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'What a Downgrade': Mirzapur Season 3 Fails to Impress Loyal Fans But These Memes Are a Hit



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Trump, Biden discuss Ukraine and Middle East crises in first transition meeting



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Melania Trump's 2nd stint as US First Lady unlikely to be full-time: Report



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Melania Trump's 2nd stint as US First Lady unlikely to be full-time: Report



SAVE our Hicksville aFacebook Group shared this picture with the the caption: "Respectful.....our American Flag should always be raised higher then others flags"

A member posted (Among others)

Antonis Panayotatos

Sorry, but you're wrong. Per the US flag code: (g)When flags of two or more nations are displayed, they are to be flown from separate staffs *of the same height*. The flags should be of approximately equal size. International usage forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in time of peace.

4 of Indian origin arrested in US's Princeton in human trafficking case

(Sai Bureau)-Four Indian-origin people were arrested in Princeton in Texas in the US in connection with a human trafficking case on Monday.

The Princeton Police arrested Chandan Dasireddy, 24, Santhosh Katkoori, 31, Dwaraka Gunda, 31, and Anil Male, 37, for allegedly running a 'forced labour' scheme in Collin County in Princeton, Fox 4 News reported.

The arrests came after the Princeton Police department found around 15 women, who were living in the same

home, were found to be sleeping on the floor.Princeton Police department said that they received a complaint about a possible human trafficking racket at a house on Ginsburg Lane in Collin County, from a pest control department in March, after which they launched an investigation. According to an article on Fox4 News, the pest control department was summoned to the house in March. But when the inspector went inside, he saw that there were around 15 women sleeping on the floors of each room.

There were also "large amounts of suitcases", he was quoted as saying.

Police said that there were several computer electronics and blankets inside the house where the alleged human trafficking was taking place, but it didn't have any furniture. The police said that the 15 women rescued for allegedly running a 'forced labour' from the house alleged that they were forced



to work for several shell companies owned by Katkoori and his wife, Dwaraka Gunda, according to a report on NBC5 News.Princeton police said that several other people, both men and women, were also victims of forced labour, and worked as programmers for the shell companies.

They said that several other locations in Princeton, Melissa, and McKinney were also involved in the case and following investigation, they seized several items, including laptops and phones from other locations.

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Mistaken for kidnapper, Indian killed in New Zealand; attacker pleads guilty

Mewa Singh, a 60-year-old Indian, died in New Zealand after being punched by a 32-year-old father. The attacker mistakenly believed that Singh, a grandfather, was kidnapping his child. The attacker pleaded guilty to manslaughter and will be sentenced in October.

(Sai Bureau)-A 60-year-old Indian died after being punched at a Christchurch skate park in New Zealand after he was thought to be kidnapping a child. Singh, a grandfather himself, and his wife had travelled from India to New Zealand in December 2022 to support their son and celebrate the birth of their second grandchild.

Within four months, in April 2023, the attacker, a 32-year-old man whose identity is concealed for legal reasons, punched Singh, leading to his death. The attacker pleaded guilty to manslaughter last Friday in the High Court at Christchurch. He will be sentenced for Singh's manslaughter in October 2024, according to Stuff, a New Zealand news media company. On the day of the incident, Singh was taking his usual walk through Linwood Park.

According to police, the 32-year-old accused had left his 7-year-old son at the park to teach him a lesson.



When he returned, he saw Singh holding his son's hand and became enraged, assuming Singh was trying to kidnap the boy, according to Stuff.

The man confronted Singh, shouting and shoving him before delivering a punch that caused Singh to fall and hit his head on the pavement.

The victim's son, Himanshu Keshwer, 33, received a call from the police about his father's critical condition later that night. "I couldn't actually think or do anything. I was totally in shock," Keshwer said, reported Stuff.

Singh died from his injuries two days later in Christchurch Hospital.

Keshwer shared the impact on their

family, describing how their lives were turned upside down.

"Someone killed my dad and I couldn't do anything, and still can't do anything. It makes me sad, it shouldn't have happened," Keshwer was quoted as saying by Stuff.

Keshwer recalled the joyful moments when his father first held the newborn.

"When I left for work that day, everything was good. My family was happy, [my father] was playing with my daughter, and everything was good," he said.

Keshwer, who had been living in New Zealand for 14 years, had to sell his business and return to India to care for his mother, according to Stuff.

"My father was a very good human being. He never took anything seriously and always tried to help people wherever possible," Keshwer said.

To support the grieving family, the New Zealand Sikh Society created a fundraising page to help them return to India and cope with their loss.

Indian student slips at waterfall in New York, drowns



(Sai Bureau)-An Indian student at Trine University slipped while hiking at New York's Barberville Falls and drowned. The Indian Consulate General in New York identified the student as Sai Surya Avinash Gadde.

The Indian Embassy in New York confirmed the news of Gadde's drowning on July 7 at Barberville Falls, Albany, New York, and expressed their condolences. Gadde, a Masters student, was from Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. He moved to the US in 2023. "We are deeply saddened by the tragic loss of Mr. Sai Surya Avinash Gadde, a student at Trine University, who drowned on 7th July at Barberville Falls, Albany, NY. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his grieving family and friends," posted the Consulate General of India in New York on X.

The Indian Consulate is providing necessary assistance for the transportation of Avinash's remains back to India.

"The Indian Consulate in New York is extending all necessary assistance, including issuing a No Objection Certificate (NOC) for the transportation of Mr. Gadde's mortal remains to India. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time."

According to local media, "One person died and another was rescued at Barberville Falls in Poestenkill on Sunday. The Rensselaer County Sheriff's Office says the person who died was a man not from the area."

The circumstances surrounding the drowning are still under investigation by local authorities.



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Modi visit isn't driving a wedge between Russia & China, but India & Indo-Pacific allies

Nothing illustrates the declining utility of the India-Russia relationship than Prime Minister Narendra Modi's just-concluded visit to Moscow. Beyond the symbolic, which had its own downsides, the visit demonstrated few tangible results. That said, the visit still raises some questions about India's foreign policy strategy and Russia's place in it.

At the symbolic level, the Prime Minister's tradition of hugging other leaders, probably an attempt to convince his less-than-bright peanut gallery back home that he is actually bosom pals with other leaders, may not have served him or the country well because of the split-screen with Russian bombing of a children's hospital in Kyiv. That's unfortunate, but scheduling visits of national leaders is always difficult, especially when there's an ongoing war. In this case, the unfortunate juxtaposition of the bearhug and dead children, which recalls former Indian foreign minister I.K. Gujral's infamous bearhug of Saddam Hussein during the Kuwait war, probably drew more unwanted attention to India's foreign policy contradictions, if not hypocrisy. On the substantive side, there was little of note. India, in any case, has been moving away from Russia for weapons, partly because it had become over-dependent and partly because Russia has few next-generation weapons that can tempt Indian military services. Moreover, the existing relationship itself does create some problems for India's relations with

its far more important Western partners. There was an attempt at sorting out some problems, such as the trade imbalance resulting from India gorging on Russian oil for the last couple of years, and the issue of Indians being tricked into fighting for Russia in Ukraine. These are bureaucratic messes that need clearing up, not issues of grand strategy, and the fact that they now occupy such a prominent place in India-Russia discussions is itself a pretty good indicator of the state of the relationship.

A wedge between India and Indo-Pacific. That said, there is still cause for some concern. For example, on the larger issue of Russia and India's China problem, New Delhi appears to be still pursuing a failing strategy. There's definitely some logic to attempting to split Russia from China, but Vladimir Putin's strategically idiotic invasion of Ukraine has made that task well-nigh impossible. It has made Russia so dependent on China that there is little India can do currently to drive a wedge between the two. The joint statement reveals more than one concession that India has made, but little by way of any Russian nod to Indian concerns regarding China. For example, India has basically accepted the Russian line on Ukraine, calling for "peaceful resolution . . . through dialogue and diplomacy including engagement between both parties", with nary a word about issues of territorial sovereignty.

By Rajesh Rajagopalan

Russia Visit: An Emphatic Foreign Policy Statement From Modi 3.0

India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war is well-established: it advocates for a cessation of hostilities and prefers dialogue over conflict, a position consistently articulated in international forums. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Moscow, his camaraderie with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the pledge to enhance bilateral trade and defence cooperation signify a strategic shift in stance.

The visit aims to send a strong message to India's Western allies that while navigating complex global issues, India remains committed to safeguarding its national interests. After all, India's Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) saved over \$10 billion from April 2022 to May 2024, largely due to Russian crude imports, as per an analysis by the Indian Express. Additionally, it underscores India's enduring friendship with Russia amidst geopolitical dynamics, including a pointed message to China.

PM Modi has demonstrated adeptness in making bold foreign policy moves, exemplified by strong ties fostered with

Gulf countries during his tenure. While India values its friendships with the US and other Western nations, it is steering its own course to protect its national interests. This is a trajectory which is set to accelerate in Modi's third term. The agreement to establish Indo-Russian joint ventures for defence production and facilitating military exports to mutually agreed friendly nations exemplifies this forward-looking approach.

Following his Russian trip, Modi's subsequent visit to Austria marks India's Prime Minister's first official trip since 1983, illustrating a pattern of seeking new allies. This trend has been evident since Modi took office a decade ago.

Modi's third term is distinct in its recent foreign policy decisions. From inviting all neighbouring countries except China and Pakistan to his swearing-in ceremony, to strategic engagements at the G-7 summit in Italy, and now visits to Russia and Austria, Modi is making significant statements on the global stage. Foreign policy remains a cornerstone of Modi 3.0's agenda.

By Mayank Mishra

Modi govt must prioritise defence spending to tackle China. Depending on US, Russia is risky

Now that the dust has settled with the conclusion of the 2024 parliamentary elections, it is time to take stock of India's ongoing boundary confrontation with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Notwithstanding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's conciliatory statement that India and China must restore peace and tranquillity on their contested boundary, all adversarial relationships, especially involving territorial disputes, hold the distinct possibility of culminating into a full-fledged war and the India-China relationship is no exception.

The wider strategic community believes that a massive attack by the PRC against India will never happen. In fact, one former Indian envoy to the PRC observed recently: "So there is a pattern of aggressive behaviour [from China], of trying to change status quo [against India and in the South China Sea (SCS)] through salami slicing, incremental steps by staying short of an all-out military conflict and changing ground realities." This statement by itself is not wrong, but salami slicing and incremental gains, which the PRC has already made against India, are among a menu of possibilities, which includes a massive attack and full-scale war. The difficulty with worst-case assumptions about the prospect of menacing adversary behaviour is that they mandate economic sacrifices that civilians do not want to make. Unfortunately, the worst is possible, and India experienced this with the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War in 1962. After all, as Krishna Menon who was Defence Minister during the 1962 war ruefully observed: "...I make no

secret of the fact that we were not prepared for a war [massive attack] against China... We expected negotiation and diplomacy to play their part [not war]." The run-up to the war also sowed civil-military tensions especially under the Indian Army Chief General Thimmaya to the extent that the latter, who was "acutely" aware of the China threat warned that the Nehru-led leadership was not paying attention to China's robust military strength and the distinct possibility that Beijing could attack massively.

