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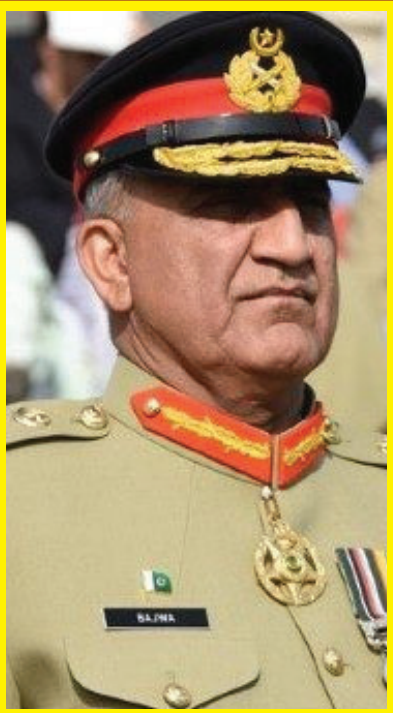
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Indian-origin engineer in Singapore stole intimate photos of women, jailed

A 26-year-old Indian-origin engineer serving in the Singapore Air Force was sentenced to 11 months in jail for hacking social media login details of women to steal their intimate images. He used trial-and-error methods to access victims' accounts after generating potential login credentials based on their social media details. Upon gaining access, he would search for intimate photos stored in the accounts.

K Eshwaran, 26, pleaded guilty to 10 charges under the Computer Misuse Act, with another 21 charges considered during sentencing, reported Channel News Asia. Prosecutors revealed Eshwaran targeted victims from 2019 to 2023, sending phishing links to 22 victims in an attempt to steal their login credentials for social media, cloud storage, and email accounts. Eshwaran targeted women he knew personally.

A court order protected the identities of all victims due to the sexual nature of the



offences.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Joshua Phang argued that Eshwaran's crimes were premeditated and sophisticated, often posing as a "helpful netizen" to gain the victims' trust.

Phang said Eshwaran would send phishing links with messages claiming their intimate images were leaked online.

He often added a screenshot with a sexual caption, usually taken from a pornographic website, claiming it was a screenshot of the victim's intimate image posted online.

In some instances, Eshwaran used trial-and-error methods to access victims' accounts after generating potential login credentials based on their social media

details.

Upon gaining access, he would search for intimate photos stored on the accounts which he wanted for his own sexual gratification, reported Channel News Asia.

Eshwaran reportedly targeted men as well, impersonating them on social media to contact women believed to be romantically involved with the men, requesting intimate photos.

INDIAN-ORIGIN MAN CONTINUED HIS CRIME EVEN WHILE ON BAIL

The court heard that Eshwaran continued his crimes even while on bail and under investigation for earlier phishing attacks.

In January 2023, he gained unauthorised access to the social media accounts of a woman in her early 20s. After discovering intimate images, he sent her further phishing links to gain access to her other online accounts. Law enforcement traced the internet protocol (IP) address used in the unauthorised access back to Eshwaran's residence.

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Laid-off H-1B workers can stay beyond 60 days in US, says USCIS

(Sai Bureau)-Employees on H-1B visas who have been laid off have the option of staying in the US even beyond 60 days, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reveals. Tech companies like Google, Meta, Apple, Dell, Twitter, Amazon and Microsoft, among many others, have fired thousands of non-immigrant employees living in the US, including many Indians. There is a general assumption that the laid-off staffers have to leave the US within 60 days. But the USCIS has clarified on this in its latest statement. "When non-immigrant workers are laid off, they may not be aware of their options and, in some cases, may wrongly assume that they have no option but to leave the country within 60 days," stated the USCIS in its latest release.



The tech industry continues to grapple with lay-offs, with news of new job cuts surfacing every month. So far, a total of 237 tech companies have laid off 58,499 employees in 2024.

WHAT SHOULD LAID-OFF H-1B VISA HOLDERS DO TO STAY IN US

According to the press release, when a non-immigrant worker's employment ends, either voluntarily or involuntarily, they typically may take one of the following actions, if eligible, to remain in a period of authorised stay in the United States:

- File an application for a change of non-immigrant status;
 - File an application for adjustment of status;
 - File an application for a 'compelling circumstances' employment authorisation document; or
 - Be the beneficiary of a non-frivolous petition to change employers. If a non-immigrant takes any of these actions during the 60-day grace period, they can stay in the United States for more than 60 days, even if they lose their previous non-immigrant status.
- But if they don't take any action during this time, they and their dependents might have to leave the US within 60 days, or when their authorised period ends, whichever comes sooner.

Additionally, H-1B non-immigrants may begin working for a new employer as soon as the employer properly files a new H-1B petition (Form I-129) requesting to amend or extend H-1B status with the USCIS, without waiting for the petition to be approved.

The timely filing of a non-frivolous application to change status will "toll," or stop, the accrual of unlawful presence until the application is adjudicated, if the applicant did not work without authorisation, either before the application was filed or while it was pending, and the applicant maintained their status prior to the filing of the request for change of status.

H-1B VISA HOLDERS CAN CHANGE STATUS DURING GRACE PERIOD

During the 60-day grace period, workers can apply to change their non-immigrant status. Options may include:

Becoming a dependent of a spouse (eg, H-4, L-2). Some dependents may be eligible for work authorisation. Changing to student (F-1) or visitor (B-1/B-2) status. Note that B-1/B-2 visitors cannot work in the US. Seeking a new employer-sponsored status (eg, TN, E-3, H-1B1). Timely filing of a petition by a prospective employer can pause unlawful presence accrual, but it doesn't grant work authorisation until approved. Premium processing may be available for some petitions. More options for STEM professionals are detailed on our website.

Workers can decide to leave the US despite the option to extend their authorised stay. If H-1B or O workers leave after losing their job, their employer (or petitioner for O workers) must pay for their transportation back to their home country. For O workers, both the employer and petitioner are responsible. Once abroad, H-1B holders can look for US jobs and return for the remaining H-1B period. They can also apply for other eligible classifications from abroad and return to the US after approval.

US envoy on Chabahar deal: Iran exports terror, businesses should be aware

(Sai Bureau)-In an exclusive interview, US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti speaks about his experiences on completing a year in office, Lok Sabha elections, the Gurpatwant Singh Pannun case, and the Chabahar port deal.

US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti said businesses should be aware of the risks of interacting with Iran as it exported terrorism. However, Garcetti said the US mission in New Delhi was awaiting further clarification on the State Department's warning of "potential risk of sanctions" for India over the inking of the Chabahar port deal with Iran.



In an exclusive interview with India Today TV, the US envoy spoke about his experiences of completing a year in office, the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, the Gurpatwant Singh Pannun murder-for-hire case, student protests in US universities and India-US relations. Garcetti also said that two more US consulates would be opened over the next 12 months in Bengaluru and Ahmedabad. "Usually these things take years. We are hoping that we can do this in the next 12 months,

which would be a record, probably not only just in India, but maybe anywhere in the world," he said.

Here are the excerpts from the interview: On completing one year as US envoy to India

It has been one of the most enjoyable

years of my life. Me and my family, to see and to feel the changes in India, but also to know the consistency of the spirit of this place and its people. That's why I have always loved this country. I think if you have been to India over many years or lived here, you really feel the optimism of this moment in so many ways. India's assertion of its place in the world, its kind of extension of what it can do as a force of good in the region and beyond.

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Showing solidarity with Palestinian counterpart, Indian Farmers Union demands end of war against children in Palestine

BY JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Chandigarh(India), May 15: Expressing solidarity with Palestinian Farmers Union, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), a largest umbrella of Indian farmers' unions, has expressed its grief and fury on the massacre of innocent children in Palestine. A release by SKM leaders states that the leaders of Palestinian Farmers Union in Qalqilya Governorate have appealed to farmers across the world to raise their voice for a ceasefire, ending the war especially on children of both Palestine and Israel. SKM claims that the Union has released video clips of brutal attacks on children-heartbreaking and stirring the conscience of the people all over the world.

SKM has appealed to end the war against children in Palestine and urged the government of India to do everything possible for a ceasefire. In a press release issued on Tuesday, SKM leaders have shown their concern that one child killed or severely injured every ten minutes in Gaza. The farmers' organisation has alleged that more than 14000 children have been butchered by Israel since



7th October 2023. SKM urged that people world over must rally against US Imperialism and the Netanyahu Government of Israel and appealed to all the Political Parties to put pressure on the Government of India to unite all world nations for peace and tranquillity. The farmers' umbrella has also appealed to all sections of the people to join the solidarity movement world over for Free Palestine and world peace.

The release divulged that as per the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the number of children killed in the besieged Gaza strip since October 7, 2023 has surpassed 14000. UNICEF also has requested the entire world to do something for

a ceasefire. The Israel attack has become 'a war against children' and one child is being killed or severely injured every ten minutes in Gaza.

Sharing the release with our representative, SKM leader and National Vice-President of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Dr. Inderjeet Singh quotes the statement that there were never such massacres of children by any army in the history of the world. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the state army must be prosecuted as war criminals for such a height of cruelty. This war is a crime against humanity.

The US Imperialism and other Imperialist countries including

UK, France and Germany are extending support to the Netanyahu Government of Israel to wreak havoc on Palestinians thus exposing the barbaric face of world capitalism. SKM appeals to the people in India and all over the world to rally against US Imperialism and Zionist Netanyahu Government of Israel.

The Indian Farmers' union alleges that imperialist manipulations and Zionist dogma based on hate politics are the root causes of the ongoing genocide. The Jewish people have been subjected to the worst genocide in the history under the Nazi Germany led by Adolf Hitler.

The modern state of Israel consisting of the Jewish people is perpetrating the most inhuman, cruel genocide against Palestinians today is a paradox. The successful history of the plural society of India is the answer for the genocide and the threat of Zionism based on racial superiority.

SKM demands the Government of India to come out of the clutches of the USA-Israel nexus and regain its status as the voice of the developing countries never compromising on world peace and tranquillity. SKM further puts its demand to all the political parties in India to exert pressure on the State of India to play its historical and most important role for mobilizing people's opinion for world peace. SKM also appeals to all the mass and class organisations and trade unions to join hands against the Imperialist forces led by the USA that stand with Israel and veto the resolutions in the UN Security Council that demands ceasefire. SKM appeals to the people of India to rally and join the massive peace movement world over in solidarity with Palestine.

Supreme Court junks ED's plea on Arvind Kejriwal's speech: 'Won't go into that'

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain the Enforcement Directorate's plea seeking action against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over his campaign speeches. The ED said Kejriwal's assertion that he would "not have to go back to jail" if people voted for the INDIA bloc was a "slap on the face of the system". The ED has objected to Kejriwal's remarks that he would be back from Tihar Jail on June 5 if the INDIA bloc came to power after the Lok Sabha election results were announced on June 4. "Arvind Kejriwal has said that if people vote for the AAP, then he doesn't have to go to jail on June 2. How can Arvind Kejriwal say this?" Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the court. To this, Justice Sanjiv Khanna said, "We welcome criticism of the verdict. We will not go into that. Our order



is clear when he (Kejriwal) has to surrender. It is the order of the apex

court and the rule of law shall be governed by this. We did not make

an exception for anybody."Arvind Kejriwal, who was arrested in a

money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, was granted interim bail by the Supreme Court last week to campaign in the Lok Sabha elections. The AAP chief will have to surrender and go back to jail on June 2. The top court was hearing a plea by the Delhi Chief Minister challenging his arrest in the case by the ED. During his poll rallies in Delhi and Haryana, Kejriwal had played the emotional card, recalling how he was arrested just before the Lok Sabha polls and how he was denied insulin doses for his blood sugar in Tihar Jail.

"I have to go back to jail on June 2. I will be watching the results on June 4 from the jail. If you work hard and make the INDIA bloc win, I will come back on June 5," Kejriwal has been saying at his rallies.

Amritpal Singh, lodged in Assam jail, declares assets worth Rs 1,000

The nomination filed by Amritpal Singh's lawyer, Harjot Singh, showed that he has assets worth Rs 1,000. The chief of the 'Waris Punjab De' outfit, Singh, 31, has thrown his hat in the electoral ring by contesting from the Khadoor Sahib seat in Punjab as an Independent.

(News Agency)-Radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, who is currently lodged in Assam's Dibrugarh jail under the National Security Act, has declared assets worth Rs 1,000, according to his poll affidavit.

Chief of the 'Waris Punjab De' outfit, Singh, 31, has thrown his hat in the electoral ring by contesting from the Khadoor Sahib seat in Punjab as an Independent.

Singh's nomination papers were filed by his uncle in Tarn Taran district on Friday. Singh filled in his nomination papers on Thursday in Dibrugarh jail in Assam. According to his poll affidavit, Singh has Rs 1,000 bank balance in the SBI branch, Rayya, Baba Bakala in Amritsar.

Other than this, Singh does not have any moveable or immovable assets, according to his affidavit.

His wife Kirandip Kaur owns movable assets worth Rs 18.37 lakh. It comprises Rs 20,000 cash in hand, gold jewellery worth Rs 14 lakh and 4,000 GBP (pound)



equivalent to Rs 4,17,440, in account at Revolut Ltd, London, UK.

Singh has been shown as dependent on parents while his spouse is a British citizen. She earlier worked as a language interpreter at National Health Services in the UK, but is now a housewife, as per the affidavit. Singh has declared that 12 criminal cases are pending against him though he has not been convicted in any

case. He, along with nine of his associates, has been lodged in the Dibrugarh jail since April 23, 2023.

Singh's educational qualification is matric which he passed from a school in Pheruman in Amritsar in 2008.

Polling for 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab will be held on June 1.

The Khalistan sympathizer had escaped the police net in Jalandhar district on March 18 last year, switching vehicles and changing appearances.

The Punjab Police had launched the crackdown after the February 23 Ajnala incident last year in which Amritpal Singh and his supporters, some of them brandishing swords and guns, broke through barricades and barged into the police station on the outskirts of Amritsar city, and clashed with police for the release of Lovepreet Singh Toofan, one of his aides. He and his associates were booked under several criminal cases related to spreading disharmony among classes, attempt to murder, attack on police personnel and creating obstructions in the lawful discharge of duty by public servants.

A Shocking Admission & An Assurance: Will AAP's Damage-Control Exercise Mollify Swati Maliwal?

(News Agency)-The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is in damage-control mode once again after it acknowledged unequivocally that Arvind Kejriwal's former PS Bibhav Kumar had misbehaved with its Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal at the Delhi chief minister's residence.

AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said: "Swati Maliwal had reached the residence of Arvind Kejriwal to meet him

wrongdoing by Kumar is perhaps the first such admission by the AAP in the midst of countless allegations levelled against the party. Singh's statement did not leave any room for interpretation and did not even carry the characteristic word "allegedly" or "Swati alleged". Shockingly, the party admitted to the episode even though Maliwal had not got her medical examination done after reaching the Civil Lines police station nor had she filed an FIR. After making two calls to the helpline number 100, saying that she was at the chief minister's residence and was assaulted by Kumar — first at the chief minister's behest and then correcting the accusation to drop the chief minister's name — Maliwal had reached the Civil Lines police station. However, she did not file a formal complaint.

While her allegations sent shockwaves across the country, the AAP fielded some of its senior leaders to get in touch with her to understand what had happened. Singh, who happened to be in Mumbai, rushed back to Delhi and was able to establish contact with Maliwal. It appears that Maliwal wanted a clear signal to be sent that what happened with her was wrong and the one who was guilty should be punished.



and was waiting for him in the drawing room. In the meantime, Bibhav Kumar reached there and misbehaved with Maliwal [unhone Swati Maliwal ke saath bahut badtameezi ki, bahut abhadrata ki]. This incident can never be condemned enough. Kejriwal has taken cognizance of the issue and has directed that strict action be taken in this regard."

Singh's unequivocal admission of



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India's Balancing Act Against China, West Asia and the West

Geostrategy is increasingly becoming a process of increasing a nation's options. Faced with Western economic sanctions, Iran and Russia have had to seek alternatives to survive and even thrive in the realm of unintended consequences. Sanctions as a geostrategic tool are facing their own limitations, and overuse by America and its NATO allies is spawning efforts to move away from the US dollar as the exclusive, or at least main currency of international commerce. While Russia has been encountering sanctions from Western Europe and the US ever since the war with Ukraine, Iran has endured them for far longer. Over the years, both countries have proved ingenious by finding new trading partners and mechanisms of international trade.

China too, despite being the second largest economy in the world, and closely involved in trade with Western Europe and the US, is now facing sustained headwinds. Its economy has become sluggish. For a country that has been the established global manufacturer of myriad things for decades, this is a difficult pill to swallow. It is increasingly facing stiff US trade tariffs and outright bans.

With India, China has recently overtaken the US as the biggest exporter of its goods despite restrictions imposed. This is ironic because there is no let-up in the tense situation on its long Tibetan borders with India.

India is considered to be an important US partner if not a full-fledged ally in QUAD, and a lateral beneficiary of AUKUS, which puts it in the same frame with a number of G7 countries including Japan, Britain and Australia. It is equipping more and more of its ports to repair and refurbish US naval ships operating in its region. It is collaborating in its military manufacturing not only with Russia, France, and Israel but very significantly with the US. Countries like Germany that were not agreeable to letting India have access to its sophisticated military technology before have also changed their posture. India shares vital intelligence inputs with the US and other Western countries. And yet, it faced the finger-wagging threat of Western sanctions for importing Russian oil and gas, and possibly its neutrality. Though the pressure has eased as the Ukraine War drags on. In fact, it has refined some of the Russian crude and re-exported it to Western Europe.

The US, Israel and others in West Asia are aware of India's cordial relationship with Iran. It is based on geostrategic as well as civilisational affinities. These other countries may be coming around to seeing its advantages. Remarks of the Indian foreign minister rather than its shipping minister, Sonowal, who signed the Chabahar contract hint at this. India has a bilateral track of value

with Iran. This partnership follows on as a much more comprehensive version of a 2016 agreement that was amped up only sectionally in 2018. But today, we can see a breakthrough.

