



The South Asian



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Speeding US Police Car



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## The Hottest Summer On The Earth In 2023, Says NASA



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## INDIA BLOC

### 50 shades of secularism is it's weakest link

That there would be differences within the 26-party INDIA bloc wasn't unexpected. But no one saw that the rainbow coalition's stand on Hindutva, or secularism, could be one of the biggest rift factors. The fuse has been lit from down South and the BJP will look to capitalise on it.



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## Jailed Khalistan Poster Boy Amritpal Now Totally out of The Picture in His Own Village

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'Bharat' is  
Great, But  
Can We  
Afford to  
Lose 'Brand  
India'?

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# Indian diaspora has many roles to play as brand ambassadors of the country: Prime Minister

You are brand ambassadors of Make in India, yoga, the handicrafts industry, and of India's millets,' he said at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention

(SAI Bureau) The Indian diaspora are the country's brand ambassadors, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention at Indore on Monday.

"I call the Indian diaspora as brand ambassadors of India. You are all 'Rashtradoots'. Your role as India's brand ambassadors is diverse. You are a brand ambassador of Make in India, Yoga, handicrafts industry, and at the same time of India's millets," PM Modi said. He said the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is visible through the overseas Indians. "Today, we see crores of overseas Indians on the global map... the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is visible," PM said. "India is being looked at with hope and curiosity. India's voice is being heard on the global stage. India is also the host of this year's G20. We do not want to make it a diplomatic event alone, but an event of people's participation, the Prime Minister said. The PM heaped praise on the youth, terming them the "skilled capital" for the country. India not only has the capability of becoming a knowledge centre, but also

a skilled capital. Our youth has skills, values, honesty



and a determination toward work. Our skilled capital can become the world's growth engine," PM said. He also said the world is interested in India's speed

and scale. "They are interested in India's future. When it comes to a cashless economy, the world is surprised to see that 40 per cent of the world's real-time digital transactions take place in India," PM Modi said.

He said, "This Pravasi Bharati Divas is special in so many ways, the nation has entered 'Amrit Kaal'. Our Pravasi Bharatiyas have a significant place in India's journey in the 'Amrit Kaal' and India's global order will be decided by you people." The Prime Minister inaugurated the three-day 17th edition of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention, which began yesterday. The President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, is the chief guest and the Republic of Suriname President, Chandrikapersad Santokhi, is the special guest of honour. The three-day conference, being held under the theme "Diaspora: Reliable partners for India's progress in Amrit Kaal", will conclude tomorrow. President Droupadi Murmu will preside over the valedictory session and present the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman.

## Indian-origin Tharman Shanmugaratnam secures overwhelming victory in Singapore presidential election



(SAI Bureau) Tharman Shanmugaratnam, an Indian-origin Singapore-born economist, registered a landslide victory in Singapore's presidential election on Friday, winning over 70 per cent of votes in the country's first contested presidential polls since 2011.

The 66-year-old former senior minister bagged 70.4 per cent (1,746,427 votes) of the 2.48 million votes cast, while his Chinese-origin rivals Ng Kok Song and Tan Kin Lian received 15.72 per cent and 13.88 per cent, respectively, the Elections Department said.

The result was announced by Returning Officer Tan Meng Dui at past midnight, making Tharman Singapore's third Indian-origin president.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong congratulated Tharman, Singapore's Deputy prime minister from 2011 to 2019, on winning the presidential election. "Singaporeans have chosen Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam to be our next president by a decisive margin. As head of state, he will represent us at home and abroad, and exercise custodial powers, including over

the reserves and key appointments," he said. Lee noted that in Friday's election, both voters and candidates showed a greater understanding of the roles and duties of the president, which bodes well for Singapore. "I have every confidence that he will carry out his duties as president with distinction," he said.

Earlier speaking at Taman Jurong Food Centre, where his supporters had gathered, Tharman said he is "truly humbled by the strong endorsement" Singaporeans have given him.

"I'm humbled by this vote - it is not just a vote for me, it is a vote for Singapore's future, a future of optimism and solidarity. That's what it really is. My campaign was one of optimism and solidarity, and I believe that's what Singaporeans want," he said.

"I will honour the trust that Singaporeans have placed in me and respect all Singaporeans including those who did not vote for me," Tharman said.

Prime Minister Lee's People's Action Party (PAP) had backed Tharman in the election. Lee said he congratulated Tharman for his

resounding victory to assure him of his Government's full cooperation. "Tharman has also declared his intention to work closely with the Government. As head of state, the president has to be a unifying figure that all Singaporeans can look up to and identify with," Lee said. Tharman

formally launched his presidential campaign in July with a pledge to evolve the country's culture to keep it a "shining spot" worldwide. He joined politics in 2001 and has served in the public sector and ministerial positions with the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) for over two decades.

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# Be careful! Your US visa application may expire even after you've paid

(SAI Bureau) Allowances that were made to help travellers during the pandemic are now being rescinded by the United States. One such move was the extensions of visa application validities.

"Check your receipt! If you paid your visa application fee before October 1, 2022, and have not scheduled an interview yet, book now," the US Embassy in India issued a warning this week.

Certain extensions were granted during the pandemic, but these extensions expire September 30, it added.

Visa applicants typically have 365 days from the date of payment to schedule an appointment before the payment expires.

If you paid your fee prior to October 1, 2022, you must schedule an interview (or submit your interview waiver application, if you are eligible) before September 30, 2023. If you don't, you may have to pay the fee again.

The interview itself does not need to



take place before September 30, 2023, the Embassy clarified, but an appointment must be scheduled in the system, even if it is for months into the future.

The United States has constantly been in news since the pandemic, for impossibly long wait times - the longest going up to three years. However, in recent months, visa wait

times have gone down considerably, with the the US Embassy in Mumbai saying it had no wait time at all.

Last month the Embassy said it had processed over 9 lakh non-immigrant visas and expected to pass the one million mark soon.

India and the United States have been working to ease the visa process. In June, PM Modi announced a plan that would let H-1B visa holders renew their visas without having to travel out of the country. The US will also be opening two new consulates in the country - one in Bengaluru and the other in Ahmedabad. More than 1.5 lakh Indians have visited the United States so far in 2023, the US department of commerce's International Trade Administration data showed. Indians were the second largest overseas visitors to America, next only to the UK, during this peak summer travel month of June — despite sky-high airfares and visa processing backlog.

## US judge rules against Biden DACA regulation for 'Dreamer' immigrants



A U.S. judge on Wednesday ruled against a program offering deportation relief and work permits to immigrants brought to the country illegally as children, known as "Dreamers," despite an attempt by President Joe Biden's administration to bolster the program's standing with a new regulation.

The decision by Texas-based U.S. District Court Judge Andrew Hanen deals a fresh setback to the program, called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and its 579,000 enrollees and other immigrants who might have hoped to be approved.

Hanen, a Republican-appointed judge,

found that a regulation issued last year by Biden's administration did not remedy legal deficiencies that led him to find DACA unlawful in 2021 and block any expansion of the program, which has been in place for more than a decade. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security can continue to renew the status of those enrolled in DACA prior to Hanen's 2021 ruling, he said. Many DACA recipients speak English and have jobs, homes and families in the United States.

Hanen wrote that the order did not require U.S. immigration authorities "to take any immigration, deportation, or criminal

action against any DACA recipient, applicant, or any other individual that would otherwise not be taken."

The ruling, which came in response to a lawsuit brought by Texas and other states, is expected to be appealed.

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# Centre's clarification on import duty on US apples after Priyanka Gandhi's jibe

**The government issued a clarification on its decision to reduce additional import duties on US apples after Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi asked why American farmers were being helped instead of apple growers in Himachal Pradesh.**

(News Agency) -The government on Tuesday issued a statement on its removal of additional duties on US apples, walnuts, and almonds, saying that this decision will not have any negative impact on domestic apple, walnut, and almond producers.

"MFN (Most Favoured Nation) duty of 50 per cent and 100 per cent continues to be applicable on US apples and walnuts as only an additional 20 per cent duty is removed. MFN rate Rs 100 per kg continues to be applicable on US almonds as only the additional MFN rate Rs 20 per kg is removed," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in an official statement.

This clarification came after Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra accused the government of helping apple growers in the US rather than apple farmers in the country after the government removed additional import duties on US apples.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is in Himachal Pradesh to review the extent of destruction caused by the floods, told news agency ANI that farmers in the state would be adversely affected by the



central government's move on tariff reduction on apples coming from the US.

"...This will make the import (of American apples) easy and they will be sold easily. Prices of procurement of apples in Shimla have been brought down by big industrialists. When the apple growers are suffering here, who should be helped? They, or the farmers in the US?" she asked.

GOVERNMENT'S CLARIFICATION



The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said that the removal of additional duties will not be detrimental to domestic producers of apples, walnuts and almonds.

Rather, it will result in fair competition in the premium market segment of these products, thereby ensuring better quality at competitive prices for Indian consumers, the ministry said.

Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said India and the US made the decision

to remove the additional duties on US apples and walnuts as both countries removed tariffs imposed on their respective products.

"They (the US) removed the additional duties imposed on Indian products and India also withdrew the retaliatory tariffs on US products including apples and walnuts," Goyal told reporters.

The 20 per cent additional duties on US apples, walnuts, and almonds were imposed in 2019 in retaliation to the US's decision to increase tariffs on certain steel and aluminum products from India. The government said that after import duties were imposed on US apples, New Zealand had emerged as a prominent apple exporter to India.

The removal of additional duties will now ensure fair competition among the countries which are exporting these products to India, the government added. To protect the Indian market from the inflow of low-quality apples from the US and other countries, the government said that it had imposed a minimum import price (MIP) of Rs 50 per kg for apples from all countries except Bhutan.

## Sanatana Dharma row: FIR registered against Udhayanidhi Stalin in Mumbai



(News Agency) -A fresh FIR has been registered against Tamil Nadu Minister and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader Udhayanidhi Stalin at Mira Road police station in Mumbai over his remarks on Sanatana Dharma.

The FIR has been filed for promoting enmity between different groups (IPC 153A) and outraging religious feelings (IPC 295A). Stalin had compared the

Sanatan Dharma with diseases like dengue and malaria and called for eradication of it.

Last week, another FIR was registered in Uttar Pradesh's Rampur against the DMK leader for allegedly outraging religious feelings. The FIR also named Congress national president Mallikarjun Kharge's son Priyank Kharge for backing Udhayanidhi's remarks. The two were

booked under sections 295A and 153A. Another complaint was filed against Udhayanidhi before the Muzaffarpur Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Bihar.

Meanwhile, a delegation of BJP leaders in Tamil Nadu handed over a memorandum to the state police on Tuesday, demanding registration of an FIR against the ruling party leader.

A controversy was erupted earlier this month after Udhayanidhi, the son of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, likened Sanatana Dharma with "malaria" and "dengue" while calling for its eradication. The DMK minister argued that Sanatana Dharma is based on the caste system and discrimination.

"Rather than opposing Sanatana, it should be eradicated. The name Sanatana is from Sanskrit. It is against social justice and equality," the minister said. Even after it led to a huge political controversy at the national level, Udhayanidhi said he stands by his words and also stated that his comments were falsely portrayed as a call for genocide.

## Rival Sena factions MLAs called for disqualification hearing on September 14

(News Agency) -Shiv Sena MLAs from factions led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Uddhav Thackeray have been called for a hearing on Thursday regarding the disqualification petitions against them. The hearings will take place in the Maharashtra Assembly in the presence of Speaker Rahul Narwekar. Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) recently held a meeting with its MLAs to prepare them for the hearings starting from 14 September.

"We will be acting as per law and established procedure will be followed. All MLAs will be given the opportunity to submit their reply. Details of the hearing can't be discussed before it happens as these are quasi-judicial hearings," Narwekar said. As the Speaker has to decide on multiple disqualification petitions, the 54 MLAs may be called again one by one or with MLAs of their faction.

On an earlier occasion, Narwekar's office added that they would have to go through the party's Constitution to decide who was the real Sena at the time of the split.



# PM Modi meets officials at G20 secretariat, praises their 'hard work'

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an unplanned visit to the G20 Secretariat and expressed his gratitude to the officers involved in the successful G20 summit.**



(News Agency) -Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an impromptu visit to the G20 Secretariat at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan on Tuesday and interacted with the officers who had been on duty for the summit in New Delhi. He also thanked the officials for their "hard work" in the success of the G20 summit.

The Prime Minister interacted with all levels of staff, including officers, of the

Ministry of External Affairs and discussed their G20 experience.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar accompanied the Prime Minister during the visit.

As many as 114 lead officers from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) were deployed on G20 duty under the guidance of the G20 Sherpa for India, Amitabh Kant, and Chief Coordinator Harsh

Shringla. Additionally, 140 young officers were also inducted in August from all services to assist in organising the summit.

Senior officials of MEA played key roles in negotiating with various member states to reach a consensus for the joint communique.

The G20 Leaders Summit under India's presidency was held in New Delhi on September 9-10. The Member countries adopted the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration where consensus was achieved on all issues, including the divisive Russia-Ukraine issue, making it a historic win for India's presidency.

The success was the result of non-stop negotiations that spanned over 200 hours, involving 300 bilateral meetings, and iterating through 15 drafts.

According to Amitabh Kant, members of his team, including senior MEA officials Abhay Thakur, Nagaraj Naidu, Ashish Sinha, and Eenam Gambhir, played a formidable role in coming up with a conclusive draft document.

## Class 10 student sets fellow student on fire after brawl in Aligarh

(News Agency) -A class 10 student at City High School in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh allegedly poured petrol on another student and set him on fire following a brawl over damaging a schoolbag. The victim, identified as Mohammed Kaif, suffered approximately 25 percent burn injuries and has been hospitalised. His condition is said to be stable.

According to the police, the students engaged in a brawl over the damage to their bags, which eventually led to the class 10 student setting his classmate on fire.

However, the victim stated that there was no dispute between him and the accused. "I was sitting at the school ground when someone came and poured petrol on me and set fire. My friends stopped him and doused the flames... There was no issue between us," Kaif said.

Kaif's father, Rahees, said he had filed a police complaint and sought action.

"I received a call in the morning informing me of the incident. He [son] is now undergoing treatment, and I have filed a police complaint," Kaif's father, Rahees, said.

## West Bengal Governor launches SPEED programme for faster decisions in universities



(News Agency) -Amid the ongoing tussle between the West Bengal Governor and the Mamata Banerjee government, CV Ananda Bose on Tuesday launched the SPEED programme in West Bengal universities. The SPEED (Simplified Procedure for Easy and Effective Decision) programme aims to speed up the decision-making process in the university system in West Bengal. Bose, who is also the Chancellor of universities, has also ordered the setting up of 25 teacher selection committees and a Vice Chancellor committee. The Vice Chancellor Committee has been set up to identify the backlog in the university administration and to suggest ways and means for revamping and rebooting the University system. A Real-time Monitoring

Cell has also been set up in the Raj Bhavan for concurrent evaluation. Governor Ananda Bose and the Trinamool Congress government have been at loggerheads over the control of universities in the state. The tussle escalated last week when the state education minister, Bratya Basu, called the Governor the 'new vampire in town.' In a follow-up action, the Governor sent two letters: one to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and another to Delhi in his 'midnight action.' Both the Governor and CM Mamata have avoided disclosing the contents of the letters so far.

The Governor's recent decision to constitute selection committees for the appointment of Vice Chancellors for multiple universities also invited severe criticism from the government.

## Rajnath Singh inaugurates 90 'strategically important' infrastructure projects

(News Agency) -Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday inaugurated 90 infrastructure projects worth more than Rs 2,900 crore, spread across nine states and two Union Territories. The projects by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) include the Nechiphu Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, two airfields in West Bengal, two helipads, 22 roads, and 63 bridges.

"strategically important projects" were completed by BRO 'in record time,' with most of them finished in a single working season using state-of-the-art technology. The BRO is not only securing India's borders but also playing a key role in the socio-economic development of the far-flung areas. The BRO has done excellent work in recent years and has emerged as a shining

example of civil-military fusion,' the Defence Minister said.

Key projects inaugurated by Rajnath Singh include:

- The 422.9-meter-long Devak bridge on the Bishnah-Kaulpur-



Of these 90 projects, 36 are in Arunachal Pradesh, 26 in Ladakh, 11 in Jammu and Kashmir, five in Mizoram, three in Himachal Pradesh, two each in Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal, and one each in Nagaland, Rajasthan, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as stated by the Ministry of Defence. Rajnath Singh inaugurated the projects at an event in the Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir.

According to the Ministry, these

- Phulpur Road in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The 500-meter-long Nechiphu Tunnel on Balipara-Charduar-Tawang Road in Arunachal Pradesh.

- The revamped Bagdogra and Barrackpore Airfields in West Bengal, which were also dedicated to the nation by the Defence Minister.

Rajnath Singh also laid the foundation stone of Nyoma Airfield in Eastern Ladakh virtually. It will be developed at a cost of around Rs 200 crore.



# Protesting Bengal BJP workers lock up Union Minister in party office

**Union Minister Subhas Sarkar was briefly locked up by a group of protesting BJP workers at the party office in West Bengal's Bankura.**

(News Agency) -A group of BJP workers on Tuesday locked up Union Minister Subhas Sarkar in their party office in West Bengal's Bankura. The party workers alleged he was being "dictatorial" in running the district unit. Sarkar, the MoS for Education and MP of Bankura, was holding a meeting around 1 pm when the BJP workers entered the district party office, shouted slogans and locked him up. A video of the incident was tweeted by the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which mocked the BJP for their "infighting".

Sarkar was locked up for about half an hour before being released by the party workers.

Mohit Sharma, one of the protesters, termed Sarkar as "incompetent" and claimed he was not giving importance to party workers who were working hard. He alleged that the Union Minister had appointed people close to him as



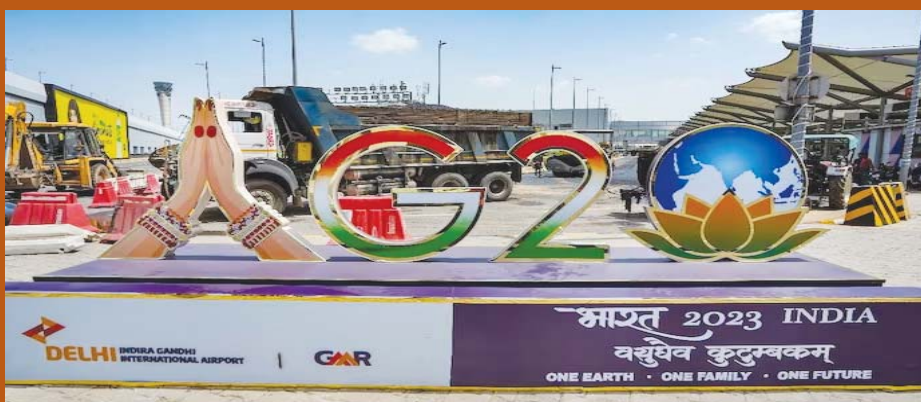
members of the district committee.

"Some of us have been show-caused. We are protesting to save the party. This time, the BJP did not get any seats in Bankura Municipality because of his incompetence. The BJP won two wards in the previous election. They could not

field candidates in many seats in panchayat. It is a shame," he alleged. Another group of BJP workers reached the party office and a scuffle broke out between the two sides amid the chaos. A police team rushed to the party office and rescued Sarkar, an officer said.

West Bengal BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya termed the incident as unfortunate and stated that action would be taken against the protesting party workers. "Such incidents are unacceptable in a disciplined party like the BJP. If there are any grievances, there is a proper forum to raise those. We will look into the incident, and action will be taken against those involved," he said. He also said Sarkar had no role in the district unit and said the allegations against him were due to "misunderstandings". In response, the TMC claimed that with each passing day, the West Bengal BJP unit "is crumbling as infighting is reaching its peak". "In Bankura, vehement clashes erupted and BJP workers locked Union Minister Subhas Sarkar in the party office. While unity within the party is a myth, the BJP is a shining example of a weak foundation and misplaced priorities," the party wrote on X.

## Drama at top Delhi hotel over China G20 delegate refusing bag check: Sources



(News Agency) -A Chinese delegation that arrived in Delhi for the G20 Summit last week refused to get a bag checked at the Taj Palace Hotel as per security protocols, police sources said. The contents of the bag were unknown. A drama unfolded at a 5-star hotel in Delhi when a Chinese delegation -- which arrived in the national capital for the G20 Summit last week -- refused to get a bag checked by the security staff, police sources said.

The Chinese delegates were staying at the Taj Palace Hotel in Chanakyapuri, the city's diplomatic enclave.

A Chinese delegation had brought a bag to the hotel. When the entourage was asked by security to get the bag checked, they refused to do so, police sources said. A commotion broke out when the Chinese delegates did not budge despite the police repeatedly

insisting they get the bag checked as per security protocols.