At most, the Nehru government saw only a "limited attack" as a possibility that India could counter with the defences it was preparing. History is instructive in the present challenge that China poses India. The ongoing confrontation between India and China is similar, but not identical to the one faced by Nehru's India in the run-up to the 1962 War. Before the onset of the 1962 conflict, Nehru was wedded to his own assumptions that the superpowers would restrain the Chinese which would be adequate to head off a Sino-Indian War. At best limited military measures both in capabilities and logistics from India's end would suffice, Nehru concluded. The leadership was also convinced that China would not want war with India because it would trigger a world war, which in turn rested on the assumption that India was too critical to the balance of power for the two Cold War superpowers—namely the United States (US) and the erstwhile Soviet Union. They believed that the Soviets would restrain the Chinese.

By KARTIK BOMMAKANTI



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US, UK, France, Iran: Why Are People Done With Their Governments?

By Harsh V. Pant

Politics around the world is evolving in ways that both leaders and analysts are finding difficult to assess and respond to. Politicians are scrambling to sustain support as new entrants make inroads into constituencies that have lost faith in the established order. It is in this melee of the old and the new that the grammar of today's politics is charting a course of its own. Globally, the political elites have never seemed so out of touch as they seem today, unable to respond to the challenge from their streets.

In just the last few days, US President Joe Biden's credibility saw a free fall, while the UK booted out an accidental, out-of-touch Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and ushered in the Labour Raj at a time when the rest of Europe is moving to the right. The French have given a mandate to the Far Right. Nine months after the terror attacks of October 7, Israel is facing a civil war-like situation, with people demanding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's resignation even as the nation remains in a state of war on multiple fronts. In Iran, Reformist Masoud Pezeshkian



found himself elected as the nation's new president, beating his hardline conservative rival Saeed Jalili by securing around 53.3% of votes, nine percentage points more than Jalili.

A Reformist In Iran, 'Changemaker' In UK

Different nations, different challenges, different political arcs, but all facing a moment of political reckoning. Ironically, it is Iran where the recent change of leadership holds the most promise. This is not the first time a reformist has come to power in Iran in a system that has been dominated by the "supreme leader" Ayatollah Ali Khamenei since 1989. The conservatives have controlled all the levers of power and have managed to scuttle earlier reformists like

Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani. However, there has been a growing disillusionment with the ruling elites. By criticising Iran's morality police and promising "unity and cohesion" as well as an end to Iran's "isolation" from the world, Pezeshkian talked in a language that appealed to those who want normalcy in a nation that has been on the edge of a precipice for years now.

Rishi Sunak, on the other hand, was not only bogged down by the legacy of his predecessors who had made a mockery of public mandates, but he was also unable to soothe the British public struggling with rising costs of living and a crumbling public services infrastructure. The Conservative Party imploded, and Sunak's

leadership never managed to rise to match the needs of today's Britain. And so, the Labour Party ended up getting a landslide even without increasing its vote share, thereby taking the United Kingdom in a direction opposite to the rest of Europe, where the Right is ascending.

Close Shave For Macron

In France, President Emmanuel Macron had to call a snap election fearing the resurgence of the nation's far-right party, the National Rally (RN). Only a last-minute, left-wing tactical adjustment could prevent an outright landslide for the RN. But this should be seen as just a consolation prize, as the RN has greatly increased its representation in Parliament.

Separately, last month, the European Union elections saw a resurgence of the right in ways few had anticipated, and the triumph of Eurosceptic parties will have serious long-term consequences for the ability of the 27-member bloc to work cohesively.

Concerns About Biden

The world's eyes, however, are now on the leadership contest in the US, where two old white men are busy damaging the brand of American democracy. Donald Trump, under whose presidency

the foundations of the American democratic institutional fabric came close to collapsing, continues to be ahead in the presidential race, as the base of the Republican Party continues to move to the right. Trump's supporters still view him as an anti-establishment candidate and despite facing a number of charges in the courts, he is hailed as a victim. His greatest advantage is that he has his primary opponent in President Joe Biden, who, after a disastrous debate performance, is having a difficult time convincing his own party about his candidacy. Old templates no longer apply to the new political climate, where fast-evolving aspirations demand a change in the status quo. Back home in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third consecutive victory and Indian democracy's continuing resilience underscores the Indian electorate's ability to make nuanced choices even as the world around it undergoes a dramatic shift. Even so, this global churn has a lesson for Indian political leaders and the larger system.

Deaf Bidens, Mute Democrats, Blind Media?

By: Reshmi Dasgupta

Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely, wrote the Victorian historian-aristocrat Lord Acton in a letter to an Anglican bishop nearly 140 years ago. But a more apt aphorism for our times would be "power tends to isolate and absolute power isolates absolutely". A look at what is happening in the US appears to underline this truth, with President Joe Biden stubbornly refusing to see the writing on the wall, if not in the ballot box.

As if his train wreck of a debate with former President and current challenger for the White House Donald Trump was not enough to convince all but the most obtuse that Biden is past his sell-by date, he has followed it up with almost equally dismal interviews with a TV channel and a couple of radio shows. He was not as zoned out in those interviews as in the debate, but he did not come across having the wherewithal—



mental acuity—to last another four years. Even when the TV interviewer gave him openings to show he is aware of what he is up against, Biden refused to play ball. He said that short of "God Almighty" asking him to step aside, he would continue his re-election campaign, no matter who or how many in his party try to convince him (and his family) to step aside, on the basis of a flood of opinion polls showing he was

trailing Trump by a wide margin. Is geriatric incomprehension? Or the effect of isolation?

India has recently seen that opinion polls—and even exit polls—can be totally off mark, in toto. So Biden's campaign managers and family can mistrust them. But the surveys are not always wrong. In the just-concluded UK elections, opinion and exit polls were bang on target, to the extent of getting the exact Labour Party tally right.

If India's pollsters were suffering from the same disconnect that affects politicians, their western counterparts clearly are not that isolated. But Biden has dispelled all talk of contrary opinion polls and plummeting approval ratings as the surveys by his campaign apparently do not corroborate what all other polls have been showing for the past year. But if the media and the Democratic Party managers do believe the polls, why have they taken so long to sound the alarm? Did they believe that Trump would be stymied by convictions, leaving the field open even for a much-diminished Biden to win?

With apologies to Robert Burns, did their best laid plans go awry because six judges of the US Supreme Court threw an unexpected legal curve ball by defining Presidential immunity? Is that why both the US media and the Democratic Party have suddenly discovered Biden's acuity issues only now? The

timing certainly points to that, which should make the American public wary henceforth of believing anything else they say—or do not, as the case may be. Even for the lay American voter, including the ones who cannot stand Trump, Biden does not seem to be all there. The innocuous questions asked in the ABC interview had stings in their tails that Biden missed, like the one asking if he would submit to a mental acuity test by an "independent" panel and make the results public. By agreeing, he would admit earlier doctors were not reliable; by not agreeing he would risk voters thinking he would fail such a test. Biden obviously did not agree to a test, thereby harking back to the damaging "opinion" in the report by Robert Hur, the special prosecutor who investigated whether Biden had kept official documents in his private home in Delaware after he had demitted office as Vice President.

Emmanuel Macron's Problems Have Just Begun

By Naresh Kaushik

The outcome of Sunday's elections in France has left this major global power and a strong ally of India in turmoil. It has resulted in a hung Parliament, an unprecedented thing in France and one that comes just weeks before the country is due to host the Paris Olympics.

Against all expectations, the far-right National Rally (RN) was pushed from a clear first place in the first round a week ago to third place in the final and second round on Sunday, by the New Popular Front (NFP), a coalition of Socialists, Greens, and Communists. President Emmanuel Macron's centrist alliance came second.

The voting and calls from all the other parties to block the far-right's ascent worked very effectively. In the first round a week ago, Marine Le Pen's RN came first with 30% of the vote, sending shock waves throughout France and beyond. That prompted the RN's political opponents to join hands to defeat the far-right party. More than 200 candidates withdrew to allow a one-to-one fight against the party in the second and decisive round. The success of this pact has ensured that Le Pen's protege, the 28-year-old Jordan Bardella, will now not be the next French Prime Minister. Had the results of the first round repeated through the second, Bardella would not only have become the

youngest Prime Minister of France but also the first far-right leader of the country since its occupation by Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler.

Nightmare for Macron

The results have thrown France into uncharted territory. The RN



may have been pushed into the third place, but no group has a majority and no clear figure has emerged as a possible future Prime Minister. This is a nightmare for President Emmanuel Macron and his country, which is a major global power, a member of NATO, and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Macron had called the snap elections a month ago to seek what he called "clarification" after the far-right drubbing in the European Parliament.

His decision was criticised a lot because it was a huge gamble. Bardella, though, was delighted,

because it was he who demanded fresh elections. Macron's gamble had ultimately failed as it brought the RN closer to power than ever. 'Unnatural Alliance'

With the final round now, Bardella has criticised the "unnatural" and "dishonourable alliance" that has

"deprived the French people" of an RN victory. He said, "For months now, a wind of hope has picked up and it will never stop blowing". Macron's problems have just begun. He will now have to live with what is known in France as 'cohabitation'. The President is the head of state, but the Prime Minister is accountable to Parliament, leads the government, and introduces bills. According to the French constitution, the President is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but the Constitution also says that the Prime Minister is responsible for national defence.

Uncertainty Looms

Macron's Prime Minister, Gabriel

Attal, has already announced his resignation. There will be a period of haggling over building a coalition around a common minimum programme. This could take weeks.

Macron has said he would not work with the hard-left France Unbowed party, but he could offer a hand to the Socialists and the Greens. However, they may not agree with him. Even after the parties decide on the next government, Macron will be forced to appoint a Prime Minister from a party that is not from his own centrist coalition and has a different political agenda. That will lead to a confrontation between Macron and the new government. Although France has a history of cohabitation, its President has never worked with a hung Parliament and a minority government. The modern French Republic has had three cohabitations. The last one was under conservative President Jacques Chirac, with Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, from 1997 to 2002.

But the fact that the NFP does not have a majority means it will have to work with Macron's coalition to govern the country, which could make things slightly easier for both. But on policies, the two groups are too far apart. Contentious Issues

The NFP coalition parties are unlikely to back Macron's stance on the Israel-Hamas conflict and

will press him to take a more critical line against Israel. They will also try to push him to overturn some of his domestic policies (such as pension reform), which have been deeply unpopular and provoked weeks of protests last year.

In its election campaign, the NFP promised to scrap the pension and immigration reforms passed by the outgoing French government and to set up a rescue agency for undocumented migrants. It also wants to put price caps on basic goods and raise the minimum wage. The French economy, the second biggest in the EU after Germany, is not in decent shape and Macron will be forced to accept some of the demands that he will not find fiscally prudent.

Even after a new governing coalition is formed, it is unlikely to be smooth sailing for France. The RN has greatly increased its representation in the newly elected Parliament, which will only embolden it and prompt them to work harder next time. Le Pen, who has unsuccessfully contested French presidential elections three times, will fight the 2027 election with greater enthusiasm. If the new French government does not fulfil people's expectations, she could end up becoming the President of France.

Unemployment In India: The Private Sector Needs To Do Its Bit Too

By Bibek Debroy, Aditya Sinha

Adam Smith in his seminal work, *The Wealth of Nations*, observed that "the real price of everything, what everything really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it". This observation underscores the critical importance of employment generation, especially in a country like India, where millions strive to earn a living through hard work.

