



The South Asian



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Harjit Sajjan's order



Page 15

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'Biden is toast'

*Democrats freak out over
Biden's debate performance:*



Story on Page 14

Canada's Big Worry: A US Civil War



Story on Page 13

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*Arabs to Abyssinians, India was
once a mercenary magnet—Russia
war shows it has turned exporter*



Story on Page 15

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COVID-19 business loan scheme*



Story on Page 14

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GOPIO Manhattan and Happy Life Celebrate International Day of Yoga 2024

By our staff reporter) Manhattan, New York: Global Organization for People of Indian Origin - Manhattan Chapter and Emmy-nominated filmmaker and Happy Life Yoga speaker Tirlok Malik, along with The Indian Panorama and Indian American Forum, organized an interactive and informative session on June 22 featuring eminent experts and speakers to celebrate International Day of Yoga 2024.

The ever-ebullient Malik emphasized loving yourself and "if you love yourself, it is your responsibility to take care of your happiness and health". He conducted practical exercises as well as chair yoga, peppered with calls for laughter among

a large number of participants logged in for the session from the New York area, other parts of the USA, India, and around the world.

Consul General of India in New York, Amb. Binaya Srikanta Pradhan, in his address as Chief Guest, underlined that yoga is a holistic body-mind-spirit system. He congratulated GOPIO and Tirlok Malik for holding the event open to all.

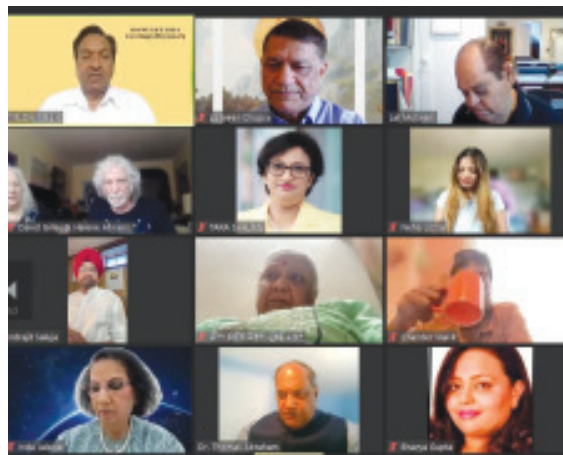
In his 4th year leading this event, session

host Malik asked the speakers to address the question: There are challenges and hardships in life, but how do you let them go and laugh at life? Give me your personal mantra, he asked them. Indu Jaiswal, Chairperson of the Indian American Forum and a medical



professional, shared her mantra: "Always have a positive outlook and believe in Yourself." Prof. Indrajit Singh Saluja, Editor-Publisher of The Indian Panorama, said that happiness is within you. He added that the five don'ts – ahimsa, Satya, etc. -- of Patanjali yoga is a formula for not causing unhappiness to others. Tara Shajan, a medical professional, suggested we should revisit our happy memories, particularly from childhood,

and try to lower our happiness threshold. Neeta Bhasin, the founder of Times Square Diwali, shared that she has learned to prioritize her own happiness. Neha Lohia, a filmmaker and spiritual enthusiast, said that we should take



whatever happens to us as 'prasad' from God. Parveen Chopra, founder of wellness and spirituality webmag ALotusInTheMud.com, mentioned the sutra, "Heyam dukham anagatam" (Avert the danger that has not yet come). Do regular exercise, yoga and meditation, he said, to avoid poor physical and mental health later in life.

Dr. Renee Mehra, Host of Zoom in with



Renee Online show conducted a short meditation. Others who spoke included GOPIO International President Lal Motwani, AIA National President Gobind Munjal, 'Vegan Ambassador' Anil Narang and Deborah Fishman. GOPIO

International Chairman Dr. Thomas Abraham, who also serves as an advisor to GOPIO-Manhattan, in his welcome address spoke about the objectives of GOPIO and urged who are not members yet to join GOPIO International organization or a nearby chapter. GOPIO-Manhattan President Shivender Sofat, said the message shared at the session should be shared with others. GOPIO-Manhattan

Board member Sid Jain provided the technical service at the session Chapter Secretary Bhavya Gupta gave the vote of thanks. Tirlok Malik has conducted over 100 Happy Life Yoga workshops over four years. He created this workshop (No mats needed!) inspired by Ayurveda, yoga, and Indian philosophy as a practical way to live a happier and healthier life in today's testing times.


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NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS ANNOUNCES NEW CHIEF BIOPREPAREDNESS OFFICER

(By our Staff reporter) New York, NY - NYC Health + Hospitals today announced the appointment of Syra Madad, DHSc, MSc, MCP, CHEP to the new role of Chief Biopreparedness Officer. In this role, Dr. Madad will lead the systemwide special pathogens team in preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts. She will oversee the development and implementation of comprehensive biopreparedness strategies and policies to enhance the healthcare system's readiness against biological threats, including emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. Dr. Madad will also develop and maintain robust education and training programs for healthcare workers, focusing on screening, enhanced infection control, patient management, and the use of high level personal protective equipment. This also includes overseeing the design and execution of drills, exercises and simulations for healthcare staff to ensure high proficiency in response protocols and procedures related to biological emergencies, such as an exercise last year around the Marburg virus, an Ebola-like disease. Additional responsibilities include overseeing the systemwide special pathogens internship program and the climate health fellowship program



as part of Central Office Emergency Management, monitoring global infectious disease trends and system-level surveillance, and collaborating with partner agencies across all levels of government. Earlier this year, Dr. Madad was featured in an episode of the health system's podcast, The Remedy, where she spoke about how NYC Health + Hospitals is preparing for the next pandemic.

"Dr. Madad is an internationally-recognized expert on emerging and re-emerging infectious disease threats," said NYC

Health + Hospitals Assistant Vice President of Emergency Management David Silvestri, MD, MBA, MHS. "Her experience and skillset are critical in helping NYC Health + Hospitals achieve our mission of keeping New Yorkers safe and healthy regardless of what threats may arise."

"I am deeply honored to serve as the Chief Biopreparedness Officer for NYC Health + Hospitals, a role that embodies our commitment to health security as the cornerstone of a resilient health system," said NYC Health + Hospitals Chief Biopreparedness Officer Syra Madad, DHSc, MSc, MCP, CHEP. "I am dedicated to advancing our capabilities not just to respond, but to proactively anticipate, mitigate, and prepare for biological threats. Through fostering innovative strategies and building strong partnerships, I am committed to enhancing our system's resilience. Together with the dedicated teams at the NYC Health + Hospitals Central Office Emergency Management and the System-wide Special Pathogens Program, we will continue to strengthen our emergency management efforts."

In addition to her role at NYC Health + Hospitals, Dr. Madad is Core Faculty at the National Emerging Special Pathogens Training and Education Center, affiliate faculty at the Center for Emerging

Infectious Disease Policy & Research at Boston University and Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. She's an advisor to the World Health Organization's Technical Advisory Group on the Responsible Use of the Life Sciences and Dual-Use Research as well as on the federal advisory group, National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity. Dr. Madad has made substantial contributions to the field of science through her publication of papers, book chapters, and journal articles and has presented her work at over 70 conferences globally.

Dr. Madad regularly authors, is frequently quoted in, and appears on major news outlets such as The New York Times, Washington Post, Atlantic, CNN, MSNBC, and Fox among others. She is featured in the 2020 Emmy-nominated Netflix docuseries, Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak and the 2021 Discovery Channel documentary, The Vaccine: Conquering COVID. She's the recent recipient of the "Top Doctors Pumphandle" Award, named in honor of John Snow and recognizes those who are trailblazers in the field of epidemiology and outbreak response.



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Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners' Zhong Neng offshore wind farm in Taiwan delivers first power

First power from Zhong Neng, a 300 MW offshore wind project off the coast of Changhua County in Taiwan, marks a significant step towards on-schedule completion of the project later in 2024.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark and TAIPEI, Taiwan, June 26, 2024 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- The Zhong Neng offshore wind farm, a joint venture between Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners ("CIP") through its fund Copenhagen Infrastructure IV ("CI IV") and China Steel Corporation ("CSC"), has today achieved a significant milestone with the delivery of first power.

Zhong Neng received local content plan approval from the Taiwan government in November 2019 and is the only second wind farm in Taiwan's offshore wind history to fulfill the highest localisation requirements. The first was the CIP-owned Changfang-Xidao offshore wind farm, which was recently inaugurated. The first turbine on Zhong Neng was installed in May 2024 and a third of the wind turbines are now installed. Completion of all offshore installation work is expected in the third quarter of 2024 followed by full grid connection by year-end. Once fully operational, Zhong Neng will provide clean energy to approximately 300,000 households in Taiwan. "We are

very pleased to have reached this important project milestone in close collaboration with our partner, CSC. The successful delivery of first power demonstrates our joint project execution capabilities and I would like to thank all our partners and congratulate the Zhong Neng team for reaching this landmark," said Mads Skovgaard Andersen, Partner at CIP. "Zhong Neng achieving first power and last month's inauguration of Changfang-Xidao are both significant contributions to Taiwan's energy transition." "The concerted efforts of shareholders CSC and CIP, the Zhong Neng team, and our supplier and contractor partners have ensured that all foundations were fabricated and installed - and that the electrical facility was successfully completed earlier this year. These achievements have paved the way towards successful turbine installation and power generation and offshore construction has progressed smoothly since the first turbine installation was announced in May," Zhong Neng Chairman Wang Shyi-chin said. "We are committed to achieving full grid connection of the Zhong Neng project on schedule this year, which is not only our responsibility to our partners, but also our commitment to Taiwan's energy transition."

Indian American Night organized in Nassau County



(By our staff reporter)
Long Island- The Nassau County Executive Hon. Bruce Blakeman, Indian American Forum (IAF) India Association of Long Island (IALI) and India Day Parade (IDP USA) joined hands together under the leadership of Dr. Bobby Kumar Kalotee to celebrate Indian American Night. This is part of



Commissioner, Meng Li, Deputy Director of the office of Asian American Affairs and Jing Zhao, Program Coordinator of the office of Asian American Affairs.

The honorees included many deserving individuals from different aspects of life, some community leaders, organizational heads, businessman and promoters of Indian Culture through art.



International Nights series organized by Nassau County Department of Parks and Recreations and Museums. at Harry Chapin Lakeside theatre, Eisenhower park, on a beautiful Sunday evening, June 16th, 2024. Several Hundreds of members came out and attended the event.

Being it was a special Day for all the fathers, to celebrate with their families, many members of the community attended the event with their families to show their support. Indian American Night Adding to that another big hurdle was to have access to the Theatre due to dismantling work of the T20 ICC stadium. A special thanks to the Commissioner of Park for his courtesy arrangements to have access close to the Theatre. Hundreds of talented kids along with their parents and guests came to participate and support the event. The program started

with Indian National Anthem of IAF ,welcomed everyone for coming and thanked all



sung by Jyoti Gupta and Bina Sabapathy and American Bobby Kumar Kalotee, National Anthem Sung by Aaria Mody. Indu Jaiswal Chairperson

Congratulated all Honorees for their contributions and support. Special emphasis given to the participation of our children in traditional cultural program. A beautiful and mesmerizing nonstop group dances and instrumental presentations were applauded by the crowd. Thanks to the teachers and students of Sadhanalaya (Mrs. Sadhana Paranj)Mudra Dance Studio (Dr. Arti Datta) YICG, (Mrs. Vidya Iyer) Nritya Sagaram Academy (Mrs. Satya Pradeep) Arvindh Senthilvelan and Fortune Star Band, A tribute to all Fathers through medley and poetry was presented by Jyoti Gupta & group, Anju Sharma and Rekha Chichara.

Indian culture was presented through dance forms of Kathak, Bharata Natyam and Ballet. For the first time students from Fortune Star Band participated in the event with more than 30 young artists. Thanks to Wioleta for introducing Sophie Wang and the team .

The County, Parks Dept, Organizers, members and volunteers put their heart and soul to make this event very memorable.

On behalf of Hon. Blakeman County Executive, who could not make it to the event, due to some family emergency, honorees were recognized and presented with citations by his representative David Franklin, Nassau County Parks

Pradeep Tandon , President of India Association of Long Island Dr Chandra Gupta, Past Chairperson of Tamil Nadu Foundation Dr Arti Datta, Artistic Director of Mudra Dance Studio Rachna Sabharwal, President of Rotary club of Jericho Sunrise Mr Ashok Kumar , Member IDPUSA Dr Pallavi Singh Manwar, Vascular Surgeon Arvindh Senthivelan, Musician Mr Anmol Dhawan , IDPUSA Dr. Bobby Kalotee, Chair, Human Rights Commission, Mrs. Indu Jaiswal , Chair, IAF, Mr. Pradeep Tandon, President, IALI, Mr. Vimal Goyal and Mr. Deepak Bansal, Co. Presidents, IDP, together sponsored an extremely successful event .Certificates, T-shirt's, and refreshments were provided for all the participants, their parents and volunteers.

A special addition to the program was Cricket tournament. Many enjoyed playing cricket from 5 pm to 6pm.

Besides the organizers and County representatives, Community leaders and volunteers Mr. Jasbir (Jay) Singh, Beena Kothari, Bina Sabapathy, Anju Sharma, Sanju Sharma, Nilima Madan, Dr. Neeru Bhambri, Dr Jag Kalra, Anil and Asha Dua Suhag Mehta, Jyoti Gupta, Dr Anuj Goenka and others were present and had their share in making the event successful,

Town of Brookhaven Dedicates Michigan Avenue in Bellport in Memory of Tanya Indrani Bathija



The late Sunrise supporter Tanya Indrani Bathija was recently memorialized by the City of Bellport, NY, with the dedication of Michigan Avenue in her name. The heartfelt event, held at one of her family's Dunkin' Donuts locations, was a beautiful tribute to Tanya's spirit. Her parents, Ben and Sonia, prominent proprietors on Long Island, have also established a foundation in her memory. The first generous gift from this foundation has been donated to Sunrise Day Camp through SunriseWALKS and the family's **TIB Team**, reflecting their commitment to bringing back the joys of childhood to children with cancer. Tanya's legacy of love, joy and support will continue to inspire and uplift our Sunrise campers and their families for years to come.

