

# The South Asian INSIDER

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Meghan Markle 'Furious' as Kate Middleton Reaches Out to Prince Harry Amid Rift Rumours?



Story on Page 22

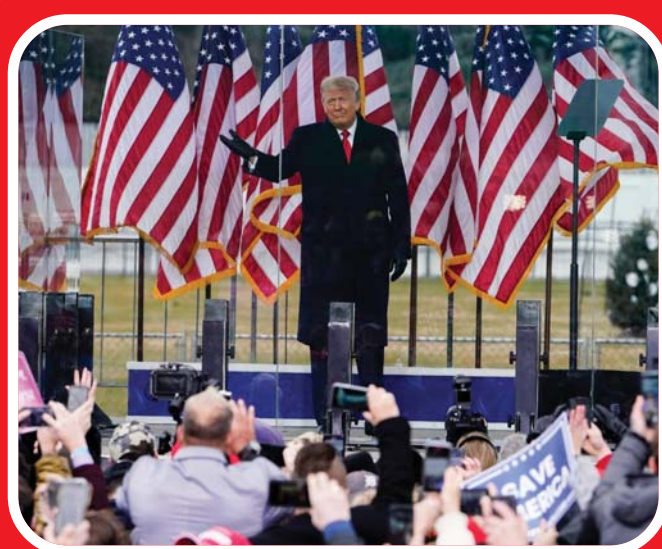


## Manipur Horror

### Mob Paraded 2 Women Naked, Based on Fake News

A video of two women being paraded naked by a mob in Manipur has sparked nationwide outrage. In Parliament, as Prime Minister said he is pained, opposition parties cornered the government over the issue. According to media reports, the sexual violence shown in the video took place after fake news about a Meitei woman's rape and murder was circulated just after the ethnic violence erupted in Manipur on May 3

Story on Page 19



### A Jan. 6 Trump Indictment Would Include Very Serious Charges

Story on Page 22

### Harmanpreet Singh and Kulbir Kaur of Virginia Charged with Committing Forced Labor and Alien Harboring for Multiple Years

Couple has been additionally charged with fraud, conspiracy to commit bankruptcy fraud and fraudulent transfers in contemplation of bankruptcy – in connection with their operation of a gas station and convenience store in North Chesterfield, Virginia.

Story on Page 19

## Why is Indian Army keeping the martial race theory alive? The British left 76 years ago



Story on Page 19

General KM Cariappa's experiment debunked the martial race theory and illustrated that differences in ethnicity, caste, religious, and regional backgrounds were not the determinants of fighting capabilities of soldiers.

### High temperatures to heavy rain: China battles heat as South Korea tackles flood



Story on Page 20

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# UK faith advisor's report on Khalistani extremism biased: British Sikh group

**The review submitted by Independent Faith Engagement Adviser Colin Bloom to the British government, which had warned against pro-Khalistani activists in the UK, was “not independent and impartial”, said a British Sikh group.**

(SAI Bureau)- A British Sikh group launched a report in the UK Parliament complex on Wednesday to attack a recent independent faith review which had warned against the "subversive, aggressive and sectarian" actions of some pro-Khalistani activists in the UK. The Council of Sikhs in Law committee, chaired by Professor Satvinder Singh Juss, alleged that the review by Independent Faith Engagement Adviser Colin Bloom submitted to the government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in April was "not independent and impartial". "The Bloom Review has damaged the hitherto excellent relationship between the Sikh community and the British government, and risks



continuing doing so, if it is not set aside by the British government," the report claims. The Bloom Review proceeds on the basis of assumptions that are flawed and misconceived and betray an alarming lack of understanding of the Sikh community, such that it lacks the very 'faith literacy' which it recommends the government to

adopt in the future," it adds. In his review entitled 'Does Government 'do God'?': An independent review into how government engages with faith', Bloom had warned that there is a "small, extremely vocal and aggressive" minority of British Sikhs who can be described as pro-Khalistan extremists, promoting an ethno-nationalist

agenda.

"It felt as though Colin Bloom was in the dock for some sort of trial, and the findings are very much critical of his independent review," said Lord Indrajit Singh, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO), with reference to Wednesday's report launch event.

However, the serious issues Bloom rightly raises, have largely been dismissed by Sikhs in Law. Sikhs must have an honest conversation about fringe elements in the community who are bringing disrepute to the broader British Sikh community with their bad behaviour, he said.

"They purport to represent 'the Sikh community' with politicians and the civil service,

but the reality is they only represent themselves," he said. The Bloom Review had specifically called on the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs, which is chaired by Britain's first female Sikh MP Preet Kaur Gill and has the first turbaned Sikh MP Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi as its vice-chair - both from the Labour Party, to review organisations allowed to exert influence in parliamentary affairs.

Recently, British Sikh peer Lord Ranbir Singh Suri stepped down from the APPG after raising concerns about the "entities involved".

Gill has been approached for a statement related to the veteran peer's exit but is yet to respond.

## Canada's big offer for H-1B visa holders and families, Indians likely to benefit

(SAI Bureau)- Canada has launched an open work permit stream to allow 10,000 H-1B visa holders from the US to come and work in the country. The move will benefit Indians, who account for nearly 75% of H-1B visa holders in the US. Indians, who account for nearly 75% of H-1B visa holders in the United States, are set to be the major beneficiaries of a new scheme launched by Canada to attract tech talent to the country.

To attract highly skilled workers, Canada has started giving open work permits for H-1-B visa holders from the US. The permit will allow H-1-B visa holders from the US to come and work in Canada for three years. It also allows family members of approved applicants to study or seek work options in the country. The new programme will be in place for a year or until the Canadian government receives 10,000 applications.

"Thousands of workers in high-tech fields are employed with companies that have large operations in both Canada and



the US, and those working in the occupation visa. As of July 16, US often hold an H-1-B speciality 2023, H-1-B speciality

occupation visa holders in the US, and their accompanying immediate family members, will be eligible to apply to come to Canada," the Canadian government said in a release earlier this month. "They will be able to work for almost any employer anywhere in Canada. Their spouses and dependants will also be eligible to apply for a temporary resident visa, with a work or study permit, as needed," it said.

H-1-B visas allow foreign

nationals to temporarily work in the US in certain specialised occupations, including the technology sector. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

Canada is hoping to become a world leader in a variety of emerging technologies and it hopes to attract professionals affected by massive layoffs by US tech giants.

## Indian-origin doctor appointed to key admin position in US

(SAI Bureau)- Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin has appointed Indian-American gastroenterologist, Dr Bimaljit Singh Sandhu, to a key administration position in the health sector. Dr Bimaljit Singh Sandhu on Tuesday was sworn in as a Board member of the Virginia Commonwealth University Health System Authority, a position in which the Indian American will play a key role in the state's health education system.

The role of the board of directors is to oversee the entire operations of the health system, the med school, nursing school, pharmacy school. "It's a lot of responsibility. We provide direction as far as the fundraising, giving strategic direction to the different medical



schools and hospitals so that we are at the cutting edge and provide the best care to the Virginians," Dr Sandhu said after the swearing-in ceremony in Richmond.

In this capacity, Dr Sandhu said he is trying to get some manufacturing industry, the medical biotech industry to help collaborate with the Virginia Commonwealth University Health System. Hailing from Faridkot in Punjab, Dr Sandhu migrated to the US in 2004 as a faculty member of

Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center as a gastroenterologist.



# AMIT DAGAR of New Jersey and, ATUL BHIWAPURKAR of California charged in Insider Trading case

**Amit worked for Pfizer. He and his associate are Charged with Insider Trading Based on Non-Public Drug Trial Results for COVID-19 Treatment**

Recently, Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Michael J. Driscoll, the Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), announced charges in four separate insider trading cases, collectively charging 10 defendants with securities fraud and other related charges. These cases involve trading based on confidential information misappropriated from entities and individuals in a variety of industries and reflect the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York's broad investigative reach and continued resolve to root out corruption in our financial markets. The defendants in these cases collectively generated more than \$30 million dollars from illegal securities trading based on material, non-public information ("MNPI") that was stolen from numerous sources.

As per details in United States v. Amit

Dagar and Atul Bhiwapurkar, In or about November 2021, AMIT DAGAR and ATUL BHIWAPURKAR participated in an insider trading scheme to reap illicit profits from options trading based on inside information about the results of clinical trials of Paxlovid, a medicine used to treat COVID-19. DAGAR was an employee of Pfizer Inc. ("Pfizer") and assisted in managing the data analysis in certain clinical drug trials.

On or about November 4, 2021, DAGAR learned that a Pfizer trial of the drug Paxlovid, a medicine designed to treat mild to severe COVID-19 infection, had produced positive results. The results were confidential and meant to remain so until Pfizer publicized them on or about November 5, 2021.

Later that same day, and while those results remained confidential, DAGAR purchased short-dated, out-of-the-money call options in Pfizer stock. DAGAR also tipped his close friend, ATUL BHIWAPURKAR, about the

coming drug results and BHIWAPURKAR also purchased short-dated, out-of-the-money Pfizer call options that expired approximately two weeks later. BHIWAPURKAR also tipped another friend ("Individual-1"), who similarly purchased short-dated, out-of-the-money Pfizer call options that expired approximately three weeks later.

The next day, on or about November 5, 2021, and before the market opened, Pfizer publicly released results of its Paxlovid study. That same day, following the publication of the positive results, Pfizer's stock price increased substantially, opening — and eventually closing — more than 10% higher than the prior day's closing price. In the coming weeks, DAGAR, BHIWAPURKAR, and Individual-1 sold

their Pfizer call options at significant profits, totaling approximately more than \$350,000.

DAGAR, 44, of Hillsborough, New Jersey, who was arrested this morning, has been charged with four counts of securities fraud, each of which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

BHIWAPURKAR, 45, of Milpitas, California, who was arrested this morning, has been charged with two counts of securities fraud, each of which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

## Ambassador Taranjit Singh Sandhu inaugurated the India Pavilion

(Sai Bureau)- Ambassador of India to the United States, Shri Taranjit Singh Sandhu, inaugurated the India Pavilion at the Texworld Apparel and Home Textile Sourcing Show in New York today. There are over two dozen Indian companies from the apparel, fabric and home textile sectors participating in the Texworld fair being held over three days from 18-20 July 2023. India's participation in the Texworld fair is being anchored by the Handloom Export Promotion Council and the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (TEXPROCIL). After the inauguration, Amb. Sandhu interacted with Indian companies and visited their stalls. He encouraged them to push hard to enhance India's textile exports to the US



and, in this regard, noted that the Commercial Wing at the Embassy and Consulates stand ready to offer all possible support. He further added that the world-class textile products from India already have a large presence in the US, but there was potential to do more, especially in areas of sustainable textiles and organic products. India's textile exports to the US in 2022-23 stood at US\$ 10.4 billion, roughly accounting for 9-10% of the US textile imports. Majority of the Indian textile companies participating in the fair are from two main clusters in India – Panipat in Haryana and Karur in Tamil Nadu. There are several new-age products made of Bhagalpuri silk, bamboo, jute and 3D prints on display at the fair.

## Businessman Sentenced for Bribery Scheme and Tax Evasion

(Sai Bureau)- The former executive vice president of an Atlanta engineering firm was sentenced today to five years in prison for paying bribes to two City of Atlanta officials in exchange for steering city business worth millions of dollars to his company, paying bribes to a former DeKalb County, Georgia, official in an attempt to obtain county contracts, and evading over \$1.5 million in taxes. According to court documents, Lohrasb "Jeff" Jafari, 72, of Alpharetta, Georgia, was the executive vice president of PRAD Group, an architectural, design, and construction management firm headquartered in Atlanta that performed services for the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County. Jafari also oversaw PRAD Group's finances. From January 2003 to February 2017, Adam Smith served as the chief procurement officer (CPO) for the City of Atlanta and supervised the city's purchasing

activities and its expenditure of billions of dollars of public money. From April 2011 to May 2016, Jo Ann Macrina served as the City of Atlanta's Commissioner of the Department of Watershed Management, a cabinet-level position from which she managed the city's drinking water and wastewater systems and was responsible for an annual budget exceeding \$500 million. Jafari gave Smith and Macrina cash and other items of value to obtain business with the City of Atlanta. In exchange for those payments, Smith and Macrina conspired with Jafari to ensure that PRAD Group received city business worth millions of dollars, including by agreeing to replace two evaluators on the selection team for the city's Architectural and Engineering contract and re-scoring an evaluation so that the city would award the contract to Jafari's company.

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# RAMI SAAB (also known as “Rami Hasan”) of Long Island Pleads Guilty to Massive COVID-19 Loan Fraud

(Sai Bureau)- Earlier today, Rami Saab, of Glen Cove, New York, pleaded guilty at the federal courthouse in Central Islip to conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection with his participation in a scheme to defraud banks and the Small Business Association (SBA) of millions of dollars' worth of small business loans under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (EIDL). Today's proceeding was held before United States District Judge Gary R. Brown. When sentenced, Saab faces up to 20 years in prison, as well as restitution of \$9,668,508 and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Ivan J. Arvelo, Special Agent-in-Charge, Homeland Security Investigations, New York (HSI), Thomas M. Fattorusso, Special Agent-in-Charge, Internal

Revenue Service Criminal Investigation, New York (IRS-CI), and J. Russell George, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) announced the guilty plea.

“Using fraud and deceit, the defendant callously stole millions of dollars during an unprecedented public health crisis at the expense of American small business owners,” stated United States Attorney Peace. “Those who engaged in blatant theft of taxpayer dollars intended to assist legitimate businesses and their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic should know they will be aggressively prosecuted by our Office.”

Mr. Peace thanked the Nassau County Police Department for their assistance on this case.

“As alleged, Rami SAAB stole nearly \$10 million dollars in relief money intended for small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic, for his own enrichment,” stated HSI

Special Agent-in-Charge Arvelo. “This is an egregious case of fraud perpetrated by an individual who pilfered a program intended for those who truly needed emergency financial assistance. HSI and our law enforcement partners remain steadfastly committed to rooting out such thievery and ensuring violators are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

“Saab pocketed nearly \$10 million in ill-gotten gains by exploiting benefits meant to help those truly in need. Criminals like Saab continue to seek the quickest way to make a buck, regardless of the rule of law or those who may be victimized in the process. But as a result of strong law enforcement partnerships, today's guilty plea means Saab now faces a large prison sentence for his criminal acts,” stated IRS-CI Special Agent-in-Charge Fattorusso.

“As alleged, the defendant and his co-conspirators fraudulently obtained more than \$9.5 million

in Federal funds from the Payroll Protection Program and Emergency Injury Disaster Loans through applications containing fraudulent documents. Fraud schemes like these defraud not only a program intended to help small businesses weather a global pandemic but also the United States' taxpayers. The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration is committed to working with our law enforcement partners and the United States Attorney's Office to prevent these types of fraud and to bring those responsible to justice.”

As set forth in court filings, between May 2020 and May 2021, amid the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Saab, working with others, fraudulently applied for, and received, at least 20 PPP and EIDL loans totaling in excess of \$9,500,000, on behalf of numerous corporate entities under his control. Saab submitted applications on behalf of these entities even though

these were not, in fact, real businesses. Instead, these entities were “shell companies” that claimed false numbers of employees, payroll costs, and intended use of the loan proceeds – all of which was specifically designed to mislead the SBA and numerous banks administering the PPP and EIDL loan programs. Shortly after the loans were funded, Saab engaged in numerous financial transactions designed to conceal the true nature and source of the funds, including electronically transferring portions of the loan proceeds between various bank accounts which Saab controlled. Saab, after transferring the loan proceeds through multiple accounts, utilized the laundered loan proceeds to enrich himself and others, including by personally making cash withdrawals and transferring funds to associates overseas.

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# Deaths do not reflect a good picture of Project Cheetah: Supreme Court

Eight cheetah deaths within a year of the translocation of the big cats from Africa do not reflect a good picture of Project Cheetah, the Supreme Court said on Thursday while seeking a response from the government on the causes of the fatalities and the steps being taken to prevent the fall in their numbers. A bench of justices BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala, and Prashant Kumar Mishra asked why the government has to make it a prestige issue. "Instead of having them [cheetahs] in one place, why cannot you create one or more habitats for them, irrespective of whatever state or whatever government they are under," said the bench while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL). "...40% of the deaths occurring within a year do not reflect a good picture."

Twenty cheetahs were translocated to Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park in two batches from Namibia and South Africa in September last year and February 2023 under



the project decades after the species was declared extinct from the country in 1952. Three of the 10 of them released into the wild have died along with two of the remaining captive-bred and three of the four cubs born in India. Kuno now has 16 cheetahs, including a cub.

Wildlife expert MK Ranjitsinh-led committee, which is assisting the court, has pointed out that none of the members of the government-appointed task force have cheetah experts. The

committee moved the court for an urgent hearing following two cheetah deaths last week.

Additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhatti, who appeared for the government, told the court that authorities at the highest level have taken cognisance of these deaths. "After all, this is a prestigious project for the country." She added the deaths are not alarming. "Up to 50% of deaths were anticipated within the first year of the project."

The bench asked Bhatti what

was the problem. "We want to know. Prima facie it appears our conditions do not suit them. They reportedly suffered from respiratory problems. One was detected with kidney ailment." Bhatti said many factors contributed to the deaths. On alternate habitats, she said this aspect has been looked into. "It is not about politics, but there are problems in making arrangements in other states." She said six tigers died after relocation to a national park in Rajasthan.

Senior advocate Prashanto Chandra Sen, who appeared for the Ranjitsinh-led committee, showed letters from South African experts, who are part of the government's committee on cheetahs, giving suggestions that were not considered. Sen said experts have called for immediate steps. "But they are not being consulted." The court allowed Sen to present the recommendations to the court. Bhatti told the court that Sen gave suggestions in June. She

added if there are any fresh suggestions, they can also be considered.

On May 18, the court called cheetah deaths a cause for concern and gave time to the Union government to propose steps for mitigation by July. On Thursday, it gave it more time and posted the matter for hearing on August 1.

In May, the court said it was not saying that deaths happened because of neglect but was only expressing its concern over them. Bhatti then informed the court that Kuno could sustain up to 21 cheetahs. She added it was the first among the sites being developed for introducing cheetahs in the wild.

Bhatti said there are no cheetah experts in India since the species went extinct. She said officers were sent to Namibia, South Africa, and Tanzania to get a first-hand experience in the management of cheetahs and other wildlife for the successful implementation of Project Cheetah.

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# Wrestling Federation Chief Brij Bhushan Singh Granted Bail In Sexual Harassment Case

**A Delhi Court on Thursday granted bail to outgoing Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who has been accused by six women wrestlers of sexual harassment, assault and stalking. Singh has continued to reject the allegations against him.**

(News Agency)- A Delhi Court on Thursday granted regular bail to outgoing Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who has been accused by six women wrestlers of sexual harassment, assault and stalking. The court earlier granted two-days interim bail to Singh in the case. The judge has also granted regular bail to co accused Vinod Tomar.

