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# Indian student attacked for using Canada food bank claims racial bias

(Sai Bureau)-An Indian data scientist who has faced vitriolic attack over his video showing how he used food banks in Canada has claimed it was racial bias that got people to target him. He told IndiaToday.In that he feared for his safety and hadn't ventured out of his room for the last six days.

The Indian data scientist, Mehul Prajapati, who is on a student visa in Canada, reached out to IndiaToday.In to share his side of the story after facing attacks over his video. The video showed how he used food banks, meant for the underprivileged and struggling students, to stock up on groceries and save money.

The now-deleted video went viral and he faced backlash. Many people pointed out that Prajapati's salary, reportedly around 98,000 Canadian dollars per year, meant he did not need to rely on food banks intended for struggling students.

They tagged his employer, TD Bank, and sought action against him. TD Bank confirmed that Prajapati was no longer working with it.

Mehul Prajapati arrived in Canada in 2022



on a student visa to pursue a master's degree at Wilfrid Laurier University. As an international student, he highlighted the challenges, including financial strain and mental stress, of being away from family in a foreign country. While sharing his story with IndiaToday.In, Prajapati said it wasn't possible for him to have worked full-time with TD Bank because he was on a student visa. Regarding his employment status, Prajapati explained that his course included an internship, which concluded

on December 22, 2023. Since then, he hasn't worked for any organisation.

The university, in collaboration with Laurier Students' Public Interest Research Group (LSPIRG) and Martin Luther University College, provides free groceries for students facing food insecurity.

Prajapati said his video was for educational purposes and meant for international students. He also said he only mentioned his college's food bank,

not government-run food banks, in his video. "The resource mentioned in the video is meant for university students specifically, not the general public. Everything I mentioned is factual, as per the website," said Prajapati.

The college website elaborates on the programme, stating that it offers free groceries and essentials for Laurier and Luther students in need.

To access this, students must be enrolled at either college and have proper identification. Prajapati had also volunteered for the program previously.

"LSPIRG and Martin Luther University College welcome you to our Free Weekly Distro program to combat food insecurity on campus. We provide free groceries and other essentials for Laurier and Luther students who need them," college website read.

"Take as much as you need. We do not limit how much students take because we don't know how much you need," the college website added.

In the video, he emphasised checking university websites, as the content was tailored for students.

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# BJP winning 35 seats in Bengal will guarantee freedom from illegal infiltration: Amit

Kolkata : If the BJP winning 18 seats in West Bengal during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls can ensure the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, bagging 35 seats this time will surely guarantee freedom from illegal infiltration, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday. Addressing an election rally at Karandighi under the Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency in North Dinajpur district, Amit Shah said: "The people of West Bengal voted in large numbers for the BJP candidates in 2019. Thereafter, the Ram Temple in Ayodhya became a reality. If the number (of BJP seats) goes up to 35 this time, the people of West Bengal will get freedom from the menace of illegal infiltration." A major part of the Home Minister's 20-minute speech focused on illegal infiltration, as he launched a scathing



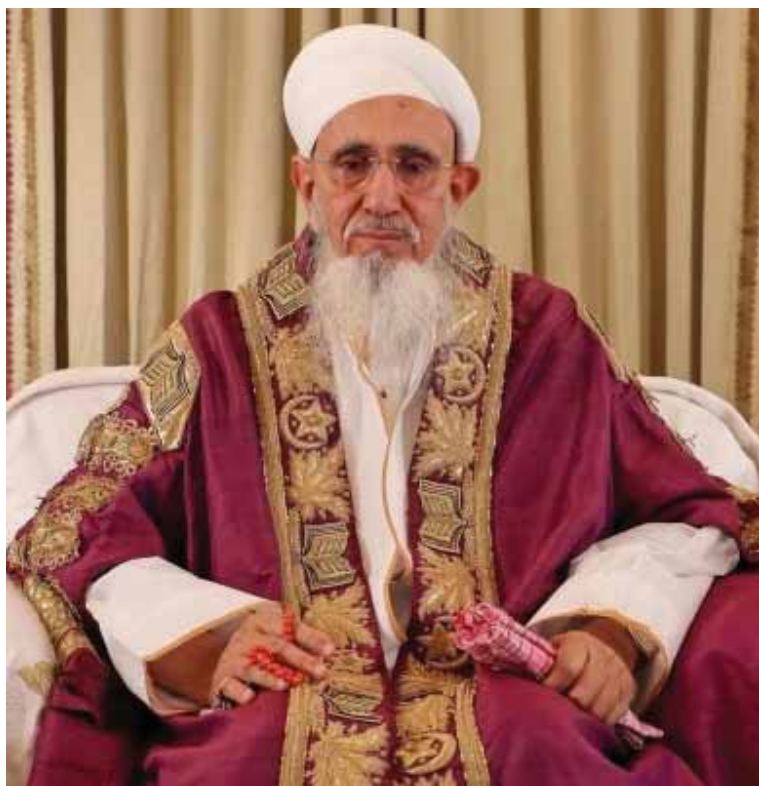
attack against Mamata Banerjee, saying: "Instead of resisting illegal infiltration, the Chief Minister is pampering the infiltrators for vote bank politics. "In Sandeshkhali, she tried to protect those responsible for harass-

ment of women because of the same vote bank politics. But after the women raised their voices, the authorities were forced to take action and send the accused behind bars." He also said the country needs Narendra Modi as

the Prime Minister for a third straight term to free the nation from the menace of illegal infiltration and to grant citizenship to the genuine refugees. "The Chief Minister is encouraging illegal infiltration and also opposing the

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Even the Congress has said that if it comes to power, it will withdraw CAA. I dare the Congress and the Trinamool to block CAA if they can," the Home Minister said. He also said that only the BJP can end the reign of corruption in West Bengal, where every government job is sold. "A massive amount of Rs 51 crore was recovered from the residence of a close aide of Partha Chatterjee, who is behind bars now. But Mamata Banerjee is yet to suspend her from the party," Amit Shah said. The Home Minister also said that an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) will be set up in North Bengal, which has been a long-standing demand of the people of the region, if the BJP retains power for a third consecutive term.

## Bombay HC rejects suit challenging Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin's elevation as Dawoodi Bohra community chief



ing the suit, Justice Patel noted that he had kept the verdict as neutral as possible and had pronounced the judgement "based on the issue of proof and note faith". The row had erupted after the passing of the 52nd Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin on January 17, 2014, paving the way for his son, Mufaddal Saifuddin to take over as the new 53rd Syedna,

the spiritual and religious head of the Dawoodi Bohras, spread globally. However, the late 52nd Syedna's step-brother Khuzaima Qutbuddin anointed himself as Syedna headquarters in Thane and challenged the elevation of Mufaddal Saifuddin as the 53rd Syedna, at the traditional base in Mumbai. Among other things, Syedna Khuzaima

Qutbuddin – who passed away in the US in 2016 – claimed that the late 52nd Syedna had privately conferred 'nass' (the official successor or inheritor) upon him in December 1965, which was valid as per the Bohra doctrine and precedents, and that Mufaddal Saifuddin had taken over as 53rd Syedna in a fraudulent manner.

## NCP has not left its claim over Nashik, clarifies Chhagan Bhujbal

Mumbai : Senior NCP leader and Samata Parishad founder Chhagan Bhujbal on Tuesday said that his party has not left its claim over the Nashik seat as it has many names for nomination. Bhujbal's statement comes days after he opted out of the electoral fray but now he has clarified that NCP is also a claimant over the Nashik seat along with Shiv Sena and BJP. He also indicated that the deadlock still continues saying that it will soon end. Bhujbal gave his statement after the meeting of the Samata Parishad members who strongly demanded that he should contest the Nashik Lok Sabha seat. His statement also came a day after party working President Praful Patel revealed that NCP has not left its claim over Nashik seat and the discussions with BJP and Shiv Sena were in progress. "Our (NCP) claim on the Nashik seat

remains. We have many candidates including former MP Devidas Pingle, MLA Manikrao Kokate, and district president Purna Balakwade. Similarly, front runners from BJP include Dinkar Patil and Shantigiri Maharaj and from Shiv Sena the sitting MP Hemant Godse and Ajay Boraste. One thing is clear we will all campaign for the MahaYuti candidate after it is finalised," said Bhujbal. Bhujbal admitted that the Samata Parishad activists are insisting that he should contest from the Nashik constituency though he has taken a decision to opt out of the electoral fray. "Activists are insisting that I should contest the elections. I listened to their views. They are our colleagues and I respect them. Different factors work in politics. But I have taken a decision not to contest the Lok Sabha elections," he said.

Mumbai : Ending a decade-long legal battle, the Bombay High Court on Tuesday upheld the elevation of Dawoodi Bohra community's spiritual leader Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin as the 'Dai-al-Mutlaq' and dismissed a suit filed by his cousin, Syedna Taher Fakhruddin. The much-anticipated verdict was pronounced by Justice G. S. Patel, just a couple of days before his superannuation, in the high-profile succession case that had shaken up the small sect of Shias. The long-winded trial in the Syedna succession controversy was concluded nearly two years ago, the final arguments were taken up in November 2022 and ended in April 2023, and the reserved verdict was delivered on Tuesday. Dismiss-

# Human Society making the mistake of forgetting the importance of forests: President Murmu

By Jag Mohan Thaken

Forests are life givers and the human society is making the mistake of forgetting the importance of forests. The reality is that forests have preserved life on earth, said the President of India, Smt Droupadi Murmu while addressing the officer trainees of Indian Forest Service (2022 batch) at their convocation ceremony at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy, Dehradun on Wednesday.

The President said, "Today we talk about the Anthropocene Age, which is the period of human-centric development. During this period, disastrous results have emerged along with development. Unsustainable exploitation of resources has brought humanity to a point where the standards of development have to be re-evaluated."

She stressed on the importance of understanding that we are not the owners of the earth's resources, but we are trustees. Our priorities should be ecocentric along with anthropocentric. In fact, only by being ecocentric we will be able to be truly anthropocentric, she stated.

The President said that in many parts of the world the loss of forest resources has occurred very rapidly. "Destruction of forests is in a way - destruction of humanity. It is a well-known fact that conservation of earth's biodiversity and natural beauty is a very important task which we have to do very quickly."

President Murmu said that human life can be saved from the crisis through conservation and promotion of forests and wildlife. We can repair the damage at a faster pace with the help of Science and Technology. For example, the Miyawaki Method is being adopted in many places. Artificial Intelligence can help in identifying suitable areas for afforestation and area specific tree species. She stated that there is a need to assess various such options and develop solutions suitable to the geographical conditions of India.

The President said that the chariot of development has two wheels – tradition and modernity. Today human society is bearing the brunt of many environmental problems. One of the main reasons for this is a special type of modernity, the root of which is the exploitation of nature. Traditional knowledge is neglected in this process.

President Murmu said that tribal society has made the eternal laws of nature the basis of their life. People of this society conserve nature. But, under the impulse of unbalanced modernity, some people consider the tribal community and their collective wisdom primitive. Tribal society



has no role in climate change but the burden of its ill effects is disproportionately more on them.

The President said that it is very important to understand the importance of the knowledge accumulated by tribal society over centuries and use it to improve the environment. She stated that their collective wisdom can help us move forward on an ecologically sustainable, ethically desirable and socially justifiable path. She stressed that we will have to unlearn many misconceptions and relearn from the ideals of a balanced lifestyle of the tribal society. We have to move forward with the spirit of climate justice.

President Murmu said that the Industrial

Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries increased the demand for timber and other forest products. New rules, regulations and methods of forest use were adopted to cope with the demand. To implement such rules and regulations, the Imperial Forest Service, the predecessor service of the Indian Forest Service, was formed. The mandate of that service was not to protect the tribal society and forest wealth. Their mandate was to promote the objectives of the British Raj by exploiting India's forest resources to the maximum.

Referring to the mass hunting of wild animals during the British period, the President said that when she visits museums where animal skins or severed

heads adorn the walls, she feels that those exhibits are telling the story of the decline of human civilization.

The President said that she was confident that the officers of the Indian Forest Service had become completely free from the colonial mentality and outlook of the former Imperial Forest Service. She stated that IFS officers not only have to conserve and augment India's natural resources but also use the traditional knowledge in the interest of humanity. They have to protect the forest wealth by synchronizing modernity and tradition and advancing the interests of the people whose life is based on forests. By doing this, they will be able to make a contribution that is truly inclusive and congenial to the environment.

President Murmu said that the Indian Forest Service has given many officers to the country who have done unparalleled work for the environment. IFS officers such as P. Srinivas, Sanjay Kumar Singh, S. Manikandan have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. She urged the officer trainees to make such officers their role models and mentors and move forward on the ideals shown by them. The President urged IFS officers to spend time among the tribal people in the field and earn their affection and trust. She said that they should learn from the good practices of the tribal society. She also urged them to take ownership of their responsibilities and become a role model.

## BJP's Arun Govil on outsider tag: 'Was born and brought up in Meerut'

(News Agency)-BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from Meerut Arun Govil, who played the role of Lord Ram in the iconic television serial "Ramayan" in the 1980s, on Friday said it was not true that he was an outsider in the constituency. "Don't know who you call an outsider, I don't understand.... There are many people here whose children leave for America after Class 10 and then never come back. Then, will they be called outsiders. They don't call them outsiders. I was born and brought up here. I have even done my studies here. Then, how am I an outsider?," Arun Govil, who will be making his electoral debut, said in response to questions from a journalist. I want to ask everyone to cast their votes. Voting percentage should always remain high. It is our responsibility towards the nation and also a right towards self. We should exercise our rights... We will



definitely cross 400-mark," he further added. Polling in eight parliamentary constituencies of Uttar Pradesh, including Meerut, began at 7 am on Friday in the second phase of the Lok Sabha election. Arun Govil is set against Samajwadi Party's Dalit candidate Sunita Verma in Meerut, most interesting battle to watch out for.

Arun Govil (66), who was among the 111 people named in the BJP's fifth list of candidates, replaces three-time MP Rajendra Agarwal who has been holding the Meerut seat since 2004.

The veteran actor joined the BJP in 2021 and praised PM Modi for his government's policies and changing the political narratives.

# BJP hits back with Manmohan Singh video after Congress chief writes to PM

**A day after Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking to enlighten him about the party's manifesto, the BJP clapped back by digging up an old video of former PM Manmohan Singh.**

(News Agency)-

A day after Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking to enlighten him about the party's manifesto, the BJP has clapped back by digging up a video of former PM Manmohan Singh and what he said about minorities being entitled to preferential treatment.

According to the BJP, in a video from April 2009, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, "Minorities, particularly Muslim minorities, if they are poor, have prior claim to the resources of the nation."

April 2009: In the run up to Lok Sabha election, Dr Manmohan Singh, reiterated his statement that minorities, especially poor Muslims, should get priority when it comes to the nation's resources. He categorically stated that he stood by his earlier assertion that Muslims should



sNTYa5WSfM — BJP (@BJP4India) April 26, 2024 Latching on to Singh's remark, the BJP used it as fresh ammunition against the Congress amid the ongoing row over its alleged "wealth redistribution plan". PM Modi had touched off the controversy when he said at a poll rally that the Congress had promised to snatch away the

assertion that Muslims should have first right when it comes to resources," the BJP said in a caption to the video.

The saffron party stated that Manmohan Singh's past remarks bolster its claims that the Congress has a policy of giving preferential treatment to the Muslim community.

"This unequivocal assertion by Dr Manmohan Singh demolishes the Congress' canards and clarifications on his previous statement... This is further proof of the Congress mindset to give preference to Muslims in everything, from reservation to resources," the BJP alleged.

This line of attack by the BJP came after Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to PM Modi, claiming that he was being misinformed by his advisors about things that are not mentioned in the Congress 'Nyay Patra' or manifesto.

In his two-page letter, Kharge

sought time from the Prime Minister to meet him in person and "explain our Nyay Patra so that as the Prime Minister you don't make statements that are false". PM Modi had alleged that when the Congress was in power under Manmohan Singh, it said Muslims have the first right to the country's wealth. "This means that they will gather this property and distribute it among people who have more children, among infiltrators. Will your hard-earned money be given to infiltrators? Do you accept this? The Congress manifesto is saying this," the PM had said.

The Congress has denied these allegations and said their manifesto had no such promise. Its manifesto says that if elected, the party will conduct a nationwide socio-economic and caste census.

The Prime Minister, however, has doubled down, repeating his charge in rally after rally.

## UP's 8 Lok Sabha seats see 3-cornered fight as Phase 2 of polling begins

**Voting in Uttar Pradesh's eight Lok Sabha seats, where a three-cornered fight is on the cards, began at 7 am in the second phase of general elections. The BJP, Congress and Samajwadi Party have fielded their candidates in these seats.**



(News Agency)-Polling in eight parliamentary constituencies of Uttar Pradesh began at 7 am on Friday in the

second phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

Among the 91 candidates in the fray in this phase are actor-

turned-politicians Hema Malini, seeking a third term from Mathura on a BJP ticket, and Arun Govil, who portrayed the role of Lord

Ram in the famed television serial 'Ramayan'. Voting is taking place in the Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddh Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh and Mathura constituencies.

The ruling BJP has fielded Govil from his native place Meerut, Atul Garg from Ghaziabad and Mahesh Sharma from Gautam Buddh Nagar.

Danish Ali of the Congress is contesting the polls from Amroha.

Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of 80 parliamentary constituencies among all states and polling will be held here in all seven phases of the election. Staggered over seven stages, the first phase of the general election saw voting in eight constituencies of the state on April 19.

With the ruling NDA, the INDIA bloc and the Bahujan Samaj

Party (BSP) fielding their candidates, a three-cornered contest is on the cards. The stakes are high for the BJP as of the eight constituencies where polling is underway, it had won seven in the 2019 election while the BSP had bagged Amroha.

There are more than 1.67 crore voters, 7,797 polling stations and 17,704 polling booths in these eight Lok Sabha constituencies. According to the Uttar Pradesh Police, 6,841 inspectors and sub-inspectors, 39,642 head constables and constables, and 28,784 home-guard personnel, along with 60 companies of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and 239 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), have been deployed to ensure security. According to Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa, the polling will continue till 6 pm.

# PM Modi's 'do shehzade' jab at Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav at UP rally

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a veiled attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and alleged that "two princes" came together for politics of appeasement.**

(News Agency)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday hit out at the alliance of Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress in Uttar Pradesh and alleged that 'do shehzade' (two princes) have come together for the politics of appeasement. Without taking any names but in an apparent attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and SP president Akhilesh Yadav, Modi said, "Can you expect development from the flop pair of 'Do ladkon ki jodi' (a pair of boys)?" PM Modi addressed a rally here in support of the BJP candidates from Shahjahanpur and nearby Lok Sabha constituencies. "Politics of appeasement is the biggest reason for the 'do shehzade' to come together," he said.

Accusing the Congress of indulging in vote bank politics, PM Modi said the party plans to implement the Karnataka model of reservation across the country where quota was given to the Muslim community after reducing the share of the OBC communities.

"I am also an OBC and I was scared by this Karnataka model. If I am scared, what would have happened to you," said PM Modi.

He went on to say he understood the pain of the poor and gave reservation for the economically weaker sections of the

general category.

PM Modi alleged that the leaders of the Congress shed tears on the death of terrorists. He appealed to the voters "to send a strong message with your vote to those with an anti-national mindset".

"The biggest leader of the Congress party shed tears on the death of terrorists. Can such people be given power in the country?" he said.

He went on to allege that the SP searched every kind of legal way to bring the jailed terrorists out.