Ultimately, the delegation chose to return to the Chinese embassy without getting the bag checked, according to police sources. The contents of the bag remain unknown. Later, more Chinese delegates arrived at the hotel and complied without objection to getting their bags checked, police said. The G20 Summit was held from September 9-10 under India's presidency at the Bharat Mandapam convention hall in Pragati Maidan. It was largely seen to be a huge success as the bloc members put out a unanimous joint statement that touched on various pressing issues, including the Ukraine war. At the G20, the Chinese side was represented by Premier Li Qiang. President Xi Jinping skipped the summit and Beijing did not provide a reason why he chose to do so.

## 16-year-old NEET aspirant dies by suicide in Kota, 25th case this year



(News Agency) -A 16-year-old student died by suicide in Rajasthan's Kota on Tuesday. This is the 25th such incident in the city among students preparing for competitive exams.

A 16-year-old student, who was preparing for National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) died by suicide by hanging herself in Rajasthan's Kota. Twenty-five students have died by suicide in Kota, a coaching hub in Rajasthan, in just eight months this year. A resident of Ranchi, the student was currently residing at Blaze Hostel in the city. She hanged herself and the body has been kept in the mortuary. Around two lakh students flock to Kota annually, hoping to qualify for competitive exams like the Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) and the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET). This year, authorities reported 25 student

suicides related to the pressure of competitive exams in the district, the highest number in any year. According to Rajasthan police data, the figure was 15 in 2022, 18 in 2019, 20 in 2018, seven in 2017, 17 in 2016, and 18 in 2015. No student suicide was reported in Kota in 2020 and 2021 for the coaching institutes were shut due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to a spate of suicides in Kota, the district administration had earlier issued an order mandating the installation of spring-loaded fans in all hostel rooms and paying guest accommodations. The order, issued by Kota district collector Om Prakash Bunkar, aimed to "provide mental support and security to the students studying and living in these accommodations, and to prevent suicides from increasing coaching students."



# PM, nation basking in G20 glory India could write the next chapter of global pharma triumph

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had his place in the sun last week. The resounding success of the G20 summit was recorded in every Bharatiya's/Indian's consciousness. It will remain in our collective memory for many years. The images recorded were of Modi confidently strutting around the newly built Bharat Mandapam, spending more than an hour receiving the guests, welcoming them with handshakes and some selected ones with a hug.

Everyone loves a good spectacle. The G20 spectacle showcased our Prime Minister and his dream of Bharat, that was India. He sat for the dinner hosted by President Murmu in the Mandapam that evening behind a nameplate that described him as 'Prime Minister of Bharat'. The old name, with which we are all familiar and by which our country is known around the world, appears to be out of favour with Modi after 26 Opposition parties joined hands and adopted INDIA as the alliance's acronym. What will the Indian Ocean be named now? Bharat Ocean? We will be told in due course! Old diplomats from around the world had not seen such a grand event played out at any G20 meet earlier. An IAS officer of my acquaintance, Amitabh Kant, was the Sherpa representing our country in the preparations for the meet, putting the nuts and bolts in place. He, too, had his day in the sun. He worked hard for the success of this year-long event and succeeded. We must give him credit for his stellar role.

Do not forget the many Foreign Service officers who must have burnt the midnight oil to ensure that events proceeded and ended smoothly. Even in normal times, they struggle valiantly with commas and dots to get documents approved and signed by just one minister, their own. In the context of G20, where 20 Foreign Ministers and 20 heads of state have to agree on each word, it is not surprising that they and Kant spent sleepless nights to ensure that the Delhi Declaration was the most potent (Kant's choice of word) message that a G20 summit had ever issued. The reference to the Russia-Ukraine war and climate change had him and the 19 other Sherpas worried. A consensus had to be arrived at with the help of semantics. It took up all the time of the 20 Sherpas and numerous others in the foreign ministries of the respective nations. As expected, Ukraine was not happy with the declaration, but Russia, which supplies us with cheap oil so that we can hope to become a \$5-trillion economy during this decade, was understandably satisfied. It felt that its friend India had got the better of the West! PM Modi held one-to-one discussions on the sidelines of the event with the US President, the British Prime Minister, the Saudi Arabian Crown

Prince, the Bangladesh Prime Minister and some other heads of state. Many bilateral issues were discussed and some resolved. All in all, it was a grand show that served to make Modi and Bharat more relevant and important in the eyes of the world.

PM Modi took the lead to induct the African Union (AU) as a permanent G20 member. The AU President, Azali Assoumani, was present at the meet as an invitee. This is a region that does not have a voice in world affairs at present. China has taken advantage of this neglect to offer its help to African countries at crucial times. It has a 'first-mover' start, which India, through its G20 presidency, has now attempted to neutralise.

A second major decision is the proposed corridor from India to Europe via West Asia to facilitate the movement of goods, technology and energy. It will compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative and hopefully surpass the latter in importance.

The one frog in the well was Canada. PM Justin Trudeau must have lost his good looks temporarily when Modi lectured him for not reining in the Khalistanis who account for a big slice of his supporters in Canada. How so many Khalistan-supporting Sikhs happened to settle in Canada is a mystery. When I visited Toronto some 10 years ago as a guest of a childhood friend from Mumbai, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer in charge of my security was a Sikh.

A delegation of Canadian MPs visited Amritsar in the late 1980s during my sojourn in Punjab. Our government was very shy of allowing the delegation to visit the Golden Temple. The MPs had been told by their Sikh voters back home that the Punjab Police had killed many Sikh boys, with the result that young Sikhs dared not visit the temple. My friend BG Deshmukh was the Cabinet Secretary. He phoned to ask for my opinion. I welcomed the visit of the delegation so that it learned the truth.

The delegation found no policemen in the temple because it was occupied by young extremists who had become a law unto themselves. If the police wanted to oust them from the holy place, that was possible only by force, something the government wanted to avoid at that time. Later, at their request, I met the MPs at the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi. They were convinced that their Sikh supporters in Canada had misinformed them about the situation in the temple. The MPs wanted to know why Canadian Sikhs were so enamoured of Khalistan, whereas those in Punjab were not. I confess that this was one question whose answer eluded me.

By Julio Ribeiro

India's G20 presidency has significant implications for the pharmaceutical industry, focussing on improving global health emergency preparedness, fostering industry collaborations, and harnessing digital health potential. It reaffirms India's dedication to addressing healthcare challenges on a global scale.

India's presidency is crucial in strengthening the nation's identity as the world's pharmaceutical hub. During the Covid-19 pandemic, despite naysayers predicting the worst for India, our country leveraged its potential to the maximum to bolster international relations by supplying more than 29 crore vaccine doses and other medicines to over 150 countries. Domestically, it administered over 220 crore vaccine doses.

India's journey from a significant drug exporter to the world's largest exporter of generic medicines, which has earned global recognition, has been fuelled by pragmatic government policies and long-term investments since the 1970s.

The Indian pharma industry has grown to be the world's third most extensive by volume and 14th largest by value, capturing 85 per cent market share in India in 2020 from a minuscule 5 per cent in 1969. Indeed, in many ways, our nation has balanced socialism and capitalism by ensuring affordable drugs, increasing access and fostering industry growth through innovation.

The spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam The Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst, propelling the Indian pharma industry forward on various fronts. But the industry's global presence has steadily expanded over recent years, even before the pandemic hit. We have played a pivotal role in meeting the WHO's demand for critical vaccines like tetanus, DPT and

BCG, contributing between 40 to 70 per cent, highlighting its commitment to global health.

India also fulfils 90 per cent of the global demand for measles vaccines, demonstrating its dedication to eradicating preventable diseases worldwide. Additionally, through the collaborative efforts of vaccine manufacturers, the government, and healthcare providers, India has achieved a significant milestone in eradicating polio in the country more than 12 years ago.

In 2022, India exported over \$25 billion in pharmaceuticals to needy countries. India's remarkable contributions to vaccine production, disease burden reduction, drug accessibility, and successful disease eradication initiatives stand as a testament to its commitment to global health and well-being. By the turn of the century, India's pharma industry scripted a stunning fight back against AIDS with an HIV generic drug bypassing patents that saved millions of lives in low and middle-income countries, particularly in Africa.

We are also a significant supplier of the first-line anti-TB drugs in the world. These successes highlight the power of coordinated action and inspire future endeavours in public health. The industry now has a formidable task to help the government eradicate tuberculosis by 2025 - five years ahead of the global deadline. Meeting challenges

More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic spurred the government to take significant steps to boost the pharma industry. Among the three significant steps were the two production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes - one for domestic manufacturing of 53 KSM, drug intermediaries, and APIs, and the other for domestic manufacturing of high-value pharma products.

By Dr K Madan Gopal

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# The 'rising superpower' myth about China

By Peter Bergen and Joel Rayburn

There isn't much of anything that the polarized politicians of Washington, DC agree on, but there is a large degree of bipartisan consensus around one big, supposed threat: China. The purportedly rising nation with a plausible plan to replace the US as the dominant superpower. The Biden administration's 2022 National Security Strategy describes China as "the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to advance that objective."

Similarly, the Trump administration said in 2020 that the United States was taking action to protect itself and its partners "from an increasingly assertive China."

In fact, by many measures, China is on the decline. It's an error American leaders are prone to making. After 9/11, the US overestimated the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq and waged a war there based on false assumptions about Saddam's purported weapons of mass destruction program and ties to al Qaeda.

Some Americans also initially overestimated Russia's ability to quickly seize and subdue Ukraine

a year and a half ago.

As a result of the perceived threat of a rising China, the US and some of its allies are now undertaking a large retooling of virtually every government sector - from militaries to intelligence and security agencies, diplomacy and economic relations, trade regulations, higher education funding, social media oversight and more.

The Biden administration's record \$842 billion budget request for the Pentagon for fiscal year 2024 is "driven by the seriousness of our strategic competition with the People's Republic of China," according to US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin.

But is this vast reorientation designed to counter a threat from China that could fizzle out in the next decade or so? An examination of China's dire demographic trends, intensifying economic woes and polling suggesting declining international standing certainly suggests so. A recipe for demographic disaster The demographic problem is arguably the long-term trend that should most alarm Chinese officials. China's "one child" policy, one of history's boldest experiments in social engineering, which was officially inaugurated in 1980 and ended in 2016, now has produced what it was designed to produce: a sharp, inexorable

contraction of the country's population.

China's fertility rate dropped to a record low of 1.09 last year, according to the country's Population and Development Research Center, making it the lowest level among countries with a population of more than 100 million.

China's aging population will present significant problems for Chinese military power. China can now draw from an enormous reservoir of manpower to serve in the large armed forces President Xi Jinping has been building - but that reservoir is shrinking rapidly. The US Census Bureau estimates China today has about 350 million males aged 15-49, the demographic cohort spanning the bulk of its military. That's a steep drop from China's 2012 peak of about 400 million in the same category, and by 2040 that number will drop to just over 299 million. By contrast, key Chinese rival India already has about 402 million males aged 15-49, and by 2040 that figure will grow to 424 million, according to US Census Bureau figures.

Manpower is not the only important measure of a country's military potential. The United States, for example, has only about a quarter of the same military-aged male population that China does. (Though that 15-49 year-old bracket, unlike China's, is predicted to steadily rise in the coming decades.)

But in China's case, the accelerating contraction of the 15-49 population group is an unprecedented problem - not just in the military sector but in the whole of the Chinese labor force.

# Anantnag ambush, Need to plug gaps in the Army's SOPs

THE death of Col Manpreet Singh, Maj Ashish Dhonchak and DSP Humayun Bhat in a gunfight with terrorists in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir is a great loss to the nation. Both Col Manpreet and Maj Dhonchak were recipients of the Sena Medal; the former was the commanding officer of 19 Rashtriya Rifles, the Army's counter-terrorist unit. It was ostensibly an intelligence-based operation that went horribly wrong. The intel input claimed that the terrorists had a hideout in a forest, but the joint team of the security forces was ambushed by the assailants when it approached the spot. Col Manpreet and the others literally walked into a death trap.



Even as the reliability of the input has come under a cloud, it is evident that there were lapses in the implementation of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for counter-terror

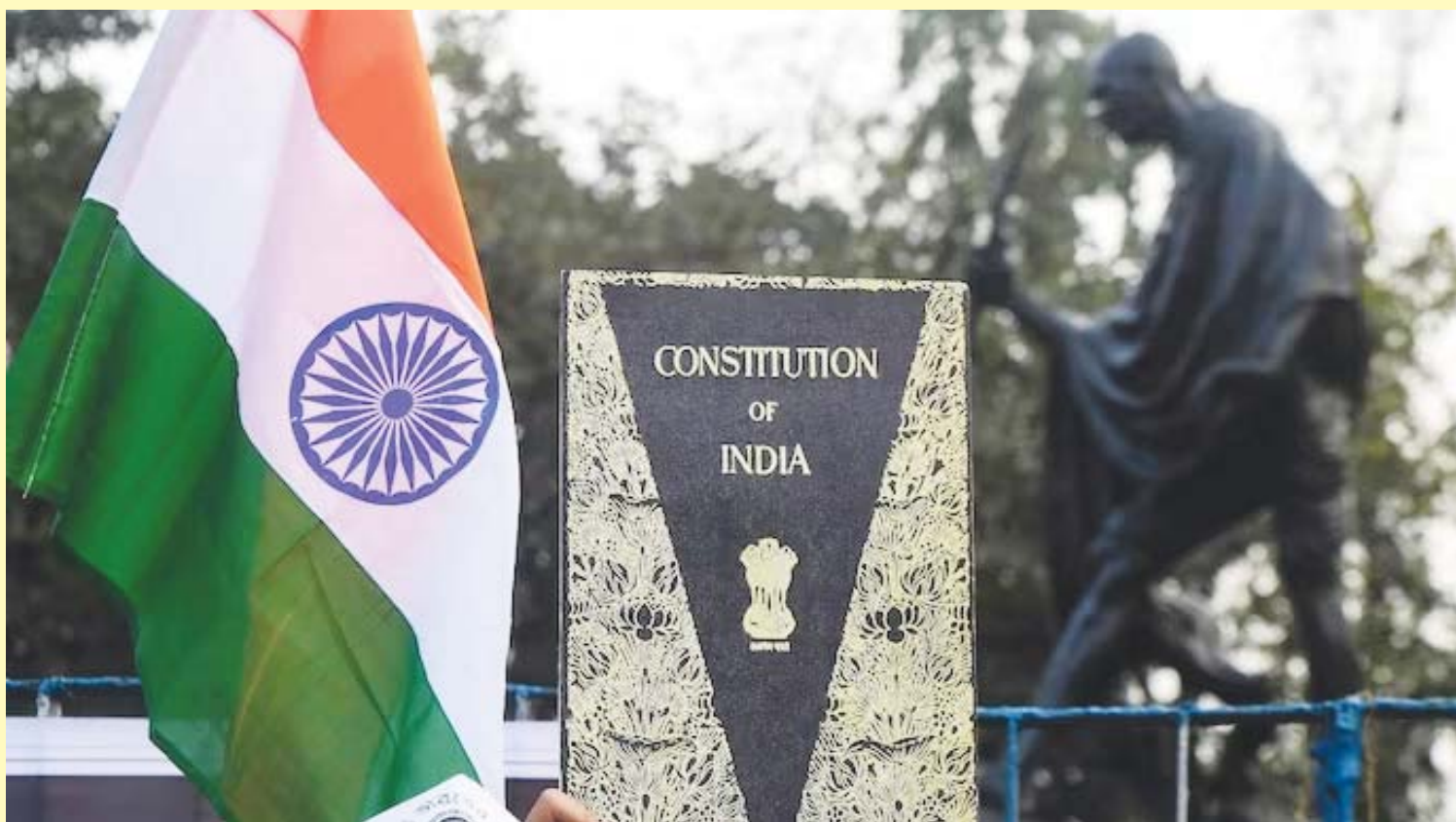
operations.

It was in 2020 that the Army had revised its SOPs for such operations in J&K, shifting the focus on ensuring surrender during encounters. While this

confidence-building measure has been helpful in saving the lives of several youths, it has made the task tougher for Army personnel, who are expected to play the waiting game for a longer period.

In any case, a thorough verification of intelligence inputs is a must to spot fatal red herrings and false trails. Round-the-clock surveillance of informers is needed to weed out those who are in league with terrorists. The Anantnag attack comes days after the Central Government told the Supreme Court that it was ready to conduct elections in J&K. An occasional setback should not deter the Centre from going ahead with the much-delayed electoral process. At the same time, there is a need to remove deficiencies in the intel system and firm up the SOPs so that soldiers and cops don't become sitting ducks for Pakistan-trained terrorists.





**Tracing the genesis of India, Bharat, or Hindustan, it becomes clear that there has never been consensus over the name of our country, and our Constitution's makers adopted the name India but defined it as Bharat to link with our ancient culture.**

# India, that is Bharat

## *Protecting originality of the Constitution*

**By Arvind Kumar**

The use of Bharat instead of India in the invitation letter sent to the delegates of G20 countries for the dinner hosted by President Droupadi Murmu has sparked contested debate over the name of our country. Supporters of the government have been hailing the decision with the argument that India refers to colonial slavery whereas 'Bharat' refers to Indic tradition.

However, critics, including Opposition leaders, panned this move. Ever since Opposition parties named their alliance INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) on the insistence of Rahul Gandhi, speculations have been in the air that the government might change the name of our country altogether - several Bharatiya Janata Party politicians have already demanded this.

Tracing the genesis of India, Bharat, or Hindustan, it becomes clear that there has never been consensus over the name of our country, and our Constitution's makers adopted the name India but defined it as Bharat to link with our ancient culture. And the issues which were settled in the Constituent Assembly, such as the name of the country, cannot be reopened since it would amount to rewriting the Indian Constitution.

The historicity of India and Bharat The term India is derived from Greek and Roman languages, and it first appeared in the works of the Greek traveller Megasthenes, who visited the subcontinent in the reign of Chandragupta Maurya (350-295 BC). He wrote "Indica", describing the riches and territory of the Mauryan empire. The term Indica was later translated as India in the Roman language. From Megasthenes to other European travellers, India was described as the land of riches and abundance. Unlike India, Bharat is mainly mentioned in Brahmanical texts. However, it is an old and native name, and according to Catherine Clementin-Ojha, it survived because of the tradition of recitation of the "Puranas". Moreover, orientalist scholars discovered this name in the nineteenth century, and early nationalist leaders such as Bipin Chandra Pal widely propagated its use in the anti-colonial struggle. Ancient debate

The ancient texts of Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism reveal that our country had different names, such as Aryavarta, Bharatvarsha, and Jambudvipa. However, these names also represented different regions of the country rather than the whole country as we see today. For example, Bharat is mentioned to be situated above Jambudvipa, according to

Clementin-Ojha. Moreover, the ancient travel records of a Chinese Buddhist Monk Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang), who visited the country in the seventh century during the reign of Harshavardhan, substantiate the argument that there was confusion over the country. According to Tansen Sen, while narrating his discussion with Harshavardhan about the name of the country, "Xuanzang begins fascicle two with a discussion of the names for India appearing in various Chinese records. He concludes by stating that the correct Chinese term for India should be Yindu, a name that is still in use in China." The term Yindu could be the outcome of different styles of pronunciation, and the possibility of similar pronunciation reaching Europe through the Silk Route cannot be ruled out.

Nevertheless, with the arrival of the Mongols, the use of Hindustan also became popular. Mughal Emperor Babur extensively used Hindustan in his memoirs "Babnama". Gradually, the use of Hindustan also became popular, until the colonisation of the subcontinent. Constituent Assembly debate Article 1 of the Indian constitution defines the name of our country as "India, that is Bharat shall be the union of states". However, the

original draft of the constitution introduced by Drafting Committee Chairman Dr BR Ambedkar on November 4, 1948, did not contain the word "Bharat".

In fact, "Bharat" also does not find a mention in "States and Minorities - What are their rights and how to secure them in the Constitution of Free India", a memorandum akin to the Constitution prepared by Ambedkar for submission to the Constituent Assembly of India on the behalf of All India Scheduled Castes Federation. He had proposed the use of "The United States of India" as the name of our country. However, the draft constitution omitted the phrase "United States".

The draft constitution was criticised for missing native names. Therefore, Ambedkar proposed an amendment in Article 1 in the Constituent Assembly on September 17, 1949, that the name would be "India, that is, Bharat shall be a Union of States". The next day, members proposed further amendments to Article 1. Those amendments were either to substitute "India, that is Bharat" with "Bharat, that is India" or omit India completely and exclusively using Bharat.

HV Kamath, the leader of All India Forward Bloc, proposed the first amendment to substitute "Bharat, or in the English Language,

India". His proposal was based on the Irish constitution, which has a similar name to the country. Seth Govind Das of the Indian National Congress proposed the use of "Bharat, known as India also in foreign countries". Kamalapati Tripathi proposed the use of "Bharat, that is, India". And Govind Ballabh Pant had proposed "'Bharat Varsha' and nothing else". Kamath summed up the prominent suggestions, which were Bharat, Hindustan, Hind and Bharatbhumi aur Bharatvarsh. Still, the Constituent Assembly rejected all suggestions and only accepted "India, that is Bharat" as proposed by Ambedkar.