The court further directed the accused to not leave the country without its prior permission and said they will not, directly or indirectly, indulge in threat or inducement to the complainants or witnesses.

Delhi Police doesn't support or oppose bail plea

Brij Bhushan wasn't present in the court during the hearing due to the ongoing Parliament Session. Meanwhile, Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Srivastava, appearing for the Delhi Police, said that they are neither opposing nor supporting the bail application, and that their submission is only that the same shall be dealt with provision of law. While granting bail, the court also imposed Rs 25,000 bounty on Singh. The counsel, appearing for the complainants, opposed the application, saying the accused was very influential. "Bail should not be granted. If at all it is granted, strict conditions must be imposed. Witnesses have been approached from time to time, no threat though," he told the court.



The counsel for the accused told the court that he will abide by all conditions.

The next hearing on the basis of 'scrutiny of documents' will be held on July 28.

In the previous order on July 18, the court had cited the case of Satender Kumar Anil vs CBI (2022), where if the offences are punishable with imprisonment of 7 years or less and the chargesheet has been filed without arrest, and the accused has cooperated throughout the investigation including appearing before the Investigation Officer, the bail applications of the accused can be decided without him being in physical custody or on an interim bail.

Wrestlers Protest

For months, top Indian wrestlers including

Sakshi Malik, Vinesh Phogat, and Bajrang Poonia protested against Singh, who is also a Member of Parliament from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). After weeks of taking to the roads, the Delhi Police in April registered two FIRs in the case. One was registered under the sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on the allegations of women wrestlers and the second was registered under the sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act on the allegations of a minor wrestlers.

"Both the FIRs spoke of several alleged instances of sexual harassment like inappropriate touching, groping, stalking and intimidation by Singh at different times and

places over a decade," reported PTI.

Despite months of protests, Singh was never arrested in the case and has continued to reject the allegations against him.

In June, the police filed charge sheet against Singh and charged him with sexual harassment and stalking. The police also charged co-accused Vinod Tomar, a suspended Assistant Secretary of WFI, for abetment, criminal intimidation, sexual harassment, and stalking. Tomar also appeared before the court on Tuesday and was granted interim bail.

The police sought the cancellation of the second case against Singh under POCSO Act, however, as the complainant had withdrawn the case.

"In the POCSO matter, after the completion of the investigation, we have submitted a police report under section 173, CrPC, requesting for a cancellation of the case based upon the statements of the complainant i.e the father of the victim and the victim herself," said Delhi Police PRO Suman Nalwa at the time.

Singh's counsel alleged media trail, to which the judge said he may move an application before the high court or trial court, reported PTI, adding that the judge further said that the court will pass an appropriate order on the application. The counsel did not move any such application.

## Jailed Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim granted 30-day parole again

(News Agency)- Jailed Dera Sacha Sauda chief and self-proclaimed godman Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was granted 30-day parole on Thursday. With this, the Haryana government has once again approved parole of the rape convict godman who was previously granted parole in January this year.

As per the recent order, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh will reside at the Shah Satnam Ashram in Uttar Pradesh's Bagpat district during the parole period. The Dera chief is serving a 20-year jail term in prison in



Rohtak for raping two women disciples at his ashram in Sirsa. The 'godman', with a substantial following in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, has been released from jail on

paroles on five separate occasions for different reasons, such as his appeal to visit his ailing mother.

The self-proclaimed godman had applied for parole under Section 3 of the Haryana

condition to obtain prior permission of the district magistrate (DM) to visit any place not specified in the release warrant during the parole period.

The parole order also mandated Ram Rahim to "keep peace and maintain good behaviour" during the parole period and "cooperate with the police and the local administration..."

The release warrant also directed the local police station to keep a close watch on the activities of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh during the 30-day parole period. A special CBI court convicted him in Panchkula in August 2017. In 2019, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh and three others were pronounced guilty in the case of a journalist's murder.

Good Conduct Prisoners (Temporary Release) Act, 2022.

Granting a 30-day parole, the authorities also put several conditions on Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh including, the

## 'PM compelled to react...': Owaisi demands CBI probe, sacking of Manipur CM Biren Singh

(News Agency)- Earlier, the Hyderabad MP questioned Modi's two-month long silence and whether CM Singh will compensate for the loss of 160 lives.

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Thursday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was forced to respond to the video of Manipur women being paraded naked only because it had gone viral. He called for the ousting of Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh and demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the matter. Speaking to news agency ANI, Owaisi said, "...PM was compelled to react on the video because it has become viral now...Genocide is going on there...Justice will prevail only when the CM is removed and the PM orders CBI inquiry."



# Sacrosanctity of womanhood under attack in Manipur

The video of two women paraded naked and later mercilessly gang-raped and left to the elements is a pogrom well planned and executed. As a woman, to say that the video sends shudders down one's spine is a gross understatement. This is an act executed meticulously by people high on something, which has succeeded in numbing their conscience, if they have any. These are foul-mouthed misanthropic misogynists that can be hired to carry out a task. And what's that task? It is, in simple language, the task of creating so much terror among the Kuki-Zo people that they will voluntarily move out of Manipur and after which, there will be a capture of the abandoned spaces by Meiteis from the Imphal valley. This has been the modus operandi.

And the fact that young men, who are fed on the ideology of hatred and revenge, have been under training under the watch of Chief Minister N Biren Singh himself and have sworn undying loyalty to him, is clear enough that they were given a task and they have carried it out to the tee. That the horrific act of destroying not just the body but the very soul of two utterly helpless women should be recorded, reeks of sadism and the lowest levels of depravity which one tended to believe is no longer present in a civilised society. But sorry, in Manipur, sadism exists and is cheer-led by the so-called women guardians of Meitei society -- the Meira Paibis -- who have prevented the arrest of such blood-thirsty villains in the past, on the plea that they are defending Meitei pride. And now the Meira Paibis are silent! Don't they have anything to say when women of another community are subjected to the most villainous form of abuse? Can women be so bound by tribal and ethnic loyalties that they can sit and watch their sons and brothers violating and defiling the sacredness of womanhood? Manipur has a plethora of academics too, some of whom have been waxing eloquent on the present issue and have taken stances that are overtly partisan. Will they now speak up against this barbaric act which is a crime not just against the Kuki-Zo women but a crime against humanity? Someone has rightly said that when a philosopher tries to be a politician, he ceases to be a philosopher.

So much has been written on the present crisis in Manipur and the deafening silence of the Indian state on the atrocities happening there on a daily basis for 77 days. Prime Minister Narendra Modi deigned to open his mouth only this morning before the beginning of Parliament session. The attack not just on the two women whose spiritual disfigurement was recorded but on many other Kuki-Zo women, men and children, calls the bluff on the much-touted 'Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao' slogan that has in recent times gone silent. Indeed, we in India, and particularly the BJP-led NDA government, has been able to coin a slogan a day but the implementation remains a

challenge. Rape as an instrument of war is well understood but is there a war on in Manipur where rape has been used as an instrument to subjugate and terrorise the Kuki-Zo people? The genesis of these atrocities is in the narrative that the Kuki-Zo people are not indigenous to Manipur but are migrants from the Chin Hills of Burma.

History tells us that the Kuki-Zo-Paite people inhabited the Chin Hills of Burma when the idea of territoriality was yet unknown and they moved into Manipur when they found it less rugged and more productive. The fact is that they were accepted by the Meitei kings and became their warriors in their fight against the Burmese in the 1820s. There are Meiteis in Burma too, so to say that the Kuki-Chins are interlopers that now need to be hounded out of their hearths and homes is not just untenable but a rewriting of history which is fraught.

The cruelties embedded in the conversations on social media; the song composed by the popular Meitei singer Tapta which openly calls for a genocide of Kukis and against whom an FIR was filed on July 13 for promoting enmity, defamation and incitement to violence all point to one thing -- an inherent hatred for the Kuki-Zo people. Mind you, Tapta is a hero for the Meiteis. It is this congenital hatred for the Kuki's which has been lying dormant all this while and which has now been manifested in different ways and by different extremist outfits who don't seem to have a dearth of arms. It is important to ask where the arms are coming from!

The latest video, which has shaken the souls of women and a large section of men too across India and the world and who now stand in solidarity with the Kuki-Zo community, should not end in condemnations alone. These voices of sanity should work at dismantling the triggers of structural violence embedded in the ethno-centric conflicts in the region and the fight for scarce resources, particularly land.

What Manipur needs at the helm today is an enlightened pragmatist, not a Chief Minister who is an overtly partisan politician and who watches as Manipur regresses into a failed state where the rule of law is now so compromised that it only protects one community against another. The Kuki-Zo people are inhabitants of the hills of Manipur and no amount of persecution against them can change the facts. They may not have been able to fight back now because of the suddenness of the conflict. But victims today can be victimizers and oppressors tomorrow. This is what psychologists and psychiatrists tell us. The tribals across India's North East are in a state of suspended animation; too stunned to react but react they will at some point and that is something that the Indian state might have to contend with and regurgitate about.

**By Patricia Mukhim**

# This heatwave is a climate omen. But it's not too late to change course

Thirty years ago, the world's nations agreed to prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. But what is "dangerous climate change"? Just turn on the television, read the headlines of the morning paper or view your social media feeds. For we are watching it play out in real time this summer, more profoundly than ever before, in the form of unprecedented floods, heatwaves and wildfires. Now we know what dangerous climate change looks like. As has been said of obscenity, we know it when we see it. We're seeing it -- and it is obscene. Scorching temperatures persist across Europe, North America and Asia, as wildfires rage from Canada to Greece. The heat is as relentless as it is intense. For example, Phoenix, Arizona, has broken its record of 18 consecutive days above 110F (43.3C). Even the nights, generally relied upon as a chance to recover from the blistering days, now offer little relief: for more than a week, night-time temperatures in Phoenix have exceeded 90F (32.2C). Meanwhile, severe and deadly flooding has stricken South Korea, Japan, and the north-east United States, from Pennsylvania to Vermont. The climate crisis -- and yes, it is now a crisis -- is endangering us now, where we live. Whether it's the recurrent episodes of hazardous air quality in the east coast cities some of us call home from windblown Canadian wildfire smoke or the toll sadly now being measured in human lives from deadly nearby floods, we are witnessing the devastating and dangerous consequences of unabated human-caused warming. That is a fact. Indeed, as you "doomscroll" on whatever social media platform you prefer these days, you might see selective images and graphs that would lead you to think Earth's climate is spinning out of control, in a runaway feedback loop of irreversible tipping points leading us down an inescapable

planetary death spiral.

But that's not what's happening. The average warming of the planet -- including the most up-to-date measurements for 2023 -- is entirely consistent with what climate modelers warned decades ago would happen if we continued with the business-as-usual burning of fossil fuels. Yes, there are alarming data coming in, from record-shattering loss of winter sea ice in the southern hemisphere to off-the-charts warmth in the North Atlantic with hot tub-grade waters off the Florida coast. We've also seen the hottest week on record for the planet as a whole this month. We can attribute blame to a combination of ongoing human-caused warming, an incipient major El Niño event and the vagaries of natural variability.

These episodes are a reminder that we can not only expect to see records broken, but shattered, if we continue burning fossil fuels and heating up the planet.

And one of the areas where observed trends truly are exceeding the predictions of climate models is in those extreme weather events we are seeing this summer. One of us has been involved in research that suggests that climate models are still not capturing some of the more subtle physical mechanisms behind persistent summer weather extremes. As the Arctic warms faster than lower latitudes, the temperature difference between the poles and tropics decreases and the jet stream -- which is driven by that difference -- weakens. Under certain conditions that can lead to a slow, wiggly jet stream, with amplified weather systems that get stuck in place. When weather systems stall like this, the same regions get baked or rained on day after day -- precisely the sort of persistent, extreme weather events we're experiencing this summer.

**By Michael Mann and Susan Joy Hassol**



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# The Opposition - A Caucus Riddled With Contradictions



By CR Kesavan

While constructive opposition is imperative for a vibrant democracy, the current opposition coalition is nothing more than a caucus of contradictions. Their political philosophies are paradoxically polar to one another.

PDA (Progressive Democratic Alliance) was Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav's suggestion for a name. It can also signify Public Display of Affection, or, behind the screens, Private Disdain and Animosity.

Even before the Patna meet, Congress's Acharya Pramod Krishnam bemoaned that the opposition was making the 'Congress-mukt' dream easier.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) agreed to participate in the Bengaluru meeting after extracting the Congress's support on the Delhi Ordinance. Senior Congress leaders in states had recently railed at the AAP, saying that they were knee-deep in corruption and had fought various state elections using ill-

gotten funds to sabotage the Congress. They publicly urged their party leadership to not support AAP's position against the Ordinance.

While Arvind Kejriwal accused Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot of corruption, Rajasthan Minister Pratap Kacahariawyas quipped that Kejriwal should get a gold medal for his lies.

Reacting to criticism over the marred Panchayat elections in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee had said, "I feel pity for the CPI(M) and Congress... but you think you will behave this way and I will entertain you?" Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury of the Congress, who had earlier denounced the Trinamool Congress as a "house of thieves", denounced Mamata Banerjee as a "great underminer" of alliance politics. He also criticised her as someone who always played the role of a Trojan horse to undermine opposition unity.[5]

It is unequivocally evident to all that the opposition parties are

not driven by the politics of commitment but by politics of unvarnished opportunism, and compulsion and convenience.

The opposition remains a direly divided house.

One common refrain of these parties is that the central agencies are being used to harass and intimidate them. Fourteen political parties had recently approached the Supreme Court alleging selective and targeted use of central probe agencies against opposition leaders to quell dissent. They had claimed that they represented 42% of the electorate across the spectrum and that if they are affected, it means the people too are affected. The Supreme Court dismissed their plea. While they try to maintain the facade of unity nationally, their inherent hypocrisy is exposed by recent developments at the regional level. Kerala Congress president K Sudhakaran was arrested by the state crime branch in a cheating case and later released

on bail. The Congress attacked the CPM and assailed the Left as "autocratic, undemocratic and not a worthy ally for anyone". A senior Congress leader labeled Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan pejoratively as "Mundu Modi". Everyone knows the blatant double standards, given that they are alliance partners in West Bengal and Tripura.

The Punjab State Vigilance Bureau arrested former Deputy Chief Minister OP Soni, the fourth former Congress minister to be arrested over illegal wealth. The Congress accused the ruling AAP in Punjab of targeting its "Hindu leadership" in the state to "help the BJP" in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The BRS working president, KT Rama Rao, had earlier said his party had dropped the idea of uniting the opposition. He reasoned that blind hatred against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the sole agenda of ousting one man from his position cannot be the reason for opposition parties' unity, and

people would not welcome such a political approach.

The timeworn talk of the opposition coming together to save democracy is a non-starter, given the inherent inconsistencies and ideological incongruities. The opposition grouping will be only viewed as a pact between paradoxes without any firm ideological underpinnings.

Twenty-four opposition parties with the sole agenda of removing Modi are getting into a huddle not knowing if they will continue in this hotchpotch for the next 24 hours, given their inherent contradictions. This opposition, a divided house of dynasts, driven by sheer self-interest, is trying to do the political equivalent of selling snake oil. On the other hand, you have PM Modi, who is talking about making India a developed nation in the next 24 years, when we celebrate the centennial of our independence. The choice before our nation could not be more clear and distinct.

## How The Opposition Can Win In 2024

By Keshava Guha

A familiar maxim of American politics holds that in any election, the challenger hopes to turn the contest into a referendum on the performance of the incumbent, while the incumbent would rather present it as a choice.

This "referendum or choice" framing might be American, but the underlying logic is native to Indian politics as well. What we call "anti-incumbency" is a form of negative voting in which the identity of the challenger is at best secondary. With only one real exception, every Indian general election in which a full-term incumbent has suffered significant losses has followed the referendum-not-choice pattern:

1967, 1977, 1989, 1996, 2004. The one exception is, of course, 2014, thanks to a presidential-style opposition campaign unlike anything India had previously seen.

The BJP's re-election in 2019 stemmed, in part, from its success in turning that campaign into a choice, between not ideologies but personalities. The Opposition - then the Congress-led UPA - fell more than willingly into the trap, focusing its campaign on the person of the Prime Minister ("Chowkidar Chor Hai") rather than on his government's record.

Choice elections benefit incumbents in two principal ways. First, because they take

advantage of a power that only incumbents enjoy - that of appearing statesmanlike on the world stage (India's presidency of the G20 will feature heavily in next year's BJP campaign). Second, because they widen the range of expression for negative emotions. The desire for collective improvement, collective greatness, ought to be at the heart of democratic politics, but fear and anger are often more reliable tools of electoral mobilisation. In a referendum, negativity only benefits the challenger. In a choice, it can actually benefit the incumbent - whether the framing is known vs unknown, experienced vs unproven or lesser vs greater evil.

Take the 2022 US midterms. An election in which the most unpopular policy belonged not to the incumbent, but to the challenger - the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade. Any dissatisfaction with the incumbent was more than compensated by fury at the opposition. The Opposition that gathered in Bengaluru this week, where they chose for themselves the not especially imaginative acronym INDIA, claim to be motivated by existential fear, for their own survival, and for the survival of constitutional democracy in India. They are motivated, just as much, by a sense of opportunity, by the relatively recent belief that 2024 can, at the very least, be a real

contest, one that the Opposition can define as a referendum.

The grounds for such a belief are as follows. In 2019, PM Modi and the BJP, like Indira Gandhi in 1971, could still claim the mantle of insurgency and could still contrast their mere five years in power with "60 years" (in fact, 54) of Congress rule. The party's gains that year in West Bengal and Telangana suggested that they had room to grow. Four years later, the BJP looks like a party that peaked, politically, in 2019, with its twin ideological victories - the abrogation of Article 370 and the Supreme Court's Ayodhya judgment. Recent reversals in West Bengal and Telangana reveal a party that is no longer expanding.





**The personal chemistry and close rapport between President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and PM Modi is a key factor in the rapid development of this close partnership. Both leaders share a common perspective of critical issues impacting the region and the key role that the two countries can play towards development and prosperity in the region.**

# Modi in Abu Dhabi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives in Abu Dhabi on Saturday (July 15) on an official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This is his fifth visit to the country since he became PM. When seen in the context of his first visit to UAE in August 2015, which was the first by an Indian prime minister after 34 years, the current visit in such a short time seems remarkable. It also marks one of the most transformational changes in India's engagement with any country in recent times. Foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra, while briefing the media on July 13, highlighted it when he mentioned that a significant transformation has taken place in India-UAE relations, and a central driver of this has been the common vision of the two leaders, PM Modi and President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

UAE was also the first country in the region with which India decided to elevate the ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership during Modi's visit in August 2015. This has been later followed by similar partnership agreements with Saudi Arabia and most recently with Egypt. The personal chemistry and close rapport between President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and PM Modi is a key factor in the rapid development of this close partnership. Both leaders share a common perspective of critical issues impacting the region and the key role that the two countries can play towards development and prosperity in the region. "Home away from Home" is how PM Modi described the UAE while



addressing the Indian diaspora at Dubai during his visit to UAE in February 2018.