Recent data paints a mixed picture of progress. According to the Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS), if employment is defined as any engagement in gainful productive activity, the growth in employment since 2017-18 has been notable. The total number of workers in the Indian economy increased from 458 million in 2017-18 to 563 million in 2022-23, reflecting significant growth. Additionally, the National Statistical

Office (NSO) released estimates from quarterly surveys for urban areas for January-March 2024, confirming these trends. The workforce participation rate for



urban males aged above 15 years increased from 67.7% in January-March 2022 to 69.8% in January-March 2024. For urban females, the participation rate rose from 18.3% to 23.4% over the same period.

Based on PLFS data, the

unemployment rate decreased from 4.2% in 2021 to 3.6% in 2022, and further to 3.1% in 2023. The PLFS is considered one of the most reliable sources for

employment data in India. However, improvements in the robustness of this data collection are necessary. The main intention behind introducing the PLFS in 2017 was to provide more frequent and timely data on India's labour market, addressing the

inadequacies of previous quinquennial surveys. Unlike enterprise-based surveys, the PLFS focuses on household-based data collection, capturing the nuances of individual and informal sector employment. This approach offers a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of labour force participation, employment status, and the nature of work, thereby enhancing the ability of policymakers to make informed decisions and address the dynamic changes in India's labour market. However, there is a need to (1) reduce the time lag of PLFS, (2) increase the frequency of the survey and (3) improve the methodology. Several empirical studies have critiqued the methodology of PLFS. In a study published in the *Economic & Political Weekly*, Jatav and Jajoria

(2020) delved into the methodological shifts introduced with the PLFS and its implications for socio-economic inequality estimates in India. They highlight the fundamental flaws in the PLFS's sampling methodology, notably the replacement of the detailed economic status-based stratification used in the quinquennial Employment and Unemployment Surveys (EUS) with an overly simplistic criterion based on the educational attainment of household members. This methodological shift is argued to be irrational and technically incorrect, as it fails to capture the multifaceted nature of socio-economic status, leading to biased and unreliable data outcomes.

Democracy and the Challenges of Integration in Kashmir

By: Arshia Malik

Frank Furedi, the Hungarian-Canadian media commentator and academic and emeritus professor of sociology at the University of Kent, in his latest article, 'The Fear of Populism Expresses The Elite's Disdain For Democracy', writes an unforgettable line: Populism is democracy in action. Furedi goes on to explain that democracy helps people find their voice.

"Throughout most of history, the political classes had little sympathy for people attempting to find their voice. Democracy as an ideal barely survived the ravages of centuries of political hostility. Even in those circumstances where societies acclaimed its virtues, democracy served as an ideal that was very rarely allowed to flourish. Though there were genuine attempts to construct a system of representation through which popular consent could be brought into a close alignment with the direction of travel of executive power, the realisation of the ideal of democracy has always faced formidable obstacles."

A lot of the news from Kashmir needs to be read in the context of Furedi's analysis. The political class of Kashmir was always disconnected from the ordinary common people throughout the seven decades of post-Independence. All that the communal, yet professing secularism, National Conference party did was use Islam as a weapon to keep grabbing power and rallying the people against the Indian state. A lot of misinformation, and disinformation campaigns were unleashed and the people grew a sentimental attachment to the hollowed-out Article 370. If the Srinagar-elect Aga Rouhullah's performance last week in Parliament is anything to go by, the NC is up to its tricks yet again. But this time it was amusing to see the political class get exposed live and demonstrate to mainland Indians how they've kept an entire population confused about their nationalist identity using the special status, tied up to the Islamist Muslim supremacy theme since the time there was no Internet or social media. For a change the political class, with Engineer Rashid given the go-ahead by the NIA for oath-taking on June 5, will be

forced to deal with the Indians they hate through dialogue and debate rather than using the crutch of the AK-47s of terror groups.

But the government will have to step up. The Indian Railways' official tweet couldn't distinguish between the Jammu division

and the Kashmir division, attributing the Chenab railway bridge to Kashmir Valley instead of Jammu in its promotional tweet. Therefore, it is still frustrating that the mainstream media runs after bytes from the political class without trying to listen to what the silent majority

terrorised by the AK-47 for decades and now the political class' favourite "Islam khatre mein hai" has to say. The Kashmiris have lots of sentiments attached to the hollow Article because of the dynasty politicians' ambiguous stance and soft separatism. That

the leaders of most political parties in Kashmir have welcomed PM Modi's announcement for assembly elections in J&K and restoration of statehood is an ominous sign for us that the intifada factory is getting emboldened once more.

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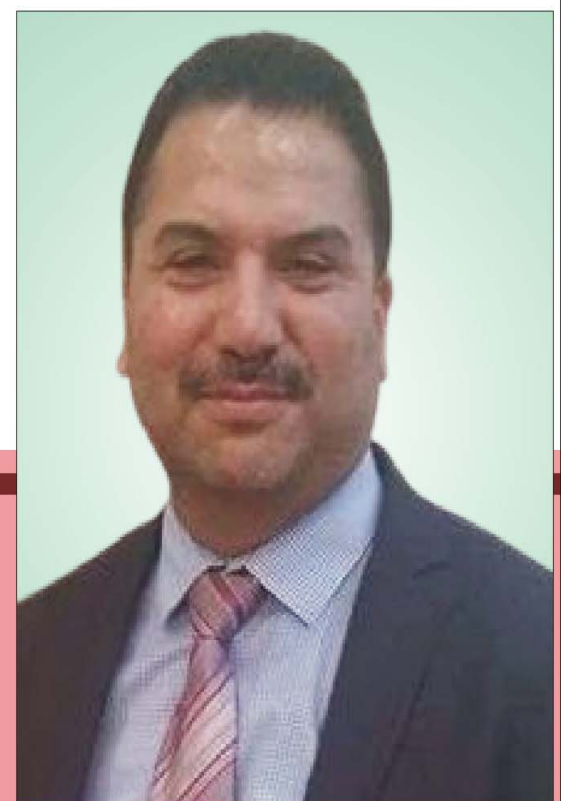
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Labour all the way

UK votes for change as Conservatives suffer rout

BRITAIN's Conservative Party had it coming. A strong anti-incumbency sentiment brought its tumultuous 14-year rule to an end as the Labour Party recorded a thumping victory in the parliamentary elections. Economic woes, political scandals, intra-party discord and glaring lapses in delivering public services prompted angry voters to throw out the Conservatives. Defence minister Grant Shapps, who was among the prominent losers, put it bluntly: 'We've tried the patience of traditional Conservative voters with a propensity to create an endless political soap opera out of internal rivalries and divisions.'

Infighting apart, the ruling party came a cropper on every front in the past five years or so, with Boris Johnson's tenure as PM (2019-22) being especially disastrous. The parties held at 10 Downing Street during Covid lockdowns shocked the entire nation. Johnson's successor Liz Truss had the ignominy of being the UK's shortest-serving PM. And then came Indian-origin technocrat Rishi Sunak, raising hopes of a turnaround. However, it soon became evident that too much damage had



already been done and it was too late for him to stem the rot. Sunak has graciously accepted defeat and apologised to his party. While the Conservatives lick their wounds after the rout and go back to the drawing board, Keir Starmer and his Labour Party have little time to celebrate their landslide triumph. Britain is facing a slew of daunting challenges, and the path to national renewal will be inevitably rocky. The nation's tax burden is set to touch its highest since just after World War II, while the net debt is almost equivalent to the annual economic output. With so many problems at home, the new UK government may struggle to maintain continuity in foreign policy, such as offering unequivocal support to Ukraine in the war against Russia. Even as 28 Indian-origin candidates won, the real point of interest for India is the Free Trade Agreement, which has been in the works for quite some time. Delhi hopes that this pact will be finalised and sealed this year without major hitches.

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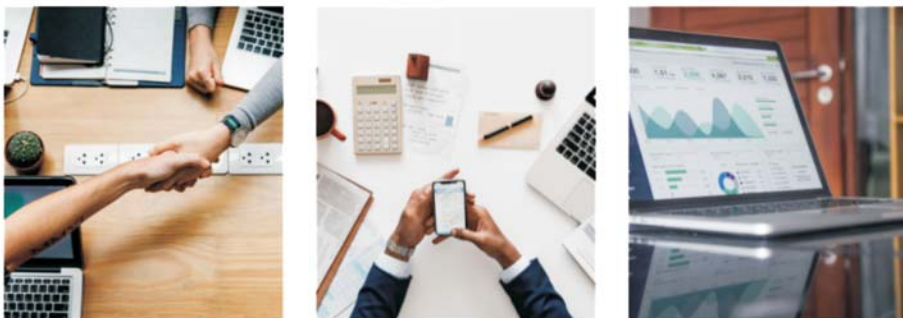
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PM Modi's Moscow Visit: New Vitality in Old Partnership

By: Kanwal Sibal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was expected to visit Russia in 2024 for the annual summit, a practice that got interrupted by Covid-19 and the Ukraine conflict. The annual summits have been a feature of India-Russia ties since the year 2000 when Putin assumed power.

If in 2024, too, the practice of annual summits had not been resumed, it would have sent a political signal that the two countries were indeed drifting apart. It would have given rise to speculation that India might be yielding to Western pressure to reduce the visibility of its ties with Russia at the highest level, or that India was conveying its own concerns about the strengthening of Russia-China strategic ties which had cast doubt in its mind on Russia's reliability as a special and privileged strategic partner, now that after the Galwan episode India's ties with China have foundered, with the armed forces of the two countries confronting each other on the border in Ladakh. The question has arisen whether Russia's growing dependence on China would leave it open to pressure from the latter to withhold arms supplies and spares to India in the event of a wider India-China conflict in the future.

Some commentators in India have argued that Russia is a declining power with an uncertain future and that India should therefore strengthen its ties with the West where its true interests lie in terms of economic growth, foreign investment,



access to advanced technologies, defence modernisation, democracy links, educational opportunities, diasporic connections, and so on. In this view, India should give up fence-sitting and choose sides more openly. Our media and think tanks generally promote this thinking. Our business community, which is obviously much more linked to the West than to Russia, is not active enough in promoting stronger economic ties with Russia.

The reality is that Russia is important to us bilaterally, regionally and internationally. It has stood by us since the mid-1950s when we were under great pressure by the

West politically and economically, and indeed, strategically. It provided us with real defence muscle, participated in laying the foundations of our heavy industry, and engaged in space and nuclear cooperation with us. Russia has shared sensitive technologies with us, unlike the West which has imposed technology denial sanctions on us for decades. Russia has never sanctioned us, unlike the Western countries. Russia is the only country which is collaborating with us currently in setting up nuclear power plants. Expanding our nuclear power sector is becoming more pressing in light of climate change issues.

Cooperation in the area of nuclear modular reactors could well be considered. Russia, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, remains the world's biggest country, with enormous natural resources, self-sufficient in hydrocarbons and food, a formidable nuclear power with powerful delivery systems, a permanent member of the Security Council, with a great tradition of diplomacy, and so on. How many countries in the world have such assets? Should we distance ourselves from such a country? What is our gain in doing that? Russia may have been weakened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it still is a formidable international player. As part of broadening the base of our diplomacy to increase our global profile and influence, we are reaching out to a whole host of countries which individually do not play any significant international role, do not possess an array of resources, are not a source of technologies or major investments. What would be the logic then to draw away from Russia?