Farmingville, NY – On May 23, along with her family, friends, colleagues, elected officials and community members, we dedicated 'Michigan Ave' in Bellport, to 'Tanya Indrani Bathija Avenue' in her memory. Tanya Bathija was an amazing young woman who, as a daughter, a sister, a friend, a powerful businesswoman and CEO, and a mentor to young ladies in our community, left a mark everywhere she went. This beautiful Dunkin' Donuts (pictured at right) was once the site of a vacant and blighted building, and her vision and partnership with Brookhaven Town Councilman Michael Loguerio, was to turn this blight into light. She

transformed this parcel in the community into a thriving business and supported the local residents with whom she employees there.

Tanya was a dedicated volunteer for the Boys & Girls Club of the Bellport Area and a Director at Sunrise Day Camp-Long Island, a camp which supports and provides services for children who are battling cancer. Her philanthropic efforts will never go unnoticed, and her foundation is still carrying on with her vision to help support underprivileged children, empowering women and promoting cultural and social values.

Councilman Loguerio said, "Tanya is missed terribly, and her life is celebrated through the many businesses and ongoing foundation work that still carries

on today. I am proud to have known her and will always be inspired by her light, generosity and her incredible passion for always helping a fellow human being. Her father Ben and her family are amazing and generous people, who unfortunately lost their daughter tragically. We wish them all peace and comfort and know that she is looking down on us all and her legacy will live on forever." Pictured at right inside the Dunkin' Donuts are Suffolk County

Legislator Dominick Thorne; Suffolk County Legislator Jim Mazzarella; Brookhaven Town Supervisor Dan Panico; Brookhaven Town Councilman Michael Loguerio; Brookhaven Town Deputy Supervisor/Councilman Neil Foley, Gobind 'Ben' Bathija (father), Sonny Bathija (brother), Pooja Shannon Bathija (sister), Sonia Bathija (mother) and Deputy Commissioner, Suffolk County Fire Rescue Services (FRES), Rudy Sunderman.

IIT Roorkee Alumni Association of North America (East Coast Chapter) Hosts Successful 3rd Annual Family Meet

The East Coast Chapter of the IIT Roorkee Alumni Association of North America held its third annual family meet on June 16 at Akbar Restaurant in Edison, NJ. The event was a joyful occasion filled with family fun, music, dance, performances, and the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and families. Over 130 alumni and their families attended, representing graduating classes from as far back as 1962 to as recently as 2022. The event began with a moving rendition of the "Kul Geet," which is the official spiritual recitation of IIT Roorkee and serves as the anthem of the institution. Recitation was followed by various culturally curated programs featuring

mesmerizing dance performances and live music orchestrated exclusively by alumni. Special recognition was given to both the oldest and youngest graduates in attendance. The lively Emcee, Ms. Tima Deole, ensured everyone remained engaged and connected throughout the event, creating a memorable experience. (Please feel free to review and share beautiful pictures and videos from Google drive Link below: IITR ALUMNI Jun 16 EVENT PICS-Videos - Google Drive)

The room's atmosphere was filled with camaraderie and enthusiasm, as seen in the enriching conversations among participants who brought valuable

insights and perspectives. Our alumni's active involvement made the event enjoyable and meaningful, and the exchanged ideas are poised to further enrich the growth and success of our association.

In-person gatherings like these provide a unique opportunity for alumni to strengthen bonds, foster collaboration, and generate innovative ideas. Coming together allows us to combine our experiences, knowledge, and expertise to address challenges, take advantage of opportunities, and drive positive change within our communities. We want to express our sincere gratitude to all the dedicated volunteers whose tireless efforts

made this event possible. We'd also like to thank our sponsors, including Air India (Event Travel Partner), and corporate sponsors such as Arive, ICICI Bank, Broadleaf Life Plan, Equitable Advisors, LLC, and individual sponsor Nandini Singh (Kumon Northfield, NJ). Your support is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the future of our alumni community, as shown by its tremendous growth this year. We eagerly anticipate the participation of over 200 alumni and their families in next year's celebration.

Minority report

US criticism of India can have repercussions



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has flagged a 'concerning increase' in anti-conversion laws, hate speech and demolition of homes and places of worship of members of minority communities in India. In his remarks at the release of the US State Department's 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, Blinken said Christian groups in India had reported attacks by mobs, allegedly in league with the police, over accusations of 'conversion activities'. The report claims that Christians and Muslims were arrested under laws banning forced religious conversion. The unusually scathing criticism comes weeks after the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA government began its third successive term. It is bound to cast a shadow on India-US ties, which have made rapid strides in the strategic and defence domains in recent years.

Blinken had also mentioned India in his remarks during the release of the 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom two years ago, expressing concern over

rising attacks on people and places of worship in the country. However, his comments this time may be seen through the prism of the US presidential elections, which are scheduled for November. With Christians accounting for two-thirds of the American population, highlighting alleged atrocities against them in countries such as India could be construed as a vote-catching tactic.

While talking about the minorities in the US, Blinken has confined himself to the observation that reports of hate crimes and other incidents targeting Muslims and Jews have gone up dramatically. America seems more keen to 'advance religious freedom across the globe' than to set its own house in order. The Indian government does need to do course correction on the minority front, but it won't appreciate the US playing the Big Brother. Antagonising a close ally will have repercussions for Washington, especially when the Gurpatwant Singh Pannun case is already testing the strength and maturity of the bilateral relations.

Assange released

Wikileaks founder's long ordeal ends

WIKILEAKS founder Julian Assange's release from prison marks the culmination of a long-running saga of international intrigue. An Internet publisher with disdain for government secrets, he gained massive attention for the 2010 release of classified documents relating to the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The material, published on his website, included a video showing civilians being killed by fire from a helicopter in Iraq. One of his collaborators, US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, was sentenced to 35 years in prison before then President Obama commuted the sentence. His plea deal with the US comes as a relief for 52-year-old Assange, who has spent the last five years in a British jail, fighting extradition.

Earlier, facing charges of rape in Sweden, which he denied, he spent seven years in refuge in Ecuador's London embassy. Assange's activism made his case a cause célèbre among press freedom advocates, who insisted his work in exposing US military misconduct is exactly what journalists are expected to do. His supporters see him as a champion of free speech, exposing abuses of power and hypocrisy. In the US, he's projected as a villain for recklessly endangering national security. The British government signed an extradition order in 2022. Last month, two judges said Assange could appeal to address the question of whether, as a foreigner on trial in the US, he would enjoy the protections of freedom of speech under the First Amendment.

The Worst Debate Performance in American History

It's likely to be the most quoted line of the evening: "I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence, and I don't think he did, either." The problem for President Joe Biden is that well before Donald Trump said that, Biden partisans from one end of the country to the other were saying pretty much the same thing.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but this was the worst performance of any general election presidential candidate in any debate in modern American history. Nothing in the past — not Richard Nixon's sweat in 1960, not Ronald Reagan's serpentine wandering down memory lane in 1984, not Barack Obama's vacuous indifference in 2012 — comes close to what we witnessed, through the hands that covered millions of eyes. Biden's performance, from his first rushed, unfocused answer on the economy to his disjointed closing statement, suggested he was utterly unprepared to make a coherent argument for his second term. Biden's efforts to confront Trump on his lies — and there was a tsunami of dishonesty, from Trump's ridiculous notion that every constitutional scholar wanted to end Roe v Wade to his claim that he never labeled servicemen and women "suckers and losers" despite his former chief of staff confirming it — were often as hard to understand as his substantive points. The Biden campaign was eager to hold a debate to prove their 81-year-old candidate had what it took to serve as president for another four years — and that he'd look especially good next to a deranged authoritarian like Trump. Instead, within minutes of the debate's start, calls for Biden to step aside from

the Democratic nomination were mounting.

But there is another point worth noting since it is likely to be overwhelmed by the all-out lamentations over Biden's performance: Donald Trump was a disciplined, focused debater.

I cannot believe I just wrote those words, but contrary to the confident assertions of many Trump-watchers, he was relatively constrained. He actually resorted to something resembling a policy argument at times, and frequently managed to "pivot" from a difficult issue. For instance, when asked about whether he had violated his oath of office on January 6th, Trump cited the low inflation, full employment and generally sunny conditions on that day. On abortion, he was striking clearly moderate tones, noting that some states had embraced liberal policies, others less so, while accusing Democrats of being the extremists. On immigration, he stressed the cost to taxpayers and the impact on Black and Hispanic workers.

Were many of those answers accompanied by flat-out falsehoods? Of course. No, Nancy Pelosi did not say she was "responsible" for the disorder on Jan. 6. Yes, January 6th was an insurrection supported by Trump. Biden tried to pin Trump down there, but it's far from clear that he broke through. There were also moments when Trump could not resist being Trump, calling Biden a criminal after attempting to soften his promise of "retribution," explaining why he'd become the best president ever, and triggering a genuinely silly argument about golf handicaps.

By JEFF GREENFIELD



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Trump wins big by letting Biden be Biden

By Mary Katharine Ham

Going into Thursday's debate, I said the two candidates would have to fight their own worst tendencies to reassure voters. Rusty from years off the debate stage, they'd have to reach out to that double-hater demographic, suburban doubters and independent voters. This small sliver of voters that remains undecided needed to be reassured in different ways. From President Joe Biden, they needed to see a man who was in command, smooth and consistent in his delivery, who could defend a record that simply doesn't feel great to the average voter. They needed to see a man who laid to rest concerns about his age, or at least quelled them for a night, as he had done at the State of the Union.

From former President Donald Trump, they needed to see a man who was temperate and disciplined, who could contrast his record with Biden's while controlling his bombastic personality quirks and tendency to re-litigate his worst moments and dwell on 2020.

The most advantageous version of both men that could show up



was the State of the Union version. State of the Union Biden is more energetic and fluent, with a handful of policy points at his disposal, if disconcertingly loud. State of the Union Trump is Trump but more subdued, with a handful of ad libs.

Only one of those guys showed up, and the contrast was undeniable. Even the difference in the two men's voices in their opening statements told the story of the debate.

It was less than 15 minutes into the debate that Biden seemed to lose his train of thought, ending

an answer with a nonsensical non sequitur: "and we finally beat Medicare."

Trump capitalized, merely smirking as he waited for Biden to deliver his answer, then following up with a critique about how Biden "beat Medicare. He beat it to death."

Trump's uncharacteristic restraint, along with a debate rule that cut off mics to prevent crosstalk, let the current president bury himself instead of being rescued by Trump's interjections.

In a disgraceful moment, Biden

simply erased the 13 American servicemembers who were killed at the Abbey Gate in Afghanistan during the disastrous withdrawal.

"Truth is, I'm the only president this century that doesn't have — this decade — any troops dying anywhere in the world like he did." Not only was Biden's mention of one of his most notable and deadly failures an unforced error, but Trump was able to retort:

"And as far as Afghanistan is concerned, I was getting out of Afghanistan, but we were getting out with dignity, with strength, with power. He got out, it was

the most embarrassing day in the history of our country's life." Trump then used his best skill — comedic timing and a sense for good TV entertainment — to deliver the line of the night. After a somewhat rambling and mumbly answer from Biden on immigration, the moderator came to Trump.

"I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence. I don't think he knows what he said either."

He said what everyone was thinking. All of that happened in the first 25 minutes of the debate, the most-watched part of any debate, the part that the very people both candidates needed to reach were tuning in. There were arguably moments in which Biden was slightly better as the debate wore on, but it didn't matter. I struggle to remember even one punch Biden landed on Trump, even on easy subjects, like January 6.

On the subjects of the future of democracy or abortion — the only issues on which Biden consistently leads with voters and which are supposed to form the basis of his whole campaign — Biden didn't lay a glove on him.

Rahul Gandhi As LoP: A Testing Phase Awaits Him, Party, And Country

By: Rahul Shivshankar

Rahul Gandhi is set to become the Leader of Opposition (LoP). The constitutional post, the first one Rahul has ever held, means he is a "shadow" Prime Minister-in-waiting, presides over a "shadow" cabinet, and is also, in a manner of speaking, a "shadow" parliamentary affairs minister. In this role, he is tasked with sharing the enormous burden of making things come together for the lower House to function through consensus. There are many other "shadows" he will cast as he enacts the several roles he embodies as LoP on the many stages he is likely to grace. But, at least for the next five years, he must accept he isn't going to play the lead role. But we digress.

Back to the point and the pertinent question: How will Rahul Gandhi be as the LoP?

That's the only question we need to have answered if the next five



years aren't going to turn into the vexed legislative doldrum that Parliament had become under Dr Manmohan Singh when he skippered the sinking boat that was UPA-2.

Surprisingly this question isn't being asked with the assiduousness that it deserves especially given the

consequentiality of Rahul Gandhi's new role for Indian democracy. Instead, for the past few days the focus has been on whether the Prime Minister has the delicate touch that is needed to shepherd a coalition. Some observers believe that Modi is not a man given to compromise. They claim he is in the mould of a latter-day

Kemalist: A "my-way-or-the-highway" variety of strongman. And that his "unilateralism" is going to prove to be the undoing of the NDA. These commentators justify their cynicism by pointing out that Modi has never lost an election which makes him impervious to humility, and that he's always been the "big I am" in government so he will never yield to another point of view.

While it is true that brand Modi has been singularly immune to loss, these professional carpers often forget the times when they've pointed out just how "politically felicitous" the Prime Minister can be. If there's one thing the folks who have their daggers out for Modi can agree upon, it is the PM's survival instinct. We tend to forget, the BJP has had and still has coalition arrangements in many states and it is but natural to think that in an alleged hyper-centralised, PMO-directed, governance structure Modi would have had a huge role

in managing contradictions associated with such tie-ups. Thus, it is a little naive to gainsay Modi's ability to iron out wrinkles when they present themselves. So, there is a good chance the PM will pull through, and for proof, the doubters needn't look further than how he managed the relationship with the late Pranab Mukherjee, a veteran Congressman who was President when Modi took charge as Prime Minister. Let's now talk about Rahul Gandhi. The scion is following in a hoary tradition of big Gandhi names ascending constitutional posts. Most recently Sonia Gandhi, his mother. Like her, Rahul has swanned in to stake claim to the LoP post which entitles him to perform a service that is, among many other things, pivotal to the transactionalism that defines much of parliamentary parlaying. His detractors could say Rahul's surname has had a huge role in ushering him to this position.