In this short period of eight years, there has been unprecedented growth in relationships. This is particularly reflected in the strong economic exchanges, both on trade as well as investments, people-to-people ties, and also convergence on a range of regional and international issues. Bilateral trade has grown to \$85 billion in 2022-23, making UAE India's third-largest trading partner.

UAE is also India's second-largest export destination. Also, with large sums of FDI flows, UAE is the fourth-largest overall investor in India. The landmark agreement CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) signed on February 18, 2022, in a record time of 88 days has laid the foundation for the exponential increase in trade and economic partnership, and is yet another example of mutual trust and the special bilateral relationship. CEPA aims to increase employment opportunities and bilateral trade in goods to US\$100 billion in five years and trade in services up to US\$15

billion.

Both countries have often gone beyond the normal to make this partnership special as well as strategic. UAE is the only nation from the region which has offered to store strategic oil reserves in India. When UAE hosted the OIC Summit in 2019, it invited India's external affairs minister late Sushma Swaraj despite protests from some nations, including Pakistan. The inauguration of the first Hindu temple in Dubai on October 5, 2022, is indeed a special gift to the Indian community by UAE.

The RuPay card, a key initiative by India in digital payment system, was launched in Abu Dhabi on August 24, 2019, making UAE one of the few countries to have such a tie-up with India. PM Modi was invited as the keynote speaker at the World Government Summit in February 2018 in UAE and in March 2018, India was the 'Guest of Honour' country at the Abu Dhabi Festival (ADF), which is UAE's annual cultural festival. During his visit to UAE in August 2019, PM Modi was awarded the prestigious 'Zayed Medal' for playing a "pivotal role" in giving a "big boost" to the bilateral

strategic ties. India, too, on its part recognises UAE as a special partner. Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan was the chief guest at the Republic Day in Delhi in January 2017. UAE is one of few select countries that have been invited as a 'Special Invite' in India's G20 presidency this year. India is also collaborating closely with UAE in the COP28 Summit on climate change being hosted by UAE in 2023.

Defence and security are slowly emerging as another important pillar of engagement. The region has always been conflict-prone, and the fact that the past guarantees of security through external players like the US may no longer be assured (especially after the 'Arab Spring'), has forced nations in the region to look for alternate arrangements. This offers an opportunity as well as increased scope and space for India to play a constructive role in the region's security.

As a part of a 'comprehensive strategic partnership', both sides conduct regular security dialogue between their national security councils, and are working closely on security issues, like counter-

terrorism, maritime security, and cybersecurity.

Bilateral defence exercises are becoming more frequent and form an important part of cooperation and understanding too. Also, the supply of defence equipment and co-production of weapon system are emerging as important areas of cooperation. There has already been some movement on it. In March 2017, India's Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) signed a contract with the UAE for the supply of 40,000 rounds of 155 mm shells, followed by another 50,000 rounds in 2018. There were some reports in the media on the possibility of the UAE purchasing Helina, Nag and Brahmos missiles from India.

India and UAE also agreed to cooperate in space as a part of their comprehensive strategic partnership. On the common threat of terror, UAE has expressed solidarity with India's position and on more than one occasion, it has strongly supported India in its fight against terror. Whether it was a terror attack on Uri army camp on September 18, 2016, at Pathankot Air Base on January 16, 2016, or on the CRPF convoy in Pulwama on February 14, 2019, it condemned the attacks strongly.

UAE and its pivotal role in the region

In addition to the strong bilateral ties, it is UAE's role and importance in the West Asian region which is of significance and makes UAE a key pillar of India's West Asia strategy. UAE is among the key economic power and political heavyweights in the region.



# Why India chose Rafale-M over F/A-18 Super Hornet

**Irrespective of the systemic procurement flaws, the naval Rafale procurement is a significant bonus for India's security imperatives in the Indo-Pacific.**

**By Abhijit Iyer-Mitra:**

A deal for 26 naval Rafales is reportedly going to be signed between India and France during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Paris. This has both good and bad aspects to it. The good is that it enhances commonality; the bad is that it shows the gaping holes that still continue to plague our procurement system.

The good

First up, the Navy needs to be thanked, for reinforcing interoperability with the Air Force. This has happened in the past where the Navy chose the MiG-29K precisely because of the spare parts and training commonality with Air Force MiG-29s. In terms of the impending deal, having a common weapon and electronics pool and the India-specific enhancements of the Rafale are all significant advantages for the Navy and represent significant cost savings. Moreover, the initial training and maintenance infrastructure acquired for the Air Force Rafales will also benefit the Navy and the taxpayer in driving down costs quite significantly. Essential to remember here is that maintenance over the life cycle of the aircraft costs twice as much as the procurement cost.

The most important operational elements of the commonality would be the India-specific enhancements that include a potent optical suite for the detection of stealth aircraft and nuclear delivery capability. These are particularly crucial when you measure what we are up against with the Chinese Navy. The unfortunate reality is that India right now can't match China's spending and the sheer number of aircraft carriers and seaborne aircraft the Chinese are able to wield. Chinese naval fighters are all Sukhoi 30 derivatives - heavier, better equipped, and more potent than the MiG-29 (though operating these heavier aircraft from the very short runway of an aircraft carrier might impose significant restrictions on heavier aircraft negating some of the advantages; while steam or electric catapults do away with the disadvantages



of short runways, the Chinese don't have these contraptions). Given this, it was necessary to settle for a quality solution. Obviously, a MiG on Sukhoi - a Russian-on-Russian engagement - has a 50-50 chance of success, but a vastly superior Western platform armed with longer-range missiles like the Meteor as well as the ability to detect any

weapons on them. This brings a significant new capability to the Navy: the ability to launch long-range air-launched, nuclear-tipped cruise missiles combined with the power projection capabilities inherent in an aircraft carrier that can take a floating airfield right into the Pacific Ocean.

We do, however, know that the

carriers as well as the deck space the Rafales take up (absent folding wings), the number of aircraft will be relatively low. The hope is the Rafales will compensate in quality and the ability to down enemy aircraft at greater distances what they lack in onboard numbers. Obviously, aircraft carriers are not stand-alone ships.

They operate in complex battle groups with other frigates, destroyers and submarines in a synergised whole. This is where India's BrahMos anti-ship missile (with a greater range and speed than any Chinese ship-borne missile) combined with the standoff ranges of the Rafale's Meteor air-to-air missile, superior electronics of the Rafale, and the sheer endurance and stealth of the



purported stealth aircraft through infrared emissions changes that equation in India's favour considerably. It is worth mentioning that while Russian-origin fighters pioneered optical detection to compensate for sub-optimal radar technology, western optical systems now outrange their Russian and Chinese counterparts in this by a huge margin.

The nuclear delivery enabled on all Indian Rafales is quite a significant enhancement. The worst-kept secret of the Air Force Rafales is their ability to deliver nuclear weapons - the French having given all the necessary clearances and modifications to integrate stand-off nuclear

Rafales will require significant re-designing of our follow-on carriers. Specifically, this has to do with the size of their aircraft elevators that transport fighters from the runway on deck to the hangars below deck. The current elevators are exactly 10 metres wide - not wide enough to accommodate the Rafale, whose wings cannot be folded, unlike say the MiG-29 or F/A 18 Super Hornet. This means the Rafales can only equip carriers that will be built and are not backwards compatible with older carriers unless significant re-engineering and retrofits are undertaken. More importantly, given the approximately 40,000-tonne cap on the displacement of our

Scorpene class submarines, become a potent weapon to choke off the Malacca straits and cause havoc in the South China Sea, despite significantly smaller numbers than the Chinese Navy. This begs the question: why not the F/A 18 Super Hornet? After all, it is more versatile, has folding wings, has a dedicated and powerful electronic warfare variant, and has a much broader array of weapons to choose from. Well, several reasons.

First is that its air-to-air missile, the AMRAAM, does not provide the kind of standoff kills that the Meteor-Rafale combo does. Second, there is no way that the Americans would allow the integration of any nuclear weapons

delivery system with the Super Hornet. Finally, having another fighter would have meant setting up a whole new training, maintenance and logistics supply chain, not to mention a long-drawn-out negotiation process further complicated by development costs of India specific modifications. Remember: there is no such thing as an exact fit - every fighter has its plusses and minuses. In this case, the minuses of the Super Hornet were greater.

The bad

While it is admirable that the Navy finally chose the Rafale over the Super Hornet in the interests of cost and commonality, we still need to ask ourselves why we had a parallel process in play which could have very easily resulted in the procurement of yet another fighter type, complicating our logistics. Indeed, the calibre of work share, technology and offsets negotiated during the Air Force Rafale deal could've been significantly improved by a bulk purchase and economies of scale. Indeed, is it wise to acquire fighters in batches of 36 and 26 when a solid investment in 180-200 (more than the French Air Force and Navy combined) could provide leverage for a near-complete technology transfer (except the 17 per cent US-sourced components in the Rafale)? This is a systemic issue that has to be addressed. To this day, we are not able to synchronise requirements, testing and competition and benefit from bulk purchasing. This has a lot more to do with a lack of inter-service coordination, but at the same time, the political leadership cannot escape blame. After all, the whole point of an elected executive is to synchronise and synthesise competing interests for the benefit of the taxpayer and the nation.

Irrespective of the systemic procurement flaws, the naval Rafale procurement is a significant bonus for India's security imperatives in the Indo-Pacific. The positives far outweigh the negatives. But, while the systemic flaws are being overcome, the system still needs fixing.



# 'Developmental' INDIA versus 'Developed' Bharat

By: Bhavdeep Kang

Will it be a 'developmental' INDIA versus a 'developed' Bharat in 2024? Having come up with a fanciful acronym for itself - 'INDIA', where the 'D' stands for 'developmental' - the Opposition has willy-nilly put nationalism and development at the heart of its agenda. It is for the alliance to explain how it can do better than the NDA on both these counts.

Will 'developmental' India be an upgrade of 'Viksit Bharat'? Bharat eagerly awaits clarity on what INDIA stands for - and so do the alliance members, some of whom thought the 'D' in INDIA stood for 'Democratic'. INDIA's confusion about its own name points to the diffuse nature of the alliance and its total lack of self-conception. 'Democratic' may actually have worked better for INDIA, as one of its main planks is 'save democracy'.

On the 'developmental' front, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the original 'Vikas Purush', took a dig at the Opposition when he said NDA stood for 'New India, Development, Aspiration'. No confusion there!

How far does INDIA represent India? Not very well. The



footprint of the so-called '26-party alliance' is much smaller than it looks. Five of the 26 parties belong to Tamil Nadu alone, four to the Left, three each to Kerala and Uttar Pradesh, and two each to Maharashtra and Bihar. Four of the parties are largely confined to a single state. That leaves the Congress as the sole representative of the alliance in the Northeast, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Andhra, Telangana, Karnataka, Goa and Puducherry.

In other words, the Congress will represent the alliance in 224 Lok Sabha seats, of which it

currently has only 15. Of the remaining states, where the alliance is represented by regional parties (with or without the Congress), its strength is not uniform. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it reigns supreme but in UP and Maharashtra - which together account for 128 seats - its presence is thin. The Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP represent only the rump of their respective parties in Maharashtra, while in UP, the vote share of 'Bharat' (NDA) in the 2019 general elections was double that of INDIA (SP + RLD + Congress).

So, geographically, the alliance is not very well represented. This is because the BJD (Odisha), BSP (UP), YSR

Congress and TDP (Andhra), TRS (Telangana) and JD(S) (Karnataka) - not to mention parties of the Northeast - are apparently not a part of INDIA. In that sense, it's more of an 'anti-BJP' than an 'Opposition' alliance.

Anyhow, the alliance finally has a name and now the hard work begins: first, drafting a common minimum programme (CMP) and talking points; second, arriving at seat-sharing arrangements in each state; and third, deciding on a face, or faces, for the campaign. As election analyst Prashant Kishor pointed out, "Electoral success is only possible when these parties have a programme which they take to the

public...even in 2019, all Opposition parties came together. How does it matter?" Let's consider the CMP and how it might be different from the NDA agenda. So far, all we have heard is the usual tropes: majoritarianism, intolerance (of free speech), and abuse of power. It's time to get down to brass tacks. Where does INDIA stand on economic reforms? We have seen sharp differences between alliance members on critical issues like labour reforms, agriculture and the Old Pension Scheme for government employees. None of these can possibly be ignored in a CMP. If the alliance comes to power, will it build on all that the NDA has done in terms of financial inclusion? What is in store for the UPI (recall that Congress leader P Chidambaram was not in favour), India Stack and IndiaChain? Will it continue the NDA's flagship programmes like Digital India, Make In India, the National Semiconductor Mission, Gati Shakti, Circular Economy and Swachh Bharat? How about welfare schemes like Ujjawala, Awas Yojana and Har Ghar Jal?

## Why Pakistan accuses Taliban of doing what it has been doing to India - abetting terrorism

By JYOTI MALHOTRA

Earlier this week in Pakistan, something strange happened. The Pakistan Army formally blamed its erstwhile friend and ally, the Afghan Taliban, for abetting terror attacks inside Pakistan by hosting terrorist sanctuaries, which it said was impacting the "security of Pakistan". Sounds familiar? Is the penny dropping in Rawalpindi, the headquarters of the Pakistani military establishment and its infamous intelligence services, the ISI? Are the chickens, to relocate an English proverb in a hot, subcontinental locale, coming home to roost? For decades, India has been accusing Pakistan of doing the exact same thing. Which is, controlling the terror tap by hosting terrorist



safe havens on its territory and infiltrating them into India - bleeding India "with a thousand cuts."

Much before the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which Pakistan has never acknowledged let alone apologized for, long before the 2001 Agra talks which broke down because of then Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf's

position on Kashmir, and even before the 1999 Kargil conflict, Pakistan has used terror as an instrument of state policy towards India.

Pakistan's refusal to shut down its safe havens for terrorists, its belief that it could turn the tap on and off for "good" and "bad" terrorists - the good ones, presumably, were those

targeting India, and the bad ones who turned the target inwards - is now coming to haunt it. It's cruel, perhaps, to quote the Bible here - you reap what you sow. And when you sow the whirlwind, you reap famine and floods and disaster every season. No one should wish that on anyone, leave alone 200 million people who live next door. It's not the people's fault, of course. They try their best, electing who they do. But the Pakistan military and ISI are so powerful that they will not just personally destroy you if you refuse to follow orders, but have perverted an entire nation for the last 75 years because they want to remain in charge. Just ask Nawaz Sharif, living in exile for the second time in his life - at least he's in balmy London this

time, not in godforsaken Attock jail to which he was sent after the 1999 coup by Musharraf. Certainly, Pakistan is nervous. On the one hand, the Pakistani economy is barely holding on for dear life with a \$3 billion tranche from the IMF, and on the other, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is demanding the application of Sharia law in territories bordering Afghanistan. Neglecting neighbourly duties. Back to the Pakistan army's hand-wringing this past week about the Taliban government in Kabul. At the 258th meeting of all the corps commanders, which was presided over by Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir, the detailed briefing on the security situation pointed a direct finger at the Taliban government's inability to shut down the TTP.





# Dear BJP, Your Nervousness Is Showing

By Ashutosh

Finally, the war has begun. The two armies are ready. One has 26 parties and the other has 38. One is called INDIA and the other is NDA. One led by a collective leadership and the other, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. INDIA claims it wants to reclaim lost democracy and constitutionalism and India.

The BJP, which leads the NDA, has launched a barrage of accusations against the opposition, painting them as corrupt, dynasts and opportunists. In the war of words, what is certain is that the battle for 2024 is no longer one-sided and that Modi can't claim a walkover as he had in the two previous elections.

There were several sceptics, even in the Left-liberal fold, who were not sure about opposition leaders ever coming together under the same umbrella, with big egos clashing, the difference of ideologies and political opportunism. But the smoothness with which they came together and created INDIA, the acronym representing a new political force to take Modi head-on, has surprised many. A few months ago, even leaders in the anti-Modi camp were unsure of any such alliance working out, given the political disparateness. There was a sense of hopelessness and despondency despite their common view that unless they joined forces, Modi and the BJP could not be defeated.

But now that myth has been shattered. Twenty-six parties have promised to fight together. The credit should be given to Prime Minister Modi. It wouldn't have come to pass if he had not created the 'new normal' in which

he breached the fundamentals of democracy, that the rule of law is for all and that central agencies are free from the clutches of political masters. The relentless targeting of opposition leaders by these agencies, led by bureaucrats who once swore by the Constitution but are now drunk on loyalty to a leader, has resulted in a situation in which opposition parties are left with no option but to fight together.

India has never witnessed such brazen misuse of agencies before. Today, among the Enforcement Directorate cases involving political leaders and parties, 95% are against opposition leaders and only 5% are against those who are either with the BJP or support the ruling party at the Centre. Opposition leaders are regularly raided, their properties are confiscated and attached by ED officials, and they are sent to jail, where they languish for months and years without any hope of bail.

This assault on their constitutionally granted "freedom" had them facing an existential crisis - either fight to survive or surrender to servitude. The onslaught is multifaceted. Not only central agencies but also Governors and Lieutenant Governors appointed by the Centre have made life hell for governments ruled by the opposition. The mainstream media has been discrediting them on a daily basis, portraying them as anti-India, corrupt and opportunistic. Every effort is made to choke them financially. The situation has reached a point that they are not allowed to even speak in parliament. If they speak, then their speech is either expunged or they are removed from parliament. Rahul Gandhi is an

example.

Against this backdrop, it would have been a big surprise if the opposition had not come together. The ruling dispensation had probably not imagined this would happen quite so smoothly, and so fast. The Prime Minister's two speeches, on a day the opposition had gathered to announce their togetherness, is proof that he is either rattled or has been caught off guard.

The Prime Minister is a good speaker. He never minces his words while attacking his opponents, but the kind of speech he gave, his choice of words to attack the opposition and his body language betrayed nervousness in the ruling camp. The BJP should know more than any other party that whenever the opposition has united, however fragmented or marginal, it has hurt the party in power. The examples are plenty in 1967, 1977 and 1989. This was the time when the Congress used to walk like a colossus in Indian politics. The opposition parties were too small to confront the Congress but collectively, they inflicted major damage.

One can argue that 2024 is different. But such arguments were also trotted out by the Congress in 1967, 1977 and 1989, and we all know how that ended. Today, defying perception, the opposition has emerged far stronger than ever before. Today, the opposition has governments in 11 states, which was never the case earlier.

