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**Dream Girl 2**



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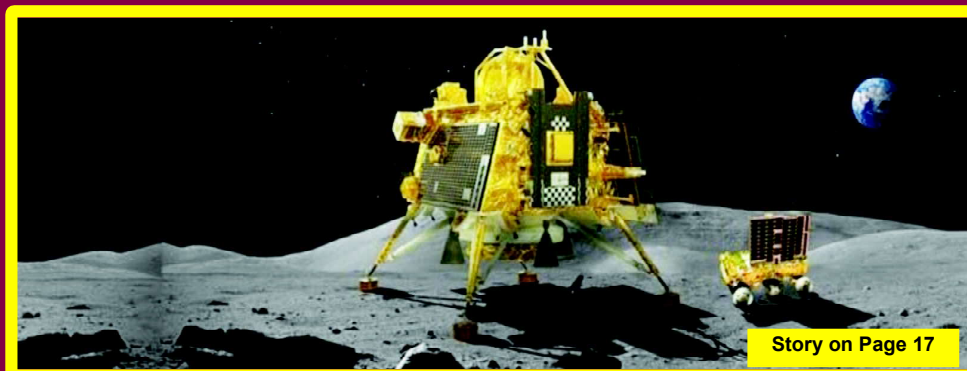
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## OVER THE MOON: GIANT LEAP FOR INDIA



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## The Indian-American trio who want to triumph over Trump



(SAI Buearu)-Three Indian-American politicians have joined the crowded field of Republican candidates vying to become the US President in 2024. Here's a look at the trio who will have to take on Republican giant Donald Trump and the party Indian-Americans have historically favoured.

Three Indian-Americans have thrown their hat in the ring and joined the crowded field of

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**CBI arrests  
Canadian  
resident in  
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**Wagner chief Yevgeny  
Prigozhin believed killed in  
Moscow plane crash: Report**



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## New York voters down on Democrats over migrant crisis



(SAI Buearu)-Top New York Democrats remain mired in mediocre poll numbers as voters negatively viewed their handling of the surge of migrants to the state, a new poll Tuesday found. The figures from the Siena College Research Institute is the latest troubling sign for Democrats, including President Joe Biden, as the influx of asylum-seekers has rose

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**Don't Sleep Next To Your iPhone While  
It Is Charging: Apple Warns Users**



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**Bollywood: Good Times are  
Back, for the Time Being**



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# Teen hacked Uber, Revolut, Grand Theft Auto maker, London jury finds

**The teen targeted Revolut, accessing around 5,000 Revolut customers' information, and then Uber two days later, causing nearly \$3 million of damage to Uber.**

(SAI Buearu)- A teenage member of the Lapsus\$ hacking group was on Wednesday found by a London jury to have hacked Uber (UBER.N) and fintech firm Revolut, and blackmailed the developers of best-selling video game Grand Theft Auto.

Arion Kurtaj, 18, embarked on a solo cybercrime spree in September 2022 while on police bail for earlier offences.

He targeted Revolut, accessing around 5,000 Revolut customers' information, and then Uber two days later, causing nearly \$3 million of damage to Uber, prosecutors said. Revolut declined to comment. Uber did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Kurtaj then hacked Rockstar Games and threatened to release the source code for the company's planned Grand Theft Auto sequel in a Slack message to all Rockstar staff.

Jurors at Southwark Crown Court were played clips of the latest installment of Grand Theft Auto,



which Kurtaj had hacked and uploaded to an online gaming forum. Rockstar did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

As Kurtaj, who has autism, was assessed by psychiatrists as not fit to stand trial, the jury was asked to find whether he had committed the acts rather than deliver a verdict of guilty or not guilty.

'KEY PLAYERS' Kurtaj had previously hacked and

blackmailed Britain's biggest broadband provider BT Group (BT.L) and mobile operator EE in 2021, demanding a \$4 million ransom or else he would delete data from their servers.

He hacked chipmaker Nvidia Corp (NVDA.O) in February 2022, taking around one terabyte of sensitive data, releasing about 80 gigabytes and threatening to publish the rest.

BT and Nvidia did not immediately

respond to a request for comment.

Prosecutors said Kurtaj and a 17-year-old, who cannot be named for legal reasons and whose case was heard alongside Kurtaj's, were "key players" in Lapsus\$.

The jury on Wednesday found Kurtaj committed 12 offences, including three counts of blackmail, two counts of fraud and six charges under the Computer Misuse Act.

The 17-year-old was found guilty of one count of fraud, one count of blackmail and one count under the Computer Misuse Act relating to Nvidia.

He was found not guilty of one count of blackmail and one count under the Computer Misuse Act in relation to BT. The 17-year-old had previously pleaded guilty to one count under the Computer Misuse Act and one count of fraud in relation to the BT hack.

He had also admitted a Computer Misuse Act offence relating to the hacking of the City of London Police's cloud storage, weeks after the force arrested him in 2022.

## Lab Owner Sentenced for \$463M Genetic Testing Scheme

**A Georgia man was sentenced today to 27 years in prison for his role in a scheme to defraud Medicare by submitting over \$463 million in genetic and other laboratory tests that patients did not need, and that were procured through the payment of kickbacks and bribes.**

(Staff Reporter )- According to court documents, Minal Patel, 44, of Atlanta, owned LabSolutions LLC (LabSolutions), a lab enrolled with Medicare that performed sophisticated genetic tests. Patel conspired with patient brokers, telemedicine companies, and call centers to target Medicare beneficiaries with telemarketing calls falsely stating that Medicare covered expensive cancer genetic tests. After the Medicare beneficiaries agreed to take a test, Patel paid kickbacks and bribes to patient brokers to obtain signed doctors' orders authorizing the tests from telemedicine companies. To conceal the kickbacks and bribes, Patel required patient brokers to sign sham contracts that falsely stated that the brokers were performing legitimate advertising services for LabSolutions, when, as Patel well knew, the brokers were deceptively marketing to Medicare beneficiaries and paying kickbacks and bribes to telemedicine companies for genetic testing prescriptions.

"In one of the largest genetic testing



fraud cases ever tried to verdict, today's sentence makes clear that the Department will seek justice for those who put profits above patient care, including owners and executives," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "The sentence also demonstrates the Criminal Division's ongoing commitment to fighting telemedicine and genetic testing fraud that exploits patients and drains health care benefit programs."

Patel knew the telemedicine doctors

robo-signed prescriptions for expensive genetic testing even though they were not treating the beneficiaries, often did not even speak with them, and made no evaluation of medical necessity. From July 2016 through August 2019, LabSolutions submitted more than \$463 million in claims to Medicare, including for thousands of medically unnecessary genetic tests, of which Medicare paid over \$187 million. In that timeframe, Patel personally received over \$21 million from Medicare in connection with the fraud.

"Deception, kickbacks, and bribes have no place in the provision of legitimate genetic testing and telemedicine services to patients who need them," said Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey B. Veltri of the FBI Miami Field Office. "Patel bilked hundreds of millions of dollars from Medicare through a complex testing fraud scheme. He is now paying the price for this crime. The FBI commends the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (HHS-OIG) for their close partnership and diligence

working this joint investigation. Our message to those who commit Medicare fraud and steal from U.S. taxpayers is clear: you will be caught and you will be held accountable."

"This outcome sends a strong message that HHS-OIG will not tolerate those who exploit Medicare patients and who pay kickbacks to providers to prescribe medically unnecessary genetic tests, all for illegitimate financial gain," said Acting Special Agent in Charge Julie Rivera of the HHS-OIG. "Our commitment to safeguarding the integrity of the Medicare program remains unwavering."

The FBI and HHS-OIG investigated the case. Trial Attorneys Jamie de Boer, Emily Gurskis, Reginald Cuyler Jr., Katherine Rookard, and Patrick Queenan of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section prosecuted the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Marx Calderon for the Southern District of Florida is handling asset forfeiture proceedings. An asset forfeiture hearing is scheduled for Aug. 25.





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# Castro Valley Resident Sentenced To 2½ Years In Prison In Connection With Prolific Pandemic Relief Fraud Scheme

(SAI Buearu)-Idowu Hashim Shittu was sentenced to 30 months in prison for fraudulently obtaining pandemic-related unemployment benefits from numerous state agencies, announced United States Attorney Ismail Ramsey; United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General ("DOL-OIG") Special Agent in Charge Quentin Heiden; and Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent in Charge Robert K. Tripp. The sentence was handed down by the Hon. Haywood S. Gilliam, Jr., United States District Judge. Shittu, 48, of Castro Valley, pleaded guilty to the charges on March 1, 2023. According to his plea agreement, from at least April through July of 2020, Shittu engaged in a scheme to obtain reloadable debit cards issued in the names of other people and to use the cards to make

expenditures for his personal use. The cards, referred to in the plea agreement as "Green Dot Cards," contained unemployment benefits distributed by various state agencies. Shittu did not know the persons to whom the unemployment insurance benefits were issued, nor did Shittu obtain the consent of the persons before he used the cards issued in their names. "In the wake of a global pandemic, our federal government passed laws to ease the suffering of those who were in financial distress. Shittu sought to take advantage of the situation by stealing unemployment benefits made available to those in need. We are proud to be working with our partners at the FBI and the Department of Labor to bring such bad actors to justice." "Idowu Hashim Shittu engaged in a scheme to fraudulently obtain over \$1,600,000 in unemployment insurance (UI)

benefits in the names of identity theft victims. He stole benefits intended to assist those who became unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said Quentin Heiden, Special Agent-in-Charge, Western Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General. "This sentencing demonstrates that those who defraud the UI program will be held accountable. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate those who exploit these benefit programs." "Shittu stole more than \$2.2 million in unemployment benefits by using the identities of innocent victims. His scheme deprived those truly in need during the pandemic crisis, and he will now face the consequences of his actions," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Tripp. "The FBI is committed to identifying and investigating those who steal

government benefits designed to help our citizens in need." The unemployment benefits at issue were made available as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). In passing the CARES Act, the federal government authorized the payment of hundreds of billions of dollars in unemployment benefits to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In most cases, state authorities were responsible for distributing those unemployment benefits to their residents. Shittu admitted that he obtained Green Dot Cards issued to other people, that the cards were obtained by fraud, and that the persons whose unemployment insurance benefits were loaded onto the cards never consented to have Shittu use the cards. Shittu also admitted that his participation in the scheme resulted in a loss of between \$1.5 million and \$3.5 million.

how Shittu used the Green Dot Cards issued to three different persons—all residents of the State of Washington. The first victim is identified in the plea agreement only by the initials, "S.O." Shittu admitted that S.O. never submitted a claim for unemployment benefits and that S.O.'s card was obtained through fraud. Further, Shittu acknowledged that he completed multiple transactions with the card—including one transaction for \$950 and two transactions, each for \$1,000, at a Walmart store in San Jose, Calif.—with the intent to defraud. Similarly, Shittu acknowledged using a card issued in the name of a second victim to make multiple cash withdrawals at Walmart stores in Hayward, Castro Valley, and San Leandro. In addition, in the Spring of 2020, Shittu used the card of a third victim to withdraw cash and to pay for service to his BMW 5-series automobile.

## Former Mayor of Anaheim Agrees to Plead Guilty to Federal Charges Stemming from Attempted Sale of Angel Stadium

(SAI Buearu)- The former mayor of Anaheim has agreed to plead guilty to federal felony charges for obstructing an FBI public corruption investigation by destroying evidence and for making false statements to FBI agents, the Justice Department announced today. In court documents filed today in United States District Court, Harish "Harry" Singh Sidhu, 66, of Anaheim, also admits cheating California tax authorities and making false statements to the Federal Aviation Administration in relation to his purchase of a helicopter. Federal prosecutors today filed a criminal information charging Sidhu with one count of obstruction of justice, one count of wire fraud, and two counts of making false statements to the FBI and the FAA. In a plea agreement also filed today, Sidhu agreed to plead guilty to the four offenses. According to his plea agreement, Sidhu - a longtime member of the Anaheim City

Council who was elected mayor in 2018 - admitted that while the City of Anaheim was negotiating the sale of Angel Stadium to the Los Angeles Angels Major League Baseball club, he sought out and became a member of the city's negotiating team for the stadium sale. While on the negotiating team, Sidhu provided confidential information belonging to the city to people working for the Angels, so that the Angels could buy Angel Stadium on favorable terms for the baseball club. After secretly providing the information he had received in his position as mayor, Sidhu later was recorded saying he expected a \$1 million campaign contribution from the Angels after the baseball club purchased Angel Stadium, the plea agreement states. "While serving as Anaheim's mayor, Mr. Sidhu took a series of actions that compromised the city's negotiating position by providing confidential information and secretly working to influence the city's decision-making process - all of which had a detrimental effect on the city and

its residents," said First Assistant United States Attorney Joseph T. McNally. "Public confidence in the integrity of public officials is critical to our society. This office will continue to root out public officials who compromise their integrity." "Mr. Sidhu was elected by and pledged to work for the residents of Anaheim, but he violated that pledge and their trust on numerous occasions to look out for special interests," said Donald Alway, the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office. "Mr. Sidhu deceived his colleagues and weakened the city's official strategy by divulging intellectual property, then lied to the government when his corruption was discovered. I'm proud of the hard work put in by agents and prosecutors which resulted in today's plea agreement." "The public places a lot of trust and confidence in elected officials, which Mr. Sidhu violated," said Special Agent in Charge Tyler Hatcher, IRS

Criminal Investigation, Los Angeles Field Office. "Working with our law enforcement partners, we were able to prevent Mr. Sidhu from causing greater harm to the Anaheim community." Sidhu admitted that he knowingly destroyed evidence by deleting multiple email messages and documents with the intent to impede and obstruct the FBI's investigation of public corruption related to the city's attempted sale of Angel Stadium. In the plea agreement, Sidhu specifically admitted he deleted an email message he had sent on July 21, 2020, with an attachment drafted by lawyers for the city, which contained confidential negotiation information related to the potential sale of Angel Stadium, including a discussion of issues related to price. Sidhu also admitted in his plea agreement that he deleted a September 2020 email message about secret mock Anaheim City Council meetings involving Sidhu, two other City Council members and representatives of the Angels - including the team president and

a team lawyer. Those mock City Council meetings would precede the scheduled public City Council meeting about the city's proposed sale of Angel Stadium. The deleted email message had an attachment titled "Angels Council Debate Prep," which detailed the topics on which each participant of the mock City Council meetings should focus, and it added "[Angels] team available to help develop 'zingers', responses, and other points to improve performance." Sidhu also admitted he had provided a confidential appraisal range to the Angels in 2019, months before the appraisal was made public. During the investigation, FBI agents secretly recorded multiple statements by Sidhu about the \$1 million campaign contribution that he expected to receive after the City of Anaheim sold Angel Stadium to the Angels, the plea agreement states. Sidhu also admitted that he lied about the Angel Stadium sale negotiations and related matters when FBI agents interviewed him on May 12, 2022.



## Former Auditor at Newport Beach Commercial Real Estate Agency Pleads Guilty to Embezzling More Than \$2.7 Million from Employer

(SAI Buearu)-A former executive at an Orange County commercial real estate agency pleaded guilty today to embezzling more than \$2.7 million from his employer by submitting fictitious invoices for companies controlled by his family and friends, whose services never were performed. Varun Aggarwal, 41, of Irvine, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud.

According to his plea agreement, from 2008 to January 2022, Aggarwal worked in the internal auditing department of the Newport Beach-based KBS Realty Advisors and rose to the level of the department's director. Beginning at least as early as January 2012 and continuing until January 2022, Aggarwal used his position at KBS to embezzle his employer's money.

As a member of the company's internal auditing group, Aggarwal was familiar with

KBS's policies and procedures for payments to vendors.



Aggarwal used his knowledge of KBS's policies and procedures to have his friends and family serve as approved vendors to do contracting work for KBS.

After several of these companies became approved vendors for KBS, Aggarwal used these approved vendors to submit fraudulent invoices for consulting services that were not performed for the company. He then funneled the payments on the invoices from KBS to his own bank accounts

- through the approved vendors - at times without informing the vendors that the invoices and the payments on the invoices were for his own benefit.

In carrying out this scheme, Aggarwal fraudulently obtained approximately \$2,729,718 from KBS that he caused it to pay to the approved vendors that ultimately went to himself.

Aggarwal resigned from KBS in January 2022 after the company began investigating the invoices, according to court documents.

United States District Judge Cormac J. Carney scheduled a January 22, 2024, sentencing hearing, at which time Aggarwal will face a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison. The FBI investigated this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney Brett A. Sagel of the Santa Ana Branch Office is prosecuting this case.

## South Bay Man Charged with Fraud in Alleged Scheme to Use His Position with Technology Company to Divert Software License Payments

(Staff Reporter) - Kevin Chao, a former executive at a technology company with offices in San Jose, Calif., appeared on charges he engaged in a years-long scheme to defraud his employer by directing millions of dollars of business to entities he controlled and by diverting more than \$2 million in software license fees to benefit himself and co-conspirators, announced United States Attorney Ismail J. Ramsey and Federal Bureau of Investigation, Special Agent in Charge Robert K. Tripp. Richard Sze and Suryanarayana Murthy Bobba, both former employees of the same technology company as Chao, face related charges. Chao made his initial appearance before the Honorable Nathanael M. Cousins, United States Magistrate Judge. Chao, 64, of Mountain View, was charged in an Information filed July 19, 2023. Chao was a former Global Business Director at a technology company identified in the Information as Company-1. According to the Information, Chao had a duty of loyalty to, and a duty to disclose outside business to, Company-1. Instead, the Information alleges, Chao engaged in a scheme in which he directed millions of dollars in business to entities in which he had an interest but kept his control and financial interest secret from Company-1. There were various aspects of the alleged scheme. First, the Information alleges Chao defrauded his employer by working with other company employees, Sze, 56, of Saratoga, Calif. and Bobba, 55, of Los Altos, Calif., to direct software development service contracts to Zillsoft, a company they controlled. Chao, Sze, and Bobba did not inform Company-1 that they controlled Zillsoft. Chao allegedly directed millions of dollars in business to Zillsoft, then split the profits with Sze and Bobba. The Information further alleges Chao continued the scheme by arranging for the sale of Zillsoft to a third entity that also performed work for Company-1, and the co-conspirators again secretly profited from Company-1's business with that entity.

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# Jadavpur University under scanner, this time for cannabis cultivation in hostel

**Fawad Chaudhry, a former Pakistan minister, has heaped praise on India's Chandrayaan-3 mission, calling it a "historic moment for humankind". He had mocked the previous Chandrayaan-2 mission in 2019.**

(News Agency) -Sources claimed that suspicious photographs from a mobile phone of one of the students of the Jadavpur University's hostel were recovered after the device was given to the forensic department by the police. Another shocking detail has been unearthed by Kolkata Police while probing the death of a first-year student due to alleged ragging at Jadavpur University. Sources claimed that suspicious photographs from a mobile phone of one of the students of the varsity's hostel were recovered after the device was given to the forensic department by the police.

The image, now deleted, showed cannabis cultivation on the hostel's balcony, the source said. According to police sources, Kolkata police seized several mobile phones of students and residents of the hostel to get strong electronic evidence of ragging. Those mobile phones were seized and sent to the forensic laboratory for examination and to recover deleted



chats if any. During the examination, an image was found on a student's phone hinting at the cultivation of the illegal substance in one of the hostels of the varsity. A Kolkata police official told India Today, "A photo came to our notice while recovering the deleted digital evidence from a student's mobile in the forensic lab. That still picture shows cannabis being cultivated in a flowerpot. The photo was deleted from the mobile phone for unknown reasons after the first-year

student died. It seems to be suspicious; we are probing the matter." This picture is currently under the scanner of Kolkata Police's detective department. After the authenticity of the image is established, the authorities will slap another charge on the university, this time under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

## JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY CASE

Swapnadeep Kundu (18), a student of Bengali (Honours), died after he allegedly

fell from the second-floor balcony of his hostel on August 9 at around 11:45 pm. So far, 12 people -- both current students and alumni -- have been arrested in connection with the probe into his death. The police have said that the deceased student was paraded naked in the hostel's corridor minutes before his death. According to police sources, the student was asked by his seniors to "showcase his manhood". Seniors at the university mocked the student by calling him gay, following which the deceased broke down and repeatedly said he was not gay, they said. Some of the suspects arrested are alumni, while the others are currently enrolled at the institute. The arrested accused were -- Md. Arif, a third-year Civil Engineering student; Md Asif Azmal, a fourth-year Electrical Engineering student; Ankan Sarkar, another third-year Civil Engineering student; Saptak Kamila, an ex-student of Environmental Science; Asit Sardar, an ex-student of the Sanskrit Department; and Suman Naskar.