Testing Times in Canada: When Politics Trumps Security

By: Pummy Pandita

Eyebrows were raised when the Canadian Parliament paid homage to Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a hardcore Pakistan-backed Khalistani terrorist named in several anti-Bharat campaigns globally. The one minute of silence observed by Canadian Parliament members for Nijjar, a wanted criminal in Bharat, does not augur well for bilateral relations or the global campaign against terrorism in all its forms. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau seems to be playing with 'Khalistani fire' to maintain his hold on office, even at the cost of sacrificing strong relations with India, all to preserve his political fiefdom with support from extremist groups. It's not just the one minute of silence that raises concerns. Trudeau hailing Nijjar "for his persistent efforts in advancing the diversity and inclusion ideals that Canada cherishes" is deeply troubling and unacceptable.

By making peace with Khalistanis who advocate for a separate sovereign state, a stance not widely supported by Sikhs, Trudeau has exposed his political opportunism. He seems to have conveniently banked on anti-Bharat forces to present himself as a leader who genuinely cares for his country. In doing so, Trudeau has effectively appeased his political support base within the

Khalistani movement while diverting attention from Canada's pressing domestic issues. In fact, Indian-descent MP Chandan Arya exposed the extremist role of Canadian Khalistani elements in the



bombing of Air India Flight 182, which occurred 39 years ago on June 23. Coincidentally, this very day is remembered in Canada as the National Day of Remembrance for Victims of Terrorism. The mid-air bombing of the Kanishka aircraft resulted in the loss of 329 innocent lives, including crew members, to terrorists who had made Canada their home.

Rightly so, Arya pointed to the ideology responsible for the Kanishka bombing that remains prevalent among a small segment of Canadians. The recent celebration honouring the late

former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is yet another incident where terrorism is glorified, violence is mainstreamed, and hate and violence are eulogised. It also indicates that the dark forces

responsible for these terrorist events are regrouping, which portends terrible events to come.

The Khalistani movement's history is marked by murder and bloodshed. Tens of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs have been slain by terrorists, not only in India but also in the US, Australia, the UK, Germany, and other countries. Many in Canada tend to overlook that 39 years ago, terrorists including Talwinder Singh Parmar (a Canadian citizen), Inderjit Singh Reyat (who held both British and Canadian citizenship), Ajaib Singh Bagri (a US citizen), Ripudaman Singh Malik,

Surjan Singh Gill, Hardial Singh Johal, Daljit Sandhu, and Lakhbir Singh Rode (all Canadian citizens) bombed Air India flight. Unfortunately, there are still places in Canada where these terrorists are revered as 'demi-gods' by some worshippers.

Gurpatwant Singh Pannun of 'Sikhs for Justice' openly threatening the lives of Hindu Canadians is nothing short of "glorifying terrorism" and endorsing hate crimes under the guise of "freedom of expression". Under Trudeau's gross mismanagement, Canada has deteriorated into an extreme version of Pakistan.

The Canadian economy, once in shambles, has yet to fully recover. The meagre incomes earned by ordinary Canadians are being eroded by persistent inflation, which continues to disrupt the economy. The cost of living in Canada has nearly tripled in three years, and skyrocketing housing rents have left many without homes. Over 40,000 deaths in eight years due to drug overdoses have turned the country into a burgeoning hub of narco-terrorism. As Pakistan grapples with Islamic terrorism, Canada appears to be following the Khalistani path.

Since his minority government depends on the support of the New Democratic Party led by Khalistani Jagmeet Singh, Justin Trudeau has pursued his own

agenda. Trudeau, much like his alliance partner Jagmeet, sees no issue with pro-Khalistan activities occurring on Canadian soil. Trudeau's overt backing of terrorists like Nijjar has legitimised the violence perpetrated by Khalistani groups in Canada. Besides endangering the security of Hindus in Canada, Trudeau has snatched the rights of common Canadian citizens to profit from shifting geopolitical conditions. Trudeau, who accuses India of involvement in Nijjar's death, remained silent on Karima Baloch, an activist who fled persecution by the Pakistani government and settled in Canada. Trudeau twiddled his thumb when Opposition leader Michael Chong alleged that he was being targeted by a Chinese diplomat.

Canada's transformation into a safe haven for Pakistan-backed Khalistani terrorism is a consequence of Trudeau's selective silence on the genuine concerns of Canadian residents, which he only breaks when a terrorist is killed as part of his vote-bank politics. Canada as a nation will now pay the price of Khalistani appeasement by its prime minister who is responsible for harbouring organised crime, aiding terrorists, and sheltering criminals. Trudeau has isolated Canada from the Western world. What a catastrophe!

India's Himalayan Powerplay: China Caught Off Guard As India, US Play the Tibet Card

By: Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra

The new Indian government was sworn in on June 4. Within days, a bipartisan American delegation led by the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs chair Michael McCaul was in town. The town in question was Dharamshala – the seat of the Tibetan government in exile and where the Dalai Lama has been living ever since he fled Tibet. Despite China's warnings to Washington against the said visit, the American delegation met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi after their talks with the Tibetan government and the Dalai Lama. That Nancy Pelosi is a personality deeply embedded in the American establishment is a well-known fact. As such, her visit had to have the sanction of the top echelons of both the Biden administration and the Modi government. Her visit to

Dharamshala was, for all practical purposes, as significant as her trip to Taiwan in 2022, if not more.

Naturally, this has made many in India and around the world sit up and take notice. After all, Washington and New Delhi's Tibet push has come out of the blue. On expected lines, the intention of the visit has come under scrutiny. China is flummoxed, while many in India appear to be apprehensive of the

Americans using New Delhi as a shoulder to fire from. However, this is certainly not a haphazard decision by India, much less one taken under pressure. It is a warning shot for China and its

president, Xi Jinping. India is essentially signalling to China that play-time is over. The scare of falling out of line vis-à-vis the "One China Policy" is over. One-



sided bullying will no longer allowed to be the norm. China can no longer rename Indian villages and expect New Delhi to sit by idly. The rules of engagement have changed.

It was about time India let China know that it too can press some of Beijing's raw nerves. While caution is advisable, it is refreshing to see India demonstrate the ability to play the game as an equal power. Bullying tolerated beyond a point is as good as submission. As a side note, it is surprising to watch the US take up the issue of Tibet's autonomy so aggressively. The US appears to be trying to gain leverage over Beijing in the run-up to it making a move on Taiwan. The

invasion of Taiwan looks inevitable, and is only a question of "when" and not "if". Joe Biden also has good reason to push the Tibet card now, at the fag end of his Presidency, given how American

foreign policy since 2020 has been an unmitigated disaster. If this indeed turns out to be the first and last Biden presidency, he would like to end it on a high note and be seen as a President who brought Tibet back on the table.

For India, China's growing appetite for expansionism is quite concerning. Beijing has been upping the rhetoric on "South Tibet", renaming Indian villages and refusing to disengage from crucial areas in Ladakh. It is also expanding its outreach in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and attempting to lure traditional India-friendly countries under its umbrella. For India, the worry in a post Taiwan-invasion scenario will be where China turns its eyes next.

Beyond the Ballot: The Real Test of India's Opposition Begins Now

By: Sayantan Ghosh

The curtains have drawn on the Lok Sabha elections, and India's political theatre is abuzz with unexpected twists. The Opposition, a mosaic of regional aspirations and national ambitions, has outperformed expectations, signalling a shift in the political winds. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), steering the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has secured victory, albeit with a performance that fell short of its benchmark. The NDA clinched 292 seats, with the BJP contributing 240 to the tally. In contrast, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), a coalition of Opposition parties, made a significant dent with 233 seats.

This election was not just a numerical battle but a test of narratives and alliances. The INDIA bloc, despite not fighting the election as a monolithic entity, has claimed the results as a mandate for their collective ideology. However, the reality is nuanced, as the alliance did not contest the elections under a unified banner nationwide. With the first session of Parliament now two days in, the real work for both the ruling party and the Opposition is just beginning. All eyes are on the Opposition to see if their unified front will hold. Will they present a strong challenge to the ruling party, or will the pressures of parliamentary debate expose cracks in their alliance? Moreover, the upcoming Assembly elections will be a litmus test for the Opposition alliance. With regional priorities at the forefront, whether a pan-India coalition can truly function remains a question. Some states may witness a harmonious alignment of interests, while others may see the alliance unravel. The political landscape is poised on the cusp of change, and only time will tell if the Opposition can transform its electoral gains into a sustainable narrative that resonates with the aspirations of a diverse India.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

The recent political landscape in India highlights a significant challenge for the Opposition parties: their inability to present a united front. Except for the Congress, most Opposition parties are regional, with their

own local priorities. This lack of organic unity and pre-election alliances is becoming increasingly evident. Take, for instance, the situation in Kerala. Priyanka Gandhi

Vadra's candidacy in the Wayanad by-election has been met with criticism from the Left, the Congress's primary rival in the state. In West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) did

not collaborate with the Congress or the Left during the Lok Sabha elections. Instead, TMC's focus was on defeating Congress's Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary in Baharampur.

Similarly, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) formed an alliance with the Congress in Delhi but not in Punjab, where both parties performed well independently.

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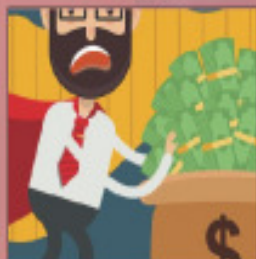
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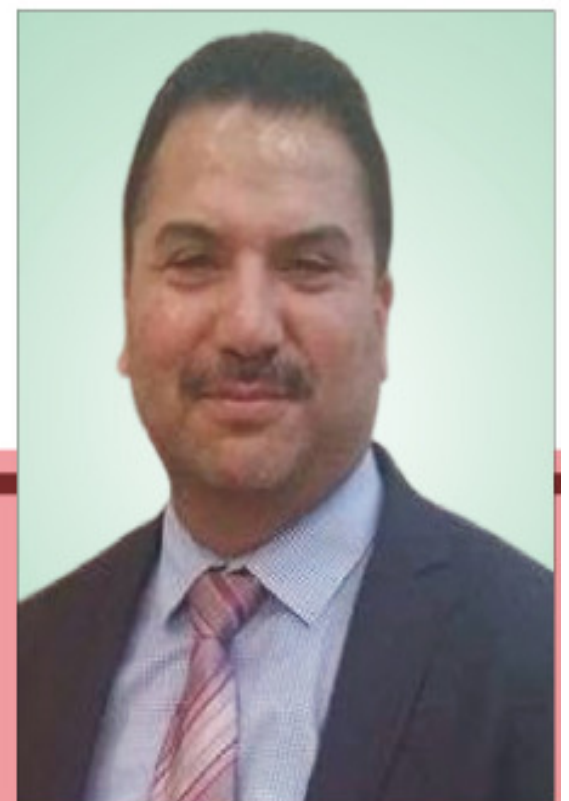
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The true losers of this presidential debate were the American people

By Rebecca Solnit

The American people lost the debate last night, and it was more painful than usual to watch the parade of platitudes and evasions that worked in the debate format run by CNN. The network's glossy pundit-moderators started by ignoring the elephants in the room – that one of the two men standing at the podiums was a convicted felon, the leader of a coup attempt, an alleged thief of national security documents who was earlier this year found liable in a civil court for rape, and has promised to usher in a vengeful authoritarian regime if he returns to office. Instead they launched the debate with the dead horse they love to beat in election years, the deficit and taxes. Throughout the excruciating evening, Joe Biden in a hoarse voice said diligDebates are a rite in which not truth but showmanship wins the day, and in which participants get judged as though it was a sporting event – which it pretty much is, in high school and college debate events. Before 2016, presidential debates



were relatively decorous events in which the participants slammed each other, but more or less within the parameters of the true and the real with maybe a little distortion and exaggeration.

Then came Trump. You cannot win a debate with a shameless liar, because what you're supposed to be debating are facts and positions. A lie is a kind of poison; once it's in the room it makes an impression that is hard to undo, and trying to undo it only amplifies it. Trump's positions on anything and everything shift and slide at will, and he lies about his own past

with pathological confidence – in this debate he both denied that he had sex with Stormy Daniels and that he praised the white supremacists who stormed Charlottesville in 2017. More substantively he lied – unchallenged, except by Biden – about his role in the January 6 coup attempt, and the CNN pundits did not trouble him further about his crimes. Trump talked about whatever he wanted – asked about the opiates crisis, he reverted to the lurid stories about sex crimes and open borders that obsess him and inflame his followers. Most outrageous of all, and of course

utterly unchecked, was one of the falsehoods Trump has been pushing for years – the claim that abortion continues on into infanticide, that doctors and new mothers are murdering babies at birth. That one candidate has long supported reproductive rights and the other has led the attack on them was not something you would learn from this debate.

Debates exist so that people can hear from the candidates, which makes sense when they're relative unknowns. We've heard plenty from both of them for 40 years or so, since Biden was a young congressman and Trump was a young attention-seeker in New York City's nightclubs and tabloids, and both of them have had the most high-profile job on earth for four years.


We didn't need this debate. Because 2024 is not like previous election years, and the reasons it's not are both that each candidate has had plenty of time to show us who they are and because one of them is a criminal seeking to destroy democracy and human rights along with the

climate, the economy and international alliances. If you are too young to remember 2017-2021, this would not help you figure that out.

As political journalist John Nichols put it, "CNN is illustrating how a 'debate' where the moderators reject the basic responsibility of fact-checking in real time, and refuse to challenge blatantly false statements, is not a debate. It's a chaos where lies are given equal footing with the truth."

Much has been said about the age of the candidates, but maybe it's the corporate media whose senility is most dangerous to us. Their insistence on proceeding as though things are pretty much what they've always been, on normalizing the appalling and outrageous, on using false equivalencies and bothsidesism to make themselves look fair and reasonable, on turning politics into horseraces and personality contests, is aiding the destruction of the United States.

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Even factchecking Trump's constant lies probably wouldn't have rescued Biden

By Margaret Sullivan

From the moment the candidates walked out on to the stage in Atlanta, it was obvious that this debate was a big mistake for Joe Biden. By the end, it was a train wreck for his campaign.

The incumbent president, who desperately needed to show vitality, looked from the start like an old man. His gait was stiff and his voice tentative. His energy was markedly different from his triumphant State of the Union address just a few months ago. Donald Trump had a thuggish look, but he seemed vigorous and energetic. He seemed ... the same.