It is also often said that the Congress is too weak to fight the BJP at the national level. Critics forget that on earlier occasions, there was no party in the opposition that could have claimed a national footprint and

governments in states. The BJP (Jana Sangh), the Left and socialists had a national vision but no national presence. The BJP, which is now on pole position, formed the first government on its own on 4 March 1990 in Rajasthan. It was led by Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. Today, the Congress has governments in four states, and in two it is a coalition partner. The party has won 12 crore votes nationally. The BJP, which is now in the government, had seven crore votes in 2009. Modi is too astute a politician not to know this political reality. So, his desperation is understandable. The cobbling of 37 parties overnight by the BJP bears testimony to my argument that Modi is aware of the danger of the BJP underestimating the opposition meet. He is the man who declared in parliament that he alone is enough to vanquish the collective might of opposition leaders. He knows that in politics, perception is very important. Hence, the effort to showcase that the BJP has the support of more political parties than the opposition. This time, the opposition doesn't seem to be intimidated by numbers. It seems to have done its homework better. The name given to the opposition front - INDIA - stands as a testament. It is no ordinary name. It tries to tackle every accusation the BJP has flung at them since 2014. The name is strategic, political and also ideological.

INDIA stands for Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance. First, let's look at the word INDIA. Can the BJP now abuse the word INDIA like it would have done with UPA? Can it say INDIA is anti-India or INDIA is pro-

Pakistan? It can't. It is an attempt to reclaim the word India, which the BJP under Modi has snatched from them. Modi, in the last few years, has claimed to be synonymous with India. He is India and any attack on him has been described as an attack on India. The opposition has tried to counter that strategy.

Two, the opposition has been dubbed anti-national ever so often. The BJP has become the harbinger of nationalism, and those who oppose the party are termed anti-national. So the "National" in INDIA serves as a reminder that they are also nationalistic, but not like the BJP or RSS - their nationalism is inclusive. That they do not discriminate on the basis of religion and caste. That their nationalism has a place for every citizen; and that Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and other minorities should not worry about their identities. They are at par with Hindus and will be treated as such, unlike the BJP claiming to take everyone along, but favouring Hindus over others. Three, Modi has also hijacked the word Development. He does not miss any opportunity to boast about India growing economically and claim that on his watch India became the fastest growing economy and fifth largest in size. To underline its development narrative, the BJP always talks about double engine ki sarkar (a government with a double engine). The opposition's use of the word Developmental is an answer to that claim, an attempt to reclaim the growth turf and tell the voter that it was the Congress that launched OG reforms to foster economic growth in India.





# Political Violence Dents Bengal's Image

By Shantanu Guha Ray

Last week, Bengal's largest vernacular daily Anandabazar Patrika said in a front-page report that some of its reporters were huddled under a table to avoid splinters of crude bombs while covering the Panchayat elections in the state. "We were shivering with fear, wondering if hoodlums using those bombs would throw a few through the windows and the bombs would explode inside the room where we were hiding. It was nightmarish," wrote one reporter.

Electoral violence, claim studies, has always been consistently high in Bengal. This time, at the centre of this violence, was an all-time high use of country-made

firearms and crude bombs.

The control of panchayats, or village councils, establishes political dominance at the local level and also helps the ruling party to control the rural economy.

Crude bombs were once used by Naxalites in the late 1960s and early 1970s during their pitched street battles with rival political parties and cops. The practice of making these bombs has continued for over six decades.

Once, smaller versions of these crude bombs were manufactured across the state with a licence from the state government. When the licences were cancelled, a whole new small-scale industry mushroomed in the hinterland. For years, these bombs have been

sold to members of political parties under the cover of darkness. It's a mini-industry worth crores. Interestingly, the industry grows whenever there is an election in Bengal. Occasionally, these bombs are smuggled to neighbouring Bangladesh and some other Indian states.

Bollywood director Anurag Kashyap, in his movie Gangs of Wasseypur, depicted the making of country-made bombs by criminals in Bihar, even from jails. Many black-and-white Bengali movies, like Aponjon directed by Tapan Sinha, had scenes of political activists singing Rabindrasangeet while tossing around crude bombs like cricket balls and then liberally using them against political rivals.

Cops in Kolkata told this reporter that these bombs are mostly used to create tensions in the neighbourhood; it works very well during elections. Voters avoid going to polling booths the moment they hear deafening blasts. Why risk injury, or worse? But this time in Bengal, these very bombs and their liberal use by political parties caused devastation across the state, where the ruling Trinamool Congress swept the Panchayat elections with a whopping majority. The high-voltage violence, rampant booth capturing, and illegal stamping of ballot papers exposed the horrific reality of the election process that left 53 dead despite the presence of central forces. This large-scale rigging

desecrated the sanctity of elections to 64,157 seats in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads in Bengal. What is alarming is that the central forces, which must work under the jurisdiction of the state police, were not allowed to guard booths. The bloodiest panchayat poll in Bengal in this century was under the CPI(M)'s rule in 2003 when 76 lives were lost. This time, Trinamool Congress cadres resorted to large-scale rigging by capturing booths, driving away polling agents of opposition parties, and stuffing ballot boxes with proxy votes, defiling the entire poll process. In many places, the presiding officers fled polling stations.

# Leftists, Liberals fuel Muslim Rage in France

By Ravi Shanker Kapoor

The massive violent protests in France after the death of a 17-year-old boy of Moroccan and Algerian descent should be seen as an example of Pavlovian conditioning. Morally supported by Leftists and liberals, Islamists and their thuggish cronies tried to set France afire, resulting in the worst riots for almost two decades. Assisted by the mainstream media, they have been able to magnify and distort a mishap - which was, at worst, a case of excessive but not unprovoked police action - into some version of the 1884-1906 Dreyfus affair. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army captain in the French Army, was charged with treason in December 1894 for allegedly selling military secrets to the Germans. A military court found him guilty in September 1899. It was found that the



charges against him were fabricated, so the French president pardoned him. In July 1906, a civilian court of appeals set aside the judgment. But the army remained unconvinced; it was only in 1995 that it publicly accepted his innocence. That was systemic racism. Nahel Merzouk suffered no such ignominy or discrimination, though he has

been presented as a martyr. The fact is that he was accused of juvenile delinquency in the past. While the police version has been disputed, what is beyond doubt is that Nahel, a minor, was dangerously driving a car. Worse, he ignored the warning issued to him by the cops. One of them later shot at him. That he succumbed to the bullet injury is unfortunate,

but this was clearly not a case of systemic racism. Delinquent behavior of any boy - white or black, French or African, Christian or Muslim - could have had a similar ending. But liberal politicians and intellectuals are so fond of the term systemic racism that they use all the time. By the way, it is only in the context of Western nations and societies. The implicit assumption is that there is no discrimination based on ethnicity, faith, gender, or sexual orientation in Muslim countries. Besides, if racism and bigotry are systemic in Western societies, why do so many Muslims (and also non-Muslims) want to migrate to Europe and the United States? Liberals and intellectuals ignore the reality that in no Muslim-majority country human rights and civil liberties are cherished as much as in Western countries. It is also a

well-known fact that in many Muslim countries discrimination is doctrinally justified and systemically and systematically enforced. For instance, the atrocities against Hindus and Christians in Pakistan. Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities in France and other Western countries enjoy not just greater freedom but also much better living standards than the people in the countries where they or their parents came from (In fact, for non-Sunni Muslims, Western countries are much safer than most Muslim nations). This is the reason that Muslims want to go to Western countries, often using illegal means. All manner of lies were spread by people about Nahel Merzouk's death. Everyone else is responsible for the death but the delinquent himself and his family.



# Afghan women protest against Taliban's beauty parlour ban

**Security officials shot into the air and used firehoses to disperse dozens of Afghan women protesting in Kabul Wednesday against an order by Taliban authorities to shut down beauty parlours, the latest curb to squeeze them out of public life.**

(News Agency)- Since seizing power in August 2021, the Taliban government has barred girls and women from high schools and universities, banned them from parks, funfairs and gyms, and ordered them to cover up in public. The order issued last month forces the closure of thousands of beauty parlours nationwide run by women -- often the only source of income for households -- and outlaws one of the few remaining opportunities for them to socialise away from home. "Don't take my bread and water," read a sign carried by one of the protesters on Butcher Street, which boasts a concentration of the capital's salons. Public protests are rare in Afghanistan -- and frequently dispersed by force -- but AFP saw around 50 women taking part in Wednesday's gathering, quickly attracting the attention of security personnel.

Protesters later shared videos and photos with journalists that showed authorities using a firehose to disperse them as shots could be heard in the background. "Today we arranged this protest to talk and negotiate," said a salon worker, whose name has not been published by AFP for security reasons. "But today, no one came to talk to us, to listen to us. They didn't pay any attention to us and after a while they dispersed us by aerial firing and water cannon." The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) condemned the protest breakup. "Reports of the forceful suppression of a peaceful protest by women against the ban on beauty salons - the latest denial of women's rights in #Afghanistan - are deeply concerning," it said in a tweet. Afghans have the right to

express views free from violence. De facto authorities must uphold this."

In late June the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice gave salons a month to close down, saying the grace period would allow them to use up stock. It said it made the order because extravagant sums spent on makeovers caused hardship for poor families, and that some treatments at the salons were un-Islamic. Too much make-up prevented women from proper ablutions for prayer, the ministry said, while eyelash extensions and hair weaving were also forbidden. A copy of the order seen by AFP said it was "based on verbal instruction from the supreme leader" Hibatullah Akhundzada. Beauty parlours mushroomed across Kabul and other Afghan cities in the 20 years that United States-led forces occupied the



country.

They were seen as a safe place to gather and socialise away from men and provided vital business opportunities for women.

A report to the UN's Human Rights Council last month by Richard Bennett, the special rapporteur for Afghanistan, said the plight of women and girls in the country "was among the worst in the world".

"Grave, systematic and institutionalized discrimination against women and girls is at the heart of Taliban ideology and rule, which also gives rise to concerns that they may be responsible for gender apartheid," Bennett said.

Akhundzada, who rarely appears in public and rules by decree from the Taliban's birthplace in Kandahar, said last month Afghan women were being saved from "traditional oppressions" by the adoption of Islamic governance and their status as "free and dignified human beings" restored. He said in a statement marking the Eid al-Adha holiday that steps had been taken to provide women with a "comfortable and prosperous life according to Islamic Sharia". Women have also mostly been barred from working for the UN or NGOs, and thousands have been sacked from government jobs or are being paid to stay at home.

## London's landmark building dotted with strip clubs, gay venues to turn into mosque



(News Agency)- A giant mosque is set to come up in the heart of London's entertainment quarter. The area is also known for its concentration of bars, nightclubs, gay venues and strip joints - all of which are considered sinful in Islam. The decision to build the mosque in such a location has sparked a row.

According to a report in The Mail, the three-storey mosque, which may be called 'Piccadilly Prayer Space', will be established inside the Trocadero, situated between

Piccadilly Circus and Soho.

The work is being undertaken by 56-year-old Asif Aziz, a Muslim billionaire and a property tycoon, popularly known as 'Mr West End'.

Though previous proposals for a 1,000-capacity mosque on the site were withdrawn in 2020, a planning application for a smaller development was approved at the end of May by Westminster Council.

According to the report, the mosque will fill the space left vacant when a Metro cinema

closed down in 2006 and will have a capacity of 390 worshippers. It is being claimed that the mosque could be opened within months. However, the decision to build the mosque has also sparked a debate, with critics questioning its "sleazy" location.

Nonetheless, Asif Aziz, originally from Malawi, remains steadfast in his plans and is spearheading the project through his charitable foundation, the Aziz Foundation.

**ABOUT THE TROCADERO**

The Trocadero, built in 1896, is a historic entertainment complex with a renowned baroque facade. It has undergone various transformations over the years, including being home to the UK's first 3D IMAX cinema in 1997.

However, despite attempts to boost visitor numbers through sponsorships from companies like Pepsi and Sega, the Trocadero faced challenges and eventually experienced a decline in popularity.

## IMF urges Pakistan to continue monetary policy tightening cycle

(News Agency)- Pakistan must continue its monetary tightening cycle, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a staff report on Tuesday, a week after the lender approved a new



bailout arrangement and less than two weeks before the country's central bank holds its next policy meeting. "The recent policy rate hike is welcome, but the tightening cycle should continue if needed to reduce inflation and facilitate external rebalancing," the staff report said. Pakistan's central bank held an emergency meeting last month, a day after the country revised its budget for

the fiscal year, in line with the demands of the IMF to secure a stalled tranche from the now-expired Extended Fund Facility (EFF). Instead, Pakistan was able to get a \$3 billion lifeline in the form of a standby arrangement. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has raised its key policy rate by 12.25 percentage points since April 2022, mainly to curb soaring inflation. The next monetary policy meeting is scheduled for July 31. The staff report added that in the short term, the forward-looking real policy rate should return to positive territory to re-anchor

expectations and achieve the SBP's inflation objective over the medium term. In the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) that resulted from its talks with the IMF, Pakistan said it stands ready to consider further action at the next monetary policy committee meeting and subsequent ones until inflation and inflation expectations are on a clear downward path.



# Lankan Tamil leaders write to PM Modi before Wickremesinghe's India visit

**The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying the Sri Lankan government has "failed to fulfil its commitments" on the devolution of powers.**

(News Agency)- Sri Lanka's Tamil National Alliance (TNA) wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday urging him to "prevail" upon Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe to fulfill the government's commitment to India regarding devolution of powers. This comes ahead of Wickremesinghe's first official visit to India from July 20 to 21. In the letter, R Sampanthan, the head of the TNA, said that despite repeated assurances, the Sri Lankan government has "not only failed to fulfil its commitments", but also tried to "abort" the implementation of the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan by "legislative manipulations". The 13th Amendment was passed in 1987 and mandates that a measure of power be devolved to the

provincial councils established to govern the island's nine provinces. The amendment was the outcome of the Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987, signed by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President JR Jayawardene. "This has led to a crisis of confidence in regard to the willingness on the part of the Sri Lankan state in honouring its obligations under the Indo-Lanka Accord in the resolution of the National Question," wrote the leader of Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), Sampanthan. ITAK is the largest constituent party of the TNA. Sampanthan further highlighted the TNA's belief in the inseparable connection between the safety, security, identity, and existence of the Tamil people and the national security of India,

particularly in the southern neighborhood. He urged PM Modi to use his influence in persuading President Wickremesinghe to fulfill the commitments made to India without any further delay. According to reports, a separate letter, signed by religious leaders, educationists, and professionals from Sri Lanka's Tamil-majority north and east, was also sent to PM Modi, urging him to encourage President Wickremesinghe to promptly call for provincial council elections. In response to these letters, Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe on Tuesday said the 13th amendment can be fully enforced only if all the party leaders representing the Parliament agree to a full separation of powers.



## SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT TO VISIT INDIA

Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe will undertake an official visit to India on July 20-21 at the invitation of PM Modi, the foreign ministry said in a statement on Tuesday. During the visit, President Wickremesinghe would meet President Droupadi Murmu and hold bilateral discussions with

PM Modi and other Indian dignitaries on a range of issues of mutual interest, the ministry said.

Ranil met Tamil political party leaders and representatives today ahead of his visit to India. The visit takes place as both countries celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year.

# Cash-strapped Pakistan gets another USD 600 million loan from China



(News Agency)- Amid its financial crisis, Pakistan secured a rollover of an extra \$600 million loan from its longstanding ally China, aimed at bolstering the country's foreign exchange reserves and supporting an IMF agreement. Cash-strapped Pakistan has received a rollover of an additional USD 600 million loan from its all-weather ally China to help shore up the country's foreign exchange reserves on the back of an IMF deal, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Tuesday. It is in addition to the over USD 5

billion in loans that Beijing has rolled over for Pakistan in the last three months, helping the debt-ridden nation avert a default as negotiations to secure the IMF bailout dragged on, the Dawn newspaper reported. Pakistan secured a last-gasp USD 3 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund on June 30, which later disbursed an initial upfront instalment of about USD 1.2 billion. Sharif said the Exim Bank of China has provided the rollover, increasing the country's foreign exchange reserves by USD 600 million.

"Our foreign exchange reserves are increasing but we want to do it not through loans but generating our income," he said at an event here. Apart from the IMF bailout and the Chinese loan, a USD 2 billion of financial support from Saudi Arabia and USD 1 billion from the UAE after the IMF pact has helped steady Pakistan's economy, the report said, quoting Finance Minister Ishaq Dar. The State Bank of Pakistan said the current account recorded a surplus of USD 334 million in June.

# On China, Republicans slam Biden administration for "appeasement"

(News Agency)- Republican leaders in the United States (US) House of Representatives have slammed the Joe Biden administration for pursuing "fruitless engagement" with China; participating in talks with Beijing on terms, timelines and conditions set by China; displaying weakness and following a policy of "appeasement"; and delaying and slowing down on competitive actions that the US must pursue in its strategic competition with China. The administration has rejected the charge and claimed that it has taken "unprecedented" steps to compete with China. It has also claimed that the engagement with Beijing has happened from a position of strength rather than weakness and on terms set by the US, and Washington DC is not "pulling any punches" in the strategic competition with China. In a hearing on Capitol Hill on Tuesday, during a meeting convened by subcommittee on Indo-Pacific affairs of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) to discuss the administration's budgetary

request for the region for this year, HFAC chair Michael McCaul and subcommittee chair Kim Young - both Republicans - grilled US assistant Secretary of State for East Asian affairs Daniel Kritenbrink on the administration's China policy. In recent months, the US, in pursuit of its policy of maintaining open channels of communication, has sought to deepen dialogue with China. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, treasury secretary Janet Yellen, and climate envoy John Kerry have travelled to Beijing while national security advisor Jake Sullivan met senior Chinese Communist Party foreign policy figure Wang Yi in Vienna. Biden is expected to speak to China's president Xi Jinping in the coming months. McCaul, the senior most Republican foreign policy figure in the House, said that he was not against diplomacy but effective diplomacy should "shape the adversary, not the other way round". "Recent diplomacy has demonstrated weakness. Weakness invites aggression and emboldens dictators such as Xi."



# Texas trooper's accounts of bloodied migrants on US-Mexico border draws criticism

**In one account, Texas Trooper Nicholas Wingate told a supervisor that upon encountering a group of 120 migrants on June 25 - including young children and mothers nursing babies - in Maverick County, a rural Texas border county, he and another trooper were ordered to "push the people back into the water to go to Mexico."**

(News Agency)-Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's escalating measures to stop migrants along the US border with Mexico came under a burst of new criticism Tuesday after a state trooper said migrants were left bloodied from razor-wire barriers and that orders were given to deny people water in sweltering heat. In one account, Texas Trooper Nicholas Wingate told a supervisor that upon encountering a group of 120 migrants on June 25 - including young children and mothers nursing babies - in Maverick County, a rural Texas border county, he and another trooper were ordered to "push the people back into the water to go to Mexico."

