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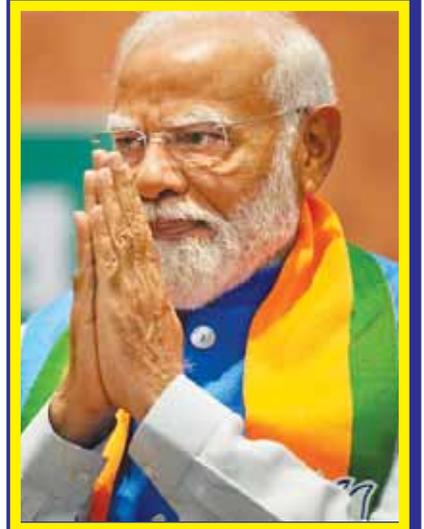
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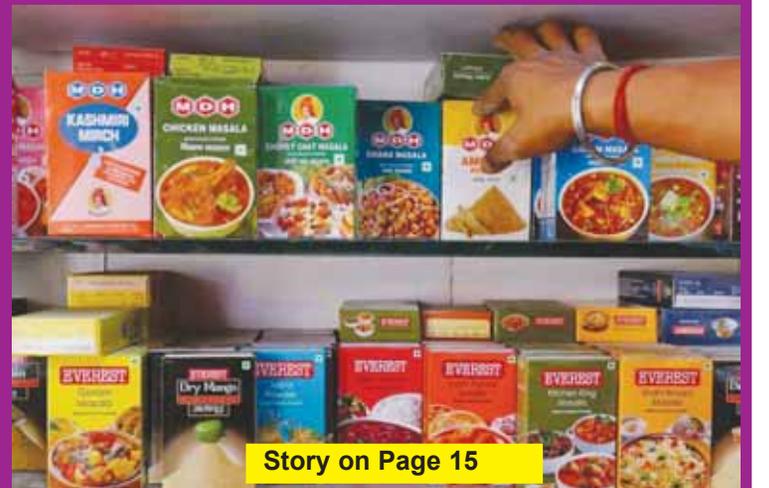
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It's too late for the West to shut the technology door on China



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## Spice crisis Contamination hits India's global market



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# Komagata Maru incident a 'dark chapter' in Canada's history, says PM Justin Trudeau

†(Sai Bureau)- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Thursday termed the tragic Komagata Maru incident as a 'dark chapter' in the country's history and asked Canadians to work together to build a better, fairer and more inclusive country for everyone.

"One hundred and ten years ago, the steamship Komagata Maru docked in Vancouver's harbour after a long journey across the Pacific Ocean. Aboard the ship, 376 people - Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus of Punjabi origin - were ready to start a new life in Canada. But instead of being welcomed as newcomers, they were refused entry by Canada," Trudeau said in a statement. Recalling their ordeal, the prime minister said that passengers of Komagata Maru, a Japanese steamship, were detained for two harrowing months in 1914 without food, water or medical care. Ultimately, the Komagata Maru was forced to return to India where many of its passengers were



killed or imprisoned.

"This tragic incident is a dark chapter in our country's history," said Trudeau, who had apologised on behalf of the Government of Canada eight years ago for what happened to the passengers of

the Komagata Maru. He said the deplorable treatment of those on board was reflected in Canada's racist and discriminatory laws of the time and we must never allow this event to repeat itself.

On this day of remembrance, Canadians reflect on the importance of promoting diversity and treating everyone with respect and dignity.

"In the years since this tragedy, we have come a long way as a country to build a more inclusive, welcoming society for people of all backgrounds. And through initiatives like our Anti-Racism Strategy, we are removing barriers, so that everyone in Canada can reach their full potential," Trudeau, whose utterances on the Khalistan issue have nearly derailed Canada-India relations, said. "Today, we remember and honour the lives lost in the Komagata Maru incident. As we pay tribute to the victims, I encourage all Canadians to learn more about the invaluable contributions that members of the South Asian community have made, and continue to make, to Canada. Let's keep working together to build a better, fairer, and more inclusive country for everyone," he added.

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## New Jersey man charged with alleged senior scam in Colonie



†(Sai Bureau)-The Colonie Police Department arrested a New Jersey man in connection to a senior citizen scam. Dhruv Patel, 33, of Franklin Park, is facing multiple charges.

Get the latest news, weather, sports and entertainment delivered right to your inbox! On May 13 around 3:15 p.m., Colonie Police received a report of a possible active scam. Police say an elderly Colonie resident was trying to dispute an online purchase over the phone when her call was transferred to a man claiming to be a representative of the Federal Trade Commission. Under the pseudonym of iPatrick, the man allegedly told the resident that she was an identity theft victim, and that she should withdraw and turn over all the money from her bank accounts to him for safekeeping. The woman then contacted family members, who advised her that the situation might be a scam, suggesting that she contact

police. Two police officers injured in Poughkeepsie car ramming Upon arrival, Colonie Police helped continue the phone call and assisted in feigning making arrangements with the man to retrieve the money. Officers then saw the suspected scammer arrive at the woman's home, identifying him as Patel. He was arrested immediately and charged with the following crimes: Middle Grove man charged with sexual assault of a child - The resident did not lose any money as a result of the the incident. Patel was arraigned at the Town of Colonie Justice Court before being released on his own recognizance. The investigation remains ongoing. Anyone with information, or anyone who believes they or someone they know has been a victim of a similar crime is asked to contact the Colonie Police Investigations Division at (518)783-2754.

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## India-born Jaya Badiga appointed judge in Sacramento County Superior Court

†(Sai Bureau)- Indian-American attorney Jaya Badiga, a certified family law specialist, has been appointed as a Judge in the Sacramento County Superior Court in the US state of California.

Gavin Newsom, the Governor of California, made the appointment of Badiga, who has earlier served as a Commissioner at the Sacramento County Superior Court since 2022. Badiga, born in Vijayawada city of Andhra Pradesh, fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Robert S. Lapham.

Badiga, a member of the Democrat Party, also served as an Attorney at the California Department of Health Care Services in 2020 and at the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services in 2018. Badiga earned a Juris Doctor degree from the Santa Clara

University School of Law and a Master of Arts degree in International Relations and International Communications from Boston University.

Badiga is a certified family law specialist and has worked in Family Law for more than ten years, according to the Sacramento Country Public Law Library. Separately, the governor appointed Raj Singh Badheshha

of Fresno County as a Judge in the Fresno County Superior Court. Badheshha, who fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Jon N. Kapetan, has served as Chief Assistant



City Attorney in the Fresno City Attorney's Office since 2022 and has served in several roles there since 2012.

Badheshha, a Democrat, has become the first Sikh to be appointed to the Fresno County bench and the first Sikh judge in California who observes the practice of wearing the Sikh headdress known as the dastar or pagri, FOX26NEWS reported earlier this month.

His appointment has been celebrated by many in the Central Valley Punjabi and Asian communities. Badheshha, in a statement after his appointment, said: "I would like to thank Governor Gavin Newsom for

having confidence in my ability to serve as a Fresno County Superior Court judge. After years of dedicated service to the Fresno community, including invaluable experience in the Fresno City Attorney's Office and extensive volunteer work, I am honoured to be appointed as a Fresno Superior Court Judge." "My commitment to justice, coupled with my understanding of the legal system and the needs of our community, have prepared me to serve with integrity, fairness, and compassion. I am glad to be able to represent a segment of our community that we don't often see on the bench, and I appreciate the Governor's commitment to diversity," he said.

He earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of California College of Law in San Francisco.

# 4th Annual Long Island Vaisakhi Mela celebrated



(Preess Release By Jasbir Singh)

New York : Long Island Punjabi Circle celebrated 4th annual Vaisakhi Mela, supported by Event Masters, Metropolitan Caterers, NC Asian American Affairs, IAAC, New York Kabaddi Club, Femina Spa & Salon& LIDC on Sunday May 19th. The weather was perfect, the set up was huge and uniformed in Nassau Community College. A big stage with huge speakers as wings, had thundering but pleasant sounds.

The retail vendors were selling clothes, jewelry, and shoes. Corporates were showcasing financial products, food sampling, Real Estate, Car Dealerships, tiles, and Solar installations. United Mortgage was the main attraction with a huge booth setup and banners all over as they were the Grand Sponsors of the event. Top Caterers like Metropolitan, Punjabi Dhaba, Badshah, Royal, Momos &Yass Tea had sumptuous foods and drinks, with the unending line of customers.

Famous Punjabi singer and heart throb Gulab Sidhu, Indian Idol Khuda Baksh, Voice of Punjab Harmanpreet Kaur and others performed so well and made everyone to dance to their tunes. The timeline included Bhangra & Giddha which showcased the cultural roots.

The administration of Nassau County including the office of Asian Affairs were given the credit with gratitude by Mela team. The County Executive Bruce Blakeman, NYS Senator Steve Rhoads, Town of North Hempstead Supervisor Jennifer DeSena, NYS Assemblyman Jake Blumencranz, NYS Assemblyman John K. Mikulin, NC Human Rights Commission Chairman Bobby Kumar Kalotee, ICCI T-20 World Cup Chairman Harry Singh Bolla, Senior Advisor Akram Chaudhary and many more graced the Stage with Citations and Proclamations apart from enjoying the event.

Every Year Mela Team helps a family with generous donation, this time they chose a family of their own, team member, volunteer Late Davinder Singh. Apart from the \$2500 contribution from Mela, Harry Singh Bolla of Bolla Oil donated \$5000 with his generosity. The Vaisakhi Mela Organizers consisting of Onkar Singh, Rajeev Maini, Deepak Bansal, Jay Sharma and Jasbir Jay Singh thanked all their Sponsors, Supporters, Volunteers.

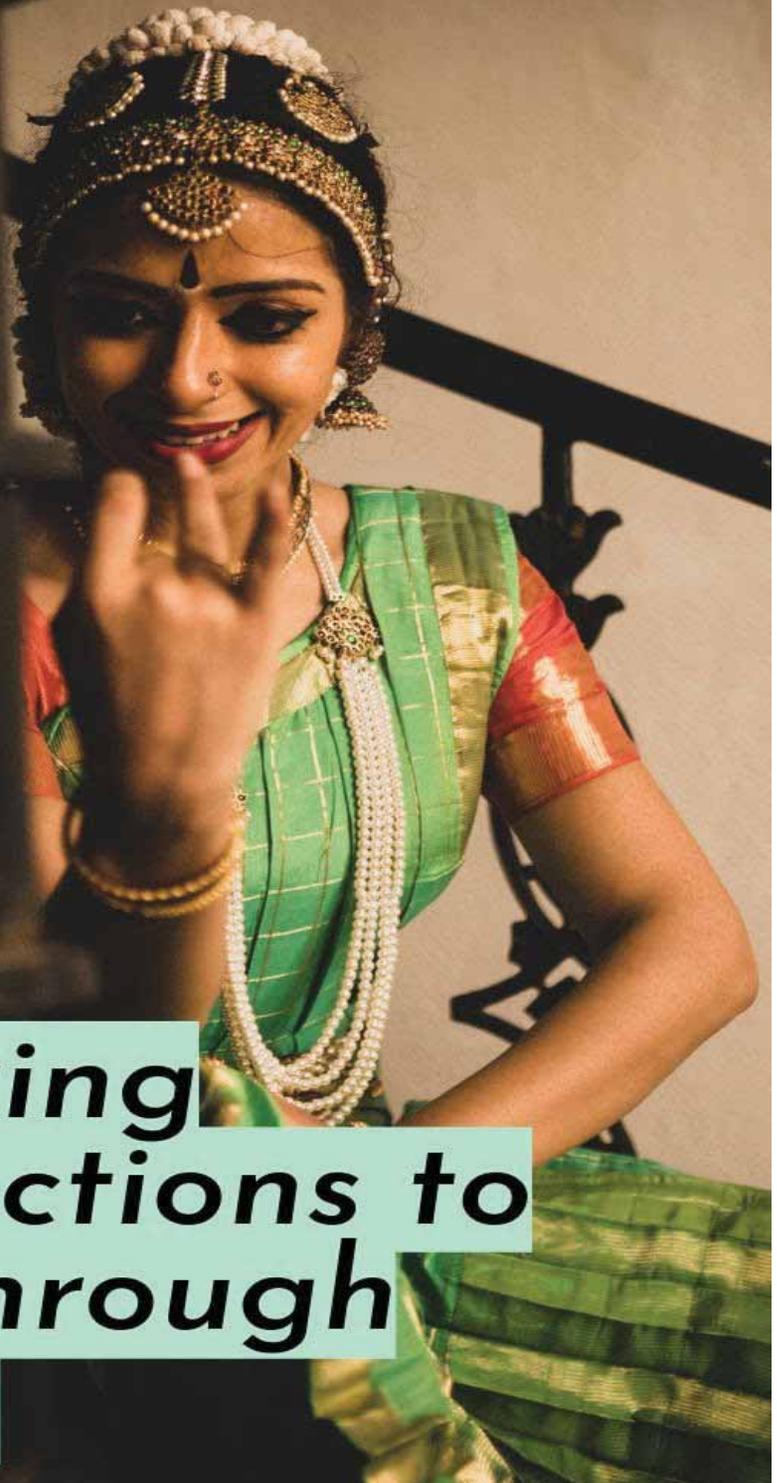
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# Fresh Heatwave Alert in These States Today, 'Heavier Than Normal' Rain Lashes Kerala, 7 Dead

By: Kavya Mishra

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for May 24 as severe heatwaves are expected to hit Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and other northern states on Friday.

Similar heatwave conditions will be seen in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat as well today, the IMD said in its release.

Heatwave to severe heatwave conditions very likely in many/most parts of Rajasthan during 23rd-27th; in some/many parts of Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh during 23rd-27th; West Uttar Pradesh during 26th & 27th; in isolated pockets of Delhi during 24th-27th May 2024, the IMD release states.

On the other hand, heavy rain continues to wreak havoc in parts of Kerala seven people died so far and alerts have been issued in several parts of the state.

The southern state witnessed heavier than normal pre-monsoon rains, even as much of South Asia



grappled with a heatwave, Reuters cited officials as saying. HEATWAVE ALERT IN THESE STATES

The India Meteorological Department has issued a severe heatwave warning, with a red alert, for Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi today.

Heatwave conditions are also predicted in parts of Jammu and

Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.

According to the weather bulletin released on Thursday, heatwaves are expected in isolated pockets of Jammu division, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh until May 27; in Gujarat till May 26; in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra till May 25; and in

Uttar Pradesh over the next three days. HEAVIER THAN NORMAL PRE-MONSOON RAIN: KERALA WEATHER

As Kerala reels under the impact of heavy pre-monsoon rains, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday revised its weather forecast and issued a red alert for two districts in the state. The weather department issued a red alert for Ernakulam and Thrissur districts. Earlier, these two places were placed under orange alert. An orange alert was also sounded in the Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki, Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode and Wayanad districts of the state. A red alert indicates heavy to extremely heavy rain of over 20 cm in 24 hours.

As per the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA), seven rain-related deaths were reported in the state from May 19 to 23.

DELHI WEATHER TODAY

A day before the Lok Sabha polling, Delhiites woke up to a warm Friday morning with the minimum temperature settling at 30.8 degrees Celsius, four notches above the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Amid continued heatwaves, humidity was recorded at 61 per cent at 8.30 am. The maximum temperature in Delhi is likely to settle around 42 degrees Celsius. The IMD has predicted clear skies and strong winds during the day and a warm night.

CYCLONE FORMING IN BAY OF BENGAL TO MAKE LANDFALL ON SUNDAY

A depression in the Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm and make landfall between Sagar island in West Bengal and Khepupara in Bangladesh around May 26 midnight, bringing heavy rain in the coastal districts of the state, the Met department said on Friday.

## SC Refuses to Issue EC Direction to Upload Voter Turnout Data Amid Lok Sabha Polls

†(Sai Bureau)-The Supreme Court on Friday refused an NGO's plea to issue the Election Commission directions to



upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website during the Lok Sabha polls, saying it would be difficult for the poll panel to mobilise manpower. A vacation bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma said it cannot issue any such directions at the moment as five phases of polling have concluded and two remain. The top court adjourned the interlocutory application filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) to be listed before the regular bench after the elections and pointed out that prima facie it appears the prayers in the application are similar to the main petition pending since 2019 on the issue. The bench said it

would be difficult for the poll panel to mobilise manpower for uploading the voter turnout data on its website. Granting any relief in the main petition which is pending, the bench said.

On May 17, the top court had sought within a week a response from the Election Commission on the NGO's plea seeking a direction to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of the conclusion of polling for each phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

## Indian man found guilty of molesting women during yoga classes in Singapore

†(Sai Bureau)-A 34-year-old Indian national who used to work as an instructor at a yoga centre in Singapore was found guilty on Thursday of molesting three women during his classes.

Rajpal Singh will return to court for sentencing in July. His passport has been impounded and currently he is out on bail of SGD 25,000. Singh was accused of touching the private parts of five women during his yoga classes in 2019

†(Sai Bureau)-Three Indian-origin students were killed and two others were injured in a car accident in the US on May 14. The five students, all 18 years old, studied at Alpharetta High School and the University of Georgia. Police say the speeding vehicle overturned upside down after the driver allegedly lost control of the vehicle. Two students, Aryan Joshi and Sriya Avasarala, died on the spot, while Anvi Sharma died during treatment at a hospital.

## 3 Indian-origin students killed in car crash in US



and 2020. But he was acquitted on three counts of molesting a fourth student after the judge found that the woman's testimony was not unusually convincing, Channel News Asia reported. The man faces a total of 10 charges. Two charges involving a fifth woman were stood down during his trial. The punishment for outraging a person's modesty is up to two years in jail, a fine, caning, or any combination of these penalties.

# Grandfather who acted as surety for Pune teen's bail questioned in Porsche case

**A top Pune Police official has said that an order is awaited on the 17-year-old boy, who fatally knocked down two motorcycle-borne software engineers with his Porsche car in Pune, to be tried as an adult in the case.**

†(News Agency)-Pune crime branch has questioned Surendra Agarwal, the grandfather of the 17-year-old boy who fatally knocked down two motorcycle-borne software engineers with his Porsche car in Pune earlier this week. The police questioned the grandfather in connection with the FIR registered in the matter in which the teenager's father, Vishal Agarwal, had also been arrested.

Surendra Agarwal was named as an accused in a firing incident that took place in 2008 and is alleged to have links to underworld don Chota Rajan. The police are questioning him to know more about his son and grandson, and conversations he had with them on the day of the accident to dig deeper into the case.

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Also on Wednesday evening, the teen driver's lawyer, Prashant Patil told reporters that a parameter has been set by the Juvenile Justice Board for the accused as to what needs to be done during his 15-day remand at the correctional home, which includes counselling by a psychiatrist or a psychologist.

"We will get the written order tomorrow (Thursday)," he added.

The teen was produced before the juvenile court after a new case was registered against him under section 185 for driving under the influence of alcohol. Meanwhile, a sessions court earlier on Wednesday remanded Vishal Agarwal (50), the minor's father, and two employees of Hotel Black Club, Nitesh Shevani and Jayesh Gavkar, in police custody till May 24.