Expressing confidence that he will form the government again for the third time, the prime minister said, "Modi will hold the corrupt accountable after forming government with your blessings after June 4."

Mounting an attack on the SP, PM Modi said, "Shahjahanpur and this entire region was a victim of 'Samajwadi sab kuch thap pariyojna' (everything stalled project). The road infrastructure here was stalled, electricity arrangement was stalled, health services were stalled and law and order was stalled. This project was stopped by Yogi Adityanath and his team."

He recounted the development projects being undertaken in the region under the BJP government.



The prime minister said he sought votes after giving an account of the development in the country and accused the SP and the Congress of not doing the same.

Attacking the law and order situation in the previous governments, PM Modi asked, "Before Modi came to power, a warning to stay away from unknown objects was displayed at the railway stations and on radio and TV because there was a fear that the object might be a bomb. Have you ever heard such a message after Modi came to power in 2014? Is there any fear of a bomb explosion now?" Modi said the trustees of the Ram temple invited the Congress leaders at the consecration ceremony but they refused it. "They refused the invitation of the consecration ceremony and called the Ram 'bhakts' (devotees) 'pakhandi' (hypocrites). Do such people even have the

right of even a single vote? Should they not be weeded out?" he asked.

Talking about the Congress, Modi said the party makes noises about the Constitution and democracy when they want to do a major misdeed, but they implemented Emergency in the 70s. "The Congress has released its flop film again. It has two dialogues. The first is that dictatorship will come if Modi comes to power. Do you agree with this?" he said. "The second is that reservation will be removed if Modi comes to power. But once the people put the trailer of their film in their manifesto, the country got the inkling of their hidden agenda," he added. Modi alleged that the Congress has said they will conduct an 'X-Ray examination' of the people's properties and land, and distribute them among their "favourite vote bank".

## Lok Sabha polls: India votes in Phase 2, battle of big guns in Kerala

**In the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections, 88 seats across 13 states are up for grabs. All eyes are on the high-profile seats of Wayanad and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala as well as Mathura and Meerut in Uttar Pradesh.**

(News Agency)-Voting has started in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections for 88 seats across 13 states. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged citizens, especially the young and women voters, to vote in "record numbers".

Several people have cast their votes, including BJP veteran and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje, author and philanthropist Sudha Murty and her husband and Infosys founder Narayana Murthy, actor Prakash Raj, Team India coach Rahul Dravid, and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, among others. Meanwhile, violence broke out outside a polling station in Bengal's Balurghat.

The second phase is seeing a big battle in Kerala where many high-profile candidates are in the fray, such as Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad, and Shashi Tharoor against Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar in Thiruvananthapuram. BJP leader Hema Malini is also in the run in this phase from Uttar Pradesh's Mathura.



Phase 2 Lok Sabha Elections: Latest Developments

Voting across 88 seats in 13 seats is currently underway in the second phase of Lok Sabha polls. Visuals showed people queueing up outside polling booths to cast votes. Polling is underway in all 20 constituencies in Kerala in the second phase. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his family and the state's Leader of Opposition have cast their votes.

The BJP and the ruling Trinamool Congress in Bengal exchanged claims over voters being influenced in Balurghat and Raiganj. Trinamool said that central forces were undermining the democratic process and stopping women voters, while the BJP hit back, with its Bengal chief Sukanta Majumdar claiming the ruling party was distributing money among voters.

Violence has been reported outside a

polling station in Balurghat from where BJP Bengal chief Sukanta Majumdar is seeking re-election. "Go back slogans" were raised against him, and massive police forces rushed to control the situation. The Trinamool Congress has alleged that the BJP tried to create tension as voting was underway peacefully.

As of 9 am, Maharashtra recorded the lowest voter turnout with 7.45 per cent, and Tripura recorded the highest with 16.65 per cent.

Congress's Jalore pick in Rajasthan Vaibhav Gehlot said there is "enthusiasm" among the people for his party. "I am 100% confident that people are bringing a change in Jalore this time," Vaibhav Gehlot, who is the son of ex-Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, said. Vaibhav Gehlot is contesting against BJP's Lumbaram Chaudhary in Jalore.

All eyes are on Kerala's Wayanad, where Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is eyeing a second term. He is up against CPI's Annie Raja and BJP Kerala chief K Surendran.

## China is silent on the Middle East crisis. It has a new friend to appease

A hallmark of great powers is their ability to mediate conflicts and wield influence over other countries. Yet, both the United States and China face challenges in this aspect. Despite China successfully brokering the Saudi Arabia-Iran deal in 2023, doubts persist about its efficacy in ongoing conflicts. The Israel-Hamas conflict has endured for over six months with no end in sight, drawing in additional stakeholders. On 13 April 2024, Iran's retaliatory drone and missile strike on Israel heightened tensions and edged the region closer to a full-scale war.

In one of its initial responses, China urged all relevant parties to exercise restraint to prevent further escalation. During a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi strongly condemned the attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus on 1 April, denouncing it as "a clear violation of international law and utterly unacceptable".

However, the absence of equally forceful language directed toward Israel in this exchange was notable. There was a robust declaration of understanding for Iran, framed as an act of self-defence against territory sovereignty violations. The Chinese side even drew parallels between the attack on Iran's consulate in Damascus and NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999. China appears to be retreating from active involvement, potentially constrained by its backing for a Gaza ceasefire, while Israel garners vigorous Western support. The adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" appears to apply solely to Iran in this context, as China struggles to exert influence over Israel. China is struggling in the Middle East

China's response to the Iran-Israel conflict starkly contrasts with the West's stance, which is predominantly pro-Israel. This isn't surprising, given the backdrop of the ongoing power rivalry between Washington and Beijing. China's strategic alignment appears to prioritise relationships with countries overtly critical of the US, leading to a reluctance to criticise Iran. China has consistently supported and advocated for a two-state solution and frequently referenced the UN Security Council Resolution 2728, which calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

While China has actively positioned itself as a mediator for peace, particularly in the Middle East, where it seeks to diminish US influence, its ambitions face impediments, occasionally diverging from its stated goals. These obstacles stem from

China's own partnerships and interests. Notably, China has emerged as the top importer of Iranian oil, acquiring 90 per cent of the country's oil exports in 2023. This trend is elucidated in an article by Atlantic Council, which argues: "China is more likely to continue to be the regional actor it has been over the past decade—one that comes to the Middle East to trade and build, not lead."

Prioritising the preservation of existing peace deals emerges as a cautious approach compared to embarking on intricate negotiations within a region where China's influence is limited among numerous stakeholders. On 15 April, the same day Wang and Abdollahian spoke, the Chinese foreign minister also contacted his Saudi counterpart, Faisal Bin Farhan Al Saud, emphasising "Iran's non-targeted actions toward other regional states". While focusing on the pre-existing deals, China wants to abstain from pursuits where its influence is limited and potential hurdles loom, thereby mitigating risks to its credibility. Nonetheless, perceptions of China's limited influence and its reluctance to intervene vary among Chinese social media users. One Weibo user (with over 2 million followers) highlighted the irony of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urging China to leverage its influence on Iran for de-escalation while Washington concurrently stirs tensions between the Philippines and China.

Why is China low-key?

Since the conclusion of the Iran-Saudi Arabia deal, China's capacity to mediate conflicts has been constrained. It has taken somewhat clear stances in both the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts. While China is apprehensive about potential spillover effects, it currently appears disinclined to actively intervene. Beijing's strategy involves delicately balancing its alignment with regional partners while sidestepping direct confrontation with Israel. The primary aim is to safeguard its interests and prevent any disruption to the Tehran-Riyadh deal, while also subtly bolstering ties with Iran.

Additionally, China grapples with numerous pressing issues, including economic challenges and the complexities surrounding the South China Sea and Taiwan. Given these circumstances, active involvement in the Middle East does not appear to be on the horizon. This stance underscores China's cautious approach and prioritisation of its own interests, implying that assuming the role of a responsible power or even a mediator, particularly in the Middle East, is currently on the back burner.

By SANA HASHMI

## Assessing the strengths and weaknesses in Phase 1 of the Indian Lok Sabha Election

By Susmita Ghosh

The first phase of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections witnessed a showdown among key political players, particularly the DMK, BJP, and Congress. In this phase, 102 constituencies across 21 states and Union Territories participated in the electoral process, with 10 states and UTs fully engaged. Reflecting on the performance of these parties in the past elections provides insights into their current standing. In the 2019 elections, the BJP secured significant victories, winning 40 seats, while the DMK claimed 24 seats, and the Congress emerged victorious in 15 seats. Analysing the constituency dynamics reveals interesting trends. Among the Phase-1 constituencies, nine are strongholds, consistently won by either the BJP or Congress since 2009. Additionally, 21 constituencies are considered swing seats, where electoral outcomes varied between the 2009, 2014, and 2019 elections.

Considering a party strong if it secured victories in a constituency across all three elections, the BJP demonstrated strength in six seats, while the Congress held strong in three. However, the DMK did not secure a single seat consistently across the three elections. Moreover, the BJP appeared relatively strong in 32 seats, the DMK in 12, and the Congress in eight. Conversely, the Congress showed relative weakness in 38 seats, the DMK in 16, and the BJP

in 13. Notably, the BJP faced weakness in 51 of the 102 seats, the DMK in 74, and the Congress in 53 seats. Examining vote shares further delineates party performance. In the 2019 elections, the BJP secured vote shares above 50 percent in 34 seats, between 30 and 50 percent in 19 seats, and below 30 percent in seven seats. Similarly, of the 24 seats contested by the DMK, it won all, with vote shares above 50 percent in 19 seats and between 30 and 50 percent in the remaining five. The Congress, contesting 65 seats, saw vote shares above 50 percent in 10 seats, between 30 and 50 percent in 36 seats, between 10 to 30 percent in nine seats, and below 10 percent in 10 seats. Additionally, it's pertinent to note that the Outer Manipur seat, participating in Phase 1, will also be contested in Phase 2. The second phase of the marathon election held on April 26 with 89 parliamentary seats up for grabs in 13 states. These analyses provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the major political players as Phase 1 of the Lok Sabha election unfolds.

The following phase of voting will take place on May 7 for 94 seats in 12 states. On May 13, 96 seats in 10 states will be decided while on May 20 voters will cast ballots for 49 seats in eight states. The May 25 phase will cover 57 seats in seven states, and the last phase on June 1 will see polling in 57 constituencies across eight states.

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# Deepening insecurity has led the world into a mindless arms race. Don't forget past wars

By Praveen Swami

Like the mythic warriors Caenus, Cygnus, and Achilles, Athens had acquired the boon of invulnerability: The Long Wall, running from the citadel to the sea, linked the great city to its ports at Phalerum and Piraeus, ensuring its grain supplies and navy could survive even an endless siege. Among Athens' allies in the just-concluded war against Persia, the Spartans, the walls caused discomfort. The wealth and maritime power of Athens was growing dramatically, and the walls would hold back the ranks of Sparta's feared Hoplite infantry. The balance of power in the Aegean sea was at risk. Two and a half thousand years ago, so the historian Thucydides recorded, envoys from Sparta proposed to restore deterrence through mutual vulnerability, and argued for tearing down the walls of all the cities of Greece. The Athenian statesman Themistocles engaged Sparta in negotiations, stalling for time as his city secretly completed the wall. Like so many which followed it, the first arms-control negotiations in recorded history had collapsed amidst suspicions and deceit, political scientist Karl Walling has written. The Athenians' own myths warned them that all three warriors finally fell: The stage had been set for a war which would tear apart the Aegean, and end in the destruction of the city that hoped to become the sole superpower.

This week, the highly-respected Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that the world's nation-states spent a staggering \$2,440 billion on their militaries last year—the highest in six decades. The biggest spenders by far were, perhaps unsurprisingly, the United States, which accounted for 37% of the spending, and China, with 12%. All five regions in the world showed significant increases—a sign of the deepening insecurity descending across the world. Even though the figure isn't as dramatic as it seems—at 2.3% of global GDP, it hovers close to the norm of many nations for defence spending in peacetime—it shows in stark relief that the sharp decline in military spending after the Cold



War has been decisively reversed.

And, as historians have shown, where arms races begin, wars often follow. Leaders of the three superpowers—US, China, and Russia—could do worse than read the story of the tragic fall of Athens.

The arms race and the Industrial Age

From his elegant chateau at La Brède, the ageing aristocrat, philosopher and judge Charles de Montesquieu bleakly recorded that “a new disease has spread across Europe; it has smitten our rulers and makes them keep up an exorbitant number of troops.”

“The disease has its paroxysms and necessarily becomes contagious,” he wrote in his memoirs, published in 1748, as wars raged across the continent, “for as soon as any one power increases its forces, the others immediately increase theirs, so that nobody gains anything by it except common ruin.” Archaeologists have since given reason to suspect the problem was somewhat older. Evidence from skeletons found at Jebel Sahaba in Sudan establishes that, some 13,000 years ago, two groups of our ancestors—one short, another tall—used spears and arrows with transverse distal cutting edges to maim each other. The killing was indiscriminate, extending to women and small children.

Five thousand years later, humans had learned to fight their

battles with aerodynamically-efficient slingstones, which were even mass-produced in the southern Levant.

European history through the medieval period, historians like Terrance Wise demonstrate, can among other things be read as a colossal arms race, with fortification designers seeking to outthink siege engineers, longbow manufacturers pitting themselves against armourers, and commanders inventing new mobile-warfare tactics.

France and Burgundy competed, between 1465 and 1477, to produce the best mobile siege guns, while England and Spain vied in warship construction through much of the next century. The coming of the industrial age, though, created the tools for true arms races: Large-scale production, organised scientific research, and nation-states with the resources to fund them. The competition for domination of Europe and new colonies across the world created the enabling circumstances for nineteenth-century arms races. France and Britain engaged in a naval arms race in 1859-1860, Germany and Britain from 1898-1914, and others involving Russia, Japan and the United States.

Even though governments also understood the competition was mutually damaging, historian David Stevenson has shown efforts to contain it led nowhere. Tsar Nicholas II called

First Hague Peace Conference in 1899, hoping to head off an arms race in quick-firing field guns, but came away with nothing. For a time, it seemed military competition could be safely managed. Lessons from wars

The first shots of the First World War weren't, as pop history now has it, heard around the world: The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Duchess Sophie on the Latin Bridge in Sarajevo. British newspapers, Britain, focussed on conflict in Ireland, paid little attention to the regicide. The United States had long retreated into isolation. France had—what else—a sex scandal on its mind. Weeks later, jaunty marching bands were cheering on soldiers headed into a war that would end in the death of 10 million soldiers and seven million civilians.

Enabled by the arsenals they had amassed, Europe's great powers marched into the abyss, certain their arsenals would ensure a rapid conclusion to hostilities. Europe was riding a great wave of prosperity that had stretched for over a century; its markets were better-integrated than ever before—and yet, poor political judgments led to carnage.

Looking back at the hideous carnage of 1914-1918, the moral seemed clear to British foreign secretary Edward Grey: “The enormous growth of armaments in Europe, the sense of insecurity and fear caused by them—it was these that made war inevitable.” “Great armaments,” Grey

ruminated, “lead inevitably to war. If there are armaments on one side, there must be armaments on other sides.”

As historian Paul Kennedy has thoughtfully argued, the arms races weren't the problem: Each of these was, rather, the result of failures of political decision-making to address insecurities and tensions. Leaders, he observed, needed to determine that the economic, social and strategic costs of going to war were not worth bearing.

Following the First World War, an elaborate system of arms control was put in place—but leaders in London and Washington failed to respond to its violation by Nazi Germany, misunderstanding the strategic threat. Seeking to avoid the risk of again being surprised by their adversaries, both the superpowers stockpiled nuclear and conventional weapons through the course of the Cold War. Even hawks like President Ronald Reagan realised that the expansion of arsenals had led both sides to a dead-end. The end of the Cold War seemed to promise an end to the arms races that had sapped resources worldwide.

A world of growing risks Through the rear-view mirror, it's obvious that is not how events unfolded. The political scientist Joseph Nye, in a prescient essay published in 1989, noted the bipolar world was giving way to a more amorphous order, in which great powers are “less able to use traditional power resources to achieve their purposes because private actors and smaller states have become more important in many issues.” Even as the United States sought to establish itself as a global hegemon—before encountering painful lessons in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11—its actions sparked deep concerns among its competitors, as well as smaller states.

The war in Ukraine, as well as the growing crisis in the Taiwan Straits, are fuelling new competition among the three superpowers. Elsewhere, the growing anarchy in the global order is leading regional powers and smaller nations to arm themselves, fearing threats from their neighbours, or internal dissidents.



# Modi's Mangalsutra Missile Hits Opposition's Politics of Caste and Religion

**By: Abhijit Majumder**

The 2024 Lok Sabha election was on a Better Call Saul kind of slow burn. Then on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought out the dragons and turned it into Game of Thrones. He suddenly dropped the niceties and tore into the Congress manifesto and Rahul Gandhi's 'wealth redistribution' plank.

"When they were in power, they [former PM Manmohan Singh] had said Muslims had the first right on the nation's resources. The Maoist Congress manifesto promises to survey gold and ornaments of our mothers and sisters, seize those, and redistribute it among infiltrators and those who make a lot of babies," he said with vintage ferocity, transforming the entire election into an overheated, polarised gladiatorial arena. "They will not even spare your mangalsutra (sacred necklace for married women)."

The Opposition immediately called him communal and asked the Election Commission to take action. But did Modi breach the election rules?

Let us examine Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act). It says that appeals by a candidate, or any other person with the consent of a candidate, to vote or refrain from voting on the grounds of his religion, race, caste, community or language is a corrupt electoral practice. Did Modi ask for votes based on religion or caste or ask a community to refrain from voting along those lines? No.

He merely analysed the Congress manifesto and pointed to brazen appeasement. He did not ask anybody to vote against Muslims as a community or for Muslim candidates.

Section 123(3A) denounces any attempt by a candidate to promote feelings of enmity or hatred among citizens on these grounds during elections.

Did Modi fan hatred against a community? Again, no.

He merely called out his rival Congress party's communal appeal. He accused it of trying to steal reservation from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and transfer it to Muslims. He has kept attacking the Congress manifesto. By his sudden and audacious attack, Modi has blunted the Congress campaign around 'wealth redistribution'. Every time the

Congress now thinks of advertising its main election plank, it will think twice. Modi has made sure Hindu voters now subliminally connect it to appeasement and galvanise. Rahul Gandhi has openly and repeatedly sought a caste census. He also

promised a survey of wealth and promised to 'redistribute' it Robin Hood-style, with Muslims getting their 'fair share' based on their numbers in an echo of Manmohan Singh's 'first claim' credo. Now, that is a purely communal appeal.

Rahul Gandhi's brazen caste pitch in the promised OBC census, or his mocking of Lord Krishna's undersea city of Dwarka, or the Congress boycotting Ayodhya Ram Mandir Pran Pratishtha fall neatly into the bigotry basket. Take for instance Mamata

Banerjee calling Ram Navami devotees 'rioters'. Or her tirade dog-whistling Muslims to fight 'kafirs' who are all cowards. Or her old but abiding assertion that 'one must endure kicks from the cow which gives milk', referring to Muslim appeasement.

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# M Modi And 'Mangalsutra' Row: A Faustian Bargain For BJP?