The trooper described the actions in an email dated July 3 as inhumane. Travis Considine, a spokesperson for the Texas Department of Safety, said the accounts provided by the trooper were under internal investigation. He said the department has no directive or policy that instructs troopers to withhold water from migrants or push them back into the river.

The emails, first obtained by Hearst Newspapers, thrust Texas' sprawling border security mission back under scrutiny at a time when Abbott is expanding the mission by putting a new



floating barrier on the Rio Grande. The Republican has authorized more than \$4 billion in spending on the mission, known as Operation Lone Star, which has also included busing thousands of migrants to Democratic-led cities and arresting migrants on trespassing charges.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters Tuesday that the trooper's account, if true, was "abhorrent" and "dangerous." Democrats in the Texas Capitol said they planned to investigate.

"We are talking about the bedrock values of who we are as a country and the human indecency that we are seeing," Jean-Pierre said. "If this is true, it is just completely, completely wrong."

A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security condemned the reported actions in a statement but did not say whether the agency was planning to investigate the allegations.

Republican Rep.

Tony Gonzales, whose sprawling south Texas congressional district includes the border, tweeted, "Border security should not equal a lack of humanity." In one instance, according to Wingate, a 4-year-old girl attempting to cross through razor wire was "pressed back" by Texas National Guard soldiers in accordance with orders and that the child later fainted from the heat. Temperatures in Maverick County this summer have soared into the triple-digits.

Maverick County Sheriff Tom Schmerber, who has supported the state deploying workers to the border, said he was taken aback by the trooper's account.

"I don't agree with whatever they were

told to do," Schmerber said. "That's not something that's part of our mission. You know, I know that we're here to protect and serve no matter who it is, you know, either immigrants or U.S. citizens. But we're not going to do any harm to anybody."

Wingate did not immediately return an email message seeking comment Tuesday. The Texas Military Department also did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

As concern and outrage over the trooper's account mounted Tuesday, Abbott's office issued a statement that said no orders have been given "that would compromise the lives of those attempting to cross the border illegally." The statement did not address Wingate's specific accounts and defended the border mission overall.

The statement said the razor wire "snags clothing" but did not address the accounts of migrants being cut and bloodied by the barrier.

"The absence of these tools and strategies-including concertina wire that snags clothing-encourages migrants to make potentially life-threatening and illegal crossings.

# US allows Iraq to pay Iran for electricity to avoid summer power cuts

**The United States has granted Iraq a national security waiver, allowing them to pay Iran for electricity through non-Iraqi banks in order to prevent power cuts during the summer.**

humanitarian goods.

Tehran has in the past pushed Baghdad to secure US permission to release such funds by cutting Iranian natural gas exports to Iraq, limiting Iraq's ability to generate power and forcing deeply unpopular electricity cuts.

The latest waiver was expanded to permit payments to banks outside Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government, apparently in the hopes that this might transfer some of the pressure that Iran has exerted on Baghdad to other countries. "We have to help the Iraqis with this perennial pressure from the Iranians to access the money," said the US official. "The Iraqis have requested, and now we have agreed, to expand the waiver," said the U.S. official,

saying this might help ensure better compliance with the US requirement that any disbursements be for humanitarian purposes.

"It also helps the Iraqis, at least somewhat, to have an argument to make (to Iran) that they are not in control of the money that they have paid (into non-Iraqi accounts)," he added.

It is not clear, however, whether Iran might ease up on Iraq as a result. Tehran could decide it has greater leverage over Iraq than over other nations and continue to exert pressure.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Iran is under extensive U.S. economic sanctions reimposed in 2018 after then-

U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned the nuclear deal that Tehran struck with major powers Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States in 2015.

Trump believed his policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran would force it to accept more stringent restrictions to its nuclear program, which the United States, European powers and Israel fear may be designed to obtain a nuclear weapon.

Iran has long denied such ambitions. As a result of Trump's withdrawal from the deal and U.S. President Joe Biden's failure to revive it, Iran could make the fissile material for one bomb in 12 days or so, according to U.S. estimates, down from a year when the accord was in force.



(News Agency)-The United States on Tuesday moved to let Iraq pay Iran for electricity via non-Iraqi banks, a US official said, a step Washington hopes may keep Tehran from forcing unpopular power cuts during the sweltering Iraqi summer.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed a 120-day national security waiver allowing Iraq - heavily dependent on

Iranian electricity - to deposit such payments into non-Iraqi banks in third countries instead of into restricted accounts in Iraq, said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Monies put into the non-Iraqi accounts, like those deposited into Iraqi banks, will also be restricted, still requiring U.S. permission for Iran to get access to them and only for spending on



# DeSantis defends Trump, says he shouldn't be charged in 2020 election probe

**Florida Governor Ron DeSantis defends former President Donald Trump against politically motivated legal action to hold him accountable for attempting to overturn the 2020 election, stating that it would be detrimental to the country.**

(News Agency)-Florida Governor Ron DeSantis came to the defense of former President Donald Trump on Tuesday, assailing as politically motivated attempts to hold his rival for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination legally accountable for trying to overturn the 2020 election.

"I hope he doesn't get charged," DeSantis told CNN in one of his first sit-down interviews with a mainstream national news outlet since becoming a candidate in late May. "I don't think it'll be good for the country."

DeSantis, who has largely favored speaking to friendly con-



servative outlets, appeared on CNN the same day Trump said

he had been told he was a target in a grand jury probe centered on his efforts to stay in power after losing the election to President Joe Biden. "We've gone down the road in this country of trying to criminalize differences in politics," DeSantis said.

The rare interview with CNN sug-

gested a shift in tactics to catch Trump, who leads DeSantis in the race for the Republican nomination in opinion polls by double-digit percentage points. While DeSantis has proven to be a strong fundraiser, his campaign recently laid off several staffers in an attempt to slow its rate of spending. In the interview, DeSantis said his campaign is "making progress" and remains focused on building a strong on-the-ground organization in next year's early nominating states, including Iowa and South Carolina.

"This is a state-by-state process," he said.

DeSantis, 44, became the national face of resistance to COVID-19 mask and vaccine mandates. He has taken the lead on hot-button cultural issues such as the teaching of race relations and gender identity in public schools.

When Walt Disney Co, one of Florida's biggest employers, opposed a new state law limiting discussion of LGBTQ issues in schools, DeSantis moved to strip the company of its self-governing status. When an elected Democratic state attorney said he would not prosecute anyone over abortion or transgender care, DeSantis removed him.

## Wildfires burn homes near Greek capital as residents flee, firefighting on

**Uncontrolled wildfires swept through towns near the Greek capital of Athens as hundreds of residents fled their homes, which were burnt. Firefighting operations were on throughout the night to douse the fire from spreading further.**

Two wildfires swept uncontrolled through forestland and towns northwest of Athens for a second day on Tuesday (local time), forcing more residents to flee their homes as authorities fought to stop the flames from reaching an area with oil refineries.

One of the fire fronts stretched over eight kilometres, according to witnesses and officials, burning homes and cars around the area of Mandra, west of the capital, which was blanketed by dense smoke.

"We are living a nightmare," Mandra mayor Christos Stathis told Open TV. "Houses and properties are on fire."

In 2017, Mandra, a largely industrial area, was hit by flash floods that killed 24 people.

Traffic was suspended for hours on two national highways connecting Athens with the cities of Elefsina and Corinth, where oil refineries operate. Late on Tuesday, the flames were headed toward the seaside town of Nea Peramos.

Homes and a small shipyard in the town of Neos Pontos had

been destroyed. Earlier, a thick column of smoke rose into the sky after an explosion, a Reuters witness said.

So far, at least seven districts have been evacuated and police assisted the evacuation of more than 300 people, a police official told Reuters.

"We put all our effort into making this. We built this and now it's all gone," said Andreas Theodosiadis, a resident of Mandra, standing around debris and charred remains of cars.

The blaze, which broke out on

Monday in the region of Dervenochoria, about 30 kilometres north of Athens, spread fast as it was fanned by erratic winds and reached Mandra on Tuesday, forcing people to flee and burning houses.

As of 2036 GMT, the flames were raging unchecked. Five coast guard vessels and private boats were on standby off Elefsina, ready to assist an emergency evacuation. "A difficult day dawned," fire brigade spokesman Vassilis Varthakogiannis told a



briefing on Tuesday night, urging people to follow guidance issued by authorities and help prevent new fires from breaking out.

Efforts to extinguish the fire continued through the night with more than 250 firefighters backed by volunteers and 75 fire engines. Another fire, in the area of Corinth, was also burning uncontrolled. At

least 30 houses were severely damaged by that fire, which broke out on Monday, the deputy governor of the Corinth region said. Greece has called for help from its European Union partners. Italy and France have sent four Canadair water bomber aircraft and foreign firefighters were also helping fight the blazes.

## Court rules against Uber in major win for California workers

(News Agency)-Uber Technologies Inc must face a California lawsuit claiming it should have covered UberEats drivers' work-related expenses, the state's top court said on Monday, in what could be a major blow to companies in the largest US state and a win for labour advocates. The California Supreme Court in a unanimous ruling said UberEats driver Erik Adolph did not give up his right under state law to sue on behalf of a large group of workers even though he signed an agreement to bring his own work-related legal claims in private

arbitration. Adolph sued Uber in 2019, claiming the company misclassified UberEats drivers as independent contractors rather than employees, who must be reimbursed for work expenses under California law. A unique California law called the Private Attorney General Act, or PAGA, allows workers to sue for employment law violations on behalf of the state and keep one-quarter of any money they win. The rest goes to the state to fund an agency that enforces labor laws. The California Supreme Court said nothing in that law bars workers

from pursuing claims on their own behalf in arbitration while separately litigating large-scale claims in court. The decision likely undermines the significance of a 2022 U.S. Supreme Court ruling involving Viking River Cruises that said companies could force individual PAGA claims into arbitration, and could mean that California employers will face more large-scale lawsuits. Theane Evangelis, a lawyer for Uber, said in a statement that Monday's ruling conflicts with the Viking River decision and violates a federal law that requires enforcing valid arbitration agreements.



# Russia targets Ukraine port, calls it payback for strike on key bridge to Crimea

**Russia has targeted the Black Sea port of Odesa in Ukraine in payback for the strike on a key bridge to Crimea.**

(News Agency)-Ukraine said its forces shot down Russian drones and cruise missiles targeting the Black Sea port of Odesa before dawn Tuesday in what Moscow called "retribution" for an attack that damaged a crucial bridge to the Crimean Peninsula.

The Russians first sought to wear down Ukraine's air defenses by firing 25 exploding drones and then targeted Odesa with six Kalibr cruise missiles, the Ukrainian military's Southern Command said.

All six missiles and the drones were shot down by air defenses in the Odesa region and other areas in the south, officials said, though their debris and shock waves damaged some port facilities and a few residential buildings and injured an elderly man at his home.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its "strike of retribution" was carried out with sea launched precision weapons on Ukrainian military facilities near Odesa and Mykolaiv, a coastal city about 50 kilometers (30 miles) to the northeast. It destroyed facilities preparing "terror attacks" against Russia involving maritime drones, including a facility at a



shipyard that was producing them, the ministry said. It added that it also struck Ukrainian fuel depots near the two cities. It was not possible to verify the conflicting claims by both countries.

President Vladimir Putin blamed Ukraine on Monday for striking the Kerch Bridge, which links Russia with Crimea and was attacked in October 2022 and needed months of repairs. The bridge is a key supply route for the peninsula, which was illegally annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Ukrainian officials stopped short of directly taking responsibility, as they have done in similar strikes before, but Ukraine's top security agency appeared tacitly to admit to a role.

Satellite images taken Monday by Maxar Technologies showed serious damage to both eastbound and westbound lanes of the bridge across the

Kerch Strait on the part nearest to the Russian mainland, with at least one section collapsed. The railroad bridge that runs parallel to the highway appeared undamaged.

The Russian military has sporadically hit Odesa and the neighboring region throughout the war, but Tuesday's barrage was one of the biggest attacks on the area.

Ukrainian forces have been targeting Crimea with drones and other attacks. Kyiv has vowed to reclaim it from Russian control, arguing that the peninsula plays a key role in sustaining the Russian invasion and is a legitimate target.

The onslaught also came a day after Russia broke off a deal that had allowed Ukraine to ship vital grain supplies from Odesa during the war. Moscow said the decision was in the works long before the bridge attack.

Even so, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov alleged, without offering evidence, that the specific shipping lanes and routes used for the grain transport under the deal were abused by Ukraine. Our military has repeatedly said that Ukraine has used these grain corridors for military purposes," Peskov told reporters.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said Ukraine will continue implementing the grain deal. Peskov warned that such action was risky because the region lies next to an area where there is fighting.

"If they try to do something without Russia, these risks must be taken into account," Peskov told reporters.

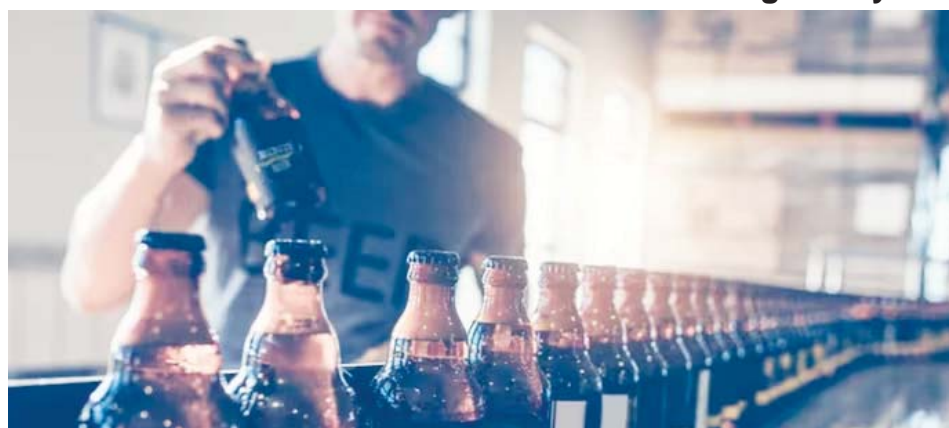
Zelenskyy said grain exports by sea and port security topped the agenda of his meeting Tuesday with senior military commanders and top government officials, adding that he received reports on logistics and protection of the coastal regions. Andriy Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential office, said Russia is endangering the lives of millions of people around the world who need Ukrainian grain exports. Hunger is a growing threat in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and high food prices have pushed more people into poverty. "The world must realize that the goal of the Russian Federation is hunger and killing people," Yermak said. "They need waves of refugees. They want to weaken the West with this."

## Beer store to pay \$15 million to family of teen killed in drunken boat crash

(News Agency)-The family of a teen killed in a boat crash, which prosecutors say began the financial downfall of double murderer Alex Murdaugh, has reached a \$15 million deal to settle a lawsuit against a convenience store chain that sold Murdaugh's son alcohol while underage.

Sunday's deal came after a judge refused to allow the Parker's Kitchen chain to be separated from Murdaugh in a wrongful death trial next month in Hampton County, South Carolina, where Murdaugh was once a powerful and well-known attorney. Murdaugh is serving a life sentence without parole over the 2021 killing of his wife and the son involved in the drunken boat crash. Under South Carolina law, even if the jury found Parker's Kitchen was only 1% responsible, since Murdaugh is now nearly broke, the chain with its deeper pockets would likely have to pay almost the entire settlement. The family's attorney, Mark Tinsley, told media outlets the \$15 million settlement that will

**The family of a teen killed in a drunken boat crash has settled a 15 million dollar lawsuit against a convenience store chain that sold alcohol to the underaged boy.**



be paid by the convenience store chain's insurance was a large enough amount that Mallory Beach's family felt would show the stores have to take alcohol laws seriously.

The Parker's Kitchen clerk did not stop Paul Murdaugh, then 19, from using his older brother's ID to buy beer, according

to an investigation into the crash. Paul Murdaugh was facing a charge of boating under the influence causing death when he was killed at the family's home.

The settlement doesn't require Parker's Kitchen to admit responsibility in the case. A lawyer for the stores said owner Greg Parker felt like he had no choice

but to settle because Alex Murdaugh and the chain would be tried together in the wrongful death suit.

On Friday, a judge refused to separate Parker's Kitchen from Murdaugh and declined to move the case out of Hampton County.

"The unfairness of that caused Parker's insurance carriers to resolve these suits to avoid paying the likely award intended to punish Alex Murdaugh," attorney P.K. Shere said in a statement, which also said he was disappointed the Beach family's attorney revealed details of the settlement before it could be approved by a judge. Beach, 19, was killed and three other teens in the boat were hurt in February 2019 after Paul Murdaugh steered the boat into a bridge piling, authorities said. Her family has already settled lawsuits with another family who held an oyster roast the group was attending, a bar that served Paul Murdaugh liquor just before the crash, and Murdaugh's older brother Buster.



# Why is Indian Army keeping the martial race theory alive? The British left 76 years ago

Even after 75 years of Independence, India still subscribes to the martial race theory in the manning of some of its combat and combat support segments of the Army. Nepal's repeated blocking of recruitment of Gorkhas under the Agnipath scheme could have been used by India to dissociate itself from this British belief of separating races based on their physical and behavioural characteristics as well as climatic conditions. But India continues to see substance in the theory birthed by the First War of Independence in 1857. The theory was ignited by the Peel Commission Report that contained the findings of the enquiry into the causes of the revolt. According to the report, British authorities lacked knowledge about various Indian ethnic groups and their martial capabilities. The report stated that the revolt began within the Bengal Army filled with high-caste Brahmins, whom the British regarded as scheming and dishonest, while groups like the Sikhs, Marathas, Rajputs, and Gorkhas had upheld their loyalty due to their understanding of honour and duty.

These loyal groups were labelled as India's martial races.

Charles Darwin's theory on species origin, which emphasised race differences, served to back up the belief that characteristics couldn't be applied across different races. The mindset of Britishers in India endorsed this theory. Commonalities of the human race that had support from ideals of Christianity were undermined by the emphasis on the differentiation between races. The result was the view of superior and inferior races.

By the Late Victorian times, everything native was considered inferior to British technology, law, religion, and philosophy. This resulted in the reorganisation of the British Indian Army on the basis of martial race theory.

Keeping the distinction alive

Infantry, cavalry artillery, and most other units consisted of 'class' companies recruited according to government rules. Units could be 'pure' or of mixed classes who were then separated within it. Therefore, a unit could have Sikhs as well as Dogras or Punjabi Mussalman, but these

different classes served in their own companies within the unit and separated according to different religions, ethnicities, and regions.

At the time of Independence, General KM Cariappa (later Field Marshal) initiated the first experimental move towards changing such a structural concept. He sought the introduction of mixed, all-class composition down to the lowest sub-unit like the section. He raised a new infantry regiment, the Brigade of the Guards, by selecting four of the oldest infantry battalions and reorganising them by mixing classes at all levels. It was an experiment to test whether such mixing of classes would promote national integration and combat effectiveness.