Here are the latest developments:

According to lawyer Prashant Patil, the



police told the three-member board during yesterday's hearing that the teenager should stay at a rehabilitation home as there could be a threat to his life if he stayed outside. He added that the defence opposed the police's plea. The process of deciding whether a juvenile should be treated as an adult accused can take at least two months as reports from psychiatrists and counsellors are required, after which the Juvenile Justice Board takes a final decision on the case, Patil added.

The police have registered an FIR against the minor under IPC sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 304 A (causing death by negligence), 279 (rash driving) and relevant sections of the Motor Vehicles Act. According to the police, the teenager was drunk at the time of the accident on Sunday.

A case against the accused minor's father, Vishal Agarwal, under sections 75 and 77 of the Juvenile Justice Act, and against the owner and employees of two bars which the boy had visited before the accident for "serving alcohol to an underage person".

While section 75 deals with "willful neglect of a child, or exposing a child to mental or physical illnesses", section 77 deals with supplying a child with intoxicating liquor or drugs.

The police FIR says that Vishal Agarwal, a real estate developer, gave his son the luxury sports vehicle despite knowing that the boy did not have a driving licence, thus endangering his life, and allowed him to party even while knowing that he consumed alcohol.

The prosecution demanded police custody of seven days for Agarwal and the other two, stating that the police wanted to investigate why the real estate developer allowed his son to drive the

MP Rahul Gandhi over the latter's "very cheap attempt to politicise this incident because, in the Pune incident, the police took immediate action".

"The attempt by Rahul Gandhi to bring vote politics into everything is very wrong," Fadnavis said.

On his part, Rahul Gandhi had said if an ordinary truck or cab driver were to cause the accident, he would be jailed for years, but there was different justice for the son of a rich man. He further said that Congress wanted to change this system.

Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi leader Prakash Ambedkar claimed that police spent more time asking questions about the relationship between the two software engineers who died in the accident, "while the accused was allegedly served burger and pizza".



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# Europe, China And US: An Awkward Love Triangle

China is obliged to play its cards with dexterity. Even in an adversarial atmosphere, it has shown a willingness to engage the US, conscious of both its strengths and vulnerabilities. This would explain the series of high-level visits of US officials to China after last year's Biden-Xi summit in San Francisco. Beijing is confident that the US cannot decouple itself from China - the world's second-largest economy, the biggest manufacturing power, as well as the biggest exporter. The Chinese market opportunities are far too big to be ignored by American corporations. China also controls many critical technologies and raw materials that are critical, for instance, for the green transition. The US can reduce its dependence on China in a few important areas, but that is going to take time. Thus, the world's two biggest economies will have to strike a new balance of interests - within a security paradigm.

At the same time though, China is aware that its economy is facing headwinds. It has a vested interest in globalisation so as to propel its own growth and prosperity. It would like to avoid a confrontation with the US even as it is willing to push back strongly through its aggressive moves in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, as well as the anti-US verbal attacks by Chinese leaders and spokespersons.

China cannot ignore America's repeated attempts to deny it access to the most advanced technologies, as well as to its market by imposing prohibitive tariffs on products like EVs that, in America's view, can further damage its industrial base. The US is also developing its own capacities in various areas, such as semiconductors, to reduce its dependence on China, and aims to ultimately develop an industrial policy of its own.

## Germany's Dependence On China

China is also aware of the US's pressure on Europe to follow its lead in technology denial measures against it. Europe cannot entirely reject such pressures given the tight security linkages with the US. But the two have a history of sharp differences on many economic issues.

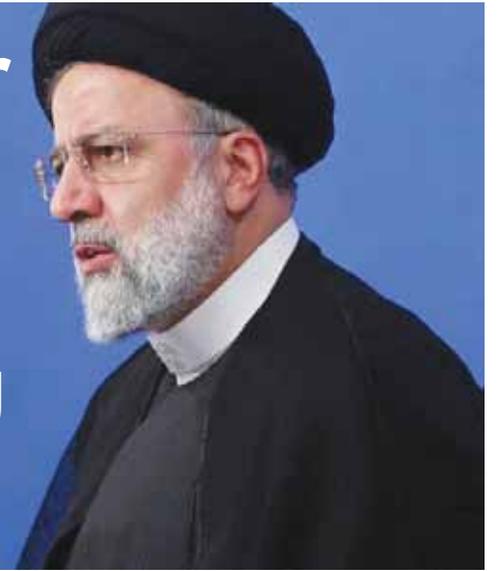
Germany is highly dependent on the Chinese market, which explains the recent Beijing visit of Chancellor Olaf Scholz accompanied by CEOs of major German corporations. On the other hand, President Xi Jinping visited France most recently, followed by a trip to Hungary and Serbia, both of which are demonstrably pro-China and at odds with the EU over the Ukraine conflict as well as the union's excessive liberalism. Already, the EU is concerned about China using the two nations to exploit the cracks in European unity. China would like to capitalise on EU-US differences. It has been openly encouraging Europe to

play an independent role in international affairs. During his visit to France, Xi, in brief televised comments, could be seen urging President Emmanuel Macron to join him in showing "independence", "prevent a new Cold War" between blocs, "work together for an equal and orderly multi-polar world", and oppose the "decoupling" of China's supply chains and other economies.

## Befriending The Dragon Independently

Scholz and Xi's visits can be seen as Europe's own parallel engagement with China, independent of that of the US. This gives China an opportunity to undercut a joint US-Europe front against it. France is less dependent economically on China than Germany, but the Chinese market is the biggest one for its luxury goods, besides the valuable Sino-French cooperation in nuclear, aviation and agriculture areas. Germany is far too deeply tied to the Chinese market to follow a more aggressive approach towards China on trade and investment. Given that and the weakening of the French-German tandem within the EU, Macron, with his ambition to lead Europe, has chosen to take the lead and shape the course and discourse on EU-China ties. With Scholz staying away from a joint Franco-German meeting with Xi Jinping - something the French President would have preferred - the message is that France and Germany are not unified in their approach towards China. Nonetheless, in order to add weight to his talks with Xi, Macron invited Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the EU Commission, to join him instead. This was intended to convey the message that he was speaking to Xi in tight coordination with Brussels. Macron, with his newly defined vision of the EU that he feels will alone ensure Europe's survival, raised with Xi the issues of Europe's deficit with China, unequal market access, China's overcapacities in manufacturing and the consequential dumping of its products in Europe. Ursula von der Leyen was blunter. She raised the issue of Chinese subsidised products, such as electric vehicles or steel, which are flooding the European market, and called on the Chinese government to address these structural overcapacities. She expanded these concerns by stating that the EU was closely coordinating with the G7 countries and emerging economies, which are also increasingly affected by China's market distortions. She demanded real progress on market access and threatened to make full use of the EU's trade defence instruments if necessary, as Europe could not accept market-distorting practices that could lead to de-industrialisation at home. She also spoke of improving the resilience of Europe's supply chains by de-risking them.

# Iran after Raisi India hopeful of maintaining strong ties



THE death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (63), a hardliner who was perceived to be a strong contender to succeed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has brought to an abrupt end an eventful tenure marked by a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests, besides frantic but futile efforts to revitalise Iran's economy in the face of Western sanctions. Even though Khamenei has the final say on foreign policy and Iran's nuclear programme, age is not on his side. At 85, he direly needs younger leaders to stabilise the Iranian ship. Raisi's death comes weeks after Iran and Israel were involved in a direct confrontation with a tit-for-tat exchange of drone and missile strikes. Iran has also been in the crosshairs of Israel over its support to Hamas, whose October 7 attack prompted a fierce Israeli retaliation that has ravaged Gaza.

Even as Khamenei has tried to reassure Iranians that there would be no disruption to state affairs and has named First Vice-President

Mohammad Mokhber as the interim President, the potential power struggle within Iran will be keenly watched by the West and other stakeholders, including India. It was only last week that New Delhi and Tehran signed a 10-year contract for the operation of the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar, which was regarded as one of Raisi's pet projects. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Chabahar pact as an important milestone that would facilitate trade connectivity to the landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asian region. Even the threat of American sanctions has not deterred India from strengthening its bonds with Iran.

Raisi had developed a close rapport with PM Modi, whose help he had sought to expedite the process of admitting Iran to the BRICS bloc; eventually, it did enter the grouping that originally included Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. India will hope to forge a similar relationship with Raisi's successor.

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# Political parties pay lip service to women's safety

*The Swati Maliwal, Brij Bhushan and Prajwal cases highlight the double standards of politicians on women's issues.*

By Prem Chowdhry

THE Swati Maliwal case underlines a horrifying reality ó political parties are reluctant to walk the talk on women's issues. They may pledge their commitment to empowering women, but when it comes to taking action, they are nowhere to be seen. It is not just the Aam Aadmi Party that is at fault. The BJP has been largely evasive about the sexual harassment case against its MP, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. The saffron party has not only ignored his condemnable acts, but it has also given the ticket to his son to fight the Lok Sabha election from the Kaiserganj constituency in Uttar Pradesh. The oft-repeated shibboleths of Nari Shakti and Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao remain empty political slogans.

In the Maliwal case, Arvind Kejriwal's former personal secretary Bibhav Kumar is accused of assaulting her at the Delhi Chief Minister's residence. Violence took place during a heated exchange between Kumar and Maliwal, a Rajya Sabha MP. She was allegedly slapped and kicked in the chest and stomach. Did it have something to do with her superior position ó as an MP ó to that of the man (the CM's aide)? What we do know is that violence was the result. The case of Brij Bhushan ó a former chief of the Wrestling Federation of India and a six-time MP ó pertains to the sexual harassment of female wrestlers. He was charged by the court for sexual harassment, stalking, outraging the modesty of women and criminal intimidation. The matter brings to the fore the menace of sexual exploitation of women by powerful individuals. Prajwal Revanna, a young MP from Karnataka, has been accused of sexually abusing several women. He belongs to an influential political family ó he is the grandson of former Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) chief Deve Gowda. The Karnataka State Commission for Women has stated that the parliamentarian had abused women and made objectionable videos of them without their



consent. When the videos went viral and the truth could not be denied any longer, Prajwal fled to Germany. Even as he continues to evade the authorities, he has been suspended by the party. Interpol has been contacted to locate him, but there has been no success so far. Incidentally, the JD(S) is an ally of the BJP in Karnataka in the ongoing Lok

Sabha elections. These cases underscore the double standards that political leaders adopt towards women and highlight the difference in what they say and what actions they take. Maliwal's case adds yet another dimension to the violence women face, which extends from domestic abuse to murder (dowry deaths and honour killings), sexual crimes (rape,

human trafficking and prostitution) and acid attacks. The unpalatable truth about women in India, both historically and socially, is that they are struggling for their own identity, shouting to have their voices heard and fighting for their esteem and respect. Despite the constitutional guarantee of gender equality, rampant discrimination and exploitation of

women continue in India. Incidents of sexual harassment, molestation and ill-treatment of women are on the rise. It is high time that women got a respectable and dignified position in Indian society to fearlessly voice their opinions. Awareness should be spread among women and in society, and their rights should be protected. All crimes against women should be made punishable. In this era of globalisation and revolution in the means of communication and information technology, the role of the media has become all the more crucial for women's empowerment in India. There has been much societal progress all over the world. And a number of organisations have been striving to protect the honour and freedom of women. But in our country, a deep-rooted patriarchal attitude persists. That is the reason why it is the male child that gets more attention in a family and enjoys more freedom than a girl. It is necessary to have women in India educated so that they can live with dignity and help solve their issues.

## Phase V poll

### *Amid campaign heat, real issues eclipsed*

AS voters head to the polling stations today in the fifth phase of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections, they will determine the fate of 695 candidates vying for 49 seats across six states and two union territories, including Ladakh. With this phase, 428 seats would have been covered, leaving 115 for the final two phases. Key candidates in this round include the BJP's Smriti Irani (Amethi) and Rajnath Singh (Lucknow) and the Congress's Rahul Gandhi (Raebareli).

The long-drawn-out polls being held amid a heatwave might be causing ennui, but the campaigning has been anything but dull. Political



parties have gone all out to capture voters' attention, often drawing the ire of the Election Commission of India (ECI). Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sought to clarify his remarks about Muslims, suggesting that the reference to large families pertained to poorer sections of society. Meanwhile, Sam

Pitroda of the Congress resigned, following a backlash over his allegedly racist comments. In West Bengal, BJP candidate and retired judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay received a show-cause notice from the ECI for his derogatory comments about CM Mamata Banerjee. The Aam Aadmi Party

is in turmoil over allegations levelled by its Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal against Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar, allowing the BJP to capitalise on the controversy. And then there was Kangana Ranaut.

As a result, several key issues that impact the lives of citizens have been overshadowed. Political rhetoric has increasingly steered clear of a meaningful debate, focusing on personal attacks and inflammatory statements. This trend is eroding the integrity of the democratic engagement, undermining the voters' capability to make informed decisions.

# Public Policy Can Force AI Platforms to Nix Deepfakes Before Their Creation

**By: K Yatish Rajawat & Dev Chandrasekhar**

Cyber fraud has evolved dramatically in recent years, shifting from simple email deceptions to incorporating sophisticated GenAI technologies to create deepfakes that can recreate the face, body movement, voice, and accent of the real thing. Lawsuits are being filed worldwide to block or bring down these deepfakes under copyright infringement laws. But using the courts to prevent this misuse is not enough; the state needs to enforce policy at the AI level.

Recently, a multinational company's CFO was impersonated using deepfake technology in a video call. This AI-generated facade was employed to authorise the transfer of a significant sum, totalling nearly \$25 million, into multiple local bank accounts. Initially suspicious, the employee was convinced after a video chat with what appeared to be her CFO and several co-workers, showcasing the dangerous persuasive power of deep-fakes to commit financial crimes.

Until recently, from synthesised music to edited images and voice assistants, such innovations, while artificial, often still bore the human touch ó a critical aspect when ownership and responsibility have to be assigned for the synthetic output. Moreover, every element of enhancement was tedious and expensive and had human interfaces.

However, generative AI (Gen AI) dramatically shifts this landscape, bypassing human touch and creating works almost entirely by software ó the deepfake. These convincing falsifications are propelled by advanced AI tools, many accessible on the Internet, that blend machine learning and neural networks.

Deepfakes are generally fought on grounds of copyright and intellectual property infringement, or as a financial crime if it involves a financial transaction and digital impersonation.

Since such reactions are generally post facto, the harms caused by these deepfakes on reputational, financial, or societal levels have already been committed; they don't prevent or reduce the number of deepfakes. Nor is there any deterrence to the AI platforms used as tools to create these deepfakes. Most infringements are limited to taking these deepfakes down on

social media. Detecting the criminal is difficult as most AI tools do not authenticate users. In a way, it's like gun control. Access to these tools is available over the

internet, most of the AI tools are free as they want users' data and are not charging them yet. It's as if anyone and everybody has access to guns; there is no need to buy the gun or the

ammunition. The only way to control deepfakes is to monitor control of the AI engine and access to the data, similar to the guns and access to the ammunition.

GUNS AND AMMUNITION: AI PLATFORMS AND DATA One way to deter deepfakes is to make the platform the co-accused in every case of proven deepfakes.

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# Who Belittled The Indian Constitution?

By: Priyadarshi Dutta

The Constitution of India is in the news, but not because it will complete 75 years of its adoption soon. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, and the heir apparent of the party, Rahul Gandhi, have both alleged that the Constitution of India is at risk from Narendra Modi. Modi's re-election, particularly with a 400-plus margin, could spell doom for the Constitution, especially its features like Parliamentary elections and reservation for members of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities etc. Rahul Gandhi, in his election speeches, is repeatedly vowing to protect the Constitution at any cost. This stance has elicited a response from the BJP. The most laconic one came from BJP President J.P. Nadda, who recently stated that though Rahul Gandhi always carried a copy of the Constitution, he never read it. Previously Rahul Gandhi had affirmed at Cambridge University on May 25, 2022, that India is not a nation, but a union of states, as the Constitution describes it. He



compared the Indian Republic with the European Union- iThink of India that it is politically and economically united, that is what India achieved 70 years ago. Ironically, it tells more about Rahul Gandhi than either about India or the Indian Constitution. If India is not a nation, then his illustrious predecessors must have erred in naming the party the Indian National Congress. Renaming it as Indian Union Congress is perhaps overdue. The purpose of the Constitution is not to describe the historical or cultural identity of India. It is to lay down a

framework for governing the Republic. Article 1 (1) of the Constitution famously states that India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States. The verb used in the sentence is shall be and not is unlike what Rahul Gandhi thinks. The verb shall be is not merely a matter of future tense, but something for a specific purpose only. When, say, an official gazette notifies that somebody has been appointed as the Joint Secretary in the Ministry or general manager of a PSU, it merely states an official fact. It says nothing about his/her station

in family or social life because that is not the purpose of an office order. That, however, does not mean that those identities are abrogated. The same is true about the Constitution whose Part I describes Union and its Territory and not the cultural or civilisational identity of India. Rahul Gandhi seems to be labouring under the mistaken belief that the Constitution nowhere refers to India as a nation. It is most manifestly there in the Preamble which speaks of fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. The expression (and integrity) (to make the affirmation stronger) was inserted through the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 by his grandmother Indira Gandhi, perhaps because she wanted to make unity more stronger, something Rahul Gandhi is now refuting. Article 249 establishes the power of Parliament to legislate with respect to a matter in the State List in the national interest. How could, without a nation, there would be national interest, in pursuit of which the Constitution allows the

Parliament to override conventional boundaries of Union List, State List and Concurrent List subjects mandated under Article 246 and elaborated in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution? The Directive Principles of State Policy uses expressions like national life, objects of national importance, whereas Fundamental Duties (Article 51A), interpolated by Indira Gandhi through the 42nd Amendment exhort us inter alia to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom, to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so. Even while protecting certain draconic laws like MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act), Indira Gandhi invoked nationhood. Article 31D, inserted through the 42nd Amendment but abrogated by the Janata government through the 43rd Amendment, spoke of the saving of laws in respect of anti-national activities. To Indira Gandhi, leaders like Jay Prakash Narayan were indulging in anti-national activities!

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# Will 'Kisan-Jawan-Pahalwan' Barricade BJP's Win Path?

By JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Has PM Modi smelt the essence of the ground? Are Ram Mandir, Dhara 370 and Hindu-Muslim slogans not working in the desired direction?

Political thinkers analyze that the Ram Mandir, Dhara 370 and Hindu-Muslim slogans do not seem to be giving much positive results for the party and issues of 'Kisan-Jawan Pahlwaní' (Farmers- Soldiers and Wrestlers) have eroded these 'Ram Baaní' (Medication for every disease) slogans of BJP. And PM Modi has got this point. That is why, now he is focusing more on 'Farmers- Soldiers and Wrestlers' and denying any discrimination with the Muslim community.

"The day I start talking about Hindu-Muslim (in politics) will be the day I lose my ability to lead a public life," Modi said, speaking in Hindi. "I will not do Hindu-Muslim. That is my resolve." PM Narendra Modi made these remarks in an interview with CNN-News18.

Why Modi had to clarify his stand? What he had said? If he had said nothing provocative and hatred spreading, then why did the Samyukta Kisan Morcha had to demand the removal and prosecution of Prime Minister Narendra Modi?