By Lakshmi Iyer

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech invoking religious symbolism at an election rally in Rajasthan's Banswara was an audacious one. It was also surprising, given how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had been so confident of securing a third term that it had dropped its usual rabble-rousers this election, like Nalin Kateel in Dakshina Kannada, Pragya Singh Thakur in Bhopal, and even Ramesh Bidhuri in South Delhi. The BJP perhaps felt that leaders who were needed to mobilise Hindu sentiments ahead of the previous Lok Sabha elections were not required any more. With the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya finally becoming a reality, aggressive Hindu posturing was not necessary, the party may have believed. But, right when people thought that the BJP was taking on a new, mellow avatar, it sprung a surprise. Through a single speech, PM Modi has managed to build an electoral narrative centred around Hindus allegedly being under threat if the Congress comes to power. Attacking the




Manifesto The narrative was not built off a one-time mention. PM Modi followed up his Banswara speech with a similar one the next day in Western Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh, where he railed against the Congress, saying that the party planned to "seize the wealth of Hindu women to redistribute among minorities". The latter rushed to demand action against the PM, but nothing deterred him. For the third consecutive day, at a rally in Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, he again warned voters about the perils of voting for the Congress. Modi's plan of attack clearly

hinged on the Congress's manifesto and poll promises, which included a yearly sum of ? 1 lakh to women. Parts of the manifesto, read along with former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's disputed remarks in 2006, were interpreted by PM Modi to infer that if the Congress came to power, it would redistribute wealth among those "with more children" (by which he evidently meant Muslims). He also cited the "urban naxal mindset" of Rahul Gandhi's advisors and alleged that the Congress would not spare even the "mangalsutra" of his "mothers and sisters". He based

his claims on the Congress manifesto's promise of a nationwide socio-economic survey and a caste census. "Based on the data, we will strengthen the agenda for affirmative action," reads the document. However, though there were reports that in a speech in Hyderabad, Rahul had said the Congress would redistribute wealth amongst minorities, the party has now rejected making any such claims. The manifesto has no mention of any such "re-distribution" either. **Congress On Backfoot?** Ultimately though, the result of PM Modi's speeches is that the Congress is now on the defensive over its manifesto. The grand old party, which maintains that it respects the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), has sought action from the ECI, contending that the 'mangalsutra' imagery can inflame communal sentiments. "The Shehzada [prince] of the Congress says that if their government comes to power, they will investigate who earns how much, who has how many properties... Our mothers and

sisters have gold. It is 'streedhan', it is considered sacred, the law also protects it. Now these people's eyes are on the 'mangalsutra' of women. Their intention is to steal the gold of mothers and sisters... This is Maovadi thinking, this is the thinking of communists," PM Modi had said in his speech. More than the Opposition's demands for action against the PM, however, what's interesting is that many BJP leaders themselves are not comfortable with the idea of Modi talking about the alleged threat to Hindus. "Ideally, such misgivings about the Congress manifesto should not have been articulated by PM Modi himself. It is best left to rabble-rousers. It should have been left to our second-line or third-line leaders," a Karnataka BJP MP said. But then, given how the party has dispensed with most of such hardline leaders, who could possibly be flagging these issues for the BJP? That's probably why PM Modi chose to himself make such comments.

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# Electoral Bonds: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

By: Anant Merathia

## INTRODUCTION

The decision of the Supreme Court of India scrapping the electoral bond scheme was certainly one that caused unrest. The scheme was held unconstitutional and seen as a peril to democracy. While one has to completely respect and abide by the verdict of the apex court; the question now is what's next in the arena of financing political parties and is a fundamental one to address. Is it really any better to go back to financing schemes that existed before the introduction of electoral bonds? Before we delve into this aspect, it is necessary to establish the basic principles and objectives of the introduction of electoral bonds and the conditions that existed before the introduction of such a scheme.

## WHY THE SCHEME WAS INTRODUCED AND ITS OBJECTIVE

The Union Budget of 2017 led by the BJP government introduced a money bill for establishing the electoral bond scheme. Electoral bonds are a form of a promissory note that act as a means to make a donation to any political party which is registered under Section 29A of the Representation of People Act, 1951 and has polled at least one per cent of the votes in the last general elections or state Assembly elections. These bonds can be purchased by any Indian citizen or corporation incorporated in India, either singly or jointly. Such



persons are required of an authorised bank account and must fulfill all the KYC norms. There is no cap on the number of bonds one can purchase. Since there were contentions on the flow of illegal cash into the political system feeding corruption, bonds can only be purchased digitally or through cheques from selected banks of the SBI authorised for this purpose. Bonds are purchased in the favor of political parties. They can be encashed by an eligible political party through a bank account. The bonds are valid for 15 calendar days from the date of issue. On demand within the 15-day limit, the cash shall be credited to the account of an eligible political party on

the same day. The money that is not recovered within 15 days will be transferred to the PM Relief Fund.

The present government which also introduced electoral bonds claims its intention behind the introduction of the electoral bonds is to rectify the effects of corruption and black money in political funding. The Government of India notified the Scheme of Electoral Bonds to cleanse the system of political funding in the country.

## ELECTIONS, POLITICAL FUNDING AND BUSINESSES: AN OLD LINKAGE

The political climate of India is vast. One in every six people on Earth who are of

voting age resides in India. Apart from being the most populous democracy in the world, there are also several parties that contest in elections which contributes to extraordinary competitiveness. In this backdrop, naturally, the role of funds in campaigning becomes crucial. With an increase in the size of the economy, electorate and competition, the role of money in politics became of paramount significance.

It was stated in the Press Information Bureau that the government's expenditure on an elector has gone up manifold, twenty times from the first general elections to the 15th general elections. In the first election, the government had spent Rs 0.60 on an elector whereas it went on spending Rs 12 in the 2009 general elections. Considering expenditure in absolute terms, Rs 10.45 crore was spent in 1951-52 whereas Rs 846.67 crore was the amount the government spent for the 2009 general elections. The widespread politics and the vast quantum of money made the regulation of political financing hard. Former Chief Election Commissioner, N Gopalaswamy, understanding the situation commented that "the Election Commission, which was able to control the muscle power in elections, utterly failed to do so in the case of the money power." This dire situation can be considered as that which attributed to the need for some kind of regularity in political financing.

# Election Commission Declines Comment as Modi Gives His Most Divisive Speech in 30 Years

By Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta

The more one is led to believe that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has grown out of his divisive rhetoric over time, the more one is made to go back to his days as the chief minister of Gujarat, where he shot to fame as the brand ambassador of communal hate. A spokesperson for the Election Commission (EC) meanwhile, after repeated queries from members of the Press since the morning, finally said "we decline comment." The Election Commission has earlier sent a notice to Uddhav Thackeray, asking him to drop certain words from the campaign, 'Hindu' and 'Jai Bhawani', which he has flatly refused to do, saying Modi should be sent a notice first. Modi supporters in the middle classes speak about his vision of development and view him as the greatest leader of India, a statesman par excellence. The BJP manifesto talks about his ambition of making India "vikshit" (developed) by 2047 and the third largest economy by 2028. Yet, deep within, Modi and his BJP betray a sense of lack of confidence, forcing them to invoke the only



political card they have tried to repeatedly encash since the party's inception – anti-Muslim hate. Until now, the Prime Minister invoked the newly-built Ram Mandir in Ayodhya as a ploy to trigger Indian Muslims, who have – in almost exemplary fashion – remained stoic in the midst of all communal attacks by the BJP. He used the Ram Mandir also to project the opposition as an anti-Hindu and pro-Muslim, in a clear attempt to polarise the Lok Sabha polls along religious lines as the opposition across the country continue

to raise issues like rising unemployment, inflation, and income inequality. Yet, it appears that the Ram Mandir issue has failed to enthuse a large section of the Hindu electorate, contrary to what the BJP had predicted earlier. It has clearly not been an effective instrument to provoke Hindus enough against Muslims, as the low turnout in the first phase of the polls reflected. The political scientist Yogendra Yadav, while talking about how livelihood issues are gradually emerging as the biggest

concerns of the electorate, showed how the dip in voting percentage was greater in seats held by the BJP-led NDA than those that were won by non-NDA parties. The trend clearly indicated a lack of enthusiasm among BJP cadres. Living up to his image of a Hindutva icon, therefore, the Prime Minister decided to give that extra push to his cynical politics, hoping that the tired Hindu-Muslim polarisation trope may still give him some electoral advantage like it did in the last two Lok Sabha elections. In Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi directly stoked Hindu communalism by stereotyping Muslims as a community that is sex-obsessed and reproduces more than any other. Despite the fact that the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in one of his speeches had said that the first right to India's resources belong to the marginalised communities like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the minorities, the BJP has spun the sentiment often to claim that Singh believed that the country's resources should first be distributed to Muslims.

# US-Japan rapport has strategic, economic lessons for India

By Gurjit Singh

Both the US and Japan will go to the polls over the next 18 months or so. Nevertheless, US President Joe Biden and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida found time for a summit in Washington earlier this month. The summit focused on strengthening and enunciating forcefully that the two nations are united strategically and economically.

Biden and Kishida asserted that the US-Japan partnership was prepared to challenge China's unrelenting, aggressive intent in the Indo-Pacific. The emphasis was on securing themselves and their friends from Beijing's economic and strategic coercion by offering alternatives for the region to engage with, including resilient supply chains. Japanese media thinks that a key takeaway from this summit is a recognition by Washington that Tokyo is now a global player and not confined to its own region. Hence, both promised, through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and beyond, to assert shared economic growth, with investments flowing in both directions. Therefore, their collaboration was projected as indispensable for appropriately responding to the Chinese economic coercion and strategic threats and the weak links in supply chains, with the bigger aim of global economic growth.

Biden is facing a tough election in November, while Kishida is experiencing political tremors due to his party's plummeting popularity. However, they are keen on sustained compatibility and a stable partnership even if the elections in both countries lead to a changing of the guard. Kishida held talks with Biden, addressed Congress and met business leaders. Kishida conveyed to Congress the message that Japan remained the warmest friend of the US and they stood hand in hand to defend their values.



Undoubtedly, the Chinese threats emanating from the Ukraine and West Asian crises dominated the summit. The address to Congress was more of a reassertion of the bilateral partnership. Economic resilience was factored in the business meeting. Kishida met Tim Cook of Apple, Jeff Bezos of Amazon and David McCall, president of the United Steelworkers International, at the state dinner. Nearly 70 announcements were made of new business efforts which are seen as significant deliverables. Now, Japan is more than willing to have a common defence mechanism, with the US playing a bigger role. The US military command structure in Japan will be revitalised, and defence technology will become a more important part of the US-Japan partnership. A boost to artificial intelligence (AI) and related research is now an integral part of the scheme of things. Microsoft is likely to invest \$3 billion in AI-related infrastructure in Japan by 2025. Amazon and Nvidia are likely to support another AI-led programme between the universities of Tsukuba and Washington. The Japanese technology of

Shinkansen (the bullet train) is likely to be a part of the Texas Central High Speed Rail Project, which can reduce the travel time between Dallas and Houston. A commercial basis of fusion energy was announced. Japanese and US institutions will work on this to jointly contribute to the alleviation of climate change. Japan is at present the largest provider of FDI in the US and a major employer. This was highlighted by Biden at the meeting where representatives of many Japanese-American companies were present. Kishida, who realises the value of the Japanese FDI overseas as a diplomatic tool, promised that this would only increase in the US in the near term. Kishida's speech to Congress was evocatively titled 'For the future, our global partnership'. He is only the second Japanese PM after Shinzo Abe to be given this privilege and he used it to raise Japan's stature. Talking about the changed geopolitical scenario, he said: "As Japan grew in confidence, we expanded our outlook beyond that of being America's closest ally. We first became a regional partner and now we have become your global partner."

Kishida's success in transforming Japan's national security strategy, increasing the defence spending to 2 per cent of the GDP and acquiring counter-strike capacities make him a more valued partner rather than a junior ally to the US. Hinting that the US could revert to the America First policy, Kishida told Congress that Japan was more than prepared to take on its own share of the burden — which so far the US has shouldered — in keeping the global order free and open. His message is that the US should continue to engage with the Indo-Pacific in which Japan will play its role alone, without leaning on the US. This implies that Japan would be ready to shoulder responsibilities brought in by the US, for instance, in defence of Taiwan and the Philippines. Speaking about China, North Korea and Russia and the challenges that they pose to the global order, he said China's actions were unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge to the peace and stability of the international community, for the sake of which Japan was ready to play a key role. Kishida was Biden's fifth state guest during his term. Among

the Quad partners, Australia and India have already been hosted, along with South Korea and France. It is clear that the US and Japan are working to build a stronger partnership in technology, FDI and their common interests in the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia. Both see the Kishida-Biden meeting as the validation of their respective Indo-Pacific strategies. With the South Korea-Japan-US relationship also steady now, the force structure of the US in Japan will become more integrated into a joint operation centre. A new military industrial council would evaluate the co-production of defence equipment, where Japan's industrial capacity and technology will come to the forefront and match the US in strategic applications. Five space agreements over the years will bring them closer in space exploration as well.

The Japan-US partnership is going global, hoping to insulate itself from domestic political turmoil. India would do well to integrate itself with this approach.

# The Supreme Court Must Order 100% Verification of Votes Cast on EVMs

By Anil Srivastava

The spectacular bluff of two 'silos' of electoral bonds data that the State Bank of India (SBI) tried to pull off was foiled by a five-judge constitutional bench of the Supreme Court. The two silos were actually two tables in a data base. Had SBI used the term 'data tables' instead of 'silos', any computer literate person could have pointed out that their matching is a trivial exercise of writing one join query in a database or "vlookup" command in an Excel worksheet. This would require no more than three minutes whereas SBI and the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) wanted three months.

Now the government along with the Election Commission (EC) wants to pull off another bizarre bluff before a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court. Multiple petitions tagged with the lead petition of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) filed a year ago, were finally heard on April 16 and 18 this year where the EC and the government were respondents. This case could



have been settled in two hours had EC used the correct terminology. But it didn't; so everyone is confused and the bench has reserved its order.

EVMs, according to the EC, comprise of three devices – ballot unit (BU), control unit (CU) and the voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) – and is a standalone system. Either the EC is terribly innocent or this is plain subterfuge because both facts are wrong.

In each election cycle, six devices are involved for the "EVM System" (a term EC avoids using) to perform. The three additional devices are:

1. Central Server of the EC: from which candidate data such as contestant's name, ID and symbol image can be accessed and downloaded via Internet;

2. Laptop of District Election Officer/Returning Officer: which is used to download the candidate file and copy the same into the symbol loading unit (SLU). SLU is also the "red herring" name of a pen drive, like 'silo' was the fancy name for data tables.

3. SLU: It is issued to field engineers to commission the EVM in each booth by inserting the SLU into the VVPAT

This being the case, malware (software written by a hacker) can enter the system: via the central server or via the Internet into the laptop, and via the laptop into the SLU, and finally via the SLU into the VVPAT's programmable memory. This infiltration of malware can occur with or without the knowledge of DEO/RO or field engineers deployed in the over 1.2

million booths to commission the EVM during the 15 days prior to poll commencement. EC representatives in the court lied on another fact as well. They said that VVPAT only has OTP (one-time-programmable) memory, therefore, no malware can enter VVPAT. However, the EC's FAQ pages dated February 7, 2024, say otherwise – look at Q53, Q104 and Q105 which are all relevant. It will become clear from reading the EC's FAQs that the EVM System is not a stand-alone system and furthermore, VVPAT has both OTP and programmable memory.

Curiously, EC does not possess the source code; it says Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) have proprietary rights over it. The EVM software is simple and the ECI can easily get it developed with its own proprietary rights for a sum that cannot exceed a couple million rupees. The Supreme Court itself is pushing for open-source software.

The 2019 Lok Sabha elections are

estimated to have cost \$8.6 billion and the 2024 elections are projected to cost \$14 billion. Surely, the hacker of EVM System is not likely to be a run-of-the-mill type. It is a mystery why the Supreme Court or the government does not question the EC on its lack of control over such a strategic component that can entangle trillions of rupees and the national security. The EVM System reliability is not an issue between the government and a political party, it is an issue of citizens' democratic rights. If the Supreme Court does not grant the following reliefs the petitioners have asked for, Indian democracy could be upended.

1. The voter should be able to pick up the VVPAT printed slip for verification and physically insert it into the ballot box; else the voter should be able to see the vote slip printed is correct and it is actually cut and dispensed into the ballot box. It is not sufficient for the voter to just see the vote slip (because it could be the previous voter's slip which has not been cut and dispensed due to a hack).

## The preoccupation with food inflation

By Devinder Sharma

SOMETIMES, I wonder how can a country poised to become the world's third largest economy in a few years get rattled by a rise in prices of the ubiquitous aloo (potato) and pyaaz (onion). The occasional spike in the prices of vegetables, fruits, pulses and cereals has often been blamed for weighing heavily on the inflation outlook, forcing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to hold on to benchmark interest rates. With the retail inflation rate, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), now down to 4.85 per cent, it is the retail food inflation that remains a cause for concern. At 8.5 per cent for March 2024, higher food inflation had left no room for the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to cut the repo rate in the first quarter of the 2024-25 financial year. Given the inflation matrix, the way it is working out, the caution with which the MPC takes a call is aimed at ensuring that inflation aligns with the RBI's target of 4 per cent.



Since the CPI comprises the basket of goods and services consumed by an average urban and rural household, all eyes are on food inflation. An average household is actually impacted much more by the expenses it incurs on health, education and housing — the real drivers of inflation. Whether poor or middle class, every household ends up spending its lifetime savings (often backing it up with bank loans) on educating children, bearing the health expenses of the family and meeting the ever-rising cost of housing.

This is even reflected in the higher estimates for household debt, and the latest analysis by Motilal Oswal Financial Services points to a new high of 40 per cent of the GDP in December 2023. Surely, the growing financial stress necessitating the need for bank loans is not because of the skyrocketing food bill but is an outcome of the ever-increasing spending on health, education and housing. With more or less stagnant incomes (rural wages have barely risen in the past 10 years), a record jump in unsecured personal loans is

also being seen. While the Finance Ministry sees the rise in personal loans as an indication of growing aspirations, many regard it as a sign of rising distress. Nevertheless, the latest RBI estimates also point towards declining net financial savings to 5.1 per cent in 2022-23, the lowest in almost five decades. In a country where the average kitchen expenses of a household are between Rs 10,000 and Rs 20,000 per month, a surge in prices of vegetables can increase the monthly food budget of the middle class by around Rs 1,000 (or at the most Rs 2,000), and yet it sets the alarm bells ringing. With the media driving home the need to tame food prices, the RBI swings into action to ensure that food inflation remains confined to the limits. But I see no reaction when media reports highlight the rising cost of houses under construction in cities. In Patna, the prices have doubled in the past five years, and risen by approximately 50 per cent in cities like Lucknow and

Bhopal. In any case, every 11 months, the house rent increases by an average of 10 to 15 per cent.

Earlier, a study by an independent policy think tank, the Centre for Social and Economic Progress, had worked out that house prices in the country had shot up by 15 times over the past three decades. Given the high base level, the actual cost, in absolute terms, that any buyer ends up paying for the house is whopping by any standard.

An influencer writing on micro-blogging site X says: "My son is in Grade 3 in a reputed CBSE school in Gurugram. The school fee is Rs 30,000 per month (excluding bus transport)." Another person says: "My friend's daughter is in an international board school in Bengaluru in Class II and her fees is Rs 8 lakh per annum, including food and transportation. With an increase of 10 per cent every year plus additional charges, the per annum fees when she reaches Class XII will be Rs 35 lakh."

# Why It's Imperative to Address the Enigma of India's Wealth Inequality

By: AS Mittal

In a diverse and democratic India, every citizen has an equal opportunity. A major global economic policy debate revolves around the pressing concern of wealth inequality in India. According to a recent research paper titled 'Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj,' released by the World Inequality Lab (WIL) at the Paris School of Economics, the top one per cent of India's population held 40.1 per cent of the country's wealth in 2022-23, marking one of the highest levels globally.