Independent India's military history is witness to the success of the experiment not only from the achievements of the Brigade of the Guards but also many other combat and combat support units that notably were also formed with all-India class composition. The experiment debunked the martial race theory and illustrated that differences in ethnicity,

caste, religious, and regional backgrounds were not the determinants of fighting capabilities of soldiers. It also proved conducive to national integration.

General Cariappa's moves to dispense with ethnicity and class differences did not have much long-term impact on changing the composition of the old regiments of the Indian Army. The issue was again at the forefront in 1984, when some Sikh units mutinied in the aftermath of Operation Blue Star. General Krishnaswami Sundarji ordered a study, which recommended an experimentation process followed by a 30-year implementation stage. The experiment was declared as having failed. However, several new units did come up based on an all-India class composition, but it left untouched most of the old regiments of the infantry, armoured corps, and artillery. The traditionalists triumphed and continue to resist change. So, even today, a newly raised Punjab unit, for example, would be composed and organised on class basis.

## Manipur Horror Mob Paraded 2 Women Naked, Based on Fake News

The shocking video which surfaced on Wednesday showing two tribal women from Kuki-Zo community being paraded naked by a mob, was learnt to be triggered by a piece of fake news.

The video was doing the rounds on the eve of a planned protest march announced by the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) on Thursday to highlight their plight. The Manipur Police arrested one of the main accused who was seen in the May 4 video of two tribal women being paraded naked and molested by a mob at a village in Senapati district, officials said. They said several police teams were formed immediately after the video of the incident surfaced. How did fake news trigger the Manipur attack? A day before the attack, violence erupted in Manipur over the Meiteis' demand for Scheduled Tribes (ST) status. The two women were

part of a small group that had fled for safety on the margins of hills-valley on May 4, when the ethnic strike escalated dramatically.

According to a report in The Print, the sexual violence shown in the video took place after fake news about a Meitei woman's rape and murder was circulated just after the violence began. It "unleashed a new, deadly cycle of reprisal violence on Kuki tribal women allegedly by Meitei mobs", says the report. The fake news that was circulated included a picture of a woman's dead body wrapped in plastic claiming that it shows the body of a woman from the Meitei community who was sexually assaulted and killed by people from the Kuki tribe in the ongoing Manipur violence. BOOM, a fact-checking website found that the photo is of an old honour killing incident from

Delhi, Aayushi Chaudhary who was murdered by her parents and her body later discarded in a red trolley bag near Yamuna Expressway in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. However, by the time the fake news was busted, clashes had already erupted in the valley between Kukis and Meiteis. The inebriated men dragged a Kuki woman and a teenager to a paddy field in Kangpokpi district on 4 May and raped them. As their ordeal was on, the men screamed, "We will do to you what your men did to our women," -- in an act of retribution, ThePrint reported on July 12. "It was all because of a fake news. The men were saying 'this is revenge for the Churachandpur case'," said the woman to ThePrint. Within 48 hours of the clashes breaking out in Manipur and the false claim spreading on social media, the police busted the fake news. On 5 May, then-Director

General of Police P Doungel was quick to clarify that no rape of Meitei women took place in Churachandpur. "The father of the purported nursing student also gave a statement to Impact TV, that his daughter was unharmed. But by then, the fake news had unleashed a deadly cycle of violence on Kuki tribal women allegedly by the mob," fact-checker Mohammed Zubair said on Twitter. More than 70 days after the incident and after violence first erupted in Manipur, Prime Minister Narendra Modi broke silence on the matter. "Today, when I am standing by this temple of democracy my heart is full of pain and anger," he told reporters in his remarks at Parliament complex before the start of Monsoon session and amid criticism by opposition parties for not speaking on the ethnic violence in the BJP-ruled north east state.

## Harmanpreet Singh and Kulbir Kaur of Virginia Charged with Committing Forced Labor and Alien Harboring for Multiple Years

A federal grand jury in Richmond, Virginia, returned a seven-count indictment today charging a Virginia couple with forced labor, conspiracy to commit forced labor, alien harboring for financial gain and document servitude along with fraud-related charges – conspiracy to commit bankruptcy fraud and fraudulent transfers in contemplation of bankruptcy – in connection with their operation of a gas station and convenience store in North Chesterfield, Virginia.

According to the court documents, between March 2018 and May 2021, Harmanpreet Singh, 30, and Kulbir Kaur, 42, allegedly forced the victim to provide labor and services at Singh's store, including working as the cashier, preparing food, cleaning and managing store records. The indictment alleges that the defendants used various coercive means, including confiscating the victim's immigration documents and

subjecting the victim to physical abuse, threats of force and other serious harm and, at times, degrading living conditions, to compel him to work long hours for minimal pay. The indictment further alleges that the defendants harbored the victim after his visa expired for financial gain and committed bankruptcy-related fraud offenses.

The charge of forced labor carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, up to five years of supervised release, a fine of up to \$250,000 and mandatory restitution. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, U.S. Attorney Jessica D. Aber for the Eastern District of Virginia and Special Agent in Charge Stanley M. Meador of the FBI's Richmond Field Office made the

announcement.

The FBI Richmond Field Office investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Avi Panth for the Eastern District of Virginia and Trial Attorney Matthew Thiman of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit are prosecuting the case.

Anyone who has information about human trafficking should report that information to the National Human Trafficking Hotline toll-free at 1-888-373-7888, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information about human trafficking, please visit [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org). Information on the Department of Justice's efforts to combat human trafficking can be found at [www.justice.gov/humantrafficking](http://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking).

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.



# High temperatures to heavy rain: China battles heat as South Korea tackles flood

80C (176 Fahrenheit) while the death toll from torrential rains in South Korea hit 44 on Wednesday, the latest extreme weather sparking havoc and curiosity around the world.

Wildfires burned for a third day west of the Greek capital Athens, with air water bombers resuming operations at first light and firefighters working throughout the night to keep flames away from a complex of coastal refineries.

In a stifling Beijing, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry began the third day of talks with Chinese officials, expressing hope that cooperation to combat global warming could redefine troubled ties between the two superpowers.

A global pattern of heat waves that have scorched parts of Europe, Asia and the United States this week have thrown that challenge into sharp relief. The World Meteorological Organization warned on Tuesday of increased risk of deaths linked to excessively high temperatures. Meanwhile Hawaii's Big Island was bracing for the impact of Tropical Storm Calvin, expected to bring as much as 8 inches (20.3 cm) of rain and strong wind gusts, the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

In South Korea, deluges of rain have pummelled central and southern regions since last week. Fourteen deaths occurred in an underpass in the central city of Cheongju, where more than a dozen vehicles were swamped on Saturday when a river levee collapsed. In the southeastern province of North Gyeongsang, 22 people died, many from landslides and swirling torrents.

This year's casualties have rekindled questions over South Korea's efforts to prevent and respond to flood damage, less than one year after the heaviest downpours in 115 years pounded Seoul. President Yoon Suk Yeol has said the situation was made worse because of lax management of vulnerable areas and failures to follow rules, and designated 13 flood-hit areas as special disaster zones on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo called for faster repair efforts to head off additional damage, warning of more heavy rainfalls predicted in the weekend.

"Taking extreme weather events caused by climate change as part of our daily lives, we will create institutional measures and systems accordingly," Han told an intra-agency meeting on flood responses.

## CURIOUS TOURISTS

In China's western Xinjiang province, tourists armed with broad-brimmed hats and umbrellas braved scorching temperatures to take selfies by a giant



thermometer that displayed a real-time surface temperature of 80C (176 Fahrenheit), state television showed. Each summer, curious tourists flock to the Flaming Mountains on the northern rim of Xinjiang's Turpan Depression to admire not just their corrugated slopes of brown-red sandstone but also to take in the super-charged heat emanating from the ground.

In recent days, temperatures in Xinjiang and other parts of Asia, as well as Europe and the United States have shattered records.

On Sunday, a remote township in the Turpan Depression registered a

maximum air temperature of 52.2C, smashing China's national record of 50.3C set in 2015, also in the basin.

On that day, the oasis city of Turpan west of the Flaming Mountains saw the highest air temperatures at 31 local weather stations exceed 45C, with the maximum at five of them breaking above 50C, according to state media on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Beijing logged its 27th day of temperatures of more than 35C, setting a new local record for the most number of high-temperature days in a year. The Chinese capital's previous record was 26 days, set in 2000.

These unprecedented temperatures have added new urgency for nations around the globe to tackle climate change that scientists say will make heat waves more frequent, severe and lethal.

In contrast to the extreme heat, heavy rains, thunderstorms, gales and hail are expected to lash other parts of China over the next 18 hours, according to the country's National Meteorological Centre. With the world's two biggest economies at odds over issues ranging from trade to Taiwan, Kerry told Chinese Vice-President Han Zheng on Wednesday that climate change must be handled separately to broader diplomatic problems.

"It is a universal threat to everybody on the planet and requires the largest nations in the world, the largest economies in the world, the largest emitters in the world, to come together in order to do work not just for ourselves, but for all mankind," Kerry told Han.

Kerry has also held meetings with China's top diplomat Wang Yi and Premier Li Qiang as well as veteran climate envoy Xie Zhenhua in a bid to rebuild trust between the two sides ahead of COP28 climate talks in Dubai at the end of the year.

## Pakistani Generals have a dilemma-keeping Imran Khan out can destabilise country's politics

### The official dissenter

The disquiet Imran voiced with the war on terror, though, was shared by a significant section of the military élite. From 2007, journalist Daud Khattak has reported, new army chief General Pervez Ashfaq Kayani pushed efforts to secure peace deals with Tehreek-e-Taliban jihadists in Pakistan. Like other key military leaders, Kayani believed that the rupture between jihadists and the army after 9/11 posed an existential threat to Pakistan, confronting it with an un-winnable war.

Following his electoral defeat in 2013, and the return of Nawaz as prime minister, Imran realised his party needed the backing of so-called notables-the powerful political brokers who controlled the electoral system.

The military élite facilitated the process. Imran spearheaded multiple protests against Nawaz, with the tacit backing of the Pakistan Army, culminating in a judiciary-led coup against the prime minister and a sham election that catapulted him to office. Even if the election was rigged, Imran had genuine appeal. The vague Islamic egalitarianism he propagated drew on former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's ideas, repackaged for a new youth cohort. To many young people, it seemed that Imran-who had, after all, demonstrated national success was possible on the cricket field-could deliver on the promise of Pakistan, where tired old dynastic leaders had failed.

Like Zulfikar and other prime ministers, Imran remained concerned that the army that had installed him in office could just as easily dethrone him. His efforts to populate the top

leadership of the army with loyal allies precipitated the crisis that ended with his dismissal last year.

Even though the Generals evicted Imran, they understand the forces he represents cannot be wished away. The Generals know Pakistan's political parties are important, or they wouldn't spend so much time attempting to control their leadership and direct their course. Even for powerful despots like Zia, politicians with local fiefdoms have been important conduits to exercise power on the ground.

### Zia's dark shadow

Zia legitimised his rule with a referendum-since there was no mention of democratic elections in the Quran-asking if citizens supported the Islamic ideology of Pakistan. "Giving a vote for Islamic Democracy is your national obligation," a banner in Bahawalpur exhorted residents, a message backed up by making opposition to the referendum a criminal offence. The military claimed over 60 per cent of eligible citizens had participated, with 97.7 per cent voting 'yes.' Estimates made by independent observers put participation as low as 30 per cent, and opposition leaders at just 5 per cent, scholar William Richter wrote. Later, he held a non-partisan election, which led to the election of landowner and industrialist Mohammad Khan Junejo as Prime Minister. Even the pliant Junejo clashed with his master on key military appointments, and was dismissed in May 1988. Musharraf used the same methods. According to the official figures, some 97.5 per cent of voters supported his appointment as the country's president, in addition to serving as army chief.



# Don't dismiss 'Barbenheimer' as a fleeting social media trend-it's a genius marketing lesson

Unlike Barbie's high-ended marketing spree, Oppenheimer let its rivals do the hard work.

Barbenheimer and Oppenbarbie are the trending words this monsoon, a union of two disparate films-Barbie and Oppenheimer-that are set to storm the box office on 21 July. It's a rare clash of the titans between the eternally pink world of Barbie and the biopic of theoretical physicist Julius Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb. And this tussle has taken social media by storm. Perhaps without irony, people have fused the two releases-an antithetical union between Christopher Nolan's Oppenheimer and Greta Gerwig's Barbie-and memes have become the flavour of the season. However, what really warrants an analysis is the marketing strategy behind this booming trend, which will seal the deal for the highly-anticipated mega-releases this week. Finding common ground

Set in an extravagant utopian world, Gerwig's two-hour-long Barbie will explore the existential crises of Mattel-inspired fashion



dolls. Nolan's Oppenheimer, on the other hand, is a three-hour biopic based on American Prometheus, a 2005 biography of the physicist.

These big-budget films, starring Margot Robbie, Ryan Gosling, Cillian Murphy and other Hollywood bigwigs, contrast each other on every front - from theme and storyline to cinematography, costumes, and screenplay. But movie promotions and marketing commitments have led them to find common ground - a very, very interesting one at that.

Robbie, who plays the titular Barbie in Gerwig's film, posted a photo of the two posing with Oppenheimer tickets last week.

Murphy, who plays Oppenheimer in Nolan's film, expressed his admiration for Robbie and Gosling (who is the leading Ken in Barbie). In an interview with La Vanguardia, he urged fans to watch both films on the same day. Actors and filmmakers of both movies, therefore, are quite committed to the popular double feature idea.

Memes and videos on platforms like TikTok and Twitter have received massive engagement, with many releasing fan-made trailers of Barbenheimer. The trend further picked up when several home-grown brands began selling their own Barbenheimer

merchandise.

Counterprogramming for attracting audiences

Studios usually avoid releasing more than one big film a week, especially in summer. The reason? "No matter how good a movie you've got, if it opens against five or six others, you're not going to get traction," Bob Berney, CEO of Picturehouse, told Variety in 2004. But movie critics say that an 'antiquated strategy of counterprogramming' is at play in the case of Barbie and Oppenheimer. It is the act of simultaneously releasing thematically divergent films to target diverse and untapped audience groups.

Days after Barbie's teaser reveal in December 2022, Universal Pictures released Oppenheimer's main trailer. A similar instance of counterprogramming can be traced to 2008 when Michael Patrick King's Sex and the City - a romantic-comedy film with Sarah Jessica Parker in the lead - was released alongside Phyllida Lloyd's Mamma Mia!, starring Meryl Streep and Pierce

Brosnan.

"Every time 'Barbie' released a trailer, 'Oppenheimer' would start trending... They're so vastly different that they allow for the narrative that popped up organically. This kind of organic marketing is probably good for both films," Robert Mitchell, director of theatrical insights at UK-based film predictive analysis firm Gower Street, told The New York Times.

Simultaneous releases can allow films to tap into non-targeted audiences and gain traction from each other's distinct fan base.

Social media buzz also helped Barbie and Oppenheimer. Memes and articles created a digital bubble for the films, and word-of-mouth converted the virtual hype into a more physical one. 'Making the Barbie cool, encore' The target audience for Barbie is not girls and their bored parents-it is the 'boomers', 'millennials', and 'GenZs' who grew up with the classic Mattel doll. The film, which also boasts of an ethnically diverse cast, rides on the childhood nostalgia of 18-35-year-olds and reiterates that "Barbie is for everyone".

# 'Impossible to contain China': Beijing's top diplomat tells Henry Kissinger

Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger made a surprise visit to Beijing. He met Foreign Minister Wang Yi who told him that it was "impossible to contain China" amid tense relations between the two countries.

Beijing's top diplomat Wang Yi told Henry Kissinger on Wednesday that it is "impossible to contain or encircle" China, hailing the former US secretary of state's role in opening up relations between the two powers.

"China's development has a strong endogenous momentum and inevitable historical logic, and it is impossible to try to transform China, and it is even more impossible to encircle and contain China," Wang told the 100-year-old Kissinger in a meeting in Beijing, according to



a foreign ministry statement. Kissinger, then US national security adviser, secretly flew to Beijing in July 1971 on a mission to establish relations with communist China.

That trip set the stage for a landmark visit by president Richard Nixon, who sought both to shake up the Cold War and enlist help ending the Vietnam War.

Washington's overtures to an

isolated Beijing contributed to China's rise to become a manufacturing powerhouse and the world's largest economy after the US.

Since leaving office, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Kissinger has grown wealthy advising businesses in China -- and has warned against a hawkish turn in US policy.

Hailing China's "friendship established with old friends",

Wang on Wednesday praised Kissinger's "historic contributions to the ice-breaking development of China-US relations".

"China's policy towards the US maintains a high degree of continuity, and follows the fundamental guidelines proposed by President Xi Jinping, which are mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation," Wang added.

"These three guidelines are fundamental and long-term, and they are also the right way for China and the US, two big countries, to get along with each other," China's top diplomat said. "The US policy toward China needs Kissinger-style diplomatic wisdom and Nixon-style political courage," he added.

Kissinger met Tuesday in

Beijing with Defence Minister Li Shangfu as part of a surprise visit to China.

"Kissinger said in today's world, challenges and opportunities coexist, and both the US and China should eliminate misunderstandings, coexist peacefully, and avoid confrontation," state news agency Xinhua reported.

"He expressed the hope that both sides will exert wisdom, make every effort to create positive outcomes for the development of bilateral relations, and safeguard world peace and stability," it added.

The elder statesman's trip to China coincided with that of US climate envoy John Kerry, and followed recent visits by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.



# A Jan. 6 Trump Indictment Would Include Very Serious Charges

As the Justice Department's special prosecutor prepares to indict former President Donald Trump, all signs point to criminal charges unseen in American history: defrauding the nation with fake electors to sway the 2020 election, obstructing Congress to stop it from certifying votes, and inciting an insurrection.

On Tuesday, Trump claimed he was singled out in a target letter by Department of Justice Special Counsel Jack Smith—a strong indication that an indictment could be weeks away. In the two years since the former president's failed coup, some of the nation's top legal minds have analyzed how a federal indictment would read. Their conclusions, laid out in various legal memos and essays, all generally point to the same end: Prosecutors will rely on powerful criminal charges, many of which date back from the last time the nation faced an existential crisis during the American Civil War some 160 years ago.