Then the barrage of lies started, as they always do with Trump.

Among them: Democrats favor post-birth executions. The former president never slept with a porn star. The 2020 election was riddled with fraud. Trump never called prisoners of war losers and suckers. Biden would quadruple people's taxes. OPlenty, but not everything.

"You don't let a proven propagandist on stage without stopping him when he lies. Instant refutation is key," observed Ruth Ben-Ghiat, who studies authoritarian "strongmen" and their techniques to gain power. Biden, for the most part, tried to counter with facts. But he often delivered them tepidly or hesitantly. At times, he seemed to lose his train of thought.

When he did get fired up, some of his lines came off like rehearsed insults. True as it might be, Biden's diss that Trump has



"the morals of an alleycat" was not dreamed up spontaneously.

I can't imagine that most people lasted more than about 30 minutes in front of their screens. (Thirty minutes, by the way, in which there was little mention of Trump's 34 felony convictions or of Trump trying to overturn the 2020 election.)n and on and on, in nearly every Trump sentence. Biden had occasional moments, too, of exaggeration or misstatement. But there is no comparison. No comparison — and no fact-checking by the moderators.

That was the policy going in. CNN's political director, David Chalian, made that

clear a few days ago when he said that debate moderators shouldn't make themselves into participants but remain mere facilitators. There would be no live factchecks during the debate.

And so Trump rolled over Biden, landing punch after punch. Not with logic. And certainly not with truth. But with force of personality, and sheer chutzpah.

The damage was obvious to everyone, even Biden loyalists who started off upset and ended up in a panic.

Biden "had a test to meet tonight ... and he failed to do that", said CNN's Van Jones, a former Obama administration

adviser, after sadly attesting that he loves Biden and thinks he's a great person.

How much of it was a result of the lack of factchecks and early questions that seemed to play to Trump's strengths?

It was that painful.

One progressive friend texted me early on that she couldn't take the punishment any more, and would need to turn off the TV to protect her wellbeing. "I'm out. My body was making it painfully clear, in every sense, that I can't handle this."

Before the debate started, the news outlet Axios — which specializes in brevity — summed up what needed to happen for each candidate to win this debate.

Biden would need to "cast his [Republican] rival as a fundamental threat to the nation, who as president would bring instability and chaos". Trump would need to argue that "the country has gotten more expensive and dangerous under Biden".

But the more fundamental test was this: would Biden seem vigorous enough to lead for four more years? Would Trump seem truly unhinged?

Biden did not seem vigorous enough. And Trump? He seemed in control of himself, not deranged as he sometimes appears in his rallies. There were no flights of fancy about sharks and electrocution.

I thought this debate might go badly for Biden. I didn't think I'd be hearing immediate calls for him to step aside — even coming from those who have been stalwartly supporting him.

Why Balochistan is on Boil Again

By: Sushant Sareen

Pakistan President Asif Zardari is visiting Gwadar at a time when the fifth insurgency since 1947 in Balochistan is now in its third decade. In 2009 in his previous term as President, Zardari had tried to bribe the Baloch with a package of economic and political sops called 'Aaghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan'. While Zardari's that attempt to assuage the Baloch sentiment failed miserably, he is once again trying to reach out to the Baloch, but as usual with empty words and insincere assurances.

During his visit he has called for political dialogue to bring prosperity, development and peace to the restive province. At the same time, he has called for enhancing the capacity of the law enforcement agencies. The incongruity of his message is clear to anyone who studies Balochistan: it is the lawlessness of the so-called 'law enforcement' and security agencies — the



extortion, kidnapping, smuggling, narcotics and human trafficking networks they run — which makes them the greatest obstacle to peace in the province. What is more, the Punjab-dominated Pakistani state wants a dialogue not with genuine representatives of the Baloch but with those who will tow their line and remain subservient to the

Punjabi establishment.

The result is that Balochistan has continued to burn ever since it was forcibly occupied by Pakistan in 1948. Since then, Pakistan has managed to keep its stranglehold over Balochistan, but only through brute force and censorship of the type that would embarrass even the Chinese.

When the first stirring of the latest

and longest episode of Baloch anger against Pakistan's neo-colonial exploitative and extractive rule started around 2001, no one expected it to last more than a few years. But the murder in 2006 of the venerable Bugti chieftain, Nawab Akbar Bugti, gave a major fillip to the Baloch movement. Since then the movement has ebbed and flowed but has continued to roll forward.

Over the last three years, especially since the Afghan Taliban broke the "shackles of slavery" of not only the Americans but also the Pakistanis, the Baloch freedom struggle has shifted gears and gained more pace. Of course, if anyone was to go through Pakistan's mainstream media, it would seem the Baloch movement has run out of steam. This is primarily because of a clampdown on media by the military to stop the flow of bad news. But just because nothing is coming in the news doesn't mean nothing is happening on the ground. The fact

is that the Baloch movement is acquiring dangerous dimensions. It has probably still not reached the tipping point where it threatens the territorial borders or constitutional structure of Pakistan, but it is slowly and surely getting there, aided in large part by the growing disorder and disaffection that has engulfed the state of Pakistan. The unrest in Balochistan is finding expression along two parallel tracks. Both of these are organic and entirely indigenous. No one in the rest of the world appears to be interested in even lending an ear to the grievances of the Baloch, let alone supporting them monetarily or materially. There is of course the militant track adopted by young Baloch cutting across class and tribal lines to challenge the might of the Pakistan Army. In recent years, there has been an increase in both the frequency as well as the ferocity in their attacks against the Pakistani state and its henchmen in uniform.

What Went Wrong With Capitalism

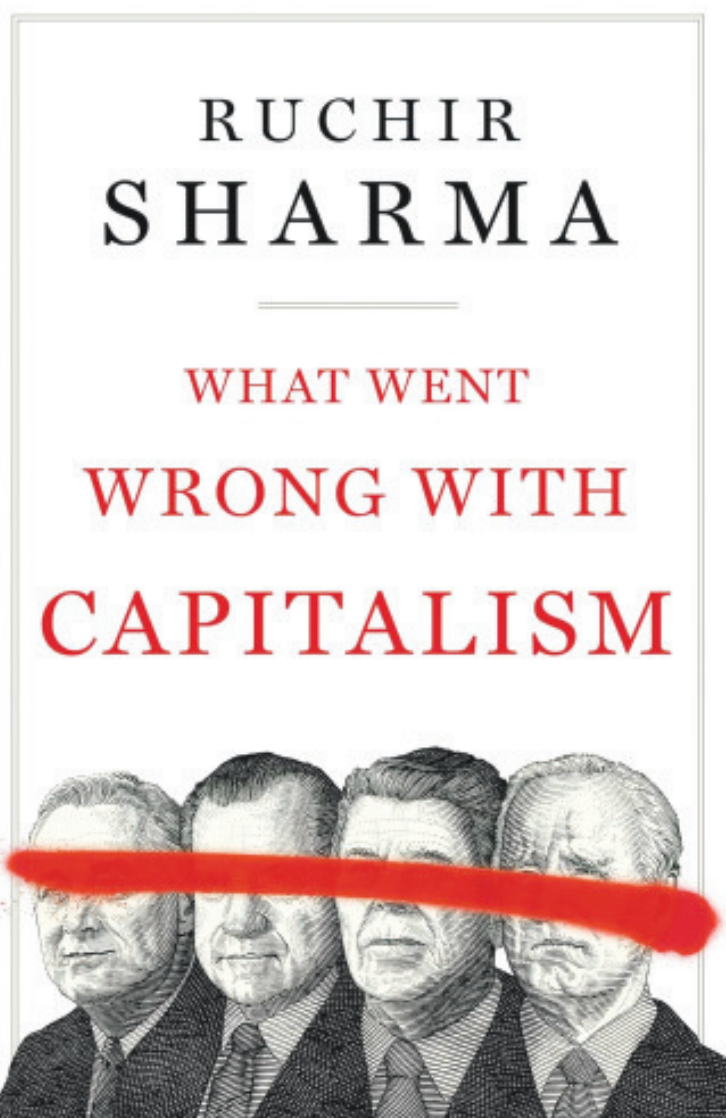
By: Monica Verma

Today in India, a whole generation that has not seen the country's tryst with socialism has now grown up and become a fan of the Leftist-style economy, though the previous generation is still around to help them understand the horrors of those socialist days. However, with the growing debate on inequality and the access to social media where popular Left-'liberal' influencers often target India's entrepreneurs for their vast amount of wealth, the youth is more likely to think of socialism as some panacea for all their problems.

The story is pretty ironic in the United States which is, for all practical purposes, the world's laboratory of capitalism. After all, it fought an entire Cold War against communists. Yet, today an average American is likely to believe that capitalism isn't serving any purpose — inequality has assumed maddening proportions; the rise of oligopolies is a brute fact; and, the huge wealth of billionaires with their flashy lifestyle seems more obscene than aspirational.

Interestingly, across the political spectrum, there is a general agreement that capitalism is undergoing a deep crisis and problems such as growing inequality, concentration of wealth and rising number of billionaires are merely a symptom of the same. However, unlike the socialists who advocate increased oversight of the state to curb inequality and other problems, Ruchir Sharma has an interesting thesis to offer. His latest book, *What Went Wrong With Capitalism*, is an attempt to help capitalism redeem itself.

Here he sets out to defend capitalism by arguing that it is not the absence of government intervention which is responsible for the growing problems of inequality and concentration of wealth but it is exactly the over-presence of government that is responsible for these current problems. According to him, today every section of society has government backing — the rich have bailouts, and the poor have welfare schemes where no one is allowed to fail and no crisis is allowed to unveil. The core argument of Sharma's thesis is that free and fair capitalism is a



thing of the past because the rise of the regulatory state, welfare state and national security state altogether has taken the spirit of freedom out of capitalism. He traces its evolution in the United States by noting that first the culture of deficit spending took roots in the 1970s; this was followed by the culture of corporate bailouts and finally the availability of easy money facilitated by the Central Bank.

He argues that the state's constant fear of a crisis in the system has made it provide

stimulus even when the economy is doing just fine. This along with bailouts and easy money has led to the problem of gross inflation, rising government debt and a fall in productivity levels because, simply put, not even Zombie firms with no real value addition are being allowed to fail. Not to mention the lack of innovation because of no scope for creative destruction and survival of the fittest.

Ruchir Sharma's book definitely strikes a chord with the current reality as it is playing out even in

India, an economy which took a legitimate capitalist turn only in the 1990s. Sharma, whose book starts with a little discussion on his own preference for capitalism, shaped by his experience with socialist India, has clinically conducted an autopsy on the capitalist system and laid bare almost everything that is wrong with it.

In India, the whole 2024 election campaign was fought by the Congress on bringing back socialist-style wealth redistribution which again would require the state to expand in numerous ways, not to mention how it would break the backbone of the middle class with taxes. Sharma warns of this and lists out how countries the world over including the United States are better placed emulating the models in Switzerland, Taiwan and even Vietnam where state intervention is kept at a minimum and the capitalist model is allowed to thrive.

His diagnosis of the problem of ballooning government debt is also on point. Just a few days ago in India also there was a debate on this. At that time, many had argued that it is a norm world over but Sharma counters by outlining how the perennial spending to avert a non-existent crisis can create more problems than actually solve one. The US is the best example of this where the downslide in population has brought the growth rate to low levels and the government's resolve to keep it high is undercutting the very productivity that it is supposed to boost. He also comes down heavily on the Biden government's resolve to counter China by

providing more state support which according to him will be counterproductive.

Sharma's book is an excellent piece of insight into what's plaguing capitalism. Unlike Thomas Piketty whose 2013 bestseller, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, advocated for taxing the rich to solve the inequality crisis in capitalism, Sharma offers a solution in curbing the flow of easy money and letting market cycles take their own course without any government interference. As someone who strongly agrees with Sharma's dictum that capitalism alone has the key to social and economic progress, this book presents a convincing thesis.

However, this book makes certain empirical omissions which compromise with the strength of its core argument. Understandably, Sharma's focus is on the advanced capitalist economies but he also mentions certain other countries including state intervention in China in reasonable detail. But when it comes to other emerging economies, this book comes across as West-centric, especially its overt focus on the United States.

The debate over the state's role in markets is not limited to the West alone. India's rising economy also witnesses this debate play out every day. Sharma does mention India but only while criticising the current government for its expansive social welfare schemes. He says, instead of spending energy on expanding the pie, the government is focusing on how to distribute it. But the catch is that the Modi government can be hardly blamed for this. The previous governments have played a more populist card and today the state governments such as in Karnataka thrive on populism at the expense of state exchequer. The Modi government is just casting a safety net to protect the most vulnerable section of the population, something which even the most advanced economies have to undertake.

Otherwise, it has emerged to be one of the most fiscally disciplined governments in India. Even during the pandemic, India emerged as one of the rare countries where the fallacy of over-stimulus to artificially boost demand was avoided.

Canada's Big Worry: A US Civil War

When Justin Trudeau meets Joe Biden at the G7 summit in Italy this week, Trudeau will probably not ask whether the United States is at risk of erupting in civil war in the next few years.

A think tank housed within Trudeau's government is already pondering that question. In a spring report titled "Disruptions on the Horizon," a quiet office known as Policy Horizons Canada proposed American civil war as a scenario that Ottawa should consider preparing for. This hypothetical was tucked into the middle of the 37-page document, which sketched the possibility in 15 spare words: "U.S. ideological divisions, democratic erosion, and domestic unrest escalate, plunging the country into civil war."

It's an unsettling thing to find out your immediate neighbor is getting nervous about the possibility of gruesome violence in your home.

There has been no shortage of apocalyptic forecasting about Trump-era American politics. Since the 2016 election, left-leaning nonprofits, political consultants and academics have indulged in endless speculation and role-playing exercises, ostensibly to help them defend democracy. In practice, much of this has amounted to self-indulgence. One hysterical episode in 2020 involved a war-game simulation that ended with Biden and his allies encouraging the entire West Coast to secede from the union.

The Policy Horizons report struck me as different: not dark fan fiction (or anti-fan fiction) from American partisans, but a sober branch of a friendly foreign government contemplating our national crackup.