At the 2023 annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, Oxfam International unequivocally released a report titled 'Survival of the Richest', revealing that the wealthiest one per cent of individuals in India possess over 40 per cent of the nation's total wealth. These findings have sparked significant concerns about the precision and influence of foreign research agencies' assessments of India's wealth inequality. The specific nature of these findings has had a profound global impact, singling out India's rapidly expanding economy. Clearly, the issue of wealth inequality demands a comprehensive examination and a far-reaching discourse. The issue of wealth inequality is often



discussed at the WEF summit in Davos, where influential individuals from various fields come together to address global challenges. While there may be doubts about the methodology and biases of these reports, they still provide insights for consideration and reflection.

An individual's wealth is distinct from the wealth of the corporation they own. Corporate entities have various stakeholders, such as banks, shareholders, and financial agencies, and they also have liabilities. The wealth of a corporation belongs to these stakeholders in proportion to their stakes.

There is a debate about why corporations' competitive returns on their large investments are being targeted for wealth inequality, and

why there is advocacy for wealth and inheritance taxes. Corporations argue that they already pay their fair share of taxes, including Corporate Tax, Goods and Services Tax (GST), import-export duties, and Income Tax. Furthermore, they claim to contribute to the economy by generating employment and fulfilling their corporate social responsibility (CSR). Some people suggest restructuring the tax system to account for both income and wealth and imposing an additional 2 per cent super tax on the wealthiest individuals to address inequality and promote economic growth and job creation. However, proponents of this idea believe that corporate competitive growth is a natural phenomenon and

contributes to the country's GDP growth. The export of goods and services as a percentage of GDP has increased from 6.3 per cent in 1984 to 22.79 per cent in 2022-23. This high growth has led to significant changes in the socio-economic fabric of civil society.

Since liberalisation in the 1990s, the economy has become increasingly globalised. Before 1990, wealth creation in India was minimal, billionaires were rare, and extreme poverty was prevalent. However, today, billionaires are common, and extreme poverty is history. According to Forbes, the number of Indians with a net wealth exceeding \$1 billion increased from just one in 1991 to 162 in 2022.

**WHY CORPORATES ARE BEING TARGETED**

It is a common but politically deliberated interpretation that corporations have exacerbated wealth inequality. There is a concern about the irrational international agencies catalysing conflict against Indian corporations, which are major contributors to the country's GDP and significant employers, especially when India ranks as the world's fifth-strongest economy. It's important to note that existing inequalities based on gender, geography, ethnicity, race, caste, and religion already exist. Further disparities would not only harm our economy but also

create a negative global public perception, hindering efforts to eradicate poverty. Extreme inequality is not inevitable and is often the result of political misgovernance, but it can be addressed through effective interventions.

When compared to many other countries, India is relatively better off in terms of income and wealth equality. Globally, the top one per cent of the richest individuals have accumulated 46 per cent of the world's wealth over the past two years. According to Credit Suisse's Global Wealth Report-2023, Russia has the highest wealth concentration, with the top one per cent holding 60 per cent of national wealth. Brazil's wealthiest one per cent holds 49.6 per cent, and in the US, the top one per cent of households own 33 per cent of the country's wealth.

**WAY FORWARD**

NITI Aayog claims that 25 crore citizens were lifted out of multidimensional poverty between 2013-14 and 2022-23, and still around 23 crore below-poverty-line (BPL) families are there. The government's key task is to uplift the poor, and the support of the corporate is crucial in this. Creating enough well-paying jobs is essential for reducing poverty and inequality. However, much more needs to be done to make India a less 'unequal' country.

## Our planet's sustainability at stake

By Arun Maira

IN its recent verdict in the case of the Great Indian Bustard, the Supreme Court has recognised the fundamental right of humans to be free from the adverse impact of climate change. The ruling has dismayed policymakers and builders of renewable energy infrastructure. They say the judges are setting aside the advice of scientific experts and delaying the construction of infrastructure for reversing climate change. The court admits that climate change has brought jurisprudence into uncharted territory. Solutions cannot be found with the same way of thinking that has caused the problem. The existential problem caused by climate change cannot be understood and solved by the prevalent paradigms of capitalist



economics and unsystemic science. In capitalist economies, natural capital is the property of its owner. Kings and landlords owned the land, water and forests, and all the fish and animals within their private estates. They also owned the produce of all humans who lived and worked on their land as their serfs or slaves. Owners who stayed on their land and interacted with the people on it

could see their forests and watch their crops grow, and their workers sweat, and sense how the system worked. Absentee landlords did not care. They wanted their profits regardless of the damage to their land by droughts and floods, besides the sufferings of their workers.

The development of commodity markets, in which animals, farm produce, timber and minerals

could be bought and sold with money and prices determined by traders, converted natural capital into financial capital. Financial markets created a new class of capitalists, even further removed from reality than absentee landlords, who gauge the condition of the world from charts of how prices move in commodity exchanges and stock markets. When labour went off the land into factories, workers were paid for the time they spent in factories and what they produced during that time. Their skills and labour became commodities purchasable for a price by owners of enterprises.

Property rights are an ancient principle of economics and jurisprudence. Human rights were recognised much later with political movements, often violent, to abolish slavery, and to pay fair wages and provide safe working

conditions for workers. Gig work is the 21st-century way to convert labour into a commodity again: workers on demand, payment only for the work done, and no social security — good for business owners, but bad for the people. Garrett Hardin's theory of the 'Tragedy of the Commons' underlies the ideology of privatisation. The theory is that property which belongs to everybody is cared for by nobody. Therefore, the commons must be parcelled out to private owners to manage their own pieces efficiently, motivated by a drive to make more profit for themselves. Damage to the global environment, which belongs to everybody, has become a global-scale tragedy of the commons. It cannot be solved by further privatisation of property.

# N-shadow over Iran-Israel conflict

By Manoj Joshi

WITH the US, Israel and Iran maintaining silence over Israel's supposedly symbolic counter-strike on Iran, it is difficult to figure out just what exactly is happening. We can interpret some of the actions by the targets chosen. In their massive drone-missile strike of April 13, the Iranians focused on a number of Israeli airbases, principally Nevatim and Ramona. Whether they did cause damage is another matter, but what is significant about these bases is that are adjacent to the Israeli nuclear reactor and facilities at Dimona.

Reportedly, on Friday, the Israelis struck at the Khatam airbase outside Isfahan, which houses some of Iran's nuclear facilities. Neither side deliberately targeted the nuclear facilities themselves, but there was clear messaging. Two pieces of rocket debris that were found in Iraq suggest that Israel used precision-guided missiles for the strike.

There are some lessons we draw from the two strikes. Israel (with some help from allies) demonstrated an astonishing ability to defend itself and emerge unscathed against waves of



drones, cruise and ballistic missiles. On the other hand, the message it sent out to Iran with its limited strike was that it had the ability to penetrate the Iranian airspace easily and strike at targets deep in the country. By landing the first and last blows, Israel reiterated its escalation dominance. For now, the escalatory spiral seems to have been controlled, but the direct attacks the two sides have carried out on each other's territory are not a good augury for the future. No doubt both sides will now revert to their earlier shadow war in the region. Both have the incentive to do so — Tel Aviv would not want to be distracted from its war against

Hamas in Gaza, and as for Tehran, it realises that its archaic air force and air defence system make it hugely vulnerable in any prolonged war with Israel or the US.

Clearly, Washington was able to incentivise Tel Aviv to limit its strike. First and foremost was the importance of its continuing support, underscored now with talk of a new \$1-billion aid package. Second, showing Israel the advantage of shaping a larger regional coalition — Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE and possibly Egypt — against Tehran.

The manifest weaknesses carry

the risk of pushing Iran over the nuclear threshold. As is well known, Israel already possesses anywhere up to 90 nuclear weapons. There is a credible report that with the help of South Africa, it also conducted a clandestine atmospheric nuclear weapon test in September 1979. It has also developed the Jericho long-range missile capable of delivering them. Like India, Israel has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapon state.

Israel also has a clear-cut policy that it will not allow its West Asian neighbours to develop such weapons. This has led to Israeli strikes on Iraqi and Syrian facilities that were suspected of being used to develop nuclear weapons as well. An Israeli-US operation introduced the Stuxnet malware that badly damaged Iranian centrifuges in 2010, and Tel Aviv has also conducted a number of assassinations of Iranian scientists who were believed to be working on Iran's nuclear weapon programme. But it lacks the heft to militarily neutralise the widely dispersed Iranian N-programme.

Iran is a signatory to the NPT and

its programme was subject to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It claimed that it was developing enrichment capacity for use to fuel power reactors, but evidence indicated that it had other intentions. Iran came under US and EU sanctions and eventually the two helped craft a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, which put severe constraints on the Iranian programme and brought it under IAEA supervision. The aim of the deal was not so much to ban nuclear activity as to ensure that the world would get enough time, perhaps a year's advanced notice, if the Iranians broke out of the deal to produce highly enriched uranium for a bomb.

In 2018, then President Trump withdrew the US from the deal; following the assassination of Gen Qassem Soleimani in January 2020, Tehran declared that it would no longer abide by it. Iran has developed a number of facilities for its programme, principally an above-ground enrichment plant and an underground one at Natanz and one buried deep in a mountain at Fordow, near Qom.

## Manifesto Manthan: Does Congress' Poll Promises Institutionalise Legal Discrimination Against Hindus?

By: Rahul Shivshankar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is determined to paint the Congress into a corner. A communal anti-Hindu corner at that. In election speech after speech, he claims to have unearthed a Congress conspiracy to institutionalise legal discrimination against Hindus if it is voted to power. The prime minister believes this conspiracy is hard coded into the clauses of the Congress party manifesto for 2024.

Modi alleges that the manifesto in its present form commits itself to affirmative action that will lead to the balkanisation of India as the document has the "imprint of the Muslim league" upon it. Of course, the Muslim League the prime minister is invoking refers to the pre-independence special political vehicle founded by anglicised barrister-politician Mohammad Ali Jinnah to champion the creation of



Pakistan.

Not just this, the prime minister believes that the manifesto commits any prospective Congress-led government to roll out policies overwhelmingly biased towards Muslims. Is the prime minister seeing the ghost of appeasement where none exist? The Congress thinks so. But a deeper inquiry into the Congress

manifesto reveals many ambiguously worded proposals to further the cause of what it terms "social justice and equity". For instance, in clause 1 of the "Equity" chapter of the manifesto, the party has promised to conduct a "socio-economic census" (different from a caste census) to ascertain the financial condition

of various sections of society. Basis this survey, the manifesto vows that the Congress will strengthen affirmative action.

A census by itself is harmless. But this census, albeit arduous but statistically heavy academic exercise, could acquire a sharper edge when it is read in conjunction with Congress chief campaigner Rahul Gandhi's "X-ray" statement. Indeed, a day after the manifesto was released, Rahul Gandhi promised to conduct, in his words, "an X-ray that will provide an insight to (all) minorities on just how much of a stake they are entitled to have in the share of the nation's resource pie." Moreover, Rahul Gandhi later in the same speech goes on to proclaim, "We will also conduct a financial and institutional survey in a historic step to ascertain the distribution of wealth held by different communities." Many are convinced that the only reason for ascertaining wealth distribution is

to undertake a redistribution of it for the uplift of minorities, particularly Muslims. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2006 had in fact said as much when he made it clear that minorities, especially Muslims, have a first claim on the nation's wealth.

The manifesto also pledges that if the Congress comes to power, it will pass a constitutional amendment to remove the Supreme Court-mandated 50 per cent cap on reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Is this promise to raise the limit on reservation quotas, so to speak, primarily aimed at appeasing Muslims? The question is answered by precedent. In 2004, for instance, then Congress Andhra Pradesh state government had announced reservations for Muslims in government jobs and education.

# Imtiaz Ali obsesses over vulgarity, misses Chamkila's cultural resistance against purity

It is heartening to see Imtiaz Ali's movie *Amar Singh Chamkila*, a biopic of the renowned Punjabi folk singer that captures his life and struggles while preserving the raw graininess intact. The movie does justice to its protagonist by thoroughly researching various life stories gathered from multiple narratives and engaging with Chamkila's music. The inclusion of Amar Singh's original video footage and photographs, coupled with the brilliant performances by Diljit Dosanjh and Parineeti Chopra, breathes life into this biographical portrayal.

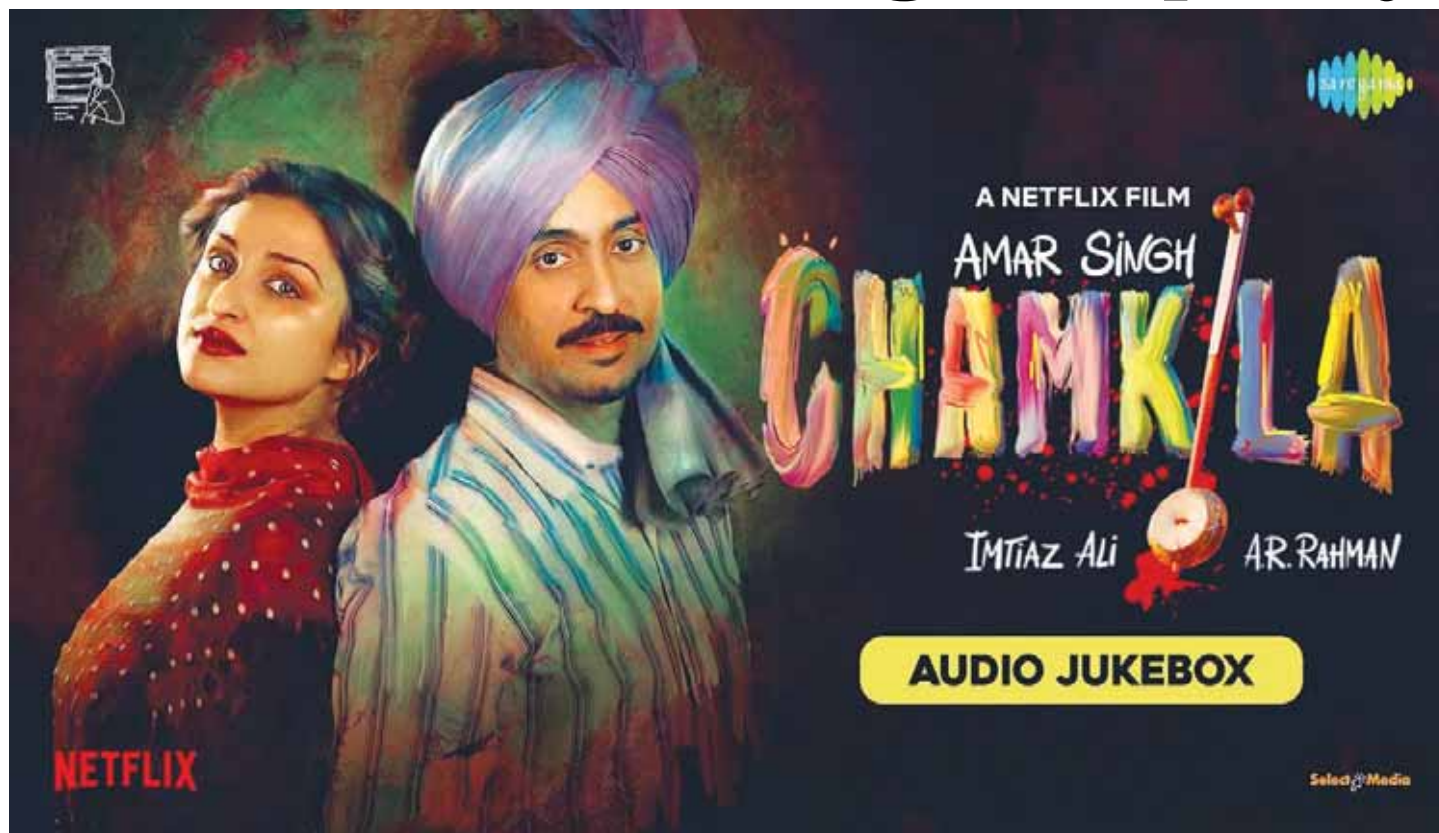
However, despite being a good attempt at a biopic, *Amar Singh Chamkila* falls short in exploring the dichotomy between vulgarity and purity in art, which hold a much deeper meaning than what is depicted. The concept of vulgarity has been used too loosely. Moreover, the central issue of caste dynamics within the Punjabi music industry is obfuscated and sidelined in the film.

The film has several scenes depicting Chamkila's constant struggle to choose or reject 'vulgar' songs. The narrative is constructed in a way that fixates this confusion onto Chamkila. This ventriloquising by the director silences Chamkila's actual voice. The film never tries to look into reasons behind Chamkila's decision to sing these 'vulgar' songs until the end of his life, despite facing threats.

The understanding of 'vulgarity' for the subaltern community means much more than a very immediate and literal meaning, which is what is discussed under the carpet. To render something vulgar is also to create the boundary of sacred and profane. The vulgar, unsanitised, and dirty become the metaphors to describe a worldview that stands antithetical to pious, sanitised, and sacred space. Thus, rendering something vulgar is to create a caste boundary, through which acceptability and non-acceptability of social values are determined.

(Mis)representing Chamkila's ambiguity It is important to understand the meaning of vulgarity and what experimentation with vulgarity has meant for Dalit-Bahujan communities. Vulgarity stood as an antithesis to the sanitised modern spaces that the music industry was generating towards the 1980s. In his classic work *Cassette Culture*, Peter Manuel discusses the booming Bhakti music during this period. It was in the '80s-'90s that figures like Anoop Jalota, Anuradha Paudwal, Gulshan Kumar, etc., saw the pinnacle of success by singing sanitised/sacred Bhajans. The growth story of the present-day giant T-Series actually began with the production of such devotional songs.

For Amar Singh Chamkila to choose vulgarity over the moral/devotional was



also a creation of a counternarrative of vulgar music against the sanitised, middle-class devotional music.

For the Dalit-Bahujan community, experimenting with the 'vulgar' hasn't been a new phenomenon. The works of scholars like Sharmila Rege and Shailaja Paik have discussed the usage of 'Ashlil' (vulgar) as a weapon to counter the mainstream narrative. Rege has referred to the emergence of popular forms like Lavani (a dance form belonging to the Dalit community) as a significant 'cultural turn', rather than just being a 'culture of resistance'. The dance performance talks back to the dominant, hierarchised structures of high art.

Evidence of this 'vulgarity' is also seen in Dalit-Bahujan writings. Namdeo Dhasal's *Golpitha* has an elaborate usage of phrases like 'A\*\*\*ker's Park', 'shit', 'flesh ripped out', etc. (in Dilip Chitre's translation). Similarly, the Dalit autobiographies of Tulsiram (Murdhaiya) and Sushila Takhbhore (Shikanje ka Dard) have explicit depictions of so-called 'profane' spaces to discuss their everyday lived reality.

The 'vulgar' thus holds a loaded meaning for those at the receiving end of such spaces. Therefore, choosing to sing a song deemed vulgar is a reclamation of the humiliation that the Dalit-Bahujan community has been historically subjected to.

If Imtiaz Ali was genuinely interested in portraying the real Amar Singh Chamkila, he would have appreciated the singer's choice to sing vulgar songs rather than depicting him as confused about whether to sing them or not. Chamkila consciously chose vulgarity. He claimed to emerge from his everyday lived experience as a Dalit by singing about his life and publicly speaking about the Dalit-Bahujan lifeworld.