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of farmers' unions in India, in a press release on April 23, 2024, had demanded removal from the PM post and prosecution of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his alleged highly poisonous hate speech at Banswara in Rajasthan on 20th April 2024. SKM had alleged that the Prime Minister had accused all members of the main minority group of the country as 'intruders' without any substance is nothing but insanity that violates the secular constitution that ensures separation of state and religion in governance.

Whether PM Modi is really following his words expressed in the News-18 interview? Has he softened his words and not voicing in the manner in which he expressed himself in Rajasthan? Yes, some changes seem there. Now he is not directly bursting against any community, as was alleged earlier, but using the words -- those doing 'vote-jihadí'.

On May 18, addressing a rally in Haryana, PM Modi alleged that Congress is solely focused on appeasement politics. The manifesto crafted by Congress resembles the entire Muslim League manifesto. Congress claims that they will conduct an X-ray of the public's assets and then distribute those assets to those doing 'vote-jihadí'.

For wooing 'Farmers- Soldiers and Wrestlers', PM Modi has started to preach the steps taken by the BJP government for the benefit of these segments, who are annoyed with the party due to barbaric behavior of BJP government during farmers' movement



and dragging the wrestlers on Delhi roads.

PM Narendra Modi, while addressing public meetings in Ambala and Sonipat, Haryana on May 18, criticized the previous Congress government and highlighted various beneficial schemes for farmers in Haryana, initiated by the BJP government.

Modi highlighted that before 2014, the Congress-led government had purchased grains from farmers at MSP worth only ₹7.5 lakh crore. In contrast, during the 10 years of the Modi government, agricultural produce worth ₹20 lakh crore has been procured from farmers at MSP. Previously, farmers often faced delays in receiving payments, but now the funds are directly deposited into their bank accounts. Congress has only betrayed sugarcane farmers. Presently, the FRP for sugarcane stands at nearly ₹350 per quintal, while the Congress government used to offer around ₹210 per quintal.

Modi divulged that in 2014, when the BJP took office, the pending dues for sugarcane were approximately ₹60,000 crore. Contrastingly, this year, the government has cleared payments amounting to ₹1 lakh 14 thousand crore. Over ₹650 crore have been directly transferred to the accounts of farmers in Ambala, Karnal and Kurukshetra under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi.

To show his government's affinity towards sports and sportspersons, PM Modi claimed that after forming the government in 2014, the BJP government increased the sports budget threefold, encouraging the youth to play more and win more medals. Whether it's building top-notch training centers in India or sending athletes abroad for training, the Modi government spares no expense in supporting athletes. Currently, thousands of athletes receive over ₹50,000 monthly under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) from the government. It is because of such initiatives, India has won the most Olympic medals to date, enhanced its reputation in the Asian Games and set records in university games. India is now striving to host the 2036 Olympics and soon, the nation will witness the first Olympics in India, with Haryana

and Sonipat youth winning gold medals.

To fetch the votes of ex-servicemen from congress basket, PM Modi alleged that Congress betrayed our ex-servicemen. For fourteen years, they made empty promises about "One Rank One Pension," and when they realized that Modi posed to be a significant challenge in 2013, Rahul Gandhi allocated a budget of ₹500 crores for it and held meetings with ex-servicemen in Haryana, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh, spreading confusion. But we implemented 'One Rank One Pension'. Their habit of lying is deeply ingrained. Our government fulfilled the promise of 'One Rank One Pension' with flying colors when given the opportunity to serve by the people. Everyone should know how Congress lies. Congress allocated ₹500 crores for OROP, but when the BJP government implemented it, more than ₹1 lakh 20 were allocated.

But has the people forgotten the death of more than 700 farmers, stating the farmers as terrorists, dragging the wrestlers on Delhi roads and dashing the hope of unemployed youths, who were preparing themselves for joining the Indian forces, by implementing Agni Veer scheme?

Dr. Inderjeet Singh National Vice-President of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) says, 'BJP election rallies being addressed by Modi and Amit Shah are hardly making any significant impact in the given isolation of BJP from the electorate in general and peasantry in particular.'

There are reports that Modi's moderately attended rally in Gohana two days ago failed even to boost the BJP workers morale let alone woo the farmers. It was only a gathering of people mobilized with the misuse of power with the help of private school buses. In the backdrop of excesses done during farmers movement and the women wrestlers as well as other sections including police repression meted out to Sarpanches, scheme workers etc. in the recent past have not faded from the memories of people. Visit of Modi- Shah and other BJP leaders is not cutting ice and deter the

electorate suffering from unemployment and acute price rise from punishing BJP cutting across caste /community considerations.

R. C Punia, an RTI activist, carrier counselor and a former Gramin Bank Manager, who himself belongs to a farmer family, expresses, 'As much as I have been able to know and have heard and talked to the farmers, based on their anger it can be said that most of the farmers in Haryana are now anti-BJP. In Bhiwani and Dadri, all the farmer organizations are campaigning against BJP in their own way. They are protesting vocally in Sirsa and Fatehabad. Protest is also going on in Bhiwani-Dadri. Ex-servicemen have also come together and announced their support to the Congress. The employees are separately causing harm to BJP. Thus, I do not think that the Modi-Shah duo will be able to do any magic. Everyone has made up their mind for change. The real situation will be known on June 4.'

Will 'Kisan- Jawan- Pahalwaní' resentment darken the BJP's fate?

To provoke the farmers against Congress Party and get sympathy of farmers, especially the 'Jats', Union Home Minister, Amit Shah during his visit to Haryana on 20th May, raised the issue of Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

'Congress worked to insult the Vice President and son of a Jat farmer Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar who holds a constitutional post.'

Shah stated that the Congress only talks about the poor but does nothing for their welfare. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi talks about farmers but insulted Shri Jagdeep Dankar, a farmer's son who is a representative leader for the Jat farmers.

But, whatever PM Modi or Amit Shah claim, the ground reality seems anti-BJP and the political observers conclude that the 'Kisan- Jawan-Pahalwaní' issue is playing its major role to abstain the BJP from returning to power a third time. During farmers' agitation death of more than 700 farmers, women wrestlers' insult and curbing the employment chances for farmers, especially the ex-servicemen's, (as most of them prefer to send their wards in the Indian forces), next generation, the most affected areas of adjoining Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab are giving a bigger jolt to the BJP.

People who watch political games eagerly state that Rajasthan, which gave 25 out of 25 Lok Sabha seats to BJP in 2019 elections, presently seems to be snatching 8 to 10 seats from BJP. Haryana, where BJP won all the 10 seats in 2019, now indicates a reverse trend. In Punjab, where BJP got only 2 seats out of 13 Lok Sabha seats in 2019, now may dash to ground without any share of seats.

# To Play the New Great Game Effectively, India Must Shed Decades of Foreign Policy Inhibitions

By: Minhaz Merchant

The original 'Great Game' was fought in the mid-1800s between the Russian Empire and the combined might of the British, French and Ottoman Empires over control of Central Asia. The British feared an attack by the Imperial Russian Army through Afghanistan on their Indian colony. The Ottomans, though in decline, wanted to guard against Russian incursions into their Balkan possessions.

As a report by Kallie Szczepanski (thought.com) described it: 'Britain's Lord Ellenborough started 'The Great Game' on January 12, 1830, with an edict establishing a new trade route from India to Bukhara, using Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan as a buffer against Russia to prevent it from controlling any ports on the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, Russia wanted to establish a neutral zone in Afghanistan allowing for their use of crucial trade routes.'

'The Great Game officially ended with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which divided Persia (Iran) into a Russian-controlled northern zone, a nominally independent central zone, and a British-controlled southern zone. The Convention also specified a borderline between the two empires running from the eastern point of Persia to Afghanistan and declared Afghanistan an official protectorate of Britain.' Russia's invasion of Ukraine nearly two centuries later has triggered a new Great Game but with vastly different actors, motives and possible outcomes.

In the mid-1800s the United States did not count. It was convulsed by a Civil War (1861-65) between Northern Unionist states and Southern Confederate states over slavery. China had been humiliated by Britain during the Opium Wars (1839-60). It lay in repose. India was a British colony, robbed of its wealth and morale.

Today Russia lies weakened, its Soviet-era satellite states absorbed into NATO. They form a Western knife aimed at Moscow's jugular. Ukraine remains a non-NATO buffer state. If it joins NATO in future, Russia will be completely encircled by the US-led West. Meanwhile,



China has emerged as the principal threat to the West's hegemony. The contest between the US and China mirrors the contest between the British and Russian Empires in the mid-1800s. Like post-Imperial Russia, post-Imperial Britain too lies weakened. The rivalry between China and the US has no third angle as in the past. The Ottoman Empire is long gone. Where does India fit into the geopolitical

contest between the US and China? As the world's third largest economy by 2028 and a critical military and geostrategic asset in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), China and the US regard India as too small to matter but too big to ignore.

US IRE

Washington is displeased with India on three key issues: One, buying crude oil from Russia at discounted prices which has

helped Moscow escape Western criticism over alleged assassinations of Indian-origin extremists on Western soil; and three, operationalising Chabahar port in Iran. The Biden administration, already annoyed over the Hardeep Singh Nijjar 'murder-for-hire' case, regards Iran as a pariah state.

Neither Washington nor Beijing welcomes the untrammelled rise

of India. To China, India is an upstart, fit for a regional, not global, role. For the US, India serves as a subaltern in the Indo-Pacific. Its usefulness is as a regional bulwark to China.

The two original actors of the Great Game, Russia and Britain, have taken sides. Russia is firmly aligned with China as a junior partner. Britain is America's alter-ego, sharing real-time intelligence and advanced defence technology.

Neither Moscow nor London, however, has the clout to significantly alter the course of the US-China geopolitical contest.

INDIAANGLE

In the 19th century Great Game between the Russian and British Empires, the Ottomans played the third angle in what was essentially a binary contest. Within 50 years, by 1918, caught in a pincer between rival European powers in the First World War, the Ottoman Empire, which had allied with Germany, was dismantled, the Caliphate abolished. India, unlike the Ottomans who were in terminal decline in the early 20th century, is a rising power. It lay dormant as a British colony. Today, a resurgent India can play the balancing pivot between the US and China.

## Xi keen on consolidating bilateral ties to divide EU

BY Jayadeva Ranade

CHINESE President Xi Jinping's recent visit to France, Serbia and Hungary came amid rising concern in Europe about the war in Ukraine and China's growing assistance to Russia. Commenting on Xi's tour, the official Zhongguo Qingnian Bao (China Youth Daily, May 6) candidly observed that the visit was 'vitally important for China's relations with France, Serbia, Hungary and the European Union (EU) at large'.

High on Xi's agenda were the economy, concern about the possibility of the West imposing sanctions on China, and the issue of 'overcapacity' flagged by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and the EU. Xi's tour was carefully crafted to first try and 'soften' France, which has a powerful voice in the EU and considerable investments in China, and then to end with a successful flourish in Serbia and Hungary - both countries with whom China has excellent commercial and diplomatic ties. Signed articles by Xi were published in major newspapers of the three countries, coinciding with his arrival. France was the most difficult to deal with as President Macron has changed

his views over the past year and now sees the war in Ukraine as an existential threat to Europe. This has increased worries about the supply by China of dual-use goods and



military material to Russia. To demonstrate - especially after German Chancellor Olaf Scholz bent his knee to Beijing - that France and the EU were equally concerned about Ukraine, Macron invited EU President Ursula von der Leyen to join the talks with Xi in Paris. Contentious issues were raised, such as the French-backed anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles from China; Chinese overcapacity; Beijing's indirect support to Russia's war in Ukraine; and the explosion

of the Nordic pipeline.

In their 80-minute bilateral talks, Macron reportedly raised concerns about China supplying dual-use items to Russia and underscored that the war in Ukraine posed a direct threat to Europe. Xi said that in this phase of transformation and turbulence, 'China and France should uphold independence and jointly prevent a new Cold War or bloc confrontation' and 'stay committed to the spirit that guided the establishment of their diplomatic ties, namely independence, mutual understanding, long-term vision and mutual benefit, and enrich it with new features of the new era'. He said they should take 'a long view and work together for an equal and orderly multipolar world' and 'jointly oppose decoupling and cutting off of supply chains'. He offered to 'deepen cooperation' in aerospace and aviation, nuclear energy, innovation and finance, and 'expand cooperation in emerging areas such as green energy, smart manufacturing, biomedicine and artificial intelligence (AI)' as well as a reform of the international financial system.

# Why Meghan Has Discovered A New Motherland

By: Reshmi Dasgupta

When Meghan Markle first strategically revealed that she is 43 per cent Nigerian in 2022 on a podcast, it did not create much of a stir. But two years hence, her discovery paid off in the form of an almost-royal visit by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex to West Africa's most populous country last week, where they were given a rapturous welcome. After all, Indians are not the only ones who get excited by the prospect of welcoming a famous diaspora, however distant.

And now her fans aver her revelation and 2024 visit had the same impact as her late mother-in-law Princess Diana's 1990 trip to Nigeria. Needless to add, her father-in-law's three subsequent visits there (including two with her current mother-in-law) did not make waves. Meghan's decision to visit Nigeria herself as a returning daughter with her obliging royal husband Harry in tow is not surprising at all. It is in keeping with rising identity politics in the US.

That Meghan's African roots are purportedly in that corner of the continent is expected. Most slaves taken to the so-called Americas were captured and



transported from western and central Africa. Less than 4 per cent of them landed in the US, though; most were taken as slave labour for plantations in the Caribbean and Brazil. They and the slaves who toiled in the cotton fields of the southern US were not allowed to retain their language or culture, so few knew their roots.

So, for many African Americans, the route back to their roots was the publication of Alex Haley's gripping bestseller *Roots* in 1975 and its hit TV version that aired in 1977. The protagonist there was supposedly from The Gambia, now one of the smallest nations in west Africa. In reality, far more were

captured from what is now Nigeria, probably 3.5 million in all. Interestingly, local tribal hierarchies and rivalries led to many of them actually helping European slave traders.

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1977. The protagonist there was supposedly from The Gambia, now one of the smallest nations in west Africa. In reality, far more were captured from what is now Nigeria, probably 3.5 million in all. Interestingly, local tribal hierarchies and rivalries led to many of them actually helping European slave traders.

Their terrible ordeal once they arrived in the US is well known. Though slavery was abolished in 1865 in the US, it took another century before segregation of races which made interracial marriages illegal was formally discarded in 1964. So even though they were nominally free, most African-Americans had no choice but to marry within their own race, thereby further blurring any micro-ethnic differences their ancestors may have brought from Africa.

Given the strong and distinct cultural ethic of their communities, calling Mindy Kaling and Lucy Liu 'Asian' just because both their ancestral countries are on that continent is ridiculous. But Africans had been homogenised to such an extent in the US that they did not think of themselves as any hyphenated American even if they knew where their ancestors came from.

## Hope of Naya Kashmir amid poll buzz

by Amitabh Mattoo

ELECTIONS in Jammu and Kashmir are much more than a democratic ritual. In the popular imagination, they have been powerful symbols of faith and betrayal; resistance and accommodation; hope and disillusionment; confidence and uncertainty. But rarely has the Kashmir valley witnessed such a boisterous celebration of competitive democracy as it has in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Robust rallies, roadshows throughout the length and breadth of the picturesque Valley and Kashmir's many brave, emotional, colourful and sometimes mercurial political leaders have coalesced to construct what may well be a watershed moment in the state-turned-UT's contemporary history.

This is the first parliamentary election after the abrogation of Article 370, and the ending of



the special provision as well as the downgrading of the state to a union territory have been key issues in the campaign. And yet somewhat paradoxically, in the fairness of the elections (conducted in an atmosphere relatively also free of fear) is the finest expression of the idea of India in Kashmir. It is a moment to build on and sustain if we want to truly create a Naya Kashmir, and for that the Assembly elections must be conducted with equal alacrity.

Democracy has had shaky roots in J&K. In the 1950s and the

1960s, stage-managed elections in Jammu were seen as a betrayal of the trust of 1947. The 1977 elections, the fairest the erstwhile state had witnessed since Independence, became a leitmotif of faith and accommodation. The 1987 elections, neither free nor fair, paved the way for decades of militancy. Confidence in the democratic process was restored to a considerable extent when for the first time the electorate was able to dislodge the then ruling party in 2002 during Prime Minister Vajpayee's tenure. But

truly gone are the days when then PM Jawaharlal Nehru had to, in the 1950s, reportedly advise the then Wazir-e-Azam of the state, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, to concede a few seats to his opponents, if only to make the election credible in the public perception.

Today, most of the voters of J&K genuinely believe that elections are free and fair and that they can make a difference. They are not under the illusion that elections can sort out the larger political issues, but they know that the quest for a resolution of the Kashmir issue cannot be allowed to hold them hostage to dysfunctional governance or an unelected government. These are voters who seek global standards of governance, world-class infrastructure and new opportunities of education and employment as well as the right to everyday dignity without draconian laws and to ensure that they are not alienated from

their land.

Look at J&K's chequered democratic past. In August 1953, Sheikh Abdullah, the tallest leader of the state, was holidaying in Gulmarg when early one morning, Superintendent of Police Lakshman Das Thakur informed the J&K Prime Minister (as was the nomenclature then) that he had been dismissed and was being interned. 'Who ordered this?' Sheikh is said to have roared, believing that his friend in Teen Murti House (PM Nehru) would never betray him. Thakur presented an order signed by the Sadr-i-Riyasat, Karan Singh, barely out of his teens, whose father, Maharajah Hari Singh, had been exiled to Mumbai. Sheikh took time to offer namaz before accepting that the 'chit of the boy' he had appointed had just removed him from office 'undemocratically'. For 22 years, Sheikh stayed out of power, arguably the most

# Fatal Porsche crash

## *Try juveniles as adults for reckless driving*



THE tragic Porsche accident in Pune, where a 17-year-old driving at 200 kmph collided with a motorcycle, killing two young engineers, has led to an unusually swift and welcome legal action. The minor's father, accused of wilful neglect, and the bar owner and staffers who served him alcohol have been arrested. This signals zero tolerance to reckless behaviour.

The Pune Police's decision to involve the Crime Branch highlights the seriousness of the matter. The case against the father as well as the bar owner and staffers underscores a broader responsibility to prevent

such tragedies. Charging the father under the Juvenile Justice Act emphasises the need for parental accountability in curbing dangerous activities. However, the Juvenile Justice Board's decision to grant bail to the minor, imposing such lenient conditions as writing an essay on road safety and undergoing counselling, is just a slap on the wrist rather than a proportionate response to a crime that caused two fatalities. Incidentally, it also raises the question of the logic of having the right to vote or get married (for girls) at 18 years and of public drinking at 25 in certain states. The recent accident in Patiala, where four students died

in a high-speed car crash, is a pointer to the troubling trend of dangerous driving among youths. Such incidents stress the need for stricter enforcement of traffic laws and a review of legal frameworks for juvenile offenders. The Pune Police's appeal to try the minor as an adult is a crucial step in this direction. The judicial system must respond appropriately and set a precedent of severe consequences for such rash acts, regardless of the offender's age. It will restore public confidence and deter reckless driving on our roads. The victims and their families deserve nothing less.