So, how seriously should people take this on either side of the 49th parallel? The Policy Horizons report surveyed hundreds of experts and government officials about disruptive events that Canada might do well to prepare for. Then, the authors classed those scenarios based on the likelihood they will occur, how soon they might happen and how much chaos they might create. American civil war ranked as an improbable but ultra-high-impact event. Other scenarios in that general category included the proliferation of homemade biological weapons; the rise of antibiotic-resistant pathogens, leading to mass death and food shortages; and the outbreak of World War 3.

John McArthur, a Brookings Institution scholar who sits on the Policy Horizons steering committee, told me the report's description of American civil war might reflect the depth of Canadian anxiety about U.S. politics, more than a literal concern about an 1861-style war between the states.

Stressing that he was speaking for himself and not Policy Horizons, McArthur noted that the rise of American protectionism

and isolationism during the Trump administration had rattled the Canadian psyche and upended decades-old economic relationships. Donald Trump's policies and personal behavior toward Canada—including trashing Trudeau after a previous G7 meeting in Quebec—have left a painful mark.

"Any sense of disruption to your closest sovereign relationship in the world, any disruption within that country, is a deep worry, I think, to any Canadian outlook," said McArthur, adding: "Canada's place in the world has become more complex



terrain to navigate."

The plausibility of the civil war scenario, he said, depends on "how one defines civil war."

Catherine Beaudry, a professor at Polytechnique Montréal who analyzed the report on a Policy Horizons panel in May, sounded more skeptical.

The value of the "Disruptions" report, in Beaudry's view, was in laying out a web of hypothetical events worth preparing for, so that experts and officials could see how they are interconnected—and how dealing with one scenario early might help address others later on.

Many of the scenarios in the report, she said, pointed to the urgency of mastering new technology: the threat of cyberattacks disabling critical infrastructure, for instance, or emergency services being overwhelmed to the point of collapse. A government could calibrate its priorities in view of those ideas.

The practical application of a U.S. civil war scenario is not as obvious.

"How do you act on this?" Beaudry wondered. "You know, 'World war breaks out'—there are things where you have very little control and there are things where you have full control."

A future report, she said, might do well to consider "the degree to which the government has tools to act" on various contingencies.

I didn't get to ask Policy Horizons officials to engage this criticism. Several officials declined to speak with me or didn't

respond to emails. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Employment and Social Development, which houses Policy Horizons, sent me a statement explaining the methodology of the report and underlining that the content "does not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Canada, or participating departments and agencies."

Had they realized, perhaps, that speculating about an ally's incipient civil war could come off as impolite?

Without a more developed sense of Policy Horizons thinking, I asked myself: What

military.

Most contemporary civil wars—in Yemen or Sudan, for instance—are not helpful reference points for the United States. They involve weak governments in poor countries, often with destabilizing interference from neighboring regimes.

So is the Policy Horizons scenario just idle provocation?

Maybe not entirely.

There is one credible scenario for American civil war, drawn not from the distant past or from far away but from a recent, nearby example—Canada's own. The Quebec separatism battle of the 1960s was not a full-blown civil war, but it was a sustained, violent attack on the state, carried out by sectional militants who believed the federal system had changed in unacceptable ways. Nearly a decade of bombings, robberies and kidnappings culminated in the October Crisis of 1970, when Quebec separatists abducted and murdered Pierre Laporte, the province's deputy premier.

This was a period of brutal, traumatic civil strife, and in a post-Jan. 6 world it is not wild speculation to envision a similar sequence of events in the United States. We are a heavily armed country with a contested federal system and proud, powerful provincial identities. Some of our states, like Texas and California, are quasi-national entities already. The next president is sure to be loathed by much of the country, and likely seen as illegitimate by at least a large minority. It does not take a kaleidoscopic imagination to see how that set of conditions could lead to our own October Crisis.

Two sent to prison in \$7.5 million Massachusetts COVID-19 business loan scheme

Two people, who do not live in Massachusetts, were sentenced in connection with obtaining millions of dollars in the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) multi-state scheme. The Paycheck Protection Program was established in April 2020 to provide businesses with a loan during the coronavirus pandemic. According to the Department of Justice in Boston, 39-year-old Aiana Pierre of Lookout Mountain, Tenn., and 51-year-old Gardy Alexandre of West Palm Beach, Fla., and 38-year-old Wallace Ford of Buford, Ga., obtained approximately \$7 million in fraudulent PPP funds. The scheme involved Pierre, Alexandre, and others to identify potential applicants and provide those applicants' information to Ford. Ford then submitted applications on behalf of numerous actual or purported businesses and non-profit organizations across the United States, including businesses operated

in Massachusetts, to collect kickback payments from the borrowers for securing loan amounts.

In February 2024, all three pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and conspiracy to engage in unlawful monetary transactions.

The borrowers who received PPP funds based on these fraudulent applications paid kickbacks to Ford, Pierre, Alexandre and others, commonly in amounts equal to 10 or 20 percent of the loan amount they received. Collectively, Ford, Pierre and Alexandre received over \$1 million in kickback payments from borrowers.

Pierre was sentenced on June 7th to 17 months in prison and three years of supervised release. Alexandre was sentenced on May 28th to 15 months in prison and three years of supervised release. Ford will be sentenced at a later date.

Dems freak out over Biden's debate performance: 'Biden is toast'

All Joe Biden needed to do was deliver a repeat performance of his State of the Union address.

Instead, he stammered. He stumbled. And, with fewer than five months to November, he played straight into Democrats' worst fears — that he's fumbling away this election to Donald Trump. The alarm bells for Democrats started ringing the second Biden started speaking in a haltingly hoarse voice. Minutes into the debate, he struggled to mount an effective defense of the economy on his watch and flubbed the description of key health initiatives he's made central to his reelection bid, saying "we finally beat Medicare" and incorrectly stating how much his administration lowered the price of insulin. He talked himself into a corner on Afghanistan, bringing up his administration's botched withdrawal unprompted. He repeatedly mixed up "billion" and "million," and found himself stuck for long stretches of the 90-minute debate playing defense.

And when he wasn't speaking, he stood frozen behind his podium, mouth agape, his eyes wide and unblinking for long stretches of time. Biden is toast — calling it now," said Jay Surdukowski, an attorney and Democratic activist from New Hampshire who co-chaired former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley's 2016 presidential campaign in the state.

In text messages with POLITICO, Democrats expressed confusion and concern as they watched the first minutes of the event. One former Biden White House and campaign aide called it "terrible," adding that they have had to ask themselves over and over: "What did he just say? This is crazy." "Not good," Rep. Jared Huffman (D-Calif.) wrote. POLITICO spoke to about a dozen Democrats, some of whom were granted anonymity to discuss Biden's performance.

Biden's team was quick to defend the president's performance. First they said he had a cold (and that he was negative for Covid-19). Then they insisted Trump was hurting himself by insulting Biden's presidential record.

Biden did grow stronger throughout the night, at one point seizing on Trump's reported dismissal of fallen soldiers as "suckers and losers" to skewer the former president as the real "sucker" and "loser." At others, he hammered Trump's criminal conviction in New York.

"The only person on this stage who's a convicted felon is the man I'm looking at right now," Biden said.

But first impressions matter — particularly to voters just tuning into the election and who were more likely to watch the first debate than the second that's scheduled

for September. And instead of setting the tone of the next phase of the presidential campaign, Biden's shaky performance reignited fears among Democrats that the octogenarian whose mental acuity and physical fitness have stood as voters' chief concerns about returning him to the White House might not even be able to carry the party through to November.

"Time for an open convention," one prominent operative texted.

Biden's team had tried to engineer the debate in his favor — pushing for it to be early and without an audience. And the president agreed to hold the event in part to calm Democratic nerves over whether he could win in November.

Afterward they didn't try to cover up his poor performance, but instead tried to emphasize that Trump remained a threat to American interests at home and abroad. "It was a slow start, that's obvious to everyone. I'm not going to debate that point," Vice President Kamala Harris told CNN's Anderson Cooper an hour after the debate wrapped. "I'm talking about the choice in November. I'm talking about one of the most important elections in our collective lifetime. And do we want to look at what November will bring and go on a course for America that is about a destruction of

democracy?" While some Democrats were quick to brush aside Biden's blunders — Rep. Haley Stevens (D-Mich.) said Biden "isn't a TV showman, he's a workhorse" — the trajectory of the race appears dramatically changed.

"My job right now is to be really honest. Joe Biden had one thing he had to do tonight. And he didn't do it," former Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) told MSNBC. "He had one thing he had to accomplish. And that was reassure America that he was up to the job at his age. And he failed at that tonight."

Already, some Democrats were openly saying that Biden should end his campaign. One major Democratic donor and Biden supporter said simply: "Biden needs to drop out. No question about it." Biden struggled at times to articulate strong arguments on some of his campaign's biggest selling points, bungling his health care record and stumbling through a response on his support for abortion rights.

"I support Roe v. Wade. You have three trimesters. First time is between a woman and a doctor. Second time is between a doctor and an extreme situation. Third time is between the doctor — I mean, between the woman

and the state," he said.

Trump tripped, too. He called former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's daughter, a documentary filmmaker, a "fil-i-maker." He accused Democrats of wanting to "take the life" of a child "after birth." He inflated the country's economic strength under his presidency.

He reiterated his defense of the Jan. 6 insurrectionists, launching into a lengthy diatribe against the convictions of hundreds of Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol in an effort to overturn the 2020 election. And asked repeatedly if he would accept the results of the election no matter the winner, Trump refused to give a straight answer — eventually specifying that he'd only do so "if the election is fair and free."

But Trump largely did what Republicans had begged him to do: show a modicum of restraint while also laying bare Biden's weaknesses. The former president, who delights in calling Biden "sleepy" and "crooked" at every turn, waited a full 20 minutes to draw attention to the Democrat's initially shaky performance. "I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence," Trump said, after Biden stuttered through an answer to a question about immigration.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has issued a warning over a particular type of financial crime that's linked to Mexican cartels.

In an announcement, the agency said it has seen a rise in scams targeting timeshare owners. The primary victims are older Americans, particularly wealthy ones looking to recoup some of the money spent on their real estate investment. In the last five years, upwards of 6,000 victims have reported more than \$300 million in losses to the agencies, the agency said.

"Timeshare fraudsters aim to suck their victims dry, with devastating consequences to victims' financial futures, relationships, and physical and emotional health," Assistant Special Agent in Charge Paul Roberts, who leads FBI New York's Complex Financial Crimes Branch, said in a blog post.

Roberts said the scams have caught the FBI's attention because its illicit proceeds are increasingly used to fund violent cartels in Mexico.

"Timeshare fraud has low overhead costs and minimal reinvestment, needing only a rental of small space, telecom setup, and English-speaking employees with access to resort databases," Roberts said. "There is lower perceived risk of prosecution and extradition for

timeshare fraud but easy cash flow that goes directly into the Mexican banking system and obfuscates funds to facilitate money laundering activities."

How do timeshare scams work?

Timeshare fraudsters do their homework before they target their potential victims, going as far as creating fake documents and impersonating individuals from trustworthy institutions like banks. They then use high-pressure sales tactics and phony information, such as mimicking legitimate entities' email addresses and forging official documents, to convince victims that offers regarding their timeshares are real.

Initial contact is generally made by phone or email with the scammer pretending to be a U.S. or Mexican-based third-party time share broker or sales representative, the FBI said. They then urge the owner to exit their timeshare, rent out their property or invest in share certificates. Fraudsters then press victims to pay upfront fees or taxes to secure the deals.

After this phase, fraudsters generally reapproach the victims posing as lawyers trying to help them recoup the money they lost to the first scammers and asking for court or legal fees. Scammers don't stop there, however, and often circle back to impersonate government officials who either claim they can help recoup some of the lost money — for a fee, of course — or threaten the person claiming the initial payment was suspicious and the person is being fined or prosecuted.

No matter the stage, it's all an effort to separate the victim from their money. Warning signs of a timeshare scam from the FBI: You shouldn't be asked to pay upfront fees or taxes in advance or to provide power-of-attorney forms.

If someone contacts you claiming to be a government official and talks to you about a settlement or threatens to arrest or prosecute you if money isn't paid, it's a scam.

If someone threatens to subpoena you to appear in a court outside of the U.S. or claims to be working for the FBI or U.S. Treasury Department Office of Foreign Asset Control it's a scam.

Rescue Afghan Sikhs first: Row over Canada ex-minister Harjit Sajjan's order

In 2021, Harjit Sajjan, a Sikh Canadian, was the Minister of National Defence of Canada. That was a turbulent time when the US and its allies were rushing to exit Afghanistan amid a Taliban takeover of the war-ravaged country. Harjit Sajjan instructed the Canadian Armed Forces to prioritise the rescue of 225 Afghan Sikhs and allocated resources meant for Canadians to them, according to a news report. This is claimed to have affected the evacuation of those on the priority list for Canada.

According to a recent report by Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail, Harjit Sajjan, then Canada's defence minister, used the resources allocated to Canadian citizens and Afghans linked to Canada and used them to help Afghan Sikhs. He even ordered that the Afghan Sikhs be rescued first.

Sajjan has denied the claims and said in a statement on June 28, as minister, he "did not order" the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to rescue Afghan Sikhs, according to the CBC, the official Canadian public broadcaster.

He said he just shared the information with the CAF provided to him by a Canadian Sikh group that had urged the Canadian government to rescue Afghan Sikhs. At the time, various groups asked the Canadian government for help. Canadian forces had landed immediately after the fall of Kabul on August 15 and helped thousands of people.

However, the Globe and Mail report, citing three officials of Canadian forces, refutes Sajjan's claims, and shows he ordered the airlifting of the over 200 Afghan Sikhs, prioritising them over Canadians or those

linked to Canada.

HARJIT SAJJAN PRIORITISED



EVACUATION OF AFGHANS SIKHS

The Globe and Mail report highlighted that its military sources were present in Ottawa and in Kabul. The sources revealed how the final hours were chaotic, dangerous and desperate.

Canada and other Western countries tried their best to evacuate their citizens from Afghanistan before the US deadline in August.

The military sources told The Globe and Mail that the army hadn't prioritised the

evacuation of Afghan Sikhs till Sajjan intervened. This affected the evacuation

of those on the priority list for Canada.

The Canadian newspaper didn't name its sources as they were not authorised to discuss the matter with media.

"The way it was presented to us at first was: If we can do this and pay attention to it, great, but not stop doing everything else," a source, who was a special forces officer told the media outlet.