Chamkila's music is also anti-caste because it defies the existing dominant upper-caste devotional music industry and instead creates an alternative space that resonates with the masses.

Casteist reality of Punjabi music industry

In my conversation with several production houses, musicians, and singers, they have revealed the casteist reality of the music industry. Similar to the ritualised sacred and profane, the dichotomy of sanitised Bhajan and anti-caste music remains distinct.

Even if select production houses and singers can carefully navigate between the production of multiple genres of music, those from the Dalit community share stories of their struggles. The ability to transition between different song genres was possible for only a select few, contingent upon having upper-caste support to authenticate their work. The tycoons of the Punjabi music industry remain predominantly from dominant caste communities, who are well-networked with the mainstream music industry.

The caste divide in Punjab's music industry is also evident in the different kinds of music produced. Artists like Ginni Mahi, Poonam Bala, Rajini Thakwal, Neelam Thakarwal, Satvinder Singh Azad, and many others are part of the anti-caste music movement, creating *Ravidasiya* songs, *Bhimgeet*, and other anti-caste compositions. Music has become a trope to talk about the caste realities of Punjab. Several production houses have dedicated channels producing anti-caste songs. The emergence of an anti-caste music industry is relatively new and closely tied to the rise of the anti-caste socio-

political movement in the region.

While many songs by these artists are assertive at their outset, it is interesting to examine figures like Chamkila, who defied caste barriers in music and experimented with the 'vulgar'. The question of caste assertion in Chamkila's music manifests subtly through defiance and disobedience.

Who killed Chamkila?

This is not an investigative question, but rather an analytical one. There are different facets or arguments one could potentially consider regarding who killed Amar Singh Chamkila, something the movie also tries to explore.

However, the critical question one needs to ponder is: What made Chamkila's death inevitable? From marrying a woman from a dominant caste (Amarjot Kaur) to seeking popularity in the music industry despite coming from the Dalit community, these were some of the caste contractions that Chamkila was prey to. The non-acceptance of a 'low' caste by the dominant caste manifests itself at multiple socio-cultural-political levels, not just in terms of economic relationship. Despite Chamkila's popularity and economic accolades, the stickiness of caste never escaped him, and his death became the only ultimate pacification.

Thus, a Chamkila biopic that aims to represent truism will have to re-centre the caste question, something that Imtiaz Ali's movie seems to miss out on. It will need to think critically that when many others were singing the same genre, why was it that only Chamkila who was cornered for being 'vulgar'. The stickiness of caste needs to be read together with what constitutes the social meaning of being vulgar.



# Why West's Rhetoric of 'Democratic Backsliding' in India Is Hypocritical

The West has developed a discourse of a division in the world today between democracies and authoritarian regimes. Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran are seen as forming the principal axis of authoritarian regimes as against the democratic axis composed principally of the West and Japan.

India is seen as part of the democratic world but with caveats. These caveats are expressed without restraint by the Western media, think tanks, academics, human rights organisations and other components of civil society. At the official level too, the standards of Indian democracy are questioned in direct statements or reports issued by state organisations.

India is not seen as measuring up to the high standards of liberal Western democracies. The fact that India holds free and fair elections makes it difficult to deny its democratic credentials, but these are sought to be blemished by referring to India as an "electoral democracy". The Indian democracy is accused of being tainted with "majoritarianism", meaning that the rights and interests of the "minority" are infringed. It is therefore qualified as an "illiberal democracy". The current narrative of "backsliding of democracy" in India has now got wide currency in Western commentary on India. India, in the eyes of its Western critics, supposedly lacks the strong institutional checks and balances that exist in Western democracies. Poverty, relatively low levels of education, and caste divisions have always been seen as factors that do not make Indian democracy comparable in its quality to Western democracies.

The approach towards India's democracy has always been judgmental, patronising, questioning and censorious on human rights issues, to which has been added the issue of religious freedoms after the BJP came to power. For long after our independence, it was doubted if our democracy would survive. India's huge diversity in languages, cultures, religions, and ethnic groups was seen as unmanageable. In the past some prominent European intellectuals had little sympathy with India's democracy, believing that India needed a revolution like in China to address its core problems of poverty, inequality and social ills.

The West's rhetoric of "democratic backsliding" in India is hypocritical. The democracy factor has played little role in the West's policies towards India since 1947, which have been dictated by hard national interest. In our region, the US and its allies favoured the non-democratic military regimes in Pakistan over India. India's democracy did not shield us from years of sanctions by the US and its allies on nuclear, missile and dual-use technology issues. This policy was reversed by signing the nuclear deal with

India in response to geopolitical changes. The US and its allies have favoured communist China as a partner over democratic India for many decades. Even now, despite China becoming increasingly dictatorial under Xi, openly rejecting democracy and Western values in general, and persecuting its Muslim minority on a vast scale, the US and its allies have a much more extensive relationship with China than with India.

If the US and its allies are reaching out to India more recently and ties have greatly improved, the key reason is not "democracy", which India always was. It has more to do with the rise of India economically, the accompanying economic opportunities available for Western capital, India's more openness to foreign business and investment, and India's perceived role as a counter to China's increasing economic, technological and military strength that is feeding its geopolitical ambitions to rival the US as a preeminent global power.

The US rhetoric of democracy is, admittedly, directed at the entire non-Western world, not only at India. The promotion of democracy and Western values is a declared feature of US foreign policy. Its European allies as well as countries like Japan, Australia, Canada, etc, being democratic, it is the non-Western world that becomes the objective of colour revolutions and regime change policies. Spreading democracy becomes a moral excuse to interfere in the internal affairs of countries.

India, as the largest democracy in the world effectively, is a special case. To have an excuse to interfere in its internal affairs a narrative has to be built that India's democracy is "backsliding". This then gives the US and others a self-acquired

political and moral right to demand that India live up to certain standards. The issue of human rights and minorities is raised with the Indian government, and the "civil society" is cultivated to raise these issues, as is the media. Funding is provided to NGOs to question government policies. By its very nature, such interference is in favour of the opposition and against the government in power.

Opposition lobbies in India get encouragement from the external support of powerful Western countries to pursue their agendas. It is not surprising therefore that Indian politicians at times openly seek external intervention to "save" democracy in India. Our media amplifies external criticism of the Indian government's policies by foreign governments. It gives prominence to the "rating" of India's democracy by Western organisations without any questioning. Negative reports of Western think tanks on developments in India, as well as articles in the Western media known to be congenitally hostile to India, are given a lot of space. Such space is provided also to Indian-origin academics living abroad known to be very critical of the present government

This "backsliding of democracy" narrative becomes a pressure point on India, putting it on the defensive, forcing it to either reach out to critics in the West to explain why the strictures on India are misplaced or push back. At many international gatherings the question of "democratic backsliding" is raised with our External Affairs Minister and he is obliged to respond. The current general election, which is the largest democratic exercise ever in human history, has naturally attracted interest. But instead of celebrating it, a flurry of articles has appeared in Western mainstream media

and journals associated with think tanks which regurgitate all the old arguments about the decline of Indian democracy, the erosion of India's secularism, the rise of Hindutva ideology, the emergence of fascist trends, minority persecution, curbing of freedom of speech, constraints on the independence of judiciary, control over institutions, and so on. To this litany of charges has been added the arrest of Kejriwal, the blocking of some accounts of the Congress party, and the unleashing of enforcement agencies to intimidate the opposition, etc.

The trigger for these often vicious articles is the general expectation that the BJP will get a third term in power under Prime Minister Modi. These articles have been mostly written by persons of Indian origin resident abroad or in India, but not in every case. The most atrocious charges have been made in these articles, such as if Modi wins this will be the last general election in India. It is claimed absurdly that the constitution will be amended, India will formally become a Hindu state, the Muslims will be permanently marginalised and made second-class citizens, and so on.

That even supposedly serious and reputable journals can publish such outrageous propaganda suggests that this is part of a campaign instigated by those in the West who feel uncomfortable by the rise of a "civilisational" Indian state and what this may mean as a challenge to Western "civilisational" hegemony. The further consolidation of the Hindu personality of India through a legitimate democratic process and the accompanying decolonisation of the Indian mind and polity under a personage like Modi seems to have actuated this orchestrated campaign.

## 'We Need A Little Of That In US': JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon Says PM Modi Doing 'Unbelievable Job' In India

JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon has praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the performance of his government, saying he is doing an "unbelievable job" that has given India an "unbelievable education system and infrastructure". He also said a "little of that" is needed in the US.

While speaking at an event by the Economic Club of New York on Tuesday, Jamie Dimon said, "Modi has done an unbelievable job in India... He has taken 400 million people out of poverty. We go lecture Modi about... he has 400 million people without toilets. We are lecturing them how to do things."

He also said In India, 700 million people have opened bank accounts. The transferred payments are going through. "They (India) have got an unbelievable education system. Unbelievable infrastructure. They are lifting their whole country because this one man (PM Modi) is tough."

He also also called Modi "tough" for breaking old bureaucratic

systems and said "we need a little bit more of that here (in US)". "Every citizen by hand or eyeball or by finger is recognised.

They've bank account for 700 million people. Their transferred payments are going through," Dimon, who has been heading the largest US lender for over 18 years, said.

On the US, Dimon cautioned on national debt, inflation and geopolitical conflicts that could impact the economy. He said inflation, and along with it higher interest rates, could last longer than expected. He also called for a more harmonious relationship between lenders and regulators and that there's a need for more inclusive economic growth.

Dimon also addressed policy issues like US military power, political polarization and the nation's economic performance

compared to other countries. "I would like to see practitioners go back to the government," Dimon said.



# Welcome to Another 'American Century.' Also: We Suck

Walk around the airy Stanford campus or step into a venture firm's charmless office on Sand Hill Road. Drive up US-101 to San Francisco for cocktails at a beautiful Russian Hill home to take in the sunset over the Bay with startup founders and investors. And you can't miss it.

It's not (only) the animal spirits AI-raging in Silicon Valley. The last time that the place was this hot was after the iPhone came out in 2007, says one top venture capitalist, "except that the tech world is like 10 times larger now than it was then." There's something bigger that hits you. It's that — take a deep breath since this goes against most everything you hear about the U.S. these days — this is and on current trends is going to be the "American Century." Again. The forces and people remaking the world are American as much as was the case in the previous century. There is a big difference. Pax Americana was made largely by Washington, which designed and executed a plan for the post-war world, powered by the American engine of innovation and growth. In that century, the big names were politicians — FDR, Truman, Reagan.

Today, technology is that century-changing force, and America's in the lead by a long way, as you see so clearly from the companies that grew out of Silicon Valley and Seattle. The century-making people that historians of this period will write about one day are from here too: Gates, Zuckerberg, Musk, Bezos, one day perhaps Sam Altman. They created companies that are more powerful than

most nation-states, with valuations in the trillions.

That's the reality, and part of the problem. Tech moguls aren't politicians, answerable to voters. That's not healthy for our politics. Nor are they able to throw weight around the same way governments with nuclear arms can — though by any standard they wield more global influence than moguls of a past era, Rockefeller and JP Morgan included. They're flawed too, very much so. We know their manias, midlife crises and ethical lapses well. Their products are amazing, and harmful.

But they've taken on such prominence because the political class has created a vacuum for them to step into. And they are a huge reason America and its government remain the sole superpower. The Valley — as shorthand for the country's entire tech ecosystem — nailed the PC revolution and transition to mobile, owned social media and now is poised to win AI, blockchain and quantum computing too. This is largely why no one innovates or attracts the best talent as this country does — eight of the world's top 10 biggest companies today are American, six of them are tech giants — or can match it militarily. This was not the way it was meant to play out. Before America's 20th century was even over, decline was foretold, notably by Paul Kennedy in 1987. Back then, Japan would pass us. Early on in this century, some picked Europe to "eclipse the American dream" and "run the 21st century." It sounded a little funny then, too. A case was and continues to be

made for China, its economy growing fast as a share of the world's — at one point, indeed, bound to eclipse America's — and powering its global power ambitions. Nearly a quarter of the way through this century, you have to cherry pick data (to be sure, in journospeak, the fiscal deficit is bad, and other calamities loom over the economy; we're behind the Chinese on green tech; and fill in more blanks here ... ) to make the case for American decline.

The fact is we're preeminent — and set to become more so.

Why? It's not only about tech. Rivals stumbled. Economic and political sclerosis, then Brexit, killed the promise of a united and revived Europe in the post-Cold War era. China's once rising share of the global economy is now in reverse, and demographics suggest the trend will hold; America accounts for over a quarter of world GDP, the highest share in almost a decade, and rising. Their ruler Xi Jinping mismanaged Covid and its economy and spooked his neighbors. China is building AI into its own formidable tech ecosystem, but it's a closed one and lacks access to better Western technology. At home, America's deeper strengths continue to be unmatched: the ability to attract the best people and capital, amazing universities and a culture open to new things. The AI wave, bringing in talent and driving value most visibly here in the Valley, strengthens America's ability to project economic and hard power. But — and this is a big one — the rise of West Coast

power coincides with the decline of political power. Politics is our view into ourselves. And the view for us and the rest of the world is ugly. If America's strong from the perspective of San Francisco Bay, Americans certainly don't think so. The country's on the wrong track, they tell pollsters, which brings to mind the brilliant insight of a since disgraced comedian: "Everything is amazing and nobody is happy."

You can't argue with feelings. Set aside the usual wails about "unprecedented polarization." This goes deeper. Polarization is a symptom of a crisis of confidence in our political elites. After every big moment of this century — 9/11, the financial crisis, the pandemic, the last presidential transition — they didn't rise to the occasion. It's little wonder that people from Washington aren't admired and don't feel appreciated the way the guy who made the iPhone is (even if he's seen, posthumously, as a bit of a jerk). At some point in the last 25 years, Washington stopped being a Big Place. One of the smarter strategic thinkers I know in Washington the other day asked me, "How many people in this town wake up and think they are changing the world?" Not many that we could think of. How many politicians do we know who are happy? Or who one day might be seen as giants? Again, we came up blank. So it's not surprising that the rest of the world doesn't believe that it's living in Another American Century — regardless of the objective data on venture spending, economic growth or unemployment.

## Judge approves \$418 million damages for home sellers overcharged by Realtors - will YOU receive a payout?

A \$418 million settlement that will change the way Americans buy and sell homes forever has received preliminary approval from a federal judge.

US district judge Stephen R. Bough this week signed off an agreement involving the National Association of Realtors (NAR) after it was accused of artificially raising commissions by enabling brokers to collude on sales. The NAR was sued in a landmark case by home sellers in Missouri which paved the way for multiple copycat lawsuits.

Homeowners who sold properties in the last seven years may now qualify for a payout - though they must submit a claim by May 9, 2025. Eligible sellers must have listed the home on a multiple listing service (MLS) and paid a commission to a real estate brokerage.

While Judge Bough has signed off the deal, it is still subject to final court approval on November 26, according to Reuters. This is largely seen as a formality. The NAR - which has 1.5 million members - will begin implementing sweeping rule changes to the way their agents operate from September 16.

The crux of the case centered on the commissions NAR agents earned on home sales.

Agents in the US charge home sellers an average commission of between 5 and 6 percent of the sale price of their property - more than twice the average fees charged in the UK, for example.

It is paid entirely by the seller but, in accordance with standards specified by the NAR, is split down the middle between the two brokers.

The NAR is the largest trade association in the US and only its fee-paying members are allowed to call themselves 'Realtors'. They are also the only people with access to its database of properties available for sale. Those databases are referred to as 'multiple listing services' or MLSs and require the seller's agent to list the amount of commission their client is paying. In theory, the system enables agents to 'steer' buyers to houses on which the commission is higher so they can profit more from a sale. According to a survey by consulting firm 1000watt, more than 76 percent of 640 real estate agents in the US said buyers' agents would be more likely to show a property if they knew the seller was paying higher commission. In turn the seller's agent can tell clients that if they don't offer up enough commission, buyers won't see their house. But under

the new ruling, agents will be essentially blocked from making those commission offers. NAR spokesman Mantill Williams said of the preliminary approval: 'It has always been NAR's goal to resolve this litigation in a way that preserves consumer choice and protects our members to the greatest extent possible. 'There are strong grounds for the court to approve this settlement because it is in the best interests of all parties and class members.' The decision was welcomed by attorney Michael Ketchmark who represented sellers in the suit. He said: 'This is the first step in bringing about the long-awaited change. Later this summer, NAR will begin changing the way that homes are bought and sold in our country and this will eventually lead to billions of dollars and savings for homeowners.' Realtors have previously expressed concern over how the litigation will impact their earnings. Desirae Wyckoff told DailyMail.com last year: 'I feel like realtors are getting an unfair reputation from this. 'I could see a lot of these people hanging up their license.' The Justice Department has also reopened its investigation into the NAR to scrutinize broker commissions and how real estate listings are marketed.

# Former Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein's 2020 rape conviction overturned

**New York court concluded that that the trial court erroneously admitted testimony of uncharged, alleged prior sexual acts against persons other than the complainants of the underlying crimes.**

(News Agency)-New York's highest court on Thursday overturned Harvey Weinstein's 2020 rape conviction, finding the judge at the landmark #MeToo trial prejudiced the ex-movie mogul with "egregious" improper rulings, including a decision to let women testify about allegations that weren't part of the case.

"We conclude that the trial court erroneously admitted testimony of uncharged, alleged prior sexual acts against persons other than the complainants of the underlying crimes," the court's 4-3 decision said. "The remedy for these egregious errors is a new trial."

The state Court of Appeals ruling reopens a painful chapter in America's reckoning with sexual misconduct by powerful figures — an era that began in 2017 with

a flood of allegations against Weinstein. His accusers could again be forced to relive their traumas on the witness stand. The court's majority said "it is an abuse of judicial discretion to permit untested allegations of nothing more than bad behaviour that destroys a defendant's character but sheds no light on their credibility as related to the criminal charges lodged against them."

In a stinging dissent, Judge Madeline Singas wrote that the majority was "whitewashing the facts to conform to a he-said/she-said narrative," and said the Court of Appeals was continuing a "disturbing trend of overturning juries' guilty verdicts in cases involving sexual violence." "The majority's determination perpetuates outdated notions of sexual violence and allows

predators to escape accountability," Singas wrote.

Weinstein, 72, has been serving a 23-year sentence in a New York prison following his conviction on charges of criminal sex act for forcibly performing oral sex on a TV and film production assistant in 2006 and rape in the third degree for an attack on an aspiring actress in 2013.

He will remain imprisoned because he was convicted in Los Angeles in 2022 of another rape and sentenced to 16 years in prison. Weinstein was acquitted in Los Angeles on charges involving one of the women who testified in New York.

Weinstein's lawyers argued Judge James Burke's rulings in favour of the prosecution turned the trial into "1-800-GET-



HARVEY."

The reversal of Weinstein's conviction is the second major #MeToo setback in the last two years, after the US Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of a Pennsylvania court decision to throw out Bill Cosby's sexual assault conviction.

Weinstein's conviction stood for more than four years, heralded by activists and advocates as a milestone achievement, but dissected just as quickly by his lawyers and, later, the Court of Appeals when it heard arguments on the matter in February.

Allegations against Weinstein, the once powerful and feared studio boss behind such Oscar winners as "Pulp Fiction" and "Shakespeare in Love," ushered in the #MeToo movement. Dozens of women came forward to accused Weinstein, including famous actresses such as Ashley Judd and Uma Thurman. His New York trial drew intense publicity, with protesters chanting "rapist" outside the courthouse. Weinstein is incarcerated in New York at the Mohawk Correctional Facility, about 100 miles (160 kilometres) northwest of Albany.