## Flying drones banned near Gorakhnath Temple, key sites, UP administration issues order



(News Agency) -Flying drones over selected locations, including the Gorakhnath Temple, without prior permission has been banned by the Gorakhpur administration in Uttar Pradesh, officials said on Thursday. The order, issued recently by Additional District Magistrate Anjani Kumar Singh, will be applicable within the city's police station jurisdictions and any violation will be considered a criminal offence, they said. Prior permission from the city magistrate is mandatory for flying drones over and around specific locations, including the Gorakhnath Temple, the fertilizer plant operated by Hindustan Urvarak and Rasayan Ltd,

AIIMS, the railway station, and within the 2-km radius of the Mahayogi Gorakhnath University, including Gorakhnath Arogyadham Balapar Sonbarsa, the order said.

The application for permission must be submitted at least seven days before the planned drone activity, it said.

The decision comes after a drone was spotted near the Gorakhnath temple on Monday. Mayank Baranwal from Nathmalpur area flew the drone to record a video of the Gorakhnath Temple without permission. Police confiscated the drone and a case was registered against him for violating prohibitory orders in the district in view of festivities in the ongoing month of Sawan.

## Cauvery water row: Supreme Court refuses to pass order on a Tamil Nadu request



(News Agency) The Supreme Court on Friday refused to pass an interim order on Tamil Nadu's plea for the release of 24,000 cusecs of Cauvery water, claiming that the court didn't possess any expertise on the issue. The court sought a report from the Cauvery Water Management Authority on the quantum of release made by the Karnataka government before September 8 (Friday). A three-judge bench headed by Justice BR Gavai sought a report from the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) on the amount of water released by Karnataka after Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati informed that a meeting of the authority is scheduled on

Monday.

"We do not possess any expertise on the matter. The ASG informs us that authorities are meeting on Monday to decide the discharge of water for the next fortnight.

"We find that it will be appropriate that CWMA submits its report on whether the directions issued for discharge of water have been complied with or not," the bench also comprising Justices PS Narasimha and PK Mishra said.

The Karnataka government has described as "wholly misconceived" Tamil Nadu's plea seeking a direction from the top court that it be asked to release 24,000 cusecs of Cauvery water daily for standing crops.



# INDIA bloc logo to be unveiled at coalition's meeting in Mumbai next week



(News Agency) -The logo of INDIA bloc, a coalition of opposition parties that seek to take on the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, will be unveiled at its meeting in Mumbai next week, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said on Thursday. He said leaders from 28 opposition outfits, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and MPs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, will participate in the third meeting of the bloc on August 31 and September 1 that will take place in the Grand Hyatt, a luxury hotel in suburban Mumbai.

There is a possibility that new political parties, especially from northeast India, will take part in the two-day gathering, said the Rajya Sabha MP.

The meeting will be hosted by Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, Raut said. "The INDIA (alliance) logo will be unveiled (during the meeting). Discussions are on for the same. We are trying to reach out to 140 crore Indians. The logo will symbolise the country, its unity, and reflect the energy needed to keep the country together," he told reporters.

Besides top leaders like Kharge, Sonia

and Rahul Gandhi, chief ministers of six non-BJP-ruled states will participate in the conclave, Raut said.

He claimed there is a lot of excitement about the opposition gathering and journalists from 38 international organizations have shown interest in covering the event. The INDIA bloc's first meeting was held in Patna in June, while the second one took place in Bengaluru in mid-July. The Bengaluru conclave had finalised the name of the bloc - Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

## Eye on 2024 Assembly polls, Arunachal BJP unit undergoes rejig

(News Agency) -Ahead of assembly polls due next year, the Arunachal Pradesh unit of the BJP underwent a reshuffle of its state office bearers.

The reshuffle, executed by state BJP president Biyuram Wahge, was officially ratified by the BJP central office in New Delhi, a party statement said on Friday.

Tadar Niglar has been designated as the state general secretary, while Romin Babom and Dotum Sora have been entrusted with the roles of state secretaries.

Kohman Lungphii Ngemu will be the new BJP Mahila Morcha state president, while Ritemso Manyu will be the state president of Yuva Morcha and Gumsen Lollen the state president of Kisan Morcha.

Kame Yangfo will be the new state president of ST Morcha while Sambu Siongju will be the new state president of Minority Morcha. These designations were accorded the stamp of approval from the central BJP office, the statement added.

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# Security beefed up, signs on Delhi roads soon: Lieutenant Governor on G20 Summit

Delhi LG Saxena assured that security was in place to meet any kind of threat – terror, nuclear, biological, chemical, general law and order situation.



(News Agency) Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena on Thursday chaired a high-level meeting to review preparedness ahead of the G20 Leaders' Summit in the national capital. He assured that security was in place to meet any kind of threat – terror, nuclear,

biological, chemical, general law and order situation. Also, the Delhi LG said that the G20 logos and flags of all the participating countries will be put up on different streets and roads, beginning with Palam Technical Area. 18 locations have been identified and two more are likely to be added, where 43 flags will be up, including those of some international bodies. Delhi LG stressed that the next seven days were crucial to completing all the envisaged projects. The LG said the work has to be carried out on a war-footing to ensure that no gaps are left in civil, electrical, horticulture, medical and security preparedness. He made it clear that a final shape should be given to each aspect of the project, be it the installation of statues, sculptures, artefacts, fountains, lighting,

flower pots etc. Saxena enquired about the power supply for the venue and asked the Power Department to make it glitch-free. He directed that mock drills should be carried out to meet any eventuality. Further, he said there should be seamless coordination between the Power Department and officials of ITPO. **HOSPITALS ALERTED**

For any medical exigencies, he was informed that all government hospitals had been fully prepared and equipped. There are altogether 80 teams of doctors and trained medical personnel with three teams in each hospital. 70 advanced and 60 well-equipped ambulances would be put in service during the event. Private hospitals have also been directed to keep themselves prepared and ready. Verification of all teams has been done

and medical kits are ready. Ambulances would also be stationed at the Summit venue and all designated hotels where dignitaries would be staying. All medical personnel have been instructed to be in proper uniform.

## FIRE TENDERS AT HOTELS

The fire department was directed to deploy tenders at the designated hotels. The LG directed that an audit of fire safety at hotels be carried out on a priority basis. Altogether, 66 fire tenders have been kept ready. 5 fire tenders would be stationed at the ITPO and there would be some standby fire tenders as well. 23 Vehicles have been earmarked for various hotels and fire officials would be deputed zone-wise. The next review meeting is scheduled for August 31.

# Surat resident claims he was 'designer' of Chandrayaan's lander, police launch probe



(News Agency) Surat police in Gujarat are probing a city resident's claims that he was a scientist working with the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) and designed the lander module of the Chandrayaan-3

moon mission, an official said on Friday. City police commissioner Ajay Tomar asked the crime branch to conduct investigation to verify the claims which were prima facie false, Deputy Commissioner of Police (special branch)

Hetal Patel said. Mitul Trivedi, who has been giving interviews to the local media since the Vikram lander successfully landed on the moon on Thursday, failed to produce any documentary proof to support his claim of being an Isro scientist, said DCP Patel. Trivedi, who claims to hold a PhD, on Thursday told several media outlets and news channels that he had designed the lander of Chandrayaan-3. As he was part of the Chandrayaan-2 project, Isro invited him to work on the latest moon

mission too, and he made several changes in the original design of the lander which was the one it landed successfully, he claimed. But some local newspapers published reports questioning the veracity of his claims on Friday. He was asked to visit her office on Friday with documents to prove his claims, she said. "But he did not produce any document or proof to establish that he is associated with Isro. Our probe found that he is a B.Com. degree holder.

## At 33 degrees Celsius, Milan records hottest day in 260 years



(News Agency) Italy's northern city of Milan registered a new record high average daily temperature of 33 Celsius (91.4 Fahrenheit) on Wednesday as a heatwave which began around mid-August reached its peak, the regional environmental protection agency (ARPA) said on Friday.

It was the hottest day since the Milano Brera weather station started recording temperatures in 1763. Milan's previous record of 32.8 C was set on Aug. 11, 2003. The Italian capital Rome registered a record peak of 41.8 Celsius (°C) in July, as much of southern Europe broiled this summer, fuelling wildfires, prompting

governments to issue health warnings, and disrupting holidays for many tourists.

ARPA said in a statement that Aug. 23 and 24 have been the hottest days of the summer across the whole of the Lombardy region which surrounds Milan, with several towns registering peak temperatures above 40 C. It added that "intense and abnormal" temperatures also hit the Italian Alps.

The heatwave is about to end though, the agency said, giving way to heavy thunderstorms and a sharp drop in temperatures of up to 10-15 C early next week.

## West Bengal Governor meets families of those killed in Mizoram bridge collapse

(News Agency) West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose on Friday visited the families of labourers who were killed in the railway bridge collapse in Mizoram. The railway bridge collapse on August 18 claimed the lives of at least 23 workers from the Malda district of West Bengal. "I am deeply grieved by the tragic incident that claimed the lives of so many souls in Mizoram. The branches that have fallen should have been turned to full bloom. We bow our heads to those departed, and we pray that their souls rest in peace," the Governor said. The governor also informed the families about the details of compensation announced by the Railway Ministry.

"I heard their grievances. I let them know that the Union Railway Ministry has allotted Rs 10 lakh each in

compensation to the family of the deceased and Rs 2 lakh each in compensation to those grievously injured and Rs 50,000 for minor injuries," Bose said after the meeting. Meanwhile, West Bengal Minister Sabina Yeasmin allotted Rs 2 lakh per family of those killed in the bridge collapse. She also assured a job for at least one person from the family of those deceased. Bodies of 18 of the 23 labourers were brought back to Malda on Friday, while the remaining five will be arriving on Saturday. The under-construction railway bridge over the Kurung River connecting Bairabi to Sairang in Mizoram collapsed on August 23. Several workers died on the spot and many were injured. Around 10 labourers are still missing



## China wants to turn BRICS into an anti-G7 grouping. And push the yuan

China smells an opportunity to develop a coalition of middle powers against the G7. President Xi Jinping isn't hiding the aspiration anymore to counter other US-led groupings via BRICS.

"If we expand BRICS to account for a similar portion of world GDP as the G7, then our collective voice in the world will grow stronger," said a Chinese official, according to Financial Times.

Beijing is targeting to induct countries like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia into BRICS, which are relatively agnostic about Chinese ideas of trade and investment and the underlying concept of China-led order.

BRICS to counter US

China's 'head-of-state diplomacy' or 'major country diplomacy' – at play in the BRICS Summit – is shedding the past squeamishness of geopolitical aspirations while pressing the "accelerator button" of China's diplomacy.

Chinese experts see BRICS as a mechanism to confront the US ideologically. BRICS' original agenda was never really a geopolitical one when it was founded back in 2009.

"Western media have not only started smearing BRICS as a challenge to the rules-based world order but also are trying to disintegrate the 'BRICS' from within and isolate China and Russia by luring India to join the US's 'Indo-Pacific' mechanism," wrote Xu Wenhong, deputy secretary-general of the Center for One Belt One Road, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Even Xi has taken a direct swipe at the US in his signed article published by South African media before he left for BRICS.

He criticised the 'small yard, high fence' approach of the US. National Security Advisor of the US Jake Sullivan had said in 2023 that Washington would protect its foundational technologies through a targeted strategy dubbed as 'small yard, high fence'.

Beijing sees this as a US strategy to hobble China's growth in the high-tech industry and ultimately to contain its overall expansion. But now, Beijing wants to use BRICS as a bulwark against the US and its alliance system.

China is keen on expanding the BRICS but New Delhi isn't sure, it could redefine the original vision of the grouping. Beijing is no longer hiding that it wants to use BRICS as a bandwagon against the US and its allies.

Push for yuan

Beijing might try to rebrand its Belt and Road Initiative and lending practices through the New Development Bank (NDB) of BRICS.

"I believe the NDB and the BRI share the

same vision in this sense," wrote Dilma Vana Rousseff, the president of the New Development Bank and former president of Brazil. The headquarters of the BRICS bank is in Shanghai.

According to some enthusiasts, the other promise of BRICS is a common currency. South African officials have confirmed that discussion about the common currency isn't on the summit agenda. Even New Delhi isn't thrilled with the idea.

For Beijing, the ideological undercurrent of de-dollarisation is a promising prospect it wants to cash out on. Emerging economies increasingly want to settle the foreign trade balance in local currency, bringing forward the idea of common currency. But Beijing could potentially push for inducting the Chinese yuan as the trade settlement currency. But India will resist such a proposal.

So, BRICS common currency is unlikely to live up to the hype, but Beijing will encourage emerging economies to move away from the US dollar.

China's diplomacy

Domestically, Beijing will sell BRICS and G20 summits as a success for China's foreign policy where Xi shined 'once again'. Authoritative commentaries published before the BRICS summit have urged China to press the 'accelerator button' of diplomacy as the country faced severe headwinds.

Chinese state television even released a new documentary about Xi's diplomatic engagements this year titled Let's walk the road of modernization hand in hand to build a community with a shared future for mankind. The film presents an aspirational world of trade and connectivity between BRICS countries, including a voiceover by Xi. He promoted the idea of 'BRICS+' to grow the network of friends. The hashtag "2023 BRIC Summit Leading Film" was viewed 84.9 million times on Chinese social media site Weibo. All the major Chinese state outlets published BRICS news stories and op-eds on their home pages to attach special significance to the summit and Xi's style of diplomacy. If, for a minute, we assumed that other BRICS members like South Africa could balance the influence of Beijing, we might want to rethink. Beijing is training ruling party officials from six African countries in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, according to Axios and the Danish newspaper Politiken. Last year, Tanzania's Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School welcomed ruling party members from several African countries, including Tanzania, Mozambique, Namibia, Angola, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

## Mission Chandrayaan-3: A Giant Leap For India

By: Martand Jha

Chandrayaan-3 is not just a mission for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) but a mission for India. A counterfactual might be thrown at this assertion that any ISRO mission is an ipso-facto Indian mission too. Correct, but if we consider all previous missions of ISRO to be equal, then this mission would come off as first among the equals. The reason being the miss by a whisker in ISRO's last attempt when Chandrayaan-2 failed to achieve its intended objectives has lived in the public memory for the last 4 years.

Public memory is a very strong emotion and in this case, it's the collective memory of 1.4 billion people. The memory is made up of re-energised hope, an acute sense of nationalism, ideals of patriotism and a strong pride with respect to ISRO as an institution. This is despite the fact that between Chandrayaan-2 and Chandrayaan-3, four years have passed. These four years were in no sense ordinary by any stretch of the imagination. The world went through a global pandemic with millions of lives lost. Despite this, an ordinary Indian still sees hope for himself in the success of India's space mission. Very few things in India unite people together like nothing else. Success in outer space is one such thing.

Space as an entity has fascinated human beings since time immemorial. So, it comes as no surprise that human beings want to explore outer space. This exploration is seen in the form of mankind's conquest over the extra-terrestrial. The lunar exploration has gained the most limelight among all aspects of space exploration. This is also natural since the Moon is the Earth's only satellite and is visible to the naked eye to every Earth-bound species. Therefore, lunar explorations over the last half a century and more have got a huge

mass appeal.

Also, the Moon has got a special place and mention in various cultures and civilisations in the form of a story-time entity for kids or a regularly used metaphor in the local sphere of life. A scientist or an engineer is not generally concerned about these 'social aspects' of cosmic or celestial entities but social scientists do look towards the broader picture and try to understand why certain things attract people more than others. The international politics of outer space is a discipline which deals with such aspects. Today, all space-powered nations are looking towards Chandrayaan-3 with great zeal, especially after Russia's lunar mission crash-landed just a few days ago. India is looking at this opportunity not only in terms of satisfying the conscience of its domestic audience but also to stamp its place as a space-powered nation among the comity of nations. Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who is currently attending the BRICS summit at Johannesburg in South Africa would also be looking at Chandrayaan's feat closely. At a diplomatic forum like BRICS, India's authority as a nation will increase if Chandrayaan-3 makes a successful landing on the Moon's surface today, i.e. August 23, 2023. This would also boost India's future endeavours in outer space such as Mission Gaganyaan, which will be India's first attempt to have a human space flight mission. It was supposed to be conducted in 2022, during India's 75th year of Independence, but has now been postponed to 2024 in order to focus on Chandrayaan-3. Outer space is an extremely costly affair involving billions of dollars. Therefore, its successes are grand and its losses are almost crest-falling in nature. So, any attempt by humans to reach and explore outer space must be applauded by the general public.

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# BRICS: India Assumes Centre Stage, China Loses Influence

By: Gautam Mukherjee

It is ironic that China should now be playing second-fiddle to India in both the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. This is not admitted to by either side, but perceptually it is increasingly evident. India held the rotating chair in the SCO for a year most successfully till it ended recently, and appears to be dominating the agenda at the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg too. So much so, that while India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi pointed out that it will soon be a \$5 trillion economy open to do business with the Global South and others, Chinese President Xi Jinping did not make a speech, and stayed away from the business session attended by the other three.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin joined in virtually from Moscow. This is the first in-person summit of BRICS since 2019. Prime Minister Modi called India the growth engine of the world in an unabashed pitch to over 40 countries present, and the global audience via coverage of the ongoing three-day event.

Russia was represented by its highly experienced Foreign



Minister Sergey Lavrov. It complained, as expected, about the Western sanctions imposed on it, but pledged support to the Global South, and Africa in particular. If President Putin was referring to grain shipments, Africa would note that those too were disrupted more than once. India is more credible in this matter, because of its timely help with vaccines during the Covid pandemic, while most others, including the rich Western countries, hoarded their own supplies. Its treatment of the many additional invitees to the G20 Summit approaching its climax next month is also much appreciated by the Global South and indeed most of the G7 countries as well, including Japan

and France.

Xi did attend the retreat for the heads of government, but, reading between the lines, did not make any headway with China's bid to expand the BRICS line-up immediately. China wants to form a larger block to rival the domination of the 'Global Commons' regime, helmed by the US. However, previous attempts ranging from the post-colonial Non-Aligned movement to the G-15 have never been effective. A line-up of about 45 countries in BRICS is unlikely to do any better.

This 'Commons' regime refers to the dominance of the US dollar as a global reserve currency, the SWIFT system as the international method of banking

money flows, and free and open access to the trade waterways of the high seas. It also includes America's established hold on a number of global institutions, and defence cooperation-oriented organisations such as NATO, AUKUS and QUAD. Any attempt to go beyond talking about a BRICS currency is unrealistic. India has made headway in trading bilaterally in local currencies with a number of countries, but this too is hampered with not enough presence in global trade. As India's economy grows, the rupee will gain greater acceptance in international trade, said Columbia University professor and economist Arvind Panagariya in a recent article. China, by way of contrast, could not properly float its external Yuan as an exchange currency and has been struggling to make something of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), an Asia-Pacific-based trade pact, akin to a common market. Many in it are chafing at the direction from China which tends to advantage it, and India, of course, has refused to join just as it refused to join China's Belt and Road

initiative. This was prescient because it has severely stressed or bankrupted those who have.