"But a day or so later, it came back to us as a firm order. Our leadership was furious. They were very upset."

"There was such furious anger that the last 24 hours were solely dedicated to getting the Sikhs out. We were unsuccessful."

The report made Canadians fume at Sajjan.

"This is absolutely insane. Harjit Sajjan instructed special forces soldiers to rescue 225 people of his own ethnic background during the fall of Afghanistan over actual Canadian citizens," said Harrison Faulkner, a Canadian journalist and radio show host.

"Sajjan left Canadian allies behind to die while rescuing Afghans of his religion. Think about that for a minute and tell me how he isn't charged with treason. I'll wait," said another person on X.

SAJJAN SAYS RELAYED INFORMATION, NOT PRIORITISED

Now, Sajjan is the Minister of Emergency Preparedness of Canada.

He has denied these claims. He said he only gave the information "through the appropriate chain of command to assist the group of Afghan Sikhs who had been determined eligible for evacuation," reported CBC.

"I relayed whatever information the NGO provided about the location and status of these Sikhs to the chain of command for it to use as it saw fit, in line with its operational plan on the ground in Afghanistan." Sajjan came under the spotlight when he visited India in 2017. Then Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh, had given him a cold shoulder and had even called him a "Khalistani sympathiser". Sajjan is the son of a retired Punjab Police constable from Bambehali, a village in Punjab's Hoshiarpur.

Arabs to Abyssinians, India was once a mercenary magnet—Russia war shows it has turned exporter

Once a favoured destination for mercenaries from various parts of the world India is now reeling under the death of its own citizens fighting as irregulars in a war that has no relevance east of the Suez. The Russia-Ukraine war has attracted a fair share of irregulars from various countries serving as contracted combatants, befitting the sobriquet of being labelled mercenaries. Even though both sides of the conflict recruit mercenaries from around the world, the ones making the headlines are those who fight for Russia, especially after they die. This has been the case for Indians 'recruited' to serve Russia. Even as distraught family members seek an answer, and a closure to the tragedy that has befallen them, there is no guarantee that this cycle of 'recruitment' by 'illegal agents' will not continue to be repeated.

For this has been the nature of what is universally regarded as the second oldest business. With its illegal riches, it also brings in its share of misery, just as much for those on the frontline as for family members left holding the hat. India must prepare for all eventualities on this score since it was once a major recruiting zone. India was a mercenary magnet

The chaos of medieval India's polity and the emergence of various economically viable kingdoms attracted hordes of mercenaries to the subcontinent. They came in the thousands, across time zones, religions, continents and cultural boundaries. Arab mercenaries traded one peninsula for another, already nearer the subcontinent, which was easily reachable by favourable trade winds, and arrived by the thousands to influence power. In one form or another, they continued in that role

until 1948. Coming in from the cold, literally too, were White Anglo-Saxon Protestants from Holland and the British Isles, as well as Catholic Portuguese and French mercenaries serving all and sundry

Afghan mercenaries even went on to found venerable dynasties in India, adding to the princely panorama in the subcontinent. Not to be outdone, and in fact, leaving a far greater military impact on the polity of India, were the Abyssinian slaves who soon enough transmuted into mercenaries with a distinctly military function. Malik Ambar, largely forgotten in India, and most certainly in his birthplace in the highlands of Ethiopia, was undoubtedly the biggest influence on Deccani politics through his adroit military tactics as well as administrative skills. His

impact on Shivaji's practice of guerrilla warfare was real, tangible, and long-lasting.

India was a magnet for mercenaries and slave traders only because the economics of the subcontinent allowed local rulers to buy or hire foreign labour, for military or non-combatant roles. For that is what labour, in all forms, is always drawn to. These basic economic theories, which are as old as human civilisation, rule the roost even today. Except that India is now exporting human labour since the economics of the subcontinent has taken a turn in that extraordinary direction. Russia, the importer in focus, is in no great shape either since it's dependent on cheap labour to fight a war. So it has taken to importing mercenaries from various time zones, religions, continents and cultural boundaries.

Can Biden be replaced as the Democratic nominee?

President Biden's performance at last night's CNN Presidential Debate has left the Democratic Party confronting the possibility of replacing their presidential nominee.

This guide explains how such an extraordinary move could occur.

BIDEN'S 'DISASTER' DEBATE PERFORMANCE SPARKS MEDIA MELTDOWN, CALLS FOR HIM TO WITHDRAW FROM 2024 RACE

If Biden wants to stay on the ballot before the DNC roll call

Biden is currently the presumptive Democratic nominee, because he has secured the overwhelming majority of pledged Democratic delegates awarded after each state's primary election.

Former President Trump is also currently a presumptive nominee.

Democratic National Committee (DNC) rules give the power of the nomination to those delegates.

Delegates must "in all good conscience reflect the sentiments of those who elected them," meaning Democratic primary voters.

In other words, as long as Biden wants to stay on the ballot, then those delegates are expected to vote for him. Since the rules do not impose any legal obligation on delegates to vote for the

candidate to whom they are pledged, a mass defection is at least theoretically possible.

The party will formally nominate Biden when the delegates participate in a roll call vote.

That normally takes place during a party convention, which for Democrats begins on the week of Aug. 19.

But this year, the Democrats have said they will hold a "virtual" roll call vote by Aug. 7 to comply with an Ohio ballot access deadline.

Following legislation signed by Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine that moves the deadline to Sept. 1, Democrats no longer need to hold this virtual vote ahead of the convention.

But for now, the plan is that a willing Biden will become the nominee on August 7 at the latest.

If Biden steps aside before the DNC roll call

If Biden steps aside before the roll call, then his delegates will no longer be pledged to him, and it will be essentially "open season."

Any candidate who is eligible to be president could emerge, including candidates who did not run in the presidential primaries, and delegates could vote for them.

Clearly, an endorsement from Biden would be critical for any one of those candidates. And while the most logical contender to receive an endorsement would be Vice President Harris, Biden could choose anyone.

If Biden steps aside, dies or has a 'disability' after the DNC roll call

Any change in the nominee after the roll call vote would be even more of a political disaster.

DNC rules give broad power to the committee to replace a candidate in the event of death, resignation or "disability" of a nominee: "In the event of death, resignation or disability of a nominee of the Party for President or Vice President after the adjournment of the National Convention, the National Chairperson of the Democratic National Committee shall confer with the Democratic leadership of the United States Congress and the Democratic Governors Association and shall report to the Democratic National Committee, which is authorized to fill the vacancy or vacancies."

The scope of "disability" will be a subject of intense debate if the party chooses to invoke that provision.

But in the event of one of those three conditions, the party's chair Jaime

Harrison would consult with Democratic leaders. He would give a recommendation to the DNC. The committee would decide a new nominee. Again, the most likely contender would be Harris, given her current position within the Biden administration, but anything could happen.

If Biden steps aside, dies, or has a 'disability' after ballots are printed

If one of these conditions occurs after general election ballots are printed — and/or it is too late to change the name of the candidate printed on those ballots — the mechanism for the DNC to replace Biden is the same.

Under that scenario, the party would have to inform voters that even though they are voting for Biden, the committee has chosen somebody else for the nomination.

After the election, the party would have to try to instruct electors in the Electoral College to cast a ballot for that new candidate.

The confusion that a last-minute move like this would cause among voters would make an already challenging campaign even more of an upward climb.

And given the unprecedented nature of such a move, it would almost certainly be litigated at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Foreign diplomats react with horror to Biden's dismal debate performance

President Joe Biden's dismal showing at the CNN presidential debate against former President Donald Trump resonated around the world, with foreign diplomats expressing shock and concern while raising questions about the implications for a consequential US election that could upend the foreign policy status-quo should Trump be elected again. "Hard to watch" is how multiple foreign diplomats described Thursday night's debate between Biden and Trump to CNN. The overwhelming sentiment among more than half a dozen diplomats from Europe, the Middle East and Asia whom CNN spoke to was that it was "a bad night for Biden," as one European diplomat put it. "It is a sad reality that Biden is old, and he is getting older. We saw it. I had difficulties understanding what he was saying, and I understand English pretty well," said a second European diplomat. "Trump ate him alive," said an Arab diplomat.

"I was shell-shocked. I could not believe my eyes," an Asian diplomat said of Biden's performance.

Biden's debate flop was front-page news across Europe, with left- and right-leaning newspapers excoriating the president — even in France, where the country has its own elections coming up this weekend. The president's debate performance also compounded already pronounced

concerns about the policies Trump would likely enact if he wins in November. Trump on Thursday once again displayed his isolationist tendencies and his NATO-skeptic worldview that often alarmed US allies during his first presidential term. At the debate, Trump questioned continuing to fund Ukraine's war against Russia and falsely claimed that the US had given more in aid to Ukraine than all other European countries put together.

Trump even suggested that he had spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin about his "dream" of invading Ukraine. He also attacked Biden over the Afghanistan withdrawal and argued it was the reason Putin invaded Ukraine in 2022.

"When Putin saw that, he said, you know what, I think we're going to go in and maybe take my — this was his dream. I talked to him about it, his dream. The difference is he never would have invaded Ukraine. Never," Trump said.

'If they can change the horse' Biden's showing Thursday did not make the diplomats CNN spoke to question his ability to serve as commander in chief at this moment, with many noting that he has a good team working with him. But it led some to question how the Democratic Party will handle the issue.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski wrote on social media that Biden should now responsibly manage a succession

plan.

"Marcus Aurelius was a great emperor but he screwed up his succession by passing the baton to his feckless son Commodos (He, from the Gladiator). Whose disastrous role started Rome's decline. It's important to manage one's ride into the sunset," he wrote.

Another Polish diplomat didn't mince their words, calling Biden's performance "a horror, what a car crash."

Post-debate, it wasn't just Democrats raising the prospect of replacing Biden on the ticket for November — foreign diplomats were also wondering whether Democrats could turn to a plan B.

"If they can change the horse, they should," said the second European diplomat. "If it was possible to call the governor of California and have Biden say, 'You go and I'll step out,' that would be the right thing to do."

But like many Americans, the diplomats woke up Friday unsure of what could be done.

"There are many options that are discussed, but we don't see, any that are self-evident," the first European diplomat said.

Some of them are reaching out to US contacts to get a sense of the likelihood of Democrats moving on from Biden.

"Some US contacts say there was always simmering debate about replacing Biden,

but they say that now the doubts are in the open. There is fire on the roof," said a third European diplomat. "I am told that if the Democrats do this, they have to go with Kamala (Harris), because they cannot skip over a Black woman vice president, but they wonder what that will do to their base. They think they could still lose."

'The problem is there is no strategy'

The diplomats were not surprised by Trump's comments on foreign policy during the debate — with one calling it the "same recipe as usual" — but they added that they felt even more concerned about his lack of commitment to Ukraine and what that might mean for European security.

"Trump certainly won this. His worldview is problematic. So for those who believe in a rules-based order, Trump isn't good," said a NATO official. "Rules mean predictability, so Trump means unpredictability. He could go soft on Russia - he has a penchant for getting on with strongmen. He could also double down in supporting (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelensky. The problem is there is no strategy, it all feels like it's done on impulse."

Other diplomats also observed that Trump's comments on the ongoing Israel-Hamas war would likely hurt him among Arab American voters.

Scarlett Johansson wanted to join 'Jurassic World' franchise for 10 yrs, even if it meant dying 'in first 5 mins'

Actress Scarlett Johansson has confirmed that she will be starring in the next 'Jurassic World' movie, directed by filmmaker Gareth Edwards, who has previously helmed films such as 'Rogue One' and 'Godzilla'.

An 'enormous' 'Jurassic Park' fan, Johansson shared that she has always wanted to be part of the franchise, even if it meant "dying in five minutes."

Speaking to ComicBook.com, Johansson said: "I've been trying to get into this franchise in any possible way for over 10 years. I'm like, 'I'll die in the first five minutes!'"

"I am an enormous 'Jurassic Park' fan," Johansson said, reports Variety.

"It is one of the first movies I remember seeing in theaters. I remember it so vividly. It was life-changing and mind-blowing. I cannot express how excited I am."

The script for the upcoming film is by David Koepp. The screenwriter is returning to the franchise after writing for Steven Spielberg's 'Jurassic Park' in 1993 and 'The Lost World: Jurassic Park' in 1997.

Johansson said that "the script is so incredible" for the fourth 'Jurassic World' movie, which will be an entirely new story that's separate from the first 'Jurassic World' trilogy, which features Chris Pratt.

"David Koepp wrote it and returned after 30 years to write it, and he's so passionate about it," Johansson said.

"I've been trying to get into this franchise in any possible way for over 10 years. I'm like, 'I'll die in the first five minutes! I can get eaten by whatever! I'll do the craft service! I'll do anything for it. The fact that it's happened in this way at this time is just actually unbelievable."

It was earlier reported that 'Jurassic World 4' will be shot in the picturesque locales of Thailand, as well as in studios in Malta and the UK.



Sonakshi oozes love in pictures with Zaheer from reception night; she calls it 'divine intervention'

Actress Sonakshi Sinha, who recently tied the knot with Zaheer Iqbal, on Tuesday shared some snaps from their wedding reception, expressing gratitude for the love, laughter, and support from their close ones, calling it a divine intervention.

The couple tied the knot on June 23 in a civil ceremony at the bride's new apartment, 81 Aureate, which is located near the Rang Sharda Auditorium in Bandra West, Mumbai. According to media reports, the 'Heeramandi' actress purchased the lavish apartment in September last year. Situated on the 26th floor, the sea-facing apartment spans 4,210.87 square feet and is reportedly priced at Rs 11 crore. The reception was held the same day at Bastian, a restaurant on Linking Road, Mumbai, known for its Asian-inspired modernist cuisine. Taking to Instagram, Sonakshi shared love-filled pictures with Zaheer from their reception night. In the snaps, the 'Lootera' actress is seen wearing a custom red 'chand boota' brocade Raw Mango sari. For makeup, she opted for nude pink lips, winged eyeliner, a contoured face, and a red bindi.



The Superhero Megastar of Indian Cinema, Chiranjeevi to Be Honoured with IIFA Utsavam Special Honor for 'Outstanding Achievement in Indian Cinema' at the Multifaceted South Indian Cinematic Extravaganza At Etihad Arena, Yas Island, Abu Dhabi This September!