Although nothing is publicly known about the oncoming law enforcement action, Smith's questioning of witnesses and grand jury subpoenas hint at what's to come. The House Jan. 6 Committee's extensive investigation and public hearings already documented how Trump was repeatedly told he lost the 2020 election to his rival. As the clock ticked down the 64 days until Congress would certify the electoral college votes, Trump and his advisers secretly engaged in a scheme to assemble "alternate" electors from seven states who would replace authentic electoral college electors already slated to vote for President Joe Biden. The effort ultimately went nowhere, but Smith is digging in. Last week, CNN reported that his investigators had sent subpoenas to all seven states: Georgia, New Mexico, Nevada, Michigan, Arizona,

Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Additionally, on Tuesday, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel politics journalist Molly Beck reported that federal investigators interviewed a Wisconsin elections official in April. A group of scholars including



former ambassador Norman Eisen, government watchdog nonprofit leader Noah Bookbinder, former U.S. Deputy Attorney General Donald Ayer, and New York's former chief public corruption investigator E. Danya Perry put together a model prosecution memo that examines what the DOJ can do with that. Trump could be charged with violating 18 U.S.C. §§ 371—conspiracy to defraud the United States—which carries a five-year prison sentence if two or more people join forces to "commit any offense" against the country. In their memo, legal scholars also cite how Trump and his advisers mounted a pressure campaign on then-Vice President Mike Pence that would have had him abuse his role as the overseer of the electoral certification—a clear violation of the Constitution.

On that note, a federal judge in California last year already found that Trump and John Eastman, the conservative lawyer who advised him to manipulate Pence this way, likely violated this conspiracy-to-defraud law.

Investigators can point to a heated email exchange between Eastman and Greg Jacob, the former vice president's lawyer, which was documented by the Jan. 6 Committee's final report. When Eastman conceded that they were asking Pence to commit a "relatively minor violation" of the Electoral Count Act, Jacob pushed back on the ridiculous idea and asked if Eastman had at the very least told Trump that the vice president doesn't legally have that power. Eastman's response was that Trump had "been so advised" and later added: "But you know him—once he gets something in his head, it is hard to get him to change course." There's a third angle to a possible violation of § 371: over the way Trump tried to use Jeffrey Clark, a MAGA loyalist in the upper decks of the

DOJ. Trump briefly considered elevating Clark to become the nation's attorney general, where he could weaponize the Justice Department by casting doubt on the election results and pressuring states to use the fake electors.

Part of this investigation could focus on Trump's efforts to also threaten Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in the now-infamous January 2021 phone call in which Trump asked him to "find 11,780 votes" to overturn the election there. And it appears that Smith's team is examining Trump's similarly menacing behavior directed at the man who was Arizona's governor during the 2020 election, Doug Ducey—whom Trump grew to despise for refusing to flip the results in the Grand Canyon State. On Tuesday, CNN reported that Smith's investigators also reached out to Ducey. Obstructing an official proceeding Trump could also be slapped with the same criminal charge the DOJ has used against more than 200 of the MAGA loyalists who assaulted the Capitol building during the winter insurrection: impeding an official proceeding. Another model prosecution memo put together last year by former Michigan federal prosecutor Barbara McQuade lays this charge out.

The massive crowd showed up at Trump's direction following his December tweet and his D.C. speech that day calling for them to march on Congress. As the DOJ has proven time and time again in court, the rioters attempted—and succeeded—in interrupting the certification of the 2020 election results.

For that, Smith could charge Trump with violating 18 U.S.C. § 1512(c)(2), which prohibits obstructing, influencing, or impeding "any official proceeding"—or even attempting to do so. That carries a hefty 20-year prison term.

Inciting a rebellion The most serious criminal charge is also the hardest to prove—and using it would be an extraordinary maneuver.

Smith could try to hold Trump directly responsible for the savage violence his followers exacted on dozens of police officers—and the extensive property damage on the Capitol, which the DOJ estimated last year at \$2.9 million.

Legal scholars have pointed to 18 U.S.C. § 2383, which severely punishes anyone engaged in outright rebellion. It dates back to a time when the nation was at war with itself, and the Union found it necessary to snuff out any flame of violent resistance.

At only 57 words, the text has barely changed since it was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln, and prosecutors haven't used it since the Civil War, according to an in-depth analysis by two college professors writing for the Illinois Law Review.

## Meghan Markle 'Furious' as Kate Middleton Reaches Out to Prince Harry Amid Rift Rumours?

Amid rumours that Meghan Markle and Prince Harry's marriage has hit the rocks, a new report has claimed that Kate Middleton has reached out to the Duke of Sussex. It is highly reported that relationships among the royal family members have been strained since Meghan and Harry decided to leave their senior royal status and move out of the UK. With the rumours of their troubled marriage making the headlines, a source has claimed Kate reached out to Harry and this has left Meghan 'furious.'

"Kate feels terrible that the royals and Harry are at this current impasse with so little contact between them," a source claimed, as reported by GB News. "She blames Meghan for it almost entirely and

the longer it goes on the more it upsets and frustrates her," they added. However, Meghan is 'furious' with the Princess of Wales' interference. "But Meghan is furious and thinks Kate has no right getting involved in her marriage. She would never dream of interfering between her and William," the source told Heat magazine. Earlier this week, it was reported that Harry reached out to Prince William after one of his highly-anticipated deals fell apart. A source told Mirror UK that Harry is 'panicking' about the future and the money and thus reached out to William for support. "Harry is starting to wonder if they made the right decision leaving England. He's even suggested to Meghan that they return to London and

the Royal Family," a source claimed. The former Suits star was allegedly "taken aback" and is not keen on returning to the UK. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle are yet to address these claims.

The news about Kate and Harry has come a day after a Radar Online report claimed the Duke and Duchess of Sussex are 'taking time apart' to rebuild their bond. "They're trying to figure out what hit them. Harry doesn't fit in Meghan's tacky Tinseltown world," an alleged source told the outlet. The couple have allegedly had a few 'rocky' months following the bad press they've received and the deals that fell out. The reported added that the Spotify deal failure was a "game-changer" for their relationship.





## Sunny Leone reveals story behind her stage name: 'Sunny is my brother's nickname, my mom hated that I...'

Did you know Sunny Leone was born as Karenjit Kaur Vohra? She has now spoken about how she got her stage name and her mother's reaction to it.

Actor Sunny Leone's real name is Karenjit Kaur Vohra. In a recent interview, she explained the reason why she changed her name. While her first name 'Sunny' belongs to her brother, Sandeep Singh, whose nickname is Sunny, there's a story behind her last name, 'Leone', too. Also read: Sunny Leone on working in adult film industry Sunny Leone was born in Canada to an Indian Sikh family. She moved to India some years ago. In a recent interview, the actor revealed how she picked Sunny as her name, and told a magazine to pick her last name, Leone.

How Sunny Leone chose her stage name "I was in the US doing an interview for a magazine and they said, 'What do you want your name to be?' I couldn't think of anything at that moment. I was working at a tax and retirement firm and I worked for the HR department, accounting department, and another agent. I helped with all these things, and then I was also a receptionist.

So, I was doing the interview in this place and I knew I had to get off the phone soon and get back to work, because I would get caught. And they were like 'what would you like your name to be' and I said, 'Use Sunny as my first name, and then you can pick the last name'."

Sunny Leone's mom hated her name Further speaking about her choice, she said, "Sunny is my brother's nickname. His name is Sandeep Singh, we call him Sunny. My mom hated that I named myself Sunny. She said, 'Out of all the names, that's the one you pick?' I was like, yeah, it's just what came to my mind... And then the magazine picked the last name and I just kept it."

Sunny's film career

After working for some years in the adult film industry in the US, she made her acting debut with Pooja Bhatt's thriller Jism 2 in 2012 after her appearance on Bigg Boss 5. She later appeared in films such as Jackpot, Ragini MMS 2, Ek Paheli Leela and Mastizaade. She recently attended Cannes Film Festival 2023 for the world premiere of her Anurag Kashyap film Kennedy.



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# Janhvi Kapoor Blings At Bawaal Screening In Holographic Gown



Janhvi Kapoor and Varun Dhawan look like a red-carpet pair at their promotions of their upcoming movie- Bawaal, to be released on Amazon Prime on July 21. The Bollywood diva's outfit screams 'all eyes on me' as she poses with the light of red LED tube light falling on one side of her face and dress, increasing the shine. (Image: Instagram)

## Supermodel Gigi Hadid arrested for transporting weed at UK airport



during the customs check at the Owen Roberts International Airport. Supermodel Gigi was accompanied by her friend, Leah Nicole McCarthy, during the arrest. As per information, the weed was for personal use only, but the model and her friend were arrested on charges of 'importation of weed and

American model Gigi Hadid was arrested at an airport in the UK for possessing weed and related smoking utensils.

As per online tabloid TMZ, the 28-year-old model was arrested on July 10 after arriving at the UK's Cayman Islands from the US via a private jet.

The model was found with a small amount of weed and smoking utensils in her bag

importation of utensils to smoke the weed.' The duo were taken to the Prisoner Detention Centre and after going through necessary procedures, both the women were released on bail.

On July 12, they pleaded guilty in court and were fined 1,000 dollars, followed which the duo were released.

According to sources, there is no conviction on Gigi's record.

## Genelia Deshmukh on whether Riteish Deshmukh made her quit films after marriage



Genelia Deshmukh has said that leaving films for a few years was her own decision, and actor-husband Riteish Deshmukh had no role in it. Genelia Deshmukh was recently

asked if people still say that her husband, actor-filmmaker Riteish Deshmukh stopped her from acting in films. She had then said that it is her sole decision whether or not she

works in movies. Genelia was recently seen with Riteish in the Marathi hit Ved. (Also read: Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na turns 15) In Abbas Tyrewala's rom-com, fight meets flight)



# From 'Bawaal' To 'Trial Period' And 'The Deepest Breath', Check Out OTT Releases This Week

Prepare yourself for an exhilarating entertainment extravaganza as the third week of July 2023 begins!



Leading OTT platforms like Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+Hotstar, MX Player, and ShemarooMe have an exciting lineup of content in the coming week, and that's bound to fulfill all your binge-watching desires. Whether it's Prime Video's gripping 'Bawaal' or the intriguing 'Trial Period' starring Genelia Deshmukh, the diverse selection of series and films guarantees a thrilling and captivating experience that will keep you hooked throughout.

Platform: MX Player

Date: 19 July, 2023

'Ice Fantasy' is a Chinese fantasy drama. Hundred years after the war between the Ice Tribe and the Fire Tribe, the only two remaining royal heirs of the Ice Tribe struggle for power. Prince Ka Suo (Feng Shao Feng) and his younger half-brother, Yong Kong Shi (Ma Tian Yu), are the only pureblood illusionists and royal heirs left in the Ice Tribe. Ka Suo reluctantly battles his brother for the throne, but he wants nothing more than the freedom to be with his lover Li Luo. Kong Shi does everything he can to take the throne away from Ka Suo, while Yan Da (Zhang Meng), the only daughter of the Fire Tribe royal family, is willing to give up everything for Kong Shi. When both Kong Shi and Li Luo suddenly go missing, can Ka Suo protect his kingdom alone when another war breaks out? Watch 'Ice Fantasy' streaming on MX Player in Hindi from 19th July 2023.

'Bawaal'

Platform: Prime Video

Date: 21 July, 2023

'Bawaal' guarantees a captivating and thought-provoking experience with its

unique storyline. It revolves around Varun Dhawan, a young man from a humble background, who falls for Janhvi Kapoor, considered beyond his reach. The movie delves into their relationship dynamics and Varun's quest to elevate his social status. Directed by Nitesh, it makes its debut on Amazon Prime Video this week. Don't miss this compelling watch!

'Trial Period'

Platform: Jio Cinema



Date: 21 July, 2023

Get ready for Genelia Deshmukh's upcoming JioCinema release, 'Trial Period,' where she explores the concept of searching for a father figure through a 30-day trial. Playing a single mother, her life takes a dramatic turn when her son insists on finding a father. This OTT film promises an engaging and captivating watch, offering an intriguing storyline filled with emotions and surprises. Don't miss out on this unique and heartwarming experience hitting the screens this week.



'The Deepest Breath'

Platform: Netflix

Date: 19 July, 2023

Embark on an awe-inspiring journey with Italian freediver Alessia Zecchini as she strives to break a world record, aided by safety diver Stephan Keenan. This documentary promises breathtaking underwater footage and emotional interviews, providing a rare glimpse into the world of freediving and the dedication

season takes us through their adventures in the charming town of Serenity, South Carolina, where they navigate romantic relationships, family dynamics, and career choices. Grab your popcorn and indulge in the heartwarming journey of these inseparable friends.

'Narasiyo'

Platform: ShemarooMe

Date: 20 July, 2023

As the holy period of Adhik Maas begins, ShemarooMe brings forth a mesmerizing treat for its subscribers with the release of the timeless Gujarati classic show, 'Narasiyo.' This extraordinary series narrates the inspiring tale of the revered 15th-century poet-saint Narsinh Mehta, who fearlessly challenged orthodox beliefs through his verses while seeking Lord Krishna's blessings. Through 27 captivating episodes, viewers will witness Narsinh Mehta's struggles, triumphs, and dedication to composing poetic works celebrating the eternal bond between humanity and Krishna. Immerse yourself in this enthralling journey, filled with rich storytelling and profound spiritual insights, as 'Narsaiyo' unfolds in three parts over three consecutive Thursdays starting 20 July 2023 only on ShemarooMe.

'They Cloned Tyrone'

Platform: Netflix

Date: 21 July, 2023

In a world teeming with mystery and adventure, 'They Cloned Tyrone' follows the unfolding of unsettling incidents that compel an unexpected alliance of individuals to delve into a malevolent government conspiracy. Its captivating premise and enthralling plot ensure an audience's undivided attention. The film is poised to be a blockbuster, and Netflix will make it available for streaming this week, adding to the anticipation and excitement surrounding this thrilling movie.

'Maurh'

Platform: Zee5

Date: 21 July, 2023

Amidst the tragedy of his brother's demise (Dev Kharoud), Jeona Maurh (Ammy Virk) embarks on a path of vengeance. Determined to avenge his bandit sibling, he emerges as a symbol of hope for the people of Punjab. Taking a stand against the land tax mafia colluding with the king and British officials, Jeona Maurh becomes a formidable force. This Punjabi film features Dev Kharoud, Ammy Virk, Vikramjeet Virk, and Naiqra Kaur in significant roles, promising a powerful and engaging cinematic experience.

it requires. With tension and drama surrounding their pursuit, this remarkable duo's resilience and passion will undoubtedly leave you inspired. Don't miss this unforgettable and immersive experience as the film releases this week.

'Sweet Magnolia Season 3'

Platform: Netflix

Date: 20 July, 2023

Childhood best friends Maddie, Helen Decatur, and Dana Sue Sullivan reunite to tackle fresh challenges. This new



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# Indian Prime Ministers and Cases of Corruption: Nehru and the Birth of Scams

BY Priyam Gandhi-Mody

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi completes his visit to France, and India gives its nod to deals for purchasing 26 Rafale jets and three Scorpene submarines - all worth over Rs 90,000 crore - it may become pertinent to observe that such a high-value order is going through corruption-free, as in the case of all previous deals during this regime. There is no middleman of foreign origin, close family friends or agents making fund transfers to offshore bank accounts, as was the case innumerable times during decades of Congress rule in the past.

It seems that India is finally reaping the benefits of policy decisions where merit trumps kickbacks. Let us here consider the first case in the history of independent India, which set the precedent for the Congress and the Nehru-Gandhi family to exploit high-value deals. When the India-Pakistan war began in 1948, the Indian Army urgently required jeeps. Vengalil Krishna Menon, the then Indian High Commissioner to the UK and also a very close friend of then PM Jawaharlal Nehru, placed an order for about 2,000 refurbished



jeeps from a company called M/s Anti-Mistantes.


Now, a little back history here - Menon had an understanding with the last British viceroy Louis Mountbatten that he'd be made the Indian high commissioner to the UK by lobbying for British interests and agreeing to "convince" his good friend Nehru on sensitive issues in Britain's favour. Moving on, Menon who was a fully trusted

ally of Nehru, not only placed this order but also framed shady terms of payment and delivery for the jeeps.


He agreed to pay 65 percent of the money for the jeeps, which were priced at about 300 pounds per vehicle on inspection, 20 percent on delivery and the remaining 15 percent a month after delivery. He also clarified that only 10 percent of the jeeps for delivery will be inspected. This meant that only after inspecting 10 percent of the refurbished jeeps, a full 85 percent of the total dues of about 6,00,000 pounds was made. In today's value - that amount would be equivalent to 1,55,00,000 pounds, ie, Rs 160,00,000 - one hundred and sixty crore rupees.

The company, M/S Anti-Mistantes, was clearly shady - it only had paid up capital of about 600 pounds. Which is why, despite paying the above money, the company sent only about 155 jeeps, none of which were in functioning, usable condition. The armed forces rejected the jeeps. Not only did Anti-Mistantes refuse to recall the jeeps, but also went incommunicado.

Now, the need for jeeps was still standing, and Menon signed another contract with another company called SCK Agencies for 1,007 jeeps at a higher price of 458 pounds. The delivery terms were that 68 jeeps would be delivered monthly. He also explained that since these companies were only delivery agents, he got SCK Agencies to agree to compensate the Indian government for the earlier money paid for the jeeps. However, only 49 jeeps were supplied over two years by SCK Agencies and no money was compensated to the Indian government. Nehru not only forced the Indian government to accept the substandard jeeps sent by Anti-Mistantes but also refused to demand a resignation from Menon. There was a massive uproar over this issue and Nehru was forced to form a committee to investigate the case. The Ayyangar Sub-Committee found many misappropriations and, on the basis of its submissions made on April 9, 1951, the Public Account Committee (PAC) started a formal investigation in the matter under the leadership of two former high court judges.



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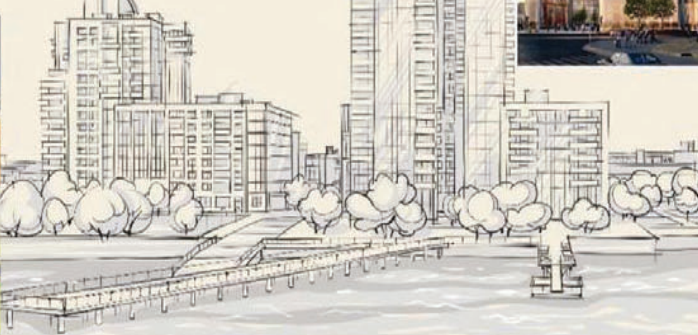
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# Pakistani Generals have a dilemma- keeping Imran Khan out can destabilise country's politics



**The Generals know Pakistan's political parties are important, or they wouldn't spend so much time attempting to control their leadership and direct their course**

By PRAVEEN SWAMI

Thousands watched as a leather whip fell on the back of Kale Khan, proclaimed "a notorious smuggler" by the regime of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq: The hand of God was always busy in the Islamic utopia the General was building. Floggings and even amputation—"under local anaesthesia", the regulations conceded, in a concession to modernity—were introduced in a new criminal code to punish criminals, fornicators and political opponents. Editors who asked how long military rule would last got a grim answer from the General: "Maybe two years, maybe four years, maybe 10 years."