The Constituent Assembly seems to have not accepted the proposal of giving primacy to Bharat over India or altogether omitting India because of its exclusiveness to one religion, since the complete replacement of India with Bharat would have given the wrong signal to religious minorities. However, anticolonial slogans associated with Bharat such as 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' forced the drafter to incorporate it into the constitution. Contemporary politics Although the Constituent Assembly settled the name of our country, the use of the word Hindustan remained in practice. Of late, there has been objection to this, mainly from right-wing leaders and activists of the Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation.

However, the logic of both camps is different. Hindu right-wing leaders object to the use of India and Hindustan because both are given by foreigners.



# Inclusive Diplomacy And Cracking of Diplomatic Code: Success of India's Stance at G20

By: Dr Priyam Barooah

The G20 Summit, held on September 9-10, 2023, represents a significantly historic moment for India to make meaningful contributions to the global discussions and resolutions on a gamut of pressing international issues. After 300 bilateral meetings, 200 hours of negotiations, and 15 drafts, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team were able to bring consensus on the Russia-Ukraine paragraphs in the final G20 communiqué. Finally, the G20 approved an 83-paragraph leaders' declaration, covering issues ranging from plastic pollution to terrorism, underscoring India's role and commitment to facilitating comprehensive and inclusive discussions on critical global issues.

The consensus appeared to be difficult in a diplomatic quagmire in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, particularly in the absence of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The summit, along with the simultaneous bilateral



and plurilateral meetings, reflected India's autonomous foreign policy stance and the nature of its relationships with key international actors. The declaration will have a definitive bearing on its bilateral relations with the US, Russia and China, its increasing global clout, being the voice of the Global South, and its efforts to effectuate a revived multilateralism.

## G20: BACKGROUND

The G20 was established in 1999, post-Asian financial crisis, to bring together both advanced and emerging economies to address international economic and

financial issues and with the primary objective of fostering dialogue and cooperation among its member states. The G20 comprises a diverse mix of both developed and developing nations, representing a cross-section of the global economic landscape, which includes Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union. The group represents approximately 85 per cent of the

world's gross domestic product (GDP) and two-thirds of the world's population. The G20 leaders meet annually to discuss issues such as international trade, tax policy, development, and climate change, among others. INDIA'S APPROACH AS ANNOUNCED BY PM MODI

Prime Minister Modi has expressed confidence that the New Delhi G20 Summit will chart a new path in human-centric and inclusive development. He emphasised that India's G20 Presidency has been inclusive, ambitious, decisive, and action-oriented where the developmental concerns of the Global South have been actively voiced. The overarching theme - One Earth, One Family, One Future - encapsulates India's vision of fostering unity and equality, transcending the traditional distinctions between developed and developing nations.

## REVIVAL OF NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE

India's role as the host nation also provides a unique opportunity to represent the interests of the Global South on a global stage. It

also empowers India to act as a leader and advocate for the priorities and concerns of countries in the developing world. 'Global South' is a term first coined by American writer and political activist, Carl Oglesby in 1969, often used to identify the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania (the term does not refer to geographical south; for example, most of the Global South is geographically within the Northern Hemisphere). Global South denotes the "third world" and "periphery" marking the regions outside Europe and North America, mostly low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised countries, and are usually current or former subjects of colonialism. The Global South represents 39 per cent of the global GDP and 85 per cent of the global population. Given the urgency of issues such as global warming, the ongoing Covid pandemic, and conflicts like the one in Ukraine, the G20 Summit has gained increasing significance as a vital platform for addressing these pressing challenges.

## Checkmating China: How India-Middle East-Europe Corridor will Make China's BRI Irrelevant

By: Shubhangi Sharma

A major sticking point at the G20 Leaders Summit in New Delhi was whether India will be able to achieve a consensus on the G20 declaration. While it was a significant moment when it was adopted with full consensus, the announcement of the game-changing India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, or the IMEEC, stole the show.

The greatest highlight of the G20 summit in New Delhi unexpectedly turned out to be the announcement of a US-backed economic corridor running from India through shipping lanes into the United Arab Emirates, across the Arabian Peninsula via rail linking UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel, and then from Israel to Europe again through seaports. All regional stakeholders, including India, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Europe

along with the US, have signed the deal to bring this revolutionary plan to fruition.

## BIRTH OF HISTORIC 'SPICE



## ROUTE' IN MODERN TIMES

The IMEEC is a massive transcontinental infrastructure project that will connect India with Europe through seaports and rail links in West Asia cutting across the Arabian Peninsula. This is the

birth of a historic "spice route" in the modern-day, which will cut transit time by about 40 percent as opposed to the traditional route

via the Suez Canal that passes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait near the Horn of Africa and Suez Canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea. These chokepoints are also vulnerable to geopolitical and

logistical calamities. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial choke point in the maritime trade route between Asia and Europe, is strategically vulnerable to the conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The Suez, one of the world's busiest waterways, is a narrow bottleneck that tends to get choked by increasing traffic. The IMEEC will serve as a faster, more stable and safer alternative, especially for the transportation of energy. It will safeguard supply chains and create new jobs in West Asia. It will also tie the region together promoting peace and stability with the involvement of Israel in the project, which is a precursor to an impending normalisation of ties between Riyadh and Jerusalem.

American President Joe Biden said it was a "real big deal" that will bridge ports across two continents and lead to a "more stable, more prosperous and

integrated Middle East". MASSIVE GEOPOLITICAL COUP AGAINST CHINA The economic corridor is a massive geopolitical coup against China. Not only is it a new and alternative trade route at the heart of energy exporting behemoths, but it challenges China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) rendering President Xi Jinping's grand plan for world domination toothless and irrelevant even before it takes off. An infrastructure project with "Chinese characteristics" like the BRI challenged western powers to follow a more constructive and democratic approach to counter Beijing's tactics. And, in this case, western powers have followed India's lead. Sources said India's national security adviser is the man behind the concept of this grand strategic infrastructure project.



# China's Xi Stays Cut Off While India's Modi Moves on Diplomatic Speed Rails

The latest G20 summit in Delhi once again highlights how India and China are escalating their differences to new heights. Xi Jinping is purely an ambitious and aggressive statesman. Since coming to power in 2012, he has been clearly and distinctly demonstrating his intentions.

On the other hand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has his own agenda to take India to the global stage despite all odds both at home and in his neighbourhood. Equally important and critical is that both Delhi and Beijing are competing for leadership positions at all international institutions. The only difference playing out in the open is that, unlike China, India is not challenging US leadership on the global stage. On the other hand, China has a one-point agenda to dethrone America from all international institutions. And to establish its own model of global governance based on Chinese characteristics. The point Beijing (Xi) is making is why we should listen to Washington, when China has its own perspective that must be considered by the rest of the world. Thus, Xi's new China is charting its own course, aiming to reorient the geopolitical order



in the coming years. In this great power game, if India comes in between, China will have no way, but to handle its emerging global neighbour.

When the world's most powerful nations are meeting this weekend in Delhi, the two notable absentees are only Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation and Xi. Both have their own reasons for not coming to attend the most talked about G-20 Summit. For Putin, he has been facing an international arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC) for atrocities carried out in Ukraine during the course of the current conflict that began in February 2021. Apart from this, he is fast

encountering international isolation for his extreme aggression against his neighbour and looking for support from friends and allies all over the world.

By now, China's reticence has generated a lot of interpretations in global media and in diplomatic circles. For Xi, it is an occasion to showcase that China is having its unique world view wherein engagement rules are quite different from what the others think. But his absence in the Delhi Summit is very unique because since his coming to power, he has never missed any G20 summit in any part of the world. In fact, no proper explanation has been given by

Beijing for Xi skipping the landmark event.

However, international observers and China watchers say that his absence indicates predominantly China's displeasure with the West, especially the US. Secondly, the Chinese strongman clearly wants to avoid isolation from the majority of the Western leaders as Putin is also not coming to the summit.

Thirdly, China's long boundary dispute with India, the host country, and so far, both the neighbours not arriving at any credible solution to this sticky issue may be one reason for his intriguing decision of absence in the meet. Also, China views India as a member of the anti-China camp headed by the US. So in that case why Xi will attend a global event that projects India as a superpower and most of the western leaders are taking a front seat, most importantly US President Joe Biden.

Fourthly, China's long rivalry with the US and complete distrust over the existing international liberal order, this kind of a no-show was highly likely from Xi.

Fifthly, China has started viewing G20 as another international forum that supports Washington's and its

ally's agenda at the most.

Sixthly, George Magnus, an economist who is with the China Centre at Oxford University, says: "There may be an element of deliberate snub to India but could also be a statement that there are different governance structures Xi Jinping thinks are important and the G20, may not be one of them. Xi may have wanted to make an example of the Indian G20."

Yes, there could be a high probability that Xi might be thinking on these lines.

As economic globalisation unfolds in full cycle, India and China seem to be heading more towards collision than convergence. But there was a time when both the bordering nations were offering huge benefits to their partnering countries without upsetting the regional power balance. Today, the world is different and geopolitical dynamics are changing very fast. To many international observers India-China rivalry and competition is going to grow at any cost. Again, China's new Premier Li Qiang has already arrived in Delhi to attend the summit who is completely new to the entire scenario of India-China conflict.

**By Makhan Saikia**

## Russia, China are forging new military alliance

Lately, there has been a lot of brouhaha over Chinese President Xi Jinping's decision to skip the G20 in New Delhi this week. This news came weeks after the Kremlin announced that President Vladimir Putin would not be attending the summit.

Political commentators have viewed this development as an indication of turbulent times ahead. The Russia-China alliance is strengthening and this is a clear indicator that there appears to be a stumbling block to democratic values which much of the free world cherishes. Essentially, relations between countries are fluid and they hinge on ongoing developments. The Western alliance must realise that isolating Russia will have ramifications and the only prudent way ahead is to negotiate firmly and, in the process, make concessions to weaken the Russia-China

alliance. What the West urgently requires is a paradigm shift.

Recent reports about China's ambition to establish a blue-water navy have been dismissed. China, today has the world's largest navy



and is surreptitiously seeking to expand its sphere of influence. It is undoubtedly an economic behemoth for the time being, but a more pertinent question that arises is why is Putin veering towards China.

Putin is an elusive leader who has his quirks. A man described by many as indifferent, hard-hearted

and a brilliant strategist. In all, he has dealt with several American Presidents. When he assumed office, former President Clinton was serving his last term in office. It was the late 90's. When the two

leaders met for bilateral talks, Clinton intuitively sensed that Putin did not have democracy in his agenda. The former KGB officer viewed the West as a formidable adversary.

Putin desires to reignite the glory of the former Soviet Union. He does not recognise Ukraine to be a sovereign nation; a viewpoint he

expressed to the next US President, George W Bush, in the NATO- Russia Council (NRC) in 2008. This striking perspective was articulated when Bush hinted that NATO was open to admitting Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance. By now, Putin had reached his patience threshold. Bush had already declared the 'war on terror' which in Putin's view was America's way of exporting democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Putin's response was brutal. He invaded Georgia the same year to reinforce the message to the US. America did not interfere.

The Putin-Obama bilateral meeting has been described by many observers as fruitless. By now, Putin was engaging with a third President. When then-Vice President Joe Biden met Putin to chart the way ahead, the meeting was uncomfortable and tense. They exchanged reproachful looks in the back doors. Biden publicly propagated the

importance of strengthening democratic values in Russia. This was viewed by Putin as a direct and veritable threat to his hold on Russia. What ensued were anti-Putin protests. His response- invade Ukraine and annex Crimea in 2014. When Biden insisted that America send military aid to Ukraine, Obama disregarded his opinion. Putin was now emboldened. He felt he could employ his military apparatus to achieve political ends and the West would not interfere. But when Putin decided to launch a special military operation in February last year, NATO was quick to send military aid. Putin wrongly believed that just like on previous occasions he would have his way. It was a miscalculation of monumental proportions. It is vitally important for the West and for the world to engage with Russia to curtail this new military alliance.

**By Ishaan Saxena**



# Just because Americans love Google doesn't make it a monopoly. Biden lawsuit goes too far.

**President Biden's antitrust enforcers claim they know better than you. Embracing the government's viewpoint would transform antitrust law into a protection racket for preferred businesses.**

On Tuesday, a landmark trial begins that will expose what The Washington Post calls the Biden administration's "aggressive posture on antitrust," which essentially seeks to punish consumers of Google's internet search engine.

The Department of Justice alleges that Google's position as the default search engine on most web browsers and Android smartphones should be dismantled.

From the beginning, the Biden administration's novel and aggressive antitrust theories have raised eyebrows. This can be seen in the Federal Trade Commission's forthcoming case against Amazon Prime, a service beloved by American consumers. Similarly, internet users see Google as the best search engine, and they overwhelmingly prefer it. American consumers' strong preference for Google's search engine does not transform this incredibly successful product into an antitrust violation.

However, President Joe Biden's antitrust enforcers claim they



know better than consumers. Embracing the government's viewpoint would transform antitrust law into a protection racket for the government's preferred businesses.

Antitrust law is designed to protect consumers, not competitors

For decades, American courts have recognized famed antitrust scholar Judge Robert Bork, whose key insight was that antitrust law is, and should be, about protecting consumers - not competitors. Market competition in all American industries

produces better products and services for consumers, and as a result, consumers, not the government, choose which products succeed. There is no antitrust violation just because consumers significantly prefer one company's superior product. Split up Amazon, Prime and AWS? If Biden's FTC breaks up Bezos' company, consumers lose.

The DOJ lawsuit against Google casts consumer preferences aside. The government contends that Google has acted anti-competitively by signing

agreements with web browsers (such as Apple's Safari and Mozilla's Firefox) that make Google the initial search engine on just-installed browsers. But to succeed in court, the DOJ must prove that the alleged conduct excludes others from competing and thus harms consumers. These agreements do not preclude competition for two main reasons. First, these agreements don't require exclusive use of Google's search engine. Rather, they are akin to a cereal brand paying for eye-level shelf space in the grocery store, which no one thinks

is an antitrust violation.

Google is simply paying to promote its product. But just as when shopping for groceries, consumers can choose differently if the competing product is better. Browsers can and do feature other search engines on their home pages. And consumers can easily change the default search engine on their browsers with just a few clicks. The DOJ's theory here is thus far different from the antitrust lawsuit it brought two decades ago against Microsoft. In that case, the government argued that Microsoft violated antitrust laws by categorically prohibiting internet providers from promoting (or even in some cases permitting) alternative browsers besides its own. Here, by contrast, Google's status as the "default" search engine presents no meaningful barrier to consumer choice. Most consumers don't use another search engine. Indeed, consumers overwhelmingly opt for Google even when presented with alternatives:

**By Barbara Comstock**

## Civil Unrest in PoK Shows Pakistan's Kashmir Narrative Falling Flat

A statement made by Union Minister and former Army chief General VK Singh (retd) became the breaking news of the day on Monday. In reply to a question regarding Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the General said that PoK would merge with India on its own after some time. This seems true with every passing day. In PoK and Gilgit Baltistan (GB), thousands of people are participating in protests, raising slogans in favour of opening both the Skardu-Kargil road leading into the Union Territory of Ladakh as well as the Line of Control (LoC) between PoK and Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

It is Pakistan's treatment of PoK and GB that has forced people to lose all hope in Pakistan and to look at alternatives. For the past 77 years, Pakistan has weaved a false political and geographical



narrative around Jammu and Kashmir. However, in recent times, the spread of information and cross-border connectivity developed due to social media has played an instrumental role in totally shattering Pakistan's claim of being a big brother and the claim that Islam serves as a bond of unity has withered away. Pakistan is now seen not only as an occupier but also as an

exploiter of our natural resources. It steals our electricity at the rate of Rs 4.00 per unit and then sells to us at the rate of Rs 53 per unit. Heavy taxes have been imposed on electricity bills and United Nations-sanctioned subsidies on food have been cut.

For the past five months, ad-hoc subject specialists have not been paid salaries. Similarly, pensioners have not received any

money for three months. The ever-increasing cost of living has made living a healthy life unsustainable in PoK. Under the circumstances, the people of PoK and GB are becoming ready to rejoin Bharat. Therefore, it is correct to say that Singh has felt the pulse of the people of PoK and GB and his statement is spot-on.

An incident that took place at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, is an indication of what might come next. On September 7, a young man switched on his mobile camera and began recording a conversation with military personnel, which in minutes, turned into an argument followed by an assault on the civilian. The young man had asked for medical assistance for a relative he brought to the CMH. But the military guards

stopped him at the gates and did not allow him to enter the premises. They asked him to stop filming but he continued to record. In the end, another guard approached him and beat him into submission.

The military stationed in PoK has become highly anxious about civilians in recent days. This is because of the ongoing civil unrest in PoK against the skyrocketed taxes imposed on electricity bills. Protests that began four months ago have now spread all across PoK. Schoolchildren have also joined the protest rallies, chanting slogans against the military.

On September 5, the Pakistan Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) announced that two new check posts would be established at Kohala crossing point and Mangla-Mirpur road.

**By: Dr Amjad Ayub Mirza**



# Naxalite Terrorism Waning in India: Dealing with Left the Right Way

Today, if the youth of this country are asked whether they know Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal or not, chances are that they will give you a puzzled look. Or maybe ask them if they have heard about the Naxalbari uprising and you will again get nothing but confused faces. Now do the same with people in their late 50s or 60s and they will tell you all about the scourge that Naxalite terrorism used to be.

As India successfully concludes its maiden G20 summit in the heart of the capital and looks forward to becoming the third-largest economy in the world by the turn of this decade, the fact that Naxalite terrorism has become a term little heard of is a sign of its forward movement towards inclusive development. In the late 1960s at the peak of India's socialist days, a little-known village of Naxalbari in West Bengal became the launchpad for a protracted armed revolution against the state. It so happened that the peasants and workers working on tea plantations in that village, who also had a long history of being exploited by the landowners and moneylenders, united against an incident of violence by a



landowner against a poor worker. This incident sparked a mass rebellion across the state and also spread to other parts of the country. Although the rebellion may look like a spontaneous event, in reality, the groundwork was being laid in advance by the radical faction of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

In interviews to Indian media, Abhijit Mazumdar, son of Charu Mazumdar has himself explained how his father, along with his other co-ideologists, had put years of hard work into launching and sustaining a Maoist uprising in Naxalbari. In fact, there is a precursor to the Naxalbari uprising in the Tebhaga movement launched in Bangladesh by the same set of

activists including Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal. The aftermath of the Naxal uprising led to the creation of a security challenge for the Indian state that would last for the next 5-6 decades.

Growing up, I remember being asked to write a long note on the causes of Left-wing extremism in India and how it is a nuisance for the state, in my school's social science exam every year. Often, the newspaper also would be full of headlines where political leaders, security personnel and ordinary citizens would be targeted by the Naxalites. On one hand, there was the Kashmir insurgency where militants were bleeding the state through multiple cuts and

on the other was the Maoist insurgency, which had infested no less than 10 states and around 180 districts by the year 2010.

Since the foundation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) more popularly known as the People's War Group, the violence by Left-wing extremists had spread across the interiors of the country in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh. These extremists who called themselves 'revolutionaries' waged an active war against the Indian state while singing tunes of the Chinese state which, according to them, was an ideal type. Some old-timers even recall chanting, "China's Chairman is our Chairman". China witnessed a total communist revolution under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) founded by Chairman Mao Zedong which later led to the establishment of the communist state, People's Republic of China (PRC).

This PRC seems to the Indian communists as their role model till today. They also swore allegiance to Mao's ideology where he preached, "political power flows from the barrel of the

gun". But unlike China, where the Kuomintang, the nationalist party lost the war to the CCP and eventually was forced to limit itself to the Republic of China (known as Taiwan currently), in India, no such victory could be secured by the communists. In 2009, the UPA government launched 'Operation Green Hunt', a large-scale counter-offence with massive troop deployment across Maoist-infested states such as Andhra, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Although due to the criticism by the communists, the then Home Minister P Chidambaram did a U-turn later and said no such operation existed and it was an invention of the media but on the ground, the troop deployment did take place for real. By 2013, more than 84000 troops were stationed across the so-called 'Red Corridor'. In 2014, with a change of government, India's fight against the Naxalites got an unprecedented boost. The Modi government not only showed more conviction in taking on the Left-wing extremism but it also changed its approach - from a narrow counteroffensive driven approach to a multi-pronged strategy.

By: Monica Verma

## Justin Trudeau's India Curse May Bring the End of His Political Career

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau seems to have fallen on the wrong side of the Hindu God Shani. Bungling up for a second time in India, then failing to take off from the country, and being shredded globally while stuck in those circumstances, Trudeau's India curse is the beginning of the end of his political career.