In one fell swoop, it opens up a route through the countries of Central Asia by road and rail connectivity all the way up to Russia and on to Europe. It negates some of the potential of the Chinese-controlled Gwadar Port, the vulnerabilities of dealing with Pakistan's Karachi Port, and the fear of a bottleneck at the Straits of Hormuz. Significantly, after Iran's refusal to accept international arbitration, all arbitration on matters arising between Tehran and New Delhi with regard to the operations will now be settled by a three-person committee sitting in Muscat, Oman. Oman, strategically positioned, and trusted by both the West and India, has served as an effective intermediary between the two and Iran for many years. It is, in the expected flowering of its potential, a second route in addition to the North-South Corridor from India, across the Arabian Sea, via UAE with connectivity to Saudi Arabia, through Israel, and on to Greece in Europe. That it is somewhat mired presently by the ongoing war in Gaza is hopefully a temporary thing. But Chabahar waking up will tend to leverage reasonableness on this parallel course too. The problems with the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, Iran-backed Houthi attacks on the shipping of various nations, the Somali pirates, and the bottlenecks at the Suez Canal have to be addressed. The burgeoning insurance costs on this route, the reluctance of shippers to send vessels or cargos through this way, the hijackings and missile attacks, and conversely, spiralling shipping expenses and delays of routing via the Cape of Good Hope are all unsustainable burdens on international trade. Iran has been selling most of its oil to China of late in bilateral currencies, at highly discounted rates. It is also selling some of it via Pakistan to try and bypass the Western sanctions, no doubt with tacit US approval. Russia's Gazprom announced its first loss despite selling twice as much of the highly discounted gas to China as it was to Western Europe. Both countries badly need balancing options. India's sea and land route via Chabahar in southeastern Iran means easy access to Afghanistan. This has been proved already with wheat shipments to the latter. But energised, Chabahar has enormous potential. India has been pressured by the US to avoid or curtail the purchase of Iranian oil and gas in the past, but with low-cost options how long can this go on? India is forced to import 90 per cent of its ever-growing volume of petroleum. It must request the US to reconsider its position. The same had to be done when it had to import the S-400 missile shield system from Russia.

"BJP's Electoral Odyssey: Navigating Electoral Bonds and Political Turbulence"

By Susmita Ghosh

Predicting the outcome of an election involves a complex interplay of various factors, ranging from political strategies and public sentiment to socio-economic conditions and policy decisions. In the context of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) winning either 400 seats or less than 270 seats in an election, two recent developments stand out: the controversy surrounding electoral bonds and the release of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on bail.

Electoral bonds, introduced in 2017, have been a subject of intense debate. These bonds allow individuals and corporations to donate money to political parties in disguise. While proponents argue that they bring transparency to political funding by channeling donations through the banking system, critics contend that they facilitate dullness and potentially enable an eye for an eye arrangements between parties and donors. The Supreme Court of India has been petitioned to reassess the legality of electoral bonds, raising concerns about their impact on the democratic process. The electoral bond controversy could influence the BJP's electoral prospects in several ways. On one hand, the party has been perceived as a major beneficiary of electoral bonds, with reports suggesting that it has received a significant share of these donations. If the public perceives the BJP as unduly benefiting from a system soiled by opacity and potential corruption, it could erode trust in the party and diminish its electoral appeal. On the other hand, the BJP's difficult organizational machinery and financial resources may allow it to weather the controversy and maintain its electoral dominance. The release of Arvind Kejriwal, the Chief Minister of Delhi and the leader

of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), on bail is another development that could impact the BJP's electoral fortunes. Kejriwal's arrest and subsequent release are emblematic of the political tensions and legal battles that characterize Indian politics. Kejriwal, known for his anti-corruption stance and confrontational style, has emerged as a vocal critic of the BJP-led central government. His release on bail could galvanize support for the AAP and other opposition parties, potentially denting the BJP's electoral prospects in certain regions where anti-incumbency sentiments run high. The BJP's electoral performance hinges not only on these developments but also on a myriad of other factors, including its governance record, coalition dynamics, and the performance of rival parties. The party's track record in delivering on its electoral promises, managing socio-economic challenges, and navigating geopolitical complexities will be closely scrutinized by voters. Additionally, the BJP's ability to forge strategic alliances with regional parties and mobilize support across diverse demographic groups will play a crucial role in determining its electoral success. Predicting whether the BJP will win 400 seats or less than 270 seats in an election is essentially hypothetical and contingent upon numerous variables. While the party's formidable organizational machinery, financial resources, and incumbency advantage may bolster its electoral prospects, it faces challenges stemming from the electoral bond controversy, opposition mobilization, and broader socio-political dynamics. Ultimately, the outcome of the election will be determined by the collective voice of the electorate, whose verdict remains uncertain till the ballots are cast and counted.



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From roadshows to studio shows, Modi ‘interviews’ are everywhere—what has changed?

PM Modi has opened himself up to questions in the middle of his campaign—he’s less formal, more spontaneous. He’s on a boat with TV 18 India, strolls in a garden with India Today correspondent, and walks inside a building with India TV.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal enjoyed their moments in the sun—and in the media glare—this last week, with triumphant appearances in Varanasi and Delhi.

However, while the PM continues to roadshow his way through the country, giving seemingly impromptu interviews to television news channels along the way—a new addition for him, this election season—the CM’s progress has hit a roadblock from an unexpected quarter: his own personal assistant. Vibhav Kumar, PA to Kejriwal, reportedly “misbehaved” with the AAP’s Rajya Sabha MP, Swati Maliwal when she visited the CM residence on Monday, leading to what India Today called, ‘AAP’s assault row’.

The puzzle over what precisely happened between Maliwal and Kumar, and why it took AAP over 30 hours to “admit” (Republic TV) that the PA’s conduct was unbecoming, has dimmed the lustre of Kejriwal’s release from Tihar Jail after the Supreme Court granted him interim bail, last Friday.

English news channels set out to investigate the mystery, Monday. They chose to largely ignore the fourth phase of voting that included Jammu and Kashmir for the first time since the abrogation of Article 370 five years ago—and gave second pegging to the Prime Minister cooking or rolling rotis at a langar in Patna.

Instead, they went after Kejriwal &

Kumar and Maliwal’s disappearance. For some reason, best known to themselves, Hindi news channels didn’t find Maliwal’s accusation of “maar peet” at the CM’s house newsworthy enough to cover.

Come Tuesday afternoon and AAP’s Sanjay Singh announced that Delhi’s CM would act decisively. When no action followed, TV news asked ‘Big questions’ on Wednesday: ‘Is AAP shielding Vibhav Kumar?’, ‘Why no police complaint?’, ‘Has someone persuaded Maliwal...’ to remain silent?

The biggest lead in “Assaultgate”, said Times Now, midday Wednesday. It interviewed her former husband, Naveen Jaihind, who alleged a threat to her life and a conspiracy to silence her.

Dear oh dear, what have we here? Modi’s newfound love for ‘interviews’ We will return to the media’s coverage of the mystery surrounding Maliwal, in a little.

Before that, let’s talk about PM Modi’s sudden fondness for on-the-spot TV interviews. In the last three days, he has stopped to chat with several news channels, including Times Now, India Today/Aaj Tak, India TV, News 18—and NDTV. This is Modi’s first interview to NDTV—at least as far as one can recall—so that’s huge for the channel.

And, in addition to these, there was the sit-down interview with Republic TV. We are familiar with the PM’s pre-planned, one-on-one formal Q&As on TV—we’ve been watching

them since 2013 during his campaign for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. In the last six weeks, we’ve watched the PM answer questions on leading Hindi and English news channels mentioned above (barring NDTV)—TV 9 Bharatvarsh being one of the first. These are recorded interactions—most of us believe the questions have been shared with the PM in advance. Now, the PM has opened himself up to questions in the middle of his campaign—it’s a refreshing change. He’s less formal, more spontaneous—on TV 18 India, he’s on a boat, and leans on the railing. In Patna, he’s standing next to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, probably after a rally on Times Now; he strolls in a garden with the India Today correspondent; and he walks inside a building with India TV. You see how comfortable he is with himself and with being interviewed. And of course, he’s a past master at amateur theatrics. Do watch his Q&A with Rubika Liyaquat (News 18 India)—listen and see how he appears surprised to learn that he had reportedly referred to Muslims as “infiltrators” during a campaign speech in Banswara, Rajasthan, in April.

His themes remain the same: attack Congress, attack Congress leader Rahul Gandhi—for example, he tells India Today that the Congress will score zero in Uttar Pradesh. He projects himself as a man of the people, the chosen one: On India TV and News 18 India, he says God has

chosen him to work for the people. That is the source of his “energy” (“urja”).

This is heady stuff.

The question is, why is the PM suddenly available to the media when he has been reluctant during his 10 years in office? What has changed? These questions are all the more interesting when Union Home Minister Amit Shah is simultaneously giving interviews to news channels—saw him on NDTV, Aaj Tak, and TV 9 Bharatvarsh.

So, what has prompted this “double engine” news media engagement? Are they aiming for ‘400 paar’ or seeking to motivate the faithful and the undecided voter?

The news media doesn’t know the sequence of events that led to AAP’s RS member Swati Maliwal making two PCR calls from Arvind Kejriwal’s residence. However, the very first reports across news channels on Monday morning spoke of her being “beaten up”. Channels said she left the CM’s residence, went to the Civil Lines police station but did not lodge a complaint and refused to be checked. Then she left and has not been seen or heard from, since.

Delhi Police generously shared its diary notes of the PCR calls with the media—and we learnt Maliwal had complained that she was badly beaten up—at the behest of the chief minister.

TV news channels made the most of this by continually referring to “maar peet” whereas the newspapers stuck to a more formal “assault”.

Republic TV and Hindi daily Dainik Jagran said Maliwal was crying when she came out of the CM’s residence before the police persuaded her to visit the police station. By the way, no media report has mentioned any visible physical injury to Maliwal.

Newspapers like The Indian Express speculated on the reasons for the altercation. “Maliwal was among the Rajya Sabha MPs whose absence from the city was questioned when Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21. In response, she had said that she was in the US with her sister who was undergoing treatment,” the Express said. Television news is all over this story and AAP needs to act fast to stop a public relations disaster.

Bumble CEO says get ready for AI dating. Are humans just algorithms now?

By AKANKSHA MISHRA

As if navigating the world of online dating wasn't difficult enough, Bumble CEO's new assertion that "artificial intelligence is the future of dating" would force even the most die-hard romantic to give up and run away to a life in the hills. "In the future, your AI concierge could go and date for you with other AI concierges, and then you don't have to date 600 people," said Whitney Herd, Bumble CEO, at the Bloomberg Technology Summit last week in San Francisco, United States. While the audience took it as an encouraging sign pointing toward the wonders of technology, to me, it sounds a lot more dystopic than eutopic. Imagine if AI took over dating — as if it's just a college term paper you need to submit (not that I recommend AI for that either) and not an entire relationship with a human being. There are already a host of problems with existing dating apps and the way they're designed because they rarely allow you to get to know someone beneath carefully curated pictures and one-word replies. Pigeonholing somebody into a minuscule online profile is a sure-shot way of seeing them not as people who contain multitudes in themselves but rather as just figures on a screen. Adding AI to the mix will only keep humans farther from the equation, and that begets the question — why are you even dating?

If it is such a task for you that you would rather let a machine do it, maybe you shouldn't be dating or looking for a partner at all. If you don't have the time to go out and find the right one, which is why you are using AI, what's the guarantee you won't use their services once the relationship starts?

Very soon, we'll be in a world where your AI device will find you the most suitable partner who would be using their own AI device. The AIs will then marry — or merge or unify — and pick and choose the best qualities in you and your partner and perhaps create AI babies too on your behalf. Not coded in love

This is not a boomer rant against AI and new technology. I don't deny that the technology and large language models like ChatGPT are immensely useful and can help us in fields like medicine, law, and coding. My issue lies in using AI over emotional intelligence.

An AI device dating on your behalf is simply scary. And it's beyond the

debate whether it will be efficient or not.

Everyone approaches dating in their own way, however, one common thing should be that you enjoy the process of getting

to know someone. Dating shouldn't be an unsavoury task that makes you toil to find 'the perfect one'; it should be a process that you enjoy in and of itself. And how do you even define the perfect

someone? No formula on earth can 'hack' dating for you, no matter which gods you pray to and how many versions of He's Just Not That Into You (2009) and Dating for Dummies you get through. The

elusive 'soulmate' isn't someone who has the same likes and dislikes as you and whose AI matches yours — it is someone who understands you despite your differences.

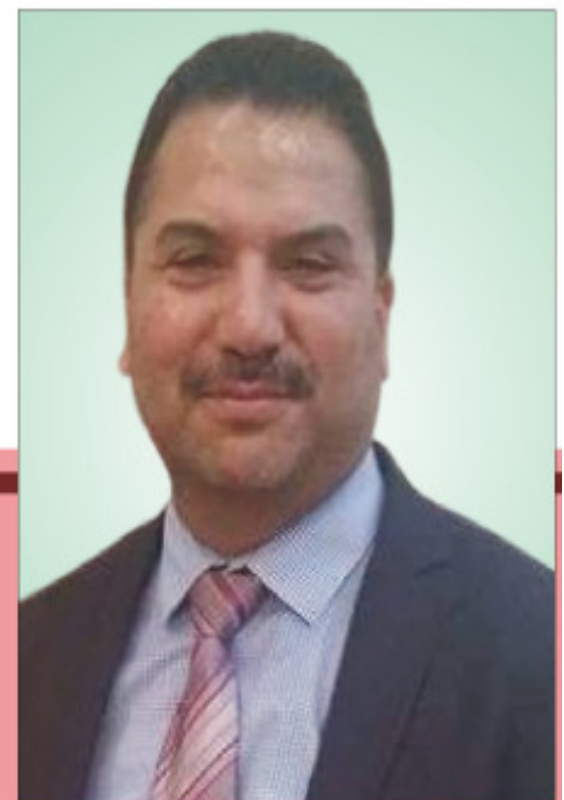
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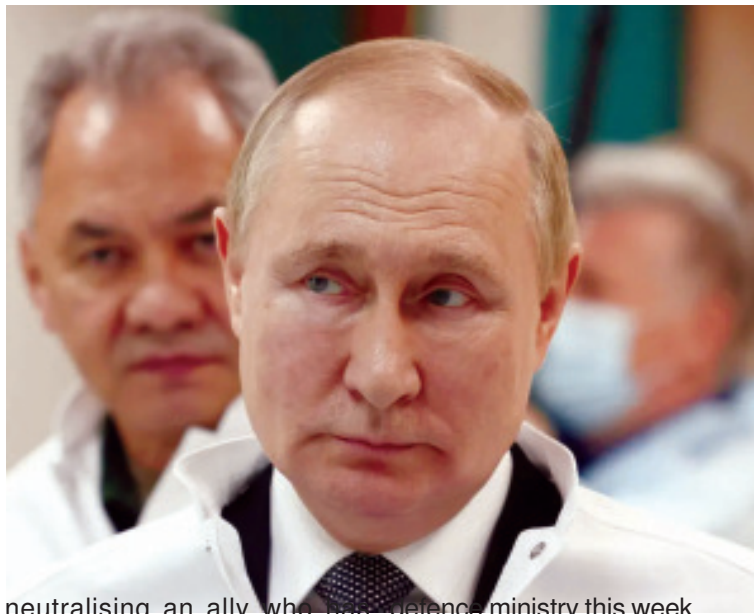


Putin's war machine reshuffle reveals his deepest fear – the rise of Kremlin rivals

By Samantha de Bendern

When the Russian defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, was removed from his post and appointed head of the security council this week, there were two big questions on everyone's mind. What would his successor, Andrei Belousov, bring to the table, and what would happen to the former head of the security council, Nikolai Patrushev – reputed to be the second most powerful man in Russia and seen by many as a potential successor to Vladimir Putin?

The second question has a straightforward answer. Patrushev, it seems, is being sidelined. Yesterday, the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Patrushev had been appointed to the grand position of presidential aide for shipbuilding – barring any further surprise moves, this is a considerable downgrade in role. The question of what Shoigu's removal will mean is a bit trickier, but it may also be a case of Putin



neutralising an ally who has become too powerful. The Kremlin

reshuffle was initially interpreted as a much-needed anti-corruption clean-up within Russia's security apparatus. There was last month's arrest of Shoigu's close ally, the deputy defence minister Timur Ivanov, and the reported detention on unspecified criminal charges of Yuri Kuznetsov, another senior figure in the

defence ministry this week. But the Russian political scientist Mikhail Savva insists that Shoigu's dismissal, and the nomination of Belousov as the new defence minister, "have nothing to do with Shoigu's corruption", adding that "in those circles everyone steals". This is about two things: taking back control of military spending and removing any threat to Putin's power.

Belousov is described as a trustworthy "bureaucrat among bureaucrats", and "President Putin's Albert Speer", who will take Russia's military industrial complex to a new level of efficiency. Russia's myriad of pro-war bloggers have welcomed him as a technocratic manager who will undertake a full audit of military spending and manage the finances and procurement vital to the army, but leave military issues to the general staff. By putting an economist who strongly believes that the state should be the main driver of the economy at the head of the defence ministry, Putin is showing the world that he is turning the whole of Russia into a war machine, and that he is digging in for the long haul. For this he needs a good technocrat who is above all loyal. Indeed, unlike Shoigu, Belousov does not come with a power base or a clan of loyal followers. He owes his position to Putin, is an introvert who does not seek the limelight and

most importantly does not threaten to build a parallel power base to Putin. Vladimir Osechkin, an exiled political commentator with close ties to the security apparatus, explains that Putin is terrified of a repeat of last June's events, when Yevgeny Prigozhin led a mutinous rebellion.

So, if it seems strange to dismiss the minister of defence while things are picking up on the front, it is precisely because of that success that Putin can now move Shoigu aside. According to Ivan Preobrazhensky, a Russian political commentator and member of the Free Russia Forum, "Putin was afraid of changing the top brass in the defence ministry while the front was unstable".

All of this points to Putin's fear of the power struggles inside the Kremlin and the awareness that, as he builds his absolutist power, there are cracks that could widen unless he takes pre-emptive measures.

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India-Iran Chabahar Deal Signals Resolve Amid A World In Flux

By Aditi Bhaduri

India's move to sign a 10-year contract for the operation of the Chabahar port is a bold and strategic step for many reasons. First, a recap.

Since at least 2013, India had been mulling over the development of the Chabahar port on Iran's East coast in the Sistan-Baluchistan province, overlooking the Gulf of Oman. For India, this is the nearest Iranian port, much closer than Bandar Abbas, which lies on Iran's West coast. However, western sanctions over Iran's nuclear programme had stalled the progress on Chabahar.

The JCPOA Story

The signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 between Iran on one hand and the US, UK, France, Russia, China, Germany, and the European Union on the other eased the way for India to commit to the development of the Shahid-Beheshti terminal of the Chabahar port. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Tehran in 2016, he earmarked \$500 million for the work. A trilateral agreement between Iran, India and Afghanistan on the 'Establishment of International Transport and Transit Corridors' was also signed with the objective of facilitating the movement of goods between India and Afghanistan. Since 2018, the port's operations have been managed by the New Delhi-backed India Ports Global Limited (IPGL).

PlayUnmute

Three years after the US signed the JCPOA, former US President Donald Trump pulled out of the deal. But given that the Chabahar port was considered critical for stabilising Afghanistan, as also the fact that this was the route India used to bypass Pakistan and send humanitarian aid to the country, the port was exempted from reimposed US sanctions on Iran. Even so, the changed dynamics made things difficult and India dragged its feet in other logistical areas, such as the construction of the railway line from the port to Zahedan. The delay irked the Iranians, and now and again came veiled threats of linking Chabahar to Gwadar in Pakistan. Ultimately, it took eight more years before India and Iran could finalise the general framework for cooperation. Monday's agreement is thus, in a way, a culmination of those efforts.

