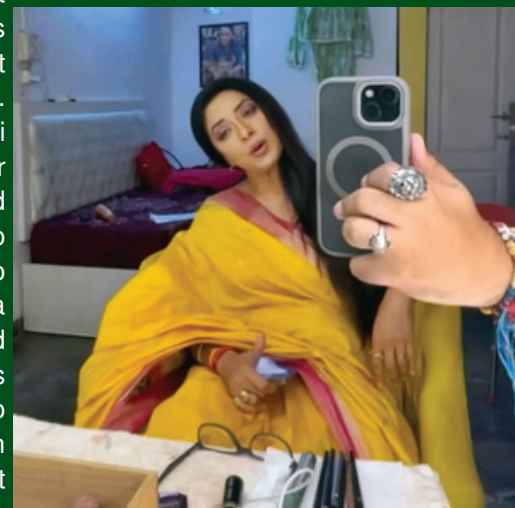
The second episode featured a compelling discussion with Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan, adding depth and intrigue to the series. The third episode brought Shibaani Dandekar and

Farhan Akhtar to the forefront, where they shared their personal experiences and life stories. Her fourth episode starred Tanmay Bhatt and Zakir Khan. 'Chapter 2' aims to provide insightful content that resonates with listeners, featuring interesting and big personalities as guests every episode who engage in candid conversations, inspiring them to embrace new beginnings and personal growth.

Rupali Ganguly asks 'Should I blow the whistle'?

Mumbai, Renowned television actress Rupali Ganguly keeps on treating the fans with behind-the-scenes snippets from her popular show "Anupamaa". She recently dropped another BTS video from her shoot diaries on her Instagram account. The video shows Rupali Ganguly whistling while she sits in her vanity. Whistling the tune of the popular song 'Kisi Ki Muskurahaton pe ho nisar', the actress can be heard saying, "Jeena isi ka name hai" at the end. Her latest IG post had the caption, "Should I blow the whistle." The caption hints that Rupali Ganguly might be making some big announcement soon. However, it is mere speculation at this point.

Previously, Rupali Ganguly took to her official IG handle and shared a video where she comes to her co-star Alpana Buch (Baa) and asks her how she is looking. Replying to this, Alpana Buch hilariously says that she is looking like a



sofa cover or a purse. To this, Rupali Ganguly reacts by saying that she is in fact a curtain. Alpana Buch gets the last punch saying, "Parde main reh." Rupali Ganguly captioned her Insta post: "Anupamaa and Baa.... aur isko hum bolte hai Baa-titude...Normal behavior while shooting with each other @alpanabuch19 u irritating woman I love u Btw I love this saree and this is my favorite blouse @nishabedii @sanyukta1294." In the meantime, the 'Anupama' actress recently rubbished the rumors of her leaving the show. She revealed, "Wow, people really have some overactive imagination. But thank you for talking about me and talking about the show. What can I say? Every person has a core, and my core, I believe, is gratitude."

Parineeti Chopra explains why “the fatigue is real” for her

Mumbai, After shooting at night for days, actress Parineeti Chopra has now switched to shooting during the day time and said that the fatigue is real. Parineeti took to her Instagram stories, where she shared a selfie of herself dressed in a white T-shirt paired with checkered pajamas. The actress is just gazing into the camera lens. Expressing herself, she wrote: “Switching from night shoots to day shifts. The fatigue is real.” On January 14, the actress, who is busy filming her forthcoming project with Netflix, posted a fresh set of insights into her schedule. She shared a BTS still from the set with the caption “The night shoot hustle

continues”. The cousin of Indian star Priyanka Chopra Jonas further dropped images of an autorickshaw, along with the night sky. Parineeti’s stories also included a still from her vanity saying, “Van Ke Andar Se Hi”. Meanwhile, her last post was with a hot water bag as she wrote, “Never without my” in the caption. Prior to this, Parineeti Chopra shared a photograph from the shoot at the Bandra Worli Sea Link in the post captioned, “Second schedule starts. Cute location today”. According to sources, the actress is shooting for the second schedule of the untitled drama at the moment. Any further details

regarding the project’s cast and crew have been kept away from the limelight for now. Parineeti will also be a part of Anurag Singh’s much-anticipated thriller “Sanki”. The actress will be seen sharing screen space with Varun Dhawan. The film will share the tale of a police officer who goes into retirement after an accident during a case investigation. After years have passed, he is forced to relive the trauma as he narrates the story to his friend’s son. She also has Karan Sharma’s “Shiddat 2” in her kitty. Sunny Kaushal, Amyra Dastur, Mohit Raina, Diana Penty, Arjun Singh, and Radhikka Madan will also be seen playing key roles in the movie.



Saif Ali Khan stabbing case: Kareena’s team requests to not speculate any further

Mumbai, Bollywood diva Kareena Kapoor Khan’s team has issued a statement and have requested fans and media to be patient and not speculate any further as

of the family is doing fine. We request media and fans to be patient and not speculate any further as the Police is already doing their due investigations. Thank you all for your concern. Team Kareena Kapoor Khan.” As per sources, Kareena and their children were at home when the incident took place. Saif’s team too had issued a statement, which read: “There was an attempted burglary at Mr Saif Ali Khan’s residence. He is currently in hospital undergoing a surgery. We request the media and fans to be patient. It is a police matter. A source claimed that Saif fought with the thief without a weapon to protect his family. This happened in the middle of the night. He fought tough and saved from family being harmed and he got injured in the process. While the guy had a weapon...



the police are already doing their due investigations on Saif Ali Khan’s stabbing case. A statement issued by the actress’s team, said: “There was an attempted burglary in Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor Khan’s residence last night.” “Saif had an injury on his arm for which is in hospital, undergoing a procedure. The rest

Saif had nothing. The actor had “six stabs” out of which “two are deep”, said the doctor from Lilavati Hospital. Dr. Niraj Uttamani, COO of Lilavati Hospital, said that Saif was stabbed by an unidentified person at his Bandra home and was brought in at 3: 30 am. Uttamani said that Saif has six stabs and two are deep.

‘MitronPolitan!’ trailer gives an idea of a “perfect city life”



Mumbai, TVF (The Viral Fever) is all set to present yet another relatable story with their forthcoming show “MitronPolitan”. The makers recently unveiled the captivating trailer of the drama, leaving the fans excited. This series talks about the tale of a boy who moves to a metro city and embarks on a journey to build a life there. The preview shows a young man, Rajat coming to a new city for a job. From the accent, the protagonist seems to be from Bihar. In the new city, he is forced to share his room with two other men, Kanan and Rishi. The trailer further shows Rajat’s struggle to adjust to the big city, leading to some hilarious situations.

Sharing the trailer on their official X (earlier known as Twitter) handle, the makers wrote in the caption, “Get ready to throw out the idea of a “perfect city life” because moving to a metro city after college is one giant “figure-it-out-as-you-go” adventure! Presenting the trailer of TVF’s new weekly show—MitronPolitan, where Rajat and his gang of 20-somethings fumble, stumble and juggle their way through metro life. So settle on your IKEA couch, grab your Chaayos chai, and join TVF’s MitronPolitan, because surviving adulthood is all about finding the funny moments in the chaos.”