## Russia vetoes UN resolution calling to prevent nuclear arms race in outer space



(News Agency)-Russia on Wednesday vetoed a UN resolution sponsored by the United States and Japan calling on all nations to prevent a dangerous nuclear arms race in outer space, calling it "a dirty spectacle" that cherry-picks weapons of mass destruction from all other weapons that should also be banned.

The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 13 in favour, Russia opposed and China abstaining. The resolution would have called on all countries not to develop or deploy nuclear arms or other weapons of mass destruction in space, as banned under a 1967 international treaty that included the US and Russia, and to agree

to the need to verify compliance. US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said after the vote that Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space. "Today's veto begs the question: Why? Why, if you are following the rules, would you not support a resolution that reaffirms them? What could you possibly be hiding," she asked. "It's baffling. And it's a shame." Putin was responding to White House confirmation in February that Russia has obtained a "troubling" anti-satellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet.

## China evacuates entire town as record rains, winds lash its south

(News Agency)-Relentless rains, hail and winds of near hurricane intensity battered southern China, forcing the evacuation of an entire town of more than 1,700 people in the province of Guangdong, media said on Thursday.

Buses and helicopters ferried to safety all the residents of the township of Jiangwan in the Shaoguan region as a new round of floods arrived, the reports said, citing local authorities.

"I have never seen such heavy rain in my life, nor have people older than me," said Jiang, a 72-year-old resident who gave only his surname, according to state-run China Daily. Power lines were downed and mobile telephone networks disrupted across the region, as the rains set off dangerous mudslides, inundated homes and destroyed bridges.

Since the arrival of powerful storms last week, scenes of havoc have played out across the province, once dubbed the "factory floor of the world", as



dozens of local rainfall records have been shattered for the month of April.

In a restaurant in the provincial capital of Guangzhou this week, customers gazed in horror as winds became hurricane-like gales and tore down trees, while fast-moving sheets of rain pounded the street outside, videos on social media showed. The province prone to summer floods had its defences tested in June 2022 with the heaviest downpours in six decades, which forced the evacuation of

hundreds of thousands of people.

The latest storms, which have killed at least four people, were brought by the El Nino weather phenomenon and a stronger-than-normal subtropical high, a semi-permanent high pressure system circulating north of the equator. The associated warmer temperatures drew in more moisture-laden air from the South China Sea and even as far away as the Bay of Bengal, weather officials said, leading to more rain and winds.

# Pro-Palestine protests at US universities continue, over 60 arrested in a day

(News Agency)-More than 60 protesters were arrested in just a day as pro-Palestine demonstrations continued unabated at the campuses of major universities in the US. The protests against the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza have intensified after over 100 people were arrested at New York's Columbia University last week. On Thursday, Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, witnessed 28 arrests, including 20 community members, while at least 33 protesters were taken into custody at Indiana University. Meanwhile, protesting students at Columbia University, the epicentre of the pro-Palestinian protests, have refused to stop their stir until the prestigious institution agrees to cut ties with Israeli academic institutions and disinvest its funds from entities linked to the Jewish nation.



Here are the latest developments: Georgia State Patrol officers arrested 28 people on the campus of Emory University in Atlanta on Thursday, CNN reported. The State Patrol said officers had to resort to pepper balls to control the unruly protesters as some of them threw bottles at the personnel. At least 33 people were arrested on the campus of Indiana

University after they refused to halt their encampment protests despite several warnings from the police. The Indiana University Police Department said the protesters were warned on Thursday morning and afternoon to remove their structures, but to no avail. Palestine Legal, an organisation that seeks to protect the rights of people in the US to speak out on behalf of Palestinians, has

filed a federal civil rights complaint against Columbia University demanding a probe into the treatment of students after last week's mass arrest of anti-war protesters, Reuters reported. The University of Southern California on Thursday announced its decision to cancel the main graduation ceremony. The move came 10 days after administrators said the student valedictorian who had expressed support for Palestinians would not be allowed to speak, reports The Associated Press. Ellen M. Granberg, president of George Washington University, said that DC Metropolitan Police were asked to help in the relocations of an "unauthorised protest encampment" on campus after multiple directions to move to an alternate protest site "went unheeded by encampment participants". US State

Department spokesman Vedant Patel said President Joe Biden's administration "supports the right of anybody to peacefully protest", adding that "harmful rhetoric, whether it be rooted in antisemitism, Islamophobia, is incredibly problematic and needs to be condemned and called out". Former US President Donald Trump has criticised the mass anti-Palestine protests and described them as "tremendous hate". He said the campus protests were far worse than the violent clashes in Virginia in 2017 between white nationalists and counter-protesters that killed one woman. The Northeastern University in Boston and the University of California, Los Angeles, witnessed the formation of fresh encampment protests on Thursday, where students were seen forming human chains and chanting anti-war slogans.

## ByteDance prefers TikTok shutdown in US instead of selling it: Report

**TikTok owner ByteDance would prefer to shut down its loss-making app rather than sell it if the Chinese company exhausts all legal options to fight legislation to ban the platform from app stores in the US.**



(News Agency)-TikTok owner ByteDance would prefer to shut down its loss-making app rather than sell it if the Chinese company exhausts all legal options to fight legislation to ban the platform from app stores in the US, four sources said. The algorithms TikTok relies on for its operations are deemed core to ByteDance's overall operations, which would make a sale of the app with algorithms highly unlikely, said the sources close to the parent. TikTok accounts for a small share of ByteDance's total revenues and daily active users, so the parent would rather have the app shut

down in the US in a worst case scenario than sell it to a potential American buyer, they said. A shutdown would have limited impact on ByteDance's business while the company would not have to give up its core algorithm, said the sources, who declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to the media. ByteDance declined to comment. - It said late on Thursday in a statement posted on Toutiao, a media platform it owns, that it had no plan to sell TikTok, in response to an article by The Information saying ByteDance is exploring scenarios for selling TikTok's US

business without the algorithm that recommends videos to TikTok users. In response to a Reuters request for comment, a TikTok spokesperson referred to ByteDance's statement posted on Toutiao.

TikTok's CEO Shou Zi Chew said on Wednesday the social media company expects to win a legal challenge to block legislation signed into law by President Joe Biden that he said would ban its popular short video app used by 170 million Americans.

The bill, passed overwhelmingly by the US Senate on Tuesday, is driven by widespread worries among US lawmakers that China could access Americans' data or use the app for surveillance.

Biden's signing sets a January 19 deadline for a sale -- one day before his term is poised to expire -- but he could extend the deadline by three months if he determines privately owned ByteDance is making progress. ByteDance does not publicly disclose its financial performance or the financial details of its units.

## US sanctions over dozen firms, including 3 from India, for ties with Iran



(News Agency)-The US slapped on Thursday sanctions on over a dozen companies, individuals and vessels, including three from India, for facilitating illicit trade and UAV transfers on behalf of the Iranian military. The US Department of Treasury said these companies, individuals and vessels have played a central role in facilitating and financing the clandestine sale of Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to Russia's war in Ukraine. While Sahara Thunder has been identified as the main front company that oversees Iran's commercial activities in support of these efforts, the three India-based companies to have been slapped with sanctions for supporting Sahara Thunder are Zen Shipping, Port India Private Limited, and Sea Art Ship

Management (OPC) Private Limited. Iranian military entity Sahara Thunder relies on a vast shipping network involved in the sale and shipment of Iranian commodities on behalf of Iran's Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL) to multiple jurisdictions including the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and Venezuela, the Treasury said. "Sahara Thunder has entered into time-charter contracts with India-based Zen Shipping and Port India Private Limited for the Cook Islands-flagged vessel CHEM (IMO 9240914), which is managed and operated by UAE-based Safe Seas Ship Management FZE," it said. "Sahara Thunder has used the CHEM to conduct multiple shipments of commodities since 2022.

# Cyrus Broacha's relationship advice: When it comes to marriage, don't behave like a monkey

**Are you having relationship troubles? Are you looking for someone to talk your heart out about these problems? From how to approach your crush to how to handle a break up, shoot your questions to Cyrus and he will answer them.**

Are you having relationship troubles? Is the long distance bothering you or do you have trust issues? Are you looking for someone to talk your heart out about these problems?

Worry not. TV anchor, theatre personality, comedian, political satirist, columnist and author, Cyrus Broacha is here to help you: From navigating relationship trouble to helping your love life go the distance, he's got all the dating advice you'll ever need from your first date to a commitment to even something that you can't find a solution to. From how to approach your crush to how to handle a break up, shoot your questions to Cyrus and he will answer them.

I am a 25-year-old woman and I've been dating a senior in office for the last 6 months. However, now, since I don't feel the same way for him, how can I end this relationship without making it

awkward for both of us? - DT  
DT Details. I want details. How old is this senior? If he's 71 years old to your 25, then the finger of suspicion for a completely, 'Matalbi', relationship falls on you. Secondly, is he directly overseeing your career? Can he affect your career? Thirdly what is the nature of your arrangement? If you both order from Scootsy, who will pay? Finally today's office (except for the serial office starring Mukul Chadda and Gopal Datt, and available on Hotstar), culture is very strict about dating within the employee circle. So it's amazing you got away with it in the first place. To save your career, maybe both your careers, please be frank and straight forward with him. Don't hedge, ask for the pink slip. Pink slip for the romance only. Maybe have a witness you can trust, so matters don't escalate. I am a 32-year-old man

and I've been married for the last 3 years. We stay with my family, but she wants to move out. How do I make her understand that we would have to stay with my family? - TA  
Congratulations TA, you are the 4,00000th person to ask this questions. It's explained in a book by Steve McQuah, called "The Great Escape" The modern version is more clear with the title 'The Great Escape from the In-laws'. The sequel to that is, 'Surviving Tragedy', which outlines life if you don't escape. I'll put it this way, its bad news and worse news for you. If you leave, the old family is upset. If you stay, the new family is upset. But when push comes to shove, from a practical point of view, you will spend more of your remaining years with your wife. Right now in Mumbai flats are selling faster than pot holes. So if you can afford it that would be my painful choice. (If you want sea facing,



let's talk offline, I know someone who knows someone. I am a 27-year-old woman and I've been single for a while now. However my parents want me to get settled. I don't think I'm ready for it now. How should I put this across to my parents? - GM  
GM, why don't we learn from the Animal Kingdom? When two red tailed Baboon's parents feel it's time to get their young daughter married, they don't put ads in papers or websites. And, they don't pressurize their young daughter, (let's call her say Laila), to go find a suitable match in such and such a time. No they don't. In fact Laila goes about picking nuts and berries,

and fleas until she finds the right baboon, who then shares his nuts and berries and fleas with her thus cementing their union. Please explain all this to your parents with corresponding pictures of baboons, sharing holy matrimony without parent interference. When it comes to marriage, don't behave like a monkey. Behave like a baboon. I am a 23-year-old guy and I've been dating a girl for the last 2 years. The issue is that she wants to pursue her higher studies and move abroad and is not ready to be in a long distance relationship. Should I convince her or is it time to end this relationship? - BH

## Popular scents don't always make best perfumes, here's why

**Perfumes are described in terms of 'notes', which can be single odour ingredients, such as vanilla, musk or jasmine, as well as more generic smells like 'floral notes'.**

Perfumes that use the most common scents do not always obtain the highest number of ratings, according to an analysis of 10,000 perfumes and their online ratings. The study, published in the journal PLOS ONE, reveals which odours are likely to bring success, with some surprising combinations providing a boost to ratings.

Perfumes are described in terms of 'notes', which can be single odour ingredients, such as vanilla, musk or jasmine, as well as more generic smells like 'floral notes'. Perfume smell is then described in terms of a combination of these notes. Combinations of several notes that are commonly used in perfumes are called 'accords'.

Researchers from Imperial College London in the UK used complex network analysis to determine the most popular notes and accords. The researchers analysed 1,000 notes in over 10,000 perfumes and their success in online shops. They found that some notes and accords are 'over-represented' in the dataset, meaning they appear more often than by chance, but that these are not necessarily the ones that are present in perfumes with the highest number of ratings.

While some common accords, like lavender and geranium, are often present in 'successful' perfumes, some less-common notes and accords have an even stronger link with perfume popularity, for example jasmine plus mint, or musk plus vetiver



and vanilla.

The researchers said this could be a new avenue for perfumers to discover scent combinations that are likely to be successful but are not yet widespread.

"Our work provides insights into factors that play a role in the success of perfumes. It also sets up a framework for a statistical analysis of fragrances based on simple properties and customer reviews," said Vaiva Vasiliauskaite, from Imperial College London. "It could be a beneficial tool for systematic ingredient selection and act as

an artificial 'Nose' -- a traditional craft-master of perfumery," Vasiliauskaite said.

The team acknowledged that brand influences perfume popularity but found no correlation between perfume price or time since release and success. The smell itself did have a large relation to perfume success. Their mathematical analysis also allowed them to determine which notes had particularly high 'enhancement' effects -- those that played a significant role in improving the rating of the accord they were added to.



# Left untreated, arthritis can affect organs, lower life expectancy

**Urban lifestyle fuels unhealthy eating patterns and inactivity, and is leading to nutritional deficiencies and obesity, which causes and aggravates bone and joint diseases.**

At least one in four men and women in India have varying degrees of bone and joint degeneration after 50, with age-related wear and tear, injury, obesity, osteoporosis and rheumatism being the leading causes of pain and restricted movement.

Living with pain is not inevitable, said experts. "Many people think arthritis and related conditions, such as rheumatism and osteoarthritis, are an inevitable consequence of getting older, especially if there is a family history. This misconception is not only outdated, but dangerous. With modern medicine and techniques, one does not have to put up with the symptoms of arthritis," said UK-based consultant rheumatologist Dr Taher Mahmud, who calls the failure to treat arthritis and osteoporosis effectively a medical emergency.

"Left untreated, arthritis can severely impact the quality of life,

causing irreversible damage to muscles and bone structure. Severe symptoms can even affect the functioning of organs and lower life expectancy," said Dr Mahmud, co-founder of The London Osteoporosis Clinic.

Urban lifestyle fuels unhealthy eating patterns and inactivity, and is leading to nutritional deficiencies and obesity, which causes and aggravates bone and joint diseases. "Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis are common in India, especially among the overweight and people above 50-60 years," said Dr RK Arya, director, Sports Injury Centre, Safdarjung Hospital.

"Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory disease that starts appearing in the 40s, usually in women with a family history of the disease. The symptoms of both, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, are similar-painful and swollen joints. But, rheumatoid arthritis causes more disability in the smaller joints

such as fingers and toes," Dr Arya said.

Pain from osteoarthritis, caused by joint overuse injuries, is usually milder in the mornings but becomes acute with continued use of the affected joint. People with rheumatoid arthritis wake up with stiff and painful joints, but experience an easing of pain as the day progresses.

Treatment focuses on a combination of therapies to relieve symptoms, improve joint function and preserve bone and joint health. "At least 30% of general physician consultations in the UK relate to musculoskeletal

problems, which account for 41% of work-related ill health. People are living in debilitating pain, even when the pain and lost productivity is largely preventable. This impacts their quality of life, productivity," Dr Mahmud said.

Treating arthritis and rheumatic



conditions not only alleviates the symptoms, but also reduces bone damage and subsequent need for surgery. "In many cases, lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise, are all that's needed to alleviate arthritic and rheumatic symptoms. For those who need it, a range of other medical options, such as injections, disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) to slow or stop the immune system from attacking joints, can treat and reverse the conditions," said Dr Mahmud.

If the pain persists, painkillers such as paracetamol, tramadol and oxycodone, and hydrocodone preparations help relieve pain, while non-steroidal

anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) lower, both, pain and inflammation.

"As a result of better treatment options, the number of people with rheumatoid arthritis needing joint repair, joint replacement or joint fusion surgeries have gone down over the past decade," said Dr Yash Gulati, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital.

"Losing weight is a must, as is doing gentle exercises to improve range of motion of the joint and strengthen the muscles surrounding the joints. These, however, must be done under medical supervision," said Dr Gulati.

## Take a rain check: Dos and don'ts for a healthy monsoon

**Load up on Vitamin C, drink more water, and focus on your feet, doctors say.**

### Stay hydrated

The cool of a rainy day can be deceptive. High humidity levels leach the water from your system more slowly than high temperatures, but cause dehydration nonetheless. So don't wait till you feel thirsty to drink water, and be sure to get your minimum of eight glasses a day.

### Boost your immunity

Raise your Vitamin C intake to boost immunity against cold and flu. Also load up on repellent plants like citronella and essential oils that can help keep bugs away. Clear away any stagnant water in and around your living spaces, to lower risk of dengue and malaria infections.

### Focus on your feet

Your feet bear the real brunt of the monsoon, and are exposed to possible infections from everyday muck as well as leptospirosis-causing contaminated water in puddles. So focus on feet hygiene in the rains. And ensure your feet and footwear are dry as far as possible, to keep fungal infections at bay.

### Avoid fish and non-seasonal vegetables

Leafy vegetables like spinach, cabbage and cauliflower are harder to clean when they're harvested in the churned, wet earth of the monsoon; they also rot more easily in this weather. So opt instead for seasonal vegetables like bitter



gourd or tinda. Monsoon is also breeding season for many fish species, so keep away and let nature replenish its reserves. Iron all your clothes

Damp clothes can become breeding grounds for fungus when you fold them and put them in your cupboard. Make sure you iron all your clothes

before you put them away, to avoid mold. You can also add a few neem leaves to the water while washing clothes, for a natural mold-repellent.

# RBI Bars Kotak Mahindra Bank From Onboarding New Customers Online, Issuing Credit Cards

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday barred private sector lender Kotak Mahindra Bank from onboarding new customers through its online and mobile banking channels, and from issuing fresh credit cards.

"The bank shall, however, continue to provide services to its existing customers, including its credit card customers," the RBI said in a statement on April 24.

These actions were necessitated based on significant concerns arising out of the RBI's IT examination of the bank in 2022 and 2023 and the bank's continued failure to address these concerns in a comprehensive and timely manner, the RBI said.

"For two consecutive years, the bank was assessed to be deficient in its IT Risk and Information Security Governance, contrary to requirements under Regulatory guidelines," the RBI said.

It said the business restrictions were being placed in the interest of customers and to prevent any possible prolonged outage which may seriously impact not only the bank's ability to render efficient customer service but also the financial ecosystem of digital banking and payment systems. Details of RBI's Restriction On Kotak Mahindra Bank

In the absence of a robust IT infrastructure and IT Risk Management framework, the bank's core banking system (CBS) and its online and digital banking channels have suffered frequent and significant outages in



the last two years, the recent one being a service disruption on April 15, 2024, resulting in serious customer inconveniences. "The bank is found to be materially deficient in building necessary operational resilience on account of its failure to build IT systems and controls commensurate with its growth," the banking sector regulator said.

In the past two years, the Reserve Bank has been in continuous high-level engagement with the bank on all these concerns with a view to strengthening its IT resilience, but the outcomes have been far

from satisfactory. It is also observed that, of late, there has been rapid growth in the volume of the bank's digital transactions, including transactions pertaining to credit cards, which is building further load on the IT systems, the RBI added. In 2020, the RBI had also taken a similar action against India's largest lender HDFC Bank for a series of technical glitches it experienced for the previous two years. The central bank had put temporary restrictions on the bank's new digital banking launches and proposed business-generating IT applications until it resolves the outage issues.

It had also temporarily barred HDFC Bank from onboarding any new credit card customers. However, the central bank relaxed the restriction on the onboarding of new customers by HDFC Credila in June 2023.