The Search For 'Alternatives'

The pact, signed between the IPGL and Iran's Port Maritime Organisation (PMO) in the presence of Sarbananda Sonowal, India's ports, shipping and waterways minister, will now enable the operation of the Shahid-Beheshti terminal. It has a total area of 254 hectares - 16 hectares of



which is open storage area - and a warehouse spread over 30,000 square metres.

Under the agreement, the IPGL will invest approximately \$120 million in equipping the port. India has also offered a credit window equivalent to \$250 million for mutually identified projects aimed at improving Chabahar-related infrastructure, officials said.

The importance of the port for India cannot be overemphasised, especially as countries scramble to search for alternatives to the Suez Canal trade route. Chabahar scores high in those calculations. Though the original intent behind the port was to bypass Pakistan in accessing Afghanistan, it was also meant to counter the China-developed Gwadar, 170 kilometres away. The latter is part of Beijing's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project under the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). With Beijing's rising influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean - most recently highlighted in events in the Maldives - the Iranian port takes on an entirely new salience.

Chabahar is equally important for India's trade and connectivity ambitions. It is easily India's closest gateway to landlocked but resource-rich Central Asian states. "Chabahar Port's significance transcends its role as a mere conduit between India and Iran; it serves as a vital trade artery connecting India with Afghanistan and Central Asian Countries," Sonowal said after the signing of the agreement.

A Gateway To Many Places

Envoys and officials from Central Asian countries have often told this author how coveted the Indian market is for them. Access to the Arabian Sea will also open up Southeast Asian markets to them. That's important given the fact that even though Central Asia is a valuable source of raw material, energy, and minerals, trade remains low due to connectivity troubles. The shortest route to the warm waters of

the Indian Ocean and to South Asia and further afield was through the Af-Pak region, but the ongoing turmoil in the area has come to pose problems for Central Asian states. This is why countries like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have been seeking to get involved in the Chabahar port project. In fact, a Joint Working Group has also been established, and its first meeting was held in 2023.

Beyond Central Asia, Chabahar is also important for India's access to the Russian Federation in the North as well as to the South Caucasus, the Balkans and West Europe. In 2020, India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, pitched for the inclusion of the Chabahar port complex in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which comprises the Caspian Sea littoral states and culminates inside the Russian Federation. The INSTC is the shortest trade route between India and Russia. A 2014 study by the Federation of Freight Forwarders' Association of India found that it was 30% cheaper and 40% shorter than the Suez route, reducing transit time for Europe-bound shipments to an average of 23 days from the usual 45-60 days.

The Route To Europe

The Ukraine conflict has helped put in focus the potential of the INSTC. With Russia under sanctions and European neighbours like Finland blocking the common borders, it becomes imperative for India to find other routes to both East and West Europe. Here again, a route through Iran, Armenia, Georgia via the Black Sea can help India reach Greek Ports - a subject that was discussed during the visit of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to New Delhi in February this year. Lastly, Chabahar also becomes important as the India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) hangs in limbo amidst the Gaza crisis.

Strategically, all these routes also offer alternatives to the Turkey- and China-

backed Middle Corridor, connecting Beijing to Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the South Caucasus.

India As A Leader Of The Global South Such foresight, however, is also contingent on firm resolve, and it is in this context that India's Chabahar agreement should be seen as a bold step amidst the current geopolitical flux. It is a time when the usual West-led world order is being seriously challenged by China and Russia, who seek to offer an alternative. Much of the Global South is caught in the middle, but as the expansion of groupings like the BRICS reflects, many of its members are not against the idea of exploring alternatives. Iran, whose relations with the US have nosedived because of the Gaza war, its military support to Russia, as well as the Red Sea crisis caused by its Houthi surrogates, has thrown its lot with Russia and China. In this climate, India, which sees itself not just as a member of the Global South but as one of its leaders, will have to do a careful balancing act. Therefore, to ink such a deal right now speaks of a great resolve. Beyond US Threats

Soon after the announcement of the agreement, Vedant Patel, deputy spokesperson of the US State Department, said, "Broadly, you've heard us say this in a number of instances, that any entity, anyone considering business deals with Iran, they need to be aware of the potential risk that they are opening themselves up to and the potential risk of sanctions." India had once ceded space to China in Iran when it halted trade and investments under the threat of sanctions. Yet, after the reimposition of American sanctions on Iran in 2018, the Chabahar port was granted a waiver. Similarly, India had also been threatened by US sanctions under CAATSA for its procurement of the S-400 Triumf missile system from Russia. New Delhi went ahead with it - just as it continued to buy Russian oil in spite of the sanctions against it, even selling it back to the European Union. Iran and the US continue to engage in secret negotiations too.

On Monday, Jaishankar said the Chabahar Port will definitely see more investments and connectivity linkages. While India will be seeking investments from the private sector, Iran is developing the area around Chabahar as an industrial, free trade and tourism zone in a bid to garner investment. The potential is immense, and it seems India is resolved to move ahead.

Israel Vs Hamas: Take A Cue From Sri Lanka's Experience

By: Reshmi Dasgupta

It is time Hamas surprises Israel—and the world—again, this time not in an unpleasant way, of course. It should release all living Israeli hostages and come clean on all the ones that have perished in the past seven months. That would leave Israel with no justification to continue with its new assault on Rafah and little reason to keep up its brutal military pressure on the rest of Gaza too. That is the least Hamas can do for the civilian Palestinians there.

And yet this is something that Hamas has never mooted; nor does this seem to have been assertively suggested by anyone either. In the ceasefire deal brokered by Egyptian and Qatari mediators last week, Hamas negotiators just insisted the truce must mean an end to Israel's war on its cadres even though it will not release all the hostages that still remain in its clutches. Why should Israel agree to such a skewed deal, seven months into its counter-offensive?

Anyone with 'skin in the game' will realise that with Israeli hostages now ominously being described merely as "dozens" by the Qatari news outlet Al-Jazeera, Israel is



unlikely to let Hamas off the hook. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can only follow through on Israel's aim stated at the start of its counter-offensive after the October 7, 2023 attack: to totally "defeat, disarm and dismantle" Hamas. And that means even more civilian deaths.

Even with the Palestinian toll now well above 34,000 and rising, Hamas does not appear to think it is time to let the rest of the Israeli hostages go even though they are the reason Israel gives to justify its relentless onslaught, turning a blind eye to the death toll and increasing international pressure. Does Hamas think the thousands of women and

children killed in the counter-attack are worth it because now their cause is getting unprecedented international support? The truth about how Hamas pulled off the attack with such bloody precision may cost Netanyahu his job. But Hamas knew Israeli retaliation would be inevitable and unrelenting as the Netanyahu government—whether unforgivably negligent or criminally complacent—would seek to redeem its credibility by wiping out the force that dented Israel's image of invincibility. That would put all Palestinians in Gaza in mortal danger. Still, Hamas went ahead with it.

It made no move to evacuate

people, including kids; instead, gambling on a high stakes' strategy, it remained embedded deep within residential areas. Its cadres operated amid the devastation, death and despair, still keeping "dozens" of Israeli hostages out of reach or rescue. Moreover, the way Israeli hostages were greeted with jeers and kicks by locals in Gaza indicated support for their actions too if not tacit acceptance of the consequences of Hamas' gambit. As pro-Palestinian—a euphemism for anti-Israel, anti-Jewish—sentiment spreads in the west, Hamas now has good reason to believe that its high-risk, shock-and-awe gambit to instigate international pressure to help achieve its goal has succeeded. A violent separatist group can say it has been able to channel naïve fervour for "justice" in its favour, overturning the nearly eight-decade-old, post-World War II western consensus against anti-Semitism. Sitting in their hideaways far away from the carnage and suffering in Gaza, the Hamas top leadership must consider their October 7 attack and the resultant 'achievement' well worth the extreme collateral damage wrought on the

Palestinians, the very people they claim to be fighting for. The implicit message in this 'success' for similar terrorist and separatist outfits plotting the same path elsewhere—and the countries in their crosshairs—is alarming.

Indians above a certain age, may recall a seemingly endless circle of violence and ethnic hate in Sri Lanka, where the Hamas-like Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) waged a war that spanned generations, for a separate homeland—Eelam—on the island. They had a charismatic and brutal leader in V Prabhakaran, besides many eloquent ideologues who fanned out in US and Europe, steering the discourse and putting the Sri Lankan government on the backfoot. Back in 1985, the LTTE had raided the area around the revered Maha Bodhi tree, killing 146 people including monks, nuns and children in an incident now known as the Anuradhapura massacre. There was a predictable bloody backlash against civilian Tamils in the northern provinces by 'civilian' Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Army. This set off a two-decade cycle of deadly LTTE attacks and brutal Army retaliation. The similarities with Gaza and Israel are obvious.

Blinken's Contentious China Visit: Sino-American Impasse Remains

By: Kanwal Sibal

China has taken full advantage of globalisation and the framework of the WTO to become a formidable economic colossus, and this in collaboration with the US and its allies. In 30 years, China developed into a global manufacturing hub with a huge inflow of capital and technology from the G7, and a carefully crafted industrial policy supported by state subsidies. This very rapid industrial expansion resulted in overcapacities in many areas, which China has successfully used to dump products and obtain control of external markets by killing competition. Equally, China, with foresight, and with the huge financial resources at its command, acquired control over many critical raw materials and made advances in many critical technologies vital for a transition to green energy amidst climate change concerns. Solar panels and batteries for electric vehicles



are examples. At the same time, China has developed into a strong military, nuclear and space power. China is now challenging US power. The equations between the two countries have changed. China, as the second largest economy, a huge market and the biggest exporting nation, with its tentacles now spread all over the globe through its Belt and Road Initiative, cannot be either ignored or contained. The US, European

and Japanese economies are far too linked with the Chinese economy to risk a rupture.

The US now sees China as its principal adversary and is forging policies that would rebuild its own industrial strength in critical areas in order to reduce dependence on China, as well as to slow down China's technological progress through denial of the latest Western technologies. It is also putting pressure on Europe to follow suit.

If the US intends to blunt the China challenge, its geopolitical strategies are not in tune with this objective. It is seeking to simultaneously contain both Russia and China, giving both the incentive to support each other, which adds to the challenge the US faces. While the US claims it can handle conflicts both in Europe and Asia and that its proxy war against Russia does not deplete its capacity to thwart China's expansionism in the western Pacific, the reality is different. The US has already lost ground in West Asia to China as well as Russia. China has played a role in the Iran-Saudi Arabia reconciliation process. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have joined BRICS which has multipolarity as a major objective, as well as promoting trade in national currencies to reduce transactions in US dollars. On Iran and North Korea, the US is no longer in a position to work with Russia and China cooperatively on nuclear or

sanctions issues in the UN or outside. China is supporting Russia politically on the Ukraine issue, including in the UN, and obtaining Russian support on the Taiwan issue. The US is now accusing China of providing dual-use technologies and raw materials to Russia to support its defence production and enabling Russia to prosecute its war against Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to China in late April 2024 was in this general background. The goals of the visit had to be limited, given the many points of difference between the two countries. The US is looking for some basic stability in ties even in an atmosphere of mutual distrust. It wants to avoid getting drawn into a military conflict, which is why it has been insisting on US-China military-to-military level talks. Any armed conflict when the presidential election is due later this year would be politically disastrous, although tough political posturing on China would bring electoral benefit.

PoJK Protests: Violent Crackdown Highlights Pakistan's Colonial Approach

By: Arun Anand

Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) is undergoing significant turmoil, with normal life severely disrupted due to the violent suppression of protests by Pakistani security forces. The region is on edge, with mobile and internet communications down and educational institutions indefinitely shut. The situation escalated dramatically in the past week, particularly following the pre-emptive arrests of local leaders by the Pakistani police to prevent their long march to the regional capital, Muzaffarabad, on May 11.

Ever since, the Pakistani Rangers have killed over half a dozen civilians and wounded hundreds of others across different districts of the occupied territory.

The protests, which have taken the shape of a non-operation movement and are among the largest and most intense in recent years, are fueled by widespread discontent over the Pakistani government's policies on basic amenities, including electricity tariffs, subsidised wheat, and a lack of development. This incident has refocused attention on the long-standing colonial and imperial



policies enforced by Pakistan in PoJK, which has exacerbated people's frustration and anger. The persistent protests underscore the broader issues of neglect and exploitation by Islamabad towards Muzaffarabad. The region "has long been ignored, exploited, looted and plundered by Pakistani military dictatorships and governments" and "lacks basic and essential infrastructure like mobile connectivity, roads, healthcare and education. This was a lava brewing that may be finding a way to erupt now." The Pakistani government's failure to address the basic needs of the people in PoJK is not just a matter of poor governance but also a reflection of its colonial approach to the region.

For over a year, PoJK has witnessed protests demanding essential services from the indifferent Pakistani government and its local toothless clientele administration in Muzaffarabad. The unrest began in May 2023 when residents of Rawlakote in the Poonch division protested against increased electricity charges and the withdrawal of subsidies on wheat and other staples adding to people's misery amidst rising inflation in this severely underdeveloped region. The civil unrest spread to the whole of PoJK, bringing to the fore the decades-long systematic oppressive policies of the Pakistani government. Ever since, people have been engaged in a sustained

protest against the government, seeking not only autonomy over their resources but also access to basic human rights and life essentials.

The situation has been compounded by recurrent interference by the Pakistani government and its military establishment in the governance affairs of PoJK. There is a consensus amongst all the local stakeholders that the PoJK government works under the direction of a two-star military general of the Pakistan Army's Murree-based 12 Infantry Division in Punjab. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on POJK, "The corps commander in Murree is known to summon the Azad Kashmir prime minister, president and other government officials regularly to outline the military's views on all political and governance issues in the territory." This was demonstrated by the Pakistan military's overnight coup to oust the elected government of Sardar Tanvir Ilyas in April 2023 and install its "puppet" administration under Chaudhry Anwarul Haq in Muzaffarabad to secure its

interests. This recurrent meddling by Pakistan is facilitated by PoJK's constitutional arrangement with Islamabad under the 'Azad' Jammu Kashmir Interim Constitution Act of 1974. While the Act provides for the region's nominal self-governance, its Section 56 nullifies everything by empowering Islamabad with unchecked powers to "dismiss any elected government in Azad Kashmir irrespective of the support it may enjoy in the AJK Legislative Assembly." This provision reduces the PoJK government to an entity functioning "by the Pakistanis for Pakistan," as it establishes the 'Azad' Kashmir Council, which operates under Pakistan's prime minister and holds unchallenged authority over 52 subjects, including everything of importance to everyday life of people and the region. Additionally, Pakistan deposes its civil services and police officers to oversee the administration in the region to ensure the compliance of the local government. As such, this administration is seen as merely an extension of Islamabad's control, lacking genuine concern for the region's welfare.

As war in the Middle East threatens to spread, nuclear disarmament is imperative

BY MELISSA PARKE

Israel is, and has long been, a nuclear-armed state — the only one in the Middle East — though this fact has never been officially acknowledged. For decades, the Israeli government has maintained a policy of "nuclear ambiguity," neither confirming nor denying it possesses the bomb.

And the United States and most western governments, at the expense of their credibility as advocates for non-proliferation, have played along. But with the risk that the war in Gaza is morphing into a direct confrontation between Israel and Iran that could draw in more nuclear-armed states on different sides (given U.S. support for Israel and Russia's growing support for Iran), clearly the time has come for urgent action to ensure nuclear weapons are not used in the Middle East.

The tit-for-tat drone and missile strikes between Israel and Iran



since the Israeli attack on the Iranian embassy compound in Syria last month seem to be calibrated not to provoke an all-out war. But that is an approach fraught with the risk of miscalculation and cannot be relied on to prevent a wider conflict.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has raised the alarm that Israel could attack Iranian nuclear facilities, which Israel alleges are a covert nuclear weapons program. For their part, the IAEA and U.S. have expressed concern about Iranian intentions, without accusing it of planning to

develop weapons, and called for it to return to compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

There is also the threat Israel could use its own nuclear weapons, as politicians from Israel's governing coalition have already talked about the possibility. It's an idea some U.S. politicians, including most recently, Sen. Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.), have appeared to endorse. When a member of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet, Amihai Eliyahu, spoke of dropping a nuclear bomb on the people of Gaza, the Israeli leader immediately slapped him down.

But such threats, even from a junior minister, raise a justifiable concern about Israel's vague and ambiguous nuclear intentions.

For years, Arab states and Iran have vocally objected to Israel's nuclear arsenal — thought to comprise around 90 warheads. Their calls for Israel to eliminate these weapons have grown louder during the current Gaza war.

The U.S. and the rest of the international community must be clear-eyed about the need for nuclear disarmament in any long-term peace settlement in the Middle East. We need to dispense with the pretense of ambiguity and have an honest and open discussion about Israel's nuclear weapons and why they must be eliminated, particularly given that they clearly have not had any deterrent effect against conventional attacks.

Israel and its key allies have long demanded, as a condition for their future recognition of Palestinian statehood, that Palestine be

completely "demilitarized" to ensure Israel's long-term security. But there is an imperative, too, for Israel to move in the same direction — first and foremost, by dismantling its nuclear arsenal — for the security of Palestinians, Israelis and the entire world.

Equally, Israel and the international community have been adamant that Iran must not use its nuclear program to develop nuclear weapons. The current impasse in reviving the nuclear deal, following then-President Trump's decision to abandon it in 2018, could be superseded by a grand compromise that sees a nuclear-free Middle East.

To this end, Israel and the other countries in the region, along with all other nuclear-armed states, should join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) as the only existing international treaty that provides a pathway towards fair and verifiable disarmament.

2024 Isn't 2004: Here Are 5 Reasons Why Modi Will Be Back Bigger



By: Rahul Shivshankar

We're at the halfway stage of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. While we won't know the verdict of the people till June 4, many "political experts" mostly from the anti-Modi tribe have declared that the NDA is in trouble. That the 2024 Lok Sabha election will be a near repeat of the 2004 Lok Sabha election. In that election, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA was widely tipped to win comfortably. The NDA was riding on the "India Shining" slogan and a fractured Opposition was not expected to pose a challenge. But in the end, the NDA lost.

The "political experts" say they're confident because there are "2004-like factors" at play in 2024. First, a lower voter turnout

than in 2019. This they say was also true of the 2004 election when fewer electors voted compared to 1999. Second, the existence of ground-level anti-incumbency despite the BJP having denied tickets to a fourth of its sitting MPs. And the absence of any one leader projected against PM Modi, which prevents the election from assuming the character of a presidential-style face-off. But are these "2004-like factors" playing a decisive role as these "political experts" have predicted? Has the election turned?

Here are some fact-based arguments that will establish that 2024 isn't 2004 and that those predicting gloom for the BJP might end up with eggs on their

faces.

THE BJP'S RAM BAAN

The NDA's dominance in the North, where it bagged 210 out of 244 seats is all but ensured. While the BJP is experiencing anti-incumbency pressures it has offset them by mobilising its base through its messaging on Ram and the mandir. The timing of the Ram mandir inauguration and the carefully curated ceremony aimed at including a panoply of castes was a calibrated exercise to shore up the BJP's big caste coalition.

The Ram Mandir gambit, if it could be called that, has helped the BJP neutralise the Opposition's bid to undercut the party's rainbow caste coalition by floating the "caste census" balloon.