India, under Modi, since 2014, has been joining and participating in other regional meetings of organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These are influential, but not subject to outright Chinese domination. It is also making every effort in BIMSTEC, particularly with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the successor, more or less to SAARC, that has been stymied by Pakistan. Relations with Nepal too are getting better with its infatuation with Chinese communism on the decline.

India is trying hard to reduce its trade with, and investment from, China. Moves like the licencing of the manufacture of laptops and other electronic items is a step in this direction.

Given the eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation of over 50,000 troops with massive deployment of military equipment on each side along the Line of Actual Control (LaC), the relationship between India and China is not good.

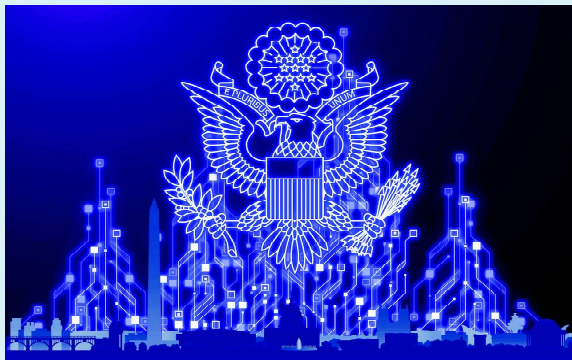
## There's Only One Way to Control AI: Nationalization

by CHARLES JENNINGS

Nine years ago, in a commercial AI lab affiliated with Caltech, I witnessed something extraordinary.

My colleague Andrej Szenasy was wrapping up a long day's work training NeuralEye, an AI initially developed for the Mars Rover program, and I was a few cubicles away, plowing through NeuralEye's test data. "Hey, check this out!" he shouted.

Our lab's mission was to train NeuralEye to see as humans do, with the ability to recognize things, not just record them as a camera does. NeuralEye was built originally to discern different soil types on Mars, but we were teaching it to identify Earth's inhabitants: animals, plants and individual humans. We believed AI could greatly improve face recognition, so that it could be used in cybersecurity, replacing passwords. The first step in teaching NeuralEye to identify people was to get it to match various photos of a single



person's face. Typically, one photo would reside in NeuralEye's training dataset of 14,000 faces; another - a different photo of the same person - would serve as the "prompt." When NeuralEye successfully matched these two photos out of the thousands in its dataset, it got the digital equivalent of a doggie treat. In AI, this method is known as reinforcement learning, and with NeuralEye, it was working.

That night in the lab, for fun, Szenasy had prompted NeuralEye with a photo of his son,

Zachie. Szenasy's face was in NeuralEye's dataset; Zachie's wasn't. Zachie, who has Down Syndrome, was a sweet 8-year-old. Round face, thick glasses, mop of black hair. Dad was tall and thin, no glasses, blonde with a receding hairline. If there was a physical resemblance between them, I couldn't see it.

Szenasy sat me in front of his computer and again prompted NeuralEye with a photo of Zachie's face. NeuralEye spun through its cache of stored faces looking for Zachie - and up popped

a photo of Szenasy. Without any specific instruction, NeuralEye had somehow picked up a faint family resemblance. Out of those 14,000 faces, it selected Szenasy's face as the third closest match with Zachie's.

The next morning I phoned the AI engineer who'd written NeuralEye's algorithm while at the Jet Propulsion Lab, home of the Mars Rover program. I asked him how NeuralEye could have seen a connection between Zachie and his father. He waxed philosophical for a few minutes, and then, when pressed, admitted he had no clue. That's the thing about AI: Not even the engineers who build this stuff know exactly how it works.

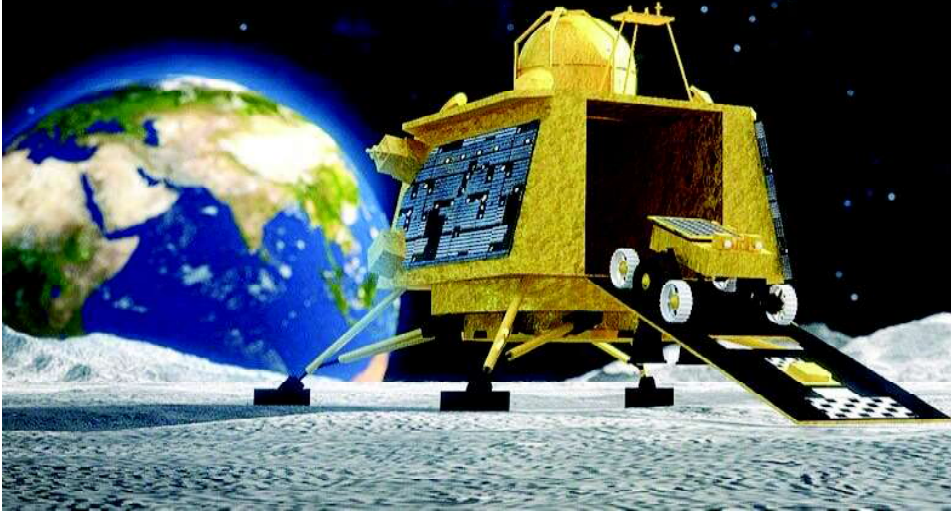
This Zachie episode took place in 2014, a time in AI that now seems prehistoric. Training datasets then had records in the thousands, not hundreds of millions, and large language models like GPT were just a gleam in Sam Altman's eye. Today, AIs are writing novels, passing the bar exam, piloting warfighter drones. According to a

recent University of Texas study widely reported on cable news, an AI in Austin is effectively reading minds: After an in-depth CAT-scan and 16 hours of one-on-one training with someone, it can read neural brain patterns and suggest what the subject is thinking with surprising accuracy. But in those halcyon AI days nearly a decade ago, we in our small lab were amazed that NeuralEye could do something as basic as spot a link between Szenasy and his son.

While the best AI scientists obviously know a great deal about AI, certain aspects of today's thinking machines are beyond anyone's understanding. Scientists cleverly invented the term "black box" to describe the core of an AI's brain, to avoid having to explain what's going on inside it. There's an element of uncertainty - even unknowability - in AI's most powerful applications. This uncertainty grows as AIs get faster, smarter and more interconnected.



# Of Chandrayaan, Witches, And Women Asking For The Moon



By Nishtha gautam

Women belong to the moon and vice versa. As the world slows down in a collective gasp to witness the history-making landing of Chandrayaan-3, let this be a primer on how women across time and space have been linked to the celestial body. Trust me, it goes beyond Chaand sa roshan chehra...

Women have often been depicted as always demanding the moon, in folklore, literature, and pop culture. Remember Rhett Butler chiding Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*? Or Madhuri Dixit crooning "Mujhko Chaand laake do..." in a bad Hindi film? Ritu Karidhal Srivastava, the ISRO scientist leading India's historical Moon mission, has been seeking the same.

The moon is women's comfort space, a Utopian room of one's own, and the oft-repeated dramatic imagery of women escaping to this celestial body is used both to depict women's descent into madness or their defiance against patriarchal strictures. Multiple waves of feminism have educated us to decry the existence of cauldron-stirring witches, though women continue to be killed if they are suspected to be witches. All of this has been allowed to happen because women's defiance, their demands, and their pursuits of forbidden knowledge threaten patriarchy. Instead of ceding

power by ceasing to be the gatekeepers of knowledge, it's much easier for men to vilify women's demands as impossible asks-like wanting the moon.

arrest the idea that women's tempers are governed by the moon and the full moon night is the night of the hysterical woman. An assertive woman is

space beyond civilisation. Isis, the Egyptian moon goddess, is also the goddess of magic, again a realm beyond rationality.

Women are, thus, the creature of Nature, while men continue to be the products of Nurture-to use Rousseau's binary. Women are difficult, men are easy, women Darkness, men Light. And when women operate in the light-the moonlight-they are threaten the order of society. Women of the moon-the so-called witches-have been some of the first dissenters of patriarchy.

Against the male-populated domain of science and 'rational' knowledge that actively prohibited women's entry, women created the lunar universe of intuition, camaraderie, and dissent-a shared space for blood, milk

and tears. The romantic gaze of poets tried to do women a favour by using the moon to glorify their physiology. Women's temperament took a backseat and their beauty was linked with the moon. Beloved became the moon: bright yet gentle, playful yet soothing, and mystical yet submissive. Benign patriarchy.

But why talk about these things now? Have we not progressed enough? Isn't there gender equality all around us? What

more do women want? What about men's rights? To come back to India's moon mission, isn't ISRO a triumph of women's participation? Haven't women scientists been the face of multiple space and missile projects in the past?

Because women do not need an association with the moon if they cannot land on it. Because it has taken even NASA more than half a century to recruit a woman, Christina Koch, to travel to the moon after Neil Armstrong's landing.

Because ISRO's celebration of women scientists pales against the fact that the organisation has never had a woman chief.

Because despite the existence of women fighter pilots in India, none of them were recruited for its Gaganyaan mission.

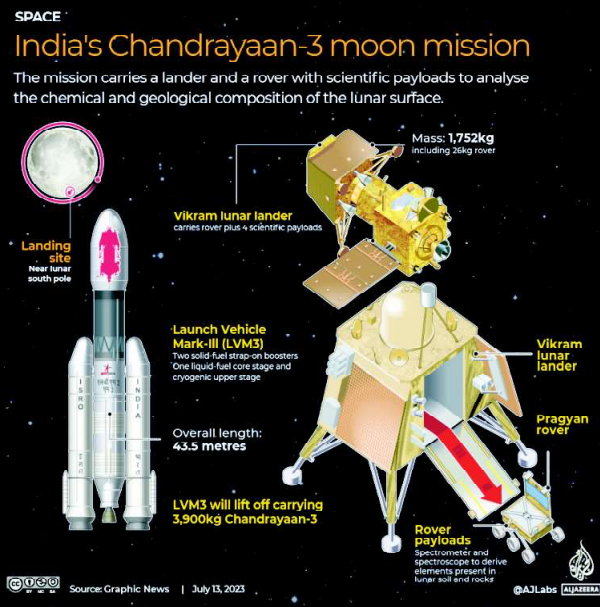
Because witch-burning is still a reality in many Indian villages. Because menstrual taboos still end up killing women.

"Because we donated our jewellery for the tabernacle (and by we I mean women and by women I mean allegories)

We have been assigned the moon.

Not a moon, our moon, our small, argumentative moon.

Sea of crisis and all - the old 'heave-ho stone' dragging waves over pebbles since the dawn of time. 58% of women say 'take what you're given, lest they assign us an even smaller celestial body.'"



In most cultures, there are linkages between the lunar cycle and women's reproductive system. Many companies now capitalise on it by using various names for the moon to brand their menstrual hygiene products - Mooncup, MeLuna, Lena, Lunette and many more. Scientific research, however, is still struggling to prove conclusively any demonstrable synchronising. But that doesn't

a hysterical woman. A vocal woman is a "hormonal" woman. And because hysteria (think words like luna-cy, lunatic) and hormones are allegedly impacted by the moon.

Women are the creatures of the moon.

Artemis and Diana of Greco-Roman mythology are the lunar deities that also govern the wilderness-the unconquered

# Does Centre's Bill Aim To Weaken Election Commission?

By Bharti Mishra Nath

In the recent monsoon session, the Centre presented a bill in Rajya Sabha recommending a new formula to select the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs). The government has proposed that the CEC and ECs be selected by a panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and a Union Cabinet minister. The proposal to replace the Chief Justice of India by a Cabinet Minister recommended by the PM in the three-member selection panel has provoked the anger of opposition parties and experts, as it gives the government a decisive say in the appointment of ECs, thus compromising the independence of the Election Commission.

In March this year, a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice KM Joseph unanimously ruled that the appointment of top election officers would be done by the President on the recommendation of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice. The bench also pronounced that its direction would hold good until parliament made a law. This



ruling emerged from a 2015 Public Interest Litigation (PIL) and a group of related pleas challenging the appointment process.

The proposed bill seeks to drop the Chief Justice from the selection process and override the Constitution bench judgment.

Experts feel the tripartite panel, as recommended by the Supreme Court bench, looked objective and had scope for impartiality, but with the PM and cabinet minister on the panel, as the bill recommends, the Leader of the Opposition would always be a minority in the selection process.

The Constitution does not lay down a specific legislative process for the appointment of the CEC and ECs. There are just five Articles (324-329) dedicated in Part XV

(Elections) for reference. Article 324 of the Constitution vests the "superintendence, direction, and control of elections" in an Election Commission consisting of the CEC and other ECs as determined by the President from time to time. Before the March Supreme Court order, the President made the appointment of a CEC and ECs on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister. The bill recommends a Search Committee that will prepare a panel of five persons for the positions of CEC and ECs. The cabinet secretary will head the Search Committee, which will also include two members not below the rank of Secretary with knowledge and experience in matters related to elections. The proposed Bill, once a law, shall rescind the Election

Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991. The bill also downgrades the status and standing of the CEC and two ECs from that equivalent to a Supreme Court judge to that of the Cabinet secretary.

"The ECs or CEC don't get power from their mode of selection. They draw their power from the Constitution and election laws. An election is one of the few exercises of the government or constitutional or statutory bodies that is undertaken as per the rule book with every aspect, big or small, provided in the election code. As administrators, we had the least discretion in decision-making in elections. The ECI is an independent Constitutional body mandated to conduct elections with all necessary powers. Whether the person occupying the chair uses those powers or cedes his autonomy in decision-making depends on his choice," says Rajiva Sinha, IAS (Retd), West Bengal cadre. "The election laws were there before TN Seshan also. But it was he who discharged his duties independently without any fear or favour. His tenure was a game changer and his actions led to further

codification of norms. Every CEC and the ECs follow these detailed rules. But if the person concerned chooses to look the other way, it is not an issue as to who has or which committee has appointed him or what rank he enjoys in the order of precedence," Mr Sinha explains.

The institution of the Election Commission has to be impartial, independent, and shielded from any influence - be it real or perceived - from the executive. In the present form, the balance is tilted towards the government, with the opposition a token presence in the selection process.

Another perspective is to view this as the judiciary trying to interfere with the powers of the executive. But the Supreme Court judgment lays down the selection panel as one that will function till parliament enacts a law specifying the composition of the panel.

A section of experts feel the Election Commission should focus on ensuring its job of conducting elections in a fair and impartial manner and the brouhaha about the proposed selection panel can be ignored. "Despite all the fuss about the selection panel, the ground reality is that even today, poll-related violence takes place in some states. The focus should be more on how the elections are conducted at the grassroots level working together with the state machinery," says Krishnanand Pandey, advocate, Supreme Court.

Though it is parliament's mandate to enact laws, the changes proposed to the selection panel can easily be interpreted as the government's attempt to pick a more pliable Election Commission. It will not only have far-reaching implications but also generate short-term political heat in the run-up to the 2024 general election. The government should tread cautiously as any move considered 'out-of-step' will certainly draw uproar, with people questioning the timing and intent of the move, especially with elections due in months.

## Himalayan challenge

### Save the mountains from rapacious plunder

ECOLOGICAL disasters in the hill states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have laid bare the fragility of the Himalayan region. Landslides in Shimla and land subsidence in Joshimath have turned the spotlight on the carrying capacity of the mountain range spanning 13 states and union territories. The Supreme Court is keen on constituting an expert committee for conducting a 'complete and comprehensive' study on the carrying or bearing capacity, which is the maximum population size that an ecosystem can sustain without



getting degraded. According to a petition being heard by the court, the Himalayan region is bearing the brunt of 'unsustainable and hydrologically disastrous' constructions - including hotels,

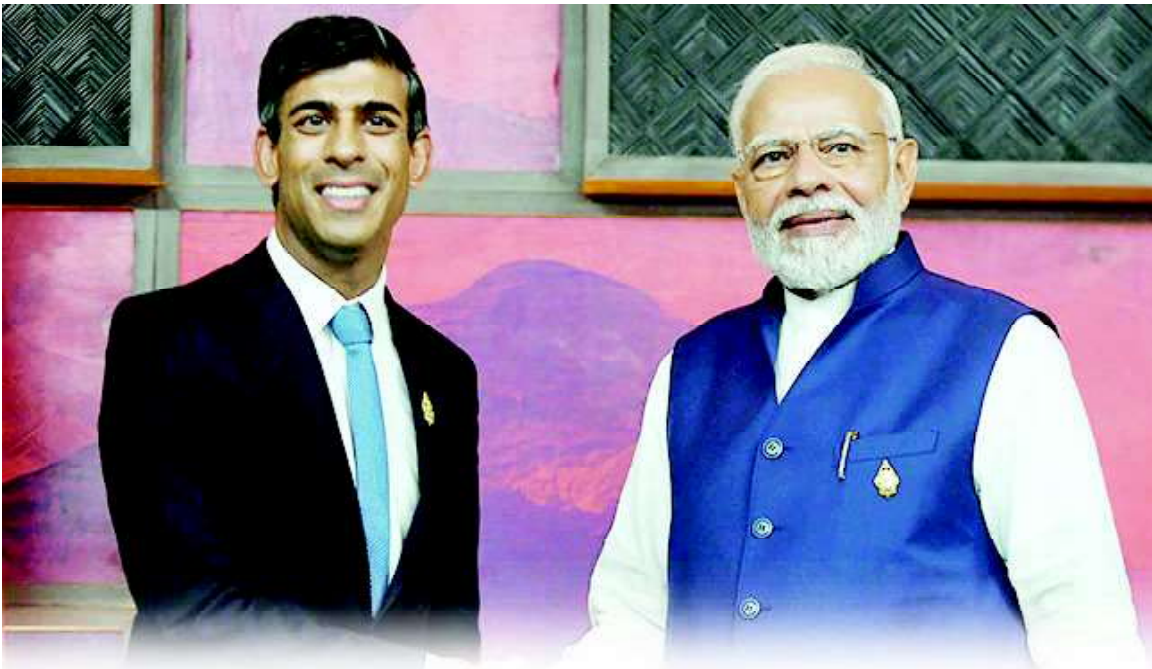
homestays and hydel projects - which have taken their toll on the drainage and waste management systems.

It was in February 2014 that the Union Cabinet had approved the action plan of the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE), which was launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change. The mission's main objectives are to scientifically assess the vulnerability of the Himalayan region to climate change and formulate policy measures to sustain its ecological resilience. However, the health of the

world's youngest mountain range has only gone from bad to worse in the past decade or so.

An urgent reassessment of the NMSHE is required to identify the gaps in its implementation. The ever-increasing vulnerability of the Himalayan ecosystem is adversely impacting several important sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, environment and forests. With extreme weather events becoming the new normal, there is a dire need to save the Himalayas from rapacious plunder masquerading as developmental and tourism activities.





# Bold, Clear and Resolute:

## *Understanding India's Approach to FTA with UK*

**By: Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra**

This week, officials from India and the United Kingdom will huddle together to iron out differences over the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that is in the works since 2021. Indications are that the talks could be completed by this October or November. Significant progress has been made already. Of the 26 chapters proposed in the FTA, the two countries are believed to have agreed on at least 19. Besides, negotiations are also underway on a separate bilateral investment treaty. Last month, Indian Union Commerce and Industry Minister, Piyush Goyal and Commerce Secretary, Sunil Barthwal visited London for the 11th round of bilateral talks on the FTA. Now, the ongoing 12th round focus primarily on issues like duty concessions on whisky and automobiles, apart from matters relating to services. India was the UK's 12th largest trading partner for four quarters till March, accounting for 2.1 per cent of the UK's total trade. Bilateral trade between India and the UK currently stands at \$20.36 billion. That's a rise from \$17.5 billion in 2021-22. With the

FTA, both countries want to take the next big step. For the UK, signing an FTA and bilateral investment treaty with India will be a big win after quitting the European Union (EU).

### INDIA-UK FTA TO BE A TRENDSETTER

Once concluded, this will be India's most complex FTA agreement to date and will serve as a standard template for future FTA negotiations. For instance, an FTA with the UK could pave the way for India signing similar agreements with more developed nations and blocs, like the European Union, Canada and even the United States. Here is some related data:

o Bilateral trade between India and the US has increased by 7.65 per cent to \$128.55 in 2022-23 as against \$119.5 billion in 2021-22. It was \$80.51 billion in 2020-21. So bilateral trade between India and the US is expanding fast.