**Impact on Kotak Mahindra Bank's Shares**  
After the RBI's action against the bank, the shares of Kotak Mahindra Bank on Thursday are likely to fall. On Wednesday, its shares rose Rs 29.8 or 1.64 per cent to close at Rs 1,843.05 apiece on the BSE. Today, Shares of Kotak Mahindra Bank ended at Rs 1842.95 apiece on BSE, up 1.65 per cent from previous close, while benchmark sensex ended nearly flat. Jyoti Prakash Gadia, managing director at Resurgent India, said, "The RBI's restrictions on Kotak Mahindra Bank in respect of fresh onboarding of new customers through online mode and mobile banking and issuing credit cards is indicative of the significant importance that the RBI is laying on the need to have strong and sustainable information technology (IT) systems in the context of the current growth of digital banking."

She added that while such new-age private banks had set up good IT systems in the initial stages to create a niche market for them to attract new customers, upgradation of IT systems as the business grows is of utmost necessity to ensure the required standards IT security and customer service.

## Trump Media CEO calls on GOP lawmakers for help in Wall Street fight



Trump Media & Technology Group CEO Devin Nunes is escalating his fight against Wall Street traders dealing in the company's stock, turning to his one-time colleagues on Capitol Hill for help.

The former Republican congressman and current Trump Media CEO is pressing top House GOP lawmakers to open up investigations into what he called "anomalous trading" by professional market players betting on the stock to

decline.

"There are strong indications of unlawful manipulation of DJT stock," Nunes wrote in a letter to the lawmakers, which was disclosed Wednesday in a regulatory filing by the company — the parent of Donald Trump's Truth Social media platform. The letter was addressed to House Judiciary Chair Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), Financial Services Chair Patrick McHenry (R-N.C.), Ways and Means Chair Jason Smith (R-

Mo.) and Oversight and Reform Chair James Comer (R-Ky.).

Nunes's letter marks a new salvo in Trump Media's attacks on Wall Street over claims that the Trump-controlled company's stock price is being swayed by professional traders wagering against it. Trump Media, whose stock is majority owned by the former president himself, has undergone severe price swings since debuting in the public markets late last month.

The stock initially surged as individual investors bought shares, often as a means of showing support for the presumptive GOP presidential nominee. But Trump Media, which trades on the Nasdaq stock exchange under the ticker DJT, has since plunged in value as the company has disclosed more information about its underlying financials and moved to permit some large investors to eventually cash out if they want.

Wall Street professionals, meanwhile, have raised concern about the prospects of the company's money-losing business while traders have rushed to bet against the stock, a practice known as short selling. Nunes asked the lawmakers to

investigate the trading in Trump Media's stock and "whether any laws including RICO statutes and tax evasion laws were violated, so that the perpetrators of any illegal activity can be held to account." He said "a thorough and expeditious investigation" should include collecting trading data from the SEC's massive trading database known as the Consolidated Audit Trail, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority and the clearinghouse for U.S. stock trades.

Spokespeople for Jordan, McHenry, Smith and Comer did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Nunes is particularly worried about a specific and illegal type of short-selling activity known as "naked short selling."

Typical shorting involves traders borrowing shares that they then sell into the market before buying them back later — hopefully at a lower price to collect the difference. But naked short selling entails never borrowing the stock to start, a far riskier practice. Last week, Nunes alleged in a letter to Nasdaq CEO Adena Friedman that there was "potential market manipulation" in the company's stock from naked short selling.

## Margot Robbie-signed 'Barbie' poster, original 'Love Actually' script to be auctioned to raise funds for children affected by war

A Margot Robbie-signed 'Barbie' poster, the original script for 'Love Actually' starring Hugh Grant and Emma Thompson, and a signed guitar from Ed Sheeran are among several star-studded items in the latest auction for War Child, which advocates for children living through war.

Over 70 celebrities have donated rare items to the charity's 'Spring Clean' fundraiser, including War Child global ambassador Carey Mulligan, who is gifting a limited edition book of the 'Saltburn' script signed by the cast.

Other items up for bid include a signed Dutch oven from Stanley Tucci, a jacket worn by Gillian Anderson on 'Sex Education', signed guitars from Ed Sheeran and Nile Rodgers, a signed drum skin from Coldplay, several costumes from 'The Crown', and a signed script.

Additionally, there's the 'Banshees of Inisherin' script signed by Martin McDonagh, an 'Evita' script signed by Jonathan Pryce, a Bradley Cooper-signed 'Maestro' book and album, a signed Florence + the Machine poster, an original Soundwaves print from Kate Bush's 'Running Up That Hill', a signed Hulk action figure from Mark Ruffalo, and much more, as reported by variety.com.

Mulligan expressed her gratitude, stating, "Right now, more children are living through conflict than ever before. Having worked with War Child for over 10 years, I am grateful to have witnessed firsthand the life-changing impact of providing vulnerable children and families with the resources they so desperately need."

"It is amazing what the creative industry can achieve when we come together, and I hope as many people as possible choose to help War Child by bidding on these rare items which have been lovingly donated," she added.

Richard Curtis, director of 'Love Actually', and script editor Emma Freud, also pledged their support by donating the original shooting script of the film.

They said: "It contains three unseen storylines, which we eventually cut, lots of jokes which didn't work, and some childish swearing which we were forced to remove by adults."

"Many of the stories are also told here in a different order, as it turns out that writing a multi-story plot can be as complex as playing 3D chess, and we couldn't tell until we saw it put together which bits were in the wrong places."



## Kim Kardashian confirms some rumours about her: Sleeping with eyes open, blow drying jewellery

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian revealed that some rumours about her doing the rounds on the Internet are true. The 43-year-old shared on 'Jimmy Kimmel Live!' that it is true that she sleeps with her eyes slightly open. Kim said that she knows the fact because her "sisters have taken videos and pictures" of it, reports aceshowbiz.com.

She also said that it is "very true" that she blow-dries her jewellery before she puts it on to warm it up. "I hate being freezing," she said. "When you put on cold jewelry or anything with a zipper, I just need it warm." When host Jimmy Kimmel asked if it was true that she has "someone take the Starbucks sleeve off (her) coffee because (she hates) the sound of cardboard," Kim answered: "Yes, that's true, and I hate the feeling." She added: "I just can't see it being done, or I can't hear it and I can't feel it. The cardboard getting moved off of the cup is like nails on a chalkboard to me."





## Legend recognises legend: A.R. Rahman wishes Taylor Swift all the best for her new album

Oscar and Grammy-winning music composer A.R. Rahman has wished American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift success for her recently released studio album, 'The Tortured Poets Department'. On Wednesday, Rahman, who recently delivered the chartbuster album for the Imtiaz Ali directorial 'Amar Singh Chamkila', took to X to wish the singer.

Sharing the album cover, he wrote, "All the best @taylorswift13 for your latest album #THE TORTURED POETSDEPARTMENT (sic)." 'The Tortured Poets Department' is the 11th studio album by Swift for which she has worked with Jack Antonoff and Aaron Dessne.

The album was announced by Swift at the 66th Annual Grammy Awards on February 4, 2024. It became the most streamed album on Spotify in a single day with 300 million streams.

Swift not only claimed the top spot, but also secured her position as the most-streamed artiste in a single day on the platform.

She created the album while working on her Eras Tour. It is a double album, with the second part, subtitled 'The Anthology', released two hours after the first.

American rapper-singer Post Malone features on the opening track 'Fortnight', which was released as the lead single.



## Mahadev betting scam: Actress Tamannaah Bhatia summoned by Maha Police

Bollywood actress Tamannaah Bhatia has been summoned by the Maharashtra Cyber Police for the ongoing investigations into the multi-crore Mahadev online gambling and betting scam, officials here said on Thursday.

Bhatia had allegedly endorsed and promoted the online viewing of IPL matches on Fairplay app, one of the group apps of Mahadev, said the officials.

The actress has been asked to appear before the Cyber Police on Monday, April 29, to record her statement as a witness for the investigations into the alleged illegal streaming of the IPL 2023 series on the app.

Noted for her role in 'Baahubali' and other films, Bhatia follows other entertainment

industry players like the business managers of Sanjay Dutt and Jacqueline Fernandes, besides singer Badshah and over 425 persons from different fields getting arrested across the country.

As more skeletons tumble out, multiple inter-state and Central agencies are now probing the Mahadev app scam, reported to run into an estimated over Rs 6,000 crore.

After the scam erupted in 2021, the involvement of many celebrities, entertainment world personalities, business folks and others, ostensibly with political patronage, came to the fore. The case has seen six dozen more FIRs lodged all over India and as a money-laundering angle emerged, the Enforcement Directorate also jumped into the multi-dimensional probe.



## Kajal Aggarwal's ode to her 'favourite, gorgeous' swans as she stuns in ivory lehenga

Actress Kajal Aggarwal looked magnificent as she stunned in an ivory lehenga, which she described as an ode to her favourite and the gorgeous swans.

Kajal took to Instagram and showcased her stunning lehenga, adorned with 3D laser-cut embroidered flowers by the label Aikeyah.

The actress completed her attire with pearls and nude makeup, opting for glossy lips in darker tones, such as brown.

She captioned the post: "An ode to my favourite, the gorgeous white swan, symbolic of purity, love, and affection, often associated with innocence and grace."

According to the label's Instagram page, Kajal's outfit was described as 'Aaliya', an embroidered ivory ensemble.

On the professional front, Kajal will next be seen in the Telugu film titled 'Satyabhama', scheduled to release on May 17.

The film narrates the story of ACP Satyabhama, who investigates a missing person case.



## Lara Dutta: OTT has led to a greater representation of 'real' characters

Actress Lara Dutta made her streaming debut in 2020 with the action-comedy series 'Hundred'. Four years later, the actress has another show, 'Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond', streaming on OTT.

Having spent close to half a decade in the streaming medium, the actress shared insights regarding OTT.

The actress said that the streaming medium today is growing tremendously, with many platforms coming into the picture. With numerous platforms available, there are greater avenues to explore different characters.

Lara emphasised that OTT inspires a greater representation of characters, particularly bringing "real" characters to the forefront.

Elaborating on this, the actress told "The wonderful thing about OTT is that because there are so many platforms, you are addressing different segments



of an audience. You have to create content that speaks to all of them."

"It has resulted in not just greater representation of characters from different walks of life but also ones that are 'real'. OTT is a complete game-changer and has tremendous growth in the future," she said.

Lara also spoke about her character in 'Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond', describing her as a lone wolf – someone who is ready to give her all for the country.

The actress said: "Manisha doesn't have a military background, but there are some similarities between us. I think the script is your starting point for a character. Manisha is a lone wolf, and she's very straightforward. It was interesting and fascinating to build out this kind of character for me. She's kind of careless about people and stuff, but when it comes to the country, she's ready to give everything."

"My approach to the character is to flesh out what you have never seen in the character, like the background story of the character. To create a character like Manisha Sehgal, I prepared from scratch. I'm sure when the audience watches this series, it will keep them on the edge of excitement," she added.

'Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond' streams on JioCinema.

## Secret behind Raashii Khanna's perfect look in track 'Achacho': Egg whites and spinach

Actress Raashii Khanna, who is awaiting the release of her Tamil film 'Aranmanai 4', has shared how she achieved her look in the 'Achacho' song from the film.

The actress shared that she banked on weight training, a healthy sleep cycle and perfect nutrition to get the perfectly toned frame for the song. She emphasised that there is no 'shortcut' to fitness and that she made some changes in her routine and sleep cycle.

Raashii said: "I work hard and I won't take that away from me. Even on a 12 to 16-hour shoot day, I take out time for my workouts. I wake up early, I sleep early. I put in the work. And I have been at it for many years now. For the song, I went on to do a lot of weight training with split routines and circuits, making it intense but not too long. The idea was to tone up."

She further mentioned that a week prior to the shoot, she opted for an egg white and spinach diet though she wouldn't recommend it for the long run.

She said: "Nutrition plays a very important role when you are trying to look a certain way. For the song, I did go on an egg white and spinach diet for a week prior (the shoot). But I wouldn't recommend it because it is not healthy in the long run."

She further stated that during the normal shoot days, she maintains a very healthy diet with "cheat meals on Sundays". The actress, who is set to tickle funny bones in horror-comedy 'Aranmanai 4', also has 'The Sabarmati Report' in the pipeline, where she will be seen sharing the screen with Vikrant Massey.

The film, which sees both actors play the role of reporters, will hit the theatres on August 2, 2024. Raashii is also looking forward to the release of a Hindi film 'TME' and a Telugu film 'Telusu Kada'.



## Priyanka Chopra reveals 'Tiger' reconnected her with the beauty of India



Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who narrated the documentary film 'Tiger', has shared why the story surrounding these majestic big cats holds a special place in her heart.

Reflecting on her experience narrating the documentary, the actress expressed, "Tiger holds a special place in my heart. This film has played such an important role in reconnecting me not only with Mother Nature but also with the beauty of India and her forests."

Narrating Ambar's journey through the untamed wilderness, navigating her hardships, mysteries, and struggles, was an exhilarating experience."

The documentary unravels the remarkable life of Ambar, a young tigress, as she faces the challenges of nurturing her cubs amid the lush wilderness.

Priyanka added: "Ambar's journey holds invaluable lessons for us all. It serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and beauty found in the natural world, and the ways in which we can draw inspiration and strength from these magnificent creatures."

Directed by the trio of Mark Linfield, Vanessa Berlowitz, and Rob Sullivan, and produced by Linfield, Berlowitz, and Roy Conli, 'Tiger' is the culmination of 1,500 days of filming.

# How Mike Johnson Is Taming Trump and His Party — Against All Odds

By JONATHAN MARTIN

There are no atheists in foxholes and few isolationists in high office.

Confronted with sobering briefings revealing Ukraine on the brink of collapse, Speaker Mike Johnson made the leap from Benton, Louisiana (pop. 2,048) congressman to custodian of the trans-Atlantic alliance. "It was the intelligence, it was the Europe generals who are in charge of the freedom of the world and of course it was the developments as well, everything has escalated," Johnson told me, alluding to the conversations he had with the American brass at European Command. If those developments, namely Ukraine running out of weapons, finally brought urgency to the speaker, his decision to call the foreign aid vote Saturday delivered a bracing dose of political clarity in Washington.

The Republican Party is drifting from its Reaganite past, but when faced with the burden of leadership, there's still muscle memory to be found; Donald Trump is more committed to self-interest than any ideological anchorage and can be managed accordingly; and bipartisanship remains possible when bad actors are removed from the negotiating table.

It may seem hard to square the congressman who, only in September, opposed \$300 million in Ukraine aid with the one who put his career on the line to



deliver \$61 billion to the battered country. It's easier to grasp when you realize Johnson grew up in the shadow of B-52s at Barksdale Air Force Base during the 1980s. He's a Republican of the "Red Dawn" generation. It only took a higher level of intelligence briefings, granted to congressional leaders, for him to pick up that old Cold War hymnal.

Recall: While Johnson dragged his feet for months on bringing the aid bill to the floor, he changed his tune almost immediately on the concept once he became speaker. Just days after his October election to the post, Johnson told Senate Republicans he supported Ukraine

funding, so long as aid to Israel received a separate vote. I was struck by the turnaround at the time and asked a savvy House GOP aide how to explain it. "Amazing what some intel briefs will do," the aide said. By spring, Johnson was sounding more like Dick Cheney than Rand Paul.

"This is a projection of American strength," Johnson said last week, adding that "we stand in the defense of freedom." As striking, he and other House GOP lawmakers have lately been reviving even more distinctly 2000s-era

language.

Following the vote Saturday, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Johnson's fellow Louisianan, told me the U.S. was "standing up to the evil actors around the world, there's an axis of evil right now between Russia, Iran and China."

Few in the House have been more aggressive than the Foreign Relations Chair, Mike McCaul of Texas, in trying to rekindle those embers.

"I keep telling my colleagues: They're all related, man," said McCaul. "To abandon Ukraine will only invite more aggression from Putin but also Chairman Xi in Taiwan. The ayatollah has already reared his ugly head." By the time I heard Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.), another ardent proponent of the aid package, use the "axis of evil" phrase, I asked where this language was coming from (besides George W. Bush speechwriters). "Spend an hour in the SCIF getting briefed," Fitzpatrick shot back, referring to the secure facility used for classified briefings. "These are not isolated problems."

Now, part of this effort by GOP hawks is aimed at bringing China into the conversation. That's a strategy based on facts (Beijing is indeed sending weapons technology to Moscow) but also politics (confronting China is far more unifying among congressional Republicans).

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# Why China Blocks the Dalai Lama's Sri Lanka Visit

By: Arun Anand

China has been blocking His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visits to Sri Lanka. Recently, a renowned Sri Lankan Buddhist monk revealed this in a media interview. When asked about China's view on the Dalai Lama, the most venerable Dr. Waskuduwe Mahindawansa said, "We respect him and invited him to Sri Lanka, but China did not like that. China pressed against our government as well, we don't like that. He is a Buddhist leader, he has freedom, and we have the freedom to invite." This incident wasn't an exception; China has been blocking His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visits to Sri Lanka since 2015. In fact, China has never shied away from expressing its displeasure whenever the Dalai Lama moves from one place to another or



meets any person of repute. For China, the Dalai Lama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, is a 'separatist'. China has even called him 'wolf in monk's robes'. Why does a benevolent exiled leader agitate an aspiring superpower so much? The answer lies in the complex history of Tibet and the Chinese subjugation of the same over the last 70 years.

#### TIBET: A BRIEF HISTORY

Tibet lies in the confluence of Central, South and East Asia. It has a recorded history dating

back to 602 AD when Namri Songsten became the first king of Tibet, uniting the central Tibetan states. There are records of conflict between China and Tibet, which was ended by the China-Tibet Peace Treaty 821 AD. The treaty famously mentions, "Tibetans shall be happy in Tibet, and Chinese shall be happy in China." After more than 700 years, China and Tibet both sustained subsequent Mongol invasions. In the latter half of the 16th century, Altan Khan, the Mongol ruler, gave the title of Dalai Lama to Sonam

Gyatso, leader of the Gelugpa school of Buddhism. In return, the Dalai Lama decreed that Altan Khan be reincarnated as Kublai Khan, which gave legitimacy to his rule. This event marks the founding of modern Tibet. For the next two hundred years Chinese tried to take hold of Tibet but could not succeed, and their influence declined in the first half of the 20th century. In 1912, the Qing emperor of China renounced his post, giving way to the establishment of the Republic of China. China also lost whatever suzerainty it had over

Tibet, and the Dalai Lama reiterated that, "We are a small, religious, and independent nation." In 1914, Britain, Tibet, and China met in Shimla to negotiate the borders between British India and Tibet. In that treaty control of Qinghai was given to China, and the rest of Tibet was recognised as autonomous.

Thereafter Tibet enjoyed a relatively peaceful three decades until China invaded it again after the end of the Chinese civil war in 1950. The new People's Republic of China initially gave the 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso) complete authority over Tibet. However, widespread Chinese brutality on Tibetans continued which finally resulted in the Tibetan National Uprising of 1959. In March 1959, Chinese troops attacked the Potala Palace in order to arrest the Dalai Lama, but he managed to escape to India. Today plenty of evidence of Chinese high-handedness while dealing with the Tibetan Uprising are available online. Since then, the Dalai Lama has extended multiple proposals toward China for peaceful engagement, which has always been ignored and subjected to blatant personal attacks by Chinese authorities.