THE 'MODI VERSUS KHICHDI' ISN'T AN OPTION

The Opposition is convinced that it has succeeded in avoiding turning the election into a presidential-style contest by not projecting a leader against Modi. But adopting such a strategy also hands the BJP a vital advantage. It allows it to market stable leadership under a decisive Modi as its unique selling point. Indian voters are today more aware of the chaotic impact of global strife in an interconnected world upon their

daily lives. With wars, testy neighbours and a pandemic having driven home the point, voters are looking for security via stability at the national level. Especially the narrative setting aspirational middle class. The prospect of a fractious coalition with competing interests and a varying vision for governance acquiring power may not appeal. This antipathy towards instability is borne out even at the assembly level where a whopping 78% of the mandates in the last few years have been decisive. Of the remaining 22% of the verdicts, 80% have been in favour of a tested pre-poll alliance.

THE SOUTHERN SWITCH

The BJP-led NDA has set itself an ambitious target in the South. It hopes to capture 40 seats. The more optimistic saffron-istas are dreaming about 50. The BJP may end up short. But because it only won 29 out of 129 seats in the South in 2019 it believes it has room to grow. In Karnataka, the BJP maxed out in 2019 and may yet concede a few seats but this will only happen if the Congress can dramatically swing votes. To put the challenge for the Opposition in perspective, the BJP's average victory margin across seats in Karnataka was 1.75 lakh votes. Dramatic swings are rare. But they do happen. In

2019 for instance, the BJP's vote share in Bengal went up to 40% from a mere 17% in 2014. But 2019 was thought to be a Modi wave election. There may not be a Modi wave but there certainly isn't a discernible anti-Modi wave either. Modi remains very popular in 2024.

Losses in Karnataka may be offset in Telangana and Andhra. In Telangana, if even 10% of the approximately 40% BRS votes were to shift to the BJP, the party would bag 5 seats. **LOW VOTER TURNOUT ISN'T A VOTE AGAINST BJP**

There is no conclusive correlation between voter turnout and poll outcomes. Over the years, the data shows that incumbent governments have returned when the turnout has fallen, and incumbents have been ousted when the turnout has risen. Nevertheless, a detailed study on voter participation in the 2004, 2009, and 2014 general elections by Dr Prannoy Roy and Dorab Sopariwala concluded that the BJP consistently won in constituencies where the turnout had dropped. This, the study concluded, was because unlike other parties the BJP has a strong cadre-level organisation of booth workers and "panna pramukhs" that are experts in getting the core vote out.

As India Goes Out To Vote, What Is At Stake For Indian Democracy?

By: Omer Ghazi

An FIR has been lodged against senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid and Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Maria Alam Khan under Sections 188 and 295A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in the Kayamganj Police Station, Fatehgarh district. The FIR alleges that the leaders made an appeal for "vote jihad", terming it as necessary in the current situation for the minority community to drive away the BJP government. Maria Alam Khan, during an election rally, urged for "vote jihad", stating that it is essential for the minority community to act in unison against the ruling party.

Prime Minister Modi, in response to the aforementioned incident, condemned the call for "vote jihad" as "an insult to democracy and constitution". He expressed shock at the remark made by Maria Alam, emphasising that



such rhetoric is particularly concerning coming from an individual from an educated Muslim family.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had earlier launched an attack on the Congress, citing a video of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wherein he allegedly stated that minorities should receive

priority in the allocation of the nation's resources. This further fuelled the ongoing discourse surrounding religious favouritism and political polarisation. As India goes out to vote in the ongoing election, similar events have sparked intense debates about the essence of parliamentary democracy and the principles it

embodies. These incidents, in particular, have brought to light the complexities surrounding identity politics, religious rhetoric, and the role of leadership in a democratic society.

While democracy is founded on the principles of equality, secularism, and meritocracy, the reality often strays from these ideals. Instead, we see instances of identity-based politics, religious appeals, and polarisation, which threaten the integrity of the democratic process. At the heart of parliamentary democracy lies the principle of electing leaders based on merit, irrespective of religious or communal affiliations. The essence of democracy is to empower citizens to make informed choices, free from divisive rhetoric and partisan agendas. It is about selecting representatives who will uphold the values of inclusivity, justice, and accountability.

As the nation heads into elections, it is imperative for voters to critically evaluate candidates based on their qualifications, track record, and commitment to democratic principles. Blind allegiance and identity-based voting only serve to perpetuate divisions and hinder the progress of the nation.

Moreover, it is imperative to recognize the intricate workings of parliamentary democracy, wherein the power to govern is decentralised and vested in elected representatives at the local level. Unlike in other forms of governance, such as presidential systems, where voters directly elect the head of state, parliamentary democracy operates on a more nuanced mechanism. Here, voters elect local leaders, who, in turn, play a pivotal role in the formation of the government and the selection of the Prime Minister.

Democrats to kick Joe Biden off the ticket after the debate?

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden—who as in previous outings interspersed some strong moments with several mushy or head-scratching ones—seemed emphatically life-sized, once again, in the latest Democratic Party debate in Houston.

There is an optical dimension to presidential politics that is hard to explain in logical terms but hard to deny in practical experience: At some point winning candidates seem to grow larger in public projection and their ability to dominate a stage.

Someone starts the campaign as an ordinary politician, desperate for a few extra seconds on camera, and somehow becomes a leader who doesn't have to beg or contrive cute one-liners to get attention, by virtue of being very visibly the most consequential person in the field. One conclusion of Thursday night's debate, over three hours: Those mysterious optics have not kicked in yet. It was a big stage of people who still seem smaller than the position they are seeking.

It does not seem likely that the Houston debate will live in memory as such a moment of transformation.

Biden's previous uneven performances didn't dislodge him atop the race, and so caution is justified in predicting bleeding wounds from this one. Even so, discursive answers on substantive issues like deportation of undocumented immigrants and Afghanistan, an oddly dated reference to a "record player," disrespectful digs and patronizing swipes from rivals, all raise the question: Can he withstand four more months of this before actual Democratic voting begins?

And, if not, a question for his rivals: When will those mysterious optics of power kick in for them? A smaller field—ten candidates on one night instead of twenty over two—meant that there was no one present who didn't pass at least some modest threshold of plausibility. And most of the candidates had at least some moments when their voices carried. But there was no one who clearly owned the stage and loomed obviously larger than rivals. There's time yet, of course. It was around this period four years ago

when Trump changed in perception from a loud novelty candidate to someone who clearly was in command of the GOP race and made much more conventionally credentialed opponents look small on the stage.

It was strong performances at a debate and on the trail in October 2007 that helped Barack Obama overcome a somewhat slow start and establish himself as front-runner Hillary Clinton's equal in stature in the Democratic contest. It does not seem likely that the Houston debate will live in memory as such a moment of transformation. For one thing, it was at times pretty hard work for the audience: three hours is a lot, especially watching people who of necessity are being quite nakedly calculating in their effort to stand out. One good thing about the length, however, was a somewhat more dignified tone: candidates did not have to shout and filibuster and interrupt to snare the spotlight as much as they did at the summer's two previous sets of two-night debates.

Elizabeth Warren showed the traits that helped drive her surge earlier this year have survived

intact to the fall. But her performances tend to flicker. Crisp and impassioned answers on expanding access to health care or curbing access to guns would be followed by long stretches when she seemed to blend into the background.

The durability of the Biden paradox—not so strong to be running away with the race, but strong enough to keep people who could claim his space among moderate, establishment-oriented Democrats from breaking through—was causing some irritation among rival campaigns after the debate. Biden, by these lights, benefits from clearing a bar that should be higher for a front-runner.

"He didn't fall over," an adviser to one of his rivals scoffed, calling Biden "the anti-expectation candidate." "I think that we are at a tough point right now, because there's a lot of people concerned about Joe Biden's ability to carry the ball all the way across the end line without fumbling," Cory Booker opined on CNN after the debate. Precisely because the candidates are still struggling

to make themselves seem large, there was incessant boasting and self-referential answers that invoked the phrase "I'm the only" in ways that often came off as quite tinny.

In truth, however, that bar is still pretty low for all ten people on stage.

Bernie Sanders, a remarkably consistent debater, whose performances generally are to your taste or not depending on your ideology, sounded the same as ever except hoarser, from what seemed to be a bug of some kind. Mayor Pete Buttigieg proved himself just as articulate as on multiple previous occasions—a fluency that the numbers suggest has so far impressed donors more than average Democrats.

Kamala Harris did not school Biden like she did in their first debate encounter, but she did find high notes in continually turning her fire on Trump, who in one caustic line she likened to the man behind the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*, who turned out to be "a really small dude." Julian Castro did try to school Biden, though he risked coming off as rude by not-so-subtly (and inaccurately

in context) implying that Biden was suffering from senescence: "Are you forgetting already what you said just two minutes ago?" Beto O'Rourke, like Castro appearing in his native state, won lots of plaudits from fellow candidates for his response to the mass shooting last month in his home city of El Paso, though the praise was in its own way a bit condescending: A clear signal that they no longer view him as a serious threat for the nomination.

Amy Klobuchar, casting her ideological centrism as a natural outflow of her Minnesota upbringing in the center of the country, and Booker, stressing his affinity for the challenges of urban America, both gave among their stronger performances of the campaign—a reminder of why they initially generated such anticipation earlier in the year. Both need a Biden stumble to lift themselves up.

Lastly, entrepreneur Andrew Yang showed he is the novelty candidate who still seems novel, after author and self-help guru Marianne Williamson failed to qualify for the debate.

Joe Biden and Donald Trump agree to two US presidential debates

Shortly after the Biden-Harris re-election campaign proposed two TV debates between Joe Biden and Donald Trump ahead of November's presidential vote, both men have agreed upon two debate dates: 27 June and 10 September.

CNN confirmed that it would host the first debate of 2024 on that date at 9pm ET from the crucial battleground state of Georgia.

ABC later confirmed they'd host a second debate on 10 September during prime time.

A third date, 2 October, has been proposed by Trump in a Truth Social post on Wednesday afternoon: "Let this TRUTH serve to represent that I hereby accept debating Crooked Joe Biden on FoxNews. The date will be Wednesday, October 2nd. The Hosts will be Bret Baier and Martha MacCallum. Thank you, DJT!" Chris LaCivita and Susie Wiles, with the Trump campaign, told ABC News of the upcoming and pending

debate dates: "We propose a debate in June, a debate in July, a debate in August, and a debate in September, in addition to the Vice Presidential debate. Additional dates will allow voters to have maximum exposure to the records and future visions of each candidate."

On Wednesday morning, Biden said in a video shared on social media: "Donald Trump lost two debates to me in 2020, and since then he hasn't shown up for a debate. Now he's acting like he wants to debate me again. Well, make my day, pal. I'll even do it twice."

He then jabbed: "So let's pick dates, Donald. I hear you're free on Wednesdays," referring to the free day in Trump's current campaign finance violations trial in New York.

In a post on Twitter/X, independent candidate Robert F Kennedy Jr accused Biden and Trump of "colluding to lock

America into a head-to-head match-up that 70% say they do not want. They are trying to exclude me from their debate because they are afraid I would win. Keeping viable candidates off the debate stage undermines democracy."

Biden's proposal bucked a tradition of three debates, typically held in the fall, that are organized by the bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates. Democratic party officials said in a release on Wednesday that moving the timing up, reducing the number of debates and ending them sooner reflected changes in the "structure of our elections and the interests of voters". The Democrats' proposal also noted that debates in previous elections cycles had not concluded until after early voting started and the commission's debates were "structured like an entertainment spectacle and not a serious exchange of ideas that

reflect the enormous stakes of the election".

The commission "has consistently demonstrated an inability to enforce their own rules" in the debates and called for a firm time limit on answers, and alternate turns to speak "so that the time is evenly divided and we have an exchange of views, not a spectacle of mutual interruption". Later on Wednesday morning, Trump accepted Biden's offer to debate him in June and September, telling Fox News Digital that "it is time for a debate to take place—even if it has to be held through the offices of the Commission on Presidential Debates, which are totally controlled by Democrats and who, as people remember, got caught cheating with me with debate sound levels". He added on Truth Social: "Crooked Joe Biden is the worst debater I have ever faced—he can't put two sentences together."

Why New York's elites are investing in hidden doors, panic rooms

The uberwealthy are known to splurge on yachts, luxury condominiums or private planes. However, the elites of New York are investing money in things entirely different -- panic rooms, hidden doors and bulletproof doors.

Gripped by fears of rising crime and immigration anxieties, elite residents of New York are taking extraordinary measures to feel safe in their own homes. This trend is evident in a surge of homeowners investing in security upgrades like panic rooms and bulletproof doors.

Over three-quarters of Americans believe crime has increased nationwide, according to a Pew Research Center study. These fears relate to a combination of factors, including violent clashes between protestors and police, and the constant stream of shocking incidents captured on video and shared on social media, reported the Daily Mail. In response to these clashes, New York's elite are shelling out thousands of dollars to fortify their homes. Security upgrades include hidden doors, bulletproof doors, electrified doorknobs, ballistic doors, advanced security systems with facial recognition locks, and more.

Wealth is being spent on boosting the sense of security.

PANIC ROOMS CAN COST OVER \$1 MILLION

The New York Post reports that the price for a custom-built panic room starts at \$50,000. These rooms are reinforced with bulletproof materials and have night-vision gear, medical kits, and even food supplies. They can be cleverly disguised and seamlessly integrated into any building, whether it's an old townhouse or a modern penthouse. For luxury apartments, the price tag for these panic rooms can skyrocket to \$1 million or even higher.

Panic room builders attribute the recent surge in demand to the anti-police-violence protests that erupted across New York City for months following the death of George Floyd, a black American man who was murdered by a white police officer in 2020, according to the Daily Mail.

David Vranicar, owner of Fortified Ballistic Security – a Florida-based construction and design firm specialising in panic rooms – is one of many industry leaders who has witnessed a significant increase in business in New York City over the past year.

Steve Humble, from Creative Home Engineering in Arizona, is another builder of hidden rooms and secret passages who has seen a similar rise in business in the New York area. He

also believes the 2020 anti-police-violence protests were a turning point.

Bill Rigdon, CEO of Building Consensus, a company specialising in high-end security solutions, has always catered to a clientele of wealthy individuals, celebrities, and people of significant influence, according to Fox Business. However, business has boomed even further in recent months. Rigdon attributes this to a combination of growing national anxieties, civil unrest, and the uncertainty surrounding the upcoming presidential election.

"People are scared to death," Rigdon told FOX Business. "They're asking me, 'How can I protect myself with the upcoming election and the civil unrest that I see on the news every day?' In fact, many projects need to be completed before November 5th, when the presidential election takes place."

The cost of a basic panic room can range from \$100,000 to \$200,000 depending on

the desired level of protection. This price typically only covers materials applied to the walls of a small, unfinished room.

HIDDEN DOORS AND BULLETPROOF DOORS IN DEMAND

Additional features like access controls, advanced technology, food and water storage, communication systems, and other equipment will significantly increase the cost.

Bill Rigdon's company offers security features beyond ballistic doors that can even stop AK-47 bullets.

These include electrified handles, smoke-screen launchers, hidden nozzles for spraying dyed pepper spray at intruders, and even remote-controlled robots or drones armed with shotgun shells. Following the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, the company said politicians from both sides reached out to create safe rooms in their homes. After Hamas terrorists

stormed Israel in early October, killing over 1,100 Israelis and kidnapping 200, some remaining hostages, the company had "a large number" of Jewish homeowners creating panic rooms, reported the Daily Mail.

Today's trend leans away from dedicated panic rooms and instead focusses on converting existing spaces like master closets, bedrooms, and home offices into secure havens. This allows these rooms to function as normal living spaces while also providing a hidden layer of security.

Then there are the hidden doors. These secret doors are built into the walls of apartments, and hidden with a window sill or a bookcase. They are meant to provide a safe exit for occupants of the apartment in case of an emergency.

With videos of protests and violence flooding social media, the elites of New York are using their wealth to secure their apartments and buy some mental peace.

India signs 10-year deal with Iran to manage Chabahar port



India signed a 10-year agreement with Iran on Monday to develop and manage the Chabahar port, marking a pivotal development in bilateral ties between the two nations.

The Chabahar port, situated on Iran's south-eastern coast along the Gulf of Oman, has been a focal point of India's efforts to bolster trade links with Iran, Afghanistan, and central Asian countries.

"Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and AYUSH, Sarbananda Sonowal visited Chabahar, Iran on 13 May 2024 to witness the signing ceremony of Long-term Main Contract for the development of Shahid Beheshti Port Terminal, Chabahar. The contract was signed between India Port Global Limited (IPGL) and Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran," said an official press release. This initiative aims to create alternative trade routes that find a way around Pakistan's Karachi and Gwadar

ports.

The progress of the Chabahar port's development was initially hindered by US sanctions on Iran.

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal highlighted the port's strategic importance beyond facilitating India-Iran trade, serving as a critical trade conduit for India to connect with Afghanistan and Central Asian Countries.

He highlighted the newfound opportunities this link has unlocked for trade and supply chain resilience across the region.

The long-term contract was signed between India Port Global Limited (IPGL) and Iran's Port & Maritime Organisation. According to Mehrdad Bazrpash, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, IPGL will inject approximately \$120 million into the port's development, alongside an additional \$250 million in financing, making the

contract's total value reach \$370 million. IPGL assumed port operations at the end of 2018 and has since managed container traffic exceeding 90,000 TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Units) and over 8.4 million tonnes of bulk and general cargo, as per an Indian government official.

Additionally, the official noted that Chabahar Port facilitated the shipment of 2.5 million tonnes of wheat and 2,000 tonnes of pulses from India to Afghanistan. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar expressed optimism about the deal, stating that it would pave the way for larger investments in the port. He shared these remarks with reporters during a briefing in Mumbai on Monday. The intention is to link Chabahar with the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), creating a pathway from India to Russia via Iran. This port offers India an alternative route to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia, avoiding Pakistan.

What's common between Netflix Chamkila and Trudeau's trouble-infested Canada? They don't get Punjab

Even in the weeks leading up to Chamkila's assassination there were massacres every other day. To airbrush all of this is sheer intellectual cowardice if not a crime.

In the middle of a raging general election now in the electoral equivalent of its slog over, why should one be talking about a mere OTT movie? Even if it is Imtiaz Ali's critically acclaimed Amar Singh Chamkila (Netflix).

It is set in Punjab in early 1988, when terrorists ruled, and ends on 8 March with the assassination of Amar Singh Chamkila, the phenomenally popular superstar of rural Punjab.

We do not write movie reviews here. This film, however, forces us to connect with a reality we prefer to forget. And those who prefer forgetting inconvenient realities are destined to live through them again. Three things as we go forward:

- The film is deeply and immorally flawed, as are almost all Indian films set in contemporary history, in being totally devoid of context. It has scattered mentions of ongoing terrorism in the Punjab of 1988, but mostly skirts it.