It is proving hard for the Canadian PM to shake off this curse. His politics is being held hostage by Khalistanis in his government. India has continued the tradition of snubbing him. As India grows more and more relevant in global affairs, Canada is slipping into the shadows of insignificance. Trudeau has thrown in the foreign policy towel. The Canadian media and his opponents are having a field day tearing into him. It's 2018 all over again. And this time, it is more serious.

In February 2018, Trudeau set out on an eight-day visit to India expecting a splash of grandeur. Instead, he made a complete

mockery of himself when in a cursed "Bollywood" trip to India, he was snubbed by his counterpart after news of a convicted Khalistani terrorist Jaspal Atwal being invited to official events came out. That



turned into a global spectacle, an unforgotten cringe-fest that makes both Canadians and Indians squirm in agony.

Five years later, a 51-year-old Trudeau arrived at the heart of India, still none the wiser. After being snubbed by most leaders

throughout the G20 summit, failing to secure a bilateral meeting with India and skipping the G20 dinner hosted by PM Modi as if to sulk about it all, Trudeau was obliterated by the Indian prime minister the next

day. As is usually the case with pull-aside encounters, the two leaders got straight to the point as PM Modi raised the threat of Khalistani terror emanating from Canada and its involvement in organised crime, drug

syndicates and human trafficking. India drew its red lines, but Trudeau came out unhinged, and chose to defend the Khalistanis under the cover of "free speech". He also had the gall to talk about "foreign interference" accusing India of meddling in Canada's affairs, when it is indeed Canada that is fomenting a significant terror threat to India.

What the Canadian people should realise is that Trudeau's defence of Khalistanis is not about free speech. Open calls for the assassination of Indian diplomats are not free speech. Attacking Indian diplomatic missions is not free speech. Parading a tableau carrying a violent depiction in celebration of the 1984 assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is not free speech. Vandalising Hindu temples and perpetrating hate against other Indian communities is also not free speech.

All of these events have taken place overtly in Canada just in the last few months. But Trudeau has refused to condemn and crack down upon such violent elements even if it skewers Canada's relations with India for a long time to come. Compare this with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who said, "Let me just say unequivocally that no form of extremism or violence like that is acceptable in the UK." He added that his government is working with the Indian government to tackle Khalistani extremism. Justin Trudeau is no free-speech absolutist. In February 2022, he rained down hard upon the Freedom Convoy of Truckers who had been protesting peacefully. He condemned them, sent the riot police after them and froze their bank accounts. That was not a good time for free speech in Canada.

By: Shubhangi Sharma



# Biden's horrible Iran deal will lead to more hostage taking

On September 11, 2023, the 22nd anniversary of the worst terrorist attack in American history, the Biden administration approved a \$6-billion ransom payment to the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism. President Joe Biden's appeasement of Iran not only disgraces the memory of those who died 22 years ago, it endangers Americans today. Biden agreed to transfer five prisoners and \$6 billion to Iran in exchange for the ayatollahs releasing five American hostages - in effect, placing a \$1.2-billion bounty on the head of every American hostage. This is a nearly 200% increase per hostage from the \$1.7 billion Barrack Obama paid for four hostages in 2015. When Democrats are in office, it pays to have American hostages. The president's September 11 deal is even worse than the one he negotiated last year to trade the Russian arms dealer, Viktor Bout - known as the "Merchant



of Death" - for the Russian-held American basketball player Brittney Griner. At least then, he didn't pay the equivalent cost of over half a squadron of F-35s per hostage, in addition to a prisoner swap. And just like in the case of the Merchant of Death, this deal will only lead to more hostage taking. Only a few months after Bout returned to Russia, the Kremlin took Wall Street Journal reporter Evan

Gershkovich hostage. There is a reason that the United States traditionally doesn't pay ransoms; it only leads to more ransom payments. This payment is not only unwise, it's also unfair. Imagine the message this sends to the other families whose loved ones are being held captive abroad. Either the administration has to extend its unwise policy to the rest of the globe, or acknowledge its hypocrisy.

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And of course, we have just delivered \$6 billion to the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism, a nation that attacked American forces over 83 times since Joe Biden took office, and the new home of Al Qaeda's leadership. This money will pay for more bombs, drones, and terrorist attacks that will kill Americans and our allies. It may also be used to

accelerate and fortify Iran's nuclear program.

The administration assures us that this money will only be used to build hospitals, roads and bridges. Even if we believed the liars and terrorists in Tehran - which we shouldn't - giving the Iranians \$6 billion for roads, bridges and health care frees up to \$6 billion dollars that they previously budgeted for those services. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the ayatollahs will likely shift those newly available dollars toward their military and security forces. Simply put, we must assume that \$6 billion less in civilian spending is \$6 billion more in military spending. This is yet another example of Joe Biden's unacceptable and embarrassing appeasement of Iran. In 2008, he was aptly labeled, "Tehran's favorite senator." Well, Tehran's favorite senator is unmistakably now Tehran's favorite president.

By Sen. Tom Cotton

## Gupta Period wasn't exactly the glorious Hindu age that we are told. It's complicated

The term 'Bharat' in today's imagination conjures up a return to a pure, primarily 'Hindu' golden age - an image carefully curated by colonial historians and accepted rather unquestioningly today. Even to Indian scholars such as RG Bhandarkar, RC Majumdar, and AS Altekar, 'ancient' India, especially under the Gupta dynasty that ruled from the 4th to 6th centuries CE, was an era far 'superior' to the medieval period. For decades, the Guptas have been held up as the exemplars of indigenous Hindu kingship, presiding over a 'golden age' defined by the expulsion of foreign rule. But historical evidence left by Guptas - and their Central Asian rivals and successors - reveal that even ancient India's most ostensibly 'indigenous' rulers had more complex identities than we might think.

How did the Guptas see themselves?

Who were the Guptas? They appear to have been minor aristocrats from the Magadha region, formerly the seat of older



Gangetic empires. The world into which they emerged was not that of ancient Magadha, though - it was an extraordinarily diverse one where peoples of Central Asian origin had already lived, killed, loved, and died across Northern India for centuries. The greatest among them were the Kushans who ruled in the Gandhara region in present-day northern Pakistan. Another power, the Shakas or Indo-Scythians, ruled in Gujarat. By the 2nd century, both the Kushans and Shakas had developed modes of royal self-presentation that justified their rule in a diverse world. The Kushans, as we have seen in

earlier editions of Thinking Medieval, had mastered inventing and reinventing gods. They presented themselves in their coins, chameleon-like, as the beloveds of Zoroastrian, Hellenic, Buddhist, and Hindu deities. Meanwhile, as studied by historian Andrew Ollett in *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language Order of Premodern India*, the Shakas had developed another innovation - the usage of Sanskrit, hitherto a language of myth and ritual, in courtly settings.

Both of these would become integral to Gupta power as it expanded through the Gangetic

plains from the 4th century onwards. In her 2007 paper *The Seated Lady and the Gupta King*, art historian Ellen M Raven points to the Gupta appropriation of a popular Kushan coin design: A standing emperor wearing a mail coat and trousers, sacrificing at an altar and holding a sceptre, with a seated goddess on the reverse. This goddess, the Zoroastrian deity Ardokhsho, holds a cloth diadem in one hand and a cornucopia (a tapered basket full of vegetables and fruit, a Hellenic symbol of abundance). Neither the emperor's costume nor the goddess' attributes can be considered 'Indic' - and yet they appear profusely in Gupta coinage. Ardokhsho was quite seamlessly understood to be Lakshmi, the goddess of royal fortune to the Guptas.

According to Indologist Harry Falk in *The Kaniska Era in Gupta Records*, when the Guptas conquered Mathura (the great Kushan city that controlled the Gangetic Plains) they inaugurated the 'Gupta Era', a year-counting system based on Kushan

models. They also followed the Shakas in using Sanskrit in their public inscriptions and self-presentation. Rather than expelling foreign ideas and peoples, the Guptas, it seemed, were attempting to portray themselves as Indian-cum-Central Asian kings, adopting the costume considered appropriate for elites at the time.

However, the Guptas were fairly catholic in their approach to claiming the mantle of older dynasties. As archaeologist Michael Willis notes in *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, the Guptas also cultivated a 'Neo-Mauryan' aesthetic, conspicuously modelling some of their architecture on the remains of this older Gangetic empire, leaving inscriptions on Mauryan pillars, and even recycling the name 'Chandragupta' (This is similar in concept to the 'Indo-Saracenic' architecture of Lutyens' Delhi as well as to modern politicians' attempts to claim historical figures).

By ANIRUDH KANISSETTI



# 'Elon Musk' perpetuates this toxic myth about genius

For much of the past two decades, journalists, politicians and investors have lauded Elon Musk for his creations: PayPal's seamless financial transactions, Tesla's stylish electronic cars, SpaceX's space-related strides. And while "his creations" deserved an asterisk - his businesses emerged through absorption of other people's technologies, ideas and start-ups - Musk entered the mid-2010s as a bright-eyed innovator pushing for new green technologies and for new extraterrestrial frontiers. His reputation glowed: all that innovation, all that wealth, was going toward The Good. No wonder he became the model for Robert Downey, Jr.'s superhero character Tony Stark. In a world of super-wealthy supervillains, Musk chose a different path.

Then in 2022, Musk bought Twitter, and the other part of Musk, the one referred to by his former partner Grimes as "demon mode," took center stage. Whatever his previous reputation, he now emerged as a force of destruction, stripping the social media site of its value, its reputation and then, ultimately, its name. In recent weeks, he has been using the rebranded "X" platform to attack the Anti-Defamation League, an

organization that fights antisemitism and extremism. Musk has repeatedly been criticized for enabling and boosting antisemitic content on the platform.

In his new biography of the world's richest man, "Elon Musk," Walter Isaacson tries to square these two Musks. He rummages through Musk's violent and chaotic childhood in South Africa (though, as Jill Lepore notes in The New Yorker, he focuses solely on the Musk family's chaos: "There are no other people, and there are certainly no Black people...."). He dissects Musk's many combative, combustible romantic relationships and the many children they produced, often in secret. He charts the ruptured business partnerships and dismissed employees and impossible deadlines that seemed tailor-made to increase human suffering. And Isaacson decides that this is the cost of innovation. It is an old story, the backbone of American lore: the driven inventor, dismissive of human frailties like emotion, personal commitments and the need for sleep, whose

seemingly superhuman drive is not a kind of villainy but rather vital to keep humanity driving forward. Isaacson, a biographer who has written about such innovators and geniuses as Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, Leonardo da Vinci and Steve Jobs, sees in Musk an affirmation of that story.



Musk's demon mode may be unpleasant, but it is the price of genius.

As Isaacson writes in the closing sentences of his 600-page tome, "Sometimes great innovators are risk-seeking man-children who resist potty training. They can be reckless, cringeworthy, sometimes even toxic. They can also be crazy. Crazy enough to think they can

change the world." Crazy, cruel, immature: these aren't failings; they're features of creative genius. That is Isaacson's thesis, anyway. But it relies on a narrow understanding of genius. Genius for Isaacson can be measured in patents and profits. Musk runs several companies and is the richest man in the world. His genius is a given. All the rest, no matter how harmful, must be understood as an essential ingredient of that genius.

That's quite an impoverished view of genius, one that perpetuates the "great man" theory of history, in which the course of the world is shaped by a few brilliant men who thrive under the systems of their time. It overshadows

genius generated through collaboration, which, though present throughout Musk's career, takes a backseat to the force of his singular personality throughout Isaacson's book. And it leaves little room for the transformative power of people such as racial justice and LGBTQ movement leaders who divined a new way of being in the world, which requires a sort of

emotional and moral understanding absent from Musk's career.

Musk's apparent cruelty is at least in part an offshoot of the fact that his companies seem to be more real, more alive, to him than human beings. In Isaacson's telling, when Musk is anxious that a company might collapse, he doesn't warn that it might fail, he warns that it might die. ("We either do this or we die," he tells Tesla executives concerned about the potential misuse of customer deposits; "I believed if we couldn't do it in three, we deserved to die," he tells Isaacson about his first three failed rocket launches for SpaceX.)

Yet when Tesla drivers using the car's autopilot mode are killed when the technology fails, Musk appears more annoyed by the bad press than the dead customers. As Isaacson describes it, Musk "held a conference call with reporters in October 2016, and he got angry when the first questions were about the two deaths. If they wrote stories that dissuaded people from using autonomous driving systems, or regulators from approving them, 'then you are killing people.' He paused and then barked, 'Next question.'"

By Nicole Hemmer

## The US economy will likely enter a recession soon

While US economic growth has defied expectations this year, clouds are gathering on the horizon. The all-important US consumers have stood their ground and continued to spend, and most data underlines spending strength. But some emerging information suggests that consumers may eventually stumble, which could drive the US into a brief recession. To be clear, gross domestic product (GDP) growth has been surprisingly robust this year - and that's largely due to strong consumer spending over the first half of 2023. First quarter GDP expanded by 2% and in the second quarter grew by 2.1%. At the end of last year, most economists expected the economy to contract over that period because of severe inflation and, in response, rapid interest rate increases. But rising wages, a war chest of pandemic savings and low debt levels have kept US consumers active this year despite



these pressures.

So, what's there to worry about? Real personal income was flat in July, real disposable personal income (real personal income minus taxes) dropped in July for the first time in 13 months and the personal savings rate dropped in July. Meanwhile, consumer spending jumped in July, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. That all suggests that US consumers may be getting out over their skis with their buying habits.

To be sure, the tight labor market is still driving incomes up, but not as quickly as last year. And the Fed is intent on softening up the labor market to further curb inflation by targeting wages.

So, if spending growth is starting to exceed income growth, how are Americans paying for things? The answer is debt and savings, neither of which is sustainable.

During the second quarter, outstanding credit card debt rose to more than \$1 trillion, and auto loans to nearly \$1.6 trillion - both

all-time highs. Granted, Americans are earning more, but the total household debt-to-annual personal income ratio is now back up to its pre-pandemic level, according to our calculations. Credit card delinquencies have also steadily climbed and are now back up to 2019 levels. Furthermore, interest rates on debt are higher than they've been in years, making monthly payments on rising balances even higher. Thus, further debt-fueled buying could be challenging for Americans. Most of us have run up credit cards at one point or another; paying them down usually requires sacrificing some spending.

US consumers have also leaned on their pandemic-fueled savings. Pandemic-relief money from the government and spending that people skipped early in the pandemic resulted in a national savings war chest of about \$2.1 trillion, according to a Federal

Reserve Bank of San Francisco study. Those savings are rapidly being spent and are currently estimated to have dropped to just \$190 billion. Without a more balanced relationship between spending and income growth, these savings could be wiped out by the end of the year.

Further evidence of an increasingly stretched consumer can be seen elsewhere. Hardship withdrawals from 401(k) accounts have jumped, retail theft is spiking and retailers report that consumers are increasingly focused on discount brands.

None of this bodes well for future spending, nor do the mandatory student loan repayments set to resume in October. Indeed, following a three-year hiatus, millions of Americans will have to start diverting a part of their monthly paycheck back to these payments.

By Dana Peterson and Erik Lundh



# Earth Had The Hottest Summer On Record In 2023, Says NASA

(South Asian Insider Bureau) The Earth experienced the warmest June-August period on record this year, according to American space agency NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). It was the hottest summer in the Northern Hemisphere and the warmest winter in the Southern Hemisphere.

The months of June, July, and August were 0.23 degrees Celsius warmer than any previous summer in NASA's record and 1.2 degrees Celsius warmer than the average summer between 1951 and 1980. Additionally, August temperature was 1.2 degrees Celsius higher than usual. It is to be noted that in the

Northern Hemisphere, meteorological summer lasts from June to August. This new record comes as a global heat wave intensified wildfires in Canada and Hawaii and fueled intense heat in South America, Japan, Europe, and the US, as per NASA. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said in a statement, "Summer 2023's record-setting temperatures aren't just a set of numbers - they result in dire real-world consequences. From sweltering temperatures in Arizona and across the country, to wildfires across Canada, and extreme flooding in Europe and Asia, extreme weather is threatening lives and livelihoods around the world." Greenhouse gas emissions have been

identified as a major driver behind climate change and the worldwide warming trend that resulted in such a sweltering summer. NOAA chief scientist Sarah Kapnick said, "Not only was last month the warmest August on record by quite a lot, it was also the globe's 45th-consecutive August and the 534th-consecutive month with temperatures above the 20th-century average. Global marine heat waves and a growing El Nino are driving additional warming this year, but as long as emissions continue driving a steady march of background warming, we expect further records to be broken in the years to come." Listen to the latest songs, only on JioSaavn.com The

tropical Pacific Ocean experiences El Nino, a natural climate trend characterised by higher-than-normal sea surface temperatures. The phenomenon may have wide-ranging consequences, frequently bringing colder, wetter weather to the Southwest of the US and drought to nations in the western Pacific, such as Australia and Indonesia, according to NASA. "Unfortunately, climate change is happening. Things that we said would come to pass are coming to pass. And it will get worse if we continue to emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into our atmosphere," Gavin Schmidt, a climate scientist with the space agency stated.

# After Mexico Brings Bodies Of 'Aliens' To Parliament, NASA's Response

**A Mexican lawmaker presented 'alien' bodies saying that they were about 1,000 years old.**

(South Asian Insider Bureau) New Delhi: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on Thursday released a new report on what it calls the "unidentified anomalous phenomenon" (UAP), better known to the public as unidentified flying objects, or UFOs. In response to a recommendation by an independent study team for NASA to play a more prominent role in understanding UFOs, the US space agency announced that it is appointing a director of UAP research. During the press conference, NASA officials were also asked questions about the UFO hearing in Mexico's Congress that featured the presentation of alleged remains of non-human beings. David Spergel, the former head of Princeton University's astrophysics department and chair of the UAP report, said he did



not know the nature of the samples but urged transparency. "This is something that I have only seen on Twitter. When you have unusual things, you want to

make the data public," Mr Spergel said. "If you have something strange, make samples available to the scientific community," he told the Mexican

government. 'Alien Bodies' Presented In Mexican Congress Mexican journalist and long-time UFO enthusiast Jaime Maussan showed politicians at the hearing on Tuesday two tiny "bodies" displayed in cases, with three fingers on each hand and elongated heads. He said in the presentation that the specimens were recovered near Peru's ancient Nazca Lines and had been carbon-dated by Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) and concluded to be about 1,000 years old. Maussan claimed they were not related to any species on Earth. "I think there is a clear demonstration that we are dealing with non-human specimens that are not related to any other species in our world and that all possibilities are open for any scientific institution... to investigate it," Maussan said.

# Jailed Khalistan Poster Boy Amritpal Now Totally out of The Picture in His Own Village



(South Asian Insider Bureau) Just a poster remains of the false 'enigma' that Khalistani supporter Amritpal Singh had built in his village near Amritsar before his arrest this April. His 'radicalisation' infrastructure stands dismantled and Singh along with his aides is now locked

far away in Assam's Dibrugarh jail. Surprisingly, residents of Jallapur Khera village now say that Khalistan was a "bogey" created by Singh and no such sentiment is there on the ground. "Khalistan is no issue, I don't feel so...there is nothing on the ground,

some people like Amritpal created it. How can Khalistan be made? This is India and it will remain so," two village elders, Satpal Singh and Harman Singh, told News18 in Amritpal's village on Thursday.

The local gurdwara where Singh used to give his sermons, and a structure nearby where he ran a so-called de-addiction centre, lie deserted. Villagers said the police raided that structure to recover arms and claimed that Singh radicalised youths here and gave them arms training, rather than weaning them off drugs. Not many in the village, however, want to talk about Singh anymore, saying he is a 'finished force' and those close to his family admit there is little chance of him stepping out of jail for many years given the strong charges put on him. Singh had absconded in March after the police tried to arrest him and he finally surrendered in Rode village of Punjab

after 35 days. At his family home too, there is a pall of gloom with his parents getting few chances to meet him in jail. Some youths in the village, however, say Singh did a good job on drug eradication and his private militia enforced a drug-use ban in the area. "He was a man who got misguided...there were no thefts in the area when he was here as there was no drug abuse. Now, again, you can find drug addicts everywhere around the village and neighbouring areas," they said.

People in Jallapur Khera, in fact, say the bigger issue is jobs and unemployment. "There are no jobs here...the children of all of us are abroad in Canada. The Punjab government should work on that as, if jobs come, the youth will not be misguided towards drugs or Khalistani talk," Satpal and Harnam said. It is, however, safe to say that the Amritpal factor is finished.



# 'Bharat' is Great, But Can We Afford to Lose 'Brand India'?

(South Asian Insider Bureau) There is a buzz that the government may soon introduce a resolution to exclude India from the official name of the republic. The Article 1 of the Constitution says, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States". It is actually the only instance of Bharat being mentioned in the entire Constitution. At all other places, the republic is mentioned as India. The expression 'President of Bharat' used in G20 invite appears incongruous. Article 52 of the Constitution of India says that there shall be a President of India. The standard letterhead of President reads in Hindi and President of India in English. There is a certain sanctity attached to the institutions, especially the dignified office of the President of India, which should not be undermined in a whimsical manner.