### WHAT'S THE HOLDUP?

FTA negotiations between India and the UK have been rocky from the start, and not without good reason.

o India is keen to protect its domestic market, especially at

a time when the government is going big with Make in India.

o India is among the biggest service exporters to the UK. So, it is seeking easier immigration rules for skilled professionals from the country in sectors like IT and healthcare, and for students.

o The UK, in turn, is advocating for better access to Indian markets. It wants lower tariffs, especially on products like scotch whisky and automobiles.

o So, while India is agreeing to cut tariffs on British car and Scotch imports, the UK has reportedly agreed to relax some visa rules for Indian professionals.

India is also pushing hard to incorporate a social security arrangement into the FTA with the UK. This would ensure that Indian professionals working in the UK do not unnecessarily pay social security contributions that they are unable to avail of benefits from. WHY INDIA DID NOT RUSH WITH NEGOTIATIONS

India is not a country that readily enters into free trade agreements. India opted out of the Regional Comprehensive

Economic Partnership (RCEP) with Indo-Pacific nations in November 2019 due to China's deep-running influence in the setup. Ever since, India has not signed a proper FTA with any country.

It is worth mentioning here that in the past decade, India had signed trade agreements/FTAs with the ASEAN, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Mauritius, Australia, the UAE and Malaysia. But the sentiment in Delhi has been that India has not benefitted fairly from several such agreements.

India is very concerned about its domestic market, given how it wants to go big on manufacturing. The Modi government is right in being wary of India becoming a prisoner of any Free Trade Agreement, or even one that would put New Delhi at a disadvantage.

WHAT ARE THE RED FLAGS? New Delhi cannot be seen as very accommodating towards the UK, as this would impact India's negotiating power in future deals with a variety of countries. India has drawn certain red lines for the UK, saying there are areas where it will not compromise. These

include the production of generic medicines, regulatory data protection, and the inclusion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in government procurement.

Here are some of the concerns that have been flagged over the proposed FTA:

o Critics argue that the UK might benefit more from the FTA than India.

o Many major Indian corporations may choose to invest in the UK once FTA is signed, as the latter offers better access to third markets. o Indian companies may find it beneficial to relocate production to the UK. This would adversely impact the Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaigns.

o British governments are often critical of India, even if Rishi Sunak has proven to be rather a pro-India force in London lately. Elections in the UK are due next year. A change in government might change the equation between New Delhi and London. Besides, the UK also has substantial ties with Pakistan. Khalistani activity in the UK is on the rise too. So, India is rightly cautious about the political implications of an FTA.

o There is also the fear of a brain drain to the UK, as aspirational Indians move West seeking higher paying jobs.

However, the pace of negotiations has recently picked up, suggesting that both India and the UK are keen to sign the deal soon. Both India and the UK are heading to elections next year. Therefore, the sentiment within both governments is to conclude FTA negotiations and sign the deal before the crucial polls.

The British are all the more desperate because a trade deal with India can compensate for the economic setbacks caused by Brexit. But the disregard with which its political establishment views India is reflected in multiple instances like the airing of the controversial BBC documentary, support for Khalistanis and their willingness to turn a blind eye to Pakistani hostility. The erstwhile colonial power may do well to remember that gone are the days when it could arm-twist India. Now, any FTA would be signed on India's terms alone, and London knows it will have to agree to such terms if it wants to relish the fruits of India's tremendous market.

By Justin Haskins

The Biden administration and its allies in Congress and the mainstream media say the president's economic policies - frequently called "Bidenomics" - are delivering unprecedented benefits to American families. The data, however, tell a very different story.

President Biden's economic policies can be summarized in three words: massive government spending. After promising to rein in federal expenditures, Biden has shackled Americans with trillions of dollars in new spending.

Even worse, Biden has offered absolutely no pathway for paying for his gigantic expansion of government. The 2023 fiscal year is expected to produce a \$1.54 trillion budget shortfall, the largest deficit in U.S. history, excluding 2020 and 2021, when COVID-19 lockdowns closed much of the economy.

Biden's spending programs have helped to keep unemployment at levels that match much of the pre-COVID period of the Trump presidency, but his policies have come with huge new costs that extend well beyond the national debt.

Under President Biden's leadership, America has experienced some of its highest levels of inflation, causing substantial harm to all Americans, especially working and lower-income families.

## Bidenomics is working?

## Tell that to millions in debt and going hungry

One of the most important but least-talked-about indicators of the state of the U.S. economy is the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey. The survey asks American families of various socioeconomic backgrounds about their spending habits, challenges they are facing, anxieties, and other concerns.

Unlike other government surveys, the Household Pulse Survey results are published throughout the year, rather than annually, and there is a relatively short

turnaround from the time a survey is conducted to its publication date. Survey data from July 2023 show that millions of Americans, especially lower-income and working-class families, are struggling to keep up with basic household expenses compared to when Biden first entered the White House. For example, in January 2021, an estimated 23.75 million Americans "sometimes" or "often" did not have enough food to eat. Recent data from July 2023 show that number has skyrocketed to

27.09 million, an increase of 3.34 million Americans. African Americans have been hit particularly hard. More than 5 million black families said in July 2023 they sometimes or often don't have enough to eat, an increase of more than 848,000 in just two years. Other parts of the survey also indicate that Americans are struggling increasingly more. In July 2023, greater than 85.46 million Americans used "credit cards or loans" to "meet spending needs

in the last 7 days," compared to 74.89 million in July 2022. Similarly, 4 million more Americans in July 2023 had to tap into savings or sell assets or possessions to cover their costs than they did just one year earlier. That's not to say there's no positive news for the White House in the survey. The data show that fewer Americans are behind on their rent and mortgage payments than when Biden took office. That victory, however, pales in comparison to the problems plaguing the Biden economy.

# China's economic recovery slowing

## Gloom in the property sector has hit incomes of people and sales in several related industries

By Yogesh Gupta

IN July, the release of data on the weak growth of the Chinese economy in the April-June quarter (net 0.8 per cent GDP increase over Q1), headline consumer inflation in the negative territory (-0.3 per cent), growth in retail sales slowing to 2.5 per cent from a year earlier and 0.1 per cent growth of the industry over the previous month have led many analysts to speculate that the Chinese economy is headed for a prolonged period of low growth, some even making a comparison with Japan's 'lost decade' (1991-2001). These figures were not isolated ones as there was more bad news on economy. Between June 2022 and June 2023, China's exports declined by about 14 per cent from \$331 billion to \$285 billion, while imports fell from \$233 billion to \$215 billion. Chinese stocks slumped as the economic gloom spread. The Hang Seng Index, reporting for major companies in Hong Kong, fell by more than 9 per cent; similarly, the CSI 300 Index, which tracks the biggest companies in Shanghai and Shenzhen, dropped by about 5 per cent this month. Third, the unemployment rate among China's youth escalated to 21.3 per cent in June 2023 from 20.8 per cent in May 2023. With a view to quell social unrest, China has decided to stop releasing youth unemployment data.

Behind this disappointing data, there are several policy



issues in recent years. One significant factor is that China has used private and government-led investments in the housing and infrastructure sector to accelerate growth. The middle and upper classes have made big investments in multiple properties to make quick gains. Similarly, local governments have funded public works by issuing debt backed by land. Concerned at the mounting debt in the real estate sector, President Xi Jinping raised a slogan in 2021 that "houses are built for living and not speculation". Thereafter, the Chinese government imposed restrictions on banks in 2021 on giving fresh loans, which led to default by several developers, resulting in the fall of property

prices.

The real estate and infrastructure sectors account for about 30 per cent of China's GDP. Private investment in the property sector slumped by 10 per cent in 2022 and another 8 per cent in the first half of 2023. Most real estate companies are now trying to pare down their debt, complete existing projects and avoid new ones. Even state-owned property developers have reported widespread losses.

Though the central bank has provided some relief to select developers and homebuyers by lowering mortgage rates and reducing down payments, the gloom in the property sector has hit the incomes of people and the sales in several related industries such as iron, cement, aluminium, consumer and luxury goods. It will lead to reduced aggregate demand across several sectors, causing corporate profits to fall. Similarly, the ability of the government to promote economic growth by investing in these sectors has sharply fallen. With its foreign trade and investments in the above sectors declining, boosting domestic consumption is the other major initiative that the government can resort to. A genuine increase in the domestic consumption requires the government to increase people's incomes, reduce debt and spend more on health, education, pensions and other social services.



# Decision 2024: Narendra Modi's Independence Day Speech Lays Out Implications

Written By: Shashi Shekhar Vempati

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech at the Red Fort last week had a curious historical reference to thousand years of rule by invaders, spanning the Mughal period to the colonial British era. The remarks by the prime minister drew predictable responses from across the political spectrum but it was interesting that he sought to place these remarks in the context of how history would judge 21st century India a thousand years down the road. Seeking to place emphasis on the choice to be made by the citizens in the general elections of 2024, Narendra Modi's speech underscored how today's decisions will have a bearing on the future.

While the reference to the thousand years of history has been variously interpreted, it would be in order to appreciate that the remark goes well beyond the communal polemics of present-day politics. Specifically, the reference has to do with long-term societal costs spanning centuries, resulting from myopic decisions borne out of short-term political considerations. These long-term societal costs are best understood by the damage successive foreign invasions had caused to both institutional systems and societal practices



rooted in native Indian traditions. Two illustrative examples of such institutional systems and societal practices that suffered devastating consequences due to foreign invasions will best highlight this aspect.

The first illustrative example has to do with the traditional methods of water conservation. With climate change posing a grave challenge to water sources across communities, Prime Minister Modi's Mann Ki Baat has, over the years, maintained a consistent focus on water conservation. A key aspect of his messaging on water conservation on Mann Ki Baat, as highlighted in my recent book 'Collective Spirit Concrete Action', is his invocation of India's traditional methods of water conservation and the significance attached to water as a resource within Indian culture.

To underscore the same, PM

Modi has drawn from several ancient sources to quote specific verses and examples of water conservation. However, these ancient Indian traditional methods of water conservation suffered a devastating disruption during the medieval era of foreign invasions, the aftermath of which continues to impact agriculture and access to drinking water in several parts of India. The book 'Early Records of British India' by James Talboys Wheeler published in 1878 reveals a letter written in 1733 that observes the impact of medieval-era devastation of traditional water bodies.

A second illustrative example comes from Kerala and the legendary tradition of mathematicians. Madhava of Sangamagrama, who lived in the 14th century, made seminal contributions to the field of mathematics and astronomy as

documented in the Malayalam work 'Yuktibh' by Jyesthadeva, a successor student of the Kerala School of Mathematics. Specifically, of note, are Madhava's contributions to infinite series and trigonometry, laying the foundation of what is modern-day calculus. While Newton and Leibniz are credited with the development of modern-day calculus, the underlying methods were expounded by Madhava more than a couple of centuries prior. The invasion of the Malabar coast by Portuguese colonisers saw the devastation of the Kerala tradition of mathematics. The most incisive account of Madhava's contributions and the legacy of the Kerala tradition comes from Dr PP Divakaran, formerly with TIFR and the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics. His detailed article titled 'Calculus in India: The Historical and Mathematical Context' appeared in the Special Section on "Mathematics in India", Current Science, Vol 99, in August 2010. His concluding remarks drive home the point of the devastation caused by the Portuguese: These are but a couple of illustrative examples of the vast societal scale damage resulting from the devastation of Indian institutional systems, methods and

practices spanning a thousand years, the price of which India continues to pay as it reclaims its geopolitical space in the world order, rebuilding its scientific and technological prowess, regaining its economic strength and restoring its socio-cultural vibrancy.

At this critical juncture, we are once again witnessing foreign actors attempting to undermine the integrity of Indian democracy, aided and abetted by domestic agents who are guided by their narrow political interests and short-term thinking. As India heads into the 2024 general elections next year, the decisions Indians make will have long-term consequences. Future generations of Indians a thousand years down the road will sit in judgement of these choices that will shape the trajectory of India over the next two decades on whether it emerges as the world's third-largest economy and whether it realises the goal of a fully developed society by 2047. It is with this perspective one must assess the remarks made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Independence Day as he had sights focused both on the rearview mirror on the road traversed as well as on the horizon ahead for the world's largest democracy.

## Turmoil in Pakistan

### Sense of deja vu in poll-bound country

THE Prime Minister of Pakistan till April last year, Imran Khan is now reduced to being Prisoner No. 804 in the Attack jail. Five years ago, former PM Nawaz Sharif was rendered ineligible to contest elections after being sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment. Imran had been the beneficiary as Sharif was knocked out of the fray weeks before the polls. Pakistan's deep state was suspected to have orchestrated the judicial verdict against Sharif. A similar misgiving prevails in Imran's case. Pakistan's current economic



freefall has remained unattended in this clash of institutions, making the common man

sceptical of their ability to deliver the goods.

Imran has been facing relentless

prosecution after his relationship with the army soured; he is now pinning hopes on the Supreme Court for his release. But in a polity where the system of negotiations and compromise has collapsed, the deep state and its political allies will try their best to make him ineligible for the elections scheduled for November. Not surprisingly, the global guardians of political rectitude have held their peace. Western powers seem to have green-lighted the impetuous and unpredictable rabble-rouser PM's removal last year itself. As if this internal turmoil were not

enough, after two years in power, the Taliban in Afghanistan are unwilling to play the ISI's game, having concluded that Islamabad has no economic heft and is hardly a model Islamic state. The ISIS seems to have got its second wind as the Taliban are apparently doing little to check its attacks on the Pakistani state. The recent suicide bombing that targeted a pro-army political party was claimed to be the handiwork of the ISIS. The onus is now on caretaker PM Anwaarul Haq Kakar to ensure a conducive environment for the elections.

# New York voters down on Democrats over migrant crisis, poll finds

to about 100,000 in New York City and has touched every part of the state.

"New Yorkers - including huge majorities of Democrats, Republicans, independents, upstaters and downstaters - overwhelmingly say that the recent influx of migrants to New York is a serious problem for the state," poll spokesperson Steven Greenberg said in a statement.

By a 46 percent to 32 percent margin, voters said that migrants resettling in New York over the last 20 or so years has been a "burden," not a "benefit" to the state. And by 58 percent to 36 percent, voters said New Yorkers have already done enough and should try to slow the flow of them.

Voters disapproved of the job that Gov. Kathy Hochul is doing to address the influx by a 51 percent to 35 percent margin, and they didn't support the handling of the situation by Mayor Eric Adams by 47 percent to 31 percent.

The poll comes as Adams and

Hochul have urged the White House to help New York with more aid and to expedite working papers for the asylum-seekers. And the two



Democrats have taken pains to avoid any public squabbling as court documents recently suggested the state is frustrated with the city's response.

It's difficult to point to the influx as the cause of the sagging in the polls, since most top Democrats' numbers remained statistically unchanged from

before the migrant boom started. For Hochul, her latest numbers were consistent with recent Siena polls, but did drop slightly to a new low. Still, it's a

sign of potential future problems as Republicans gear up to make the matter a top campaign issue heading into the 2024 elections for state legislative and congressional seats.

Overall, Hochul was viewed favorably by 40 percent of voters and unfavorably by 46 percent. Adams' favorability

was 29 percent to 37 percent statewide, essentially unchanged in recent months, but he was still in positive territory in the city: 45 percent to 42 percent, the poll showed. Perhaps the most troubling finding for Democrats was that fewer than 50 percent of New Yorkers in the solidly-blue state would vote for President Joe Biden in a head-to-head matchup against former President Donald Trump.

Biden still led Trump 47 percent to 34 percent. But that 13-point lead was among the lowest in recent memory for a leading Democratic presidential candidate in New York: In 2020, Biden's edge never dipped below 25 points after it became clear he would win the Democratic nomination.

"For the first time in a Siena College poll, more New Yorkers now view Biden unfavorably, 50 percent, than view him favorably, 46 percent," Greenberg said.

Only 47 percent of Democrats

said they think their party should renominate Biden, while 46 percent preferred somebody else. That's down from 54 percent wanting his renomination in June, and up 43 percent in March.

On the migrant issue, respondents of every demographic overwhelmingly viewed the influx as a serious problem. Even among the one category that was the least concerned, self-identified liberals, 29 percent viewed it as "very serious" and 39 percent as "somewhat serious."

Still, New Yorkers supported the transfer of migrants from New York City to other parts of the state by a margin of 50 percent to 40 percent - a move by Adams that has angered local leaders. But that positive showing was driven by a supportive response from the city, where 62 percent of registered voters supported the relocation. Siena polled 803 registered voters from Aug. 13-16. The poll had a margin of error of 4.4 percentage points.

# Bollywood: Good Times are Back, for the Time Being

Bollywood is smiling. There has been a lot of good news in the last three weeks. Viewers have been thronging the cinemas, resulting in great attendance - and substantial collection at the ticket counters. The recent popularity of Anil Sharma's period drama Gadar 2, Karan Johar's romantic drama Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani and Amit Rai's satirical comedy OMG 2 is a reminder that modern-day filmgoers can step out of homes, purchase expensive tickets and watch a film if the content has genuine mass appeal. More importantly, two films headlined by big stars and released on the same day can enjoy varying degrees of success. The latter, in recent times, seemed practically impossible.

The phenomenal success of Gadar 2, whose estimated national net collection has crossed Rs 300 crore in eight days, has silenced doubters and surpassed the seemingly unrealistic expectations of most Sunny Deol and its prequel Gadar: Ek Prem Katha fans. Released along with Gadar 2,

OMG 2, whose estimated national net collection has crossed the Rs 100 crore mark in nine days, has been widely appreciated. The film, which was passed by the CBFC with an 'A' (Adults Only) certificate, is attracting viewers in good



numbers despite Gadar 2's onslaught. RARKPK has slowed down because it is a three-week-old release, a long period compared to its two strong competitors released later. But the film's estimated net collection of Rs 140 crore in India is remarkable for sure.

Gadar 2 is, without a shade of

doubt, the highlight of the season. Although most critics did not like the film, Sunny Deol's screen presence and his ability to convince the viewer in over-the-top action sequences were frequently praised. However, the film received

criticism for its weak screenplay, a much smaller role for Deol compared to its prequel, the near-insignificance of Ameesha Patel's character, the real hero Utkarsh Sharma's inability to make much impact - and a lot more.

Critics do not enjoy every mass entertainer, and Gadar 2 is one

such film. Powered by some dialogues that have become particularly popular in mass circuits, recycled songs from the prequel, and Deol's reappearance as the much-loved Tara Singh, the film has minted an estimated Rs 30 crore plus on the second Saturday after release. Its spectacular success has surprised everybody as the industry looks forward to near-certain blockbusters such as the Atlee-helmed action thriller Jawan and Maneesh Sharma's action thriller Tiger 3, which will hit the marquee soon.

Gadar 2's success is the outcome of memories of its blockbuster prequel and the terrific mass appeal of Sunny Deol as Tara Singh. OMG 2's acceptance, on the other hand, is a triumph of well-written content, assured direction, and good performances led by a brilliant Pankaj Tripathi and a solid Akshay Kumar in an extended cameo. That most critics and viewers, in general, have loved the film is a much-desired result for Kumar, who has experienced a series of

failures recently.

RARKPK, the third recent release, is a Karan Johar film with identifiable characteristics, such as grand sets, designer costumes, and much else that the viewer expects from KJo's brand of larger-than-life presentations. The film is a romantic drama, which is not surprising either. RARKPK has worked because it has superb performances from its gifted leads Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt and some members of the supporting cast. The entertainer covers a spectrum of emotions, and also finds a way to question social evils along the way. It offers what it does in a visually appealing package, which does not distract the viewer from the focus of the story. Gadar 2, OMG 2 and RARKPK are vastly different films, but each has been able to attract viewers in the last few weeks. Some will insist that the simultaneous popularity of these films is a coincidence that will not repeat itself often. While that might be true, these films clearly suggest that makers must work harder to find content with mass appeal.