- While I will elaborate on the context in subsequent paragraphs, this assassination took place exactly two months before Operation Black Thunder in the Golden Temple complex. Friday — 10 May, 2024 — when this column is being written, is the 36th anniversary of the operation, after which terrorists/militants/radicals haven't been able to return to this most hallowed of Sikh shrines.

- Third, and most important. Canada has just arrested three "Indian citizens" (all Punjabis, likely Sikhs) for the alleged assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. A concerted and somehow well-supported effort has been on, centred in Canada but also with links mostly to other countries in the Anglosphere, to reignite the same fires and burn Punjab again. This was given further legitimacy last week with both the prime minister of Canada and its leader of the Opposition attending a Sikh religious event where separatist and offensive slogans were shouted, and incendiary pictures and posters displayed.

For clarity, between 1981 and 1993, the phase of terror, a few of its leaders did escape to Canada and the UK but found zero political support and mostly gravitated to Pakistan. Today, the separatist leadership exists only — or mostly — in Canada and it has the fullest political support.

The other difference is, unlike in the 1980s, there is no support for such a campaign in Punjab, Sikh shrines enjoy peace and calm. This is a positive. The negative, however, is how strongly this purely offshore campaign has become enmeshed in the domestic vote bank politics of Canada. There is protection for the vilest subversive

activity under the garb of free speech. It's a negative also if Indian intelligence sees the need to go fight the so-called Khalistanis in faraway nations when almost none exist at home. All of these things do not end well.

The Canadians believe that the three alleged assassins of Nijjar were working at the behest of Indian 'agencies'. At the same time, what we know is that the three arrived in Canada on student visas and have apparently never done a day of school or college. They are uncluttered hired mafia hitmen. Further, they've also been named for three more murders where no 'Indian agency connection' is alleged.

Assassinations and counter-strikes are now commonplace in Canada. Some of the well-known armed mafias in India are also operating through these groups in Canada while their leaders are lodged in jail. For example, Lawrence Bishnoi in Gujarat's Sabarmati jail. Punjab mafias, popular culture (mostly music), drug- and gun-running and illegal immigration are a deadly mix and most of its sustenance comes from the lax — I'd rather not say complicit — Canadian system.

It is for Canadians to ask how come they are importing jobless flotsam like these three, and others running mafias in their country, from Indian Punjab. We know that in our Punjab, there is an extensive illegal immigration racket — popularly called

Biden should have pardoned Trump on federal charges, Mitt Romney says

Joe Biden should have pardoned Donald Trump on all federal criminal charges the moment they were announced, the Utah senator and former Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney said.

"Had I been President Biden," Romney said, "when the justice department brought out indictments, I would have immediately pardoned him. I'd have pardoned President Trump." "Why? Well, because it makes me, President Biden, the big guy and the person I pardoned the little guy. And, number two, it's not going to get resolved before the election. It's not going to have an impact before the election. And, frankly, the country doesn't want to have to go through prosecuting a former president." Romney was speaking to MSNBC, in an interview to be broadcast on The 11th Hour with Stephanie Ruhle on Wednesday night. Trump is the presumptive Republican presidential nominee despite facing 88 criminal charges. Forty-four are federal: four regarding election subversion and 40 retention of classified information. Neither case has reached trial.

The president could not pardon Trump on his other 44 charges, at the state level. Thirty-four arise from hush-money

kabootarbaazi (literally, pigeon-flying).

How are the visas arranged, though? Is the visa/security clearance system of a G7 and Five Eyes member state so porous, callous or corrupt that so many of these "students" keep getting in? Is the need for cheap Punjabi labour so desperate? Or is it the need for more voters for a particular party? Canada is importing India's mafias. Mostly, they fight amongst themselves. Now this is spilling over into India. The killing of singer Sidhu Moosewala, for example. The Moosewala assassination caught India's imagination because he had become a pan-national star. In 1988, Amar Singh Chamkila — a Dalit whose original name was Dhani Ram, aged just 28 when he was killed — was a very local star.

He was working class and his lyrics were so rustic that those of us floating in the state keeping the daily count of dead weren't particularly aware of the phenomenon. Unless a taxi driver dropped his cassettes in the player.

The film suggests he was killed because "somebody" thought his lyrics were obscene, warned him to desist, and when he didn't — because his audiences wanted the "real" stuff — he was killed. As simple as that. Or, for the filmmaker, as simplistic as that. That's where the context is missed. And in my book, context missed so deliberately and conveniently in a film set in a critical juncture of our history isn't

creative freedom. It borders on the criminal. The film doesn't suggest he was killed by militants/terrorists. It doesn't even mention the 't' word.

His lyrics, raw as they were full of double entendre, weren't the worst you'd hear in all of rural Punjab then, or now. Chamkila's fame had greatly disconcerted competitors, mostly upper caste. Did somebody put out a contract on him? We still do not know. Nobody was ever caught. The safest crime in that reign of terror was murder.

However, if he was killed for obscenity, why was the much-loved progressive poet Pash (original name: Avtar Singh Sandhu) assassinated just two weeks after Chamkila. His poetry had words of equality, a little bit of egalitarian revolution. His most famous composition (google it) was sabh ton khatarnak hunda hai sapneyan da mar jana (the most dangerous thing for you is when you let your dreams die). Somebody would kill him for that?

He was a former Naxalite, had spent time in jail and had just travelled overseas to rouse the Punjabi diaspora's conscience against violence in his state. Overseas, he also joined a group called Anti-47. That '47' came from the AK-47 rifle, then freely supplied by the Pakistanis, which killed at least 25,000 in Punjab in that decade-plus. Who killed him if not those who ruled with the '47'?

payments to an adult film star around the 2016 election, an election subversion case now at trial in New York, and 10 concern election subversion in Georgia.

Trump has also been hit with multibillion-dollar fines in civil suits concerning his business practices and a defamation claim arising from a rape allegation a judge called "substantially true".

When Trump was president, Romney was the only Republican to vote to convict in both Trump's Senate impeachment trials, for seeking political dirt on opponents in Ukraine and for inciting the deadly January 6 attack on Congress.

Romney told MSNBC: "I think the American people have recognised that President Trump did have an inappropriate affair with someone who was a porn star. I think they realise that. I think they realise he took classified documents he shouldn't have and didn't handle them properly. I think they understand that as well.

"I think they realise he's been lying about the election [and supposed voter fraud] in 2020. They know those things. [But] these things are not changing the public attitude."

Polling has put Trump ahead in battleground states.

In America's pre-Trump past, Romney lost the 2012 election to Barack Obama. In 2016, as Trump stormed to the White House, Romney wrote in the name of his wife, Ann, rather than support Hillary Clinton. Romney then flirted with accepting a post in Trump's cabinet, as secretary of state, but found humiliation instead.

According to the author Gabriel Debenedetti, Romney urged Biden to run against Trump in 2020. Romney has said he did not vote for Trump that year, reportedly writing in Ann again.

Romney told MSNBC he liked Biden, who he found "capable" despite widespread claims that at 81 Biden is too old for his job, claims less prevalent regarding Trump, who is 77.

But when asked who he would vote for, Romney did not say Biden. "I'm not announcing that here and now," he said. "I'm not going to be voting for President Trump. I made that clear. I know, for some people, the character is not the number one issue. It is for me. When someone has been, well, determined by a jury to have committed sexual assault, that's not someone who I want my kids and grandkids to see as president of the United States."

Pakistan: A Nation Held Hostage by its Own Army?

Amidst the complex web of challenges facing Pakistan, the nation grapples with a worn economy, volatile internal security, a faltering regional policy, and importantly, heightened political uncertainty. At the heart of this tumultuousness lies one institution: the Pakistan Army.

Its persistent interference in the country's political affairs and consequent dominance over all other institutions has largely inhibited the establishment of strong and stable civilian democratic institutions in Pakistan. While traditionally tasked with national defence, the Pakistan Army has, over the years, assumed a dual role as both a military and a political actor, exerting influence through its overt and covert involvement in the politics of the state. Despite occasional civilian efforts, it has proved difficult to undo or limit the influence of this deeply entrenched political role of the Pakistan Army.

Several factors contribute to the complexity of addressing the Pakistan Army's entrenched role. These encompass its extensive economic interests, manifested in numerous commercial enterprises, the fragility of civilian institutions, and deliberate actions to maintain internal security instability. Moreover, it has positioned itself as Pakistan's most reliable institution in the eyes of foreign powers like the United States and China, thereby securing influence over the nation's foreign policy. The Pakistan Army's intervention in politics dates back to the country's formative years when it "was tasked with the responsibility of safeguarding the nascent nation and ensuring internal security." However, this constitutional duty has been historically exploited by the Army to acquire a disproportionate share of national resources, a trend that continues to this day. For instance, when Pakistan acquired \$2 billion in financial aid from the United States in 1947, the armed forces received a significant share of \$300 million. Similarly, despite Pakistan's current economic challenges, the military establishment ensured a 13 per cent increase in the annual defence budget from PKR 1.5 trillion in 2022-23 to 1.8 trillion in the 2023-24 federal budget.

Through collusion with other state actors such as civil bureaucracy, judiciary, and various political and religious leaders, the Pakistan Army's political meddling has manifested in various forms. From orchestrating military coups to directly influencing the appointment of political leaders, it has consistently sought to shape Pakistan's political landscape through direct and indirect means in accordance with its interests. This was particularly evident during the recent February 2024 elections when the Pakistan Army not only prevented Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

(PTI), from securing an electoral majority through elaborate pre- and post-poll manipulation but also ensured the sidelining of Nawaz Sharif in favour of his brother Shehbaz Sharif to safeguard its interests. Such nuanced manipulation underscores the Pakistan military's adeptness in navigating the complexities of Pakistani politics, ensuring its continued influence within the democratic framework.

The foremost reason for the unending political interference in Pakistan's civilian affairs largely stems from the Army's vast network of commercial enterprises it has established over the decades, spanning sectors such as agriculture,



manufacturing, education, construction, and real-estate sectors. In the broader political economy of the country, the Army-led Pakistan Armed Forces are directly involved in commercial or profit-making ventures or have personal economic interests of its officer class at stake. Pakistani author Ayesha Siddiqi calls this nexus 'Milbus', which is the "military capital...used for the personal benefit of the military fraternity, especially the officer cadre, but is neither recorded nor part of the defence budget." This is significant for the armed forces, given the Pakistan Army has continued with the colonial practice of rewarding its officer class with land and effectively formed a new feudal class.

At the apex of the military's economic pyramid stands the Fauji Foundation (FF), Army Welfare Trust (AWT), Shaheen Foundation (SF) and Bahria Foundation (BF), all being run in the name of welfare organisations. Not only do all three services of the Pakistan Armed Forces run their welfare organisations with economic subsidiaries, but the military formations and units of the Pakistan Army starting from its Corps till brigades level run their independent commercial ventures.

For instance, Fauji Foundation controls dozens of subsidiaries, such as Fauji Foundation Gas, Fauji Corn Company, Fauji Cement, Fauji Security Company, Fauji Fertilizer, Fauji Sugar Mills, Fauji Foundation Securities (PVT), Fauji Farm Ltd, Fauji Oil, Overseas Employment Services, among others. Likewise, the Army Welfare Trust (AWT), as per 2016 Senate filings of Pakistan's Ministry of Defence, owns over 50 housing projects in the country besides dozens of industrial ventures such as Askari Farms, Askari Rice, Askari Sugar, Askari Fish, Askari Cement, Askari Pharmaceutical, Magnesite Refineries, Commercial Plazas, Askari Guards, Askari Aviation,

among others.

Additionally, the Army also controls organisations such as the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO), which is Pakistan's largest construction company, along with the Special Communication Organisation (SCO), which accord it control and dominance over all other state institutions. Besides, Pakistan's Armed Forces own 11.58 million acres of the 93.67 million acres of state land, with the exclusive powers to change its character to private use. Of this military landholding, it has allocated a huge 6.8 million acres, that is 59 per cent, to the individual members of the armed forces, thereby making them the new feudal class of the country. It is this omnipresence across all economic sectors of Pakistan that essentially accords it "an important role for the military in the state and society even if the generals do not directly control the levers of power," as Pakistani Political Scientist and Military Analyst Hasan-Askari Rizvi argues in his book *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*.

Given these economic entanglements, the Pakistan Army has developed vested interests in the government's economic policies and hence has felt the necessity to infiltrate the democratic institutions of

the country to ensure it retains unchallenged control of and access to state resources. This explains the appointment of retired and serving senior military officers in important civilian institutions such as NADRA, WAPDA, SUPARCO, and CPEC Authority, among others. Not only do these strategic appointments help it tilt the government policies in its favour, but it also ensures that the military itself designs such policies where its interests are at stake. What is more interesting is how the Army has ensured that its economic empire functions out of governmental accountability mechanisms even as it exploits national resources at the peril of the state economy. This is significant in the current context wherein the country's economy remains ventilator-ridden, yet the military economy remains unscathed and thriving. For instance, whereas Pakistan's economy risks a potential external debt default in the absence of new sustained financial support from external creditors, its unaccountable military economy remains thriving with the assets of its enterprises growing to over \$20 billion, with entities such as Fauji Foundation worth PKR 9.8 billion and Army Welfare Trust PKR 50 billion.

Given this state of the economy, the Pakistan Army needs a civilian yet feeble façade of government to not only shield its unaccounted assets but also to scapegoat these political leaders for the country's economic mismanagement.

Intricately related to this is how the Pakistan Army has exploited frequent militant violence and internal insecurity in the country to its advantage. From the tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Balochistan, Pakistan has witnessed recurrent violence from many groups that the military establishment has long patronised such as the various factions of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and several sectarian groups. While the Pakistan Army conveniently blames external forces out of convenience, unsurprisingly, it also remains the ultimate beneficiary of this violence in the country's hinterland.

This insecurity gives the Army carte blanche to retain dominance over the state institutions, as well as to justify its claims over ever-increasing annual budgetary allocations. Increased volatility in Pakistan's security situation allows the military establishment to pressure the weak political dispensations to allocate an increased share of the federal budget to the armed forces. This was seen in the 2023-24 annual budget allocation when the Shehbaz Sharif government was forced to increase the defence share by 13 per cent despite the near economic collapse of the country.

India on alert as China-Bangladesh military cooperation raises strategic concerns

Dhaka has gradually leaned towards Beijing and acquired fighter jets, tanks and submarines, marking a shift in the geopolitical landscape

In the first week of February, national security advisor Ajit Doval made a quiet visit to Bangladesh, the first high-level trip from India after prime minister Sheikh Hasina's party, the Awami League, won a fourth consecutive term in the 12th parliamentary elections. Doval expressed concern over the increasing number of Myanmar soldiers, who owe allegiance to the country's junta, seeking refuge in India. It is estimated that over 700 troopers have crossed into India since November last year after being defeated by the Arakan Army and resistance allies. Of them, some 300 entered the country this January.

Now, India's foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra is in Bangladesh to strengthen bilateral ties. In the past three months (since Doval's visit), things have changed fast between the two countries. Bangladesh was born with India's support but gradually leaned towards expansionist China. In the recent past, Beijing has supplied Dhaka's military fighter jets, tanks and submarines. Of late, the biggest concern in the Indian strategic fraternity is the maiden joint training of the Chinese and Bangladeshi armies. People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops are travelling to Bangladesh, where they are scheduled to carry out drills at the Bangabandhu Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition

Center in Rugganj, Narayanganj, near Dhaka.

Chinese military activity in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh are closely monitored by experts in New Delhi due to their potential impact on the geopolitical landscape. The increasing presence and engagements of the Chinese military in the region raise concerns about Beijing's intentions and its influence in India's immediate neighbourhood. This dynamic underscores the importance of India remaining vigilant and proactive in managing its strategic interests in the region. According to the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, the joint exercise, codenamed 'China-Bangladesh Golden Friendship 2024', takes UN peacekeeping counter-terrorism operations as the scenario, and the two militaries will conduct joint training in mixed groups on subjects including bus anti-hijacking and elimination of terrorist camps.

The Chinese spokesperson added that the exercise was the first joint training ever between the Chinese and Bangladeshi armies, noting that such activity was conducive to enhancing understanding and friendship between the two militaries and deepening practical exchanges and cooperation.



Experts in New Delhi are watching all of this carefully as it signals a shifting geopolitical landscape. Some feel Chinese military activity in India's close neighbourhood should raise concerns.

In recent years, China's footprint in Bangladesh has grown significantly. Dhaka has become China's second biggest defence customer, after Pakistan. Bangladesh has acquired sizeable military hardware from Beijing in recent years, including corvettes, naval guns, anti-ship missiles and surface-to-air missile systems.

Last year, Bangladesh prime minister Hasina inaugurated the China-built \$1.2 billion six-slot submarine base, named BNS Sheikh Hasina, at Pekua in Cox's Bazar. The Pekua Naval Base, about 200 miles southeast of Dhaka, houses two refurbished Chinese submarines and was

built to increase Bangladesh's naval capacity after the demarcation of its maritime boundary with India and Myanmar. This submarine base in the Bay of Bengal is a concern for New Delhi from the standpoint of India's economic, security and foreign policy interests. A military strategist maintained that the presence of a Chinese-built submarine base in India's backyard could disrupt the regional balance of power and complicate the tense geopolitical situation in the Bay of Bengal. In November 2016, Bangladesh took the delivery of two China-made retrofitted Ming-class Type O35B diesel-electric submarines worth \$203 million. The same year, the country joined the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has invested over \$25 billion in various projects in Bangladesh, the highest after Pakistan in South Asia.

Gunmen kill 3 foreign tourists, one Afghan citizen in Afghanistan

Four foreign nationals and three Afghans were also injured in the attack when gunmen opened fire, said interior ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qaniee.

Three foreign tourists and one Afghan citizen were killed by gunmen in Afghanistan's central Bamyan province on Friday, the Taliban interior ministry said.

Four foreign nationals and three Afghans were also injured in the attack when gunmen opened fire, said interior ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qaniee. Four people have been arrested, he said.

The nationality of the tourists and identity of the attackers was not immediately clear.

Mountainous Bamyan is home to a UNESCO world heritage site and the remains of two giant Buddha



statues which were blown up by the Taliban during their previous rule in 2001.

Since taking over Afghanistan in 2021 the Taliban have vowed to restore security and encourage a small but growing number of tourists trickling into the country and sell tickets to access the Buddha statues. Friday's attack was among the most serious targeting foreign citizens since foreign forces left and the Taliban took over in 2021. The Islamic State claimed an attack that injured Chinese citizens at a hotel popular with Chinese businessmen in Kabul in 2022.

Putin arrives in China, to hold strategic talks with President Xi

Vladimir Putin's visit to Beijing highlights the strengthening strategic partnership between Russia and China, focusing on extensive cooperation across various sectors.