## Lok Sabha Polls 2024: How Congress And BJP's Campaigns Have Evolved

The long-drawn campaign for the Lok Sabha elections entered the home stretch this week. In about 10 days, the seven-phase voting to elect a new government and constitute the 18th Lok Sabha will end.

Political campaigning is central to any election. In mid-March, when the electoral race began, the incumbent government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seemed to be in the pole position. But as the contest progressed, there was talk about the waning of the 'wave'.

### Modified Strategy

The BJP government had started its campaigning much before the election schedule was announced. Cutouts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and 'selfie' points were a common sight, aimed at publicising the government's achievements. This was backed by regular claims that the development seen in India over the last 10 years was just a "trailer". But perhaps learning from the failure of the 'India Shining' and the 'feel-good factor' campaigns in 2004, the party modified its pitch. Instead of playing up the work done by the Modi government, the party chose to highlight how previous governments did little, especially when it came to welfare schemes for economically backward sections.

Simultaneously, BJP leaders started talking about the importance of having a strong government and decisive



leadership. For instance, Union Home Minister Amit Shah mentioned recently that under Modi's leadership, the government was able to tackle serious internal challenges like 'Left-wing extremism' and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, also stressed the need for a strong leader amid the emerging global landscape.

The emphasis on 'Modi Ki Guarantee' and the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) target of securing 400-plus seats also reduced as party leaders increased direct attacks on the Congress and its allies. Sharp barbs against Rahul Gandhi and his family and the Congress's manifesto and promises followed, as also attempts to draw the party into a vortex



through religious issues.

### Opposition's Narrative

However, the BJP-led alliance ultimately could not avoid ignoring the narrative the Opposition was building. Taking a cue from Karnataka and Telangana assembly polls, the Congress stuck to its script. It maintained that the real objective of the 2024 elections was to protect the Constitution, charging that the NDA, by the admission of some of its own MPs, was seeking 400-plus seats to alter the Constitution.

The party combined this attack with two other things. It alleged that if the BJP was voted back to office, it would alter the existing reservation for Scheduled Castes/Tribes and Other Backward Classes. This was supplemented with

a promise to carry out a caste survey, which, the INDIA bloc says, would help it recraft welfare schemes and allow an equitable distribution of resources. It is here that BJP-led parties were swift to join the discourse, prompted by concerns that the Opposition's 'Constitution change' claim was getting traction and that the perception needed to be countered. The BJP launched a counter-offensive, with leaders, including PM Modi, reminding the electorate about the changes to the Constitution made by past Congress governments. It also alleges that the Congress would scrap reservation for SC/STs to facilitate affirmative action for Muslims. The Opposition is seeking to pin the BJP down largely on bread-and-butter issues like price rise and unemployment. The alliance also promises to scrap the controversial Agniveer scheme if it comes to power. Ironically though, a few other challenges that the world faces today are either missing from manifestos or are low-priority. This is true for all parties. For instance, there is little conversation about, say, global warming and the need to develop a green economy, or about tackling Artificial Intelligence. Parties should have outlined at least a basic plan for dealing with these issues, but they remain far removed from any serious discussion.

# Countdown to History: Why PM Modi is Poised For Third Consecutive Victory

By: Tuhin A Sinha

With just about 12 days left for the June 4 counting day, the speculation industry is on an overdrive. Myriad possibilities are being thrown up by both credible as well as self-proclaimed analysts from both sides. At the core of this speculation blitzkrieg, is the media's need to generate watchable content and soothsayers' desperation to keep themselves relevant till June 4.

However, with 79 per cent of the elections over and with the verdict nearly round the corner, from my close observation of the politics of the last three decades, I feel this is the right time to set the record straight on key factors that have played out during these elections.

## BRAND MODI IS STILL THE MOST RELEVANT FACTOR

The best example of this is Bihar and Maharashtra. In both these states, a narrative was floated by the vested ecosystem that voters are unhappy with the BJP's choice of alliance partners and that the NDA might suffer significant losses in these two states. Contrary to all speculation, the first-hand ground feedback is very heartening.

In Maharashtra, even in the seats fought by the Shiv Sena, the enthusiasm of BJP supporters has been no less. The best example of this is the south Mumbai seat where almost all top BJP leaders campaigned for the Shiv Sena candidate. The same is believed to be reflected in the voting on these seats. In Bihar, despite an aggressive campaign by Tejaswi Yadav, there is very little traction for the RJD on the ground and the BJP is believed to be repeating its 2019 performance. Lately, a political mercenary has been going around giving interviews to TV channels explaining why BJP will retain its 2019 performance but this is a vote of scepticism as brand Modi has been dented. One needs to watch these self-contradictory commentaries with a pinch of salt. Similar contrived commentaries were made before the Assembly

election results last winter. Brand Modi has only grown every year and will take another huge leap on June 4. **THE SILENT VOTER** The silent voter has always played a crucial role in Indian elections. Now who exactly is the silent voter? The silent voter is the one who often hasn't made a pre-decided voting choice, who follows the voice of his/her conscience and whose vote is invariably for the party or alliance he/she feels will serve national interests better. This silent voter makes a decisive impact in close contests and often influences the poll outcome.

Now pre-2014, this 'silent voter' often used to side with the Congress as the party had succeeded in its vicious game of voter-shaming and branding the BJP voter as communal. Post-2014 and more so from 2019 onwards, this silent voter is firmly behind the BJP. It includes the 'labhartis' or the direct beneficiaries of government welfare schemes. The impeccable deliverance mechanism of the Modi government wherein more than Rs 36 lakh crore has been transferred directly into the bank accounts of the poor as on the current date, is a huge influencing factor for this silent voter. Similarly, based on the Modi-led NDA's ability to fulfil key election promises in the last 10 years, the silent voter naturally finds PM Modi far more credible than Opposition leaders, most of whom are battling an acute credibility crisis.

## WORK ETHICS

PM Modi has undertaken a marathon campaigning schedule over the last 50 days. At the age of 73 and in the intense summer heat and high humidity, his efforts have been nothing short of extraordinary. By the time the campaign ends on May 30, PM Modi will have completed 200 rallies. There have been days when he has attended 5 rallies, an impromptu roadshow, and then come back to Delhi for a lengthy one-on-one interview. He has given nearly 60 interviews in the last 5 weeks. Rahul Gandhi in comparison has only completed around 65 rallies to date and has given zero

interviews.

The herculean efforts that PM Modi puts into winning elections reflect his ambitions for the nation and the party. In comparison, the lackadaisical, leisurely schedule of Rahul Gandhi and his inability to take questions shows his entitlement and under-preparedness. Someone who isn't ambitious enough as an individual can never think and aspire big for the country. And that leaves Rahul Gandhi with his shoddy alternative of trying to divide the country on caste lines. The difference between the work culture of the two parties is more pronounced when one compares the complete transformation of Varanasi in the last 10 years with the way Raebareli had been languishing for decades under the Gandhis. While Priyanka Gandhi keeps boasting of Congress giving AIIMS to the country, the fact is Raebareli got an AIIMS hospital only in 2018 under the Modi government. PM Modi has changed the country's political work culture. Politics now requires a 24x7 commitment which the Gandhi siblings still seem to be struggling with.

## BJP'S ELECTION MACHINERY IS INHERENTLY FUTURISTIC

The best thing about PM Modi's work culture is the constant effort to improve the future. So while the Opposition may have woken up to the 2024 challenge only last year, for the BJP, the work on how to better 2019 had started on May 23, 2019, itself. The party knew that in terms of vote share and seats, it may have peaked in certain states. Therefore, an all-out effort was launched to cultivate new geographical ground in the south and the east. There is evidence to suggest those efforts have worked.

The BJP is likely to gain vote share and seats in at least 9 states, including Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Odisha, Bengal and Punjab. This is part of a larger planning where in 2029, these would be the states that would fetch the BJP seats in very high numbers. Thus, PM Modi's relentless efforts for the 2024 elections have actually created a fertile ground and expansion zone for the BJP for 2029.

## THE OPPOSITION'S DEVIOUS AGENDA POST JUNE 4

By circulating a doctored video of Home Minister Amit Shah and spreading falsehood on the

issue of reservations, the Congress party has touched a new low in these elections. However, it seems that the Congress is likely to resort to even worse antics of denialism on June 4 and blame the Election Commission of India (ECI) for its fate. It is believed that Yogendra Yadav has been unleashed upon the media with this insidious motive to create a false perception that the BJP is falling short so that they could shrug off their defeat and start casting aspersions upon the election verdict. Any honest individual who has travelled across the country would perhaps know that for all the noise that the Congress still manages to generate in the media, most of its ground workers have deserted the party. In half the states, the Congress is critically dependent upon the mercy of its regional allies who again are sceptical of giving room to the party to grow. In this hopeless situation, the Congress party is unlikely to do any better than 2019. But since self-introspection is alien to non-performing dynasts, June 4 will perhaps witness one of the biggest Opposition meltdowns in many years.

## *Spice crisis, Contamination hits India's global market*

THE recent ban on Indian spices, imposed by Singapore, Hong Kong, Maldives, Australia, and Nepal due to alleged contamination of ethylene oxide (ETO) in products of popular brands MDH and Everest, could potentially reduce spice exports by up to 40 per cent, as warned by the Federation of Indian Spice Stakeholders. The presence of ETO, a toxic chemical, beyond permissible limits in spice mixes poses severe health risks, including cancer. This alarming development underscores the urgent need for India to enhance its food safety protocols and restore global confidence in its spice exports. India's pre-eminence as the

world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices is at stake. The country exports over \$4 billion worth of spices annually, and its domestic market is valued at \$10 billion. Yet, recurring quality concerns have dented this reputation, jeopardising a sector that significantly contributes to the economy. In 2014, lead was found in the food colouring used in spices like chili and curry powder. The US FDA has rejected 14.5 per cent of MDH spice shipments since 2021 due to bacterial contamination. Last month, authorities in Gujarat seized over 60,000 kg of adulterated spices.

Considering the serious health risks, it cannot be business as usual in the spice industry. The

Indian government has responded with stricter quality controls, expanding inspections across manufacturing units. However, these steps must translate into tangible results and mitigation of further damage, for food quality affects everybody. People need reassurance that the spices they consume are safe. Nobody can be allowed to play with their health. Surprisingly, the government has failed to send out a message to consumers that the companies at fault are being scrutinised. They are left wondering whether they should consume spices. Transparent operations and proactive communication with international regulators are essential to safeguard our spice legacy.

# Corporations are forcing Americans to pay more for less – in their own words

In 2022, the Biden administration and the oil industry were in a brutal fight over oil prices. The president was demanding that domestic oil producers invest and drill more to address spiking costs, but Texas frackers were recalcitrant. Whether it's \$150 oil, \$200 oil, or \$100 oil, we're not going to change our growth plans, the Pioneer CEO, Scott Sheffield, said, echoing comments from other leaders at different domestic firms. Profits would go to investors, not to more rigs to address pain at the pump. The oil barons won the fight. Profits in the oil industry jumped from virtually nothing in 2020 to the hundreds of billions in 2021, and then doubled again in 2022. And yet, economists did not see any sort of plot at work. Don't blame the oil companies for their high profits, said the economist Olivier Blanchard. It is not price gouging, just how markets work. Three weeks ago, the Federal Trade Commission released information showing how naive such statements really were. Sheffield, it turns out, allegedly helped engineer a price-fixing scheme to reduce oil production and increase prices for Americans at the pump. His goal was to end fierce competition in the industry, which had, as he put it, lowered the price by \$20 to \$30 per barrel over the past 10 years. The FTC banned Sheffield from his corporation's board and has reportedly referred allegations against Sheffield to the Department of Justice for possible criminal investigation.

The magnitude of this alleged plot is stunning. Oil prices are controlled by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), a cartel composed of nations with known oil reserves. Because Opec is made up of governments, price-fixing law doesn't apply. But these laws do apply to domestic US firms engaged in shale oil production, who competed fiercely with Opec from 2014 to 2016 for market share, bringing down prices in the interim. In 2017, tired of this price war, Texas oilmen and Opec officials began sitting down to dinners, and by 2021, Texas had de facto joined Opec. Companies like Pioneer, Devon Energy and Continental Resources publicly pledged to hold back production. As the FTC found, Sheffield was also privately sending hundreds of text and WhatsApp messages to Opec officials, seeking to align US producers with the global cartel.

Class-action lawyers are on top of the scandal, but there's also increasing political interest. At a hearing last week, the US representatives Rosa DeLauro and Matt Cartwright began criticizing the oil for this scheme, and Representative

Mark Pocan even called for jail time for the oil executives allegedly involved. The top Democrat on the powerful energy and commerce committee, Frank Pallone, just launched a wide-ranging investigation across the industry.

The US consumes 7bn barrels of oil a year, meaning that if the dollar amount went up by \$20-30, as Sheffield calculated, that's roughly \$400-700 a person in America, a transfer from consumers to oil men and their private equity backers. That's a not small amount of what inflation wrought in 2021, which was about \$4,700 per capita in increased prices. (I suspect the amount is actually more than \$20-30 a barrel, since price spikes tend to be larger than the average over long periods of time. But we'll leave it at what Sheffield calculated.) What is perhaps most shocking about this scandal is not that it happened, but that it happened in plain sight. Oil CEOs weren't hiding. In 2021, as prices rose on the end of Covid lockdowns, Sheffield publicly threatened rivals who might increase production, saying all the shareholders that I've talked to said that if anybody goes back to growth, they will punish those companies.

For years, there has been a debate between macro-economists like Blanchard about the source of post-Covid inflation. Many economists chalked up price hikes to workers demanding more money and saw the way to address it as scaring workers into accepting less money by throwing a bunch of them out of work. We need five years of unemployment above 5% to contain inflation, said Larry Summers. That's what their models told them.

By contrast, 85% of Americans, along with a few iconoclastic scholars and writers, said corporations being greedy and raising prices to make record profits was the cause of inflation. Why? Well it might have been because they noticed that CEOs were routinely telling investors that they were raising prices to increase margins, not to meet wage demands. Or it might have been because they experienced large and unexplained price increases in meat, rent, hotels, groceries and restaurants. Indeed, when the CEO of Wendy's recently said Wendy's was considering using AI to engage in dynamic pricing, the public outrage was palpable. It's time to declare the debate over. In 2021, the total corporate profit increase was \$730bn, or a little over \$2,100 a person. That's a large chunk of the inflationary increase in costs. Moreover, the price-fixing in the oil industry, which contributed roughly \$200bn of that, isn't an anomaly.

Take post-Covid rent hikes. One software and consulting pricing firm for landlords,

RealPage, specialized in telling its clients to hike rents more than they otherwise might. As of December of 2020, RealPage had nearly 32,000 clients, including 10 largest multifamily property management companies in the United States. There are multiple antitrust suits accusing the private equity-owned firm of organizing a massive price-fixing conspiracy to inflate rents across the board. Beyond rent, the Biden administration or private plaintiffs now have credible antitrust claims against firms engaged in price-fixing in meat, hotels and large online sellers like Amazon. Corporations in a range of industries have made comments similar to those of Sheffield. Alex Cisneros, an executive for Red Roof Inn, told a trade outlet that Red Roof Inn was using a software package called STR from CoStar to systematically hike prices across the hotel industry. Red Roof's franchisees for the most part are making more money with less occupancy, Hotel News Now explained. Red Roof is now providing more data to franchisees to educate and get them comfortable commanding higher rates.

According to a lawsuit, an unnamed executive at Smithfield, a pork processor, summarized the advice he

got from Agri Stats, a consulting firm that coordinates production in the industry, as: Just raise your price.

Rent, meat, oil and hotels are big sectors, so criminal activity in the form of price-fixing to boost profits should bust through the illusions economists have about how our markets really work. There are also a number of concrete steps policymakers can take to respond to this price-fixing. The first is to arrest or sue the offending executives for criminal activity.

The second is to strengthen price-fixing and merger laws, allow more private class-action suits, force judges to speed up cases and increase the budget of antitrust enforcers to make collusion more difficult.

The third is to reform the Federal Reserve so policymakers there stop using macro-economic models that avoid considerations of profits and price-fixing. And the fourth is, frankly, political. One key reason there is action on these schemes is because Biden has prioritized antitrust enforcement. He hasn't put enough into antitrust, and he doesn't talk about it very often. But he should, or else Americans are likely to fall into the trap of thinking that what is good for big business is good for their pocketbooks, when the opposite is so often the case.

## Prashant Kishor jabs critics over poll prediction: 'Keep water handy for June 4'

Political strategist Prashant Kishor on Thursday stood firm on his prediction that the BJP would repeat its 2019 performance, scoring around 300 seats in this year's Lok Sabha polls. In a tweet, Kishor even took a swipe at "rattled" detractors, advising them to "stay hydrated" and "keep plenty of water handy on June 4", the day of the counting of votes. The 47-year-old political strategist's tweet came hours after a video of his heated exchange with a journalist in a recent interview went viral. Kishor, in the interview, was reminded about two of his poll predictions in the past that went wrong, including "the Congress's impending electoral rout" in Himachal Pradesh in 2022. Prashant Kishor vehemently denied having made that prediction, daring the journalist to produce video evidence. As the clip from the interview began circulating on social media, screenshots of his old tweet on Himachal Pradesh also made their way as a counter to the strategist's denial. In Thursday's tweet, Kishor also cited his past prediction on the Trinamool Congress sweeping the West Bengal assembly polls in 2021 for good

measure.

"PS: Remember, May 2, 2021, and West Bengal!!" he tweeted. Kishor had managed Trinamool Congress's campaign during the 2021 Bengal polls. The Mamata Banerjee-led party retained power with an overwhelming majority, winning 215 of 294 seats. "Drinking water is good as it keeps both mind and body hydrated. Those who are rattled by my assessment of the outcome of this election must keep plenty of water handy on June 4th. PS: Remember, May 2, 2021, and West Bengal!!" he tweeted. PRASHANT KISHOR'S BJP PREDICTION

In an exclusive interview with India Today TV on Wednesday, Prashant Kishor said it was impossible for the BJP to get 370 seats on its own and that the party would get somewhere around 300 seats. "From the day PM (Narendra) Modi claimed that the BJP would secure 370 seats and the NDA would surpass the 400 mark, I said this was not possible. This is all sloganeering to boost workers' morale. It is impossible for the BJP to get 370 seats, but it is also certain that the party will not fall below the 270 mark.

# East wind prevails over the West wind

IN the escalating contest between the West and the Rest, it is now clear that the former, while still packing the more powerful punch, is weakening. In the Asia-Pacific, the US Navy's stance has shifted from dominance to deterrence. In the economic sphere, too, Washington has switched from being on the offensive (technology bans, trade restrictions and financial sanctions) to playing defensive (putting up a tariff wall around the US market). And Western support for Ukraine has not stopped Russia. Mao Zedong had declared somewhat ahead of time that the East wind prevails over the West wind. That may now be beginning to happen. For years, Western analysts and journalists misread both China and Russia. The latter was portrayed as economically vulnerable and Vladimir Putin as politically challengeable, perhaps even terminally ill. China's collapse has been forecast for decades; more recently it has been seen as beleaguered. Yet Russia has withstood Western sanctions unexpectedly well; it has gained the upper hand in Ukraine, and Putin has been elected to a fresh term in office. China, meanwhile, remains the fastest-growing among economies with comparable income levels.