# OVER THE MOON: GIANT LEAP FOR INDIA

India moonwalked into history on Wednesday, becoming the first country to reach the uncharted south pole of Earth's only natural satellite, as the Chandrayaan-3 lander module, carrying advanced scientific equipment as well as the hopes and dreams of a 140-crore-strong nation, touched down on the lunar surface.

With this momentous achievement, India also became the fourth country to master the technology of soft landing on the moon after the United States, China, and the erstwhile Soviet Union.

Less than a week after Russia's Luna-25 mission failed, the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft landed on the lunar south pole around 6.04 pm (IST) on Wednesday, ending an agonising wait for Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) scientists as well as millions in India and across the world.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is in South Africa for the BRICS summit, joined ISRO virtually for the final phases of Chandrayaan-3's journey. Calling it the "dawn of a new era", he congratulated India after the Vikram lander successfully touched down on the moon's south pole. "This moment is precious and unprecedented. This moment is the 'jaighosh' of new India. This moment is the strength of 1.4 billion heartbeats, Amrit Varsha in this phase of Amrit Kaal," said the PM, in an online address to the nation from South Africa, as beaming scientists and technicians celebrated at ISRO's headquarters in Bengaluru. "We

are all very jubilant," ISRO chairman S Somanath said in an exclusive chat with News18. "We were all very confident of the soft landing...It was a flawless landing...Chandrayaan journey started with Chandrayaan 1...It's a journey of so many years."

People crowded around televisions and giant screens in offices, shops, restaurants and homes while thousands prayed for the success of the mission at religious places and also with oil lamps on river banks, including in the holy city of Varanasi. Many schools held special live screenings of the historic event for children.

The mission is aimed at examining the southern polar region of the moon, which has water ice or frozen water that could be a source of oxygen, fuel, and water for future lunar explorations or a more permanent moon colony.

After landing successfully, the Chandrayaan-3 is expected to remain functional for two weeks, running a series of experiments, including a spectrometer analysis of the mineral composition of the lunar surface.

The Chandrayaan mission, also known as the Indian lunar exploration programme, involves a series of space missions conducted by ISRO. The first mission, Chandrayaan-1, was launched in 2008 and successfully entered lunar orbit. Chandrayaan-2 failed in its lunar phase when its lander Vikram crashed into the surface of the moon following anomalies in the braking system while attempting a touchdown on September 7, 2019.

Chandrayaan-3 is a follow-on mission to Chandrayaan-2 and its objectives are to demonstrate safe and soft landing on the lunar surface, roving on the moon, and to conduct in-situ scientific experiments.

With an estimated budget of Rs 615 crore, Chandrayaan-3 is one of India's most cost-effective space missions. It is cheaper than its predecessor, Chandrayaan-2, and costs far less than many big-budget films.

The Chandrayaan-3 mission was launched on July 14 onboard Launch Vehicle Mark-III (LVM-3) rocket, for a 41-day voyage to reach near the lunar south pole. ISRO had shown the first glimpse of the third moon mission in April last year. The launch was earlier scheduled to take place in 2020,

but it was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Learning from its past instance, ISRO implemented several improvements in Chandrayaan-3 to ensure success this time.

The spacecraft consisted of three parts: a lander module (LM), a propulsion module (PM), and a rover. The lander had the capability to soft-land at a specified lunar site and deploy the rover which will carry out research on the lunar surface. The main function of the propulsion module was to carry the lander module from the launch vehicle injection to the final lunar 100 km circular polar orbit.

Vikram, the lander's name, honours Vikram Sarabhai, the visionary behind India's space endeavours. His legacy includes

founding ISRO, elevating India to space exploration. His name symbolises progress.

Pragyan, the rover's moniker, signifies wisdom. It operates post-landing, collecting data from five scientific instruments onboard the lander and rover.

Chandrayaan-3 took off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh from the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (GSLV-MK III) heavy-lift rocket on July 14, 2023.

The significance of the mission is that the propulsion module has a payload, SHAPE or Spectropolarimetry of Habitable Planet Earth, to study Earth from lunar orbit.

After the launch on July 14, Chandrayaan-3 conducted a

## Don't Sleep Next To Your iPhone While It Is Charging: Apple Warns Users

iPhone users have been warned about using the device while charging, and also it is important that you should never keep the iPhones close to yours while it is charging, which usually happens when you are sleeping. These warnings come amidst several cases of fire incidents reported because of where and how the device was used.

Many people like to charge their phones while sleeping but Apple says that doing so could be hazardous, causing major incidents that can be easily avoided. The company mentions that keeping the phone on charge next to you while sleeping could lead to electric shock, injuries or even property

damage.

The risk of charging while sleeping is clear to everyone, but most people like to keep the device next to their heads or under the pillow, rather than place it on a night stand. Apple also has a word of advice on the basics of charging a device, notably the iPhones.

The company is clear about using its standard chargers and asks people to avoid using third-party chargers that may not provide the right amount of voltage safely to charge the iPhones. People are also told to avoid using impaired cables or any cable that is in damaged condition, which could also be dangerous to use for charging. Apple continues to stress on the

need to buy its original charger and cable, which generally ensures the iPhone is charged in the right way, which also ensures the device doesn't face any unwanted issue. Apple says using the 'Made for iPhone' cables are designed to safeguard such issues and also meet the international safety norms, which goes a long way in assuring the users about its quality.

While there are plenty of third-party chargers and cables in the market that deliver better performance than Apple's own charger but the safety quotient of the original units is always going to work for people, especially when they spend big on owning an iPhone.

# The Indian-American trio who want to triumph over Trump

Republican candidates vying to become the US President in 2024. Their first test, the primary debate in Milwaukee on August 23.

Of the three, Nikki Haley is a seasoned politician who has served in several senior government positions. The two fresh faces are millionaire entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy who has created waves with his "anti-wokism" and Hirsh Vardhan, an engineer who calls himself a "lifelong Republican". The US presidential election is scheduled to be held on November 5, 2024 and the Republican Party's presidential primary will start in January.

The action begins with the Republican Party's primary debate in Milwaukee on August 23. Donald Trump, however, plans to give it a miss.

Though an Indian-origin American, Kamla Harris, occupies the position of US Vice-President, no Indian-American has yet become its President. Kamla Harris, born to Shyamala Gopalan who immigrated to the US from Chennai, is a Democrat.

Most Indians have traditionally aligned themselves with the Democratic Party's politics and policies.

How Indian-Americans were inclined towards Democrats was evident from a 2020 survey. It found about 72% of registered Indian-Americans planned to vote for Joe Biden, a Democrat, while 22% favoured the Republican incumbent, Donald Trump.

But this could be changing fast. When it comes to the Republican Party, Bobby Jindal was the first Indian-American to have entered the race for the US presidency in 2016.

But Bobby Jindal, the former Governor of Louisiana, dropped out in the early stages of the Republican primary, which Donald Trump went on to win, going on to become the President.

The battle for the 2024 US polls looks much more intense with lot many candidates and the Indian-Americans all fired up.

**NIKKI HALEY: THE SEASONED POLITICIAN**

Nikki Haley announced her campaign in February and became the first formal challenger to former President

Donald Trump's election bid.

Nikki Haley was born into a Sikh family in Bamberg, South Carolina in 1972. Her name at birth was Nimrata Nikki Randhawa and she converted to Christianity after her marriage to Michael Haley in 1996.

She has served as the US ambassador to the United



Nations, under ex-President Donald Trump, and two terms as the governor of South Carolina.

Invoking her background as "the proud daughter of Indian immigrants", the Republican leader said she saw the "promise of America" unfold before her. She proudly flaunted her Indian heritage in her first public appearance as a White House hopeful in February.

Though Nikki Haley has highlighted her immigrant roots, she has courted controversy for calling India a historical polluter, which is far from the truth.

"If we want to be serious about saving the environment, we need to confront India and China. They are some of the biggest polluters," she said in June.

Haley has also been talking tough on China right from the moment she launched her 2024 campaign. She identified "Communist China" as the "strongest and the most disciplined enemy" that the US has ever faced.

She has also taken on Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, her Republican competitor, over their refusal to say whether they want Ukraine to win its war against Russia.

But probably the most caustic comments were reserved for President Joe Biden.

In April, Haley reacted to Biden's announcement that he would be seeking re-election in 2024, saying that he was "unlikely to make it till 86".

"If you vote for Joe Biden, you really are counting on President Harris. Because the idea that he would make it until 86 years old is not something that I think is likely," she said, warning that his supporters will have to be content with Kamala Harris in the Oval Office.

Hirsh Vardhan Singh, a 38-year-



old aeronautical engineer, calls himself the "only pureblood candidate" in the Republican race for his refusal to receive Covid vaccines.

Singh believes Trump to be "the greatest president of all time" and proclaims himself to be a "lifelong Republican". He is an "America first and pro-life" candidate.

"Today, Americans face grave threats from big tech and big pharma, which have relentlessly attacked our freedoms," Singh said in the video in which he announced his candidature for the 2024 polls. He also says the schools, which were places of learning, have now become centres of indoctrination.

Hirsh Vardhan Singh's campaign website promises, "No medical mandates. No tech monopolies. No woke ideology."

Singh hasn't been too successful in his political ambitions. He entered New Jersey politics in 2017 as a candidate in the governor polls but secured just 9.9 per cent of the votes. His father bankrolled his campaign, donating \$1 million.

Born to Indian immigrant parents in New Jersey, Singh has worked as an engineer and federal contractor.

His bid for a House seat in 2018 and a senate position in 2020 were both unsuccessful. He again tried for the governor's post in 2021, without success. Labelled "Trump on Steroids" by New Jersey's Democrat Senate

President, the Indian-American has a good opportunity to make a mark in his primary run.

**'ANTI-WOKE' MILLIONAIRE VIVEK RAMASWAMY**

The Indian-American who emerged as the real surprise candidate is Vivek Ramaswamy. From having a longshot chance to being one of the favourites, Ramaswamy has shaken up the early Republican race.

The 38-year-old Vivek Ramaswamy, an "outsider" in the US political setup, has centred his campaign around "anti-wokism".

A biology graduate from Harvard College and a lawyer from Yale Law school, Ramaswamy made his fortune in biotech and asset management businesses. His net worth, according to Forbes, is at least \$630 million.

With his radical ideas and fiery speeches, Vivek Ramaswamy has caught the attention of one and all, including Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who keeps tweeting and retweeting in favour of the Indian-American Republican candidate.

Born to Indian-Americans who moved from Kerala to the US, Ramaswamy is fiercely anti-immigration in his stance. His father was an engineer with General Electric and his mother worked as a geriatric psychiatrist.

Ramaswamy promises to revive America's national identity and brands climate change a "hoax". He has also vowed to shut down several government departments if voted to the top office.

Ramaswamy's radical ideas and speeches have found an echo in the hearts of Americans as he works hard to position himself as an alternative to former US President and Republican top choice Donald Trump within the Republican Party. He is a favourite just after Trump and is tied in the second spot with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, according to the latest opinion polls.

**INDIAN-AMERICANS AND THEIR PARTY LOYALTY**

According to a report, nearly 4.5 million Indian Americans, representing a varied spectrum of ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, reside in the US. Like in most fields, Indian-origin people have

contributed to the US political landscape too.

Their political affiliation, like any other demographic, is subject to diversity and cannot be generalised. But there is definitely a political inclination that is visible.

Research conducted by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund indicates that a significant portion of Indian-origin Americans tend to align themselves with the Democratic Party. A survey conducted during the 2020 Presidential election revealed that approximately 65 per cent of Indian Americans favour the Democratic Party, supporting its candidates and policy agendas. Another survey published in 2020 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP), Johns Hopkins SAIS and the University of Pennsylvania found that 72 per cent of registered Indian American voters planned to vote for Joe Biden, a Democrat, while 22 per cent were in favour of incumbent President Donald Trump, a Republican.

Moreover, historical trends suggest a strong inclination towards the Democratic Party among Indian Americans, with the community's support for Democratic presidential nominees consistently exceeding that of Republican nominees in past elections. However, this support varies across regions, generations, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

But this loyalty could be shifting. As the community continues to grow both in size and influence, some individuals are drawn to the Republican Party's emphasis on economic growth, entrepreneurship, and national security. These Indian-Americans find the Republican Party's policies that focus on free markets, tax reforms, and a strong defence resonating with them.

Will any of the three Indian-Americans get the better of Don? Will the community shift its loyalty in the 2024 polls? These are questions that will be answered in due course of time. But what is sure as of now is that the Indian-origin trio will offer some fireworks and light up the Republican primary debates.





## Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin believed killed in Moscow plane crash: Report

Russia's most powerful mercenary Yevgeny Prigozhin was on board a plane which crashed on Wednesday evening north of Moscow with no survivors, the Russian authorities said, two months to the day after he led an abortive mutiny against the army top brass.

There was no official comment from the

Kremlin or the Defence Ministry on the fate of Prigozhin, head of the Wagner mercenary group and a self-declared enemy of the army's leadership over what he argued was its incompetent prosecution of Russia's war in Ukraine. A Telegram channel linked to Wagner, Grey Zone, pronounced him dead, however, and hailed him as a hero and

a patriot who it said had died at the hands of unidentified people it called "traitors to Russia."

Amid fevered speculation and an absence of verifiable facts, some of his supporters pointed the finger of blame at the Russian state; others at Ukraine, which was due to mark its independence day on Thursday.

A building housing Wagner's offices in St Petersburg lit up its windows after dark in such a way as to display a giant cross in a mark of respect and mourning.

Prigozhin's death would leave the Wagner Group, which incurred President Vladimir Putin's wrath in June by staging an abortive armed mutiny against the army's top brass, leaderless and raise questions about its future operations in Africa and elsewhere.

Whoever or whatever was behind the crash, his death would also rid Putin of someone who had mounted the most serious challenge to the Russian leader's authority since he came to power in 1999.

### WAGNER CO-FOUNDER ALSO ON PLANE

Rosaviatsia, Russia's aviation agency, published the names of all 10 people on board the downed plane, including Prigozhin and that of Dmitry Utkin, his right-hand man who helped found the mercenary group and bore the call sign "Wagner".

Russian investigators said they had opened a criminal investigation to determine what had happened. Some unnamed sources told Russian media they believed the plane had been shot down by one or more surface-to-air missiles. Reuters could not confirm that.

The aircraft, which had been travelling from Moscow to St. Petersburg, had crashed near the village of Kuzhenkino in the Tver Region, Russia's emergency situations ministry said.

## CBI arrests Canadian resident in defence espionage case

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday arrested a Canadian national, Rahul Gangal, for his alleged involvement in a defence espionage case. According to sources, Gangal was allegedly getting sensitive documents pertaining to the defence and armed forces from arrested journalist Vivek Raghuvanshi.

Rahul Gangal has worked as defence dealer and he is associated with a Germany-based consultancy firm, Roland Berger. He is allegedly involved in aerospace, defence, engineering products, automotive, homeland security and infrastructure dealings.

Rahul Gangal has also worked for a top Indian firm as an investment banker and private equity businesses in the aerospace, defence and security sectors.

Rahul Gangal, a businessman who had taken Permanent Residency in Canada in 2019, was arrested in the case when he landed here on Monday, CBI officials said.



They also said that the accused has been sent to four-day CBI custody by a special court.

The recent arrest comes months after

the federal probe agency arrested a former Navy commander and an independent journalist in May on charges of spying. The former Navy commander Ashish Pathak and independent journalist Vivek Raghuvanshi are accused of allegedly collecting sensitive information related to defence matters illegally and passing it on to foreign intelligence agencies, news

agency PTI reported.

Raghuvanshi is listed as India correspondent of a US-based portal on defence and strategic affairs on its

website. Before his arrest, CBI searched 12 places in Jaipur and Delhi linked to him and also spoke to people close to him.

Several sensitive documents were recovered during the searches.

Raghuvanshi and Pathak were booked under Section 3 (spying) of the Official Secrets Act and with Section 120-B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code.

According to CBI, classified communication relating to national security and details of strategic and diplomatic talks of India with friendly countries were shared by the accused, which can spoil bilateral relations of India with other countries. The classified information was allegedly also shared with intelligence agencies of foreign countries. CBI suspects that an international network was behind the espionage, in which some Indian journalists were supplying strategic secret information to intelligence agencies of enemy countries.

# Pak ex-minister calls for Chandrayaan-3 live telecast weeks after bizarre tweet

Fawad Chaudhry, a former Pakistan minister, has heaped praise on India's Chandrayaan-3 mission, calling it a "historic moment for humankind". He had mocked the previous Chandrayaan-2 mission in 2019.

(News Agency) -Former Pakistan minister Fawad Chaudhry, who once mocked the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro), especially its Chandrayaan-2, termed the Chandrayaan-3 mission a "historic moment for humankind". He congratulated the Indian scientists and space community on the lunar mission.

Fawad Chaudhry, a former Information and Broadcasting minister in the erstwhile Imran Khan government, said all media houses in Pakistan should broadcast the landing of Chandrayaan-3 at 6:15 pm (local time) today.

"Pakistan media should show Chandrayaan moon landing live tomorrow at 6:15 pm. Historic moment for humankind, specially for the people, scientists and space community of India. Many congratulations," he wrote on X on Tuesday.

The sudden praise by Fawad Chaudhry for Isro's Chandrayaan-3 came after a video emerged on social media last month,



where the Pakistani leader appeared to take a jibe at India's moon missions.

"Itne pad belne ki zaroorat nahi hai (there is no need for such efforts)," the former minister said at a TV debate.

"Chand jo hai najar aa jata hai, exactly uski location pata hoti hai...kis territory me uska kya altitude hoga? (the moon is visible, its location is known, and what will be its altitude in which territory is also



known)," he said.

His remarks did not go down well, with many social media users roasting the minister for his obsession with India and its space programmes.

In 2019, when the lander of Chandrayaan-2 suffered a technical glitch and was unable to land on the Moon, Fawad Chaudhry took a brutal dig at the lunar mission.

In a tweet, the Pakistani leader criticised India for "spending Rs 900 crore" on the Moon mission and claimed it was "unwise" to venture into "unknown territory".

ALL EYES ON CHANDRAYAAN-3  
Meanwhile, India is waiting with bated breath as the Vikram lander of Chandrayaan-3 is set to attempt a soft landing on the Moon's south pole at 6:04 pm today. The landing comes four years after the Chandrayaan-2 mission ended in part failure. Later this evening, the Chandrayaan-3 mission's Vikram lander, currently in orbit around the Moon, will begin a slow, calculated descent on to the lunar surface. The landing sequence will begin around 5:45 pm and will last for around a quarter of an hour, a period that former Isro chief K Sivan has described as "15 minutes of terror". If all goes well, Vikram will land in an area near the lunar South Pole. Shortly after, the lander will open its doors to deploy Pragyaan -- a six-wheeled rover the size of a coffee table -- on the surface of the Moon.

## Massive landslide claims life of 4-year-old in Lower Lungchok



(News Agency) -A landslide took the life of an infant in Lower Lungchok under the Maneybong-Dentam constituency under West Sikkim.

As per reports, the landslide damaged the house of a resident identified as Nar Bahadur Chettri and in the process, a 4-year-old infant died. On the otherhand, all PWD roads in West Sikkim have also been blocked due to landslides.

Also Read: Sikkim: Several injured after commercial vehicle hits state transport bus at Topakhani tunnel  
Earlier this month, a massive landslide was captured on a mobile camera on Thursday along NH10 between Ranipul



and Singtam in 32 No.

On August 4, the main National Highway NH-10, connecting Sikkim with the mainland and capital Gangtok, was severely disrupted for several hours due to a sudden landslide.

The busy traffic on both sides came to a halt for over an hour until the highway authority cleared the debris to facilitate smooth passage for vehicular movement.

The hilly state has been experiencing continuous rainfall in recent days, leading to several instances of landslides that are causing difficulties for commuters and local residents

## Pakistan President invites top election official for meeting to set poll dates

Pakistan President Arif Alvi invited Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja for a meeting, citing the constitutional requirement for the president to decide a date for general elections.