(News Agency)- Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Beijing early on Thursday for talks with Xi Jinping that the Kremlin hopes will deepen a strategic partnership between the two most powerful geopolitical rivals of the United States. China and Russia declared a "no limits" partnership in February 2022 when Putin visited Beijing just days before he sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine, triggering the deadliest land war in Europe since World War Two. By picking China for his first foreign trip since being sworn in for a six-year term that will keep him in power until at least 2030, Putin is sending a message to the world about his priorities and the depth of his personal relationship with Xi. In an interview with China's Xinhua news agency, Putin praised Xi for helping to build a "strategic partnership" with Russia based on national interests and deep mutual trust. "It was the unprecedentedly high level of the strategic



partnership between our countries that determined my choice of China as the first state that I would visit after officially taking office as president of the Russian Federation," Putin said.

"We will try to establish closer cooperation in the field of industry and high technology,

space and peaceful nuclear energy, artificial intelligence, renewable energy sources and other innovative sectors," Putin said.

Putin, 71, and Xi, 70, will take part in a gala evening celebrating 75 years since the Soviet Union recognised the People's Republic of China, which was declared by

Mao Zedong in 1949.

Reuters reported exclusively in March that Putin would travel to China in May.

Xinhua confirmed his arrival for what China's state press has described as a state visit from an "old friend".

The United States casts China as its biggest competitor and Russia as its biggest nation-state threat while US President Joe Biden argues that this century will be defined by an existential contest between democracies and autocracies.

Putin and Xi share a broad worldview, which sees the West as decadent and in decline just as China challenges US supremacy in everything from quantum computing and synthetic biology to espionage and hard military power. Putin will also visit Harbin in northeastern China, a city with strong ties to Russia. It was not immediately clear whether or not Putin would drop in on any other capitals in Asia after Beijing.

Donald Trump calls Joe Biden 'worst debater' as they agree to face off twice



(News Agency)-US President Joe Biden and Republican rival Donald Trump on Wednesday agreed to face off in two debates on June 27 and September 10, setting up the highest stakes moments yet in the race for the White House.

"As you said: anywhere, any time, any place," Biden said on social media. Trump called Biden "the worst debater" he has ever faced. "I am Ready and Willing to Debate Crooked Joe at the two proposed times in June and September," he posted on social media. vf55456CNN, a division of Warner Bros Discovery, said the first debate would be held in their Atlanta studio with no audience, and would be moderated by anchors Jake Tapper and Dana Bash. Georgia is one of

November's most closely contested states. The candidates also accepted an invitation from ABC, which will host a second debate on September 10.

A separate vice presidential debate has been proposed for July, after the Republican National Convention.

Key differences between the two sides remained on the terms of engagement. Biden said he would participate in those two debates under strict rules to reduce interruptions, while Trump called for more than two -- and a very large venue "for excitement purposes." Independent US presidential candidate Robert F Kennedy Jr claimed in a new post on X that he would meet the criteria to participate in the CNN debate before the June 20 deadline. It remained unclear if he will qualify.

Slovak PM 'no longer in life-threatening condition' after being shot: Minister



(News Agency)-Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico is no longer in a life-threatening condition after he was shot in an assassination attempt when leaving a government meeting on Wednesday, a government minister said.

The gunman shot Fico, 59, five times, initially leaving the prime minister in critical condition and undergoing surgery hours later on Wednesday evening.

"I was very shocked ... fortunately as far as I know the operation went well - and I guess in the end he will survive ... he's not in a life-threatening situation at this moment," Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Environment Minister Tomas Taraba told the BBC's Newshour. Taraba said one bullet went through Fico's stomach and a second hit a joint. News outlet Aktualny.sk cited an unnamed source

saying Fico was out of surgery and in stable condition. Defence Minister Robert Kalinak told a news briefing hours earlier that Fico had suffered "serious polytrauma" after several shot wounds.

Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok had said earlier that Fico was in a life-threatening condition while he remained in the operating room.

"This assassination (attempt) was politically motivated and the perpetrator's decision was born closely after the presidential election," Sutaj Estok said, referring to an April election won by a Fico ally, Peter Pellegrini.

The shooting in the central Slovak town of Handlova, which Slovak media said was carried out by a 71-year-old man, stunned the small central European nation and drew international condemnation.

US President Joe Biden announces 100% tariff on Chinese EV imports

US President Joe Biden will keep tariffs put in place by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump while ratcheting up others, including a quadrupling of EV duties to over 100%.

US President Joe Biden on Tuesday unveiled a bundle of steep tariff increases on an array of Chinese imports including electric vehicles, computer chips and medical products, risking an election-year standoff with Beijing in a bid to woo voters who give his economic policies low marks. Biden will keep tariffs put in place by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump while ratcheting up others, including a quadrupling of EV duties to over 100%, the White House said in a statement. It cited "unacceptable risks" to US economic security posed by what it considers unfair Chinese practices that are flooding global markets with cheap goods. The new measures impact \$18 billion in Chinese imported goods including steel and aluminum, semiconductors, batteries, critical minerals, solar cells and cranes, the White House said. The announcement confirmed earlier Reuters reporting. The United States imported \$427 billion in goods from China in 2023 and exported \$148 billion to the

world's No. 2 economy, according to the US Census Bureau, a trade gap that has persisted for decades and become an ever more sensitive subject in Washington. "China's using the same playbook it has before to power its own growth at the expense of others by continuing to invest, despite excess Chinese capacity and flooding global markets with exports that are underpriced due to unfair practices," White House National Economic Adviser Lael Brainard told reporters on a conference call. US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said the revised tariffs were justified because China was continuing to steal US intellectual property and in some cases had become "more aggressive" in cyber intrusions targeting American technology. She said prior "Section 301" tariffs had minimal impact on US economy-wide prices and employment, but had been effective in reducing US imports of Chinese goods, while increasing imports from other countries.

But Tai recommended tariff exclusions for dozens of industrial machinery import categories from China, including 19 for solar product manufacturing equipment. Differing tariff stances Even as Biden's steps fell in line with Trump's premise that tougher trade measures are warranted, the Democrat took aim at his opponent in November's election. The White House said Trump's 2020 trade deal with China did not increase American exports or boost American manufacturing jobs, and it said the 10% across-the-board tariffs on goods from all points of origin that Trump has proposed would frustrate US allies and raise prices. Trump has floated tariffs of 60% or higher on all Chinese goods. Administration officials said their measures are "carefully targeted," combined with domestic investment, plotted with close allies and unlikely to worsen a bout of inflation that has already angered US voters and imperiled Biden's re-election bid. They also



downplayed the risk of retaliation from Beijing. Biden has struggled to convince voters of the efficacy of his economic policies despite a backdrop of low unemployment and above-trend economic growth. A Reuters/Ipsos poll last month showed Trump had a 7 percentage-point edge over Biden on the economy. Analysts have warned that a trade tiff could raise costs for EVs overall, hurting Biden's climate goals and his aim to create manufacturing jobs. Biden has said he wants to win this era of competition with China but not to launch a trade war that could hurt the mutually dependent economies. He has worked in recent months to ease tensions in one-on-one talks with

Chinese President Xi Jinping. Both 2024 US presidential candidates have sharply departed from the free-trade consensus that once reigned in Washington, a period capped by China's joining the World Trade Organization in 2001. China has said the tariffs are counterproductive and risk inflaming tensions. Trump's broader imposition of tariffs during his 2017-2021 presidency kicked off a tariff war with China. As part of the long-awaited tariff update, Biden will increase tariffs this year under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 from 25% to 100% on EVs, bringing total duties to 102.5%, from 7.5% to 25% on lithium-ion EV batteries and other battery parts and from 25% to 50% on photovoltaic cells used to make solar panels.

Elon Musk fired 500 people at Tesla after one bad meeting: The inside story



Just a few weeks ago, Tesla Chief Elon Musk fired all employees in Tesla's electric-vehicle charging division. Two senior-level employees and the entire 500-member Tesla Supercharger team were laid off. The circumstances that led to the mass firings have now been revealed, with detailed accounts from former employees, who were quoted in a Reuters report. Just a day before the mass layoffs, Elon Musk had met with Rebecca Tinucci, the former chief of the Tesla Supercharging

division. The former employees told the news agency that they were optimistic about Tinucci's meeting with Elon Musk, given that the division is important for Tesla's operations. They were also optimistic about the meeting since Tinucci had already cut between 15-20% of staffers – part of a wider strategy – and believed that Elon Musk would affirm plans to provide a boost to charging-network expansion. To their dismay, the meeting could not have gone worse. The

employees quoted in the news agency's report said Musk was not at all pleased with Tinucci's presentation and wanted more people to be laid off. However, Tinucci argued that more job cuts would undermine charging-business fundamentals and denied Musk's proposal. Musk responded by firing Tinucci and her entire 500-member team. The Tesla chief's decision came as a shock to the former employees and the departures from the supercharging division, viewed as a signature Tesla achievement and a key driver of its electric vehicle (EV) sales, have already caused massive disruption. It is worth mentioning that Tesla Superchargers account for more than 60% of US high-speed charging ports. However, a Bloomberg report suggests that Tesla has rehired some Supercharger division workers weeks after they were laid off.

Top carmaker plans to manufacture EVs in India. It's not Tesla or BYD

Tesla might have postponed its entry into India despite the new EV policy, but Stellantis is considering manufacturing electric vehicles (EVs) in India, reported The Economic Times (ET). The world's third-largest carmaker plans to do this by working with



a Chinese electric vehicle company called Leapmotor at its facility in Thiruvallur, Tamil Nadu. Stellantis owns several brands, such as Chrysler, Citroën, Fiat, and Jeep. India's electric vehicle policy was something that was negotiated by Tesla but it "certainly helps," Carlos Tavares, the chief executive of Stellantis told ET. "This (the EV policy) is an

opportunity that we did not study yet, but I understand the intention and I understand why you can be able to win (investments) for the country and from the carmaker that will come with EVs," Tavares told ET on a video call. India announced a new policy on March 15 to encourage investment in local manufacturing of high-end electric cars. The government said it will allow the import of completely built-up electric cars that have a minimum cost, insurance, and freight value of \$35,000 (Rs 29.2 lakh) at 15% import duty for a period of five years if companies make a minimum investment of \$500 million to start local manufacturing. Leapmotor for now is looking at selling affordable electric cars in India, which will mostly be priced under the cap specified in the policy.

Should You Brush Before Or After Breakfast? Dentist Resolves The Morning Dilemma

Starting the day with a simple routine is everyone's preference. But the age-old question of whether to brush your teeth before or after breakfast can quickly become a daily conundrum. Deciding between enjoying a hearty breakfast or tending to your oral hygiene can feel like a challenging choice, reminding us of the classic 'chicken and egg' dilemma. For many, diving into a plate of scrambled eggs or a Full English breakfast seems like the logical start to the day. On the other hand, some individuals cannot imagine beginning their day without first brushing their teeth. The debate over the ideal time to brush your teeth in the morning is a topic that everyone seems to have an opinion on. Fortunately, a dentist has stepped in to provide her expert opinion on this dental quandary.

Anna Peterson, a dental therapist from Essex known for sharing dental advice on social media, has weighed in on the debate, offering clarity on whether breakfast or brushing should come first. Having previously advised against using mouthwash immediately after brushing and explaining the concept of 'black triangles' between teeth, Anna's expertise adds weight to her stance on



the breakfast brushing debate. While Anna has already shared the advice back in 2022, her video has resurfaced and has been going viral on social media platforms. According to Anna, it is advisable to brush your teeth before eating breakfast. In her caption, she has also detailed why one should "brush straight before bed and at one other time in the

day." "This is good advice but there is a reason I advise my patients to brush first thing in the morning and here's why: Minimise wear to your enamel, disturb all the bacteria that have been getting busy overnight setting up camp, eating without brushing and applying a good fluoride toothpaste to your teeth means the teeth are not as strong as they could be and

we are feeding the bacteria," she explains. She also adds that if you forget to brush before breakfast, you should ideally wait for 30 minutes before brushing to ensure the mouth is less acidic and to avoid wearing the enamel. In a video, she outlined her reasoning: "There's two reasons for this. When you eat breakfast, your mouth becomes acidic. So what you're doing when you brush your teeth after breakfast is brushing the acid into the tooth and this wears away the enamel. And, brushing before breakfast protects your teeth from anything you're going to eat." It seems that in addition to combating morning breath, brushing your teeth before breakfast can also protect your teeth from potential harm. Most viewers in the comments have also agreed with her. One user said, "I knew I was doing it right since childhood," while another one wrote, "Where were you during my childhood?"

However, despite Anna's reasonable opinion, some have expressed discontent, as following her advice would mean starting the day with a 'minty breakfast.' It appears that in the ongoing debate, finding a satisfying solution is a challenge in itself.

Not just muscle growth, here's how exercise also boosts brain function

For years, researchers have known that exercise prompts muscles to release molecules that enhance brain function, but the process has always remained unclear. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign researchers have recently found that nerves stimulating muscles increase the release of brain-boosting factors.

"The molecules released from the muscle go into the bloodstream and then to the brain, producing so-called crosstalk between the muscle and the brain. We wondered, what is the effect of the neurons on this activity of the muscle, and further down to the communication between muscle and brain?" said study leader Hyunjoon Kong, whose research was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. "As we age, or due to disease or injury, we lose these neurons in muscles. Understanding their role is crucial for older adults and patients with neuromuscular issues," he added. Research shows that exercising muscles secrete hormones and tiny extracellular vesicles carrying RNA fragments that improve brain cell connectivity and



communication. However, the role of nerves stimulating muscles is less understood, explained graduate student Kai-Yu Huang, the study's first author.

To investigate, researchers used a novel tissue model that compared muscle tissues with and without neurons. They found that muscles with neurons produced more molecules that help the brain and better regulated muscle growth.

When they stimulated the nerves with glutamate, a neurotransmitter, the muscles with neurons showed higher levels of a gene that controls secretion and released more of the irisin hormone and extracellular vesicles. "As we age, losing nerve supply to muscles leads to their breakdown, affecting overall organ function. Understanding how to maintain muscle's secretion is vital," said Huang. Our organs communicate: the brain stimulates muscles via nerves, and muscles release molecules that benefit the brain. "Exercise strengthens the neuron-muscle interface, enhancing brain function. This highlights the importance of fostering this connection through exercise, beyond just building muscle strength," Kong added.

Manoj Bajpayee Opens Up on Criticism of Ranbir Kapoor's 'Animal', Says 'Don't Create Trouble for...'

Actor Manoj Bajpayee has shared his thoughts on the controversy surrounding Ranbir Kapoor starrer Animal movie which features numerous scenes that have received a volley of criticism from a section of the internet. Some people have made strong arguments against nearly every element of the movie and labelled it as "problematic" especially with respect to its treatment of women. Now, Manoj Bajpayee has reacted to the criticism of the film in an interaction with Pinkvilla. He said, "I am very clear if many people disagree or don't like a film, what's wrong with that? The film is released, does its business, and moves on. The money goes into the producer's pocket; let them take it; they invested in the movie." The actor continued, "If you don't want to watch it, then don't. If you disagree with something, it's better not to watch it, but don't create trouble for the movie. You will be only encouraging a bad notion by



doing so, what if others hinder your work in the same way? There should be open discourse without calls for bans or protests." Earlier talking about the hype around 'Animal' movie and how it had an impact on his own film 'Joram', Manoj Bajpayee told News18 Showsha, "We knew that Animal and Sam Bahadur are two very big films. A lot of money was spent on both the films. There was and still a hype around Animal. But we couldn't afford to spend that much money on our film because Joram was a different kind of a film and we could only allot a certain amount of money to promote and publicise it." "We didn't want to over-burden our film. We were very practical and realistic about it. We knew that we couldn't be idealistic about the situation and our film. And that's why the pressure on us was less in terms of earning profits as quickly as possible," the actor added.

Kangana Ranaut's 'Emergency' release postponed amid ongoing political campaigns



The release date of Kangana Ranaut's upcoming film, 'Emergency', has been postponed amid her ongoing political campaigns. The film, based on the life of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was previously scheduled for release on June 14. Kangana plays the titular character in the film. The makers of the same announced the film's delay on May 15. The new release date is yet to be mentioned. Kangana Ranaut's upcoming film, 'Emergency' was to release in theatres on June 14. The same has been pushed amid her ongoing political campaign for BJP. The makers announced the film's delay with a note

that can be read, "Our hearts are filled with love pouring in for our queen Kangana Ranaut." The note further read, "As she prioritises her duty to the nation and her commitment to serve the country, the release date of our much awaited film 'Emergency' has been postponed. We promise to update you soon with a new release date. Thank you for your continued support. #EmergencyComingSoon (sic)." As per PTI, Kangana Ranaut once said in a statement, "'Emergency' is my most ambitious project and second directorial post-'Manikarnika', we have the best of

Indian and international talent come together for this big budget, grand period drama." The film was previously set to release on November 24, 2023. Meanwhile, Kangana Ranaut is a BJP candidate from Mandi Lok Sabha seat in Himachal Pradesh. In an exclusive conversation with India Today/ Aaj Tak, the actor said she did not see herself as a politician and praised PM Narendra Modi, saying he was her source of inspiration. She also mentioned that she had a 'natural alignment' with the BJP and underlined the need to serve the people with dedication.

Shivangi Verma declared that she will 'never put on weight' for a project



Actress Shivangi Verma, who gained 10 kg for a song named 'Nana Buluku' of the movie 'Pichaikkaran 2', has opened up about her weight loss journey, stating that she will never gain weight for any project again. The actress, known for her work in 'Choti Sarrdaarni', 'Reporters', and 'TV, Biwi aur Main', shared that she was able to shed 10 kg through dedication and hard work. Shivangi said: "I managed it somehow. It literally took me, like, one year, from 69 to 59. Thanks to my dietitian, I think I was pretty focused. My workout was on point, which is why I was able to achieve this." However, she is very clear now that she will not agree to gain weight for a role.

Amid 'Shikhu' tease, Janhvi Kapoor opens up on what she looks for in a partner

Actress Janhvi Kapoor, who has a busy year before her, spoke about the qualities that her partner should have. The actress attended the song launch of 'Dekhha Tenu' from her upcoming film 'Mr & Mrs Mahi' on Wednesday, at a multiplex in Mumbai's Juhu.

During the event she was asked about the qualities of a "perfect partner." Responding to the same, the actress said: "The person should consider my dreams as his own, and be my solid support system through thick and thin." As the actress listed the qualities of her partner, the media took her rumoured boyfriend Shikhar Pahariya's name as

they collectively said: "Shikhu Shikhu." Janhvi had earlier had a Freudian slip as she dropped Shikhar's name saying "Shikhu" during the last season of the chat show 'Koffee With Karan'.

Looking at the reaction from the media, Janhvi couldn't help but blush as she helplessly looked at her co-star Rajkumar Rao and her film's director Sharan Sharma, and smiled at the media.

Janhvi will be seen essaying the role of a cricketer opposite Rajkumar Rao in the film which is produced by her mentor Karan Johar. 'Mr. & Mrs. Mahi' is set to release on May 31.

Nitanshi Goel's 'Laapataa Ladies' journey began with injured hand on Day 1, ended with hurt foot



'Laapataa Ladies' star Nitanshi Goel, who played the role of Phool, spoke about the challenges she faced while working on the film. She said that she injured herself on the first day and had also twisted her ankle while filming the climax.