The steep tariffs that the US has announced recently on some Chinese products do not signal a full-scale trade war since they target items that China does not sell much in the US. So, the signalling may be primarily to President Biden's domestic political base. Regardless, China remains the dominant producer of many of the targeted products, and can find other markets. It is US importers who may have no alternative sources of supply for some items. China could also route supplies through factories in third countries. Meanwhile, American consumers will pay through inflation.

Such defensive ploys (the flip side of a subsidy-laden policy to revive American manufacturing) contrast with the offensive thrust of earlier moves. The hope was that those aggressive moves would box in America's enemies. Without question, the sanctions have hurt, but (as almost always with sanctions) the impact has been partial. Russia has found new customers for its oil and gas, while Europe has lost a vital source of cheap energy, thereby hobbling economies like Germany's. Meanwhile, the Russian economy has continued to grow. Both Russia and China have developed payment systems that bypass the dollar (95 per cent of the Russia-China trade is now in local currencies) and even banking communication systems like SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications). Russia now holds more renminbis in its reserve armoury than it does dollars. And China has been switching to gold, of which it has bought vast quantities over the past 18 months. The People's Bank of China's

2,250-tonne gold hoard still accounts for less than 5 per cent of the total reserves, but is the highest ever.

As for technology, China moved earlier and faster than anyone else and occupies pole position in the clean-energy fields of electric mobility, solar power and lithium batteries. China also moved ahead of the pack to secure supplies of the special materials needed for these industries, and



may have a lock on some of those markets. It may now be ready to break through tech barriers in electronics, life sciences and defence manufacture.

Huawei, for instance, recently surprised the West by showcasing smartphones loaded with 7-nm (nanometre) chips, and is getting prepared to turn out 5-nm chips. China has set itself the target of 70 per cent self-sufficiency in chipmaking by next year. Meanwhile, Western pharmaceutical firms have acknowledged China's emerging leadership in biopharma and life sciences in places like BioBay, a mega-hub for innovation at Suzhou, near Shanghai. In defence, China is building a fourth aircraft carrier, which may be nuclear-powered, signalling the crossing of another technology threshold. The bald fact is that it is too late to shut the technology door

on China. On the security front, Western commentators worry about possible convulsions if Russia gets its way in Ukraine, and further carves up that half-destroyed country. Matters could get worse if Donald Trump returns as US President and carries out his threat to hobble the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Given the extreme limitations of European defence forces in

terms of manpower, equipment, fighting capabilities and defence production capacities, all of Europe would suddenly feel more vulnerable than at any time since the start of the Cold War. European defence budgets have belatedly gone up to the targeted 2 per cent of the GDP, but it will be at least a decade before Europe can hope to be viable in its defence without the assurance of US support not to mention the US nuclear umbrella.

In comparison, Moscow and Beijing have moved closer, while scoring diplomatic gains elsewhere in the world. Russia played a successful card in Syria and now gets drones from Iran. Last year, China brokered the normalisation of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In Africa, China is outspending the US on a continent that needs lots of money, while one country

after another is booting out French and American soldiers and inviting in Russian soldiers for security support. Even in South-East Asia, countries whose economies are closely interlinked with China's, and getting even more so, do not wish to choose between the US and China. It doesn't help that the US frequently shows itself as an unreliable support pillar, as seen on arms supplies to Ukraine. Nor does it help Western credibility with the Global South when it adopts hypocritically contradictory stances on Ukraine and Gaza.

Western commentators argue, with reason, that China has for long been single-mindedly pursuing a mercantilist course, promoting industries with massive government support and running huge trade surpluses without allowing its currency to appreciate; and that China is provoking the West into applying (belated) counter-measures. Fair enough. But what they don't add is that China has intensely competitive home markets. No fewer than 139 companies turn out electric vehicles, for example. Only the fittest will survive, and companies like BYD therefore emerge as potential world-beaters.

Still, it would be a challenge for China's manufacturing capabilities if major export markets were denied to it. But as India's experience shows, tariff walls do not necessarily keep out Chinese products. Indeed, China could soon be in a position to play tit-for-tat on both technology and market access. That seems a more likely response to Western pressure than Japan's in the mid-1980s, when Tokyo reined in its exports and got the yen to appreciate. In today's world, whether it is on security matters, technological development, manufacturing and trade prowess or diplomatic heft, in short, the global power balance is East wind is blowing harder than before.

## Food regulator finds no Ethylene Oxide in MDH, Everest Spices amid quality concerns

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has reported that no traces of ethylene oxide were found in samples of spices from 2 major brands, MDH and Everest, tested in 28 accredited laboratories. This finding comes amid ongoing quality checks initiated last month due to concerns raised by Hong Kong and Singapore. The FSSAI began sampling powdered spices from various brands, including MDH and Everest, following alerts from Hong Kong's Center for Food Safety (CFS). The CFS had warned consumers against certain spice mixes from these brands, citing ethylene oxide levels beyond permissible limits. The products in question included MDH's Madras Curry Powder, Everest Fish Curry Masala,

MDH Sambhar Masala Mixed Masala Powder, and MDH Curry Powder Mixed Masala Powder.

In response, a pan-India inspection drive was launched on April 22, involving state and Union Territory food safety commissioners and FSSAI regional directors. This drive included thorough inspections of spice manufacturing units and the collection of samples for testing. Everest spice samples were taken from two of their manufacturing facilities, while 25 samples from MDH were collected from 11 facilities. Each sample was analyzed for compliance with quality and safety standards, including pesticide residues and ethylene oxide levels, at NABL-accredited laboratories. The scientific panel at FSSAI reviewed the

results and found no traces of ethylene oxide. Additionally, over 300 samples of spices from other brands were tested, all showing no presence of the chemical. The scientific panel consists of experts from the Spice Board, CSMCRI (Gujarat), Indian Spice Research Institute (Kerala), NIFTEM (Haryana), BARC (Mumbai), CMPAP (Lucknow), DRDO (Assam), ICAR, and the National Research Centre on Grapes (Pune). To prevent microbial contamination, the Spice Board has issued guidelines for using ethylene oxide as a fumigant for sterilizing spices, in line with international standards.

The FSSAI continues to await reports from 6 more laboratories to complete the comprehensive testing process.

# The science behind why we get hangry. Plus, how to be less mean when we do

Food and mood sound quite similar. But that's not the only thing that connects them. Science links them too, showing how they impact one another. When you are stressed or depressed, you either tend to overeat or lose your appetite and don't feel like eating at all.

Speaking the other way around, research has shown that the food we eat can significantly affect our mood and mental well-being. For instance, eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins can boost serotonin levels and lead to a better mood. Diets high in highly-processed foods, on the other hand, are often linked to an increased risk of depression and anxiety. There's more to this food and mood connection than just getting food when you're hungry can unknowingly make you angry. Have you ever felt a sudden burst of rage, snapping at people around you, or being unreasonably cold, only to realise later that it was because you were hungry? This feeling is called being 'hangry' (a portmanteau of hungry and angry). Remember those Snickers advertisements featuring Rekha and Sonam Kapoor being mean and throwing tantrums out of hunger? It was only after they grabbed a bite of chocolate that their



Health experts say it is a common experience caused by a drop in blood sugar levels, which can affect brain function and emotional regulation.

All that irritability, annoyance and sudden mean behaviour towards those around you are temporal. It all happens when brain's demand for energy is not met.

shown that low blood sugar can increase the production of cortisol and adrenaline, hormones linked to stress and aggression. Dr Saibal Chakravorty, senior consultant, internal medicine, Metro Hospital Noida, further says that being hungry for a long time or a while can also reduce serotonin levels, the hormones

Being unreasonably rude to someone can make things sour.

So, here are some expert-approved tips to avoid letting out your hangry beast:

**Regular meals and balanced diet:** Firstly, eat at regular intervals to keep hunger pangs at bay and maintain blood sugar levels.

responsible for mood regulation. A drop in serotonin levels may result in an increase in irritability and annoyance.

**The hangry mode**

When 'hangry' mode is switched on, a person's self-control goes for a toss.

Hunger can reduce self-control, making it more likely for a person to express anger and frustration, says Dr Chakravorty.

Additionally, impulsive behaviour worsens when a person is hungry and he or she is likely to respond inappropriately or violently to small provocations.

If you are wondering if everyone faces the same level of hangriness, the answer is no.

People who have conditioned

to avoid being 'hangry', it's essential to maintain steady blood sugar levels by eating regular, balanced meals. Including more protein, fibre and healthy fats in your diet can help sustain energy levels for longer, says Dr Ankita Priyadarshini.

**Carry healthy snacks:** Whether you are travelling, going to work, or are simply at home, keep some healthy snacks around.

They could be nuts, fruits or protein bars.

In case you are starving and you know it is going to take some time for the meal to be ready (the restaurant might be far, the food delivery guy might be late or you are probably stuck in a meeting), you can satiate hunger pangs with these easy-to-grab health snacks. **Stay hydrated:** Keep drinking water! Sometimes, thirst can be mistaken for hunger. Drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated, says Dr Jaiman.

**Practice mindful eating:** Experts suggest paying attention to your hunger cues and eating before you become extremely hungry.

Mindful eating helps you recognise when you're getting hungry and allows you to address it before irritability sets in, says Dr Jaiman.

**Manage Stress:** Stress can exacerbate feelings of irritability when hungry. Experts suggest practicing stress management techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, or physical activity. Remember to grab a snack and do deep breathing when you feel hangry the next time.



characters resumed being their normal selves. Hunger acche acchon ko badal deta hai (hunger changes the best of us), the tagline said.

Those ads, released in 2012, depicted what being hangry looks like even before Oxford English Dictionary recognised it as a word. It was in 2018 'hangry' was added to the Oxford English Dictionary. The dictionary defines it as 'bad-tempered or irritable as a result of hunger'.

What makes us go hangry and the science behind

Sugar and hormones play a role in making us feel hangry.

Dr Ankita Priyadarshini, consultant psychiatrist and behavioural medicine, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Dehradun, explains the science behind getting hangry: 'When we haven't eaten, our body starts to release hormones like ghrelin, which signals the brain that it's time to eat. If this signal is ignored, stress hormones like cortisol increase, leading to heightened feelings of stress and irritability.'

She adds: 'When blood sugar dips, the brain, which relies heavily on glucose for energy, starts to struggle. This can lead to irritability and anger. Research has

themselves to associate eating with emotional comfort might experience heightened emotional responses when deprived of food,' says Dr Shambhavi Jaiman, psychiatrist, Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurugram.

**How to not get hangry (and be less mean)** The storm within, caused by the fierce fusion of hunger and anger, may calm down the moment you take the first bite of food. However, the havoc it usually wreaks outside may not. One must realise that those around you did nothing to deserve the wrath you emit when you are hangry.

## 4 killed, 16 injured as restaurant collapses in Spain's Balearic Islands

(News Agency)-A two-storey restaurant building collapsed on the beach in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, resulting in at least four fatalities and 16 injuries.

A two-storey restaurant building collapsed on the beach in Palma de Mallorca on Thursday, killing at least four people and injuring 16 people in the tourism hot spot in Spain's Balearic Islands, the country's national police said.

Seven people were injured "very seriously" and nine were seriously injured, emergency services said on the X social media platform. They were taken to various hospitals in Palma. Emergency crews are finalising search and rescue operations and securing the area, a spokesperson for the local police told radio station RNE around midnight, local time. "That is why now we ask you silence because we need silence to see if we hear someone," he said, adding that he could not rule out that someone was still trapped.

"The terrace has come down, probably due to excessive weight," he said, adding that the causes are still being investigated. The first calls came in around 8 pm, he said. Firefighters and police forces rushed to the scene, emergency services said,



adding some psychologists had been called in. "I am closely following the consequences of the terrible collapse that occurred on the beach of Palma," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on X.

Sanchez said he had spoken to local and regional authorities, adding the government is ready to help "with all the means and troops that are necessary."

"I want to send my condolences to the families of the deceased and my wish for

a speedy recovery to the injured," he said. Spanish state-owned broadcaster TVE showed firefighters working to clear areas of the Medusa Beach Club in Palma around 11.30 pm local time, and ambulances on the scene.

## 2 dead, 3 injured after ex-employee opens fire at linen company in Philadelphia

(News Agency) A disgruntled employee opened fire at a linen company near Philadelphia on Wednesday, killing two coworkers and injuring three others, authorities said.

The shooting took place at the Delaware

address the gun crisis, especially as it relates to people with mental health problems.

"We can't have guns in the hands of the wrong people," Roots said. "There had to be some type of mental health issue that

would have an employee walk into his workplace on a day of work and take out his anger in such a violent way ó to not just the boss, but his coworkers, who he probably worked side-by-side with for years. Three people remained hospitalized, at least one in critical condition, police said.



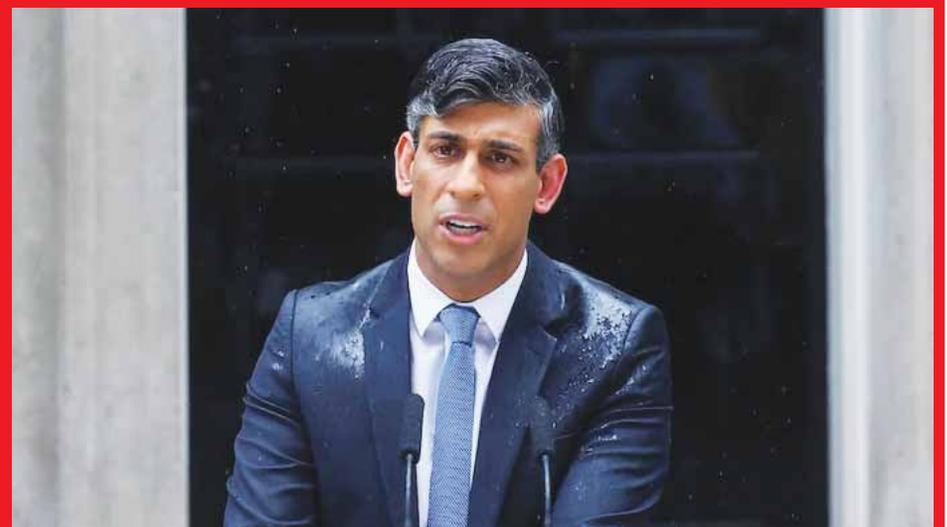
County Linen at about 8.30 am in the city of Chester, about 18 miles (29 kilometres) south of Philadelphia. The shooter fled in a vehicle but was soon captured in a traffic stop, Delaware County District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer said. The shooter's name has not been released, and the specific motive remains unknown. Earlier

statements said he was a former employee. "It speaks to guns in America," said Chester Mayor Stefan Roots, who said his small city has enjoyed a period of relative calm in recent years, with violent crime on the decline. "Violence is always unpredictable. We don't know what conditions people are under, in a city that's impoverished like ours." Roots called on state lawmakers in Pennsylvania to

The business had been in the community for more than 30 years, and some workers lived near enough to walk to work each day, residents said. Some of the workers on hand when the gunman opened fire gathered on the steps of a church across the street, behind barriers enacted by police. One had a bandage visible on his hand.

"It's always quiet around here. We don't have too many issues, so this is surprising," said Doneshia Johnson, who lives next door to the linen company and was standing outside with her 1-year-old grandson. She said she was out at the time of the shooting. "You never know. It's why you got to wake up, say your prayers, and just hope that you make it home safely each day," she said.

## UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak calls for July 4 general election



(News Agency) UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday called a surprise early election on July 4. The announcement is seen as a high-risk move for the Conservative party with polls heavily favoring the opposition Labour Party.

"Now is the moment for Britain to choose its future," Sunak said as he listed the highlights of his time in government, including the introduction of the so-called furlough scheme that helped businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic.

These uncertain times call for a clear plan and bold action to chart a course to a secure future.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday called a surprise early

election on July 4. The announcement is seen as a high-risk move for the Conservative party with polls heavily favoring the opposition Labour Party.

"Now is the moment for Britain to choose its future," Sunak said as he listed the highlights of his time in government, including the introduction of the so-called furlough scheme that helped businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic. You must choose in this election who has that plan and who is prepared to take that bold action to secure a better future for our country and our children. [pic.twitter.com/qIbGmYuGkM](https://pic.twitter.com/qIbGmYuGkM) ó Rishi Sunak (@RishiSunak) May 22, 2024 Rishi Sunak made the announcement from outside his Downing Street office.

# Singapore Flight Turbulence: 22 People From Flight SQ321 Treated For Spinal, 6 For Head Injuries After High-Altitude Horror

†(News Agency)-Dozens of passengers on a Singapore Airlines flight that hit turbulence this week suffered skull, brain and spinal injuries, the head of a Bangkok hospital said Thursday, two days after a video of the incident went viral on the internet.

Twenty people remain in intensive care in the Thai capital, where flight SQ321 made an emergency landing on Tuesday after the high-altitude ordeal. The Boeing 777-300ER hit what an airline official described as sudden extreme turbulence over Myanmar, sending passengers and crew flying and slamming some into the ceiling. BRITISH MAN DIED A 73-year-old British man died and 104 people were injured on the flight, which was carrying 211 passengers and 18 crew



from London to Singapore. Adinun Kittiratanapaibool, director of Bangkok's Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital, said his staff were treating six people for skull and brain injuries, 22 for spinal injuries, and 13 for bone, muscle and other

injuries.

“We have never treated people with these kinds of injuries caused by turbulence,” he told reporters. The injured at the hospital range in age from two to 83, he added. One passenger said people were

thrown around the cabin so violently they put dents in the ceiling during the drama at 11,300 metres (37,000 feet). Nine of the 16 Malaysians who were on the flight are being treated in hospital in Bangkok, the country's ambassador to Thailand told AFP. Five of them are in ICU and under observation and one victim is in normal ward. They are all in stable condition, said Jojie Samuel. But one is in critical condition but stable. He has multiple injuries to his head, back and leg. He is one of the crew. Passenger accounts are still emerging after the incident in which the plane plummeted 1,800 metres (6,000 feet) in just a few minutes, with too little warning for many passengers to fasten their seatbelts. It fell onto the floor,

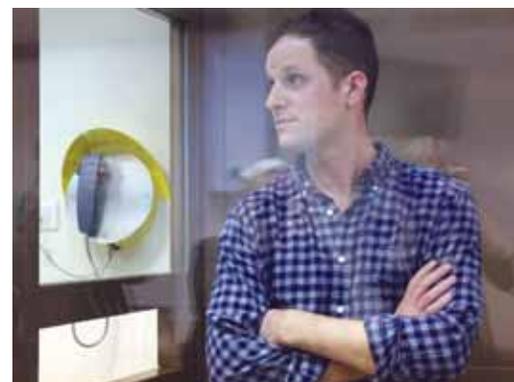
I didn't realise what happened. I must have hit my head somewhere. Everyone was screaming on the plane. People were scared, Josh Silverstone, a 24-year-old Briton on his way to the Indonesian holiday island of Bali, told reporters. I turned on the plane WiFi that I bought and texted my mum to say 'I love you,' he added after leaving hospital, where he was treated for a cut to the head, on Wednesday. Singapore Airlines chief executive Goh Choon Phong has apologised for the traumatic experience and expressed condolences to the family of the deceased. Photos taken inside the plane after it landed in Bangkok show the cabin in chaos, strewn with food, drinks and luggage, and with oxygen masks dangling from the ceiling.