Since 1960, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been heading or guiding the Tibetan government in exile from Dharamshala and is one of the most substantial hopes for the 7 million Tibetans living under the oppressive Chinese regime. The Dalai Lama has carved a niche for himself for not being just a religious head but also as a symbol of resistance, which is non-violent, supportive and talks about love and care among people. It gives the Dalai Lama a distinguished reputation worldwide. His teachings navigate through the ideas of joy and happiness and how to channel one's emotions for the better. Since the late 1970s, the Dalai Lama has travelled from one continent to another spreading the wisdom of Buddha worldwide. He has followers worldwide, ranging from Hollywood superstars to politicians, diplomats and intellectuals from various corners of the world. This immense popularity of the Dalai Lama presents a phenomenal challenge to the Chinese regime accused of cultural genocide in Tibet. The CCP has an official ideology which thinks of religion as an 'opium of the masses'. Its political leaders have defined religion as 'foreign cultural imperialism', 'feudalism' and 'superstition'. The Chinese regime seems to be fearful of the aura and popularity of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is suspected that a visit of the Dalai Lama to other countries would bring the Tibetan cause to the forefront and expose its repressive regime.

Thus, China has been repeatedly using its economic clout and influence to curtail the popularity of the Dalai Lama. The repeated attempts by China to stop his holiness visit to Sri Lanka is part of the same playbook. The way the Chinese government has arm-twisted Sri Lanka to stonewall the visit of an esteemed Buddhist spiritual leader is a matter of serious concern. It has again brought to the forefront widely known folly of smaller economies walking into the Chinese 'Debt Trap' losing their sovereignty.

# How Sunak, Great Hope of Multicultural Britain, Fell Flat and Is About to Fizzle Out

By Poonam Joshi

Last week, Susan Hall, the Conservative Party's candidate to replace London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan, posted a photograph on Twitter that Khan was planning to charge motorists for every mile that they would drive in the capital – already one of the most expensive places in the world to drive a car in. The claims were shared and reposted gleefully by Conservative supporters, columnists and even a handful of Tory MPs.

But it was a lie. Khan has categorically ruled out the so-called "Pay-Per-Mile" scheme and the picture that Hall had tweeted was photoshopped. Despite repeatedly being called out for her lies, Hall doubled down and then released a video repeating the claim.

Making false claims about your opponents has been a part of political discourse around the world for decades – especially around election time – but it appears that after 14 years in power, such tactics are all that's left for Britain's Conservatives and their beleaguered leader Rishi Sunak.

When he was anointed Britain's first Indian-origin Prime Minister in



October 2022, it was hailed as a celebration of Britain's progressive, multicultural democracy. More importantly, after the buffoonery and chaos of the Boris Johnson and Liz Truss months, Sunak promised "integrity" and "accountability". Instead, his administration has been marked by in-fighting between multiple factions and posturing.

The Conservatives are mutilating

themselves from within – moderate centrists and traditional conservatives in a seemingly life-and-death battle with extreme right-wingers who want to shred Britain's international legal obligations, like the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) which the great Conservative leader Winston Churchill helped draft, and who are never shy about being Islamophobic or to protest against "wokeness", whatever that means

at any given time.

The public, weighed down by a cost of living crisis and crumbling public services – including Britain's world-renowned National Health Service – appear to have had enough.

An important recent survey of more than 15,000 people by Survation forecasts that Keir Starmer's Labour will win a vast 286-seat majority at the general

election later this year – with the Conservatives reduced to an embarrassing 80 seats.

And yet it could have all been so different.

When Sunak was appointed Minister of Finance in 2020, it inspired confidence in markets – despite the ongoing damage caused by Brexit.

When Covid-19 hit, he quickly implemented sound policies, including the furlough scheme which helped steer companies through the worst public health crisis in a century. Sunak enjoyed huge levels of popularity for aiding employees. His "Eat out to Help Out" scheme then helped prop up Britain's vitally important hospitality sector.

But the economic aftermath of the pandemic – made worse by the additional cost of Brexit – has meant that Sunak's reputation for economic pragmatism has dissolved rapidly.

He's also been fined for breaking Covid 19 rules; his cabinet ministers have been continually caught up in various scandals and there have been defections and a coterie of MPs whose one solution to all life's problems is to bring back Boris Johnson.

## The Haiti I Know Is No More. But There Is Still Hope.

By JOEL DREYFUSS

I have a cousin in Haiti who's an ophthalmologist. Each morning, she turns on the radio before leaving for her office. She's not listening for the weather or traffic but for the safest route amid the gang violence that has gripped Haiti. What intersections are blocked? Where were the shootings overnight? Are the police still in control of major roads? Who was kidnapped yesterday? Even as the violence has soared, she still goes to work.

She's one of 12 million Haitians living precariously in a country that has tumbled into lawlessness. I admire her courage and her dedication to her patients — she doesn't benefit from an armored car, as do some of Haiti's rich — but I am not surprised. Members of our family have a three-century tradition of service to Haiti, going back to the colonial era and the struggle for



independence from France. Our ancestors — French Catholics and Jews, Colombians with Spanish and Native American origins and enslaved West Africans — came to Haiti from three continents. We produced lots of doctors, educators, engineers, architects, artists and, yes, politicians. My father had briefly worked for a previous government in the early

'50s and quit over corruption. He joined UNESCO and took us to Liberia, West Africa, when I was seven. When we were due to return to Haiti six years later, he opted to land in New York instead, where I spent my adolescence.

I spent 50 years as a journalist for American media companies. A few relatives flirted with politics. A paternal great-uncle was briefly mayor of Port-au-Prince in the

1920s; an uncle was ambassador to Washington during World War II and was present at the creation of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. My father kept his distance from the Duvalier regime, which ruled Haiti for 30 years, and discouraged us from visiting until after the death of "Papa Doc." But an important part of my identity remains firmly rooted in Haiti, the place of my birth. I've spent a lot of time thinking about the responsibility of Haitians at home and abroad to help save our native land.

Haiti has suffered political crises before, but this one is different. I feel the accumulated sins of corrupt government, demographic pressures and a lack of enlightened leadership has finally reached a critical mass.

The future of Haiti has never seemed so bleak. Since 2021,

it has had no functioning government. The terms of all elected officials have expired. The widely reviled acting prime minister, Ariel Henry, is locked out of the country. Gangs have taken control of 80 percent of Port-au-Prince, shut down the main port and forced the airport to close. They have ransacked hospitals and pharmacies and put the seriously ill in jeopardy. The police are outgunned — and there is no army. A council selected to install a transitional president finally named members after a month of negotiation but was immediately denounced by some opposition members as a scam. One gang leader is even demanding he be included in transition talks. On Thursday, the Biden administration resumed deporting Haitians back to my war-torn nation. The Haitians being deported are not just those caught at the border.

# Who Owns a Scientific Invention?: The Truth About ORS

By Kiran Kumbhar

A few days ago a popular X account repeated an oft-cited piece of misinformation: Dilip Mahalanabis “never patented his” ORS formula. This is a piece on how science and scientists’ work are distorted in the social media jungle these days.

In 2022 when Mahalanabis died, the news took me back to years ago when I was an aspiring public health student. I had come across a 2009 interview of him and another stalwart, Dhiman Barua, in the WHO’s Bulletin. In it he recounted his pioneering 1971 work in Bangaon, Bengal.

However, I was uncomfortably lurched back to the present upon reading some of the supposed tributes ppl were paying to Mahalanabis. Alongside thoughtful commentaries, a lot of what was written or shared contained toxic nationalism and incorrect, often blatantly wrong, information.

Besides, all the major media outlets rehashed the same few details of his life and work, offering few glimpses of Mahalanabis as an individual. In many commentaries, it was difficult to gauge whether it was Mahalanabis the person or ORS the solution that was being commemorated.

The tributes, obituaries, and commentaries on Mahalanabis got me wondering about how we approach science and history, how we commemorate the dead, and how society and politics intersect with science.

First and foremost, I was surprised by the unfortunate erasure of the long history of the development of oral rehydration therapy (ORT), including the involvement of many researchers and institutions both Indian and international.

Firstpost gushed about how Mahalanabis “never patented his ORS solution”, and a popular account on X spread the blatantly false information that he “invented the ORS sachet”.



Mahalanabis was a genius. And like every genius he stood on the shoulders of and rubbed shoulders with other geniuses. As my own memory of coming across Barua and Mahalanabis together indicated to me, ORT was a massive innovation behind which were the mammoth efforts of many. The original 1973 paper in which Mahalanabis laid out the details of the spectacular ORT work in Bangaon, was written jointly with four other experts. At the start of the article, they cited much earlier research & fieldwork on which their work was based.

For example, they wrote that the “effectiveness of oral glucose-electrolyte solutions” had already been demonstrated in hospitalized patients, and that the ingredients and proportions

in the solution they used were derived from previous research. Clearly, ORS – or for that matter the “ORS sachet” – was not “invented” by Mahalanabis, and neither was ORS “his” (or of any single researcher’s) to patent.

In fact, far from being the product of the stereotypical lone genius scientist working alone away from the messiness of the world, ORT/ORS was the product of multiple researchers and organizations toiling deeply in the world’s diarrhoea trenches.

In recent decades, historians and other scholars have worked to dispel the myth of the typical “lone genius” portrayal of great scientists: The journal Nature for instance, published an article titled “Einstein Was No Lone Genius” in 2015.

Some of these efforts are part of

larger initiatives towards “decolonizing” modern science and its narratives, with scholars showing how it is incorrect to assume that only white European/American male researchers were responsible for the major modern-era scientific advancements.

Considering these recent progressive directions in thinking about science, it was jarring to witness the extreme Indian/Hindu nationalistic content of some popular tributes paid to Mahalanabis. The erasure of the collective efforts of researchers across the globe was striking.

One consequence of the misinformation in these obituaries, was that people were left with really little idea of what it is that makes Mahalanabis so important. The 1994 history of ORT by Joshua Ruxin provides useful contextualization of his work. By 1970, it had been demonstrated that ORT worked well in stable, hospital settings under expert supervision, but these studies were inadequate to convince the mainstream medical and public health communities of the feasibility and effectiveness of large-scale ORT treatment.

In their own words, what Mahalanabis et al accomplished was to provide

“confirmation of the effectiveness” of ORS in a “field trial... [where] extremely adverse logistic and administrative conditions prevailed”.

Once again, let it be remembered that Mahalanabis even himself (with his co-authors) laid no claim to having “invented” ORT/ORS — their claim to fame was for having demonstrated the effectiveness of employing locally-produced ORS treatment in a large-scale field setting. Another historical aspect that needs revisiting is the oft-repeated claim that ORS was termed by a 1978 Lancet editorial as the (or among the) “most important medical advance” of the twentieth century. However, the Lancet said nothing of the sort.

What a 1978 editorial (“Water with Sugar and Salt”) did say: “The discovery that sodium transport & glucose transport are coupled in the small intestine, so that glucose accelerates absorption of solute and water, was potentially the most important medical advance this century.”

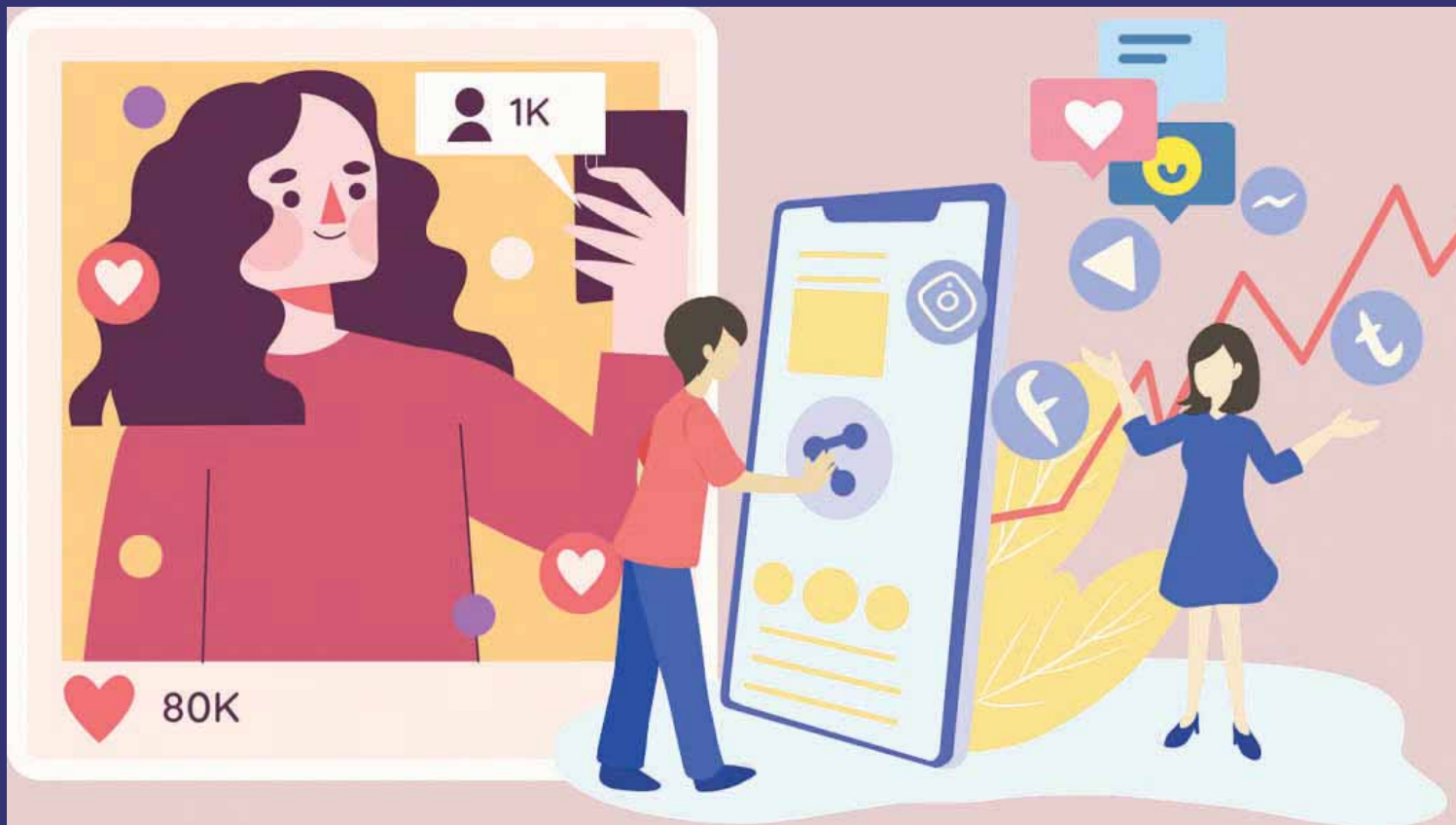
It is true that as a general rule, trend-setters in fields like public health receive far less media acclaim than those in other areas in science and medicine: one saw, for example, surgeons rather than public health experts being overwhelmingly invited to TV studios during COVID.

This common bias against supposedly “unglamorous” fields could be one of the main reasons why many of us stumbled upon Mahalanabis and his work only after his death.

Nevertheless, if we are genuinely interested in learning about and celebrating such stalwarts and their achievements, then propagating misinformation and false histories under the agenda of nationalism and even decolonisation, is certainly a sad way to do that.

# Influencer is a real job. They are shaking up the internet

*The reach and impact of influencers are so significant that even politicians such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi have recognised their value—the National Creators Award is proof.*



By TRIYA GULATI

A frequently asked question today goes something like this: Is being an influencer a real job? How you reply is likely to reveal your age and your coolness quotient. In today's Instagram era, people regardless of their age, look to influencers for advice on everything—from makeup recommendations and movie reviews to money management tips. Being an influencer is more than just a passing trend or a casual pastime; it is a legitimate profession that demands specific skills and attributes. While it may seem like the grass is greener on the influencer side, we shouldn't label it as easy just because it looks glitzy. It's high time we peer beyond the sparkle and appreciate how influencers have disrupted the business of marketing and advertising agencies. They play a crucial role in shaping trends, opinions, and consumer behaviours. Their reach and impact are so significant that even political figures, such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have recognised the value of influencer marketing—the

National Creators Award is proof. This growing influence underlines the fact that being an influencer is not just about minting money by posting photos or videos online; it requires 4 Cs: creativity, confidence, consistency, and a willingness to face criticism. Being an influencer is also a strategy of survival for some. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's restrictions have led women to become YouTube influencers posting about food, fashion, makeup and family tales. But you don't have to go that far to see how influencers can use their platform and their popularity to make a real impact. Meet Abhi and Niyu, the content creator couple making waves with their political and environmental videos. Not only did they raise awareness about the 2020 Northeast floods on YouTube, but they also donated money and helped NGOs gather funds for relief efforts.

**Staying fresh**

In a world where content is king, influencers are constantly looking to whip up fresh, exciting material that connects with their audience. This means coming up with out-of-the-box ideas, trying new formats to stand out, and

always keeping up with the latest trends. Whether it's eye-catching photos, captivating stories, or entertaining videos, creativity is the fuel that powers an influencer's ability to hold their audience's attention.

Diving into your creative bank every other day sounds easy, but it's not all sunshine and rainbows. Your mind isn't an endless vault of novelty. It's draining, can fry your brain, and sometimes feels like you're banging your head against a wall. Hey, even the great Picasso hit a creative slump now and then.

Confidence is another essential ingredient. Putting yourself out there for the world to see is a bold move. You need a certain sense of self-assuredness to share opinions, personal stories, and your life, especially knowing you will most definitely face backlash. Criticism is part of the job, and the internet can be a ruthless place. Everything, from an influencer's appearance, their content and their personal lives, gets criticised. With people crossing the line with harsh language and even threats. Handling this with grace and resilience is the key to survival. But you can't complain because

you signed up for this gig.

Despite the constant criticism, influencers must consistently show up every day, and with fresh content, because consistency is crucial to keeping followers engaged. Being your own boss doesn't mean discipline can take a back seat. Slacking off can hurt your reach and fan base. Influencers must balance their work with personal lives, often blurring the lines between the two to ensure they remain visible and relevant in an ever-changing digital landscape.

**Doesn't sound too glamorous now, does it?**

**Disrupting traditional marketing**

The rise of influencers has also led to a boom in influencer marketing, shaking up how brands connect with their audiences. Think of it like a democratic, capitalist utopia where you must keep your audience engaged or risk losing them—and your paycheck. Influencers are motivated to dish out quality content their followers crave, which means sticking with brands that match their vibe and can be seamlessly woven into their work. This system is pretty good at policing itself.

Companies benefit more from these collaborations because, with zero effort, they get to tap into niche audiences and drive engagement in ways old-school advertising can't keep up with. Influencers shape consumer opinions and steer buying choices, making them powerful assets for businesses aiming to broaden their horizons.

Even politicians have embraced the power of influencer marketing. BJP leader and road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari recently dined on Chinese food with food-and-travel influencer Kamiya Jani aka Curly Tales. They spoke about his favourite meals and vacation spots, while he promoted his work on infrastructure. An interview of foreign minister S Jaishankar by YouTuber and podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia aka BeerBiceps has racked up 8.7 million views since it was published in June.

By connecting with influencers, political leaders can appeal to younger generations and spread their message more effectively. This strategy shift highlights the growing importance of influencer marketing across different industries and fields. It's definitely the next big thing. Who knows? Influencers might even run for office one day. But that's a conversation for another day.

The truth is that we're in an era where freelancing and self-employment are the norm. Harvard Business Review this month even said the future of the workforce is freelance. More and more people want to avoid going to 9-to-5 jobs. There's also a growing distrust of big corporations and a desire to learn and DIY, making the internet the go-to platform for all things life. Like it or not, influencers are becoming respected voices, on par with experts in their fields.