The names India, Bharat and Hindustan, although they might have different vintages, are commonly used for our country in the modern times. While it is common to use India in English, Bharat in Hindi and other Indian languages, and Hindustan in Urdu, there has been no clash as such. Thus, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan chose to publish the famous series, The History and Culture of the Indian People, under the general editorship of RC Majumdar. When industrialist GD Birla lent K.M. Munshi, the President, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (estd.1938), the support for the project in 1944, a special purpose vehicle was set up called Bharatiya Itihasa Samiti, or the Academy of Indian History. Munshi's commitment to "Bharatiya" culture was never in doubt. However, nowhere has he shied away from using the word India, while writing in English. The name India was seamlessly used by all nationalists namely Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Lokmanya Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Sister Nivedita, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Veer Savarkar, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Syama Prasad Mookerji while writing or speaking in English. Even M.K. Gandhi, who must be credited as the 'de-coloniser' of the Indian mind, never shied away from using India. The same person would use the word Bharat while speaking or writing in the native language whether Hindi, Bengali, Marathi or Gujarati. To imagine a clash between India and Bharat on that account is disingenuous. The conflict between India v/s Bharat was a copywriter's spin meant to capture the gulf between the affluent and underprivileged population of India. However, the same underprivileged population celebrates the victory of "Indian" cricket team the

most. Nobody in the public calls the Indian cricket team as Bharatiya Cricket Dal.

The government justification for excluding the name India remains to be heard. Possibly, it would be revealed only on the floor of the House in Parliament. However, the arguments of those advocating the name Bharat, in exclusion to India, are pedantic. They refer to the verse in the Vishnu Puran, which describes the land lying between the Himalayas and the sea as Bharat. The continuity of that name is implicit rather than evident. Little is known about how Buddha, Chandragupta Maurya, Samudragupta, Harshvardhan, Rajendra Chola, Shivaji or Baji Rao-I used to describe the country. In the 19th century, it is evident from the contemporaneous printed works, that India was called Bharat in vernacular languages. The use of Bharat (Bharatvarsha) was so seamless that it seems part of historic memory rather than a coinage. However, we never notice any conflict between the two words, India and Bharat, both having different spheres in linguistic terms.

During the Constituent Assembly debates, there was an animated discussion on the subject. There were members namely Prof. Shibban Lal Saksena, Lokenath Mishra and M. Ananthasayam Ayyangar who insisted on the name of Bharat in exclusion to India, when amendments to Article 1 were moved on November 15, 1948. H.V. Kamath, during the discussion on Draft Constitution on September 18, 1949, moved an amendment to Dr. Ambedkar's formulation of Article 1

that India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States. Kamath's option were a) Bharat or, in the English language India, shall be a Union of States and b) Hind, or in English language India, shall be a Union of States. His inspiration was an article from the 1937-Constitution of Irish Free State – "The name of the State is Eire, or, in the English language, Ireland". Seth



Govind Das' suggestion was – "Bharat known as India also in foreign countries". Shri Kallur Subbha Rao (Madras) supported Bharat, and even wanted to rename Hindi language as Bharati. Ram Sahai (Madhya Bharat) also wanted the name to be Bharat. Kamalapati Tripathi more or less agreed with Kamath overtly by supporting "Bharat, that is India" or alternatively "Bharat, that is known in the English language as India". Hargovind Pant (United Provinces) by quoting the ancient Sanskrit axiom – "Jamboo Dwipay, Bharat Varshe, Bharat Khande, Aryavartay etc" supported the name Bharat in exclusion to India. Ultimately, when President of the Constituent Assembly Dr. Rajendra Prasad put the motion – (1) Bharat, or in the English language India shall be an Union of States — to voting, the assembly was divided by show of hands (there were no electronic voting

systems in Parliament then) Ayes-38 and Noes-51. Provided that (as on December 31, 1947), there were 229 members in the Constituent Assembly representing the provinces, and 70 members from Indian princely states (that largely went vacant), comparatively fewer number of members appeared to have participated in the debate as evident from the division of the vote, although at stake was the most important possession of the nation, her fair name! The amendment was thus negated. Later on, "India, that is Bharat, shall be the Union of States" was adopted.

The survival of the name of India as one of the two names of republic was not really unfortunate. Since the 19th century, the appellation India has gone around the world. Whether it was Dadabhai Naoroji setting up East India Association (estd. 1867) in London, or Swami Vivekananda preaching the glories of this ancient nation in the USA, or our national leaders such as G.K. Gokhale, Lala Lajpat Rai advocating the cause of self-government for the country abroad, they have used the name India. Even Tagore, a greater cultural icon is harder to find, used India in his lecture series on Nationalism in the USA during 1916-17. Subhas Chandra Bose, a greater nationalist is harder to find, also used India without reservation, although he later popularised the word "Hind" through his Azad Hind government.

It would have led to more consequential rupture with history if the nation excluded the name India. Most of the knowledge production about this land and its people (being gazetteers, history, geography and archaeology) has happened under the name India.

## Indian Student Killed By Speeding US Police Car

New Delhi: The shocking bodycam footage of an US cop laughing while talking about the death of Andhra Pradesh student Jaahnavi Kandula in an accident has sparked outrage. Her university meanwhile has decided to award the 23-year-old her degree posthumously and present it to her family. Expressing solidarity towards the incident, the Northeastern University's Chancellor said, "We also recognize that our Indian student community-across all Northeastern campuses-has been especially impacted by this tragedy and its aftermath. We stand in solidarity with you and have every expectation that the ongoing

investigations will bring a measure of justice and accountability." While issuing the note, the University also mentioned a helpline number for mental health support. Northeastern provides a 24/7 mental health support service called Find@Northeastern that offers students access to a licensed mental health clinician at any time from any location in the world by calling 877.233.9477 (U.S.), 55.229.8797 (Canada), +1.781.457.7777 (Intl.). Student support is also available from the We Care team in Student Life at wecare@northeastern.edu or 617.373.7591 as well through the Student Affairs team on the Seattle campus at

sea.sa@northeastern.edu. Faculty and Staff can contact the employee assistance program at New Directions at 800.624.5544." The 23-year-old Jaahnavi Kandula from Andhra Pradesh was pursuing a master's degree from the Northeastern University campus in South Lake Union. She went to the US from Bengaluru on a student exchange programme in 2021 and was due to graduate this December. Ms Kandula was hit and killed by a police car while crossing the street on January 23. According to The Seattle Times, Kevin Dave, the police officer driving the car was going 119 kmph and the graduate student's body was thrown more than 100 feet.



# 50 shades of secularism is INDIA bloc's weakest link

(News Agency) When the 26-member INDIA came together, it was expected that there would be differences. That was a given, because the parties of the rainbow coalition subscribe to a wide range of ideologies and are spread across a huge geography. But it is the suddenness and the source of the problem which has taken everyone by surprise.

That a problem was likely to originate in the North, in the form of AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, or from the East, because of Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee, was anticipated. Both Arvind Kejriwal and Mamata Banerjee are said to harbour PM aspirations and have a rancorous relationship with the Congress, the main opposition party.

But no one saw it coming from the South. And no one thought it would be on

Sanatana Dharma or Hindutva.

But why weren't ideological differences over Hindutva expected, given that the INDIA parties have shown varying degrees of alignment with it or towards secularism? The answer to that is that experts and people likely saw the prime ministerial aspirations of INDIA leaders and their seat-sharing as key divisive issues.

They failed to factor in how the disparate parties use separate prisms to view "secularism", a favourite word when it comes to cobbling together an alliance trying to counter the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

## **SANATANA ROW PUSHES INDIA BLOC ON BACK FOOT**

DMK leader and Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin lit the fuse with his

Sanatana Dharma remark. Udhayanidhi compared Sanatana Dharma to "dengue and malaria" and said that it should not just be opposed, but "eradicated".

The BJP immediately slammed Udhayanidhi but the situation blew out of hand and even members of the INDIA bloc found Udhayanidhi's remarks indefensible.

The otherwise fire-spitting Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, too, was on the back foot over Udhayanidhi's remarks.

"We should not be involved in any matter which may hurt any section of people. Maybe he [Udhayanidhi] is a junior and so he may not know that. From my side, I don't know from which vision they have said this," Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi called Udhayanidhi "ignorant". "Anyone making derogatory comments against it (Sanatana Dharma) is ignorant of what it stands for". Sanjay Raut, another leader of the Uddhav Thackeray-led party, said it was not right to attract the anger of the entire country.

"I am from Sanatana Dharma. I condemn and oppose such statements," AAP leader and MP Raghav Chadha said, adding, remarks by "small leaders" couldn't be seen as the official stand of the Opposition bloc INDIA.

The Trinamool Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and the AAP are all partnering with the DMK as part of the INDIA bloc. What is also interesting is how they themselves use Hindutva or secularism, in some cases, in their politics.

# Cybercrime in India: Taming The Raging Bull

(News Agency) Every year lakhs of Indians become unsuspecting victims of cybercrime, often losing their life savings. The raging bull of cybercrime in India is a major GDP deflator. Globally 2-2.5 per cent of GDP is lost to cybercrime, and I humbly posit that India that is Bharat, is amongst the worst sufferers globally.

## **INJECTING A PERSONAL NOTE**

On October 12, 2019, between 1022 to 1928 hours, through three coordinated remote transactions in quick succession, in a classic cybercrime case, I was swindled off Rs 2,61,028.38 from my savings bank account with State Bank of India (SBI), Kalyani Nagar Branch, Pune. All that swindlers left in my account were Rs. 4.28. As a SBI probationary officer of the 1981 batch, I had access to the top management of the bank who on my complaint, instituted an enquiry committee of five senior officers and an enquiry report was sent to me after three months. It was my fault. Period. Being emotionally attached to the bank, I decided to rest my case. Earlier, my complaint about cyber fraud to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Ministry of Finance did not even elicit a reply.

Alas! The bank did not have an electronic counter to detect and stop the fraud perpetrated by the notorious Jamtara gang which swindled my savings. The bank also did not have the much-needed insurance cover to protect hapless customers from cyber fraud. Pune Police Commissioner acted within minutes on my verbal complaint but by that time, the money had already vanished without leaving a trail.

## **TALES FROM CITIES**

A 27-year-old housewife lost her life savings of Rs 7.2 lakh after being lured by online crooks to invest in prepaid tasks with the lure of 'extra income'. Cyber crooks had reached her through a

messaging app.

A 41-year security guard was duped by cyber crooks with fraudsters siphoning off his bank account without his knowledge. Crooks managed to get details of the account and simply transferred the money to a private bank account in West Bengal. A 32-year-old woman lost Rs 16.6 lakh, duped by a conman whom she met on social media. The modus operandi was using another woman to tell her there was a huge cash parcel in her name and she needed to transfer Rs 16.6 lakh to a bank account for different charges to get hold of the cash booty.

A 25-year-old pharmacist was duped of Rs 9 lakh after taking part in an online task which turned out to be a fraud. The modus operandi was an invitation through a link to join a prepaid task.

A cyber crook robbed a 37-year-old woman of Rs 18 lakh between April and September this year. He had contacted her through a matrimonial site telling her he liked her profile. He apparently got the money transferred for the interior of the house and for investing in the share market on her behalf.

Two software engineers and NGO volunteers were collectively duped of Rs 37 lakh in separate online task frauds. This included a 35-year-old male software engineer losing Rs 23.3 lakh, a 27-year-old techie cheated of Rs 12.24 lakh and an NGO volunteer robbed by Rs 2.07 lakh. Two software engineers, including a woman (37) lost Rs 34 lakh to cyber crooks who trapped her with the bait of a handsome return on performing online tasks like rating hotels or liking online videos. The crooks got the two victims to open an account on a mobile messenger application to communicate with them and perform tasks.

As reported today, in another case, a 33-year-old marketing manager working with a digital marketing company was

defrauded of Rs 3.57 lakh to different UPI IDs given by crooks, who promised her handsome earnings on online ratings of restaurants.

The above dozen cases of online fraud have been culled out by me, as reported in just one newspaper in the past three days. These frauds have been perpetrated on hapless people. Victims have been both illiterate and highly literate.

## **HIGH CYBERCRIME RATE, GUILTY ROAM SCOT-FREE**

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), during the last five years, has reported nationwide cybercrime data of 21796 (2017), 27248 (2018), 44735 (2019), 50035 (2020) and 52974 (2021). Despite the high number of arrests, the conviction rate is alarmingly poor. Convictions 162 (2017), 601 (2018), 486 (2019), 1369 (2020) and 736 (2021) against arrests 11601 (2017), 13569 (2018), 15268 (2019), 18420 (2020) and 27374 (2021).

The arrest-to-conviction rate has been appallingly low, varying from a lowly low of 1.40 per cent (2017), 4.42 per cent (2018), 3.2 per cent (2019) and 2.69 per cent (2021). Even the best conviction rate in 2020, at 8.9 per cent, is minuscule, below ten per cent.

## **NCRB CYBERCRIME DATA A FRAUD ON THE NATION**

Having talked about cybercrime data collated annually by NCRB, I humbly posit that the NCRB cyber fraud data is a big fraud on the nation. It is not even the tip of the iceberg. My assertion is backed by the cybercrime data of complaints received at the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) in Delhi where since January 2022, more than 2.5 lakh cyber fraud complaints have been received. However, investigation into a majority of these cases is pending since only 1-2 per cent of the complaints are converted into FIRs. In terms of recovery

of money lost, the pan-India data suggests not more than 2-5 per cent of money defrauded is recovered.

And if proof is needed of what I say, it is here:

In Pune — my hometown — as per police data, till August 18, 2023, a total of 22,671 cybercrimes were recorded against 19,500 and 19,020 during the same period in 2022 and 2021. For a city with 71 lakh population, it is an astounding 319 cybercrimes per day and 15 per hour.

Delhi: As per Delhi police data, in 2023 up to August, with 25000 cybercrime cases filed, there has been a 212 per cent increase compared to the 8,000 cases filed last year in the same period. The cases, ranging from UPI fraud to bank and email scams, have resulted in financial losses exceeding Rs 200 crore this year. Among the cyber frauds committed in Delhi this year is the biggest cyber scam of a 34-year-old doctor duped of Rs 4 crore by a gang posing as officials from the Narcotics Control Bureau.

Mumbai: Data collated from an RTI application from Mumbai police shows a whopping Rs 615 crore has been lost between 2013 and June 2023 to cyber fraud. And this year, cybercrime has gone up by 50 per cent over last year. Chennai: 33 per cent of all criminal cases booked by Chennai crime branch this year between January and April relate to cyber offences. Ahmedabad: Between 2020 and 2022, the number of calls received by the cyber helpline number from victims of cyber fraud spiked 11 times. According to Gujarat police figures, a total of 24,689 calls were made by the victims in 2020. In 2021, the calls surged to 67,879, and 2022 saw an unprecedented 2,75,264 calls. In recent months, every day over 230 Amdavadis were conned by cybercriminals. It translates to nearly 10



# Second Republican primary debate: When is it, candidates list and what to expect

Following on from last month's debate in Wisconsin, the second showdown will take place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute in Simi Valley, California, about 45 miles (72 km) north of Los Angeles.

(News Agency) -At least six Republican candidates will take part in the second 2024 Republican presidential debate on September 27 in California. Here are some facts about the event and what to expect:

## WHEN AND WHERE WILL IT TAKE PLACE?

Following on from last month's debate in Wisconsin, the second showdown will take place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute in Simi Valley, California, about 45 miles (72 km) north of Los Angeles.

The Republican National Committee, which organizes the debates, has picked the Fox Business Network to host the event, alongside Univision, the US-based Spanish language TV channel, and Rumble, the online video platform popular with conservatives. The two-hour debate will start at 9 pm ET (0100 GMT).

## FEWER CANDIDATES - AND LIKELY NO TRUMP AGAIN

The qualifying rules for the second debate are more stringent than the first, when eight candidates were on stage in Milwaukee. This means two long-shot contenders - North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum and former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson - will likely fail to make the cut due to a lack of donors



and poor polling.

Former President Donald Trump, the runaway front-runner in the nominating contest according to opinion polls, has said he will skip the debates, and did not appear at the first one. Trump may hold a rival event at the same time as the debate, as he did last month.

The six candidates likely to be on stage are: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence, former UN ambassador and South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, US Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, biotech investor Vivek Ramaswamy, and former New Jersey Governor Chris

Christie.

With a smaller lineup, there will be more time for each candidate to attack each other and make their pitches to voters. It also gives them more opportunity to shine or self-destruct.

## DESANTIS DESPERATELY NEEDS A BREAKOUT PERFORMANCE

DeSantis, who was seen in January as the most likely candidate to topple Trump, has had a torrid year, with sinking poll numbers and two staff shake-ups. Once the clear second-place candidate behind Trump, DeSantis' campaign has floundered as some other candidates closed the

gap with him in recent polls.

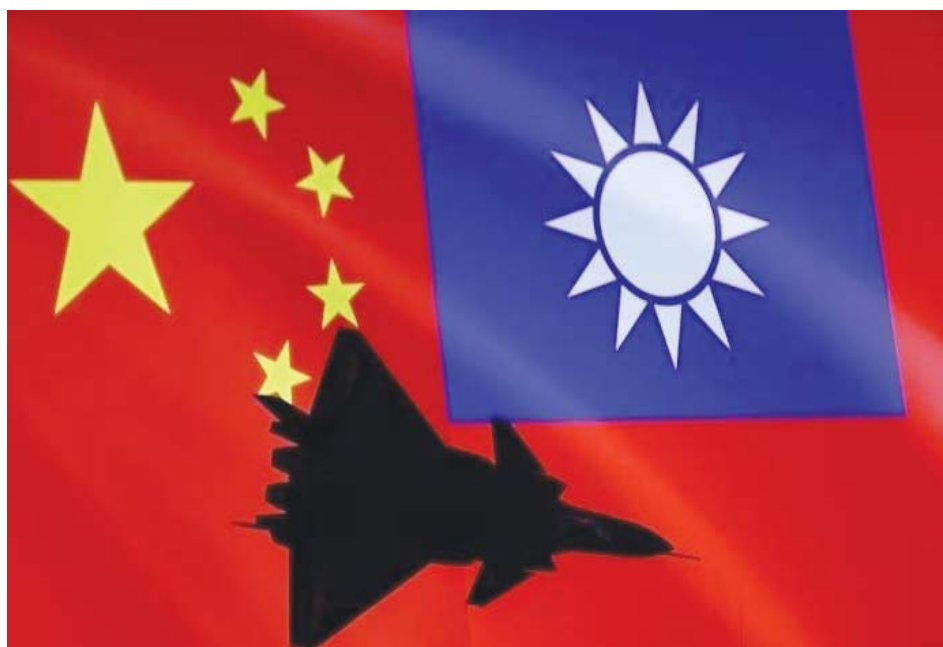
The Florida governor delivered a solid, if not flashy, performance in last month's debate but was frequently overshadowed by Ramaswamy. DeSantis will be looking for some breakout moments this time around to rejuvenate his candidacy. RAMASWAMY WILL GET HIT FROM ALL SIDES

With Trump currently crushing his rivals by roughly 40 percentage points in national polls, the Republican nominating contest has become a fight for second place. His rivals hope the former president's four criminal indictments and legal woes will somehow knock him out of the race next year, giving an alternative nominee the chance to emerge.

After Ramaswamy's pugnacious performance in the August debate, expect to see more attacks on him and his lack of experience, especially by Haley and Pence, both of whom had strong outings last month.

Like DeSantis, Scott also needs a more forceful night after his subdued one last month. The Haley-Ramaswamy-Scott-Pence scramble to overtake DeSantis and become the clear alternative to Trump will likely be a major dynamic.

## Taiwan detects 40 Chinese military aircraft in its air defence zone in last 24 hours



(News Agency) -Taiwan's defence ministry said on Thursday that in the past 24 hours it had detected 40 Chinese air force aircraft entering the island's air defence zone, mostly flying to the south of Taiwan

and into the Bashi Channel.

At least four of the aircraft also crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait to the northwest of the island, according to a map the ministry provided.

## Days after Rajghat visit, UN chief says 'let's not forget example of Gandhi'

(News Agency) -UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi during his visit to Delhi for the G20 Leaders' Summit, on Wednesday urged that one must not forget the example of Gandhi.

"I came from India and I went to pay tribute to Gandhi. Let's not forget the example of Gandhi," Guterres said at his press conference here in response to a question on Palestine.