It is wrong to describe our ties with Russia as "legacy" ties. The sense in which this word is used is equivocal. In reality, these ties continue to serve our interests in many important ways. Russia remains our biggest defence partner even as we diversify. (In fact, even in Soviet times, we procured major defence items from the West, excluding the US, and so diversity in defence supplies is not a new policy).

Democrats don't just need a new candidate. They need a reckoning

By Osita Nwanevu

It was 17 years ago that Joe Biden?—having just launched a second, hopeless bid for the presidency, his first having been toppled, 20 years earlier, by his habit of talking nonsense?—infamously offered Barack Obama a compliment he thought magnanimous: "You got the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy," he told the New York Observer. "I mean, that's a storybook, man." It was the political gaffe as art form?—at once a casually, shockingly ugly assessment of Black leaders and candidates like Jesse Jackson and Shirley Chisholm and a condescending slight against the party's fastest rising star, who was more than merely "articulate". His many failures aside, Obama won that primary, and the presidency, on his extraordinary gifts as a communicator.

On Friday, Obama tried, rather wanly, to put those gifts to use on



the behalf of his friend and former rival one more time. "Bad debate nights happen," he posted on X after the debacle the night before. "Trust me, I know. But this election is still a choice between someone who has fought for ordinary folks his entire life and someone who only cares about himself." It was more than a "bad debate night", though, as all who tuned in saw for themselves. After months of speculation and argument about his condition and in what could be the final, gutting irony of his political career, Biden

proved unprecedentedly and perhaps fatally inarticulate. Since he took office, Biden and his backers have labored mightily to convince the American people he's well enough not only to take on the duties of the presidency but to save American democracy. As it stands today, it's doubtful he can even save himself.

It's been reported now that Obama and other party leaders, their initial displays of support aside, have been harboring doubts about Biden's viability as a candidate; the Democratic omertà has only

been broken within the last few days. The critical question is why there wasn't movement to encourage Biden to drop out sooner. Leaks have been flooding out about the Biden team's extraordinary insularity and insecurity, but what's happened with Biden doesn't outwardly seem terribly different from the way Hillary Clinton coasted to the nomination with only Bernie Sanders in opposition in 2016 or the inertia that kept Dianne Feinstein and Ruth Bader Ginsburg in their posts even as their age became a liability.

It's clearly difficult for Democrats to dislodge their most important figures even when political realities suggest that they should; all told, the Democratic party is best understood less as a political party organized to enact or protect specific policies than as a professional association committed to protecting its most valued members.

Until now, that included Biden.

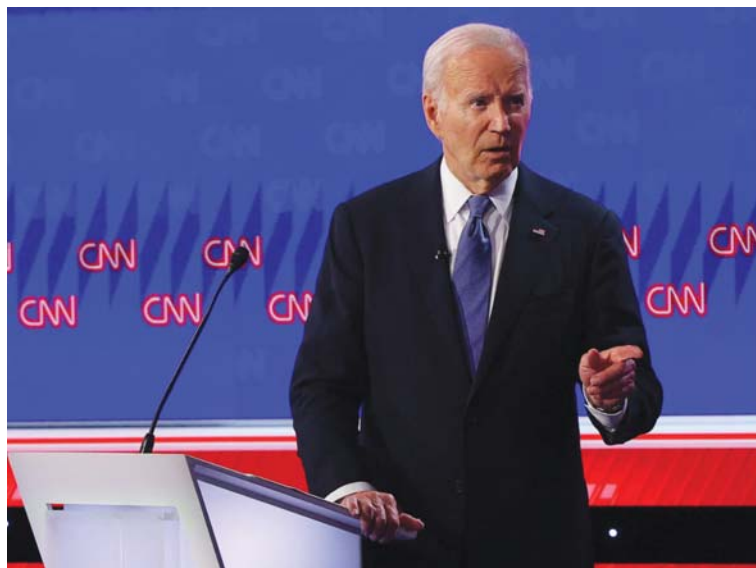
Years of disdain from the party's leadership were set aside after he beat Trump in 2020?—while there was open conversation that year about the unlikeliness of a second term, no one in the party wound up pushing seriously for a primary or a replacement even as his poll numbers slid and questions about his health emerged. It became clear that Democrats would only topple him in an emergency. After his debate performance, he finally presented them with one. And part of the alarm now gripping the party stems from the realization that Biden's state might cost the seats of moderate Democrats in Congress, who may have to spend their campaigns parrying questions about his health. On Tuesday, Jared Golden, a Maine Democrat in a district Donald Trump won by seven points in 2020, published an op-ed in response to Biden's debate performance saying he'd be fine with Trump winning the election.

Joe Biden is taking advice from his son, Hunter. This does not inspire confidence

By Arwa Mahdawi

The moment Joe Biden walked off the debate stage last Thursday night, the clock started ticking. There was a small window of time after the president's disastrous performance in which he could have made a dignified exit from the 2024 race. He could have called a press conference on Monday morning and said he had carefully assessed the calls made by the New York Times editorial board and high-profile pundits and political consultants urging him to step down. He could have said he had decided it was the best thing to do for the future of the US and democracy itself. Biden would have looked selfless; a man putting country before ego. The Democratic party could have gone swiftly to work, rallying behind a replacement.

I am not saying this scenario would have been simple. Of course not. It would have been a mess! But not as much of a mess as the situation we find ourselves in now. The window for a dignified exit has passed. Doubts about Biden's cognitive fitness, meanwhile, are only increasing. According to a CBS News/YouGov poll, 72% of registered voters don't think Biden has the mental and cognitive



health to serve as president; the same percentage don't think he should be running for president. Among Democratic registered voters, 46% don't think he should be running for president, up from 36% earlier this year. Biden disagrees. The president, it seems, has dug in his heels and is determined to stay the course for a rematch with Donald Trump. The Democratic National Convention (DNC) is apparently on board with making this happen. Bloomberg reported on Monday afternoon that the DNC is considering formally nominating Biden as early as mid-July to "stamp out intraparty chatter of

replacing him".

The president's family, a major influence on him, reportedly bear much responsibility for this decision. The Biden clan gathered at Camp David on Sunday and, according to multiple reports, urged him to "keep fighting". The New York Times stated: "One of the strongest voices imploring Mr Biden to resist pressure to drop out was his son, Hunter Biden, whom the president has long leaned on for advice." Which doesn't exactly inspire confidence: Hunter has poor judgment and a well-documented history of scandals. (To be clear, I am not sneering at his drug use;

addicts deserve empathy. Drugs aside, his questionable business dealings and chaotic personal life make it difficult to look at Hunter and think: "Yeah, that's a guy I should take advice from.")

Fingers are not just being pointed at Hunter. The conservative pundit Tucker Carlson reportedly told his audience that Jill Biden is keeping her husband away from people who would convince him to drop out. Meanwhile, the billionaire Bill Ackman ranted on X that Jill Biden doesn't want to give up the perks of being first lady and is forcing her husband to stay on. This narrative may be in bad faith and of questionable veracity. Still, it doesn't help that the first lady is on the cover of the July issue of Vogue, which dropped on Monday, with her nose in the air alongside the words: "We will decide our future." It's terrible timing and conservative commentators are gleefully using this to argue that the Biden family are power-hungry autocrats. To be fair, it is not just Biden's family who don't think he should drop out. He still has plenty of cheerleaders including Allan Lichtman, the historian who has correctly forecast the results of nine out of the 10 most recent presidential elections through his

13 "keys" to the White House. Lichtman recently told CNN calls to replace Biden are "foolhardy nonsense". Lichtman says debate performance isn't a factor that determines the outcome of an election: "Debate performances can be overcome."

Of course, one bad debate performance can be overcome. But Biden has been battling questions about his mental and physical fitness for a long time; it will take more than a few perky public performances to put people's minds at rest. Then there are Biden's other challenges. The president had already alienated progressives because of his unconscionable Gaza policy. Yes, many progressives will still hold their nose and vote for him in November, but will they campaign for him? Will they sacrifice spare hours to knock on doors and staff the phonelines for a man nicknamed Genocide Joe? Will they devote unpaid time to convincing the important undecided voting bloc that Biden is up to the job? I don't think so. The Democratic party has treated activists and young progressives with disdain. Now, more than ever, they will need their energy and enthusiasm to win.

Kathua ambush

India needs to review military, diplomatic options

THE killing of five Army personnel, including a Junior Commissioned Officer, in an ambush by heavily armed terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district has compounded the internal security challenge for the Narendra Modi government, barely a month after it assumed office for the third time. This is the latest in a series of terror incidents, beginning with the attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in Reasi district on June 9 — the very day the new government was installed in Delhi.

The situation is deteriorating despite PM Modi's go-ahead to officials to deploy the 'full spectrum of counter-terror capabilities'. Pakistan-based



terror groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba have stepped up activities in the Jammu region through their local agents and recruits. The government, which is gearing up to conduct the long-delayed Assembly elections in J&K by September, has its work cut out.

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane has vowed that the sacrifice of soldiers will not go unavenged and India will defeat the evil forces behind the Kathua attack. The onus is on India to review its military and diplomatic options. The naming and shaming of Pakistan on international forums has not been of much help as Islamabad has

continued to play the victim card, claiming that it is more sinned against than sinning as far as terrorism is concerned. Dependent on its allies for the first time in a decade, the ruling BJP may find it tough to adopt a typically muscular approach. During the Modi government's first term, cross-border 'surgical strikes' were carried out in the wake of the September 2016 Uri terror attack, while the Balakot airstrikes were conducted in retaliation for the February 2019 Pulwama suicide bombing. It's an 'enough is enough' scenario all over again, but Modi 3.0 might have to restrict itself to efforts to restore peace in J&K without crossing any red line.

Curb 'stupid plastics' and stop industry BS: urgent actions to prevent a plastic crisis

Plastic is everywhere, including our bodies. This year, various researchers found microplastics in every sample of placental tissue they tested; in human arteries, where plastics correlate with increased risk of heart attacks and strokes; in all 27 of the human testes they studied; and the semen of 40 otherwise healthy patients, adding to concerns that plastics – many of which contain hormone-disrupting chemicals – may be contributing to a global decline in sperm health.

These recent discoveries add to the rapidly mounting evidence of plastic's ubiquity and our growing understanding of the health risks it poses.

It is increasingly apparent that we are in a plastic health crisis. Industry profits from products that are not safe, passing these health and economic burdens on to the public and governments. The 2023 Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health estimated that the costs of disease, disability and premature death caused by exposure to the chemicals BPA, DEHP and PBDE exceeded \$675bn in 2015 in the US alone. A report from the University of Birmingham this month further links microplastics, inflammation and noncommunicable diseases.

Yet some researchers say we are actually in "the lull" before this crisis begins in earnest. In a 2024 research review about the implications of increasing microplastic pollution, the authors write "the widespread

outbreak of [microplastic] pollution has not yet occurred". The currently detectable levels of microplastic pollution are "likely just the beginning", the authors write, in part because plastic production has dramatically accelerated since the 1970s. We're approaching a tipping point because much of the plastic waste from 20 to 40 years ago is crumbling to micro-scale. While plastics may take over a thousand years to break down completely, they can become micro-particles much sooner. For example, opening a bottle cap can release microplastics immediately, and many forms of plastic begin degrading into micro-particles within decades or even years under certain conditions.