## 'He Will Be Home With His Family': Trump Says Putin Will Free Jailed WSJ Reporter For Him

†(News Agency)-Former US President Donald Trump has posted on social media that he will use his relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin to get Wall Street reporter Evan Gershkovich freed from a Russian prison. Trump wrote on his social media platform Truth Social that

what grounds he had to believe that the Russian leader would release Gershkovich. Asked about the comments, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin has naturally not had contacts with Donald Trump. Gershkovich was arrested in Russia in March last year on spying charges that he, his paper and the Biden administration have all strongly denied. He has spent well over a year in a Moscow prison, with no date set for a trial. Putin said in February it might be possible to free him in exchange for a Russian imprisoned in Germany for murder.

Peskov reiterated previous Kremlin statements that contacts with Washington regarding any exchange of prisoners must be conducted in complete silence and absolutely discreetly. This is the only way they can be effective. During his 2017-2021 presidency, Trump expressed admiration for Putin. In 2018, he refused to blame the Russian leader for meddling in the 2016 U.S. election, casting doubt on the findings of his own intelligence agencies and sparking criticism at home.



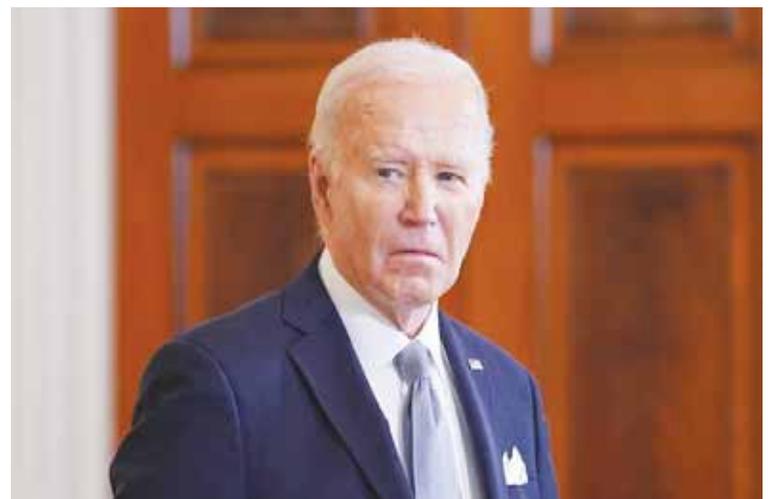
this would happen soon after the November election in the United States, when he is seeking to defeat President Joe Biden and return to the White House. “Evan Gershkovich, the Reporter from The Wall Street Journal, who is being held by Russia, will be released almost immediately after the Election, but definitely before I assume Office. He will be HOME, SAFE, AND WITH HIS FAMILY,” Trump said. “Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, will do that for me, but not for anyone else, and WE WILL BE PAYING NOTHING!” Trump did not refer to any contacts with Putin or say

## US political consultant fined \$6 million for AI-generated Joe Biden phone calls

**A political consultant is facing a \$6 million fine and over two dozen charges for using AI-generated robocalls mimicking President Biden's voice ahead of the New Hampshire primary.**

†(News Agency)-A political consultant who sent artificial intelligence-generated robocalls mimicking President Joe Biden's voice to voters ahead of New Hampshire's presidential primary faces a \$6 million fine and more than two dozen criminal charges.

The Federal Communications Commission said the fine it proposed Thursday for Steven Kramer is its first involving generative AI technology. The company accused of transmitting the calls, Lingo Telecom, faces a \$2 million fine, though in both cases the parties could settle or further negotiate, the FCC said. Kramer has admitted orchestrating a message that was sent to thousands of voters two days before the first-in-the-nation primary on Jan. 23. The message played an AI-generated voice similar to the Democratic president's that used his phrase “What a bunch of malarkey” and falsely suggested that voting in the primary would preclude voters



from casting ballots in November. Kramer is facing 13 felony charges alleging he violated a New Hampshire law against attempting to deter someone from voting using misleading information. He also faces 13 misdemeanor charges accusing him of falsely representing himself as a candidate by his own conduct or that of another person. The charges were filed in four counties and will be prosecuted by the state attorney general's office. Attorney General John

Formella said New Hampshire was committed to ensuring that its elections remain free from unlawful interference. “I am pleased to see that our federal partners are similarly committed to protecting consumers and voters from harmful robocalls and voter suppression,” said Formella, who was appointed by Republican Gov. Chris Sununu. Lingo Telecom said it strongly disagrees with the FCC's action, which it called an attempt to impose new rules retroactively.

# Why This Former Goldman Sachs VP, Who Got Six-figure Salary, Left Her Job

Lindsay MacMillan, former vice president at the investment banking company Goldman Sachs, has stirred the headlines with a revelation about the toxic work culture of the company. In an article written for the Business Insider portal, the former VP wrote that she had made great strides in her career starting from an intern to the vice president.

MacMillan wrote that after six years, she left her job at the Wall Street giant two years ago to become a novelist. According to her, this is because of its 'man's world' culture that left female employees 'not feeling valued'. She worked at the bank's marketing department and was earning a 6 figure salary.



According to her column in the Business Insider, MacMillan wrote that her hectic 07 AM to 10 PM daily schedule and long hours on weekends were dictated by

whatever the male leadership demanded. The former VP, who has now turned a novelist, added that she would keep a pair of black pumps. She would call them her

Hollywood heels. According to MacMillan, whenever she wore them every morning, she would feel like a thick-skinned character who thrived in a man's world.

Describing further about her plight, MacMillan stated that she was the only woman in a team of 20 investors. The novelist wrote that she had to mimic the mannerisms of the masculine way to succeed in her professional career. 'I wore a pantsuit and muted my personality,' MacMillan wrote. She also talked about the recent exodus of high-ranking women from the company and a \$215 million (Rs 1,788 crore) class action settlement as well. A class-action lawsuit settlement is the proceeds that are received from winning a class-action lawsuit.

This lawsuit has been made over claims that female staffers suffered gender pay discrimination as well as sexual harassment.

Lindsay MacMillan wrote that she played golf, talked about football, and cried in the bathroom stall. The novelist did this so she wouldn't be seen shedding tears at her desk. Not only this, when MacMillan used exclamation points in her emails, she was told to stop, according to her essay. She described that her out-of-the-box ideas were also discouraged. When the former VP baked cookies and brought them into the office for co-workers, she said she was admonished that she 'should have been building financial models instead of baking.'

## Why Hero Electric, Okinawa, Benling India Could Be Barred From All EV Incentive Schemes



The three popular electric vehicle manufacturers, Hero Electric, Okinawa and Benling India, which failed to return the incentives wrongly availed under the government's flagship FAME-II scheme, could be debarred from all central schemes. In 2022, the Ministry of Heavy Industries received complaints about the flouting of FAME-II guidelines by various OEMs registered under the scheme, alleging that they were selling electric vehicles in violation of local procurement requirements and importing vehicle parts on a large scale. Hero Electric, Okinawa Autotech and Benling India did not return the incentives and were therefore deregistered from the FAME-II

scheme. Okinawa was not debarred because the country was in court at the time.

'The next step is debarment from all Indian government schemes. This has not happened so far as it is a gradual process and the Finance Ministry approves exclusion of a company from any of the ministries' schemes/policies,' a senior official told a news agency. The official also said that AMO Mobility, Greaves Electric Mobility and Revolt Motors have received no-objection certificates under FAME-II but are not registered under the Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS) 2024.

'The process of making them (the three companies that

received no-objection certificates) eligible for future schemes is underway. The ministry has constituted a committee. The committee has made some findings. Since this matter is still pending and is being heard in court, we cannot disclose any details,' he said.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) of India launched the Electric Mobility Incentive Scheme (EMPS) in March 2024. The objective of the

scheme is to encourage the adoption of two and three-wheeler electric vehicles for commercial purposes and provide necessary support for the development and manufacturing of electric vehicles in India. The EMPS-2024 will be implemented for four months, from April 2024 to July 2024. The scheme has a budget of Rs 500 crore and offers subsidies for electric vehicles. Each electric two-wheeler will be subsidised

with up to Rs 10,000, each small electric three-wheeler with up to Rs 25,000 and each large three-wheeler with up to Rs 50,000.

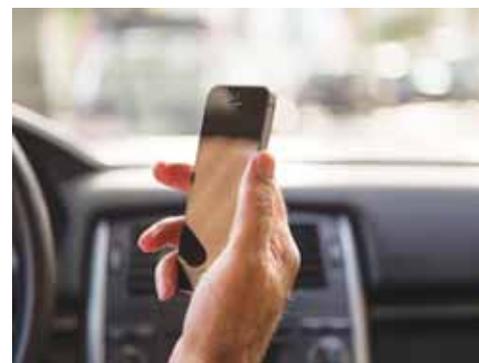
The MHI will return the subsidies or demand incentives to the e-mobility manufacturers on the sale of a vehicle, which will also support the consumer's benefit because the subsidy amount is deducted from the final invoice price, thereby reducing the purchase price of the electric vehicles.

## DoT Aims To Disconnect Over 6 Lakh Mobile Connections Obtained Using Fake Documents

The Department of Telecommunications has directed the telecom service providers to reverify over 6 lakh mobile connections in the country. These identified mobile connections are suspected to have been obtained using invalid documents, fake Identity proofs and fake KYC documents. The

telecommunication department has ordered all the telecom companies to complete the re-verification process within 60 days. According to the statement released, the Department

of Telecommunications has stated that they have flagged around 6.80 lakh mobile connections as potentially fake following a



thorough Artificial Intelligence driven analysis. The AI analysis suggests that the KYC documents used as ID proof or address proof were fabricated for

obtaining mobile connections. The statement reads, 'The use of incorrect or fake KYC documents suggests that these mobile connections were obtained fraudulently. The Department of Telecommunications has issued instructions to all the telecom service providers to re-verify the identified mobile numbers. All telecom companies must re-verify the identified mobile connections within 60 days and report accordingly. If someone fails to verify their documents, the compile connection will be terminated.'

# Air pollution can reduce life expectancy by 5 years. Doctors explain why

**A recent study showed that air pollution can reduce the life expectancy of an Indian by over 10 years. Doctors explain how high AQI can affect the mortality rate so drastically.**

A recent study has shown that fine particulate matter (PM2.5) air pollution is estimated to shorten an average Indian's life expectancy by 5.3 years, and in Delhi (considered to be the most polluted city in the country), as much as 11.9 years.

The data was compared to the World Health Organisation (WHO) standards of 5 micrograms per cubic meter, according to an updated Air Quality Life Index released by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC). Doctors explain how low air quality has the ability to impact the mortality rate. Air pollution, being a significant contributor to the death rate, targets the lungs and eventually, the heart, kidneys, the brain and slowly causes detrimental effects on the body's system. "Over time,



we've come to realize that many years of productive business life can be eroded by sustained exposure to air pollution," said Dr Arjun Khanna, Department of Pulmonary Medicine, Amrita Hospital, Faridabad.

According to Dr Kuldeep Kumar Grover, Head of Critical Care and Pulmonology, CK Birla Hospital, Gurugram, exposure to pollutants like particulate matter (PM2.5), ozone, sulfur dioxide

and nitrogen dioxide can lead to respiratory problems, cardiovascular diseases and even cancer.

"Over time, these health effects can reduce life expectancy, especially among vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions. Efforts to reduce air pollution can have positive impacts on public health and potentially

increase life expectancy," said Dr Kuldeep Kumar Grover. Dr Avi Kumar, Senior Consultant, Pulmonology at Fortis Escorts said that studies have indicated areas with higher levels of air pollution tend to have higher mortality rates.

**Respiratory health effects:** Pollutants like particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), and sulfur dioxide (SO2) can irritate the respiratory system, leading to conditions such as bronchitis and asthma. Prolonged exposure to polluted air can exacerbate these conditions and reduce lung function over time.

**Cardiovascular health effects:** Air pollution can increase the risk of heart attacks, strokes, and hypertension. Long-term exposure to pollutants can contribute to the development of atherosclerosis, a condition

where arteries become narrow and hardened, increasing the risk of heart-related complications. **Reduced lung function:** Chronic exposure to air pollution can lead to a decline in lung function, particularly in vulnerable populations like children and the elderly.

Since the ongoing air quality menace poses serious health threats to humanity, experts urge critical corrective measures. "Efforts to mitigate the impact of air pollution on life expectancy include implementing stricter environmental regulations, transitioning to cleaner energy sources, improving public transportation, and raising awareness about the health risks associated with air pollution are the need of the hour," underscored Dr Avi Kumar.

# Fruit and vegetable prescription by doctors could help increase nutrition levels

**As part of produce prescription programs in the US, doctors are able to prescribe subsidised fruits and vegetables. A study found that adults at risk for heart disease had reduced blood pressure and body mass index.**

"Prescribing" fruits and vegetables to adults and children has been associated with an increased consumption of these foods, according to a new study.

The analysis, published in the American Heart Association's peer-reviewed journal *Circulation*, observed that people who participated in the study had a lowered risk of heart disease. As part of produce prescription programs in the US, doctors are able to prescribe subsidised fruits and vegetables.

Patients receive electronic cards or vouchers to access free or discounted produce of their choice at retail grocery or farmers' markets, explained study lead author Kurt Hager at UMass Chan Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Adults at risk for heart disease who participated in producing prescription programs for an average

of six months increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables and had reduced blood pressure, body mass index and blood sugar levels. Among adults and children, produce prescription programs also appeared to decrease food insecurity, the lack of equitable and stable availability, access, affordability and consumption of healthy foods and drinks, and improve self-reported health status.

"We know that food insecurity impacts health through several important pathways, including overall dietary quality, but also through stress and anxiety, mental health and tradeoffs between paying for food and other basic needs such as housing costs, utilities and medications," said Hager. "These results indicate produce prescriptions may lay an important foundation for improved health and well-being," he added.



Study participants received a median of \$63 per month to purchase produce at local stores and farmers' markets. They also attended nutrition classes. At the beginning and after completing the program, from 4 to 10 months, participants completed questionnaires about fruit and vegetable consumption, food insecurity and health status.

Routine testing of blood pressure, weight and height, and hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) - a measure of blood sugar - was completed at enrollment

and at the conclusion of the program. The analysis found that blood sugar, as measured by HbA1c levels, decreased by 0.29 to 0.58 percentage points among adults with diabetes. "Poor nutrition and nutrition insecurity are major drivers of chronic disease globally, including cardiometabolic conditions like Type 2 diabetes and their cardiovascular consequences, including heart failure, heart attack and stroke," according to Mitchell Elkind, chief clinical science officer of the American Heart Association.

# Janhvi Kapoor's big revelation: She believes in astrology

Bollywood actress Janhvi Kapoor says she believes in astrology and has checked her zodiac compatibility many times.

During the press conference for her upcoming film *Mr & Mrs Mahi*, Janhvi was asked if she believed in astrology, considering that her character Mahima is kundali is matched for an arranged marriage.

Janhvi told media: "I think we all have checked our zodiac compatibility. I have done it so many times. I do believe in astrology a lot but not to the extent where I stop talking to a person just because my zodiac sign doesn't match!"

*Mr & Mrs Mahi* also stars Rajkumar Rao and is slated to hit the screens on 31. She then has *Devara: Chapter 1* with star Jr NTR releasing.

She revealed that her character Thangam in the film is interesting.

The actress added: "I love working on a film set where people do their work with love. The passion these guys have is amazing and their storytelling is beautiful. With conviction they showcase each character, it is very different. I am very lucky to get a chance to work (in the film with Jr NTR)."

**Sharad Kelkar is thankful to the lot of people who've 'shown trust in me' in the last two years**



Actor Sharad Kelkar said that he dubs well but that doesn't mean he will do a certain type of role that requires a good voice. He feels fortunate and added that in the last two years, a lot of people have shown trust in him. Sharad, who has lent his voice for *Baahubali: Crown Of Blood*, said: "I dub well but that doesn't mean that I'll do a certain type of role that requires a good voice. I am an actor first, I can perform and when it comes to my voice I can take it to any dimension." But, fortunately, in the last two years, a lot of people have shown trust in me. I try to do different kinds of roles so that I am not stuck being typecast. I am waiting for the good times, the best to come.



## Rukmini Maitra spent 2 hours on make-up for her humanoid robot character in Jeet's 'Boomerang'

Actress Rukmini Maitra, who predominantly works in Bengali cinema, will be seen in dual roles in the upcoming movie 'Boomerang'.

In the film, she shares the screen with Bengali superstar Jeet, and essays two different roles of a humanoid robot (NISHA) and his wife (Isha).

The actress shared that for her look as NISHA, she had to sit in the make-up chair for two hours to achieve the desired result in terms of appearance.

There had to be a clear demarcation between the two, the actress shared.

Rukmini told VOICE: For the robot specifically, we had to work on making the skin look a lot more shiny or plastic or silicon-like. The face of a doll almost. So the hair and make-up itself would take two hours. And then the way she would walk, talk, and emote. So, I did my workshops and worked on body language.

The actress shared that the most challenging aspect for her was maintaining static eye contact or movement where the eyeballs wouldn't move much like humans.

Talking about the most interesting, or rather anticipated, thing which unfolded on set, the actress said that it was the camaraderie that she and Jeet shared

on set.

Thankfully, the bond that we share off-screen bloomed into an extremely comfortable chemistry on screen, which was beautiful and satisfying to experience. One very interesting thing, which I have also shared with him, is that we are very similar in many ways. It was so bizarre the kind of little things I discovered that were so strangely similar, she added.

Bollywood has had many humanoid robot characters over the years, the recent one being Kriti Sanon's character of SIFRA from 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya'. But this is a first for Bengali cinema. However, the actress feels that in the current day and age, there's no such thing as a language barrier.

The actress told VOICE: We are all regional, national, and global all at the same time, keeping the way we are currently connected to various content from all around the world. So as an artiste, I surely feel lucky to have played a robot in my career, as it's not the kind of character a person usually gets to play in their lifespan as an actor. It's actually quite rare. 'Boomerang' is very much a film which is indigenous to Bengal! And I sincerely hope the audience enjoys this laughter riot, she added.



## Nimrat Kaur reflects on two decades in industry: 'Tried to enjoy the moments, not rest on past laurels'

Nimrat Kaur, who started her acting career with the music video 'Tera Mera Pyari' in 2005, has reflected on her two decades of journey in the industry, sharing that she has tried to enjoy the moments, and not rest on past laurels. The actress featured in Kumar Sanu's song 'Tera Mera Pyari' before doing a few commercials for television.

She made her film debut with a small role in the English movie 'One Night with the King', before starring in the 2012 crime thriller 'Peddlers' directed by Vasan Bala.

Speaking to VOICE on her journey, Nimrat said, 'So much has happened. I have learned so much. And I have enjoyed every bit of it. 'Tera Mera Pyari' was my first work on camera. I had just come to Mumbai. I was very fortunate that it came my way, and opened the advertising world before me. I did a lot of ads after that. Then I did a lot of theatre.'