(News Agency) -Pakistan President Arif Alvi on Wednesday invited the top election official of the country for a meeting to set a date for the upcoming general elections.

Alvi wrote a letter to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja, citing the constitutional requirement for the president to decide a date for general elections within 90 days of the dissolution of the National Assembly (NA).

The National Assembly was dissolved on August 9 which makes it mandatory for the Election Commission of Pakistan to hold polls within 90 days after the dissolution. However, the ECP is set to delay the election in order to carry out delimitation in the light of the new census, which is also a constitutional requirement. The president wrote a letter to CEC for a meeting to be held "today or tomorrow" to fix an appropriate date for general elections, according to the letter posted on platform X through the President's account.

Alvi wrote that "by virtue of Article 48(5)



of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the president is obliged to appoint a date not later than 90 days from the date of dissolution for the holding of general elections of [the] assembly".

The invitation for the meeting comes in the wake of the ECP announcing a new delimitation process which would be completed by December 14 and after that the election schedule would be announced.

The ECP is in fix as it cannot fulfill the two obligations of holding elections within 90 days and also determine new electoral districts.



# Who's in, who's out, who's boycotting:

## The 8 candidates expected onstage for the first GOP debate

(News Agency) - Donald Trump won't be on the Republican debate stage Wednesday. But the former president is driving the conversation on and off the debate stage anyway.

Trump supporters including Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene will be in Milwaukee. There are questions about how many of his campaign surrogates will be allowed into Fox News' spin room. The network has restricted their access unless they are the guests of another media organization. Eight other candidates met the donor and polling qualifications to be onstage, according to the Republican National Committee. For those who didn't, missing the debate could be a decisive moment in their campaigns.

Conservative radio host Larry Elder has said he plans to sue the RNC over being left out, despite what he says is proof that he qualified for the debate. It also wasn't immediately clear what Miami Mayor Francis Suarez - who didn't make the cut - would do, following his Iowa State Fair comments that he might drop out of the race if that happened.

To qualify for the Aug. 23 debate, candidates needed to satisfy polling and donor requirements set by the RNC: at least 1% in three national polls or a mix of national and early-state polls deemed acceptable by the committee, between July 1 and Aug. 21, and a minimum of 40,000 donors, with 200 in 20 or more states.

Candidates also needed to commit at least 48 hours before the Wednesday evening debate, according to RNC criteria, which also required participants to sign a pledge promising to support the party's eventual nominee.

A look at who's in, who's out and who's decided not to participate:

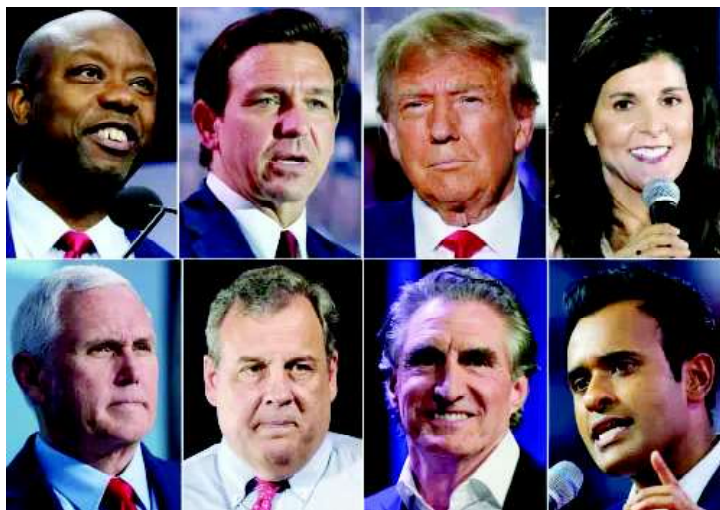
### RON DESANTIS

The Florida governor has long been seen as Trump's top rival, finishing a distant second to him in polls in early-voting states and in national polls as well, and raising an impressive amount of money.

But DeSantis' campaign has struggled in recent weeks to live up to high expectations. He let go of more than one-third of his staff as federal filings showed his campaign was burning through cash at an unsustainable rate.

With Trump absent, DeSantis may be the primary target for others onstage. According to people familiar with DeSantis' planning who were granted anonymity to discuss strategy, the campaign is preparing him for nonstop attacks.

DeSantis has been participating in debate-related question and answer sessions at least once a week, having brought in



experienced debate strategist Brett O'Donnell to assist.

### TIM SCOTT

The South Carolina senator has been looking for a breakout moment. The first debate could be his chance.

A prolific fundraiser, Scott entered the summer with \$21 million cash on hand. In one debate-approved poll in Iowa, Scott joined Trump and DeSantis in reaching double digits. The senator has focused much of his campaign resources on the leadoff GOP voting state, which has a large number of white evangelical voters.

Scott is hitting the early-state campaign trail after the debate, traveling to New Hampshire, Iowa and his home state of South Carolina, where he has four stops planned on Monday.

### NIKKI HALEY

She has blitzed early-voting states with campaign events, walking crowds through her successes ousting a longtime South Carolina lawmaker, then becoming the state's first female and first minority governor. Also serving as Trump's U.N. ambassador for about two years, Haley frequently cites her international experience, focusing on the threat China poses to the United States.

The only woman in the GOP race, Haley has said transgender students competing in sports is "the women's issue of our time" and has drawn praise from a leading anti-abortion group, which called her "uniquely gifted at communicating from a pro-life woman's perspective."

Entering the race in February, Haley has brought in \$15.6 million. Making no mention of plans to go on the attack while speaking to reporters in Iowa earlier this month, Haley did explain why she showed up to the state fair in a shirt that read, "Underestimate me, that'll be fun."

### VIVEK RAMASWAMY

The biotech entrepreneur and author of "Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America's Social Justice Scam" is an audience favorite at multi-candidate events and has polled well despite not being nationally known when he entered the race.

Ramaswamy's campaign says he met the donor threshold earlier this year, but this summer he rolled out "Vivek's Kitchen Cabinet" to boost his donor numbers even more by letting fundraisers keep 10% of what they bring in for his campaign.

As he pursues a whirlwind campaign schedule, Ramaswamy has done virtually no formal debate prep, according to a senior adviser granted anonymity to discuss campaign strategy. The adviser said he'll spend the day before the debate playing tennis and spending time with family.

### CHRIS CHRISTIE

The former New Jersey governor opened his campaign by portraying himself as the only candidate ready to take on Trump. Christie called on the former president to "show up at the debates and defend his record," calling him "a coward" if he doesn't.

Last month, Christie - who kicked off his campaign in June - told CNN that he surpassed "40,000 unique donors in just 35 days." He also has met the polling requirements.

### DOUG BURGUM

Burgum, a wealthy former software entrepreneur now in his second term as North Dakota's governor, has been using his fortune to boost his campaign.

He announced a program last month to give away \$20 gift cards - "Biden Relief Cards," hitting President Joe Biden's handling of the economy - to as many as 50,000 people in exchange for \$1 donations. Critics have questioned whether the offer violates campaign finance law.

Within about a week of launching that effort, Burgum announced he had surpassed the donor threshold. Ad blitzes in the early-voting states helped him meet the polling requirements.

Whether Burgum would be able to participate in Wednesday's debate was thrown into question after he hurt his Achilles tendon playing basketball with members of his campaign staff on Tuesday and was taken to the emergency room. After doing a walk-through of the debate stage on his injured leg on Wednesday, Burgum posted a photo of himself on crutches and said "I'm in," asserting that he'd be able to debate.

The injury, which occurred Tuesday while Burgum was playing with campaign staff, was first reported by CNN.

### MIKE PENCE

Trump's vice president had met the polling threshold but struggled to amass a sufficient number of donors, raising the possibility he might not qualify for the first debate.

But on Aug. 8, Pence's campaign announced that it had crossed the 40,000 donor threshold, and also that he had become the first candidate to formally submit his donor count to the RNC for verification.

An adviser who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal strategy said earlier this month that Pence had participated in roughly a half-dozen formal debate prep sessions to date, including at least one in which a campaign aide previously close to Trump is playing the part of the former president.

### ASA HUTCHINSON

The former two-term Arkansas governor was the final candidate to meet the RNC's qualifications. Satisfying the polling requirements but slowly working on passing the donor threshold, Hutchinson said Sunday on CNN that he had finally surpassed 40,000 unique donors.

Hutchinson is running in the mold of an old-school Republican and has differentiated himself from many of his GOP rivals in his willingness to criticize Trump. He posted pleas on Twitter for \$1 donations to help secure his slot.

### WHO'S DECIDED NOT TO PARTICIPATE

**DONALD TRUMP**  
The current GOP front-runner long ago satisfied the polling and donor requirements. But Trump has opted not to participate in Wednesday's debate - and potentially any others that may follow. "The public knows who I am & what a successful Presidency I had," Trump wrote on his social media site over the weekend.

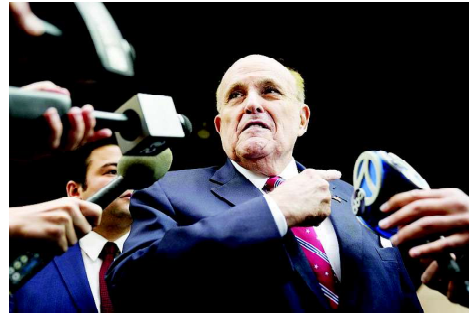
# Giuliani turns himself in on Georgia 2020 election charges after bond is set at \$150,000

(News Agency) - Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump's lawyer and confidant, turned himself in at a jail in Atlanta on Wednesday on charges related to efforts to overturn then-President Trump's loss in the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. The former New York mayor, was indicted last week along with Trump and 17 others. Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis said they participated in a wide-ranging conspiracy to subvert the will of the voters after the Republican president lost to Democrat Joe Biden in November 2020. Bond for Giuliani, who was released after booking like the other defendants, was set at \$150,000, second only to Trump's \$200,000.

Giuliani, 79, is accused of spearheading Trump's efforts to compel state lawmakers in Georgia and other closely contested states to ignore the will of voters and illegally appoint electoral college electors favorable to Trump.

Other high-profile defendants also surrendered Wednesday, including Jenna Ellis, an attorney who prosecutors say was involved in efforts to convince state lawmakers to unlawfully appoint presidential electors, and lawyer Sidney Powell, accused of making false statements about the election in Georgia and helping to organize a breach of voting

equipment in rural Coffee County. Georgia was one of several key states Trump lost by slim margins, prompting the Republican and his allies to proclaim, without evidence, that the election was rigged in favor of his Democratic rival Biden.



Giuliani is charged with making false statements and soliciting false testimony, conspiring to create phony paperwork and asking state lawmakers to violate their oath of office to appoint an alternate slate of pro-Trump electors. Outside the Fulton County Jail Wednesday afternoon, Giuliani laughed when asked if he regretted allying himself with Trump.

"I am very, very honored to be involved in this case because this case is a fight for

our way of life," Giuliani told reporters. "This indictment is a travesty. It's an attack on – not just me, not just President Trump, not just the people in this indictment, some of whom I don't even know - this is an attack on the American people."

After Giuliani's surrender, Trump repeated his unfounded claims that the election was rigged and stolen and wrote on his social media site, "The greatest Mayor in the history of New York City was just ARRESTED in Atlanta, Georgia, because he fought for Election Integrity."

Trump, the early front-runner in the 2024 Republican presidential primary, has said he plans to turn himself in at the Fulton County Jail on Thursday. He and his allies have characterized the investigation as politically motivated and have heavily criticized District Attorney Willis, a Democrat.

Former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and former Justice Department official Jeffrey Clark are both trying to have the case against them heard in federal court rather than

in Fulton County Superior Court. Both argue the actions that gave rise to the charges in the indictment were related to their work as federal officials and that the case should be moved to federal court and the charges against them dismissed.

They had each asked a judge to allow them to avoid being arrested while those requests are pending. But U.S. District Judge Steve Jones on Wednesday rejected their requests to avoid having to be booked in jail while they fight to move the case to federal court.

Willis has set a deadline of noon on Friday for the people indicted last week in the election subversion case to turn themselves in. Her team has been negotiating bond amounts and conditions with the lawyers for the defendants before they surrender at the jail. Misty Hampton, who was the Coffee County elections director when a breach of election equipment happened there, had her bond set at \$10,000. David Shafer, who's a former Georgia Republican Party chair and served as one of 16 fake electors for Trump, and Cathy Latham, who's accused in the Coffee County breach and was also a fake elector, turned themselves in Wednesday morning.

## 'Impressive progress by India': Putin on Chandrayaan-3's historic landing on Moon



(News Agency) - Russian President Vladimir Putin, among other global leaders, congratulated India on Chandrayaan-3's successful landing on Moon on Wednesday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and UAE Vice President Sheikh Mohammed were among the world leaders who congratulated India on Wednesday on the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the Moon, saying the historic event is evidence of India's impressive progress in

the scientific-technological sphere. President Putin has congratulated India's President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the successful landing of the Indian space probe Chandrayaan-3 on the Moon near its South Pole, the Kremlin's press service said.

"Please accept my heartfelt congratulations on the successful landing of India's Chandrayaan-3 space probe on the Moon near the South Pole. This is a

long stride in the exploration of outer space and, of course, evidence of the impressive progress made by India in science and engineering," Putin said in his message.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, congratulated India on becoming the first country to land a spacecraft on the south pole of the Moon.

"Congratulations to our friends in India for the successful landing on the moon. Nations are built through perseverance, India continues to make history," he said in a message posted on his account on X, formerly known as Twitter. Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' also congratulated his Indian counterpart on the success of Chandrayaan-3.

"I congratulate Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji and ISRO team of India on successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the surface of the moon today and the unleashing of a historic achievement in science and space technology," he said in a post on X.

## Watch: Xi Jinping left puzzled at BRICS after aide stopped abruptly by security

(News Agency) -An aide of Chinese President, Xi Jinping, was stopped by security officials when he was trying to catch up with the president and enter a hall during the 15th BRICS summit which is currently going on in South Africa's Johannesburg.

In a video that has gone viral on social media, Xi Jinping can be seen walking towards the hall. As the Chinese premier entered the hall, one of his aides tried to catch up with him.

However, as he tried to approach Jinping from behind, security staff posted there stopped him abruptly from entering the hall, as his movement, reportedly, raised suspicions. The incident left Xi Jinping visibly confused as he looked back several times to understand what was going on.

As the video went viral on social media, Russian state-run news channel Russia Today aka RT in a tweet clarified that a Chinese official was lagging behind Xi Jinping at the Sandton Convention Centre.

Earlier on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed on open plenary session of the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg.



# BRICS leaders weigh expansion criteria with bloc's future in balance

**The BRICS multilateral bloc is considering expanding its membership and the question of adding new members has topped the agenda at the Johannesburg summit.**

(News Agency) -BRICS leaders were weighing rules for admitting new members to the bloc of developing countries at a summit on Wednesday even as splits over its future direction risked undermining its ambition to give the "Global South" more clout in world affairs.

Bloc heavyweights China and Russia - whose President Vladimir Putin is attending the meeting virtually - want to reinforce BRICS amid heightened tensions resulting from the Ukraine war and Beijing's growing rivalry with Washington.

They are seeking to use the Aug. 22-24 summit in South Africa's commercial capital Johannesburg to forge the grouping, which also includes Brazil and India, into a counterweight to the West.

But longstanding divisions re-emerged on the first day of talks on Tuesday, notably voiced by Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who said the grouping should not seek to rival



the United States and Group of Seven wealthy economies.

Lula and counterparts Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi met for dinner and a mini-retreat on Tuesday evening.

The question of enlarging BRICS has topped the agenda at the summit and exposed the kinds of divergence of vision that have long plagued the grouping.

China and Russia are keen to expand BRICS to give the bloc

more global clout. South Africa's Ramaphosa said on Tuesday that his country's stance was similar to China's. Brazil, meanwhile, is concerned that expanding BRICS will dilute its influence, though it wants to see neighbour Argentina join the bloc. An Indian official familiar with the Tuesday evening discussions between the leaders said Modi indicated his country was open to expansion but "there have to be ground rules about how it should happen and

who can join".

## LEADERS DISCUSS MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

More than 40 countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS, say South African officials. Of them, nearly two dozen have formally asked to be admitted. While no new members are expected to be admitted to BRICS during the summit, leaders are weighing a framework and criteria for joining, details of which could be included in a joint declaration

due to be finalised on Wednesday.

BRICS remains a disparate group, ranging from South Africa, a relative minnow which is nonetheless Africa's most developed country, to China, the world's second-biggest economy.

Russia's Putin, who is wanted under an international arrest warrant for alleged war crimes in Ukraine, is keen to show the West he still has friends. But India, wary of Chinese dominance, has increasingly reached out to the West, as has Brazil under Lula.

Beyond the enlargement question, boosting the use of member states' local currencies in trade and financial transactions to lessen dependency of the U.S. dollar is also on the summit agenda.

South African organisers say there will be no discussions however of a common BRICS currency, an idea floated by Brazil as an alternative to dollar-dependence.

## 1-year-old dies in hot day care van as scorching weather hits central US

(News Agency) - Scorching weather hitting nearly 100 million people across a huge swath of the U.S. forced schools and outdoor workers to scramble to adjust Tuesday - and claimed the life of a 1-year-old girl left in a Nebraska day care center's van on one of the hottest days of the year.

Officers and medics were called Monday afternoon to Kidz of the Future Childcare in Omaha for an unresponsive baby inside the van, police said. Temperatures at the time reached into the upper 90s (mid-30s Celsius), part of a dayslong heat wave.

The child, Ra'Miyah Worthington, was pronounced dead at a hospital, police said. Court documents say her body temperature was 109 F (42.8 C). Her parents questioned why her absence at the day care wasn't noticed.

"She loved, loved, loved her family," her mother, Sina Johnson, told the television station WOWT. "She loved her daddy. She was daddy's little girl."

Prosecutors charged the 62-year-old van driver, Ryan Williams, of Omaha, on Tuesday with a

felony count of child negligence resulting in death, which carries a sentence of up to four years in prison.

He told investigators that he was distracted by a young boy who didn't want to get out of the van when he was unloading the vehicle and mistakenly forgot the girl inside, according to court documents. A second staff member came out to help get the boy, and Williams closed up the van without conducting the sweep of the vehicle that he said he normally does.

A bond hearing for Williams was set for Wednesday morning. Online court records didn't yet list an attorney who could comment on his behalf, and a phone listing was disconnected.

"He was responsible for getting those kids inside," said Douglas County Chief Deputy Attorney Brenda Beadle. "That little girl was in that van between five and six hours with the temperature outside reaching nearly 100." State officials said the day care would remain closed while the girl's death is investigated.



## US puts visa curbs on Chinese officials over boarding schools for Tibetans



(News Agency) -The United States will impose visa restrictions on Chinese officials to tackle "forcible assimilation" of Tibetan children in government-run boarding schools, the State Department said on Tuesday, without providing details or naming any officials.

"We urge PRC authorities to end the coercion of Tibetan children into government-run boarding schools and to cease repressive assimilation policies," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. China firmly

opposed the curbs, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a news briefing on Wednesday. "This wrong of Tibetan children in government-run boarding schools, the State Department will make a resolute and forceful response," Wang said.

Tibet has been ruled by China since 1951, when troops took control in what it says was a peaceful liberation.

China maintains that it protects the rights of all ethnic minority cultures and its constitution grants groups the freedom to use and develop their own written and spoken languages.



# Aditya attends Ananya's Dream Girl 2 screening, Ayushmann arrives with Tahira

A special screening of 'Dream Girl 2' was hosted by the makers on August 24. Aditya Roy Kapur, Suhana Khan, Shanaya Kapoor, Chunky and Bhavana Pandey arrived to watch Ananya-Ayushmann's film.



'Dream Girl 2' released on August 25 and a special screening was held for close friends and families of the film's team. Ayushmann Khurrana AKA Pooja arrived with wife Tahira Kashyap at the screening of 'Dream Girl 2'.