Less than four weeks from today, on 12 August, the term of Pakistan's parliament, the National Assembly, will end. Even though ministers have given conflicting accounts of exactly when parliament will be dissolved, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has promised to hand power to an interim government that will conduct elections within three months.

Three critical dangers confront democratic life in Pakistan if the coming elections aren't credible. First, engineering defections from former prime minister Imran Khan's party and prosecuting him in high-profile graft cases have weakened him heading into the elections. Even then, he's demonstrated substantial popular support—especially among the young. Flagrant rigging could destabilise the polity, undermining Pakistan's fragile economy. Second, eliminating the axis of opposition from Pakistan's political life could empower a resurgent jihadist movement operating against the army with increasing immunity. Last week, 12 soldiers were lost in attacks at Zhob and

Sui.

Third, the threat to the army's own legitimacy could push it to deepen repression, further destabilising Pakistan's polity. The military is determined to keep Imran out—but to keep him out might involve the demolition of the party system in Pakistan.

Late in 1984, Zia held a referendum to legitimise his rule. Empty voting stations manifested overflowing boxes of ballots, 97.7 per cent marked in the General's favour. Zia's dour clerical ally, the Pir of Pagaro, Sikander Ali Shah, attributed the miracle to 'farishtey', or angels. In many elections since—among them, the referendum held by General Pervez Musharraf, and Imran's own triumph five years ago—farishtey have proved a decisive voting bloc.

Will they do so again? To hazard an answer needs an examination of the complex ties between the military and Imran's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, and why they broke down.

The birth of a new politics

"Are you sure you want to start a political party?" the constitutional lawyer Hamid Khan incredulously asked Imran in the summer of 1996. Early on the morning of 25 April 1996, former party activist Tabinda Khan recorded, Imran had called a meeting at the home of Nausherwan Burki, the head of the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital. There, he had put his plans to a small group of his core philanthropic supporters—not a single one a career politician.

"The PTI's founding group," Tabinda Khan notes, "was connected to high-ranking military officials and politicians aligned with the Musharraf regime through family ties and long-standing friendships." Like the military leadership,

the élite it represented attributed Pakistan's problems to the corruption and incompetence of traditional politicians.

From 9/11 on, Imran grew in visibility—the consequence of the exile imposed on former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif by Musharraf's military regime. Imran could have capitalised on the opportunity—but his trenchant support for the Taliban and his opposition to the Pakistan military's cooperation with the West led him to be arrested under anti-

terrorism laws by Musharraf in 2007.

In 2008, Musharraf turned to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) for legitimacy. Even if some in the party were uncomfortable about making a deal with a military ruler who had deposed their principal opposition in a coup, they chose to silence their conscience. The seduction of power, as always, was substantial: "Politicians from the existing parties," scholar C. Christine Fair has observed, "would rather serve the army than lose power altogether."

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# India Every Day, Where Immorality Is in the Air and Politics Is Sans Morals



**In this piece inspired by Ashok Mitra's legendary 1969 column 'Calcutta Every Day', Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay captures the woes of contemporary Indian society in Mitra's chaotic style.**

**By Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay**

Publicity. The abrasive pervasiveness of it. Lifeline for sustenance. Pictures, words, slogans, jingles, speech excerpts. Towering hoardings dwarfing passersby. Handful of faces. Gleeful smiles or expressions of contrived determination. Audio when required, visual with textual padding elsewhere. And a combination of the two for greatest impact on mobile devices. Mind-numbing incessantness. Full-page advertisements. One page after another. Nearly every newspaper - there's no escaping. Pictures of joyous citizenry above claims, claims, more claims. Sharp contrast to teeming but fatigued hordes jostling at degrading labour markets. Anxious wait for jobs that come in trickles, if at all. Stretched hands at intersections, imploring a morsel or two with defeated expressions. Wherever you go, India remains, for the most part, the same. Immorality in the air. Politics sans morals.

Media organisations. Outputs matching mass-mailed handouts from official PIB & Co accounts. Anchors and reporters in the game of outdoing one another. Competition for who sounds more like the 'horse'. Edit writers using the apologetic shield of anonymity. In-house columnists give a spin to what's whispered in their ears. Commentators with known positions. Diehard revolutionaries of yore line up to play the apologists. Selected soundbites. Distorted statements. Replayed unremittingly.

Incalculable reduplications with Goebbels-esque self-assurance. Conflict-provoking utterances. Untruthful claims packaged and rendered demagogically become the false truth. Old promises run through shredders. New pledges made with greater vigour. Confidence that publicised falsity will be

bought by 1.4 billion. Spinning yarns is all that is required.

Leader in perennial 'launch' mode. A spirited inaugural a day keeps the image soaring. Multiple inaugurals and launches in states when and where elections are due. New alliterations and abbreviations every day. Impressive to the gullible, they concluded by researching mass psychology. No audience is missed. Frenzy increases as notification nears.

The law cannot be violated, they say. Because that is solely the Opposition's reserve, don't you know? Number of functions in several tens every day. Never scrutinised subsequently for any progress made. All claims accepted at face value. Questioning contentions is treasonable. Silence is proof of loyalty. Social media warriors. Round the clock operations. Litany of tasks always on the 'to do' list. 'X', followed by variable zeros instances of trolling. 'X' thousand re-ups. Cruder and sexist remarks directed at smart and intelligent women with a public face and compelling opinions. New expletives selected from an updated list circulated by the IT Cell head for those from the minorities and all adversaries.

Hurried phone calls. Only directives, no time - or need - for pleasantries. #Hashtags are new-age virtual markers. Promotion, trolling and hate spewing go hand-in-hand. The police look through and see hate only on the other side of the playground.

Nonstop declarations of accomplishments. Cheerleaders gather, cameras and mikes in hand. Original sadomasochists haul up naysayers. Treason. The mob wearing no masks comes closer. The initial 'crime' is run through the thesaurus for more offences applying to the same. For every situation, an IPC is found. Cheers grow louder.

Cheerers go berserk. A new 'traitor' has been hauled up.

Hate is a four letter word. Sits pretty in the mind. Easy on the tongue. Comfortable to wield in the hand too. A slap, box, kick, shove or even a combination. Lynching is routine. Vigilantes issue orders to official law enforcers. And now, a new trick in town - urinating. Pent-up fury is enhanced by 'true' history.

Much of history keeps coming back. The enemy is in the past. The trait is now carried by their progenies, as the tales are spread. Dirty, breed excessively, marry adulterously, eat everything that is not pure, as they are charged.

Prejudices and beliefs galore. No need for proof, suspicion is enough. What went in front pages and prime time, have now been pushed to inside pages as 'briefs'. Videos circulate. Not as evidence of crime with calls for punishment, but as proof of vengeance taken. Retribution is a matter of pride.

Institutions of the state in crisis. The message is clear. For success, survival and promotions, sing the official tune. Judges who don't weigh with impartiality go the farthest - right till the corridors that politicians haunt. Officers who violate oaths to be dutiful to their office and remain even-handed and unbiased. Police that overlook the crimes of the majority. Investigative agencies which target the regime's critics. Systemic erosion of democratic practices.

Yet, India is proclaimed endlessly as the mother of democracy, with the child being in the nation's DNA. Every claim is little but a jumla.

Flattery has a quasi-religious synonym - Bhakti. An adjective for every situation. Every single tweet, statement or declaration is laced with a profusion of words that hail the leader's qualities. D.K. Barooah's fawning is passé. New age

sycophancy is unspooling. Stadiums and museums raised to immortalise the leader. No more waiting for the eventual passing.

History is history. History is a tool. History is weaponised. Jihads of new kinds are incessantly imagined and routinely foisted on the imaginations of the hungry and bare-bodied. All previous history is wrong - it is said. Was written with the intention to embrace medieval-era colonisers, we are told. From legislatures on other shores, it is declared - the thousand-year period preceding independence was foreign rule.

New history is being written. Gandhi's killers are celebrated. Those who inspired his assassins on that path are venerated national icons now. The appropriation of several other nationalists is a continuing project for want of its own. New laws. Old laws with new amendments. Old laws with new rules. Some laws with no rules. If sedition does not work, there's the charge of defamation to be levelled. If that too is inadequate, there's UAPA. Amended, made more draconian in 2019.

More laws exist. Preventive detention is the norm. Detentions with no bail. Bail is a notable exception, not the norm. Overcrowded cells. Overflowing jails. For someone who dared to complete 500 days, another 1,000 of the same. Awaiting trials that never begin. Like the revered figure who passed away before his bail plea came up. Instances galore when process is the punishment. Creates a dark, dank and despairing climate of the mind. Fear is in the air. Big brother's omnipotent watch from behind the shoulders. It is not Emergency, at least not in name. But feels quite the same? Ask the old man, the insider who warned us all. Who has time for wasted former demagogues?



# China's elite love art, hide it from CCP. It's their dirty secret

**Xi Jinping may have spoilt Chinese billionaire party. But his decade-long anti-corruption campaign has only made the world of art auctions more attractive to those with ill-gotten wealth.**



**By AADIL BRAR**

Elites in China have long been purchasing art, paintings, and antiques as a means to hide their wealth from the Chinese Communist Party as well as to assert their status in the upper echelon of the country's power circles. Although President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign initially slowed down auction sales, they have resurged in Hong Kong to a roaring success. The proliferation of auction houses from London to Hong Kong led to contemporary art and antiquities becoming popular avenues for hiding riches. In 2012, China's growing wealth became evident worldwide as Chinese elites flocked to European capitals to acquire modern art and antiquities. In 2021, despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Chinese economy, art auction sales in mainland China reached \$5.9 billion, accounting for 79 per cent of global sales. While this figure is lower than the peak of the Chinese auction boom in 2012 when sales reached \$8.9 billion, demand for modern art and rare objects remains strong in China. China's gilded age The Hu Jintao era, spanning the 2000s until Xi Jinping assumed power, was a gilded age for Chinese politicians who splurged on expensive art to conceal their wealth. Then in 2012, Xi launched a vigorous anti-corruption campaign to curb the excesses of the previous decade. Paradoxically, this campaign has only made the world of art auctions more attractive to those seeking to hide ill-gotten wealth.

I was in London last year, where I met students from mainland China studying the history of art, which piqued their interest due to Xi's campaign to close corruption loopholes. Through conversations with these students, I learned

about the thriving art scene in China and its connections to wealthy politicians, motivating students to pursue higher education that could open doors to leading art galleries or auction houses. Nowadays, Chinese students not only flock to Imperial College London to study Artificial Intelligence but can also be found at the Courtauld Institute of Art at Vernon Square in London.

As power transitioned from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping, China's affluent individuals, referred to as "robber barons", grew increasingly ambitious in parking their assets, earned through connections to the CCP elite, worldwide. They employed intermediaries, commonly known as "white gloves", to purchase expensive art and maintain anonymity. Sotheby's and Christie's, renowned auction houses, offered a shroud of secrecy that concealed the true owners of exclusive artworks and antiquities. China's wealthy used shell companies and intermediaries to hold assets on behalf of the ultimate owner, who preferred not to be directly associated with the artwork or real estate. For instance, a Vincent van Gogh painting sold in 2014 for \$62 million at Sotheby's was officially claimed to have been purchased by Wang Zhongjun, a Chinese film producer based in Hong Kong. But The New York Times investigation revealed that the ownership trail led to a Chinese billionaire named Xiao Jianhua, known for his deep connections to the CCP. Both Wang and the van Gogh painting have since disappeared, while Xiao was charged with "illegally absorbing public deposits" in 2022 after being abducted from a Hong Kong hotel in 2017.

Chinese leaders and business tycoons have chosen to store their wealth in Hong Kong, from where they can move their billions worldwide, depending on the political climate. Xi's allies were not concerned about the suppression of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, as their wealth remained secure in the city's exclusive lockers.

The new wealthy

In his book *Red Roulette*, author Desmond Shum describes how he and his wife Whitney Duan used artworks to safeguard their wealth. "The jewelry jumped tenfold, and someone offered us ten times what we paid for the paintings. But we didn't really acquire these things to realize gains. We locked them in a wardrobe-size antique safe that I purchased from Austria," writes Shum.

The mid-2000 duels between Chinese billionaires to possess rare paintings continues to this day as Xi's allies seek to park their wealth in art without attracting the attention of the big boss. Auction houses are hard-pressed to conceal the identity of the true owners of the antiquities and artwork they sell.

Art and antiquities have long served as tools of statecraft for Chinese elites since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the 1960s, Beijing opened state-owned antiquity shops, which collected objects from the public and sold them to Western visitors to earn foreign reserves during a time when China was struggling to shore up its reserves. Premier Zhou Enlai instructed these shops to sell their collections to yield high returns on rare Chinese antiquities.

Even today, connections between art auctions and Chinese bureaucracy are not difficult to find. China's largest auction house, Poly Auction, is owned by China Poly Group, a massive state-owned conglomerate founded by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1992. Poly Auction and China Guardian, another Hong Kong-based auction house, are actively seeking more contemporary art from Europe to compete with the thriving art auction scene in Hong Kong. Christie's, Sotheby's, and Phillips, three prominent global auction houses, are also expanding their presence in Hong Kong.

While Xi Jinping may have gained fame as the iconoclast who stopped the Chinese billionaire party, under his leadership, state-owned enterprises have encroached upon the domains of private businesses, creating a new generation of ultra-wealthy individuals. The shadowy world of art auctions and corrupt officials concealing their wealth has not disappeared under Xi's rule but has rather transformed.



# Did you know that India has a 7200-year-old history with cotton?

## Harappans took it to the world

**A paper published in Israel in 2022 from the Tel Tsaf site shows cotton fibres originated in the Indian subcontinent around 5200 BCE.**

**By DISHA AHLUWALIA**

It was through the trade matrix of Harappans that the world received the gift of cotton. It had a long journey, spanning around 8,000 years. Archaeological records trace the beginning of India's sacred connection with cotton to around the 7th-6th millennium BCE. Iraq, Greece, the Persian Gulf and North Africa all received the gift of cotton, which was earlier thought to be thousands of years after its first use in the Indian subcontinent. But a paper published in Israel in 2022 from the Tel Tsaf site shows that cotton originated in the Indian subcontinent around 5200 BCE (7,200 years ago). This humble beginning around 8,000 years ago paved the way for domesticating cotton, which was then spun and woven into beautifully designed textiles used domestically and exported to contemporary civilisations.

### Old world cotton

The story of cotton begins in the arid mountainous region of Balochistan at an archaeological site in Mehrgarh. It is an index site that mirrors a complete and continuous evolution of cultures from the Early Food Producing Era till the end of the Bronze Age (8th millennium BCE to 2nd millennium BCE) in the subcontinent. Here, the French archaeologist JF Jarrige and his team, while excavating a Neolithic funerary chamber dated to the first half of the 6th millennium BCE, recovered the remains of two people - one adult male and at his feet, a one to two-year-old child. Next to the adult's left wrist, Jarrige and his team found a set of eight copper beads. The metallurgical analysis of a copper bead from the assemblage yielded evidence of mineralised thread fibre. Upon

characterisation and scanning with a reflected light microscope and an electron microscope, scientist Christophe Moulherat and his team found that this thread was made of cotton, becoming the earliest known example of cotton in the Old World.

In the Old World, four species of *Gossypium* (cotton) - *G. arboreum* L, *G. herbaceum* L, *G. hirsutum* L, and *G. barbadense* L - were domesticated in different regions at different times. *G. arboreum* was domesticated in the Indian subcontinent, eventually spreading to Africa and other parts of Asia, whereas *G. herbaceum* was first cultivated in Arabia and Syria.

In the case of Mehrgarh samples, the species of the fibre is not yet known. The study suggests that the Neolithic settlers in Balochistan were skilled in using semi-ripe cotton even before the crop was domesticated. While it is unclear if they were using a wild species of cotton during the 6th millennium BCE, this experiment by early settlers surely allowed full-fledged cultivation of *G. arboreum*, which reached its zenith under the mighty Harappans.

The Harappans and their bond with cotton In the 1930s, during the excavation of Mohenjo-Daro, cotton fibres were found preserved in a corroded silver jar. (John Marshall 1931, Vol. 1:20, 218-219). This first conclusive evidence of cotton was reported in the archaeological data supported by many recent archaeobotanical studies. Although the dates of this context were not as early as the one from Mehrgarh, the evidence of cotton in the 1930s helped archaeologists piece together fragmentary evidence from

historical sites.

Following this study, evidence from a few other Harappan sites concluded that just like us and the Neolithic settlers, Harappans were also using cotton. But the production method was still unknown. Were they using the famous charkha (spinning wheel) or something else? Scholars like Jonathan Mark Kenoyer argue that although it is hard to find evidence of an intact spinning wheel, fragmentary evidence and objects can help answer these pertinent questions.

At the excavation of Harappa (1998-2000), Kenoyer tried to do just that. From the Ravi phase (c 3300-2800 BCE) at Harappa Mound AB, a floor was unearthed at the bottom of the trench. It had a hearth with a handi (cooking vessel) next to it, as well as a spindle whorl and bone tools. These findings made the excavator call it a unit of textile production. Similar evidence has also emerged from Balakot, dating back to c.2500 BCE.

At Harappa and many other sites associated with the culture, the excavators and archaeologists took the help of objects like terracotta spindle whorl, bone points and bone needles to determine the presence of spinning and weaving. The mere presence of spindle whorls can testify to the presence of production units. Countless potsherds with cloth impressions that have been found in large numbers at many Harappan sites are also great indicators of the presence of fabric during the Harappan period. On this note, one can't help but remember the famous 'Priest King' sculpture with a piece of cloth wrapped around his left shoulder, patterned with a trefoil design. Countless more

figurines with elaborate headgear, trousers, and skirts (both patterned and plain) speak volumes about Harappan-era fashion.

### The spread of cotton

It was earlier thought that cotton did not spread out of the Indian subcontinent until thousands of years after the first instance of its domestication. For example, the cotton fabric found at Nimrud in Iraq dates back to the 8th -7th centuries BCE, and the one at Kerameikos in Greece dates to around 5th century BCE. Moreover, first instances of cotton cultivation were also seen in the Persian Gulf at Qal'at al Bahrain (c.600-400 BCE) and in North Africa at Qasr Ibrim, Kellis and Al Zerga between the 1st and 4th century BCE. What is fascinating is that cotton reaches China around c. 200 BCE.

These dates from sites spread far and wide support the migration and spread of cotton, which began sometime around 7,200 years ago. Besides this, the evidence from Tel Tsaf is crucial as it indicates the onset of early exchange, especially before the civilisation's urban phase. The presence of cotton fibre from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, where the crop is not grown natively, is an important example of the Harappan trade matrix during the 3rd millennium BCE. This evidence, followed by an unbroken chain of data from many sites beyond the Harappan timeline (such as Nevasa) shows that the skills to cultivate cotton and the technique of manufacturing cotton were not restricted to the Indus Valley and Harappans alone. Historical texts and many traveller's records mention the use and production of cotton in the subcontinent.





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