Despite a potential surge in environmental and health issues related to microplastics, we haven't yet started reigning the problem in. Global plastic production doubled from around 230m tons annually in 2000 to 460m tons in 2019, and is expected to double again by 2040.

The prognosis may be dire, but experts believe there are ambitious, urgent and effective ways to begin mitigating the wide-ranging harms caused by plastics. Here's what they say.

A global cap on plastic production – with a focus on single-use plastics

According to Dr Philip Landrigan, an anti-plastic advocate, physician and the director of the Program for Global Public Health and the Common Good at Boston

College, the most "fundamental and far-reaching step that must be taken to contain the global plastics crisis is to impose a global cap on plastic production". This would be analogous to the limits on chlorofluorocarbon manufacture imposed under the Montreal Protocol or restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions set under the Paris Climate Agreement, he says.

Some plastics are essential to industries like engineering and medicine, and have an important role in daily life – but Landrigan thinks it's important to curb what he calls "stupid plastics, which are basically single-use disposable plastic", he says.

This April, Landrigan participated in the lead-up to the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution in Ottawa, a group of global political representatives formed in 2022.

"The industry is out in force," he said at these negotiations. Companies involved in fossil fuels and plastics "want desperately to avoid a production cap", particularly on single-use plastics, which currently comprise about 40% of the plastics market and could become more important to their bottom line as gas demand declines.

Landrigan co-authored the recent Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health summary, and wants people to understand that microplastic pollution is not an abstract issue confined

to the stomachs of whales and seabirds. Instead, it is a tangible threat contributing directly to our disease and death. "My fear is that that level of concern does not yet exist today," says Landrigan, "and because of that, the plastics treaty might end up being a lot weaker than it could be."

Landrigan recommends those concerned about the health impacts of plastic make the connection between health and plastic explicit when urging their elected officials to ban single-use plastics and enact stringent plastic regulations akin to those in place in California, and those which New York state nearly passed in a recent legislative session and will reintroduce next year. Greater transparency about "plastic chemicals of concern"

According to Martin Wagner, a researcher at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and an author of the 2024 PlastChem report, over 3,600 of the 16,000-plus known chemicals in plastics are unregulated "plastic chemicals of concern", defined as chemicals that are carcinogenic, disruptive to hormones or otherwise toxic and bioaccumulative. Almost 400 are used in plastics that come into contact with food, and 97 have been found to leach out of plastics and into food or human bodies. "The public has the right to know what chemicals they're exposed to. It's not like consuming alcohol or smoking tobacco. It's totally involuntary," says Wagner.

Centre extends ban on Sikhs For Justice by 5 years

The ban on pro-Khalistan group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ), founded by US-based lawyer Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, has been extended by the Centre for five years for its relentless anti-India activities.

In a notification issued on Tuesday, the Union Home Ministry said the SFJ was declared a banned organisation five years ago under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for its anti-national activities. The notification said the central government is of the opinion that the SFJ continues to indulge in the activities which are prejudicial to the integrity and security of the country and is involved in anti-national and subversive activities in Punjab and elsewhere, intended to disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

It said that the SFJ is in close touch with the militant outfits and activists, and is supporting violent form of extremism and militancy in Punjab and elsewhere to carve out a sovereign Khalistan out of territory of India. The pro-Khalistan separatist group is encouraging and aiding the activities for secession of a part of the Indian territory and supporting separatist groups fighting for this purpose in India and elsewhere by indulging in activities and articulations intended to

disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

The Home Ministry said the government feels that if the unlawful activities of the SFJ are not curbed and controlled immediately, it is likely to escalate its subversive activities including attempts to carve out Khalistan nation out of the territory of India by destabilising the government established by law.

The SFJ continues to advocate the secession of Punjab from India and formation of Khalistan, it continues to propagate anti-national and separatist sentiments prejudicial to the territorial integrity and security of the country and escalates secessionist movements, support militancy and incite violence in the country, the notification said. "Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-sections (1) and (3) of section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967), the central government hereby extends the declaration of the Sikhs For Justice as an unlawful association and directs that this notification shall, subject to any order that may be made under section 4 of the said Act, have effect for a further period of five years from 10th day of July, 2024," it said.

'What a Downgrade': Mirzapur Season 3 Fails to Impress Loyal Fans But These Memes Are a Hit

After a long, four-year wait, Mirzapur Season 3 finally arrives, but it sadly falls short of the explosive spectacle fans had hoped for. When the first season of Mirzapur burst onto the scene in 2018, it delivered a rush of adrenaline with its potent blend of action, deceit, politics, and power. The emotional gut punch of Bablu Pandit's death, brought to life by Vikrant Massey, moved fans to tears, while Pankaj Tripathi's chilling portrayal of Kaleen Bhaiya left audiences spellbound. In the second season, Ali Fazal's Guddu Pandit's quest for revenge made us root for him, and Divyenndu's dynamic performance as the power-hungry Munna Bhaiya was a highlight. Now, after the excruciating four-year wait, Mirzapur 3 dropped at midnight, only to leave fans feeling let down. Guddu and Kaleen Bhaiya return, joined by Rasika Dugal as Beena Tripathi and Shweta Tripathi as Golu. However, Munna Bhaiya's absence is keenly felt. Eager fans binge-watched the new season almost immediately, only to find that while the show doesn't hold back on

violence, the brutality often feels excessive, lacking the impactful storytelling of previous seasons. Fans have noted that the series' earlier charm lay in its quiet moments amid the chaos—a nuance that's missing in Season 3. Disappointment was widespread. Some fans found the season boring, others lamented the weak storyline. The internet soon buzzed with humorous memes and jokes on "X," reflecting the general sentiment that Season 3 was a downgrade. One fan lamented, "MIRZAPUR Season 1 >>>>>> Season 2 and 3. Worst experience in Season 3.... no content, no story no action ..too much boring season." Another quipped, "#MirzapurS3 is like a slow-cooked khichdi—too many characters and plots mixed together, making it a boring mess." Despite the mixed reactions, the post-credit scene hints at Mirzapur Season 4. But the big question is, will fans wait for it as eagerly as they did for Season 3, which has clearly missed the mark? Only time will tell.

Trump, Biden discuss Ukraine and Middle East crises in first transition meeting

US President-elect Donald Trump returned to the White House on Wednesday and met with outgoing President Joe Biden at the Oval Office, a week after the Republican leader's spectacular victory in the November 5 election. This was Trump's first visit to the White House following his 2020 election loss to Biden and his refusal to accept his defeat while claiming fraud. During the meeting, Biden and Trump discussed Ukraine and the Middle East. Arguing that supporting Ukraine is important for US national security, the outgoing President said that a strong and stable Europe would keep America from going into a war, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said. At the start of the meeting, Biden welcomed Trump and both sat next to the roaring fireplace in the Oval Office. Biden told Trump that he would ensure a smooth and peaceful transfer of power and to



do all he could "to make sure you're accommodated". To this, Trump replied, "It'll be as smooth as it can get." Biden was once Trump's rival until July before a disastrous debate performance against the Republican leader caused concerns among the Democrats over his mental fitness and age to serve a second term. Several Democratic leaders asked Biden to step aside. Biden subsequently gave in and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris.

Wednesday's pleasant exchange between Biden and Trump was a sharp contrast to the criticism the two leaders made at each other for years. During campaigning, Biden, 81, portrayed Trump as a threat to democracy, while Trump, 78, called Biden incompetent. Both their respective teams hold vastly different positions on policies from climate change to Russia to trade. First Lady Jill Biden joined her husband and congratulated Trump on his victory. She

handed him a letter of congratulations addressed to former First Lady Melania Trump, according to The Hill. Trump's motorcade rolled through the heavily guarded White House gate and the President-elect was greeted in the Oval Office by Biden. Trump did not extend the same courtesy to Biden and invited him to the White House in 2020, a longstanding tradition, and alleged widespread fraud in his electoral loss.

Earlier on Tuesday, White

House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre spoke about Biden's decision to invite Trump, saying the 81-year-old President believes in a peaceful transfer of power. "He believes in the norms, he believes in our institution, he believes in the peaceful transfer of power," she told reporters. Outside the White House gates, signs of the impending power transfer were evident with construction already underway for the stands for VIP guests to sit during the parade that will take place after Trump takes oath on January 20, 2025.

Trump became the first President in over 130 years to win non-consecutive terms, defeating Harris and securing 312 electoral votes as opposed to the Vice President's 226. He swept all the seven swing states, including Pennsylvania and Arizona. Trump won in 2016, defeating former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Melania Trump's 2nd stint as US First Lady unlikely to be full-time: Report

After declining a White House invitation from the outgoing First Lady Jill Biden on Wednesday, Melania Trump is unlikely to shift to Washington full time as First Lady, sources told Axios, signalling her willingness to break traditions. Talks on how and where she will invest her time are underway, CNN reported, while citing sources. However, it is more likely that Melania Trump will divide her time between Palm Beach and New York, where her son Barron Trump is attending New York University, visiting the White House primarily for ceremonial events such as state dinners or special occasions, Axios reported. One of her first official decisions was to bypass the symbolic meeting with Jill Biden at the White House as outgo-

ing President Joe Biden hosted her husband and President-elect Donald Trump in the Oval Office on Wednesday. Both the leaders discussed the Ukraine and Middle East conflict in the first transition meeting. Sources told CNN that Melania had to skip

the meeting due to her prior schedule related to her book. On Wednesday,

the office of Melania Trump confirmed that she would not be attending the meeting. This incident hints that Melania



nia Trump, who invested her first term reshaping the role of First Lady, is establishing an early precedent, suggesting that she will wield even greater autonomy in a potential second term. "I'm not

anxious because this time is different. I have much more experience and much

more knowledge. I was in the White House before.

When you go in, you know exactly what to expect," Melania said during an interview with Fox News in October. Melania Trump remained mostly absent from her husband's campaign trail during the 2024 presidential race, as she focused on promoting her memoir.

She did not introduce Donald Trump at the Republican National Convention in July. However, in a Fox News interview, she mentioned that a letter she wrote after the assassination attempt against Trump in Pennsylvania had served as a substitute.

Melania Trump's 2nd stint as US First Lady unlikely to be full-time: Report



There is an atmosphere of fear, mistrust and division in the US. After Donald Trump's victory in the US elections, many fear that he might implement radical policies suggested in a 900-page playbook, Project 2025. It is the document's origins and take on contentious issues, like immigration and abortion, why a section of Americans are scared. Though Trump has distanced himself from the handbook, the majority Republicans have in the House and Senate and the portrayal

of the President-elect as a villain are giving people the jitters.

The 900-page document was put together by the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank. The think-tank has advised several Republican presidents since Ronald Reagan. It advised Trump on policy issues in his first term, and was among the first to congratulate him after his victory in the 2024 presidential election.

Will India see a Teesta twist as Hasina meets Xi?

Weeks after her India visit, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is on a three-day trip to China. Ahead of her meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, there has been chatter about a new dimension to the Teesta reservoir project. India wants to help Bangladesh in the project and keep China away from the strategic Chicken's Neck.

(News Agency)-There are no free lunches. And that truism will definitely play out as Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on Wednesday and talks about financial aid for her country. India will be keenly watching to see if the Teesta project is discussed and Bangladesh and China try to bring a new dimension to it. There is chatter regarding that already. The Teesta water-sharing has been a contentious issue between India and Bangladesh. And now a Teesta reservoir project in which China is seeking to participate has got experts in India worried.