Ananya Pandey's denim-on-denim avatar was a hit as she

dressed up for her film's screening. Proud parents Chunky and Bhavana Pandey with Ananya at the screening. Aditya Roy Kapur attended the screening of rumoured girlfriend Ananya's film. Soon-to-be debutantes Suhana Khan and Shanaya Kapoor arrived at Ananya's film screening with

Navya Naveli Nanda. Manjot Singh arrived in a quirky outfit.

Rajpal Yadav was at his quirkiest best at the screening.

Abhishek Banerjee looked dapper as he posed for photos. Shalin Bhanot was one of the attendees at the screening. Varun Sood posed for paps at the screening.





# Ragging pushed this 19-year-old into trauma: How medication and weekly therapy brought him back

Ragging, the practice of initiating newcomers into a group, elicits a range of perspectives. Some view it as a tradition fostering camaraderie, arguing it builds friendships and a sense of belonging among students. In their eyes, light-hearted initiation activities break the ice and create lasting memories. Conversely, others emphasize the potential harm, pointing out cases of extreme ragging causing severe emotional trauma and psychological distress. They stress that such practices perpetuate a culture of bullying and go against principles of respect. This is a story about Alok (name changed), a 19-year-old student from rural India who newly joined the first-year degree course at an educational institution known for its academic excellence and vibrant campus life. Alok was ambitious but introverted due to his socio-economic and family background. He was anxious about adjusting to an urban environment and making new friends. He had always been a diligent student, and this was his chance to prove himself in a prestigious institution. He had heard stories about ragging, the practice of seniors welcoming newcomers through light-hearted "initiation" activities. While he was apprehensive, he hoped to make friends and embrace the college

hostel experience.

## THE ORDEAL THAT BROKE HIM

One evening, as Alok was returning to his room late in the night after a study session in the library, his classmate told him that a group of seniors had left a message instructing him and some of the junior



students to meet on the terrace of the building at the stroke of midnight. Alok decided to go, feeling a mix of curiosity and apprehension. As the clock struck midnight, Alok cautiously entered the terrace. To his surprise, he found a group of senior students along with a small group of his classmates waiting for him. The

seniors had their faces hidden with masks, but an eerie silence hung in the air. One of them broke the silence, instructing Alok and his first-year colleagues to participate in a series of bizarre tasks. These tasks escalated quickly from eating spicy concoctions to reciting embarrassing

and emotional well-being deteriorated.

Days turned into weeks as the ragging sessions continued relentlessly, leaving Alok emotionally broken. His academic performance plummeted, and he started skipping classes to avoid encountering his seniors. He began experiencing severe anxiety, depression, and even contemplated suicide, as he felt he was unable to confide with anyone due to fear of retaliation and also the anxiety of burdening his parents.

## WHY SEEKING ON-CAMPUS COUNSELLING HELPS?

One day, while wandering aimlessly, Alok came across a pamphlet about counselling services which were offered on-campus. Desperate for help but scared of being judged if anybody came to know, he finally decided to meet the counsellor. During the session, Alok hesitantly recounted the extreme ragging sessions which he had endured.

The counsellor, alarmed by the severity of the situation, immediately escalated the matter to the university administration. An investigation was launched, and the seniors responsible for the extreme ragging were identified and promptly suspended pending further action.

## Hot weather can make dengue virus more virulent, says study

The Dengue virus could become more virulent as the temperatures increase, according to a recent study. Researchers at Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology (RGCBI) in Kerala found that dengue becomes even more severe and hostile in animal models when its virus (DENV), while being grown in mosquito-derived cells, is exposed to higher temperatures. The research, published in the FASEB journal, can help in predicting and mitigating the severity and virulence of dengue, which has an estimated global disease burden of 390 million cases per year. As a precautionary measure, individuals should consider wearing long-sleeved shirts, applying mosquito repellent to exposed skin, using mosquito nets, and staying well-hydrated by consuming an adequate amount of water. These practices can help reduce the risk of mosquito bites and dengue infection, added Dr Chaudhary. Dr Tushar Tayal, Consultant of Internal Medicine at CK Birla Hospital said that viruses, anyway, survive better in warmer weather. "Every year at the end of the monsoon season and once the

temperatures start increasing again, conditions become optimal for the survival and proliferation of viruses," said Dr Tayal. India being a tropical country, these cyclical weather changes will continue. Hence, Dr



Tayal suggested, that we have to find measures to contain and control the spread of mosquitoes until the dengue vaccine becomes available. Symptoms of dengue are flu-like conditions including a sudden high-grade fever coming in separate waves, pain behind the eyes, muscle, joint and bone pain, severe headache, abdominal fullness, nausea and vomiting and a skin rash with red spots, which happens by the fifth day of the illness.

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# Chandrayaan-3 puts India on the Moon: What it means for country's economy

**The success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission has not only made the nation proud but also opened up a wave of opportunities for several sectors that could boost India's economic growth.**

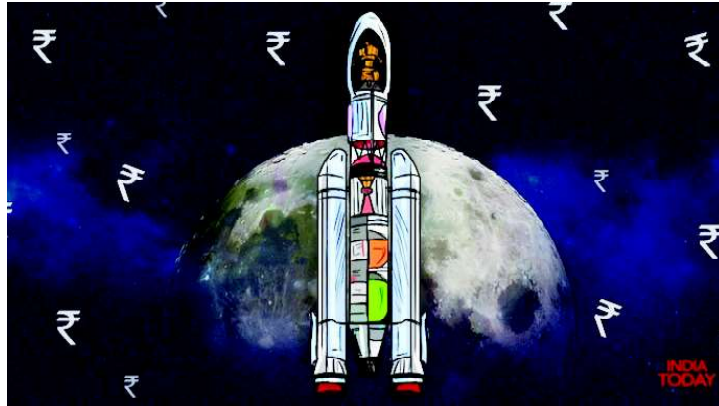
It was a historic day for the country as the Indian Space Research Organisation's (Isro) Chandrayaan-3 conquered the Moon.

The achievement has not only made the entire nation proud but also opened up a wave of opportunities for several sectors that could boost India's economic growth, bringing the country closer to its dream of becoming the third-largest economy in the world.

Chandrayaan-3 opens up India's space economy

Isro's remarkable feat has opened up a new horizon of opportunities for several start-ups and companies involved in sectors such as space tech, aerospace, defence and R&D, said experts.

While the achievement is likely to boost the government's future budgetary allocation towards space research, it will also boost private investment in allied sectors, ultimately contributing to economic growth.



India already has 140 registered space-tech start-ups and the successful lunar mission is likely to provide a massive boost to each one of them. In fact, it can establish India's position as a cost-effective satellite launcher, benefitting sectors like aerospace and defence, feels Mukesh Kochar, National Head - Wealth Management, AUM Capital.

"It is one of the biggest milestones for India. India currently contributes around 2-3 per cent to the global space economy and it is expected to contribute around 8-10 per cent in the next 8-10 years. This will establish India as a cost-effective satellite launcher and a global opportunity may emerge. Sectors like aerospace and defence will

get a boost," Kochar said.

"There are around 140 registered space startups in India. These startups should attract a lot of investment after the success of this remarkable journey. The budgetary allocation is also expected to increase going forward. So overall this will give a boost to the Indian economy," he added.

Sreeram Ananthasayanam, Partner, Deloitte India, agrees. He said, "Historical, once-in-a-lifetime moments like these, while uniting our country, also pave the way for an increased scientific temper amongst the youth of India, an accelerated pathway for self-reliance in emerging sectors and technologies, and instilling the confidence to be amongst the top 3 economies of the world."

"A classic lesson on focused perseverance, economic innovation and sovereignty in new and emerging tech, today's event will propel India's space economy to the next orbit," he added.

## Global stock market correction likely before year-end: Reuters poll



Global stock markets are heading for a correction in coming months, though overall they should post marginal gains between now and the end of 2023, according to a majority of analysts polled by Reuters.

A bad year for stocks in 2022 carried into this year as global central banks battled inflation with interest rate rises that are now largely drawing to an end.

But while an unexpected surge in stock prices through May-July has coincided with news most major economies are performing better than expected, a nagging worry among analysts that stocks will underperform has not really gone away. Attractive rates in money markets well above inflation have also dimmed the allure of equities, which

during a long era of zero interest rates and low inflation were repeatedly described as the only game in town for investors.

A jump in benchmark U.S. Treasury yields to 2007 levels before the Global Financial Crisis shows investors coming around to the view that even as the Federal Reserve's hiking cycle campaign nears its end, rates will stay higher for longer.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell is due to deliver a speech at the central bankers' conference in Jackson Hole on Friday that has the potential to further embed those expectations. A 71% majority of analysts, 55 of 77, who answered an additional question in the Aug. 9-23 poll said a correction by year-end in their local equity market was either likely or very likely.

## Here's how Michael Burry dodged a bullet amid China's property crisis



In a stunning turn of events, Evergrande, a prominent name among China's property developers, has recently filed for bankruptcy, succumbing to the relentless turbulence in the country's housing market.

The crisis has cast a shadow over another major player, Country Garden, as it grapples with imminent default risks after losing billions of dollars and accumulating \$200 billion in unpaid debts.

These developments highlight the issues the Chinese real estate market, and the broader economy, are facing at the moment. Naturally, the headwinds have weighed on the country's stock market as well, with the CSI 300 benchmark

index losing more than 3.3% over the past 5 days.

Interestingly, legendary stock investor Michael Burry dodged the bullet after successfully predicting these challenges.

According to 'Michael Burry Stock Tracker,' the investor sold all of his Chinese stock holdings right before Evergrande's collapse, the Twitter account declared on August 21. Which stocks did Burry sell?

Per the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filings released last week, Burry's fund Scion Asset Management offloaded a large number of shares, particularly in the banking sector.



# Trump Says He Has Immunity. Will the Supreme Court Beg to Differ?

By KIMBERLY WEHLE

On August 4, 2023, one day after pleading not guilty to four federal criminal charges arising from special counsel Jack Smith's investigation into efforts to thwart the 2020 presidential election, former President Donald J. Trump announced on his Truth Social platform that "the Supreme Court must intercede." What he presumably means is that the Supreme Court, on appeal from motions that his trial team will undoubtedly file in all four criminal cases, should rule that his conduct is untouchable because it involved actions taken while he was still president of the United States.

"Everything that President Trump did was while he was in office as president," one of Trump's attorneys, John Lauro, argued on NBC's Meet the Press. "He is now immune from prosecution for acts that he takes in connection with those policy decisions."

Trump has raised broad claims of presidential immunity in litigation before, with mostly poor results. Still, the argument is not entirely frivolous, in part because the Supreme Court has only weighed in on presidential immunity in a handful of cases, and none of those involved indictments of a former president. Even if Trump loses his motions to toss out the indictments on immunity grounds at the trial court level, which is likely, the Supreme Court would almost certainly vote to hear the issue on appeal given the unprecedented nature of these cases and the stakes for the presidency and the country. The issue of how much legal immunity a president or former president enjoys is a somewhat unsettled area of constitutional law. Unlike for members of Congress, who are expressly immune from civil or criminal liability for official acts under the Constitution's Speech or Debate Clause, the Constitution says nothing whatsoever about presidential immunity. And there are only a few Supreme Court decisions that provide precedent for deciding the issue.

One of the first was a unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Mississippi v. Johnson* in 1867 which held that courts could not force the president to enforce the post-Civil War Reconstruction Acts, which then-President Andrew Johnson had vetoed. After Congress overrode the veto, the state of Mississippi asked the court to stop Johnson from enforcing the statutes, claiming they were unconstitutional and violated states' rights. The court held that, because the president's power to execute the law is foundational to the prerogative of the office under Article II of the Constitution, courts could not step in and direct Johnson how to do his job.



Since then, the Supreme Court has offered some additional guidelines for understanding presidential immunity, but none definitively resolve whether all of Trump's relevant conduct in office is fair game for the criminal justice system - or whether some sorts of decisions are immunized.

Going forward, the legal analysis will likely boil down to two questions. The first is whether, by asking DOJ officials to declare the 2020 election "corrupt," for example, or by initiating "catch and kill" hush money payments from the Oval Office in order to bury negative publicity, Trump was acting within the "outer boundaries" of executive policy-making authority. If so, certain acts could conceivably be immune from prosecution or otherwise excised from the scope of the criminal indictments.

The second question is whether greenlighting criminal indictments that implicate even borderline conduct would set a bad precedent that could hamper future presidents from performing their constitutional duties. Even if what Trump did as president was unacceptable, in other words, if it fell within the discretion that presidents need in order to do their jobs, it could be protected.

These are issues that the Supreme Court can and probably should decide in the coming months or years as these four indictments proceed. The question will likely come down to balancing the constitutional interest in cementing expansive discretion and power in the presidency against a broader public interest in ensuring the rule of law applies to everyone, including the president. Because there are no clear lines for striking that balance, it's impossible to rule out that politics and ideology could play a role in that assessment.

Here's what the Supreme Court will have

to weigh in reaching a decision.

No Absolute Presidential Immunity  
After *Mississippi v. Johnson*, the next major case on presidential immunity did not arise until 1974, when President Richard Nixon tried to halt a subpoena directing him to produce tape recordings of his Oval Office

conversations. Special prosecutor Archibald Cox had indicted a slew of Nixon's aides in connection with the Watergate probe. A unanimous Court rejected Nixon's argument that the Constitution provides "an absolute, unqualified presidential privilege of immunity from judicial process under all circumstances."

But, importantly, it left some wiggle room: "A president and those who assist him must be free to explore alternatives in the process of shaping policies and making decisions, and to do so in a way many would be unwilling to express except privately." Balancing the public's interests in justice with the interests of the presidency has been the prevailing standard ever since. In *United States v. Nixon*, the fact that Cox sought the information in connection with a criminal trial tipped the scales against the president, on the rationale that "[t]he very integrity of the judicial system and public confidence in the system must depend on full disclosure of all the facts." Back in 1807, Chief Justice John Marshall, similarly ruled in *United States v. Burr* that President Thomas Jefferson was susceptible to a subpoena for documents because the accused defendant had a right "to prepare for his defense at trial." At the time, Marshall was serving as chief justice for Virginia in connection with the treason trial of Aaron Burr.

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# The Astonishing, Unexpected and Completely Modern Rise of Vivek Ramaswamy



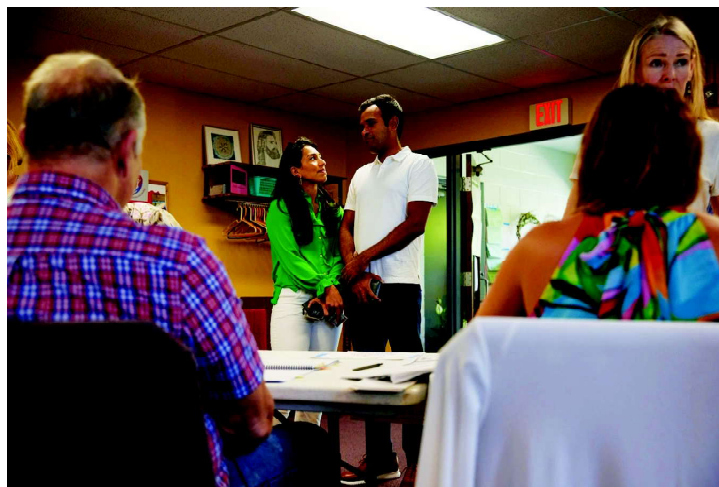
A disembodied voice filters through the hallway of a \$2 million estate in a leafy suburban neighborhood outside Columbus, as the early morning light floods an entryway near a winding staircase. At its base sits an empty chair surrounded by five audio-visual staffers. "Guys, you can't see my feet, right?" says the voice.

A second later, Vivek Ramaswamy materializes, barefoot, in a black suit with parts of his white dress shirt shooting out from beneath his suit vents. He got home at 11 p.m. the night before from Bloomfield Hills, Mich., where his private campaign plane's cabin had de-pressurized and he missed an event. But by 9 a.m. he was already geared up for a day of back-to-back media appearances. He takes a seat in front of a camera. Nearby, Ramaswamy's personal security guard scans an iPad featuring 16 different views of his home, which, Ramaswamy told me, he purchased with cash in 2021.

It's a Tuesday in early August, and the insurgent, mercurial millennial Republican presidential candidate and former biotech entrepreneur is briefly off the trail and back home readying to go on camera. First up is a two-hour podcast interview with Jordan Peterson, the controversial Canadian psychologist. Ramaswamy takes a seat and slides in a pair of AirPods.

He starts talking and he doesn't stop. He once did some 30 interviews in one day alone, and has appeared on more than 150 podcasts since launching his campaign in February. For a while, the only outlet he couldn't get on seemed to be MSNBC, which had not booked him for an interview until recently, something that had clearly gnawed at him before. (A few days after I sent an email asking an MSNBC spokesperson about their rationale for excluding him, Ramaswamy finally scored

an appearance on the network; MSNBC didn't respond to a request for comment.) Today is a "light day" he and his team tell me. He would end up sitting for roughly five hours of interviews. He is only scheduled for: two podcasts; a sit down



with ABC; a conversation with a radio station out of Myrtle Beach, S.C.; an interview with Axios' local Columbus website; an evening standup with NewsNation; and appearances on Fox News and CNN. That's not to mention the two interviews he granted me while we drove around his hometown in his black Cadillac Escalade and a third interview in his backyard that evening as his youngest son Arjun played underfoot.

This is what it takes to go from zero percent in the GOP primary polls in February to 7 percent today. That puts him - at 38, the youngest presidential candidate in the field - solidly in third place. He'll be at center stage at Wednesday's first GOP debate, and if memos on Ron DeSantis' strategy and pre-debate attacks from Mike

Pence and Nikki Haley are any indication, all knives will be out for the political newcomer.

All politicians seek out the glare of cameras and banks of microphones. But no one in the 2024 presidential campaign has been as eager about getting in front of the media as Ramaswamy. In the fractured information landscape of the 2020s, a long-form podcast interview with Jordan Peterson can be far more productive than trying to gladhand in all 99 Iowa counties. His ubiquity is paying off. But it's also what he's saying that's capturing news cycle after news cycle: The candidate who initially built his brand decrying "wokeism" recently vowed to pardon Donald Trump without regard for the seriousness of his charges; he has walked right up to the line and perhaps tiptoed over the edge of 9/11 trutherism, which he would double down on in his interviews with me; and he has raised questions about the "truth" of the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. Later, after he'd finished talking with Peterson,

plane of existence and knowledge. He often peppers his responses with actually, implying that things are different than what you'd assume or expect. "I'm talking to voters that go beyond the traditional Republican primary base," Ramaswamy tells Peterson.

"But everything that I'm saying here applies to the traditional Republican primary base as well. I think that our voters today are hungry for depth, actually, in a way that they may have never been."

Not long into his interview with Peterson, some dishes clink in the sink as a housekeeper toils. Ramaswamy stops the interview, looks at me, and asks me to tell "them," a woman I had never met, to quiet down. I panicked and broke out in a cold sweat. Tricia McLaughlin, a senior adviser to Ramaswamy who just came off the campaign of Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, had disappeared. I heard myself ask the housekeeper if "we could keep it down during the recording," and then awkwardly shrank back into my seat.

This relentlessly, frankly exhausting, all-out strategy of appearing on any and every media platform that will have him is how someone who has never run for office before is breaking through. That disembodied voice I heard as he came downstairs is how many people first encounter him. Tagging along with him as he voted on an Ohio ballot initiative later that day, I heard a man who described himself as one of Ramaswamy's neighbors stop him after he gaggled with local press. "I've been listening to you on all the podcasts," the fan says.

"It's not really a strategy," Ramaswamy told me when I asked him about how he's used media ubiquity to leap ahead of a former vice president and several former and current governors. "It's just how I'm wired."