Nitanshi, who was honoured with the IMDb 'Breakout Star' STARmeter Award, was seen talking about working on the film. She shared the video on Instagram, which was originally posted on IMDb's handle on the photo-sharing website.

She recalled: "So it was my Day 1 and this scene where I was running and clashing with chotu. So I am running and looking behind and Chotu is in front of me and Abdul is behind me and to make that look very natural I was actually looking back and I was wearing glass bangles and I hit him so hard that on the first day, my glass bangles broke on my hands."

"I got injured the first day."

She added: "In fact, whenever we had a take, we would hit each other so hard that I would fall this way and he would fall the other way... but it was fun."

Nitanshi then spoke about the climax scene.

"Let me tell you that your Phool ran so much for that scene because the platform was so long and there was so much crowd..."

"And I would bump into people. So, I am about to meet Deepak and there's this person who mistakenly bumps into me so hard that I twisted my ankle and after that I gave two more takes."

She then went back to the vanity van and wondered why her ankle was hurting so much.

"Then I realised I had hurt my right foot. I remember the doctor telling 'she needs to rest in bed for a week' and we were like sir we have to be in Shirdi, Bhopal and then Bombay in one week. So give us a better solution," Nitanshi said.

The actress added: "Only the people on the set knew and they had pampered me so much and even more after my injury... nobody knew this happened."

Directed by Kiran Rao, 'Laapataa Ladies' tells the story of the misadventures of two young brides who get lost from the same train.



Deepika Padukone Named Global Disruptor in Entertainment by Deadline

Deepika Padukone has been acknowledged as a disruptor for 2024 by Deadline, an international publication, placing her among a select group of influential figures reshaping the entertainment industry. As the only Indian star on the list, this recognition solidifies her status as a trailblazer on the world stage, alongside Eva Longoria and Uma Thurman.

The recognition underscores Deepika's significant impact on the global entertainment landscape, evidenced by her consecutive years of jumpstarting India's box office with successful films. Her journey from Bollywood to global stardom has been remarkable, marked by appearances at prestigious events like the Oscars and BAFTAs, serving on the Cannes jury, and gracing the cover of TIME magazine. Notably, she was also the first Indian to unveil a FIFA World Cup trophy, showcasing her unparalleled influence.

This acknowledgment is a testament to Deepika's ability to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, fueled by her passion for cinema and her adeptness as both an actor and producer. Beyond her contributions to entertainment, Deepika is a vocal advocate for mental health awareness through her foundation, Live Love Laugh, earning her immense respect and admiration globally.



Sanjay Dutt squares off with Ram Pothineni in 'Double iSmart' teaser

The teaser of the upcoming Telugu film 'Double iSmart' was unveiled on Wednesday, showing the lead character essayed by Ram Pothineni engaging in brawl, gun fights, banter, and of course, dance. The teaser opens with a voiceover that uses filthy words to describe the character of the protagonist who is now in a lab in Hyderabad with scientists around him. Ram's character of iSmart Shankar flirts with Kiraak girls, and lends a massy tone to the film. Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt stars as Big Bull in the film, serving as the antagonistic force to Ram's titular character.

Director Puri Jagannadh reunited with Ram, who celebrated his birthday on Wednesday, for the film after the 2019 hit film 'iSmart Shankar'.

The one-liners in typical Hyderabad dialect, the background score, the humour and the action all add up to the narrative of the film.

Produced by Puri Jagannadh and Charmme Kaur, the film will be released in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Hindi.



Fans laud Aishwarya's 'professionalism' as she heads to Cannes with arm in a sling

Bollywood star Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, a regular at the Cannes red carpet, was seen entering the airport with her daughter Aaradhya Bachchan, wearing an arm sling, as they headed to attend the 77th edition of the prestigious event at the French Riviera. Fans quickly noticed the injury and lauded her professionalism.

This year, the theme of the event, which began on May 14 and will conclude on May 25, is "Many Ways To Be An Icon".

Aishwarya will be seen strutting the red carpet on May 16 and 17 for the beauty brand L'Oréal Paris to celebrate its 27th year, along with actress Aditi Rao Hydari.

Fans on social media have expressed their concern over the injury sustained by Aishwarya, who was the first Indian female actor to serve as a Cannes jury member.

One fan praised her commitment to work despite the injury,

writing, "And she's on her way to Cannes with a broken hand. No one is as professional as her! Can't wait for more."

Another fan wished her a speedy recovery, saying, "Speedy recovery, queen. #AishwaryaRaiBachchan #AishwaryaRai."

A fan showed concern and questioned if she was "fine and well".

Other comments included, "OMG she will walk Cannes with injured hands," and, "Can't wait to see her at Cannes. Love her so much."

At the airport, Aishwarya chose a casual look, wearing a blue overcoat paired with a black ensemble, while Aaradhya sported black joggers and a white sweatshirt.

Despite being asked about her injury by the shutterbugs, the 'Fanny Khan' star remained quiet but responded with a "thank you" when the paparazzi wished her to "take care" as she was stepping into the airport.



Sonali Bendre exudes cool chic vibe with all-green look, edgy heels, top-notch bun



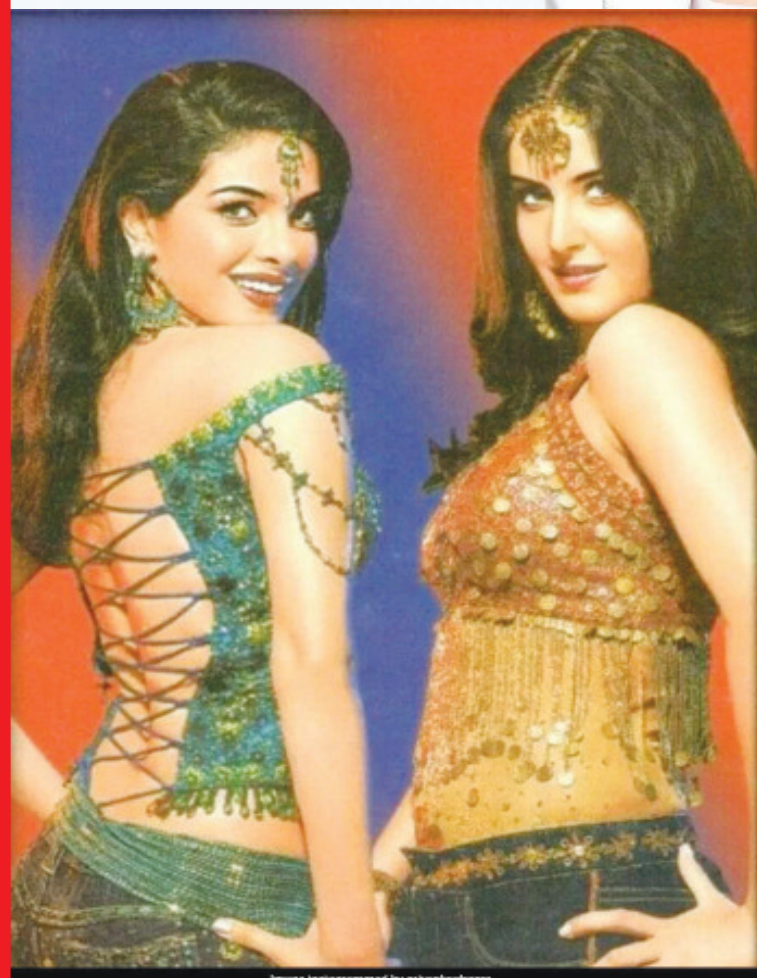
Actress Sonali Bendre on Wednesday went all green for her outfit of the day, sending major summer fashion cool chic vibes. The actress took to Instagram where she enjoys 4.5 million followers and dropped a string of pictures from her latest photoshoot.

The snaps show her wearing a below-knee-length green dress. She went all matte with her makeup — brown lips, Kohl-rimmed eyes, and a contoured

face. Her hair is tied in a top-notch bun. She completed her look with gold earrings and black edgy heels.

"Wednesday Wisdom: Water your own grass, it's already greener than you think," she captioned the post.

On the work front, Sonali recently appeared in the newsroom drama 'The Broken News Season 2' also starring Jaideep Ahlawat and Shriya Pilgaonkar in key roles.



Priyanka shares throwback picture with Katrina when they were 'babies'

Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas took a walk down memory lane as she shared a throwback picture with actress Katrina Kaif and said she cannot recall when the photograph was taken.

Priyanka took to Instagram stories, where she shared the photograph. In the image, the two are wearing corsets with jeans. To complete the look, they wore a maang teeka and jhumkas. It is a picture from their younger days. For the caption, Priyanka wrote: "Woah... dunno who took it and when this picture was

taken... but babies Katrina Kaif."

Priyanka and Katrina were supposed to star together in Farhan Khan's film 'Jee Le Zara', which, according to reports, has been shelved. The 'Quantico' star has just wrapped up shooting for her next film 'Head Of State', an action comedy, which also stars Idris Elba and John Cena. The film is directed by Ilya Naishuller. Katrina was last seen in 'Merry Christmas', a neo-noir mystery thriller film directed by Sriram Raghavan and starring Vijay Sethupathi.

Padma Lakshmi opens up on raising teenage daughter: 'I'm strict about some things'

India-born supermodel, TV host, producer, cookbook author and actor Padma Lakshmi spoke about being a mother to teenage daughter Krishna, and confessed that she is strict about certain things.

It's on social media where Padma has been easing her 14-year-old daughter Krishna into the public spotlight.

"I think any parent will be able to identify with what we're doing," Padma told people.com at the Gold Gala.

"It wasn't some conscious thing. We were just sitting on the couch talking like, 'Oh that's funny. This is funny. And so I



just said, 'Let's tape it,' and we just chopped it up. It's just an experiment. It's fun to watch your children grow and become who they're going to be," she said.

She said that she is sometimes surprised by Krishna's candid answers.

"She has so many opinions... I don't think she's unlike most teenagers; she may be a little more precocious, perhaps."

Padma said that while Krishna makes appearances on her social media account, her daughter doesn't have one of her own. "She's not on social media, at least that I know of, otherwise she'll be

in trouble," she said.

"I'm strict about some things and I'm not that strict about other things that I probably should be stricter about like bedtime (as) she's 14," Lakshmi admitted.

"But I was very strict about making sure she ate a very good diet the first four, five years of her life, and I will not abide by her being disrespectful to adults."

"She's not (disrespectful), but that's where our Asian culture shows itself — respecting our traditions like taking your shoes off before you come in the house, and calling elders uncle and auntie."

From the India Today archives (1998) | Mujra: A defiled art

By Rohit Parihar

Using a water pipe as a banister, the gentleman walks up steps that have been worn through time by the tread of anxious feet. Some things are as they were. The room is well lit, the mattress and masnad (bolster) positioned neatly on the floor, musicians straddled across a harmonium and tabla, and two tawaifs awaiting him. But this is all, the last perfume of the past that lingers. As Tanuja, the elder tawaif, begins to whirl around in her salwar-kurta, he is aghast. "Where is the Rajasthani mujra dress?" he asks.

Surprised, for some girls dance in western skirts, she replies, "Yahan to sab chalta hai. We have to arrange a mujra dress tomorrow if you want it." The tragedy goes on. A third girl, Sabra, arrives and with a coy wink starts dancing. Not to the sensual strains of a thumri but to the metallic sound of Dil to pagal hai, dil diwana hai. Here in Jaipur's Chandpole Bazar, tradition is being mauled, convention brutalised. Once singers, dancers, lyricists romanced an ancient art on these lanes, spinning fantasies in kothas every day between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. It is all gone, the tradition of the mujra has taken flight, carried away on a hot desert wind. Painted faces loll in corridors, crooking their fingers seductively beckoning at passers-by. Few go, for the present no



longer has the promise of the past. "Gentlemen, the world has changed," says Banno Begum, 65, a well-known maand singer now faded by time. In her home, where the harmonium has a "Made in" label and the telephone instrument appears to have been borrowed from Alexalgia reigns. But only that. "This is no longer an exclusive showroom where specialities are offered and courtesies bestowed on elite customers," she says. She should know. In those days when maharajas were to be taken seriously, she recalls strictly adhering to a dress code when attending a majlis organised by Raja Man Singh.

Diwali meant a black dress, Dussehra a pink, and wearing artificial jewellery an unpardonable slur. The mujra was the dance

of suggestion, a sophisticated cabaret with clothes on. To display less was important, it demanded more from the imagination. Which is why in Pakeezah, Raj Kumar fell in love with Meena Kumari's feet.

Television, that omnipotent, insidious beast, has assisted in changing all this. Baywatch, 60 minutes of remote-controlled prime flesh, is the more appetising culture; to lounge for four-five hours (at a cost) is less appealing, and in this collision of cultures the tawaif has had to compromise, mujra has had to bastardise itself, to survive. The serious dancer of kathak or ghoomar-based mujra can still be

found, but as for an endangered species it requires a careful search. The other dancers who can be seen peering through window bars have become less discriminating, dancing and gyrating in imitation of a Kajol film clip.

In Corner Wali Bai's kotha, the flaking paint makes the walls look wounded, only smudged lines stand as memory of the enormous mirrors that once hung there. As she summons her best student, Shabana, she says, "Even she is very fond of dancing to filmi numbers." Spirits of tawaifs passed on must cringe at the sound of Bindiya chamkegi echoing from the lanes. Karisma Kapoor has replaced Allah Jila Bai.

Too much has changed. Like a beautiful painting surrounded by an equally exquisite frame, the elaborate etiquette of the mujra was as becoming as the performance itself. The rituals of courtesy like the perfume sprays, the trays of betel nut, the understanding that money was a recognition of grace, never to be demanded, have died.

Now, customers are expected to pay at regular intervals, even to talk requires monetary compensation. And to watch a girl bend on her knees and use her teeth to pull away a currency note from between a man's lips is to mourn the passing of custom.

Teaching and learning with ICT tools: Issues and challenges

In order to compete in a global competitive environment, a highly skilled and educated workforce with aptitude and skill sets in application of ICT is inevitable for every nation. A detailed analysis by, Pankaj of Elets News Network (ENN).

In the age of innovation and productivity, most Nations are focusing on ways to improve knowledge generation and sharing; and creation and flow of new technologies. In this scenario, it has been duly recognized that implementation and adoption of ICT in a nation at all levels, would certainly contribute and enhance its productivity, efficiency and growth. ICT is inevitable for all sectors and all segments across regions. The COVID crisis has accelerated the usage of technology in education. ICTs offer the potential to share information across traditional barriers, to give a voice to traditionally unheard peoples, to provide valuable information that enhances economic, health and educational activities. The role of ICT cannot be undermined keeping in view its pertinent uses. ICT is useful in education; for digital literacy and developing all kinds of resources; in infrastructure development; in logistics management; in healthcare; for livelihood generation and empowerment of masses; for e-governance; in administration and finance; specialized business and industrial uses; agricultural uses; in research and development and for economic growth and poverty alleviation. ICT has a direct role to play in the education sector. It can bring many benefits to schools, educational institutions as well as to the community. ICT is the convergence of computer, communication and content technologies. It has attracted the attention of academia, business, government and communities to use it for innovative

profitable propositions. In order to compete in a global competitive environment, a highly skilled and educated workforce with aptitude and skill sets in application of ICT is inevitable for every nation. ICTs are a potentially powerful tool for extending educational opportunities, both formal and non formal, to previously underserved scattered and rural populations, groups traditionally excluded from education due to cultural or social reasons such as ethnic minorities, girls and women, persons with disabilities, children with special needs and the elderly, as well as all others who for reasons of cost or because of time constraints are unable to enroll on campus. Use of ICT will catalyse the cause and achieve the goals of inclusive education in schools. There is no conclusive research to prove that student achievement is superior when using ICTs in the education space, either in the developed or in developing countries. However, there is a general consensus among practitioners and academicians that integration of ICTs in education has an overall positive impact on the learning environment.

ICT is important in schools and educational institutions as it assists in carrying out their activities and functions such as record keeping, research work, instructional uses, presentations, financial analysis, examination results management, communication, supervision, MIS, teaching learning activities, and general school management functions. ICT benefits schools in several ways: (i) enhancing learning in classroom; (ii) improving school management and related tasks; (iii) improving accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in school activities; (iv) introducing usage of Power Point presentations and internet. Literature reveals that when well-utilized, ICT in schools has the potential to improve the teaching learning process in many ways. ICT is learner

centric and hence brings about active involvement of students in the learning process. Students get motivated when learning activities are challenging, authentic, multi-sensorial and multi-disciplinary. Schools tend to witness a higher attendance, motivation levels, academic accomplishments and effective communication as an outcome of ICT programs and projects. Teachers too gain as a result of ICT initiatives. They find ICT to be useful for teaching as well as for personal and professional work. Application of ICT in teaching makes teaching more innovative, interesting, interactive, easy and effective. It complements the traditional teaching learning process. While imparting knowledge with the aid of ICT, educators find that students are more receptive and responsive. Also, ICT can help to impart more information and knowledge to students in a shorter time, enabling maximum utilization of resources and time.

Although ICT has the potential to improve education system of a country to a great extent, yet it is not the case in the developing countries. There are multiple issues and challenges confronting the implementation of ICT education in schools and educational institutions in these countries and the problems are much more magnified in case of schools located in remote villages and rural areas. For rural schools in specific, the introduction of ICT faces hindrances in the form of internal and external barriers. Internal barriers to ICT implementation in schools in rural locations include: Lack of trained teachers- A major obstacle in the use of ICT in rural education is the lack of knowledge and skills.

How Iran's covert influence is threatening American democracy

BY KASRA AARABI AND JASON M. BRODSKY,

Imagine if Russia attempted to infiltrate the U.S. government and prestigious American universities. Imagine that, by developing relationships in such high places, Russian agents facilitated the hostage-taking of U.S. students by the Russian FSB security service.

Were that to happen, there would rightly be an outcry, of course. Unfortunately, this is exactly what is happening and has happened with Iran. Yet somehow, no one is talking about it, despite the obvious threat to U.S. national security.

In recent years, where Washington has sought to engage, Tehran has sought to exploit. While all the focus has been on the Islamic Republic's escalation in the Middle East, the threat emanating from Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's regime is much closer to home.

Recent media investigations by Iran International and Semafor confirm a significant information operation by Iran's regime on U.S. and Western soil spanning years. The reporting reveals that in 2014, Iran's Foreign Ministry and veterans of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) — the Iranian regime's ideological paramilitary force — at least participated in a coordinated network made up of senior Western-based specialists and academics to influence policy in favor of the hostile clerical regime. This network came to be known as the so-called "Iran Experts Initiative."

In the years since, these Western-based specialists and others have worked in think tanks, universities and even U.S. government agencies such as the Pentagon, developing close associations with senior U.S. and European officials on Iran. Some of these experts, flattered by the attention, do so unwittingly. Others may be fully aware of what they are doing. There are those even directly connected to the regime, such as Princeton University's Hossein Mousavian, who was Tehran's ambassador to Germany during a string of assassinations against Iranian dissidents in that country.