The location of the reservoir project close to the Siliguri Corridor, also known as the Chicken's Neck, makes it strategically important for India. The Chicken's Neck is a 20-22km strip of land that connects the Northeast states to mainland India. China has always wanted to get closer to it. "Ahead of Sheikh Hasina's Beijing visit, people backed by the government started a buzz that it was possible that Bangladesh could bring both India and China together on the Teesta project," a Dhaka-based senior political analyst told IndiaToday.in.

The analyst was referring to remarks by Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Bangladesh's former ambassador to China, to BBC



Bangla on July 8.

"It is important for us to keep both India and China happy. Since the Teesta reservoir project is a large one, it is possible that Bangladesh could request India to work on a part of the project, while China could help with another part," said Faiz Ahmad. He added that this subject could come up for discussion during the Hasina-Xi meeting.

A joint participation by India and China is a new dimension in the Teesta reservoir project, and it won't be what New Delhi would be interested in.

"The mention of joint participation shows that Bangladesh hasn't moved away from China on the Teesta project. Why else

would a former diplomat make such remarks on the eve of the Hasina and Xi meeting," said the Bangladeshi political analyst.

The river water-sharing issue has been hanging fire from even before Bangladesh was formed.

"The river water-sharing issue between Bangladesh and India is a complex one. Fifty-four rivers flow into Bangladesh from India. This issue has been pending since Bangladesh was part of the Pakistani regime," veteran Bangladeshi journalist Swadesh Roy tells IndiaToday.in.

"Pakistan settled the river water-sharing issue in the western part early on but did not try to solve the issue in the

eastern part," he adds. India announced during Sheikh Hasina's visit in June that it would send a technical team to evaluate the Teesta water conservation and management project.

Dhaka wants to build a large reservoir on the Teesta to hold surplus run-off water during monsoons. To India's discomfort, China has been more than eager to finance the project.

Hasina's China visit is being seen as a balancing act to keep the two key players happy. The trip, planned for four days, will be wrapped up in three days after all scheduled programmes, reported Bangladesh media. Hasina will leave for Bangladesh after meeting Xi at 4pm (local time) at the Great Hall of the People.

India has historical and cultural ties with Bangladesh, and helped in the country's liberation from Pakistan. An expansionist China is, however, eyeing a stronger foothold there because of Bangladesh's geographical location.

"Sheikh Hasina has very intelligently maintained relations with India and China. She needs India to be in power, and China for economic support. Because of its fiscal, trade and budgetary deficits, Bangladesh needs a lot of money. So, Hasina has to rely on China," Professor Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University tells IndiaToday.in.

Operation Azm-i-Istehkam: Pakistan's New Counter-Terrorism Strategy Backfires

(News Agency)-The persistent threats by high-ranking Pakistani officials and ministers to target terrorist groups inside Afghanistan have raised the spectre of further destabilisation in the region. For a country that has struggled to contain the menace of terrorism within its borders, Pakistan's military-dominated establishment often obfuscates its shortcomings by blaming the Afghan Taliban and accusing it of providing sanctuary to terrorist groups targeting Pakistan.

But this convenient excuse to make Afghanistan a scapegoat has failed to address the root causes of Pakistan's internal security woes. In fact, these threats mark a misdirected escalation in Islamabad's approach to dealing with terrorism. Such actions have further strained the already fragile relations between Islamabad and Kabul.

With an exponential surge in terrorist violence in the country, Pakistan's federal government, under pressure from China,



whose five nationals were killed in one such incident on March 26, announced its latest counterterrorism operation, Azm-i-Istehkam (Strong Resolve for Stability) on June 22. A press release from Pakistan's Prime Minister's Office (PMO), affirmed that this "reinvigorated and re-energised" military campaign "will integrate and synergise multiple lines of effort to combat the menaces of extremism and

terrorism in a comprehensive and decisive manner." This was followed by Defence Minister Khwaja Asif's declaration of June 27 emphasising in no uncertain terms that Islamabad would not hesitate targeting terrorist groups inside Afghanistan as part of this counterterrorism push.

Operation Azm-i-Istehkam is the latest in a series of military campaigns by the Pakistani state to root out terrorism from

the country. In 2014, Pakistan launched its first large-scale counterterrorism operation, Zarb-e-Azb, or Sword of Prophet Muhammad, against various extremist groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in its North Waziristan region. While it displaced nearly a million people and led to hundreds of civilian deaths, Pakistan claimed to have succeeded in dismantling the terror ecosystem and eliminating over 3,500 terrorists. Despite these claims, the operation failed to address the root causes of extremism in the country, allowing the TTP and other groups to regain strength swiftly and engage in anti-state violence. Following Zarb-e-Azb, the Pakistan Army initiated Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, or Rejection of Strife, to consolidate its gains. However, the recurrent terrorist attacks indicated that the campaign did little to dismantle the terror ecosystem in the country, allowing the terrorists to operate with relative impunity.

SUPERBOYS OF MALEGAON

WORLD PREMIERE / TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 2024 / GALA PRESENTATION



Reema Kagti's new upcoming film *SUPERBOYS OF MALEGAON* has been selected by the 2024 Toronto International Film Festival for a World Premiere Gala Screening to be held on September 13th. Written by Varun Grover and executive produced by Ritesh Sidhwani, Zoya Akhtar, Reema Kagti, and Farhan Akhtar, the film stars Adarsh Gourav, Vineet Kumar Singh, and Shashank Arora.

Superboys of Malegaon is a film based on the life of Nasir Shaikh, an amateur

filmmaker from the town of Malegaon. The residents of the town look to Bollywood cinema for a much needed escape from daily drudgery. Nasir gets inspired to make a film for the people of Malegaon, by the people of Malegaon. He bands together his ragtag group of friends to bring his vision to life, thereby bringing a fresh lease of life into the town. The film is a poignant yet uplifting take on both filmmaking and friendship - and what happens when those two worlds collide.

Taylor Swift performs 'Mary's Song' for first time in 16 years



Pop icon Taylor Swift finally treated her fans to a song they had waited years to hear live.

The singer-songwriter surprised the sold-out crowd at her Eras Tour show in Amsterdam by performing a mashup of 'Mary's Song', 'So High School', and 'Everything Has Changed' during the secret songs segment, reports People.

At the end of the mashup, Swift sang the closing lyrics to the 2006 classic 'Mary's Song', which has taken on new meaning since she started dating NFL star Travis Kelce: "I'll be 87, you'll be 89 / I'll still look at you like the stars that shine / In the sky, oh my my my."

According to People, the 'Fortnight' singer had a big smile on her face as she performed the song for the first time since 2008. Fans cheered as they heard those

lyrics because the Kansas City Chiefs player's jersey number is 87, and Swift was born in 1989 (and has an album called 1989).

Kelce was present for this special moment. He has become a fixture at Swift's record-breaking stadium tour and even joined her onstage for a show in London last month. Among the audience members who experienced the moment live were Kelce's teammate Patrick Mahomes and his wife, Brittany Mahomes. The couple stopped in Amsterdam during their European vacation, which also included Spain, London, and Switzerland. With the football players in the crowd, Swift switched up the lyrics once again in 'Karma' to mention "the guy on the Chiefs," which she sings whenever Kelce is in the crowd.

Avika Gor on her character in Telugu film: 'After playing bechari roles, this was a good change'

Actress Avika Gor has opened up on her character Sara in the upcoming Telugu thriller fantasy movie 'Shanmukha', shared that after playing a lot of 'bechari' and victim roles, this was a good change for her.

"After playing a lot of 'bechari' and victim roles, this was a good change. Here, I am playing someone who takes leaps and goes out of her way to get things done," she added.

Directed by Shanmugam Sappani and produced by Thulasi Ram Sappani under Sapbro Productions, 'Shanmukha' has a unique blend of thriller and fantasy elements. The music is composed by Ravi Basrur.

The movie also stars Aadi Sai Kumar in the lead. It will soon be released in the theatres.

Avika made her Hindi television debut in 2007 with 'Sssshhh...Koi Hai', while she made her film debut in Tollywood in 2013 with 'Uyyala Jampala'.

She has been a part of Telugu movies 'Lakshmi Raave Maa Intiki', 'Cinema Choopistha Mava', 'Thanu Nenu', 'Ekkadiki Pothavu Chinnavada', 'Net', and '10th Class Diaries'.

Avika gained recognition with her portrayal of young Anandi

in the TV show 'Balika Vadhu'. The actress has also featured in shows like 'Sasural Simar Ka', 'Laado-Veerpur Ki Mardani', and has been a contestant in the stunt-based reality series 'Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 9'.



Reflecting on her role, Avika said: "The character Sara in 'Shanmukha' is trying to investigate something. To play someone who is so curious, interested, and courageous because the character is very confident was interesting for me."

Hindenburg shared Adani report with client two months before publishing it: Sebi

Sebi charged Hindenburg of making 'unfair' profits from 'collusion' to use 'non-public' and 'misleading' information and induce 'panic selling' in Adani Group stocks.

US short-seller Hindenburg Research had shared an advance copy of its damning report against Adani group with New York-based hedge fund manager Mark Kingdon about two months before publishing it and profited from a deal to share spoils from share price movement, according to market regulator Sebi.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), in its 46-page show cause notice to Hindenburg, detailed how the US short seller, the New York hedge fund and a broker tied to Kotak Mahindra Bank benefited from the over USD 150 billion routs in the market value of Adani group's 10 listed firms post-publication of the report.

Sebi charged Hindenburg of making "unfair" profits from "collusion" to use "non-public" and "misleading" information and induce "panic selling" in Adani Group stocks. Hindenburg, which made public the Sebi notice, in its response, has described the show cause as an attempt to "silence and intimidate those who expose corruption and fraud perpetrated by the most powerful individuals in India" and revealed that the vehicle used to bet against Adani's flagship firm Adani



Enterprises Ltd belonged to Kotak Mahindra (International) Ltd, a Mauritius-based subsidiary of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd.

KMIL's fund placed bets on Adani Enterprises Ltd for its client Kingdon's Kingdon Capital Management. Sebi notice includes extracts of time-stamped chats between an employee of the hedge fund and KMIL traders for selling future contracts in AEL.

Kotak Mahindra Bank has stated that Kingdon "never disclosed that they had

any relationship with Hindenburg nor that they were acting on the basis of any price-sensitive information". Sebi — which last year told a Supreme Court-appointed panel that it was investigating 13 opaque offshore entities that held between 14 per cent and 20 per cent across five publicly traded stocks of the Adani group — has sent notices not just to Hindenburg but also to KMIL, Kingdon and Hindenburg founder Nathan Anderson.

Senior lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani, who had in the past spoken for the Adani

group, in a post on X claimed that Kingdon had a Chinese link.

Kingdon is married to "Chinese spy" Anla Cheng, he claimed.

"Accomplished Chinese spy Anla Cheng, who along with her husband Mark Kingdon, hired Hindenburg for a research report on Adani, engaged the services of Kotak to facilitate a trading account to short sell Adani shares; made millions of dollars from their short selling; eroded Adani market cap enormously," he alleged. Kingdon, which had a controlling stake in KMIL's K-India Opportunities Fund Ltd, had a pact to share with Hindenburg 30 per cent of profit made from trading in securities based on the report, the Sebi letter said, adding this profit share was cut to 25 per cent due to the extra time and effort needed to reroute trades via the K India fund.