(By our staff reporter) Mumbai India- Recipient of the prestigious civilian honour bestowed by the Government of India, Padma Vibhushan, the extraordinary supreme hero and Megastar of South Indian Cinema, Chiranjeevi to be honoured with IIFA Utsavam Special Honor for 'Outstanding Achievement in Indian Cinema' at IIFA Utsavam's global tour, starting off in the remarkable city of Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, this September 2024.

IIFA Utsavam is set to honour and pay tribute to Megastar Chiranjeevi on receiving the prestigious award which is the second highest civilian honour, Padma Vibhushan, by the Government of India from President. Smt. Droupadi Murmu in the presence of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah this year for his valuable contribution to the world of cinema for exceptional and distinguished service at the multifaceted South Indian Cinematic Extravaganza.

Megastar Chiranjeevi has undeniably captivated audiences throughout his illustrious four-decade film career. He has made significant contributions to Indian cinema across various languages, delivering brilliant performances in diverse roles, energetic dance routines, and captivating fight sequences. Moreover, he is recognized

nationally for his notable philanthropic endeavours and humanitarian work, which have empowered many.

Megastar Chiranjeevi, shared his thoughts on being honoured with the 'Outstanding Achievement In Indian Cinema' at IIFA Utsavam, "I'm deeply humbled by this incredible recognition and honour. Thank you, IIFA Utsavam, for bestowing upon me the coveted Lifetime Achievement Award. I am profoundly grateful for the unwavering love and support throughout my five-decade film journey, a true testament to the invaluable affection of my audience, fans, and industry. I've consistently tried to demonstrate my gratitude through my humanitarian endeavours. While entertaining to the best of my abilities on screen, I am equally dedicated off-screen to actively participating in impactful social humanitarian causes whenever the opportunity arises."

As the grand celebration of South Indian Cinema takes center stage in the captivating setting of Yas Island, Abu Dhabi This 6th And 7th Of September 2024 under the honourable patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance & Coexistence, the highly-anticipated IIFA Utsavam 2024 is being held in partnership with The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, and Miral, the leading creator of immersive destinations and

experiences in Abu Dhabi.

IIFA Utsavam is all set to celebrate the triumphs of South Indian cinema by uniting the Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada film industries, showcasing their rich tapestry of talent, creativity, and storytelling to a global audience. The highly anticipated two-day celebration promises to immerse audiences in a rich tapestry of cinematic experiences. Day one will spotlight the vibrant worlds of Tamil and Malayalam cinema, highlighting their unique storytelling and cultural richness,

while day two shifts focus to Telugu and Kannada cinema, offering a diverse array of films and performances from these dynamic industries.

Commenting on the occasion, Andre Timmins, Founder/Director, IIFA Utsavam said, "We are incredibly proud to honour and pay tribute to Megastar Chiranjeevi at IIFA Utsavam with 'Outstanding Achievement in Indian Cinema' award for receiving the Padma Vibhushan for his immense contribution to Indian cinema. As one of the highest civilian awards in India, the Padma Vibhushan recognizes his exceptional and distinguished service in the field of cinema, reflecting his decades-long influence and impact.

Renowned for showcasing the finest in South Indian cinema, IIFA Utsavam, is proud to honour

Padma Vibhushan recipient, Megastar Chiranjeevi's illustrious career and his achievements, celebrating the richness and diversity of South Indian cinema. Megastar Chiranjeevi, a luminary in South Indian cinema, has left an indelible mark with his versatile acting, charisma, and dedication. His extensive filmography and numerous accolades highlight his talent and commitment, and his significant impact on Indian cinema continues to resonate today. He is truly a formidable force, not only within the industry but also in his individual notable contributions, which have been remarkably profound. We are proud to have him join us at IIFA Utsavam's global tour on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi this September as we celebrate South Indian cinema."

Avika Gor and her an innate desire to explore different realms of storytelling

Actress Avika Gor, who made her acting debut with "Sssshhh...Koi Hai" in 2007 but gained the spotlight with her performance as Anandi in 'Balika Vadhu', said that her innate desire is to explore different realms of storytelling and challenge herself creatively. Avika made her film debut with the Telugu movie 'Uyyala Jampala' in 2013 before her big break in Hindi came with the horror film '1920: Horrors of the Heart'.

"I truly appreciate the beauty of storytelling on both big and small screens. For me, 'Balika Vadhu' was a profound journey on television, where I had the privilege of exploring complex narratives and touching the hearts of the viewers with its powerful messages," Avika told VOICE.

"Transitioning to the big screen with '1920' was equally exhilarating, as I got to immerse myself in a cinematic world filled with suspense and intrigue, captivating the audience in a whole new way," she said.

Avika also said that these experiences shaped her as an actor and deepened her appreciation for the diverse platforms through which stories can be told.

The actress was last seen on the small screen in the 2019 stunt-based reality show 'Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 9' hosted by Rohit Shetty.

So, what made her take a step back from the

small screen?

"Television has been an incredible journey for me, filled with unforgettable experiences and boundless love from the viewers. However, as an artiste, I have an innate desire to explore different realms of storytelling and challenge myself creatively," she told VOICE.

Avika, who won the Rajiv Gandhi Award in 2009



for her work in 'Balika Vadhu', said that while television has provided her with endless opportunities for growth and connection, she feels drawn to explore the dynamic and diverse landscape of cinema.

"I'm excited about the prospect of delving into new characters, narratives, and cinematic experiences, and I believe that this shift will not only broaden my horizons but also allow me

to connect with the audience in new and meaningful ways. I believe in 'never say never' but right now my focus is on being in movies," said the 26-year-old actress.

In 2023, Avika talked about her work in the show 'Sasural Simar Ka' in a podcast, where she shared that she did bizarre things — from being stabbed with a trishul, to getting resurrected several times, marrying over three to four times to even advising a ghost to go against the law.

Does Avika agree that small-screen content is regressive even today?

Adah Sharma to play 'badass, witty' lead role in new show 'Rapchick Reeta'

Actress Adah Sharma is all set to play a "badass, witty" titular character in the upcoming show titled 'Rapchick Reeta'.

A source close to the development shared, "Many actresses were considered, but the team unanimously zeroed in on Adah. She has excellent comic timing and a huge youth fan following. She is also very versatile, so she's perfect for the part of Reeta. Reeta is badass, witty, kind, and a lot of fun. After 'Sunflower', 'The Kerala Story', and 'Bastar: The Naxal Story', she has proved that she is one of the best among the young actresses."

When contacted, Adah was tight-lipped and said: "Yes, I'm doing something exciting, but the team will make an announcement soon."

The show will air on Disney+ Hotstar. Adah will also be making her singing debut next month with her first single, which is a rendition of the Shiv Tandav Stotram.

The actress made her acting debut as the lead in the 2009 Hindi horror film '1920' opposite Rajnesh Duggal, directed by Vikram Bhatt. In 2011, she featured in another horror film titled 'Phir'.

Adah has been a part of films like 'Hasee Toh Phasee', 'Commando 2', and 'Commando 3'.

The actress has also starred in South Indian films, including the Telugu movies 'Heart Attack', 'S/O Satyamurthy', 'Kshanam', 'Subramanyam for Sale', 'Kalki', and 'Question Mark'.

Adah has also appeared in the Kannada movie 'Rana Vikrama', Tamil films like 'Idhu Namma Aalu' and 'Charlie Chaplin 2', and had a special appearance in the song 'Maaman Waiting' from the movie 'Idhu Namma Aalu'.

The diva has also been part of web series like 'Pukaar', 'The Holiday', 'Aisa Waisa Pyaar', and 'Meet Cute'.

The actress next has 'The Game of Girgit' in the pipeline.



Asha Negi opens up on 'Industry', says it shows viewers real challenges of people in showbiz



Actress Twinkle Arora has stressed how people go overboard following fashion trends. She revealed her comfort clothes and preference for date night outfits.

Twinkle, who is known for her work in 'Udaariyaan' says she doesn't believe in following fashion trends. For her, comfort takes over everything when it comes to fashion. "Fashion trends do change, and I am someone who doesn't follow them actively. Sometimes I feel like it's a difficult task because I'm not from a fashion background. So to keep up with it, I have to put in effort," she said. She mentioned that, as an actor, she is not forced to style, but believes in dressing up depending on the occasion and

place she is visiting. Talking further about fashion trends, Twinkle said: "Sometimes I see people are not comfortable with what they're wearing. But that's fashion. Something that you must look at while deciding what to wear is elegance and comfort. These two are my major POVs while selecting an outfit." Twinkle's comfort clothes are loose pants and crop tops, saying they are easy to style and look nice. "They're comfortable to wear too. After that, it would be pajamas or anything that feels comfortable, which is my comfort clothing. Somewhere the kinds of clothes I can move around easily, and they come out to be presentable, like co-ords," she said.

Actress Asha Negi, who is part of the recently-released show 'Industry', feels the series shows people the real challenges of showbiz. Talking about the series, which offers an insider's look into the Hindi film industry, Asha said: "Yes, 'Industry' has been receiving some great reviews and a lot of appreciation, especially from people within the industry because it's very relevant and relatable to everybody."

Asha, who's also happy to see people relating to her character as ambitious Sanya Sen, said: "The feedback has been great so far. Many people, especially those in the industry, relate to the character I'm playing."

The actress, who gained limelight with the TV show 'Pavitra Rishta', also said that 'Industry' highlights the struggles behind the scenes.



"For those outside the industry, the show reveals how glamorous it might seem from the outside as it highlights the hard work and struggles behind the scenes," she said.



New Zealand's Chatham Islands might be the only place in the world experiencing overtourism right now

The coronavirus pandemic has decimated the travel industry, as hotels, restaurants and airlines in destinations around the world find themselves going broke or dramatically cutting back costs as they try to survive.

But there's one place on the planet where there are too many tourists right now: the Chatham Islands.

Haven't heard of them? It's okay; you're not the only one.

The remote Pacific Ocean archipelago near the international date line is technically part of New Zealand. And as New Zealand's borders remain mostly closed and locals are advised to not travel overseas at this time, the Chathams -- about 500 miles east of the country's South Island -- have become 2020's hottest getaway for Kiwis. Moving to the top of the list - In a typical year, the Chathams -- whose two main populated islands are Chatham Island and Pitt Island -- get about 2,000 tourists. That compares to about 700 full-time residents, most of whom live on Chatham Island, the largest of the archipelago.

But 2020 is no typical year.

The Chathams' remoteness usually makes it a part of the country that New Zealanders never get around to visiting. Now, that remoteness is an

advantage, with travel-starved Kiwis turning to the islands as a way to feel like they're on a far-off holiday without having to quarantine or take a Covid test. "It happened quite quickly," Jackie Gurden, the islands' tourism manager, explains about the tourism spike in the Chathams. "It's a bit more expensive to get out here so you don't get young people looking for a cheap holiday, and there are no beach resorts or anything." But once the pandemic kept international borders closed, Tourism New Zealand -- the country's official national tourism board -- had to pivot from marketing their country to foreign tourists to encouraging domestic travel. That suddenly made the usually-sleepy Chathams a hot commodity. Demand, though, is far outstripping supply. Gurden

estimates that there are 150 beds on the islands in a mix of hotels, lodges, guesthouses and local residences that list themselves on sites like Airbnb. Most property is privately owned, and camping is forbidden.

The only airline serving the archipelago is Air Chathams, which operates just a handful of flights per week between Chatham Island and what the locals refer to as "the mainland." (Side note: most Kiwis only mean the South Island when they say "mainland," but to Chathamites both the North and South Islands fall under this category.)

Normally, tourism season lasts from about November to March, which is summer in the southern hemisphere. But now, all on-island accommodation is booked solid through June 2021. Even

Gurden, who lives on New Zealand's North Island, isn't sure she'll be able to find a place to crash when she next visits.

What to do there

In the past, most visitors to the Chathams were older travelers looking for a quiet place to get away from it all. Prices can be high, as much food and fuel for has to be shipped from mainland New Zealand. But once you're able to get there, the beautiful scenery is worth the trip. Pitt Island is believed to be the first inhabited place in the world to see the sun rise every day. The Chathams were the easternmost sliver of the Gondwanaland supercontinent, meaning it has a fascinating range of terrains, including basalt columns a la the Giant's Causeway and volcanic cones. The islands are also home to some of the world's rarest

birds, plus there's a large -- and adorable -- seal colony.

Where do we go from here?

Before she was the islands' tourism manager, Gurden was asked to work on a consulting project for the future of the hospitality industry there -- although no one could have guessed just how soon some of those initiatives would be tested. Luckily, some of those projects included the islands' tourism website and official brochure, which landed in the hands of would-be visitors just in time.

In some ways, an uptick in tourism is a major plus for the islands, where most people work in the farming or fishing industries and the absence of a high school sends students off to Christchurch in their teens.

The islands also got a grant from the New Zealand government to help with infrastructure projects, like public toilet facilities and updates at the airport. Even without a pandemic, 2020 was shaping up to be the Chathams' time to shine.

"It's not about driving growth, it's about managing growth," Gurden explains. "There's a need for growth in tourism to create jobs for young people. Young islanders can actually have a future on the island."

That said, she cautions would-be visitors to respect the delicate ecosystem and small-town feel that makes the Chathams so special in the first place. "There is a resistance on the island to tourists coming into their space," she says. "Tourism is about coming and taking but we made sure there's a way to give back." That means tour companies give \$25 per traveler to the Chathams, which uses the money to pay for projects that benefit locals, such as the construction of a swimming pool.



India likely to see 5 times rise in data centre capacity expansion: Report

Driven by steep data usage and digital adoption, India is likely to see a five times rise in data centre capacity expansion in years to come, a new report said on Thursday.

The country requires an additional 1.7-3.6 GW (gigawatt) data centre capacity over and above the planned development of 2.32 GW (colocation) capacity.

It is estimated that India will be adding 464 MW of new colocation data centre capacity each year until 2028, according to the report by Cushman and Wakefield.

India's colocation data centre capacity stood at 977 MW across the top seven cities in the second half of 2023.

About 258 MW of Colo capacity came in 2023 alone.

"This is a formidable number and surpassed the capacity addition in 2022 which stood at 126 MW,



indicating a 105 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth," the report mentioned.