Connect all the dots, from Princeton to the Pentagon, and behind this influence operation is one Iranian so-called think-tank whose activities and affiliates have been overlooked in the West. The Tehran-based Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) is no ordinary think tank. As an official branch of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, it represents a lethal and hostile regime. It and its members are in close coordination with the regime's repressive security-intelligence apparatus.

IPIS has longstanding ties to the IRGC. Mostafa Zahrani, an IRGC veteran, was its president at the time of the Iran Experts Initiative's founding and had direct contact with Iran Experts Initiative members. In fact, Princeton University's student exchange program with Iran, which resulted in a U.S. student being taken hostage by the Iranian regime, was reportedly an idea initially proposed by Zahrani to a Western-based member of the Iran Experts Initiative who now works for the Pentagon.

Remarkably, in 2015, IPIS even brought a Munich Security Conference core group into contact with the late Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani — a U.S.-designated terrorist with the blood of thousands of American troops on his hands. IPIS's think-tank status and official affiliation with the Iranian Foreign Ministry — rather than any security-intelligence entity — has enabled it to conduct activities beyond Iran's borders and to host foreign dignitaries without raising suspicion, even though many of its officials are card-carrying members of Iran's Intelligence Ministry and the IRGC. This is precisely why it is the perfect incubator for Iran's infiltration activities, such as the Iran Experts Initiative.

Beyond that, IPIS and its affiliates frequently travel to and from the U.S. and Europe, receiving senior policymakers, experts, and academics from both. This includes hosting conferences in Tehran and speaking at prestigious Western policy

institutions.

Iran International has additionally discovered a formal but undisclosed agreement between IPIS and the International Crisis Group, whose former CEO Robert Malley later became U.S. special envoy for Iran and whose security clearance has been suspended amid a federal criminal probe.

Upon first glance, the existence of such a forum for dialogue with Islamic Republic officials may seem appropriate on its face. But it is actually a problem, because the Iranian regime does not behave like a normal nation-state. As with all other academic and research centers in Iran, all foreign engagement takes place with the close coordination and involvement of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence, an entity subject to sanctions for human rights abuses and terrorism in the U.S., UK, and European Union.

For too long, the Islamic Republic's infiltration campaigns have operated under the radar in the U.S. IPIS should be sanctioned as a matter of urgency.

Threat of sanctions: How Chabahar port deal with Iran tests India's ties with US

By Pradip R. Sagar

The India-US relationship can be complex at times, with both strong cooperation and occasional disagreements. The brewing tensions over the India-Iran Chabahar port deal highlight the intricacies of international relations and the competing interests of nations.

While the US values India, bilateral ties have sometimes hit a rough patch as well. After Washington accused an Indian national of conspiring to murder Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York, it has now threatened India with potential sanctions after New Delhi signed a 10-year deal with Tehran for the Chabahar port. As per the agreement signed on May 13, India will offer a credit window worth \$250 million for the development of infrastructure around the strategic facility in the Gulf of Oman. Vedant Patel, principal deputy spokesperson of the US Department of State,



reacted to the development, saying: "We're aware of these reports that Iran and India have signed a deal concerning the Chabahar port. I will let the government of India speak to its own foreign policy goals vis-a-vis the Chabahar port as well as its own bilateral relationship with Iran. I will just say, as it relates to the United States, US sanctions on Iran remain in place and we will continue to enforce them."

"Anyone considering business deals with Iran, they need to be

aware of the potential risk that they are opening themselves up to and the potential risk of sanctions," Patel added. In response to a query if there were any exemptions to this, he responded: "No." However, in 2018, the US Department of State had given 'exemption' to certain sanctions concerning the development of Chabahar port and its associated railway, considering its significance to Afghanistan.

Chabahar is the first long-term port deal for India and is with Iran,

a country heavily sanctioned by the West. Going ahead with the deal in the middle of military conflict in West Asia highlights New Delhi's diplomatic skills.

Even in the Pannun case, India has been able to maintain an upward trajectory in its relations with the US. External affairs minister S. Jaishankar recently said in an interview that the fundamentals of India-US ties are very robust and that the allegations over the Pannun case have not impacted relations.

However, the latest salvo by Washington on India's maiden overseas port deal could test New Delhi's ability to tactfully deal with slippery situations. Tehran is strategically important to New Delhi as it helps India circumvent Pakistan. The Chabahar port's location in the Arabian Sea means India will be able to skirt any challenges posed by developments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

India's Employment Challenge Needs Solutions, Not Hasty Conclusions

BY Bibek Debroy, Aditya Sinha

Employment statistics frequently become a central theme in electoral campaigns as they directly reflect the economic health of a nation and influence voter sentiment. Studies have shown that employment rates and job creation are pivotal issues that can sway electoral outcomes. For instance, one National Bureau of Economic Research working paper highlighted that changes in employment and wages significantly impact voter turnout and preferences in gubernatorial elections, suggesting that economic performance is a critical factor in

political campaigns. Moreover, political discourse often leverages employment statistics to frame narratives or critique opposing parties, as seen in India's recent elections, where opposition leaders used reports such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) India Employment Report 2024 to raise the issue of unemployment. The report revealed that since 2019, the majority of new work has been through self-employment, predominantly among unpaid family workers, who are mainly women. The report highlights an increase in employment within the agricultural sector and notes a concerning stagnation in the manufacturing sector's employment share. The report further revealed that unemployment rose from 5.7% in 2000 to 17.5% in 2019, decreasing to 12.4% in 2022.

Methodological Issues With The Report

It goes without saying that one of the primary responsibilities of any government is to establish a favourable environment that encourages the creation of job opportunities. However, there are some methodological issues with the report. This has been already highlighted by the Chief Economic Advisor, V Anantha Nageswaram, and TCA Anant.

The report utilises data from various sources, such as the National Sample Survey (NSS) from 1999-00 and 2011-12 and the Periodic Labour Force



Survey (PLFS) from 2018-19 and 2021-22, leading to potential discontinuities in the data timeline. This gap between datasets obscures significant labour market trends and transitions, particularly around key economic reforms and policy changes that occurred in the interim years, such as the economic shifts following demonetisation. The lack of continuous data makes it difficult to assess whether observed employment trends are consistent over time or whether they are simply the result of specific policy impacts or global economic conditions.

Furthermore, the shift from NSS to PLFS introduces complexity due to differences in methodology, frequency, and possibly coverage and sampling techniques. While the NSS provides quinquennial snapshots of employment, the annual PLFS aims for more frequent updates but may differ in how it categorises employment or the working-age population. Direct comparisons without adjusting for these methodological differences could lead to misleading conclusions about employment trends.

Unemployment Varies Across India

Going beyond this report, one should also look at the spatial distribution of unemployment in India. PLFS 2022-23 data shows that the unemployment in India is 3.17%. However, there are states that are way above the national average: Goa (9.7%), Kerala (7%), Haryana (6.1%), Punjab (6.1%) and Meghalaya

(6.0%). The unemployment rate is lowest in Assam (1.7%). Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Assam & Gujarat have the lowest unemployment rate in the country.

One fact misrepresented by the media is that the ILO report has suggested that 82.9% of youth are unemployed. However, to be fair to the ILO report, it has said that the share of unemployed youth in the total unemployed population was 82.9%. Irrespective of that, PLFS 2022-23, the unemployment rate in India for individuals aged 15 and older, based on their highest education level, varies significantly. The rate for those who finished middle school is 1.7%, while it increases to 2.2% for secondary school completers. Higher secondary completers face an unemployment rate of 4.6%. The rates escalate for those with higher qualifications: 12.2% for diploma holders, 13.4% for graduates, and 12.1% for postgraduates and above. Those with at least a secondary school education experience a 7.3% unemployment rate.

Unemployment And Education: A Paradox

This points to the fact that unemployment, sometimes, can paradoxically increase with the level of education primarily due to three factors. First, highly educated individuals often have specific career expectations and may not settle for jobs that they perceive as underutilising their skills, leading to longer periods of job-seeking. In FY24, despite the significant growth in job vacancies on the National Career Service

(NCS) portal, which soared by 214% to 10,924,161 positions compared to 3,481,944 the previous year, there was only a 53% increase in job-seeker registrations, totalling 87,27,900. This discrepancy highlights a surprising trend of fewer job-seekers relative to the burgeoning job opportunities, reflecting a mismatch in job requirements or awareness.

Second, the job market may need more high-skill positions available to match the growing number of graduates, creating an imbalance between supply and demand. This situation is exacerbated by rapid changes in technology and global economic structures, which can make certain specialised skills obsolete more quickly. Third, higher education can sometimes be misaligned with the labour market's actual needs, leading to a mismatch where the workforce's qualifications do not meet the requirements of available jobs. To specifically address India's skill gap as revealed by the India Skills Report 2024, several targeted strategies can be implemented. For regions like Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Delhi, which show higher employability rates, tailored initiatives to boost local skills can be replicated in regions with lower employability. Emphasising emerging technologies in educational curricula, such as in Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE) and Information

Technology (IT), can help meet the high demand for skills in these areas. Moreover, expanding public-private partnerships can ensure that educational programmes align closely with industry needs, particularly in fast-growing fields highlighted by the impact of AI on future work.

Furthermore, vocational training needs strengthening to provide practical skills quickly and effectively, addressing immediate skill demands in various trades and technical roles. Policy incentives for lifelong learning, including tax breaks and subsidised training programs, can motivate ongoing skill development among the workforce. To ensure these measures are effective, a robust monitoring framework should be established to evaluate the impact of these policies and adapt them as needed, ensuring they meet the evolving demands of India's labour market and effectively reduce the skill gap. The new government should make this a priority in the next term.

With that said, India needs to create more jobs. India's population growth rate has decreased to about 0.8% from the earlier figures of 1.3% or 1.5%. Concurrently, the number of children in the 0 to 15 age brackets has not only proportionately declined but also in absolute numbers since 2019. Past job creation targets suggested by entities like the SP Gupta Committee or the Montek Singh Ahluwalia committee of the former planning commission - around 10 to 12 million jobs annually - are now outdated; a more realistic figure might be closer to 8 million jobs per year considering the current economic growth rate. However, the reality seems to be that we're creating less than this number annually. The declining employment elasticity of growth has been going on for more than two decades. It's not a new phenomenon. This should change. The enabling reforms over the last decade will help the next government achieve this target.

This November, your data privacy will be on the ballot, too

BY NICKY WATSON

This fall, voters will be contemplating a risky decision—and I'm not referring to the presidential candidates. I am talking about the real issue this election season: protecting voter data privacy.

With the Cambridge Analytica scandal still in recent memory, voters are concerned about the security of their personal information online. Ahead of this year's election, which is happening in tandem with the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI), voters must be aware that there are heightened risks to the security of their personal information. There are also steps that businesses can and should take to ensure they are protecting customer data from bad actors. During election seasons of years past, inboxes got fuller, campaign cold-calls ticked up and mass texts exploded. We all know this to be true. It's an age-old challenge that dates back to before the AI boom.

Just think back to the November 2022 primary season. The Federal Election Commission approved a request from Google that allowed political senders to bypass spam filters on their way to Gmail inboxes. Essentially, a candidate, party, or political



action committee could apply for the pilot program and, as long as its emails didn't contain content prohibited by Gmail's terms of service (phishing, malware, illegal content), they were accepted into the program.

Once that political sender was accepted, its emails would no longer be affected by forms of spam detection to which they'd otherwise be subjected. As a result, all of our inboxes started getting pretty darned full.

Now layer AI onto that.

Data from Invoca found that nearly 90 percent of respondents will have a dedicated budget for AI tools, and their investment in

the technology will increase this year. This means marketers will tap into increased productivity, streamlined processes and more outreach. In a perfect world, these tools mean marketers are investing in deeper personalization so voters only receive tailored content that aligns with their political preferences.

But this isn't a perfect world, and there is ample room for human error, meaning our inboxes are about to be stuffed with unwanted political ads...probably more than ever before. Along with a storm of political ads from well-meaning marketers, hackers and

bad actors are also leveraging AI to ramp up their schemes this year. New data from McAfee found that 53 percent of consumers say AI has made it harder to spot online scams—particularly AI-generated deep fakes. The vast majority (72 percent) of American social media users also find it difficult to spot AI-generated content such as fake news.

Case in point: Ahead of the New Hampshire primary in January, a fake robocall of President Joe Biden made the rounds with voters. Using AI voice-cloning technologies, the falsified message urged Democratic

voters to stay home, saying "Your vote makes a difference in November, not this Tuesday."

But for businesses, AI also offers some seemingly positive implications. New channels are now available for marketers to reach customers, including virtual and augmented realities, facial recognition and precise location-ID. With these new means, there is a far greater volume of data that marketers can leverage to personalize customer outreach. This is, in theory, a positive impact of AI, but data privacy implications inevitably increase in parallel. The long-term success of AI-powered marketing is therefore contingent on a company's ability to maintain a technological infrastructure that protects consumer data and brand reputation. As a means to address these fears, legislators recently brought forward the bipartisan American Privacy Rights Act of 2024, which aims to establish the first-ever federal standard for comprehensive data privacy and security regulation. The bill would recognize individual data controls for consumers and related obligations across a wide range of corporations. These include the right to opt out of targeted advertising and certain algorithms—which, during an election year, offers the opportunity to significantly cut down on unwanted political advertising.

Regulations on a federal level could raise the stakes on the scale of fines and penalties, as well as the likelihood of enforcement. In this case, proposed enforcement is actually threefold, including the FTC, the states, and individuals through a private right of action. However, the fact that 93 percent of respondents to a recent study worry about the security of their online data indicates a widespread lack of confidence among users regarding the protection of their personal information. Such a high level of concern could be attributed to various factors such as frequent data breaches, lack of transparency in data-handling practices, or increasing awareness of privacy-related issues. Addressing this concern is paramount to maintain user trust and confidence, as well as to comply with data protection regulations.

'Mumbai Has 1,025 Hoardings': BMC's Tall Claim Amid Scores Of Illegal Billboards, Ignored Checks, Renewals

By: Yesha Kotak

Even as two more bodies were recovered from the debris of the Ghatkopar billboard collapse on Wednesday, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) claims that there are 1,025 hoardings in the city. The number, which any Mumbaikar may find hard to believe after one look at the hoardings around him, points to the larger problem—scores of illegal billboards that face no action.

The 120×120 sq ft hoarding that collapsed on a petrol pump at Chhedanagar along the Eastern Expressway in Ghatkopar after a duststorm and gusty winds lashed the city on Monday, too, was illegal. In the wake of the incident, the BMC shared details of the hoardings installed in its 24 wards. While four wards—D (Grant Road), H-West (Bandra)



and K-East (Andheri East) and K-West (Andheri West)—top the list, all wards have at least more than 100 hoardings each. BMC EARNs RS 200 CRORE A YEAR FROM HOARDINGS

The civic body earns around Rs 200 crore in annual revenue through the licensing of these

hoarding, according to Deputy Municipal Commissioner Sanjog Kabare, in one of his earlier interviews. According to sources, the BMC charges around Rs 1.75 lakh per month for a 40×40 square foot structure.

The permission doesn't come easy. The licence department,

which looks into the ads put up on metal structures, seeks no-objection certificates from various departments. The building and factories department issues permits after consulting other departments such as fire brigade, engineering and estate, among others. The garden department, soil testing and tree authority ensure the flora is not damaged. The agreement is for a period of one year, with a fixed deposit and rental fee. According to sources, however, the authorities as well as the applicants ignore the renewal process after erecting the hoarding.

IN CASE OF RAILWAY LAND In the blame game that ensued between the BMC, Railways and Government Railway Police (GRP) after the Ghatkopar incident, the civic body was quick to point out that the hoarding was on a railway land.

Can Trump win without Haley supporters?



BY
**BERNARD
GOLDBERG,**

This won't be easy, but imagine, if you can, that Donald Trump is capable of putting his massive ego aside and is prepared to be gracious to a political opponent he doesn't like — and one who, for good measure, doesn't like him either. Unless you just emerged from a coma, you know we're talking about the icy relationship between Trump and Nikki Haley.

Let's imagine that Trump tells her that while they had their differences during the primary campaign, it's time, for the sake of party unity, to put those differences in the rearview mirror. Imagine if he could muster what it takes to praise her for her intelligence and apologized for calling her a "birdbrain." Now imagine if he asked her to be his vice-presidential candidate, a conciliatory gesture that would

go a long way in winning over her voters — and a lot of other moderate voters too, especially suburban women — and would certainly enhance his chances of winning in November. But that's not going to happen. Donald Trump is a man who holds grudges and doesn't like anyone too close to him with strong, independent views. He prefers the kind of people who, whether they really believe it or not, will go out on the campaign trail and enthusiastically tell voters how wonderful he is — and who, when asked, will either tap dance around the question of whether the 2020 election was rigged, or flat-out agree with Trump that it was. So reaching out to Nikki Haley would be out of character.

But Haley won 22 percent of the vote in last week's Indiana's

GOP primary — even though she dropped out of the race two months ago. In one wealthy Indianapolis suburb, she did even better — winning 34 percent of the vote.

And the New York Times reported in March that, "Even out of the race, Ms. Haley has continued to pull in a significant number of voters in ongoing primary contests. Across the five swing states that have held primaries so far — Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina and Nevada — a total of about 750,000 people cast ballots for Ms. Haley." Those votes could be the difference between winning and losing in a close race.

Despite all that, soon after Axios reported that Haley was being considered for VP, Trump tried to bury the speculation. He went public and said she is not a contender.

Trump, I think, is making a mistake, but when his ego is involved, mistakes are never far away. And, who knows, she might not even want the job. Wherever Trump goes, drama and chaos are right there with him. Haley may figure that she doesn't need that for the next four years. So which VP candidate could win over Haley's supporters?

Donald Trump needs a grownup on his ticket, someone mature, someone stable — someone, in other words, like Nikki Haley and not like Donald Trump. He needs someone who could win over voters who don't especially like Biden but are uneasy with Trump and need a reason to vote for him.

Two possibilities: Doug Burgum, the North Dakota governor and successful entrepreneur — not especially charismatic, but he checks the stable and mature boxes that would help Trump — and Glenn Youngkin, the Virginia governor, who's smart and likable. And if the Trump campaign really is targeting Virginia, Youngkin can help him get it.

Like Haley, either one would make Biden's vice president look by comparison even less competent than voters already think she is.

A recent New York Times-Siena College poll shows Trump winning in five of six key battleground states. It shows him running neck and neck with young voters and Hispanic voters — two groups Joe Biden won with 60 percent of their vote in 2020. And it has Trump winning more than 20 percent of black voters — a much higher percentage than GOP

presidential candidates normally get.

So maybe he figures he's got the election wrapped up and doesn't need Nikki Haley — or her supporters. But that's a big gamble. Someone needs to tell Trump (if they haven't already) that reconsidering Haley would be the smart thing to do. That he's not running against her anymore; he's running against Joe Biden and Kamala Harris — and they're already going after Haley voters.

But even if he won't consider Haley, he still needs her supporters. A vice-presidential candidate rarely has much influence on the outcome of a presidential election, but this year — with so many voters unenthusiastic about both presidential candidates — Trump's VP pick might make a big difference. You'd think a "stable genius" like the former president would understand that.

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