She added, 'I have always been a student of life as an actor, and tried to learn every medium that I have explored. When I did 'The Test Case', it was one of the few web series to be made in India. I enjoyed every turn of this journey. I have tried to enjoy the moments, and not rest on past laurels or 'eki wo experience jo tha wahi hona chahiye dubara'. 'The Lunchbox waisi thi, waise hi dubara ho'. No experience is ever repeated in life.'

Nimrat, who last featured in the movie 'Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video', said she enjoys life's reality, adding that everything comes with its own set of problems and excitement.

'I don't feel like it's been 20 years. It feels like a lot, sounds like a lot. What happens with actors is when you are essaying a part, a part of your life and your years are gone. Time keeps passing by. It's very interesting when you look back, I just like to experience my life through people and their reactions, and understandings,' she added.



## Sonakshi's wish list: 'Want to do edgy film with Anurag Kashyap, want to work with Rajkumar Hirani'

Sonakshi Sinha has a string of names of filmmakers she wants to collaborate with. After auteur Sanjay Leela Bhansali ticked off the bucket list, she says she would love to work with Rajkumar Hirani, Anurag Kashyap and Rohit Shetty.

About whom she would like to work with next, Sonakshi told VOICE: 'I would love to work with Rajkumar Hirani sir. He's another filmmaker who taps into the emotions of his audiences. He is a simplistic filmmaker but so impactful and I would love to work with him.'

She shared that she would love to do an all-out action film as well.

'There's Rohit Shetty, I would love to do an all-out action film with him. There is Ashutosh Gowariker sir. I really want to see an edgy film with Anurag Kashyap and then Anurag Basu. Lots of filmmakers on my bucket list still,' she added.

After making her debut in 2010 with Salman Khan-starrer 'Dabangg', in a career spanning almost 14 years, Sonakshi has worked with filmmakers such as Prabhu Deva, Vikramaditya Motwane and A. R. Murugadoss to name a few.

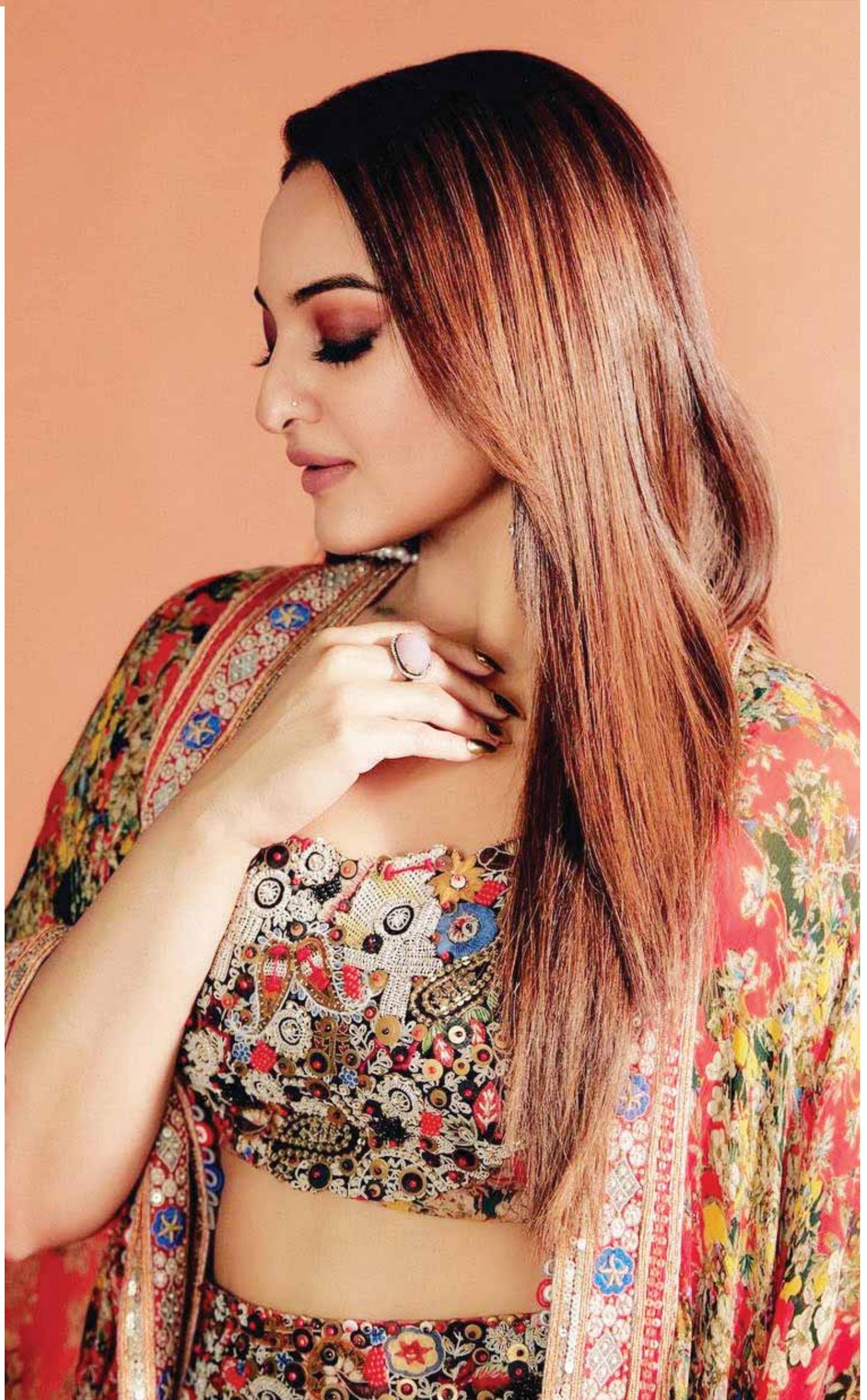
Her upcoming work includes 'Kakudai', a horror comedy directed by Aditya Sarpotdar.

**Monalisa's beach fashion is all about breezy co-ord set, sun hat, slippers**



The 'Bigg Boss 10' fame actress Monalisa, on Wednesday, shared pictures of herself in a breezy co-ord set, as she poses on a beach at an undisclosed location. Known for her major work in Bhojpuri cinema, Monalisa, who participated in 'Nach Baliye 8' took to Instagram and shared a series of pictures from a beach, wherein we can see her posing in a sky blue co-ord set.

The co-ord set includes a sleeveless crop top with tie up detail in front. It is paired with a matching skirt, which has a slit on one side. She opted for pink lips, blushed cheeks, and kept her long tresses open.



# Hina Khan pairs Anarkali suit with blushed cheeks, winged eyeliner & oxidised jhumkas



Actress Hina Khan exuded grace and elegance in a pink Anarkali ethnic suit, as she promoted her upcoming web series *ëNamacoolí* on Tuesday in Mumbai.

The diva, who plays Rubiya in the show, is seen wearing a long pink Anarkali kurta and has a mehendi colour outline in the neck portion.

The kurta has intricate embroidery on the sleeves and the bottom line along with floral imprints on the entire outfit. It was paired with mehendi coloured dupatta.

For the makeup, Hina opted for matte pink lips, blushed cheeks, and winged eyeliner. She kept her long tresses open and accessorised the look with oxidised silver jhumkas.

*ëNamacoolí* stars Abhinav Sharma and Aaron Koul, and revolves around two inseparable friends, and the true definition of manhood. Set in Lucknow featuring two inseparable friends Mayank and Piyush who yearn for fame as they enter their second year of college and uncover the true essence of manhood.

Directed by Ritam Shrivastava and written by Shantanu Srivastava, this seven-episode series also features Abhishek Bajaj, Anushka Kaushik, Faisal Malik, and Aadil Khan in pivotal roles.

Produced by Reliance Entertainment Studios, *ëNamacoolí* will premiere on May 17 on Amazon miniTV.

## Shah Rukh Khan hospitalised in Ahmedabad due to dehydration

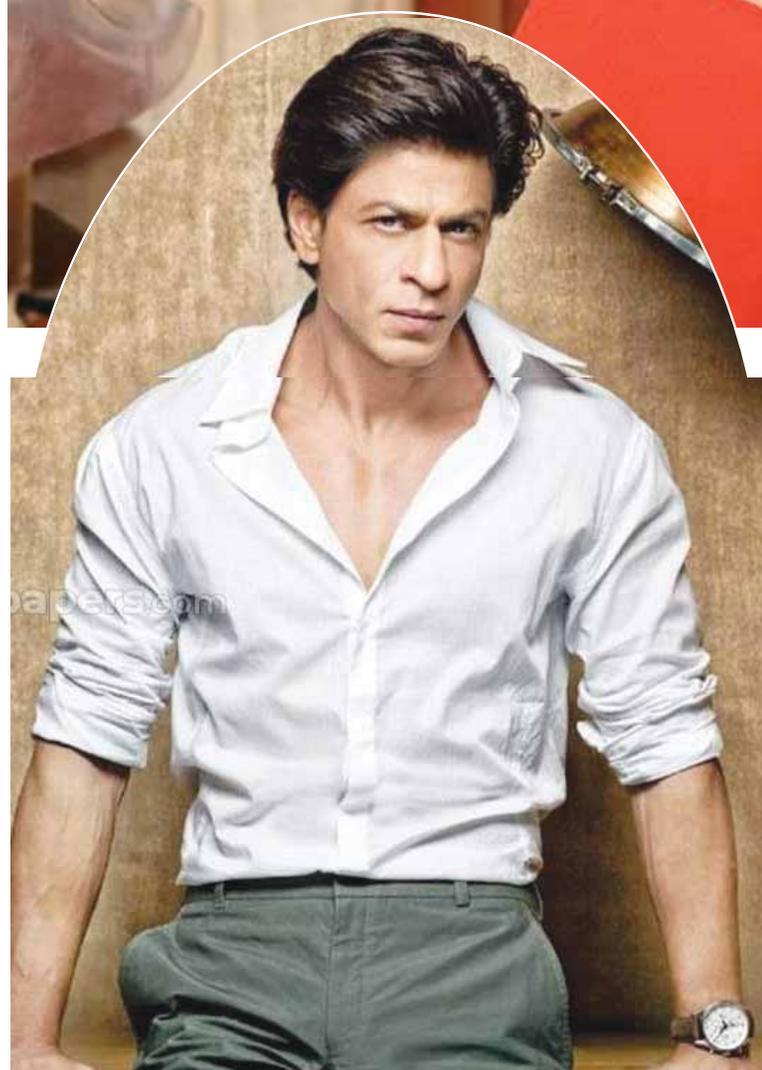
Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan was admitted to the KD Hospital in Ahmedabad on Wednesday after reportedly suffering a heat stroke. The actor reached Ahmedabad on Tuesday to watch the Indian Premier League (IPL) match between his franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH), which KKR won at the Narendra Modi Stadium here to reach the

final. The actor was suffering from dehydration amid a high temperature of 45-degree Celcius in Ahmedabad. He is under medical observation although his health is stable. Security has been tightened around the hospital. sources said. Actor Juhi Chawla visited the actor at the hospital.

An official statement from the hospital is expected later on Wednesday.

After KKR's victory on Wednesday, Shah Rukh Khan marked the occasion by taking a victory lap in the stadium along with his daughter Suhana and youngest son AbRam.

During the lap, he delighted thousands of fans with his iconic arms outstretched pose. He also shared warm moments with the KKR players. Known for his supportive nature, the actor also spoke to the SRH players to lift their morale after the match.



# Zayn Marie Khan talks about her 'morally balanced yet very ambitious' role in 'Illegal 3'



Actress Zayn Marie Khan, who plays the role of Zoya Ahmed in the upcoming legal thriller web series *Illegal 3* has given insights into her character, calling it 'morally balanced yet very ambitious'.

Talking about her character, Zayn shared: 'I believe Zoya is a character that the audience will easily connect with. She is morally balanced yet very ambitious, making her intriguing due to this balance. There are many high-drama scenes between her and Neha's character.'

'Zoya fought her way up in a cutthroat industry, and through sheer hard work, she is determined to prove herself. In this way, her character is very relatable. I am grateful to Sahir for giving me the opportunity to play such an intriguing character,' said Zoya, who has also starred in the web series *Made In*

Heaven.

Speaking on the impact of the series on society, Zyan added: 'One thing I always feel that people should keep in mind is that the show is one particular case scenario and it's not necessary that this would happen everywhere. Additionally, because the show is talking about domestic abuse, abuse of relationships, etc and there's a great amount of responsibility that comes to us artists involved, but I also feel as an audience we are also responsible for the way in which we consume the media.'

In the third season, Zayn essays the role of Zoya, a lawyer and the rival of Niharika (played by Neha Sharma).

The show also stars Neha, Piyush Mishra, Akshay Oberoi, Neil Bhoopalam, and Satyadeep Mishra in the lead roles.

Directed by Sahir Raza, *Illegal 3* will air on JioCinema from May 29.

## Radhika Madan wishes to keep 'spark & innocence' of her 'Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video' character intact



Actress Radhika Madan, who essayed the titular character in the mystery film *Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video* opened up on how the movie made them introspect themselves a lot and wants to keep the 'spark and innocence' of her role intact in herself.

Talking to VOICE, Radhika shared one takeaway from her character Sajini.

She said: 'I really feel sad for Sajini. But the takeaway would be not to lose your spark or your innocence for society. It's very important that you are right in your own eyes, and trust

your gut.' 'One should not live on external validation. So, I will try to keep Sajini's spark and innocence intact in me,' Radhika told VOICE.

On one memory from the shoot of the movie, Radhika, who last featured in *Kacchey Limbu*, shared: 'Every scene has made us introspect a lot. Not just me, but the director, the people on set, the co-actors. I think every scene was filled with introspection.' 'You don't think about yourself and usually think about your role, but this movie makes you question how you view yourself. And whether I can give judgement to myself or not,' added Radhika.

# Why does postnatal care only last a few weeks? New data shows it should be years

By Devi Sridhar

Birth is usually a time of celebration, when we recognise the miracle of life as a child is brought into the world. In Britain, childbirth used to be a much more fraught experience, with a high risk of death for mother and baby. But scientific progress and modern medicine have reduced infant deaths for every 1,000 live births from 31.7 in 1950 to just four by 2020. Deaths are relatively higher than Finland's and Japan's infant mortality rates, of about two for every 1,000, but much lower than Afghanistan at 103.1.

Once a woman and her baby survive childbirth, several weeks of follow-up is routine in many countries to ensure that any urgent health issues are resolved.

This six- to eight-week period is called postnatal care, as women recover from their labour and delivery, especially if they've had a C-section or episiotomy. But what happens to new mothers after that handful of weeks? They usually disappear from the health system and are left on their own to cope with recovery. This year, a new scientific review was published in *Lancet Global Health*, which estimated the extent of long-term postpartum conditions through bringing together a number of international studies. The authors estimate that more than a third of women who give birth in a given year struggle with long-term health complications that's at least 40 million women globally. Even for births without immediate complications, issues can arise later on, often after the health system has stopped monitoring women. You won't be surprised to hear that postpartum health issues are not easily brought up at a dinner party, given they involve the most private areas of our body. These include urinary and anal incontinence, dyspareunia (pain during sex), postpartum depression, tokophobia (fear of childbirth), and chronic pain in the lower back and pelvic area. It's estimated that 43% of women had pain during sex for two to six months after childbirth, 22% for six to 12 months, and 40% from 12 to 24 months. For those who gave birth vaginally, 19% of women had anal incontinence symptoms even one year after the birth.

Postpartum depression has been better recognised in recent years, and is estimated to affect 11% of women in high-income countries, while secondary infertility (not being able to give birth a second time) at 10.5%. Lower-back pain was estimated to affect 31.6% of women postpartum, while perineal pain affected 11%. If you've given birth, or have been close to someone who has, these conditions probably resonate. These are talked about behind closed doors, with women often told to just get on with it,



all while caring for a new baby. Yet these health challenges are not easy to ignore for new mothers given the daily pain they bring to simply going to the toilet, having sex or just existing. Despite the high prevalence of these conditions, the study finds that no high-quality guidelines for the management of 40% of priority conditions exist in high-income countries, and none were developed in low- and middle-income countries. We finally have powerful statistics showing the extent of long-term postpartum conditions. These should be used not just to raise

awareness, but also develop solutions. Healthcare systems need to see post-birth support as lasting longer than six weeks. This could involve three-, six- and 12-month routine checks on women to ensure recovery is on track and provide care to help ease pain and symptoms. Women should not be left alone to suffer. In addition, we need high-quality international guidelines developed for the top 32 priority conditions for nurses and doctors to rely on.

Reducing the stigma around long-term health complications post-birth is also important: you could do this in your daily life by asking not just about the new baby, but asking a new mother how she is doing and making sure that talking about urinary or anal incontinence, pain during sex, or postpartum depression isn't seen as taboo or awkward. So many people experience them that they are, in fact, commonplace. No one should feel isolated and alone dealing with these issues. Last month, I wrote about declining fertility in almost all regions in the world. While there are several factors behind women choosing not to have children, including access to birth control and gender equality, governments need to also be aware of what childbirth does to women's bodies, and the long road to full pain-free recovery. There is an obvious urgent need to improve maternity services in the NHS, which are in crisis. But another step in making childbirth more safe and attainable would be for health systems to offer services and support to let women know that they won't be left alone after six weeks, but supported and cared for at least for the first two years.

## Allies enraged and enemies emboldened – Sunak's campaign is already a fiasco

By Gaby Hinsliff

Cut your losses short and let your winners run. It's the oldest cliché on Wall Street, and, at heart, Rishi Sunak is more of a banker than a politician. So, in retrospect, perhaps we should have guessed how he would react to the current collapse in the Conservative party's share price.

His bet on turning the country around hasn't worked out, so he's unwinding his position; dumping his stocks and getting out. On Wednesday, Sunak had the air of a man who is tired of waiting for the inevitable and would rather get it over with. What he doesn't seem to have realised – although judging by their seasick expressions as they lined up behind him, plenty of his cabinet ministers have – is how much politics is not like banking. Cutting and running now, against the reported advice of the Tories' election guru, Isaac Levido, is a tacit admission that things are not going to get better; that, if anything, they are likely to get worse. And just like that, he has effectively turned his campaign into a public admission of failure. By breakfast time on day one of the campaign, Sunak had

already conceded that we haven't made the progress on NHS waiting lists I would have liked, and that flights to Rwanda would not in fact be taking off before the election. (Though Nigel Farage isn't formally standing for election this time, having lost seven

arranged a campaign around all the things voters are angriest about. What next? Well, lights are flashing red all over the criminal justice system: this week it emerged that police chiefs privately discussed asking forces to delay arrests because the jails were too

full, thanks to the Tories failing either to build more cell space or reform sentencing in time. Prisoners are already being released early to ease hellish overcrowding, and from this week some sentences will be cut short by up to 70 days, to victims' understandable distress.



times in a row, expect him to make hay with that on the Reform party's behalf as the peak season for small boat crossings gets under way in June.) By the afternoon, the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, was describing Boris Johnson's regime as the worst governing ever seen to the Covid inquiry, in case any voters happened to have forgotten Partygate. It's as though someone had actively

Yet this campaign will not be a slam-dunk for Labour. For a start, all these problems will most likely be theirs to solve by 5 July, and it may be only when and if they get the keys to the Treasury that they understand exactly why Sunak chose to leave when he did. Inflation is down but not necessarily out, with speculation about an autumn rebound, and borrowing figures this month were worse than expected.