The market regulator said Kingdon transferred USD 43 million in two tranches to build short positions in AEL. The K India fund built short positions for 8,50,000 shares ahead of the report release and squared off these positions soon after the report was released.

According to Sebi, Hindenburg published a report titled 'Adani Group: How the World's 3rd Richest Man is Pulling The Largest Con in Corporate History' on January 24, 2023 (United States time — January 25, 2023, according to IST) during pre-market hours.

"Prior to the release of the Hindenburg Report, concentration in short-selling activity was observed in the derivatives of Adani Enterprises Ltd," it said. "Pursuant to the release of the said report, the price of AEL fell by around 59 per cent during the period from January 24, 2023 to February 22, 2023" — from Rs 3,422 to Rs 14,04.85 per share. Sebi said K India Opportunities Fund Ltd — Class F (KIOF Class F) opened a trading account and started trading in the scrip of AEL just a few days prior to the publication of the report and then squared off its entire short position post-publication of the Hindenburg Report, making significant profits of Rs 183.23 crore (USD 22.25 million).

"The net profit after trading and legal expenses comes to USD 22.11 million," Sebi said.

As part of the deal, Kingdon owned Hindenburg USD 5.5 million, of which USD 4.1 million had been paid as of June 1, the notice said.

In its response to Sebi, Kingdon Capital said it had got legal option that it could "enter into a research services agreement with a third-party firm that publicly releases

Chandigarh woman loses Rs 80 lakh in new Aadhaar-Sim card link scam

India is currently dealing with a web of online scams, with thousands of individuals losing lakhs and crores to date. Scammers are constantly developing new tricks to deceive people and steal their money. In the latest case of online fraud,

a woman from Chandigarh fell victim to a sophisticated scam, losing Rs 80 lakh to fraudsters posing as Crime Branch officers. What makes this case noteworthy is that the scammers targeted the linkage between Aadhaar and SIM cards to threaten the victim. According to a report by Tribune India, the victim, a resident of Sector 11, Chandigarh, received a call from an individual claiming to be a police officer from the Crime Branch in Mumbai. The caller asserted that a SIM card issued against her Aadhaar card was being used in illegal money laundering activities.

In an attempt to appear credible, the fraudster informed the victim that there were 24 money laundering complaints filed against her. The caller then threatened the victim with a possible arrest. Panicked and seeking to avoid any legal trouble, the victim followed the caller's instructions meticulously. To clear the case, the caller demanded that she deposit Rs 80 lakh into a specified bank account as part of an ongoing investigation, promising that the money would be returned if she was found innocent. Desperate to clear her name, the woman transferred the money, only to realise later that she



had been duped. By the time the victim understood the deception, the scammer had disappeared without a trace, and the funds were unrecoverable. A case has been registered at the cybercrime police station, and an investigation is underway.

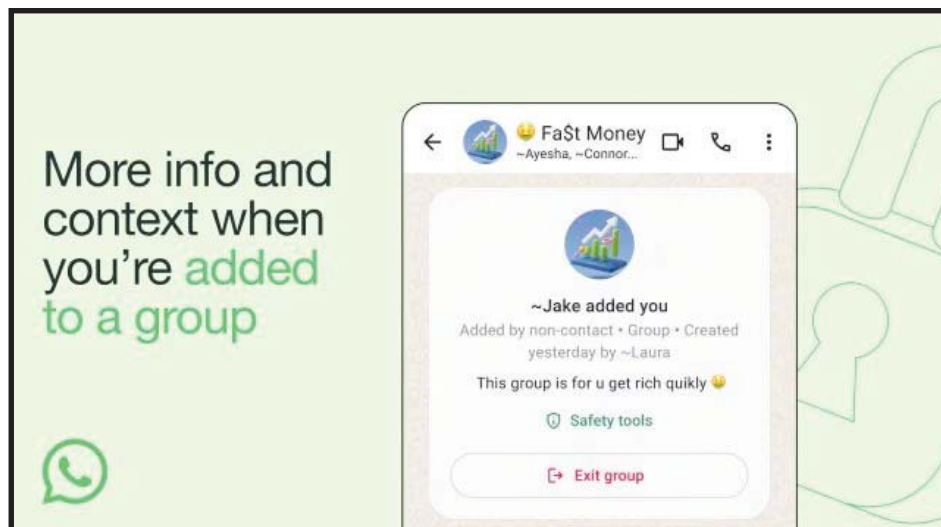
This is yet another case highlighting how scammers are evolving their tricks to deceive people. It underscores the importance of being vigilant. Here are some essential tips to stay safe from such scams:

Always verify the identity of the caller. Genuine officials will never ask for personal details or money over the phone. Cross-check by calling the organisation directly using a verified contact number.

Never share sensitive personal information like Aadhaar numbers, bank details, or OTPs over the phone. Legitimate organisations will not request such information in this manner.

Be wary of calls that use scare tactics to force immediate action. Law enforcement agencies follow proper legal procedures and do not resort to threats of arrest over the phone. If you receive a suspicious call, consult with family members, friends, or trusted sources before taking any action. A second opinion can often prevent a hasty decision. Report any suspicious calls or messages to the police and your service provider immediately. Early reporting can help prevent further scams and assist in the investigation. Use official channels such as government websites and helplines to verify any claims related to Aadhaar or other official documents.

WhatsApp announces new feature to safeguard users from joining unknown groups



A new feature on WhatsApp looks to keep users safe by giving them more information about a group before joining it. That means the next time someone you

don't know adds you to a WhatsApp group, you'll be shown additional details such as who added you, when the group was created, and who created it.

The Meta-owned platform said that this particular user safety feature is intended to help someone make a more informed decision on whether or not it's a group that they know or want to be a part of. "It is particularly helpful if you just met someone or a group of people, and haven't yet saved them in your contacts," WhatsApp said in a press release on Tuesday, July 9.

While the feature may already be available to some WhatsApp users, it will be rolled out to everyone on the platform in the coming weeks. Bad actors are known to

add users to unknown WhatsApp groups in order to push crypto or job scams, hoping that someone falls for them. Users can also be flooded with spam after being added to such groups.

Hence, in 2019, WhatsApp decided to give its users more control over who can add them to a group. Now, users can head to Settings & go to Account > Privacy > Groups, where they can choose between three options: "Everyone," "My Contacts," or "My Contacts Except." Outside of a group, what happens when a stranger texts you on WhatsApp? In that case too, the instant messaging platform said that it will provide the user with more context about the account holder that has texted them.

Households face 'curry crisis' as onion, tomato and potato prices skyrocket

As of June 30, wholesale onion prices surged by 106% compared to the previous year, while potato prices rose by 96%.

Households across India are feeling the pressure as prices of essential kitchen staples like onions, potatoes, and tomatoes continue to soar.

Official data revealed that the persistently high prices are largely attributed to reduced output last year, reported The Hindustan Times.

This has been exacerbated by a hot and dry summer since April, which strained supplies of commonly consumed vegetables and heightened demand for these essentials. As of June 30, wholesale onion prices surged by 106% compared to the previous year, while potato prices rose by 96%.

Despite a 40% annual decline in wholesale tomato prices, monthly figures spiked by a staggering 112.39%. Retail prices mirrored this trend, with tomatoes reaching an average of Rs 55 per kg by July 3, up from Rs 35 a month earlier, as reported by the Consumer Affairs ministry's price monitoring division.

Last year's irregular rainfall led to a 20% drop in onion output, compounded by a further 20% reduction in winter-sown onions in 2024.

It may be noted that high temperatures and depleting reservoir levels since April also impacted seasonal vegetables like okra, gourds, beans, cabbage, and turnips, causing severe rotting and driving prices higher.

In its monthly bulletin, the Reserve Bank



of India (RBI) highlighted that while April, the exceptionally hot summer and headline inflation softened in March- low reservoir levels could stress summer

crop production.

The RBI also highlighted the need for careful monitoring of rabi arrivals of pulses and vegetables amid concerns that fluctuating high food prices, particularly in pulses and vegetables, could hinder achieving the 4 percent retail inflation target.

While consumer inflation in India moderated to 4.75%, food inflation remained elevated at 8.69%, as noted in the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) minutes released on June 26.

The central bank also flagged that wholesale inflation in India surged to 2.61 percent, the highest in the past year, primarily driven by escalating food prices.

RBI allows resident Indians to open Foreign Currency Accounts in IFSC, Gujarat

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in a notification issued on Wednesday evening allowed resident individuals to open Foreign Currency Account (FCA) in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) at GIFT City in Gujarat under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS). On a review, it has been decided that Authorised Persons may facilitate remittances for all permissible purposes under LRS to IFSCs for availing financial services or financial products as per the International Financial Services Centres Authority Act, 2019 within IFSCs; and all current or capital account transactions, in any other foreign jurisdiction (other than IFSCs) through an FCA held in IFSCs," the RBI said in the notification.

"Authorised Persons shall bring the contents of this circular to the notice of their constituents and customers," it added. Authorised persons are those authorised by the RBI to provide forex services such as banks and specific FX dealers as such transactions will be routed through the banking system.

Currently remittances under LRS to IFSCs are permitted only for making investments in IFSCs in securities except those issued by entities/companies resident in India (outside IFSC); and for payment of fees for education to foreign universities or foreign institutions in IFSCs for pursuing courses mentioned in the gazette notification no. SO 2374(E) dated May 23, 2022, issued by the Central Government. "For these permissible purposes, resident individuals can open Foreign Currency Account (FCA) in IFSCs," the RBI said. "The directions contained in this circular have been issued under sections 10(4) and 11(1) of the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (42 of 1999) and are without prejudice to permissions/approvals, if any, required under any other law," the banking regulator said. Tapan Ray, MD and Group CEO, GIFT City said "We at GIFT IFSC welcome the Reserve Bank of India's recent circular expanding the scope of the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS).