For Ramaswamy and his campaign, it's content all the way down. For his headquarters, he picked an office inside a rustic, barn-like, two-story former horse stables. Enconced on a picturesque hillside, the building, known as Horizons and shared by several other offices, is about a 3-minute drive from his home. A giant American flag flanks its side. Above the Vivek 2024 branded frosted glass doors hangs a sign that reads: "TRUTH. VIVEK." Horizons is a suite of animation, editing, and audio studios that has done work for companies like pizza chain Donatos and some Columbus automotive outfit called Krazy Kenny's Automotive. The setup couldn't be better for a candidate like Ramaswamy.

Ramaswamy will surpass DeSantis in the betting markets. I know this because he checked his phone as we were riding between his home and his headquarters and he was talking about how such markets were "actually" better indicators than public polling. According to AdImpact, he has spent about \$2 million on TV and digital advertising - much less than his opponents, some of whom have spent 10 times that amount. Instead, he jams his days with bookings on television, radio and podcasts. Ramaswamy puts the "earned" in the phrase "earned media."

As he sits for the Peterson interview at his home this morning, he is flanked by two tasteful plants and an American flag. He speaks with Peterson in a knowing way, like they're both on a different, higher



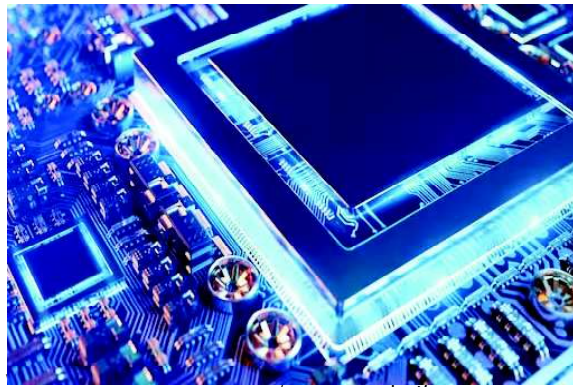
# From Vision to Reality: India's Semiconductor Journey

By: Divya Singh Rathore & Suhani Jain

As the spotlight turns towards India, it is the nation's time to shine as a vibrant semiconductor hub, strengthening global supply chains and reshaping the dynamics of chip manufacturing. The SemiconIndia 2023 conference serves as a strong indication of India's unwavering determination to train the younger generation, propelling the country to the forefront of this vital industry.

During his address at the conference, Prime Minister Narendra Modi aptly captured the rapid transformation that has transpired within just one year. The question no longer lingers as "Why Invest in India," but resounds with a resolute "Why not invest in India." This significant change shows how much India has progressed and makes global stakeholders eager to support and be a part of the country's growing semiconductor industry.

Within the intricate tapestry of cutting-edge technology, semiconductors emerge as diminutive yet indispensable keystones, forming the bedrock for the ever-evolving domain of computing and electronic marvels. From the ubiquitous smartphones and laptops that have become extensions of ourselves to the vast network of interconnectedness



semiconductors weave the very fabric of our interlinked world. Beyond their role in internet infrastructure, semiconductors permeate a vast array of electronic devices.

Moreover, their transformative power extends to the realm of healthcare, where they empower life-saving medical equipment and implantable technologies, like pacemakers and insulin pumps. Additionally, semiconductors find utility in harnessing the sun's energy through solar cells and play a vital role in power electronics, facilitating the creation of advanced sensors for multifaceted applications.

India Semiconductor Mission is a strategic initiative that resonates harmoniously with the theme of India's G20 aspirations - One Earth, One Family, One Future - as well as the 'Make in

mission not only shows India's dedication to utilising its knowledge, capacity, and abilities for the benefit of the world but also demonstrates the country's strong determination to reduce imports and achieve self-sufficiency.

The prime minister rightly summarised, "Our 'Make in India' initiative inherently signifies not just domestic production, but also the creation of goods with global impact." The SemiconIndia Conference, held from April 29 to May 1, 2022, was a pivotal step in bridging industry and government for collaborative policy formulation. It aimed to propel India into a leading role in the upcoming tech revolution.

India's commitment was evident through its \$10 billion allocation to the India Semiconductor Mission. This investment fostered

a conducive environment, cultivating a robust semiconductor industry and positioning India as a global leader. India has emphasised the long-term nature of this endeavour, underlining the meticulous planning and collective efforts to establish India as a premier chip design and manufacturing hub. Signifying a paradigm shift, global giants like Applied Materials invested substantially in India. Their pledge of Rs 1800 crore and the acquisition of land in Bengaluru for manufacturing facilities underscored India's ascent in the semiconductor realm.

Since 2014, India's electronic manufacturing has skyrocketed from under \$30 billion to over \$100 billion today. In the last two years alone, electronics and mobile device exports have doubled. Mobile manufacturing units have surged from a mere two to over 200. Additionally, the number of broadband users has seen a remarkable increase from 60 million to an astounding 800 million, while internet connections have exceeded 850 million.

Backed by an allocation of Rs 76,000 crore, the Central government's policy for semiconductor manufacturing introduces a financial boost. It extends a substantial incentive of 50 per cent of the project expenditure for the establishment

of semiconductor fabs at any level within India, along with corresponding incentives for the establishment of display fabs within the nation. Prime Minister Modi underscored the ongoing Industry 4.0 revolution, which is resonating worldwide. India's population is displaying an inherent inclination and enthusiasm for embracing technology. Across various sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and logistics, India has adeptly harnessed technology. The nation's reservoir of adept engineers and innovative designers stands as a powerful asset. In the contemporary landscape, India, being the world's largest democracy has emerged as a reliable partner in fortifying global supply chains, earning trust on an international scale. The utilisation of semiconductors in India has witnessed a substantial upsurge, propelled by domestic companies such as Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Wipro, and HCL Technologies, which have been instrumental in fostering this expansion.

Every new opportunity brings its fair share of challenges. Within the dynamic domain of the semiconductor industry, a paramount obstacle emerges due to constant innovations and quick technological shifts.

## Who is a Hindu: Why The Debate on 'Hindu Identity' Needs to Settle Now

By: Arun Anand

Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) chief and former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Ghulam Nabi Azad, recently gave a statement that the majority of Indian Muslims have converted to Islam from Hinduism.

This is what Azad said: "In the parliament, once some BJP leader said some (Muslims) have come from outside and some have not. I said no one has come from outside. Islam came into existence just 1,500 years ago. The Hindu religion is very old. Around 10-20 of them (Muslims) might have come from outside. Some were there in the Mughal army. The rest of them converted from Hinduism in India. Kashmir is an example of it. Who were the Muslims in Kashmir some 600 years ago? All were Kashmiri Pandits. They converted to Islam. I am saying all were born in this (Hindu) dhama only."

Azad's statement attracted strong reactions from a section of Indian politicians sparking a debate. This isn't a new debate, it gets re-ignited now and then,

in both the domestic and global arenas. The issue at the core of this debate is: Who is a Hindu?

WHO IS A HINDU?

There have been many definitions of the term 'Hindu'. But the most commonly accepted definition is that it was a term used to denote a civilisation that carried certain cultural values that were imbibed in the concept of 'dharma'. There is no equivalent term in English for 'dharma', though the closest is righteousness, perhaps. Most of the fallacies in understanding 'Hindu Dharma' has emerged due to the misinterpretation of the term 'dharma' as religion.

'Dharma' is a Sanskrit term and it means a way of life whereas 'religion' denotes a way of worship. Dharma in practice comprises the unchanging, eternal, universal laws and the ever-changing socio-economic order in the light of these laws. Perceived oneness in the midst of all diversities (Avibhaktam Vibhakteshu) has been the eternal message of Sanatana Dharma or Hindu Dharma.

In the early years of the 20th century, religion was used interchangeably with the word dharma due to impact of the British colonialism on Indian public discourse. Similarly, many philosophers used the word 'Hinduism' also, including Swami Vivekananda. However, 'ism' also denotes a dogma such as 'capitalism', 'socialism' etc. When we talk about 'ism', we are talking about a certain set of rigid rules that create an ideological framework. But 'Hindu Dharma' isn't a dogmatic framework. Hence, many Indian philosophers also used these terms interchangeably while writing in English on Hindu philosophy, history, culture and civilisation in the 19th and 20th centuries due to the constraints of colonialism. It is most evident from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, who initially talked about the Hindu 'religion' in his famous Uttarpara Speech. But in his later works, he elaborated upon Hindu 'Dharma'. Dr S Radhakrishnan and Radha Kumud Mookerji also followed the same path. So, as we move ahead, the word 'religion'

used by the Indian philosophers and ideologues may be read as 'dharma' as that was their intent. The word 'Sanatana' means eternal and as Hindu Dharma is considered to be eternal so 'Sanatana Dharma', Hinduism, Hindu religion and 'Hindu Dharma' had been used interchangeably. But the true essence of Hindu civilisation can be explained by the words Hindu Dharma and Sanatana Dharma. It would help the readers to read the word 'religion' as 'dharma' whenever used in the quotes of the early 19th and 20th century Indian philosophers.

In his famous speech delivered at Uttarpara Jaikrishna library on May 30, 1909, Sri Aurobindo said, "What is the Hindu religion? What is this religion which we call Sanatana, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this Peninsula, it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas because in this sacred and ancient land, it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. But it is not circumscribed by the

# Why China Is So Desperate To Put India In Its Place



**Written By: Minhaz Merchant**

For decades, China regarded India as a geopolitical upstart, to be taught the occasional military and diplomatic lesson to keep it in its proper place.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will run into Prime Minister Narendra Modi twice between August 22 (BRICS) and September 9 (G20). The meetings between the two leaders will be brisk, business-like, shorn of diplomatic niceties as the confrontation at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) festers.

When Xi arrives in New Delhi on September 9, 2023, for the G20 heads of government summit, he will be aware of a new reality. India is a rising power. China's own rise has stalled.

The stall isn't temporary. China's three golden decades when GDP growth often crossed 10 per cent a year are over. But a terminally slowing economy isn't Xi's only worry. Beijing is confronted by an increasingly hostile United States-led West.

At next month's G20 summit in New Delhi, six of the world's seven largest economies will be ranged against Xi - the US, Japan, Germany, India, Britain and France.

Russian President Vladimir Putin won't be there to offer support to Xi. Others like Saudi Arabia's Mohammad bin-Salman and South Africa's president Cyril Ramaphosa will hedge their bets. Xi's effort to stamp China's diplomatic imprint on Middle East politics has met with mixed success. Beijing brokered a détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia and nudged the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to re-admit Syria. Xi hosted Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Beijing to revive moves

for a two-state solution to the Palestine problem.

But China is far from imposing its writ on the Middle East. Washington may be distracted by the Russia-Ukraine war and febrile domestic politics, but it still has military bases across the region. China has so far been able to establish only one significant military base globally, in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa.

China's relationship with Europe has meanwhile deteriorated. Italy, Beijing's beachhead to Western Europe, is set to withdraw from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's support of Russia in the Ukraine war could end Beijing's ambitious attempt to build a new Silk Route across Eurasia.

Despite mounting problems at home and abroad, China is still the world's second largest economy and a technological powerhouse. It leads the world in automation, quantum computing, machine learning and electric vehicles (EVs). Tesla's gigafactory in Shanghai produces more passenger EVs than the US firm's anchor plant in Austin, Texas.

But in the industry that today matters more than any other - chip-making - China is being shut out. The three global leaders in the complex chip manufacturing and design ecosystem are the US, the Netherlands and Taiwan.

Washington's Chips and Science Act, passed into law in August 2022, has effectively barred advanced chip technology transfer to China. This means China will remain one, possibly two generations behind the West in the world's most critical cutting-edge industry.

**THE XI FACTOR**

Xi knows that China is growing older. Its

public debt is over 282 per cent of GDP - twice America's 130 per cent. When Xi took over as president in 2012, China had just ended a five-year period of spectacular growth. In 2006, China's GDP was \$2.75 trillion. In 2011, China's GDP had nearly tripled within five rampaging years to \$7.55 trillion.

India was meanwhile in the throes of political paralysis in 2011 under the Congress-led UPA government. The Congress enjoyed cordial relations with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The two parties signed an MoU in 2008, its contents still undisclosed.

Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) reported on August 7, 2008: "India's ruling Congress and the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Thursday signed a pact to put in place a mechanism that would help regular high-level exchanges between them, soon after party chief Sonia Gandhi arrived in Beijing with her family for the Olympics inaugural ceremony. The memorandum of understanding (MoU) also provides the two parties the opportunity to consult each other on important bilateral, regional and international developments."

"The MoU was signed by the Chinese vice-president and standing committee member of the CPC's politburo, Xi Jinping, and Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi in the presence of his mother and party president Sonia Gandhi, sources told IANS. 'It is strictly on a party-to-party basis,' a source said."

"Before the signing of the MoU, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi held a meeting with Xi and other senior leaders of the Communist Party of China and held discussions on issues of mutual interest, the sources said. Xi, one of the most

prominent leaders of China, is widely believed to be a strong contender for the president's post in 2012."

"The fact that China, though aware of the recent developments in India, decided to go ahead and sign this document shows it is trying to build a relationship with the Congress, and the Nehru-Gandhi family in particular, that goes beyond the UPA government."

When the Narendra Modi-led NDA came to power in May 2014, a little more than a year after Xi took office, the Chinese president tried to assess him first-hand at their informal Ahmedabad summit in September 2014. Xi's glamorous singer-wife Peng Liyuan joined the two leaders at the Sabarmati riverfront.

Two more informal summit followed in Wuhan (2018) and Mahabalipuram (2019). They allowed both men to take a measure of the other. Neither came away satisfied. Xi recognised that Modi was cut from different cloth from Congress leaders he had met.

Modi had meanwhile formed a close strategic partnership with the US-led West. India, Xi decided, needed to be taught a lesson. Chinese incursions in eastern Ladakh began in April 2020, early into Modi's second term as prime minister.

**LEADING SUPERPOWER?**

China's oft-stated ambition is to be the world's leading superpower by 2049, the centenary of the CCP's founding. But to achieve that objective, Xi knows China must first be an unrivalled regional power across Asia. The only country that has the size and scale, militarily and economically, to thwart China's absolute supremacy in the parabolic arc from the South China Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, cutting through East Asia, South Asia and West Asia, is India.

Since Modi had not accepted India's subsidiary status to China through diplomacy in the Ahmedabad, Wuhan and Mahabalipuram summits, Xi concluded that New Delhi must be put in its place through other means.

Galwan Valley followed. India's strong subsequent military build-up across the entire LAC came as a shock to Beijing's mandarins, used to India's supplicanry silence over Tibet and Taiwan.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), India's GDP by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in 2022-23 was \$13,033 against China's \$33,014. The gap is now 2.5x and narrowing with every passing year as India's GDP grows at twice the average annual rate of China's GDP.

If China cannot exert supremacy over India militarily and economically, how can it exert it over the US-led West? Instead of the G2 architecture of global power between the US and China that Xi believed was inevitable, India, the interloper, could convert that into a G3 with two angles of the triangle, the US and India, aligned against China.

It will therefore be a thoughtful and subdued Xi we will likely see in New Delhi



# Why are Countries Interested in Being Part of an Expanding BRICS?

By: Anushka Saxena

The 2023 BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) Summit is scheduled to be held from September 22 to 24 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Pre-Summit deliberations show that there are some unique and significant developments to look out for.

For one, Russian President Vladimir Putin will skip the summit for the first time on account of an International Criminal Court warrant issued against him, which makes him liable to be arrested for a war crimes trial upon his visit to South Africa. The other is the expansion of BRICS, which is set to be taken up for an elaborate discussion at the summit.

Interestingly, the expansion of BRICS to include new member countries isn't just the novel acronym they would likely have to come up with, but also why over 40 countries have expressed interest to be part of it. Then there is the issue of the induction criteria for new members, and how such an expansion, if successful, would impact existing members.

The precedent for the formalisation of BRICS expansion lies in the creation of a 'BRICS-Plus Circle' at the 2017 Summit, where China invited Egypt, Kenya, Tajikistan, Mexico, and Thailand with an aim to promote openness, inclusiveness and cooperation between BRICS member countries and other emerging



market economies and developing countries. Before that, in 2016, India had invited Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka to attend the summit.

Since then, not only has expansion been a part of the agenda across summits, but the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) has also included three new member states under its financing ambit - Bangladesh, United Arab Emirates, and Egypt.

Ahead of the 2023 Summit, countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Argentina, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, and Indonesia have formally applied to be BRICS members. There are reportedly many more on the list. And this is despite all of BRICS's shortcomings. Not to mention, there is a lot of scepticism regarding China's sustained emphasis on expansion.

Analysts argue that other BRICS members, India in particular, are wary of China using the

expansion route to create a loyalist bloc of its own within the organisation. Similarly, both India and Brazil have advocated a cautious approach toward expansion, with India arguing in the Beijing Declaration at the 2022 Summit that there need to "clarify the guiding principles, standards, criteria and procedures for this expansion process," with "full consultation and consensus."

Brazil, in particular, wanted to invite Venezuela to be part of the BRICS Outreach Session at the 2019 Summit, but because the other members did not recognize Venezuelan President Juan Guaidó at the time, they refused. Exposing internal fault lines, Brazil cancelled the Outreach Summit.

So why are countries still applying to join BRICS?

There are a few reasons other developing economies may want to be part of the grouping. First is the prestige and brand name attached to BRICS. In 2022,

Brazilian Minister for Foreign Affairs Mauro Vieira said: "BRICS is a brand and an asset, so we have to take care of it, as it means a represents a lot." The statement sheds light on the value BRICS members assign to the organisation's image as a representative of developing economies.

Naturally, Global South countries that are vying for a greater say in global governance may find merit in membership of such an organization. For example, analysts argue that because Mexico, which has expressed interest in joining BRICS, fears military intervention from the US in its cartel wars, being part of the grouping may eventually earn it a sense of security, while also fostering its global influence.

Secondly, there are multiple economic opportunities that accompany membership in BRICS. For example, new members may find it easy to access India and China's large markets.

They would also be able to access funding from the NDB and other intra-BRICS economic mechanisms such as the Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (ICM). Established at the 2013 BRICS Summit in Durban, ICM allows member countries to settle payments and finance investments in local currencies. Even the NDB has announced that as part of its 2022-2026 strategic cycle, 30 per cent of the Bank's total financing volume will be denominated in local currencies of its members.

For countries facing economic difficulties in the aftermath of Western sanctions against Russia amidst the war in Ukraine, and are otherwise also subject to sanctions by the US and its allies (such as Iran), access to capital under such mechanisms may alleviate some of their woes. And finally, there is a sense of equality between countries that comes with a BRICS membership. Because the grouping has a flat hierarchy, there is consensus and equal say on all matters, and any finalised decision is the best common minimum all member countries agree on.

Of course, with the inclusion of new members, the process will likely become more elaborate and complex. But decisions taken will also be more representative of the wishes of emerging markets and economies. It is precisely also this consensus-based decision-making that insulates the process of expansion from influence-peddling by the Chinese or the Russians. How might it impact current members?

Many of the existing BRICS member countries have reason to shun expansion. For India, it may be suspicion regarding China's inclusion of countries economically indebted to it, and therefore more likely to be influenced by Chinese actions. For South Africa, it may be that the inclusion of countries with significantly more economic output worth than its own US\$400 billion - such as Mexico, Indonesia, or Argentina - may reduce its value as one of the five initial BRICS members. For Brazil, it may be that the cohesion of the grouping will be further undermined by the introduction of new members, and the overall prestige of this exclusive grouping could potentially diminish.

At the same time, Russia and China may find partners within the expanded grouping that can help advance their increasingly vocal anti-West agenda, including in other multilateral institutions. Russia is especially in need of support from as many countries as possible amidst its tarnished image owing to the Ukraine war.

As the process of the grouping's expansion is underway, India's priorities would lie in making sure that principled guidelines are laid out to set benchmarks for membership, in creating space for consensus-building against the possibility of Chinese influence-peddling, and in attempting to retain the image and brand value of BRICS as a community of developing market economies demanding more voice in global governance.





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