# A real estate mogul bought her way into the New York mayor's inner circle – and then the favors started

BY George Joseph, Yoav Gonen, April Xu, Bianca Pallaro, Haidee Chu and Katie Honan

An ambitious hotel developer held multiple, previously unreported fundraisers with the New York City mayor, Eric Adams, and provided benefits to several of the mayor's longtime associates. She then scored behind-the-scenes favors and millions more in city contract dollars from his administration, a new investigation by the Guardian US, the City and Documented has found.

That fundraiser, Weihong Hu, was previously the subject of a February investigation by this reporting partnership which unearthed allegations that Hu's family secretly bankrolled illegal donations to Adams's re-election campaign.

Now a review of thousands of



hotels in a residential stretch of north-eastern Queens – despite the fact that taxpayers were paying thousands of dollars a month for the suite to be used for a program housing formerly

assertions. In a phone call, Tung also denied that Greco stayed in one of the shelter program's rooms. In addition, the mayor's son, Jordan Coleman, visited the same far-flung hotel in Fresh

Adams' friend and former state senator, as her hotel company's CEO. The job was a boon for Sampson, who was sentenced to prison in 2017 after being convicted of obstructing an investigation into allegations that he embezzled more than \$400,000.

Hu also enlisted the help of another trusted Adams ally, a local religious leader named Alfred Cockfield II, to help intervene with city officials on her behalf, according to two sources with direct knowledge of the matter. Cockfield made news two years ago after the New York Times reported that a political action committee he was running paid more than \$126,000 in wages and consulting fees to Cockfield himself – many times more than it gave to any of the individual candidates it was ostensibly set up to support. Tung said that the minister approached Hu saying he might be able to help with this and that, but that his client never hired him or paid him any money.

Hu's largesse to the Adams campaign and cultivation of his inner circle was matched many times over by city contract dollars and regulatory favors her companies received from the new mayor's administration. In two separate cases, when Hu's projects were cited for construction safety and permitting violations, the fundraiser tapped Cockfield to help her deal with city officials,

according to two sources involved in those episodes.

On 8 July 2022, after a city buildings inspector halted construction at one of Hu's hotel developments on West 39th Street citing a serious safety issue, Cockfield phoned top officials at the New York City department of buildings at about 10pm that night, pushing them to clear the violation and allow work to resume, according to one source familiar with the agency's operations. Just after 11pm, the agency reversed its stop work order at the site for Hu, department records show.

Andrew Rudansky, the department of buildings' press secretary, said the agency lifted the stop work order because the site's safety issue had been resolved. He did not comment on Cockfield.

At the time of Cockfield's alleged interventions, the New York buildings department commissioner was Eric Ulrich, an Adams appointee who now faces criminal charges alleging that he took bribes in exchange for favorable department decisions. Ulrich has pleaded not guilty.

Ulrich did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

In another episode after Adams entered the mayor's office, Hu hosted several meetings with Cockfield during which they strategized about how to fast-track another stalled Manhattan hotel development on West 35th Street, according to a person who attended the meeting. That construction snag stemmed from her team's unauthorized partial demolition of rent-stabilized apartments at a property that she wanted to turn into a high-rise hotel. Earlier, the previous mayoral administration, that of Bill de Blasio, and local community representatives had pushed Hu to keep affordable apartments at the site. But after her meetings with Cockfield, in late 2022, the Adams administration reversed course, freeing Hu of the stop work order and allowing the developer to build a hotel without any affordable residences.



pages of city and business records and interviews with more than 20 sources – including Hu's former associates and current and former government officials – demonstrates that the businesswoman went beyond suspect campaign donations: she bought her way into Adams's inner circle and leveraged her newfound political pull with his administration.

For roughly eight months in 2022 and 2023, Hu allowed one of the mayor's top aides, Winnie Greco, to stay in a suite at one of her

incarcerated New Yorkers, according to business records and two sources with direct knowledge of her stay. An analysis of hotel blueprints and invoices shows that during the period of Greco's stay, the city was being billed and paid for her room at a cost that probably comes to \$50,000 or more.

Hu's attorney, Kevin Tung, and the mayor's office have both previously claimed that Greco paid for the room herself. But both have since refused to produce receipts to back up these

Meadows, Queens, on at least one occasion in November of 2022 with an unidentified young woman, where the pair allegedly used a taxpayer-funded room, also contracted for the post-incarceration program's use, according to a former worker at the hotel who said Coleman was pushing a roller suitcase.

Coleman did not respond to repeated requests for comment. Tung denied that the mayor's son stayed at the hotel overnight. Along with the hotel stays, Hu hired John Sampson, a longtime

# Iran's internal political balance at stake

By KC Singh

IRANIAN President Ebrahim Raisi's tragic death is untimely for Iran as it confronts Israel, and by proxy the US, in the wake of the October 7 massacre by the Hamas in Israeli settlements. Iran is allegedly the Hamas financier, arms supplier and abettor. Other Iran-aligned armed groups in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, especially Hezbollah, are seen as complicit. Iran launched its first-ever direct missile and drone attack on Israel on April 13. The provocation was the Israeli bombing of an Iranian diplomatic complex in Damascus that killed some Iranian military commanders who were coordinating Iran's clandestine activities in West Asia.

During the Barack Obama presidency, the US opted for engaging with Iran to control its nuclear programme and strategic reach over the Shia crescent, running from Iran via Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to the Mediterranean. The 2015 nuclear deal was struck between Iran and P5+1, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. However, then President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the deal in 2018, imposing sanctions instead. Simultaneously, he worsened America's pro-Israel tilt, shifting the US embassy to Jerusalem without obtaining Israeli commitment to curb settlements in the occupied West Bank or a two-state solution.

President Joe Biden tried to recalibrate this policy, but was first distracted by the Covid-19 pandemic and then the Ukraine war. Meanwhile, the US envisioned a new West Asia and Gulf security paradigm, utilising the Abraham Accords signed during the Trump presidency. Pro-US Arab nations like the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Saudi Arabia were encouraged to normalise relations with Israel. The aim was to contain Iran and its deep political linkages in West Asia. But the danger posed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new coalition government, with extreme right-



wing parties advocating Palestinian marginalisation, was ignored. Netanyahu argued that Palestinians had ceased to matter in regional geopolitics.

Based on this new vision, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was proposed. The leaders of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, US and India met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi for its high-profile launch. But the Israeli PM, in whose country the Adani-owned Haifa port was the land route's termination point, was absent. Clearly, the Saudis had resisted signing the Abraham Accords without Israeli commitment to resolve the Palestinian issue.

Less than a year later, the Iran-provoked Gaza crisis has upended the IMEC project. Even signatories to the Abraham Accords like the UAE and Bahrain are compelled to toughen their public posture against Israel to satisfy domestic public opinion and the Arab Street's ire.

Having sabotaged the US-Israeli plans, Iran has moved closer to the Russia-China combine. This convergence challenges America's global hegemony and the existing global order. Iran has become a major supplier of armed drones to Russia, threatening to make tanks and

artillery redundant. The recent visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to China, his first foray abroad after winning a fresh six-year term, underscores the new geopolitical realignment. Raisi was in the third year of his four-year term. As a former head of the Iranian judiciary, a position with more authority than chief justices in democratic nations, he had a blood-tainted past. He oversaw the mass execution of political prisoners in the 1980s. His election in 2021 was less free than usual Iranian presidential elections. Traditionally, the Supreme Leader and his advisers use the Guardian Council to prune the list of candidates. In the past, this was done shrewdly to provide the people some sense of choice and electoral freedom. When Mohammad Khatami was elected in 1997, he was an acknowledged reformist who beat the regime-favoured conservatives. This was abandoned in 2021 amid rising public disenchantment due to economic distress caused by Western sanctions. Later, young Mahsa Amini's death in police custody in September 2022 ignited widespread protests, especially by women. With the regime's moral authority damaged, the 2021 voting percentage dropped to 49 per cent from 60 per cent or above earlier. In fact, voters protested by casting

damaged votes, numbering 13 per cent of the total. This was higher even than the votes received by Raisi's opponents. Raisi was being talked about as the current Supreme Leader's successor, who is old and a cancer survivor. A new presidential election must now be held in 50 days. The challenge is to select a conservative who is young, trusted by the Supreme Leader and loyal to the regime's core religious conservatism.

How does this impact India-Iran relations? Both nations value strategic independence but have compulsions limiting their legroom. India cannot provoke the US excessively by its dalliance with nations like Iran, which are challenging US dominance in the Gulf and West Asia. Iran needs China as a market for its oil and a supplier of dual-use products for its defence and nuclear programmes. It also needs Russia to balance dependence on China and as an export market for its defence products, at least till the Ukraine war continues. India-Iran trade last year was \$1.39 billion, falling from a high of \$3.38 billion in 2019-20. The reduction in oil imports and the Chinese dominance of the Iranian domestic market were contributory factors. The

Chabahar port has been the talisman of bilateral relations. After the recent 10-year deal to develop the port, the US issued a warning of imminent sanctions. With Afghanistan under Taliban rule and Iran goading its proxies to fight Israel, the Americans may be less willing than in the past to exempt India.

The Indo-Iranian strategic convergence was the closest during 1996-2001, when the Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Both backed the Northern Alliance of Ahmad Shah Massoud. But since 2003, when the Iranian clandestine nuclear programme was revealed and US as well as Western sanctions followed, India began negotiating a nuclear deal with the US. Since then, relations between the two have fluctuated between strategic suspicion and transactional forbearance.

Raisi's death will not alter these fundamental factors. In any case, the Supreme Leader and the advisers in the Supreme National Security Council, especially its secretary general Ali Akbar Ahmadian, will keep foreign policy operational. But his death could affect Iran's internal political balance as jockeying begins to fill the power vacuum.

# No sex drive and a 'tanking libido': how I redefined intimacy in midlife

BY Angela Garbes

Talking with women my age, sex ñ specifically, a lack thereof ñ comes up frequently. One friend referred to her 'tanking libido'; another sent a text that read 'sex drive' followed by two thumbs-down emojis.

I relate to both, and even more to a stranger who asked me to write about 'the ways we redefine intimacy'.

I've been with my spouse for 17 years, and our sex life has gone through periods of both abundance and scarcity. It's a wave we ride together. Three years ago, the prescription medication I take daily dulled my sexual sensation and we embarked on the nebulous, ongoing project of redefining intimacy. My desire for physical closeness and release is still present, but neither are spontaneous or easy to reach.

Recently, wholly subsumed in Miranda July's new novel *All Fours*, a brilliant (and exceptionally horny) exploration of female midlife and desire, I found myself involuntarily grinding my pelvis against the carpet I was lying on. A sign of life! July's narrator, an unnamed 45-year-old artist on a journey of cracking open her life and body, describes an urge that lit up new



neural pathways, as if sex, the whole concept of it, was being freshly mapped.

Yes, I thought. I want that.

I was routinely jolted out of my sensual reading experience by my children, as well as the other stuff of life that pulls me away from pleasure: Zoom meetings, laundry, chronic pain, depression, scheduling logistics, insomnia. I also wondered whether perimenopause, the biological reality of midlife, entailed the diminution of sex.

Emily Nagoski, a sex educator and author of *Come Together: The Science (and Art!) of Creating Lasting Sexual Connections*,

gets this question a lot. Over the phone, she tells me there are no hormones or brain changes specific to midlife that affect sexuality. But cortisol, the primary stress hormone, does. 'Women in their mid-40s are under a lot of stress,' says Nagoski, referring to the high American expectations when it comes to professional success, productivity and domestic work. 'When you feel like you're being chased by a lion, that's not a great time to be turned on.' Estrogen levels drop in middle age, Nagoski explains, which can make vaginal tissue drier and more prone to tearing,

which leads to pain. 'Who wants to have sex that is painful?' she asks rhetorically. (Nagoski herself experienced these changes and found relief in hormone therapy, specifically a prescription for estradiol: 'it would throw a parade for vaginal estradiol if I could'.)

This got me thinking. What kind of sex do I want to be having? Instead of attempting to drum up longing on command, can I tune into my own desire ñ feel and identify some of its contours and accelerators? In *All Fours*, the protagonist and her best friend, Jordi, share what 'a typical fuck' in each of their marriages is like.

The narrator and her husband have a weekly sex appointment and she relies heavily on fantasy to orgasm. Jordi, in contrast, describes how she and her wife wrap their legs around each other, and how 'it really like my mouth to be overfilled so almost her whole hand might be in my mouth so there's drool running down the sides of my face and we're just, you know, humping, kind of like animals.' 'I've actually thought about how ugly this must look, like two desperate cavewomen.' This rabid, particular, ravenous vision of sex is anything but ugly to me. It's extraordinary.

'Some people get to a place of having extraordinary sex,' says Nagoski, or 'sex that doesn't follow other people's rules, that is authentic to their true selves, and their partner's true selves.' of course, I thought, grateful for the reminder: sex can be anything we want.

If the quest for extraordinary sex seems daunting, Nagoski offers an easy place to begin.

'Find a half an hour a week to touch parts of your body ñ and I'm not even talking about masturbation,' she says. 'Touch parts of your body alone and explore those sensations and which of them your brain is interpreting as pleasurable.'

For the last couple of years, I've applied this practice more to how my body moves through the world. I attune to which muscles call out for movement during improvisational dance classes; how the wind, scented with lilacs, feels on a spring walk; how amazing oil feels on my body after a hot shower.

That attention to pleasure has improved my sex life. These days, sex with my spouse is less like a straight line with an endpoint, and more like a series of loops and swirls, delays and digressions. Male ejaculation once signaled the end, or the approaching end, of intercourse. Now it's more of a comma, a pause on a longer path. Along the way, there are inordinate moments of gratification and my orgasms are deeper, feel new. According to Nagoski, the key to great sex is simple: you have to decide that it matters. And you have to invest time in yourself and whoever you're getting down with.

'People tell me: 'This sounds so

## A 1971 boiler and barbarity even Hitler couldn't have imagined

By Sushim Mukul

A heavy steel boiler in which people were burnt alive, legs shoved in first and the torso later, stands as a reminder of the horrors of the Pakistani regime in Bangladesh in 1971.

The brutal repression by the Pakistan Army during Bangladesh's freedom struggle in 1971 is well known. However, the extent of the barbarity during the genocide might not be fully known to people.

The steel boiler is a reminder of that barbarity and horror. It is the latest addition to the revamped Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum in Khulna, Bangladesh, which is marking its 10th anniversary in May. The steel boiler from Platinum Jute Mill, was used to burn alive at least 100 Bangladeshis by the Pakistani regime.

"In today's world, genocide is



taking place in multiple places, like in Palestine. Speaking sarcastically, the cost of such genocide is high. With gas chambers, Hitler made it cost-effective. But what Pakistanis did in 1971 in Bangladesh, even Hitler couldn't have imagined that sort of barbarity," Muntassir

Mamoon, chairman of the board of trustees of the Genocide Museum, tells IndiaToday.in. Hitler massacred millions of Jews with his ingenious methods, including the gas chambers. The atrocities committed by the Pakistani regime before and during the

Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 led to the deaths of an estimated 3,00,000 to 30,00,000 Bengalis, with countless others subjected to unimaginable brutality. The crackdown on political dissent began with Operation Searchlight to silence the Bengali demand for autonomy and independence. It marked the beginning of a systematic campaign of mass murder, rape, and arson. Intellectuals, students, and civilians were targeted, with entire villages razed and women brutally violated as a weapon of war.

According to a media release by the museum, Bengalis opposing the Pakistani regime were stuffed into gunny bags and shoved into the two boilers at Platinum Jute Plant. The torso and heads of the shrieking people were pushed in later.

# Virgin Island: the bizarre dating show where celibacy is at risk



Students of reality TV, take heed, for the genre has finally reached its logical endpoint. In retrospect it was always a question of when, not if, a production company would pitch a series entitled *Virgin Island*, but now at last the day is upon us.

According to *Variety*, Hulu has just launched *Virgin Island*, a show that is exactly what you think it is. A tropical island. A bunch of virgins. Lust. Temptation. Probably some sort of clumsy, desperate, fear-filled sexual intercourse. Almost definitely a lot of crying afterwards. This might just be the show your television was invented for. Over 10 episodes, *Virgin Island* will thrust a number of stunningly attractive and confident singles together. As Hulu states: 'As the cast finds heartfelt connections and explores their varying reasons for waiting, there will be plenty of unexpected twists, including new arrivals and departures, all

culminating in a dramatic finale where burgeoning relationships are put to the test.' This is complete conjecture on my part, but I'm taking that last bit to mean that the finale will feature two people attempting to have sex for the first time while their devoutly religious older relatives watch them from the corner of the room. Will our contestants reach the point of sexual release despite the sound of their grandparents weeping with bitter disappointment? Tune into *Virgin Island* and find out! Clearly, there are a number of questions to be asked here. The first, and perhaps most pressing is: 'What sort of virgins are these people looking for anyway?' This is important, because it will directly influence the direction of the series. If it's about adults who have made the decision to abstain from sex, then it could be fascinating television. Perhaps they will all have to overcome a long-held

fear of physical intimacy, in which case the show has the potential to be a sensitive and profound exploration of the obstacles we choose to throw in the way of our own happiness.

Then again, it could be full of a more traditional type of virgin; young people who are absolutely straining at the leash to have sex for the first time. This would make for a much more titillating series, except everyone would have it away with everyone else as soon as they set foot on the island, and the entire series would be over after three seconds.

Question number two is: 'How can you be sure these people are virgins anyway?' So far, the online application form poses questions like, 'Are you a virgin?' and, 'Explain why you remain a virgin,' which doesn't seem like a particularly scientific method of only attracting verified virgins. The system feels like it could be

extremely easily gamed and, while there is definitely a reality show in a *Traitors*-style series where a sexually active person infiltrates a pack of virgins for nothing but personal gain, that show shouldn't be something that bills itself as *Virgin Island*. Also, good luck finding applicants. There is going to be a British version of *Virgin Island* in the UK, entitled *Intimacy Retreat*, and Channel 4 has already struggled to find anyone who wants to take part. The application process began last summer and yet by January it was reported that not a single person wanted to participate. Shaken by the crisis, in March the channel loosened the entry requirements to allow non-virgins in. Maybe that means people who are celibate. Maybe it means people who have never had full sex. Who knows, but the backtracking certainly feels like a defeat. Maybe the American version will

have more luck, but it's hard to see how. The type of people the show is angling for are likely to consider their virginity sacred. They might not want the world to know that they have maintained their virginity. Or perhaps they've waited for so long because they want the eventual loss of their virginity to be a meaningful event, as opposed to a pre-commercial beat on the sixth episode of a reality show with a title that sounds like it was created by a masturbating chimp.

Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps America does have enough attention-seeking wannabes willing to trade their virginity for three months of vague notoriety. And if that's the case, maybe *Virgin Island* will run for years to come. But if it doesn't, and the show struggles to find applicants, I hope it remembers that there is still enough time to fully give into the dark side and rebrand itself as *Incel Island*.