Hathras And The Making Of Superhero 'Babas'

By Nishtha Gautam

The day Baba died, my childhood breathed its last, too. I was in Benares, shooting a documentary, when a text message from my mother on the family group shattered my sense of invincibility. Baba was a superhero who made me, and many others, believe that we were neither our jobs nor our social (marital) status. We, the long train of kids, competing for Baba's attention, would often joke about much later in life how our bosses and spouses wondered about our sense of righteousness—something that fuelled the tendency to live life on our terms—free of fear or favour. Baba addressed the next-door tea hawker in our small town with his full name. He addressed men he asked for directions from as "Shriman". He made everyone feel like they mattered. My grandfather, Baba, was a man that everyone needs in their life. Someone who makes them believe in the justness of cosmic logic. Someone who sees and hears them. Someone who can make the wrongs right. And this need is precisely what people like Baba Narayan Hari, also known as Saakar Vishwa Hari 'Bhole Baba', prey on. The reason I have



jostled with my rational mind to expose an utterly private, raw, memory for all and sundry to prey on is because I can only make sense of the Hathras tragedy—a stampede at a satsang that has already claimed at least 121 lives—through decoding this need. It doesn't help my rational mind that the geographical region in the centre of this horrible tragedy is barely half an hour from where I was born. It is possible that at least one of the deceased was known to my family. A Mahatma And A Murder
 Ironically, many 'babas' were known to my Baba. At least in their non-baba lives. I have a vague memory of a man who took care of me as a child but became a 'mahatma' later. No, there was nothing Gandhian about this Mahatma. A murder investigation led to this

transformation. The man just disappeared one day. When he emerged again, it was with all the ritualistic bells and whistles. I have another memory to tap into at this moment. I once participated in a dance competition and won the second prize (I'll kill to win a dance award today). The song was "Aaj phir jeene ki tamanna hai..." from Dev Anand-starrer Guide. The film delineates the trajectory of a charlatan, Raju 'Guide', becoming a self-sacrificing godman. Raju Guide didn't sign up for being a holy man, a performer of miracles. He was destined to be so. In his beginning as a sadhu, was his end. Unlike real life, though, the film was driven by a sense of poetic justice. Raju Guide

had to die because of his devotees' belief in his superpowers. In reality, it is the believers who pay the price for belief. Men and women claiming to have direct access to god—of whichever kind—are nothing new or peculiar. The claim of divinity is one of the oldest, most effective tricks to avert reproach and responsibility. It is common to all civilisations. Nobody questions those who claim to be doing god's work. Those who dare meet their fate. God Is Perfect- Since we in India claim ourselves to be the guru of all civilisations, a quick note on how our belief business goes. Unlike the Greco-Roman gods, who are seen as fickle-minded and driven by similar passions that govern the mortals, our gods are largely seen as just and benevolent. They do the right thing. By extension, then, their 'conduits' or representatives are also seen as doing the right things. No matter how wrong they are. Questioning them becomes questioning a just god. Looking westward, "All mythology opens with demigods", writes Ralph Waldo Emerson in Representative Men. In the mythology of our times, godmen are the demigods, the superhumans. In etymology

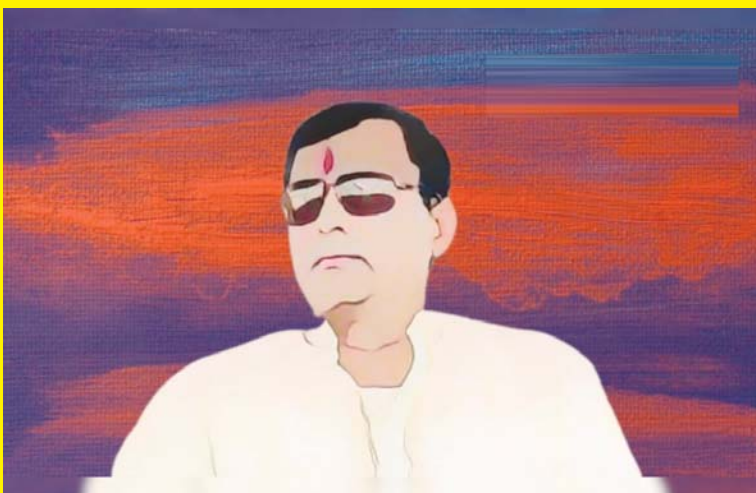
and conceptualisation, these alleged superhumans come from Goethe's "übermensch," Nietzsche's "übermensch," Shaw's "superman," etc. Godmen see and thus elevate the unseen and the marginalised. They also see and alleviate the fears of the seen and the mainstreamed. They signify hope. In the modern mythologies, this is the role of comic book superheroes. The "Supes"
 Commenting on his assumption as the new Superman more than a decade ago, actor Henry Cavill commented, "India has a rich mythology and they're both (Superman and the heroes of Hindu mythology) rooted in the same thing - hope and goodness". Unfortunately, the very hope and goodness of Indian spiritual traditions has been long exploited by charlatans pretending to be superheroes. In that sense, these sundry babas and matas are closer to what the OTT series The Boys has conceptualised: the "Supes". The Supes have superpowers, they have infiltrated all the structures of power, they control the minds of the masses, and they are self-serving. Their days, the series tends to suggest, however, are numbered. What about the babas?

In God's Name: How 'Babas' And 'Matas' Feed On Insecurity

By Bharti Mishra Nath

Days after a tragic stampede in Hathras on July 2 that claimed 121 lives, self-styled godman Suraj Pal Singh, a.k.a. 'Bhole Baba', has still not been arrested. In fact, through his lawyer, Singh continues to hurl new allegations about the cause of the stampede. The Hathras tragedy yet again brings to the fore Indians' unhealthy obsession with babas and matas, despite the plethora of controversies and criminal cases that frequently come up against such god-men and -women. People from even the most disadvantaged backgrounds don't mind waiting for hours for 'darshan' and spending their last saved penny as 'dakshina', with the hope that the baba's 'magical powers' would cure their sickness and eradicate their problems.

Gurus have been part of Indian tradition for ages, and there is no denying that many of them brought succour to the lives of



their followers in the form of moral guidance and financial help. Many have also worked for the upliftment of lower castes, who have long been discriminated against in society. The modern Indian godmen, however, are a different brand. They are flashy, powerful, influential, more connected to the worldly world, and draw huge crowds of supporters. And, they are not new to scandals.

Godmen And Crime

Godmen like Gurmeet Ram Rahim

Singh and Asaram Bapu have in the past faced charges for crimes like murder, rape, tax evasion and fraud. But Indians continue to be in thrall of them. In 2010, the misdeeds and corruption of one such godman, Nithyananda, came to light after a video of him engaging in sleazy acts with women surfaced in the media. He fled India and has remained in hiding since 2019. In December of that year, in fact,

he claimed that he had created a new Hindu micronation, 'Kailaasa'.
 "In India, we see godmen as someone who would give us instant relief from anxiety and pain. Poverty and unemployment contribute to such anxieties and pave the way for babas whose 'social healing' comforts people," says Dr Malinee Priya, Associate Professor of Psychology at Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar College, Delhi University.

Bhole Baba's Adventures

In the latest case, what's surprising is that few had heard about Bhole Baba before the stampede made national headlines. There are many other such religious 'gurus' operating across India. Reportedly, for 18 years, Bhole Baba had been a constable in the Uttar Pradesh Police, working across various districts and spending time with the intelligence unit. Perhaps it was this experience that gave him

a deep understanding of societal dynamics and human psychology, which he later capitalised on to build his following. Singh had already been embroiled in several legal cases - including allegations of sexual assault - but that didn't deter his supporters, who continued to see him as a 'healer' and 'exorcist'. At one point, he was arrested for taking a dead girl away from her family, claiming that he could resurrect her.

'Miracles' And Religion

It's often people from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds, ignored by the state and society and left to face their own hardships, who turn to gurus for 'spiritual and material sustenance'. Dr Shivani Katara, a PhD in Social Medicine from Delhi School of Economics, says for most Indians, 'miracle' is just another word for religion. "Miracles establish a saint's 'saintliness' among masses.

Another Stampede, Another Tragedy: Will India Ever Learn?

By: Akhileshwar Sahay

It has been four days since the Hathras tragedy. The dust is yet to settle, the mud still drying in the fields of Phulrai village in the Mandi area of the Sikandrara region in Hathras district, Uttar Pradesh. It was in an attempt to collect this very 'holy' dust and mud, left behind by the caravan of Suraj Pal Singh, alias Narayan Sakar Hari (the name translates to God incarnate), also known as Bhole Baba, a police constable turned self-styled guru, that over a hundred people, mostly women and children, died at the end of his satsang (religious congregation) held on July 2.

LESSONS UNLEARNED

The Hathras satsang tragedy is neither the first nor the last. Sadly, the harsh lessons from all past such cases have largely been unlearned. The religious congregation in Hathras is neither unique nor the worst, and it will be no surprise if another such case unfolds soon in another part of the nation. Mass religious congregations worldwide, in which hundreds of thousands and millions gather, have always been prone to stampedes, leading to large-scale, unfortunate deaths. This year's Hajj, which witnessed more than 1,300 deaths (including over 100 Indians), is not an



isolated event. On September 24, 2015, during Hajj, a gigantic stampede at the site of the stoning of the stelae in Mina near Mecca left more than 2,400 people dead, in one of the deadliest disasters of its type.

Bharat, too, is home to many such tragedies at frequent intervals. I will return to this later in this article. Every time a major tragedy occurs, inquiries are announced and held, and criminal cases

are lodged and investigated. But no lessons are learned. Nothing changes. Then another tragedy unfolds. Despite so many tragic events happening, there are more questions than answers. This piece aims to dig deep beneath the surface, tracing the root causes behind such tragedies and exploring possible ways to prevent them. It also examines how to reduce casualties and mitigate the devastating impact when such mishaps

are unavoidable.

NUMBERS GAME

The official death toll from the Hathras stampede stands at 121, including 112 women, as reported by UP Director General of Police Prasant Kumar. The number of injured officially has been pegged at 28. According to officials, all bodies have been identified and handed over to their next of kin. However, reports indicate that the casualty numbers may be higher, with many still searching for missing or injured relatives. In a congregation of 250,000, the number of casualties in what is arguably one of the deadliest such tragedies will always be a matter of conjecture. Even before the dead in the July 2nd tragedy were counted, identified, and cremated, a political slugfest and game of one-upmanship began, with the Opposition training its guns on CM Yogi Adityanath. Akhilesh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party supremo, thundered on July 4, "There cannot be a conspiracy behind the Hathras stampede, but it can definitely be a conspiracy that the government wants to run away from its responsibility in this matter." Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, visited family members of the deceased on July 5 and said there were lapses on the part of the government.

Nalanda's Resurrection: Modi's Tryst with History and India's Future

By: Sanju Verma

"Nalanda is a symbol of India's academic heritage and vibrant cultural exchange. Nalanda is not just a name. Nalanda is an identity, an honour, a value, a mantra, a pride and a saga. This revival is going to start a golden age for India. Nalanda is not just a renaissance of India's past. The heritage of many countries of the world and Asia is linked to it. India has lived and demonstrated sustainability as a model for centuries. We move forward with progress and environment together." These profound words by Prime Minister Narendra Modi capture the true essence of Nalanda.

"My mission is that India becomes the centre of education and knowledge for the world. My mission is that India should again be recognised as the most prominent knowledge centre of the world. Our endeavour is to have the most comprehensive and complete skilling system in the world in India and for India to have the most advanced research-oriented higher education



system in the world. I have faith that Nalanda will become an important centre of global cause," PM Modi further stated. Last month, Prime Minister Modi inaugurated the new campus of Nalanda University in Rajgir, Bihar. The University is conceived as a

collaboration between India and East Asia Summit (EAS) countries. Several eminent people, including the Heads of Mission of 17 countries, attended the inauguration ceremony. Addressing the gathering, Modi, who was visiting Nalanda within 10 days of taking oath

as the prime minister for the third term, said that it was a positive indication towards the developmental journey of India. Nalanda is not merely a name; it is an identity, a regard, a root, a mantra. Nalanda is the proclamation of the truth that knowledge cannot be destroyed even when books are consumed by fire.

The revival of Nalanda near its ancient ruins will showcase India's capabilities to the world. It will demonstrate that nations with strong human values are capable of creating a better world by rejuvenating history. Nalanda carries the heritage not just of India, but of the world and Asia as a whole. Its revival is not restricted to Indian aspects alone. Nalanda was once a vibrant centre of India's culture and traditions. Its name signifies the continuous flow of knowledge and education, reflecting India's longstanding approach to learning. Education transcends boundaries, inculcating values and shaping thought.