"I think it's important to fully recognise the rights of the Palestinian people" and it is important to condemn any attempt to undermine the two-state solution, he said. "I do not think that it is with violence that the Palestinians will be able to better defend their interests. That is my humble opinion," he added. Guterres travelled to Delhi to attend the G20 Leaders' Summit held under the Indian presidency on September 9 and 10 in the national capital.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted leaders of the world's biggest economies, including US President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Brazilian President

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov among others, for the G20 Leaders' Summit. On the second day of the summit, the G20 leaders, including Biden, Sunak and

Guterres, went to Gandhi's memorial at Rajghat and paid tributes to the revered Indian leader. In response to a question by a Pakistani journalist on whether Guterres raised the issue of alleged violence against minorities in India with the Indian leadership during his visit to Delhi, Guterres said he did not have any bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Modi during the summit. "But our position has been very clear.



# Vivek Ramaswamy says he wants to shut down FBI, cut federal workforce by 75%

**Vivek Ramaswamy said he would try to reduce the federal employee headcount by half in his first year in office and by 75% during his first term if he makes it to the White House.**

(News Agency) -Republican presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy on Wednesday laid out his ideas to shut down the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and fire more than 1 million federal workers, lining up with increasingly sweeping conservative proposals targeting the federal government and particularly law enforcement.

Candidates trying to beat former President Donald Trump have responded to growing anger among GOP primary voters about the indictments against Trump as well as federal investigations and policies seen as unfairly targeting conservatives.

Ramaswamy's proposals are among the broadest in the field. Speaking at the America First Policy Institute in Washington, he said he would try to reduce the federal employee headcount by half in his first year in office and by 75% during his first term if he makes it to the White House. He wants to shut down five federal agencies, including the FBI and the Department of Education. He said he would also eliminate the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms



and Explosives, and the Food and Nutrition Service. "The people who we elect to run the government ought to be the ones who actually run the government," Ramaswamy said. Attempting a purge of that size would immediately lead to huge pushback from federal employees who have civil service protections, interest groups, and lawmakers of both parties who support the work of some or all of those agencies. While in office, Trump often railed against what he saw as a "deep state" of bureaucrats working against his

administration's priorities, but he did not carry out firings of rank-and-file employees. Ramaswamy, a 38-year-old businessman, has drawn the attention and curiosity of primary voters, especially after his performance at the first Republican presidential debate. Even as he runs against Trump, Ramaswamy has repeatedly praised him as the most effective president this century. In the audience Wednesday was US Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Florida congressman who is one of Trump's staunchest allies in

Congress. Ramaswamy is not the only Republican candidate to suggest slashing the federal workforce. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has said he would eliminate the Internal Revenue Service, or IRS, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Education. And there's a larger effort to dismantle the federal government that is being fueled by conservative organizations along with former Trump administration officials. They have been working on drafting a plan for when Trump returns to the White House to oust federal employees and replace them with like-minded officials. Ramaswamy said, currently, presidents act like "puppets" who can't implement policies. He said he would rescind federal regulations that he considers unconstitutional. Regarding the plan for the FBI, Ramaswamy said he would fire 20,000 employees deemed to be in non-essential roles and send 15,000 to the US Marshals Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network at the US Department of the Treasury.

## 2 Russian naval vessels badly damaged in Crimea attack, says Ukraine

(News Agency) -Ukraine said it seriously damaged two Russian naval vessels and struck port infrastructure in the Crimean city of Sevastopol early on Wednesday, in what appeared to be the biggest attack of the war on the home of the Russian navy's Black Sea Fleet. The strike on Crimea, seized and annexed by Russia in 2014, was confirmed by Moscow. It highlighted Kyiv's growing missile capabilities as Russia continues to bombard Ukraine from afar with long-range missiles and assault drones.

Ukrainian military intelligence official Andriy Yusov told Reuters that a large landing vessel and submarine had been hit in the strike, and later described the damage as "considerable" in televised comments.

"We can say now that it is highly likely (the vessels) are beyond repair," he said. Russia's defence ministry said that Ukraine attacked a Black Sea naval shipyard with 10 cruise missiles and three uncrewed speedboats in the early hours, damaging two military vessels that



had been undergoing repairs.

It said it downed seven of the incoming missiles and that the attack boats had been destroyed by a Russian patrol ship. It later said its two vessels would be fully repaired and return to service, contradicting Kyiv's account.

An image circulated online and verified by Reuters showed a docked vessel that had sustained serious damage.

Ukrainian military analyst Volodymyr Zablotsky told news outlet RBK Ukraina the damaged vessels were the "Minsk"

Ropucha-class large landing ship and the "Rostov-on-Don" Kilo-class attack submarine, which can carry Kalibr cruise missiles.

"It carries six torpedoes or four Kalibr missiles in one salvo. So we can calculate that Russia is now down four Kalibr missiles. It would seem that they have lost one missile launcher, at least partially, for several months."

'BIGGEST ATTACK'

Retired Ukrainian navy captain Andriy Ryzhenko, speaking to Reuters by

telephone, said: "It really is the biggest attack on Sevastopol since the beginning of the war."

The city is home to the Black Sea Fleet which the Kremlin uses to project power into the Middle East and Mediterranean and - during the war in Ukraine - to impose a de facto blockade on Ukraine's seaborne food exports via the Turkish straits.

Ukraine has tried to push back against the fleet's naval power by attacking with sea drones packed with explosives, but Russia has continued to use its warships for missile attacks on Ukraine throughout the more than 18-month-old war.

It was not clear what kind of missile was used by Kyiv in the attack on Sevastopol, which lies about 300 km (185 miles) from Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa. Ryzhenko said Ukraine may have used domestically made Neptune anti-ship missiles that had been modified to work against ground targets. British-supplied Storm Shadow cruise missiles were another possibility, he said.



# Kim says Russia will win 'great victory' in Ukraine, invites Putin to North Korea

**North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un, on a visit to Russia's Far East, told President Vladimir Putin that he was sure that Moscow would win with a "great victory" in Ukraine. Putin accepted Kim's invitation to visit North Korea.**

(NewsAgency) -Vladimir Putin has accepted an invitation to visit North Korea, Pyongyang state media said on Thursday, as he and Kim Jong Un toasted "cooperation and friendship between our countries" during a meeting in Russia. Kim is on a visit to Russia's Far East as Putin seeks to bolster alliances with other leaders ostracised by Western countries.

The North Korean leader is also due to oversee a display of Russian warships during his visit, Putin said, to "demonstrate the capabilities of the Pacific Fleet".

Western allies have raised concerns about a possible arms agreement between Russia and North Korea, as Moscow's war in Ukraine grinds on. After a meeting between the two leaders on Wednesday, "Kim Jong Un courteously invited Putin to visit the DPRK at a convenient time", according to the state-run KCNA news agency, which referred to the country by its official name.

"Putin accepted the invitation with pleasure and reaffirmed his will to



invariably carry forward the history and tradition of the Russia-DPRK friendship."

Kim told Putin on Wednesday he was sure Russia would win a "great victory" over its enemies.

"There took place a tete-a-tete between Kim Jong Un and Putin after the extended talks", according to KCNA, and Kim left a message in a visitor's book which read, "The glory of Russia

that produced the first conquerors of space will be immortal."

Russia became a pariah in the West after launching full-scale hostilities in Ukraine last year and has looked to strengthen alliances with other leaders facing similar isolation.

Putin praised the "strengthening of cooperation and friendship between our countries", while hosting Kim at a spaceport in Russia's Far East, and told

reporters he saw "possibilities" for military cooperation with North Korea.

He had earlier said Moscow could help Pyongyang build satellites.

In Washington, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said any cooperation would be "quite troubling and would potentially be in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions".

US officials and experts have said Russia is interested in buying North Korean ammunition to use in Ukraine.

While Kim was in Russia, Pyongyang fired two ballistic missiles on Wednesday, the South Korean military said, the latest in a string of sanctions-busting tests.

Raising a toast during an official dinner following one-on-one talks, Kim told Putin, "We are confident that the Russian army and people will win a great victory in the just fight to punish evil groups who pursue hegemony, expansion, and ambition."

He also praised the "heroic" Russian army.

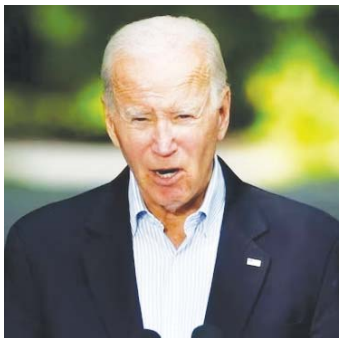
## Hit by impeachment inquiry, Biden says Republicans want to 'shut down government'

(NewsAgency) -US President Joe Biden on Wednesday said Republicans wanted to impeach him because they want to shut down the government, hours after the White House denounced plans to launch an impeachment inquiry against the president.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the inquiry a "political stunt" and said no evidence has been produced by Republicans against Biden as they investigate the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden.

The inquiry is centered around whether Biden benefited from Hunter Biden's business dealings.

Biden said that when Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, a far-right Republican lawmaker and staunch ally of former President Donald Trump, was first elected to the US Congress, she said the first thing she wanted to do was impeach him. "I don't know quite why, but they just knew they wanted to impeach me," Biden told donors at a fundraiser in Virginia. "Now, the best I can tell, they want to impeach me because they want



to shut down the government."

Biden said he does not focus on the impeachment inquiry. "I get up every day, not a joke, not focused on impeachment. I've got a job to do," he said.

The White House has blamed Taylor Greene into pressuring House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy, the top Republican in Washington, to order the impeachment inquiry.

McCarthy's move sets the stage for months of divisive House hearings that could distract from lawmakers' efforts to pass spending bills and

avoid a government shutdown and could supercharge the 2024 presidential race, in which Trump hopes to avenge his 2020 election loss to Biden and win back the White House. "This is an entire exercise of how to do this in an illegitimate way. ... It is going after the president politically, not about the truth," Jean-Pierre said. She said Republicans have turned up no evidence that Biden did anything wrong "because the president didn't do anything wrong."

## Families identify victims as 10-storey building fire kills over 50 in Hanoi



(News Agency) -Hundreds gathered outside a morgue in western Hanoi Wednesday, waiting to hear if their families and friends were victims of a devastating apartment fire that killed more than 50 people.

The fire in the 10-storey building, which had only one exit and wire-barred balconies, started as residents fell asleep on Tuesday night.

Neighbors and residents of the building in the capital's southwest said they heard screaming as people struggled to escape the flames and thick smoke. Police said 56 people were killed and 37 injured, while state media reported that three children were among the dead. At the morgue in a military-owned hospital, officials appeared at the entrance every half hour to announce

through a loudspeaker that there was another victim for families to identify.

Holding out a photo on a mobile phone or simply describing the dead, medical workers asked desperate relatives if they recognised their loved ones.

Cries broke out each time a match was found.

Authorities tried to prevent families talking to journalists, but one man, who did not give his name, said his daughter had died and feared his wife had also perished.

Neighbours said they heard screaming as people struggled to escape the flames and thick smoke.

"I lost my daughter, who was staying with her mother," he said through tears. Unsure where his wife was, he told AFP: "I guess she did not make it either."



# India slashes solar module imports from China in a shift towards self-sufficiency

**Year-on-year, India's solar module imports from China plummeted from 9.8 GW in the first half of 2022 to a mere 2.3 GW during the corresponding period in 2023, the report by global energy think tank Ember said.**

(News Agency) - In a departure from global trends, India has recorded a substantial 76 per cent drop in solar module imports from China during the first half of 2023 which reflects New Delhi's resolute shift towards self-sufficiency in solar manufacturing, a new report said on Thursday. Year-on-year, India's solar module imports from China plummeted from 9.8 GW in the first half of 2022 to a mere 2.3 GW during the corresponding period in 2023, the report by global energy think tank Ember said. This strategic shift, coupled with the imposition of tariffs, underscores India's determination to minimise dependency on imports and prioritise the development of its domestic manufacturing capacity. Neshwin Rodrigues, an India Electricity Policy Analyst at Ember, said, "India's dependence



on China for solar module imports is well and truly reducing post-2022. Domestic manufacturing is gaining momentum, thanks to recent policy interventions."

"As India edges closer to self-sufficiency in solar manufacturing, reliance on Chinese modules and cells is no longer a constraint. What's crucial now is creating an enabling policy environment to ensure that solar installations

keep pace with the National Electricity Plan," he said. India started levying a customs duty of 40 per cent on solar modules and 25 per cent on solar cells from April 2022 in a bid to cut imports and boost local manufacturing.

The country's commitment to reducing import dependency and nurturing a robust domestic solar manufacturing

ecosystem aligns with the nation's broader goals of sustainability and energy self-reliance.

According to its updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs), which are national plans to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, India has committed to achieving 500 GW of installed power capacity from non-fossil fuel-based resources by 2030. Solar is at the heart of this ambitious goal.

The report also said China's exports of solar panels rose by an impressive 3 per cent in the first half of 2023, reaching a total of 114 GW shipped worldwide. This marks a substantial increase from the 85 GW exported during the same period in the previous year.

Ember's data lead, Sam

Hawkins, said, "Solar growth is going through the roof."

China's dominance in the solar panel manufacturing market, accounting for about 80 per cent of the global market share, has significant global implications.

More than half of the solar modules exported from China during the first half of 2023 were destined for Europe, making up 52.5 per cent of exports.

Europe experienced the most substantial absolute growth worldwide, with exports from China increasing by 47 per cent year-on-year (21 GW), reaching a total of 65 GW during the first half of 2023 compared to 44 GW in the same period the previous year.

While Europe led in absolute growth, the fastest expansion occurred in Africa and the Middle East.

## BP CEO Bernard Looney resigns abruptly over transparency issues



(News Agency) - BP CEO Bernard Looney resigned on Tuesday with immediate effect after less than four years in the oil major's top job for failing to fully disclose details of past personal relationships with colleagues, the company said.

Chief Financial Officer Murray Auchincloss will act as CEO on an interim basis, the company said.

Looney, 53, became CEO in February 2020 with a vow to reinvent the 114-year-old company, laying out ambitious plans for the British energy giant

to achieve zero net emissions by 2050, and to invest billions in renewable and low-carbon power. Looney's surprise resignation came after allegations of personal relationships with company colleagues surfaced recently, prompting the company to launch an investigation. That followed similar allegations the board investigated in May 2022. During that review, Looney disclosed "a small number of historical relationships with colleagues prior to becoming CEO." "No breach of the company's code of conduct was found at the time and the board was

given assurances by Looney "regarding disclosure of past personal relationships, as well as his future behaviour."

Looney informed BP's board on Tuesday that he did not fully disclose details of all relationships, prompting his resignation.

BP shares in London ended up 1% before the FT reported Looney's resignation. Its New York-listed shares BP.N fell 1.5% to the day's lows after the news. REINVENTING BP

Auchincloss 52, became CFO in July 2020 and has helped Looney steer the company through some of the most tumultuous years in modern history, from COVID-19 to a rapid exit from Russia following the invasion of Ukraine last year, an energy price shock, and a global cost of living crisis.

Auchincloss, a Canadian national, started his career as a financial analyst in Amoco, before BP acquired the company in 1998. Since then he has held several roles including CFO of BP's North American Gas business.

## Tesla plans to source parts worth \$1.9 billion from India, says Piyush Goyal



(News Agency) - Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, announced that Tesla plans to procure components valued at \$1.7-\$1.9 billion from India, reported news agency Reuters. Goyal also highlighted that Tesla had already sourced components worth \$1 billion from India in the previous year. Goyal's statement comes amid Tesla's keen interest in the Indian market, with the company engaging in talks with the government about establishing a manufacturing facility for affordable electric vehicles (EVs). "Tesla last year already bought \$1 billion worth of components from India... this year their target is \$1.7-\$1.9 billion," Piyush Goyal said at an auto

conference, according to the news agency.

"I am convinced that this (EVs) is the future. It is something we must try to attract," he added.

The shift in Tesla's strategy reflects a willingness to manufacture locally in the country, overcoming previous hurdles related to import taxes on EVs. The company's executives visited India in May, initiating talks about setting up manufacturing facilities for both vehicles and batteries. It may be noted that high-level meetings were held between Tesla and the commerce minister after Elon Musk met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June, during which Musk expressed his intent to make substantial investments in India.



# Move over, kale: Mushrooms are the new grocery aisle celebrities



Move over, kale. There's a new celebrity in the produce aisle: mushrooms. People are scooping up mushrooms so quickly that producers are scrambling to keep pace with burgeoning demand. "We haven't run out as yet, but we're definitely trying hard to keep up," said Gale Ferranto, who helps run her family's third-generation business, Bella Mushroom Farms, in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Chester County, about a two-hour drive southwest from New York City, is the epicenter of mushroom production in the United States. "We call it the Mushroom Mecca," said Ferranto. The area accounts for more than 60% of all domestic mushroom production coming from more than 50 local family-owned

farms. Ferranto's farm produces five million pounds of mushrooms annually, packaged under its Buona Foods brand and other private labels for grocery store chains like Stop & Shop and Giant Food. "It's not going to be easy, but we are upping our game to grow more mushroom crops a year from now," she said. Monthly US mushroom production has surged to an all-time high, according to industry trade group American Mushroom Institute. Store prices for mushrooms have also ticked up. The average selling price for a pound of fresh mushrooms increased to \$4.19 in December 2019, up from \$4.03 from a year ago, according to market research firm IRI. "The push by consumers to eat healthier by

pivoting to plant-based foods is a big part of mushroom's popularity," said Lori Harrison, spokeswoman for the American Mushroom Institute. Plant-based diets are in vogue, fueling demand for meat alternative items like the Impossible Burger and innovations such as cauliflower rice and cauliflower bread. "Growing recognition of the health and nutritional value of mushrooms along with their year-long availability and culinary versatility have contributed to increased customer demand," Walmart (WMT), the nation's largest grocer, said in a statement to CNN Business. Mushrooms are packed with vitamins and minerals. "They are fat-free, low calorie, low sodium, gluten free," said Harrison. "They are versatile, you can eat them

cooked or raw, and they fit any healthy eating plan you have for breakfast, lunch or dinner." Although button mushrooms remain the most commonly consumed variety, Harrison said demand is picking up for specialty varieties, such as shiitake, crimini and oyster mushrooms. Albertsons said shoppers seem to be doing just that. "What we're seeing with mushrooms is customers buying more mushroom varieties, beyond the traditional white and brown mushrooms," said Christine Wilcox, spokeswoman for the supermarket chain. Then there are some unconventional products with mushrooms as an ingredient: There's mushroom tea, mushroom jerky and "shroom" crackers. Meanwhile,

the mushroom "blended" burger continues to pop up on menus nationwide. Growing mushrooms on site Some grocery stores are keeping up with demand by growing mushrooms on site. Entrepreneurs Adam DeMartino and Andrew Carter are cofounders of Smallhold, a startup in Brooklyn, New York that's developed portable indoor mushrooms farming units for stores, restaurants and hotels. The average unit is six feet tall, four feet wide and three feet deep but the setup can be configured in different ways. Each unit can produce 40 to 60 pounds of mushrooms a week. "We've built the company around the growing demand for mushrooms," said DeMartino. The automated units are designed to grow organic specialty mushrooms like pink and blue oyster mushrooms and shiitake mushrooms in a highly-controlled and monitored environment. "Part of the appeal of these units is that mushrooms are delicate in nature. When you cram them into boxes for shipping, it affects their quality," said DeMartino.

## Cutting salt likely to prevent future heart disease, even if you're not at risk now

Heart disease is the number one killer of people worldwide. What's the leading cause of heart disease? High blood pressure, which is often triggered by high sodium (salt) intake in the food we eat. Hypertension is also the leading cause of stroke, heart failure and kidney disease. Yet even if we never salted another dish again in our lives, we would likely still be eating too much sodium every day. That's because it's added to manufactured foods for flavor, texture and color as well as a preservative. A new meta-analysis of 133 clinically randomized trials on lowering salt intake, published Monday in the British journal BMJ, found strong evidence about what would happen if the salt in the foods we eat was cut back. Not only did cutting dietary sodium reduce blood pressure in those with existing hypertension, it also reduced blood pressure in people who were not yet at risk. The greater the reduction in salt intake, the greater the fall in blood



pressure, the research found. That's huge in the world of prevention, said cardiologist Dr. Icilma Fergus from New York's Mount Sinai Hospital, who was not involved in the research. "The importance of this study is that it shows that the reduction in sodium results in blood pressure reduction widely across multiple populations, not just in populations

who were initially deemed as salt sensitive, such as African Americans," Fergus said. That's especially significant considering the revised guidelines from the American Heart Association, Fergus said. Hypertension used to be diagnosed when the top number (systolic) was 140 and the bottom number (diastolic) was 90. Now you're considered

hypertensive if your blood pressure is 130/80. "At 130/90 you already begin to see changes in the vasculature (blood vessels) of the kidneys and some hardening of the arteries," Fergus said. "So having blood pressure in the lower range is beneficial." An even bigger benefit for at-risk populations In addition to the

finding that reducing salt in food brings down blood pressure across populations, the research discovered an even larger fall in blood pressure for those highest at risk, such as the elderly, those with existing high blood pressure and African Americans. In the United Kingdom, blacks are three to four times more likely to have high blood pressure and twice as likely to die from stroke, according to World Action on Salt, a UK advocacy group concerned with salt's effects on health. The American Heart Association says that in the US, more than 40% of African American men and women have high blood pressure. African Americans are also more likely to develop hypertension early in life, where prevention can make an impact. The new meta-analysis was done by international researchers from the Queen Mary University of London, the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, and Action on Salt.



# Leonardo DiCaprio and girlfriend Vittoria Ceretti's kiss at Ibiza club goes viral



Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio and Italian model Vittoria Ceretti were seen kissing at the Hi Ibiza club on August 9. In a video shared by Page Six, the actor and the supermodel were seen getting cozy.

**LEONARDO DICAPRIO AND MODEL VITTORIA SEEN KISSING**

According to a recently surfaced video, obtained by Page Six, Leonardo DiCaprio and Vittoria Ceretti can be seen having an intimate moment. The latter, Leonardo's junior by 23 years, sported a high ponytail and a glittering

crop top, while the actor opted for a casual look with a black T-shirt and a coordinating black cap. DiCaprio, renowned for his roles in movies such as 'The Wolf of Wall Street,' 'Shutter Island,' 'Inception,' and numerous others, was romantically associated with actor Camila Morrone until the year 2022. He has also been rumoured to be dating Indian-origin British model Neelam Gill and supermodel Gigi Hadid. The actor will be next seen in 'The Killers of the Flower Moon', directed by Martin Scorsese.

## Ridhi Dogra said 'no' to playing Shah Rukh Khan's mother in 'Jawan'. But...

Asur actress Ridhi Dogra stars as Shah Rukh Khan's mother in the record-breaking Atlee-directed film 'Jawan'. Despite initial reservations about taking the role, Dogra has been complimented on her performance, including by Khan himself, and says she took the part because it was a challenging opportunity.

Ridhi Dogra is a part of Shah Rukh Khan's 'Jawan'. The Atlee directorial is on its way to breaking several records. SRK plays a hardcore vigilante in the movie. The Asur actress plays his mother, Kaveri, in the film. As her role caught



everyone's attention, IndiaToday.in got in touch with the actress to garner some insights on how she bagged the role, and what convinced her to play a mother to SRK on screen. **'GOT THE BEST COMPLIMENT FROM SRK'**

Recounting the best compliment she has received so far for the role, Ridhi Dogra told IndiaToday.in, "I think my biggest compliment would be from Shah Rukh Khan himself, what he said on the stage. I don't think I need any more responses after what he said that he would like to work with me again.

She further added, "And for me, that is fantastic. I'm very grateful for all the responses. I'm hearing great things, people are being very encouraging. Everyone's like 'your time has come, you worked so hard for this'. I'm trying to enjoy myself and make the most of it."

While her role is justified in the movie, many did question her reasons for saying 'yes' to playing SRK's mother onscreen. When asked about the same, Ridhi told IndiaToday.in, "I'll be honest, I was very nervous about taking this up, but I didn't know any better. I didn't understand if I should do

it, or I should not do it. The only thing I saw in it was that it was challenging for me. That's the only thing that pushed me to do it." Explaining further, Dogra shared, "At that time, I was shooting for like all those web series where I played significant roles, that's the time I got a call for this character, Kaveri. For me, I am a student of cinema and so, when I was told that Atlee wanted to meet me, it was a huge thing. They had started shooting back then. I remember when Atlee called me on set, SRK was on the floor, shooting.





## Taylor Swift's videos from 2023 VMAs are too cute: Watch her cheer for Selena Gomez, dance as Shakira performs on stage

Taylor Swift won the award for best pop music video on Tuesday at MTV's Video Music Awards (VMAs), where the winners are voted for by fans. Videos of the singer making the most of the night are all over social media - from cheering for Shakira and Demi Lovato as they performed on stage, to reuniting with and hugging BFF Selena Gomez as they posed for photographers. While Selena and Taylor Swift were not seated together at the event or arrived at the red carpet together, they posed together for pictures and were each other's biggest cheerleaders when they took the stage to accept their respective VMAs.

Selena Gomez and Rema won best Afrobeats video award for their song Calm Down. While on stage, Selena was asked by Rema to give her own little acceptance speech, as Taylor cheered for her bestie from the audience. In a video from the awards' show that was shared on a fan page, Taylor Swift also asked people sitting around her to stand and cheer as Selena won the award.

Meanwhile, Selena was filmed standing during Taylor's acceptance speech. Sharing the video on Twitter (X), a fan wrote, "Selena Gomez praising her best friend Taylor Swift, while she's giving her speech is so cute." Selena Gomez and Taylor Swift first became friends in 2008, when they were both dating Jonas Brothers members - Selena was with Nick Jonas, while Taylor

was dating Joe Jonas. Over the years, Selena and Taylor have spoken fondly about each other in their interviews and on social media.

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## Shilpa Shetty 'never got the tag of an actor': I'm surviving because of my songs

Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty recently spoke about not getting enough chances to portray her acting chops. The actor said she has survived this long in the audience's memory largely due to the popularity of her songs.

### 'I NEVER GOT THE TAG OF AN ACTOR'

Speaking to Siddharth Kannan, the actor said she got typecast as a glamorous heroine: "I never got the tag of an actor. I always got relegated or rather typecast into being just a glamorous actor, which is also a great niche to have because today I can proudly say that I can do this (pointing at the poster of her film Sukhee), but can you become glamorous? I can say proudly that I picked from whatever was offered to me and I survived."

Despite delivering hits like *Main Khiladi Tu Anari*, the actor was never offered a movie from a big

production house. **SHILPA ON THE POPULARITY OF HER SONGS**

"I have had a long career with so many lows that I used to wonder, 'Why didn't I get offered this role or why was I never offered a film with big banners?' Whatever I have achieved is by working in small films with big actors. I did small characters and no matter whether my films worked or not, all my songs were hits. I am surviving because of my songs," Shilpa stated.

She further added, "There are films of the 90s which I worked in, and the producers would say, 'Oh, we incurred losses.' So, I didn't get the remaining fees also. That time was very different."

On the work front, Shilpa Shetty will next be seen in the family entertainer *Sukhee*, which releases later this month.

## Joe Jonas felt 'detached,' 'sensitive' months before divorce from Sophie Turner

Sophie Turner and Joe Jonas, who got married four years ago, have now parted ways. The 34-year-old singer filed for divorce from his wife of four years in Miami on September 5. Now, according to a source by Page Six, it has been said that Joe was 'very sensitive' whenever he was asked anything related to Sophie in the past few months. 'JOE JONAS WAS DETACHED, SENSITIVE', SAY



**SOURCES** - Joe Jonas and Sophie Turner recently confirmed their separation with a joint statement on Instagram. The two also expressed their desire for privacy, particularly for the sake of their young daughter.

In a report by Page Six, a source told them that Joe was 'very sensitive' about Sophie Turner and their family months before announcing their divorce.

## The Deepika Padukone Effect

### How her extended cameo in 'Jawan' stole the show

It's fair to say that Deepika Padukone truly captured the audience's attention in 'Jawan.' From her first appearance to the final scene, the actress succeeded in keeping the audience thoroughly engaged and on the edge of their seats.

Cameos or special appearances are typically constrained by a limited timeframe, and more often than not, they bring significant contributions to the film. In the case of 'Jawan,' Deepika Padukone had one such role. However, her involvement went beyond merely offering something valuable.

Instead, the film's narrative, which revolved around Azad's story, was intricately intertwined with the tragedy her character experienced. Despite her appearance being just a cameo, Deepika's character emerged as one of the central and crucial figures in the film.

### DEEPIKA'S HIGHLY IMPACTFUL EXTENDED CAMEO IN 'JAWAN'

Deepika Padukone is a name that resonates with grace, talent, and unparalleled charisma. She has

emerged as one of India's finest actors in the contemporary film industry. Over the years, her journey through the world of cinema has been nothing short of remarkable. From her debut in the 2006 Kannada film 'Aishwarya' to her portrayal of Malti in 'Chhapaak' (2020), Deepika Padukone has captivated audiences with her versatility, dedication, and transformative acting skills.

In 'Jawan', Deepika assumes the role of Aishwarya, the protagonist, Azad's mother, in the film. Aishwarya finds herself unjustly convicted for a multitude of complex reasons, entangled in the conflict between her husband and the story's antagonist. Believing her husband has been killed, Aishwarya fiercely fights to defend herself. Yet, her world takes a dramatic turn when she discovers she is carrying a child. The film's evocative background score and the poignant main song, 'Araraari Raaro,' undoubtedly contribute significantly to the emotional impact, leaving viewers deeply moved and likely shedding tears.





# Bhumi Pednekar, Shehnaaz Gill turn Coyote Ugly, show off sultry moves in new Thank You For Coming song

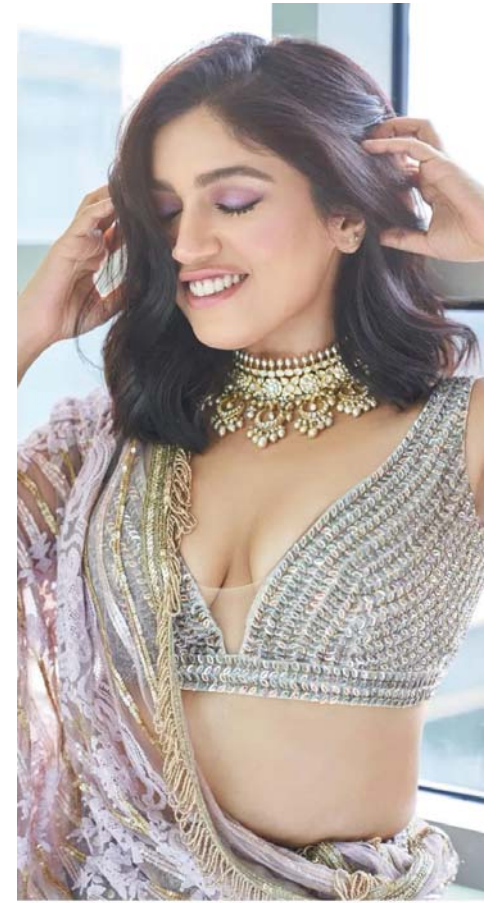
The first song from Bhumi Pednekar's upcoming movie Thank You For Coming is here. Titled Haanji, the song features all the five leads - Bhumi, Shehnaaz Gill, Kusha Kapila, Dolly Singh and Shibani Bedi. The song still shows Bhumi and Shehnaaz more prominently than the others. Haanji is filmed in a club, where Bhumi and her gang go out to party. Also seen with them is actor Karan Kundrra, serving the girls shots and drinks. Bhumi is in a red dress, while Shehnaaz is in a blue top and black PVC pants. They begin by grooving on the dance floor amid a sea of gyrating butts, and then take the party to the bar. They climb up the bar and pull off some dance moves, true Coyote Ugly style. Helmed by Karan Boolani, the film is all set to hit the theatres on October 6. On directing the film, Karan earlier said, "I've been fortunate to be surrounded by incredible women throughout my life, and I'm extremely proud to have directed this film. As a man, Thank You for Coming has taught me so much about the female experience around desire, love and acceptance. I hope that the audiences have as much fun watching the film as we had making it."



The film will be facing a clash with Akshay Kumar's upcoming film Mission Raniganj: The Great Bharat Rescue. Billed as a coming-of-age comedy, Thank You for Coming follows the story of Kanika Kapoor, played by Bhumi Pednekar, a single girl in her 30s, and her quest for true love and pleasure. The film is directed by Karan from a script penned by Radhika Anand and Prashasti Singh. The premiere

of the movie is scheduled to take place on September 15 at Roy Thompson Hall during Toronto International Film Festival 2023 (TIFF). Producer Anil Kapoor said about the film, "I've been wanting to attend TIFF ever since Slumdog Millionaire! That year, I travelled to all the festivals from BFI at London to Cannes and everything in between. The only festival I couldn't attend then was TIFF and that was

because my visa didn't arrive in time for me to be there. So, TIFF has been on my bucket list ever since!" "I may not have been able to attend the festival then as part of the movie, but this year I get to be there in the capacity of a producer. 'Thank You For Coming' has so much heart, soul and sass, and I'm grateful to be a part of its showcase on such a hallowed platform," he said in a statement.



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# As pro-India candidate Solih teeters in Maldives polls, only Nasheed can decide his fate

At the end of the first round, there's no question that Nasheed is the kingmaker, not Ibrahim Solih or Mohamed Muizzu.

By JYOTI MALHOTRA

Loyalty and revenge are being explored in equal parts in the Maldives these days, as the Indian Ocean nation went to polls this weekend and delivered a stinging blow to the ruling pro-India Maldivian Democratic Party.

In the results declared Sunday, the MDP's presidential candidate, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, was trailing by 7 per cent against the front-runner, the pro-China candidate and Male mayor Mohamed Muizzu. Since neither candidate got over 50 per cent of the vote, the second and final round of voting will take place on 30 September.

Solih won 39 per cent of the vote, while Muizzu was ahead with 46 per cent. The exact difference of 7 per cent between the winner and runner-up was grabbed by Ilyas Labeed of The Democrats, a party headed by former president and MDP leader Mohamed Nasheed, who broke away from Solih and the MDP to form a new party because India preferred to back Solih over him.

Nasheed will play kingmaker

If Nasheed had stayed in the MDP and if India had backed him, there's no question who today's winner would be. But history has always been a game between ifs and buts, and sometimes, the winner who takes all is forced to choose the side that is not yours.

Of course, the next few weeks will decide which way the wind blows in this Indian Ocean nation of several hundred islands and atolls. There is much speculation that Nasheed will support Muizzu, even though he is the author of the 'India Out' campaign, which includes the promise to remove so-called "Indian soldiers" believed to be stationed on Addu island. Only a month ago, Nasheed had said about Muizzu that if he wins, he will introduce a kind of extremist politics in the Maldives that the island nation had never seen before.

How things change in six weeks. If Nasheed does end up supporting Muizzu today, it will be the end of what once was and could have been again, a beautiful relationship between him and New Delhi. But if all sides are persuaded to come to some sort of understanding, then Nasheed could very well transfer his 7 per cent vote to Solih, allow him to win, and in return get his pound of flesh - whatever that might be.

At the end of the first round, there's no question that Nasheed is the kingmaker of this Maldivian election, not Solih or Muizzu. And that the former president remains the most powerful man in the



Maldives today. Nasheed and Solih were once best friends. Nasheed was in exile in Sri Lanka in 2018 when the people of the Maldives unexpectedly overthrew the ruling pro-China government led by Abdulla Yameen and voted the MDP back to power. Solih was named the presidential candidate because Nasheed was in exile, so he naturally became president. Nasheed was named for the next best job, that of Speaker of the People's Majlis - but he has spent the last five years chafing at the bit, wanting to

assert his powerful presence, which Solih kept denying him space for. Still, everyone in the Maldives and the rest of the region is keenly aware that it is Nasheed who wins the votes for the MDP. An unfortunate primary earlier this year pitted the two men face-to-face - Nasheed lost, to his great chagrin. He later said that the MDP had fixed the voting lists. But the fact remained that Solih had won. The Indian will in Maldives Over the last five years, India has doubled down to support Solih, committing projects to

generate employment as well as strengthen the security ring around the Maldives; simultaneously, differences between Delhi and Nasheed began to grow. So when Nasheed began to push for a change in the form of government, from presidential to parliamentary, Delhi pooh-poohed the suggestion. The Maldives is too small, too unstable, too far-flung - there were so many reasons to maintain the status quo. Nasheed felt that India was not interested in supporting his rise to power. So what did he do? He decided to break away from his beloved MDP, form his own party, undermine his former friend and offer the Maldivian voter an alternative - Muizzu. They took it. The problem is that Muizzu is not just the architect of the 'India Out' campaign; his wife is said to be a close relative of a senior leader of the radical Jammiyatul Salaf organisation. The irony is that when Nasheed was attacked by a motorcycle bomb a few years ago, it was by suspected "religious extremists" who wanted him eliminated because they thought he was too modern and progressive for the Maldives.

## Nawaz Sharif is on his way back to Pakistan. But history shows he must prove his 'piety' first

Facing the grim stare of a judge in the bowels of a government office in the flyblown town of Dera Ismail Khan, the actress Musarrat Shaheen prepared for the most important performance of her life. The star of hundreds of low-budget Pashto films—among them the wilfully-misspelt 1990 cult classic Haseena Atim Bum—Shaheen had devoted her later life to contesting elections against the fundamentalist politician Maulana Fazlur Rehman. Now, her war against clerical hypocrisy depended on her delivery.

The cleric's supporters had turned to a then-obscure clause in Pakistan's constitution, mandating that candidates in elections prove their credentials as pious Muslim, sadiq (truthful) and ameen (faithful). The judge demanded that she demonstrate her knowledge of Islam. Flawlessly, Musarrat delivered the Sura Akhlas and the Dua-e-Qanoot and then offered to recite any other passages of the Quran the judge might wish to hear. Then, she majestically swept out onto the streets of National Assembly Constituency 124.

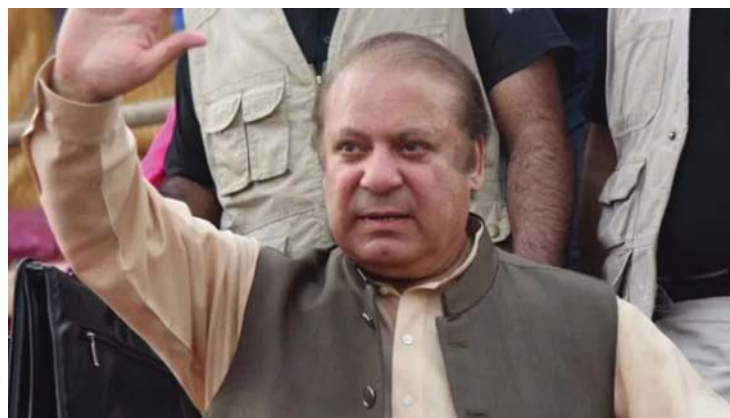
Nawaz's sadiq and ameen problem This week, ahead of elections scheduled for 6 November, former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that his brother, ex-PM Nawaz Sharif—the most high-profile victim of sadiq and ameen requirement of Article 62 (1)(f) of Pakistan's constitution—

would return from self-exile in London next month. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) desperately needs its star politician to shore up its popularity, which has been hard hit by economic distress and soaring energy prices.

Later this month, Sharif's bête noire, Pakistan Supreme Court Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial, author of

the 2018 judgment that disqualified Nawaz from membership of parliament for life, will retire from office. Nawaz and other PML-N leaders hope the new chief justice will prove willing to reverse that order, either by amending the length of disqualification or clearing him of corruption-linked allegations.

There is no way of telling how the courts will deal with the issue, but the requirement of piety goes to the heart of Pakistan's dysfunctions. The use of Islam to legitimise the power of military and civilian elites wounded the country's democracy, perhaps beyond healing. Even though the PML-N is eager to help Nawaz escape disqualification, it is showing little interest in addressing the larger problem, and its own complicity in creating it. Indeed, lawmakers are doubling down on brutal blasphemy laws in a bid to seize the religious high ground from increasingly powerful jihadists.







# I don't like Made In Heaven for one reason. The way it shows white women

**As a foreign woman married to an Indian man, I expected the creators to be more careful with their representations of women.**

By MICHAL ERLICH

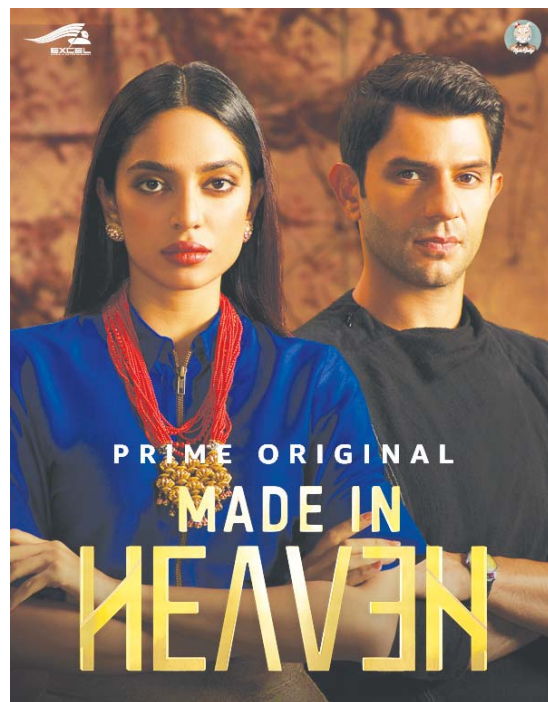
I am a fan of Indian cinema and relish all genres of it. Watching Made in Heaven on Amazon Prime Video was rewarding. I fell in love with the first season, and like many others, waited for the second one. The series approaches, with wisdom and precision, important social issues of gender, LGBT, caste, and family intricacies of Indian society through lavish upper-class weddings. Another bonus for me, of course, is the character of Delhi, a place where I lived on and off for many years and for which I have a particular fondness. The episodes in the second season touched on the difficulties of the LGBT community, the colonial ideal of white beauty, domestic violence, middle-aged love, the difficulties of being a female Bollywood actor, inter-caste marriages, and the deep-seated shame Dalits endure no matter what they achieve, materially.

But the joy of the first five episodes only turned into disappointment with the sixth one, named Warrior Princesses. It dealt with the delicate issue of polygamy among Muslims. In India, the practice finds protection under the Sharia law and the legal system. ThePrint columnist Amana Begam Ansari also touched upon the subject in these columns. After Parliament declared Triple Talaq as illegal in 2019, the debate on polygamy is open in the country.

The sixth episode in the series touched a personal chord - the representation of the white foreign woman in Indian cinema and popular culture. The way it has been dealt with is problematic. What left me disturbed

In this episode, the second person the Indian man chooses to marry is a white blonde woman. Perhaps polygamy isn't the only threat to the peaceful Indian family. A 'foreign vamp' woman too is.

I am an Israeli woman and a scholar of India Studies, married to an Indian Hindu



man. My husband's family does not recognise our marriage and our child. I have never met them, and I doubt if such a meeting will be possible. A traditional religious Indian family might have multiple reasons for their negative attitude toward such a union. And if there is one thing that has furthered this bias beyond measure it is the portrayal of western blonde and white women in Hindi cinema since the 1970s.

Many can easily recall scenes from Bollywood movies in which the western

white woman (or westernised Indian woman) smokes and drinks alcohol - Preeti in Purab Aur Paschim or the foreign women in Shah Rukh Khan's Pardes (1997). Often such characters' sexuality is extroverted, erotic, and moral norms do not matter to them. They are vamps who covet the wealth of the Indian man. These characters contrast with the Indian woman protagonists in the same movie who are shown valuing tradition, femininity, motherhood, chastity, and self-sacrifice. An Israeli friend who is also married to an Indian man told me recently, "Every time I see a white woman in an Indian movie, I prepare myself for her to be a really negative character."

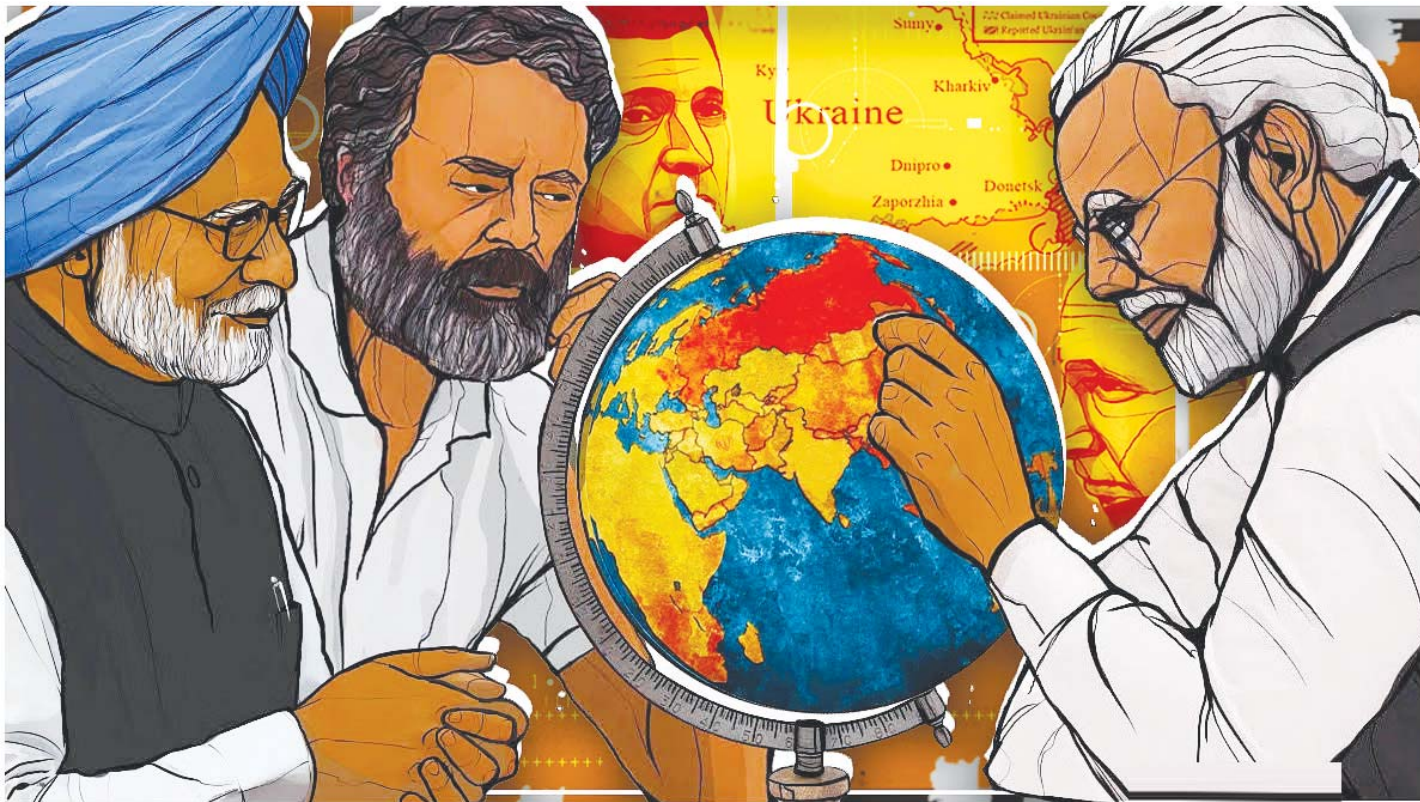
In Made in Heaven's first episode, a bunch of white women are shown hired as waitresses at a Punjabi wedding, dressed in short skirts with deep necklines serving alcohol. When a drunk guest tries touching one of them inappropriately, a riot breaks out. The episode explores the lens through which Indian men and society look at these women - they are rampant, provocative, available, and they probably like it too. The series also captures the disgust such women go through, because of the attitude Indian men have toward them.

The bias

The sixth episode reveals the paradox of the makers. A foreign woman is at the centre of the plot. A Muslim man (Wasim), who is married to Shehnaz, plans to take a second wife. The second woman is a

"younger, blonde-haired Albanian wife". She smokes and secretly dyes her hair blonde because she knows that's what attracts the gullible Indian man. Unlike her wealthy husband-to-be, she is a flight attendant without much financial means. In a conversation with her sister and mother, she explicitly says it is worth tolerating the "other wife" situation for the money and wealth around her. That way, she will no longer have to struggle in life. In contrast, the first wife (Dia Mirza) is shown as full of grace, pleasantness, care, dignity, and authenticity. We learn that she married her husband before he acquired a fortune and bore him two sons. One wonders why the makers of this otherwise brilliant series felt that a white blonde woman as the second wife would help them underline the brutality of polygamy. Also, the Indian man is shown in dilemma, manipulated by the blonde who is after his wealthy life. The ill intentions of the foreign woman are starker than the poor character of the man who thinks he is not doing wrong by practising 'legal' polygamy. Couldn't the story have been about having a second wife and that she, no matter who, did not have to be evil? Why often it is the case in Indian scripts that malicious foreign women are the ones chasing Indian men and destroying their families and homes? As a foreign woman married to an Indian man, I expected the creators of the series, who are trying to produce feminist, progressive, and critical social content, to be more careful with their representations of women. Yes, even white blonde women.





**The 40 years from the NAM summit in 1983 to this G20 with Biden, Macron & Sunak bilaterals mark India's march from a fake non-alignment to a mostly transactional policy autonomy.**

# Manmohan Singh, Rahul back Modi on Ukraine. Some things still work in India's broken politics

By SHEKHAR GUPTA

As New Delhi welcomed streams of international delegations and global leaders, from Rishi Sunak to Sheikh Hasina Wazed and Joe Biden and many more arriving in a power procession unprecedented for India, two headline points emerged from an unexpected direction: the principal Opposition.

One, the interview with former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh on the front page of The Indian Express. And second, the statements from Rahul Gandhi speaking to the media in Brussels.

The first said nothing that was critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government. While taking a by-and-large optimistic view of the direction in which India is moving, he only said it might do better in an environment of social harmony. Rahul Gandhi was more direct and charged the government with presiding over democratic backsliding in India. Both, however, were also forthright in their view that on Russia and Ukraine, the Modi government had taken the correct approach and that it had their backing. Rahul went a step further to say that even an opposition government would have followed broadly the same policy.

This isn't entirely new to Indian politics. On some of the most critical issues of foreign and strategic policy, the ruling establishment and the main Opposition have generally agreed in the past. Lately, however, our politics has been so broken, so polarised, that even what would have been a perfectly normal few words of solidarity have now become headline-worthy.

Where it started isn't difficult to find, nor does it need any deep archival research. The relationship between the Congress

and the BJP had taken a particularly bitter turn post Vajpayee. In the Advani era, niceties or honour among the thieves, whatever you choose to call it, had dissolved into pure vitriol. Besides ruining the national discourse, it was also corrosive to the larger national interest. Here are three good examples, two purely of foreign policy, and one on economics but with wider implications. Consider these:

o Between 2005 and 2008, the Indo-US nuclear deal. While it would be a reasonable argument that Manmohan Singh's UPA was only taking a logical next step in the process Vajpayee had started, the BJP saw it as so much a "surrender" that it didn't hesitate in joining hands with its permanent ideological adversaries, the Left for example, in trying to defeat the government in a confidence vote on the deal.

Sushma Swaraj, then the BJP's most prominent leader in Parliament, compared the deal to Emperor Jahangir allowing the East India Company to do business in India. "Which laid the foundations of two and a half centuries of subjugation. The repercussions of the nuclear deal also may be the same," she darkly warned.

o The BJP similarly blocked the India-Bangladesh boundary deal, which involved the two countries exchanging enclaves deep inside each other's territory. It was unwilling to see reason, not even that it would serve India's larger interest deeply to give the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina a boost and in the process settle one of its disputed boundaries. Arun Jaitley said, "There should be no compromise with Indian land."

By that time, Modi had already emerged

as his party's preeminent leader and I had written a National Interest column in August 2013 headlined 'Dear Narendrabhai', suggesting that he intervene and help get this concluded in the national interest.

o And the third was allowing FDI in multiple-brand retail. Once again, the BJP was at its shrillest, calling it the destruction of India's economic freedoms, fretting over the future of the neighbourhood mom-and-pop shops (as they are called in the West), and forcing another Parliament vote that it lost. This wasn't just economically important, it was also of strategic importance because reforms like these built India into the economic power it is today.

About a decade on, it is instructive to say where each policy stands. Indo-US strategic ties are far deeper and this government swears so strongly by the nuclear deal that it will most likely work in the direction of resolving the liability issue.

On Bangladesh, settling the borders was among Narendra Modi's earliest achievements and there was zero controversy. And multi-brand retail? Step by step, the restrictions have been removed or diluted. And e-commerce, whether carried out by the global market leader, Amazon, or the many foreign (mostly Chinese and some Japanese) funded startups, is a lesson to those in the BJP who forced that second Parliament showdown, which they lost. If you are the more sceptical type, you might argue that the Congress taking this view on the Modi government's Ukraine-Russia policy should be no surprise, pleasant or not, because it fits in with their leaders' multi-generation pro-Soviet,

anti-Western (read America) upbringing. The fact, however, is that the Congress, out of power for the 10th year now, had overseen the big moves with the US, repositioning India decisively on the western side. The aggressive rise of China has now made it easier for the BJP.

While it is correct that many in the Congress were deeply suspicious of Manmohan Singh's policy, even angry, they put up with it. By this 10th Modi year now, we haven't seen the Congress attack him on the US policy, the deepening strategic partnership and dramatic diversification in the sourcing of weaponry away from Russia.

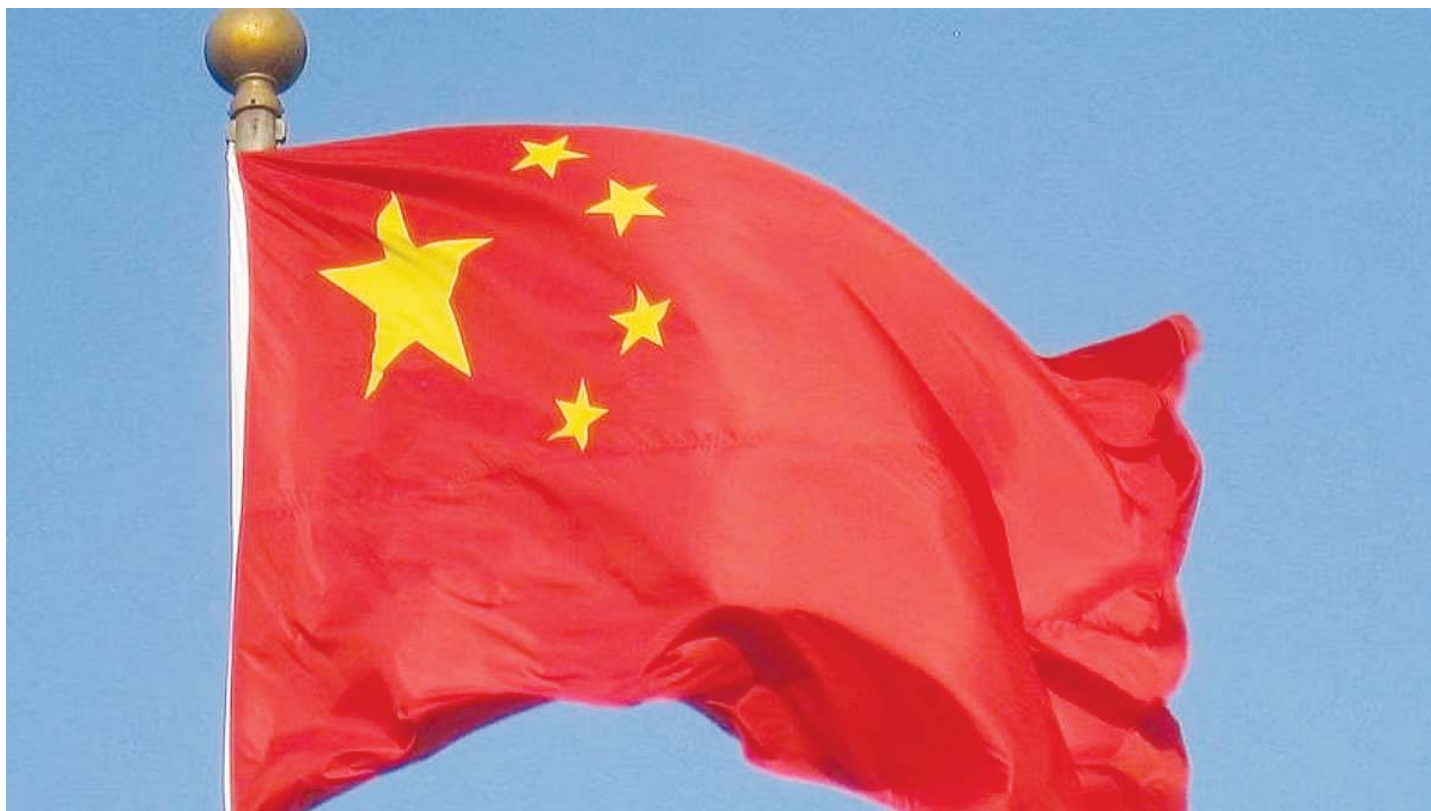
To understand how significant a shift this is in our national politics, we need to look back exactly 40 years. In March 1983, Indira Gandhi hosted the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) summit and marked it as her finest foreign affairs hour after, of course, the liberation of Bangladesh. Fidel Castro hugging Indira was the highlight image of that era. Indian political and policy elites still nurtured and loved the pretence of being a 'revolutionary' nation of some kind.

Even subsequently, as the going became tough in the second half of his tenure, when a beleaguered Rajiv Gandhi thundered "naani yaad dila denge" (OK, bad translation: teach them such a tough lesson that they'd seek refuge in their grandmothers' laps), he wasn't talking about the Soviet Union or China. America was still the Satan.

The 40 years from the NAM summit to this G20 with Biden, Macron and Sunak bilaterals mark India's march from a fake non-alignment to a mostly transactional policy autonomy.



# Chinese are running new phishing scams across Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand. It's a scamdemic



**China has a history of working with organised crime syndicates to achieve political goals. This time, it has affected Chinese nationals.**

**By AADIL BRAR**

After China opened its economy last year, ending its zero Covid policy, an old problem has roared back with a vengeance. Chinese authorities are grappling with the issue of their citizens operating fraudulent schemes from Southeast Asian countries, targeting mainland Chinese residents.

China has a history of collaborating with organised crime syndicates in places like Australia, Canada, and Taiwan, employing criminal groups to achieve political objectives. However, the increasing prevalence of telecom fraud and human trafficking in Myanmar and the Golden Triangle area is now adversely affecting Chinese citizens.

What has been described as 'scamdemic' encompasses a series of illicit activities, including human trafficking and online scams. The epicentre of these activities lies in Cambodia and the Golden Triangle area, which overlaps Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos and is notorious for illicit opium production and other criminal activities.

Global threat of human trafficking Cambodia, particularly Sihanoukville, has long been known as a hub for Chinese nationals engaging in illicit activities, including gambling. However, these scams originating in

Cambodia have now reached industrial scale, deterring Chinese tourists from visiting this once-preferred destination. In June, Interpol issued a warning about online scam centres operating from Cambodia, with networks extending into Laos and Myanmar.

Interpol noted that initially, victims of human trafficking primarily came from Chinese-speaking regions such as China, Malaysia, Thailand, or Singapore. However, victims are now drawn from as far away as Europe and South America, with even Indian nationals falling prey to job scams in Southeast Asian countries.

"What began as a regional crime threat has become a global human trafficking crisis," said Jürgen Stock, Secretary-General of Interpol.

Interpol is not the only organisation sounding the alarm. In August, the United Nations reported that over 1,00,000 people were trafficked into Cambodia, and 1,20,000 into Myanmar.

In recent months, the Chinese Public Security Bureau has conducted a large-scale crackdown on the scam centres, which appear to have tacit support from the governments in Cambodia and Myanmar.

The Ministry of Public Security has said that it has "intensified the fight against telecom and online fraud" in the "Northern Myanmar and the Golden

Triangle, an area that comprises parts of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, are two major hiding places of the fraudsters".

"Since the beginning of this year, the ministry has dispatched teams to countries including the Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos for cooperation on international law enforcement, with severe crackdowns on telecom fraud and human trafficking," said an article in China Daily. The report was subsequently published on the website of China's Supreme People's Court.

China's international security In a recent joint operation, Chinese police, in collaboration with local law enforcement in Myanmar, shut down approximately 11 dens operating fraudulent schemes. The bust resulted in the arrest of 269 suspects, including 189 Chinese nationals.

In a separate action, China's Ministry of Public Security launched a massive crackdown on telecom scams in Northern Myanmar, resulting in the transfer of 1,207 suspects from Myanmar to Chinese law enforcement authorities in Yunnan. These suspects were apprehended in connection with telecom fraud cases affecting Chinese citizens.

While improved relations between China and Myanmar have allowed Chinese public security agencies to

conduct policing activities more effectively in the country, challenges remain.

Interestingly, there is even a new Chinese blockbuster movie titled No More Bets, released in 2023, which educates people about the dangers of being lured into jobs in Southeast Asia and getting ensnared in networks of fraudsters. The film tells the story of a Chinese model and a computer programmer who are promised high-salary jobs overseas but end up becoming part of a trafficking network that forces Chinese nationals to work for an online fraud scheme. The movie has been a sensational hit, grossing over \$500 million in its first month and drawing attention to the issue of human trafficking.

As domestic economic prospects fray, Chinese nationals are increasingly seeking opportunities in Southeast Asia for investment and employment. However, they often find themselves entangled in a web of scams in politically unstable regions, where their fellow compatriots lure them into illicit activities.

**Growing clout**

Chinese President Xi Jinping's Global Security Initiative is a policy tool aimed at expanding China's influence in the realm of human and national security beyond its immediate borders. The crackdown in Cambodia and Myanmar serves as an example of how China can leverage its security institutions to achieve specific objectives, highlighting China's growing clout in the region.

With significant economic challenges at home, Xi is keen to project strength in addressing large-scale fraud activities that harm Chinese nationals. Thus, this crackdown represents a display of power on an unprecedented scale in the Southeast Asia region.

In the realm of high-table diplomacy, it is often easy to forget that people are the true drivers of geopolitical influence. Southeast Asia has emerged as a backyard for China's externalised power projection and a destination for its citizens seeking new opportunities.

The crackdown on 'scamdemic' illustrates that China is willing to use its externalised policing authority to address domestic issues on a scale never seen before, thereby expanding the reach of Chinese public security institutions.