"This exponential growth is driven by several factors, including increased data

consumption due to widespread digital adoption and the use of data-intensive technologies.

An average Indian cell phone user

consumes over 19 GB of data per month — the highest in the world.

The country is experiencing an exponential rise in adoption of internet services, smartphones, social media, and OTT channels.

Consequently, the demand for data centres is of high interest to transform India's digital infrastructure.

"Both colocation data centres and cloud firm-owned data centres are being built at growing speeds over the last few years," the findings showed.

While adding an average of 464 MW of Colo capacity each year until 2028 may seem like good delivery speed, India shall keep building more to capitalise on its digital transformation story, it added.

Over the next five years, India is likely to see fastest growth in penetration of smartphones, internet, OTT subscriptions, and social media usage.

AI flagship killer realme GT 6 democratises big storage in smartphones

The evolution of mobile phones has been remarkable, transforming from bulky, brick-like devices with protruding antennas to today's sleek, powerful smartphones.

Ironically, those early models had far less storage capacity than our current slim devices.

Smartphones have become indispensable personal assistants, serving countless functions from work and entertainment to banking and video production. This multifaceted role demands reliable storage of vast amounts of data, making the evolution of storage technology crucial to smartphone advancement.

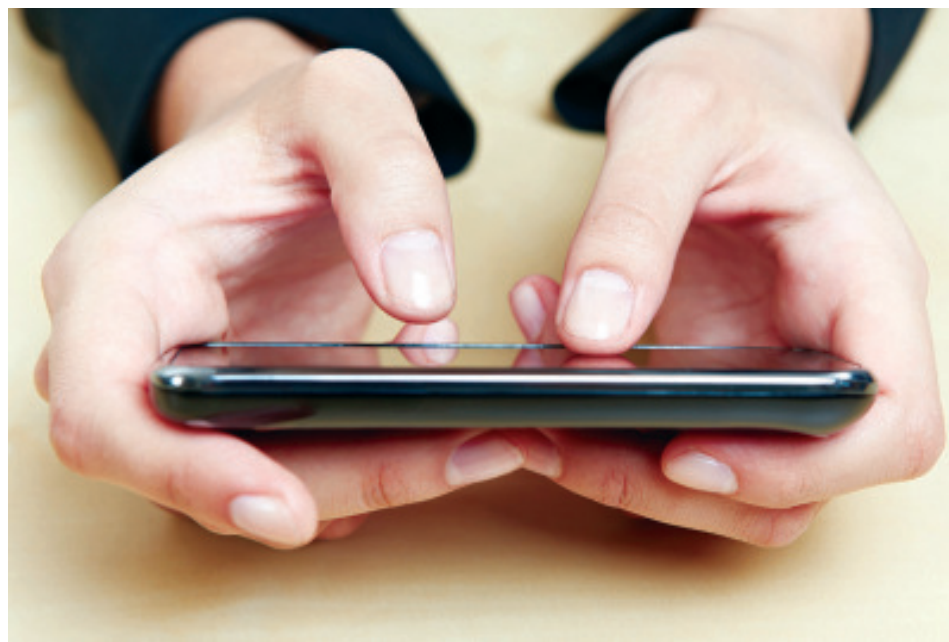
As smartphones rapidly developed, becoming more powerful and feature-rich, they required increasingly responsive and faster storage solutions. The advent of 5G technology further intensified these demands.

Storage technology has risen to the challenge, with advancements leading to more efficient space utilisation, improved file compression, and better management systems.

These developments cater to the growing need for high-resolution media, sophisticated apps, and complex games, ensuring seamless user experiences. The progression of storage technology, though often overlooked, has been a critical component in the overall evolution of smartphones, enabling them to meet our ever-expanding digital needs.

One smartphone with impressive storage

capacity is the newly-launched realme GT 6. The brand unveiled the device on June 20, giving fans a glimpse into all the exciting



features it offers — including the impressive storage capacity of 16GB+512GB.

The announcement of this top variant at a reasonable price point has excited fans, as it's the only smartphone offering 16GB+512GB storage for under Rs 40,000. The GT 6 boasts an impressive combination of up to 16GB LPDDR5X RAM and 512GB of overclocked UFS4.0 storage.

This powerful duo ensures lightning-fast performance, whether you're launching resource-intensive games or accessing large files. This storage configuration is a true game-changer in the smartphone

industry. It not only allows users to store an extensive library of high-resolution photos, videos, and apps but also

expanded digital playground, storing an

extensive library of apps, games, photos, and videos without constantly worrying about space constraints.

This abundance of storage not only enhances the overall user experience but also improves device performance, as ample free space allows for smoother system operations.

The higher storage capacity reduces reliance on cloud services, ensures better offline accessibility, and future-proofs the device against growing file sizes. For productivity enthusiasts and mobile gamers alike, this means less time managing storage and more time enjoying a seamless, lag-free experience with all their favourite content at their fingertips.

Ultimately, the GT 6's high-capacity storage variant represents a significant leap forward in mobile computing, offering a vast level of convenience and performance.

The realme GT 6 stands as a testament to the remarkable evolution of smartphone technology, particularly in storage capabilities.

With its impressive 16GB RAM and 512GB storage, it offers users a vast digital playground for apps, media, and files.

By combining cutting-edge storage technology with powerful performance features, the realme GT 6 cements its position as the ultimate device in the mid-high segment, setting new standards for what users can expect from their smartphones.

The US real-estate market is headed for a correction, strategist says

By Jennifer Sor

America's real-estate market could be in for a big correction, the veteran strategist Chris Vermeulen said.

The chief market strategist of The Technical Traders pointed to worrying signals flashing in the real-estate sector, as borrowing costs look poised to stay higher for longer.

Construction starts for single- and multi-family homes have plateaued after a steep drop last year, a pattern similar to one that flashed prior to the 2008 housing correction, he said. The stabilization of construction activity is likely due to a burst of investment that's hit the sector, Vermeulen said, but real estate is still in trouble, especially if mortgage rates remain elevated.

"To me, this is a sign that things are really breaking down, and this is just a bounce," Vermeulen said of the recent stabilization in construction activity. "It's the last spot right now," he said, where "you can squeeze a little bit of profits out of these



buildings." Material and labor costs are up, he said, "and then, we see the financial sector and real-estate pricing really fall apart." While most single-family homes in the US are financed with a 30-year fixed mortgage, higher rates could pose a problem for property owners who need to refinance sooner. That's the case for many commercial property owners, and the

sector will see \$900 billion of debt maturing this year, according to Bloomberg data. Continued interest-rate pressure could bring on a wave of distress, Vermeulen said. Commercial-real-estate foreclosures jumped 117% year over year in just the first quarter, according to data from ATTOM.

In residential real estate, it's unlikely that

home prices will crash the way they did during the 2008 bust, Vermeulen said. However, further weakening could spark a panicked sell-off among investors who have been putting cash to work in real-estate companies and in things like real-estate ETFs.

"People don't realize real estate is primed and ready for another major leg down," he said. "They're buying right now, because there's been a pullback, but the reality is that I think we're going to see this collapse," he later added. Real-estate veterans have warned about a correction in property prices for the last year, particularly in commercial real estate. Office values have plunged since the COVID-19 pandemic, dropping 35% through late March. The sector likely has more downside on the way as remote work drives vacancies up and property owners refinance debt at higher interest rates and lower property valuations, Fitch Ratings said.

Paramount Chiefs to Staff: We're Cutting \$500M in Costs After "Unacceptable" Profit Drops

BY GEORG SZALAI

The M&A "noise" surrounding Paramount Global following the end to sales talks with David Ellison's Skydance Media won't dissipate any time soon, but the company must address profit declines and focus on a plan that can set up the entertainment giant for success. Also: Bankers have been hired to sell off unspecified assets in order to help pay down debt.

That was management's message in a company town hall meeting in Los Angeles on Tuesday. The three co-CEOs — Brian Robbins, president and CEO of Paramount Studios, Chris McCarthy, president and CEO of Showtime/MTV Entertainment Pictures, and George Cheeks, president and CEO of CBS — all spoke to around 500 employees at the Paramount Theatre on the company's studio lot, with more understood to have been put onto a waiting list. Before we begin today's presentation, we'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the challenges of all the M&A speculation surrounding our company," Robbins told the audience. "We know what a difficult and disruptive period it has been. And while we cannot say that the noise will disappear, we are here today to lay out a go-forward plan that can set us up for success no matter what path the company chooses to go down."

Meanwhile, McCarthy called out that Paramount's revenue has grown by 13

percent between 2018 and 2023, while its operating income before depreciation and amortization (OIBDA) has declined 61 percent over the same period. "Let me be clear: a 61 percent decline in profits is simply unacceptable," he emphasized. "We need to act now to reverse this



trend." The triumvirate's plan to do so consists of three strategic pillars, the co-CEOs reiterated. First is transforming Paramount's streaming strategy to accelerate profits, so they can begin to make up for linear declines. McCarthy argued that there has been progress since the company's annual shareholder meeting on June 4. In its latest quarter, the company reached 71 million Paramount+ subscribers, up from 67.5 million in the prior quarter, with streaming

losses totaling \$286 million.

In international markets, "we are advancing talks with potential partners that will significantly transform the scale and economics of the service, making it profitable and driving long-term value," McCarthy said. "This approach could also

serve as a model for the U.S."

The executive didn't share more details of what kind of partnerships or other deals this could involve, but Paramount and Comcast/NBCUniversal have the SkyShowtime streaming joint venture in Europe. Sources at two other media companies have told THR that they would be interested in exploring some sort of a partnership with Paramount in the U.S., though in both cases they indicated that their own companies, not Paramount,

would need to be the controlling partner.

The second strategy is optimizing the company's asset mix. Cheeks described the progress on that front this way: "We're looking at selling certain Paramount-owned assets — in fact, we've already hired bankers to assist us in this process — and we'll use the proceeds to help pay down debt and strengthen our balance sheet." That could include negotiations to sell BET Networks or other linear TV assets like the non-CBS local TV stations (the company also owns brands like MTV, Nickelodeon and Comedy Central), as well as potential assets like VidCon or even the free streaming service Pluto TV. Paramount has been executing a plan to "slim down to scale up" in streaming for several years now. The company sold publisher Simon & Schuster to private equity firm KKR for \$1.62 billion last year, and previously sold CBS' New York BlackRock headquarters building for \$760 million and CBS' Studio City lot for \$1.85 billion in 2021. Third is modernizing the organization "so we can move faster — and be more nimble" via \$500 million in annualized cost savings by eliminating duplicative functions and being more efficient with resources. That means more layoffs will be coming to the company.

The executives were asked during the Q&A session if they had a specific timeline for job cuts, but were not prepared to give one just yet, according to an attendee.

The Sad Truth About Elite Universities

By EVAN MANDERY

When the Supreme Court effectively ended race-based affirmative action one year ago, it was possible even for passionate defenders of the practice to hope for a narrow silver lining: The colleges with the nation's highest endowments — who'd most ardently defended affirmative action — would be forced to find alternative ways to maintain some measure of diversity in their student bodies. One could even imagine an expansion of opportunity for poor students of color.

Instead, the opposite has happened.

A handful of schools, including Amherst and Johns Hopkins, had ended the practice of giving admissions to the children of alumni — so called legacy preferences — in the years before affirmative action was struck down. Seven more ended the practice after the Supreme Court's decision last year, and for a minute it appeared the dominoes would fall — but then no other college



followed suit.

Meanwhile, many have doubled down on legacy preference and other mechanisms of exclusion that drive the massive wealth disparities on these campuses. And no "elite" college has made an explicit commitment to give a leg up in the admissions process based on socioeconomic disadvantage —

the most obvious mechanism for promoting diversity. For several years now, at Harvard and 37 other U.S. colleges and universities, more students have come from the top 1 percent of the income distribution than the bottom 60 percent. The reality is so little has been done in response to the Supreme Court's ruling that the dynamics

of the case seem fundamentally different in retrospect. With the first anniversary of the decision approaching, it now seems more accurate to describe the antagonists in the case as silent partners in a shared project of preserving the American elite.

Superficially, the litigants in *SFFA v. Harvard* were fierce

adversaries. Edward Blum, the conservative agitator who forged the group known as Students for Fair Admissions, devoted nearly two decades to ending affirmative action. The lead defendant, Harvard University, spent a reported \$25 million litigating the case, which it framed in existential terms. Its chief diversity and inclusion officer called "diverse communities" essential to the "educational mission of higher education" and the "success of students."

But there was another option for Harvard (and its peers) all along. It could have significantly increased diversity by ending or significantly curtailing the admissions tips, or special treatment, the college offers to athletes, legacies, donors and the children of alumni and staff — so called "ALDC" preferences — which are known to mostly benefit affluent white people. At Harvard, where more than 15 percent of students come from the top 1 percent, 30 percent of admitted students are an ALDC. Seventy percent of these are white.

How Buddhists lost out to Brahmins in Nalanda. Even before the Turks came

By ANIRUDH KANISSETTI

Nalanda, the Buddhist mega-monastery in present-day Bihar, was perhaps the single most famous centre of higher learning in all of Asia. It attracted students from Java, Tibet, China, and possibly even Mongolia and Korea. How did it rise to such eminence? As controversies rage about entrance examinations and higher studies in India today, the past holds some lessons and surprises.

Getting into Nalanda

Trekking across deserts, passing through glittering Central Asian cities, and braving hostile mountain passes, the 7th-century Chinese monk Xuanzang arrived at Nalanda. The site has often been described as a university, but in reality, it was a vast complex home to multiple Buddhist monastic orders—a Maha-vihara, or Great Monastery. Xuanzang spent several years studying and collecting texts at Nalanda before returning to China. He left



the clearest-surviving account of how Nalanda operated in its heyday, with later disciples and biographers adding many fantastical details.

According to Xuanzang, entering the Great Monastery required

clearing an oral examination conducted by its gatekeepers. Historian RK Mookerji, in his monumental study of ancient Indian education, described these gatekeepers as "expert religious controversialists, who were

always ready with difficult problems to try the competence of the claimants for admission." Serious applicants needed a command of Buddhist and Vedic scriptures, commentaries, and logic. Most Nalanda applicants

already came from elite backgrounds, equipped with royal or monastic connections that facilitated such knowledge. Even among this erudite pool, Nalanda's admission rate was about 20 per cent, which is considerably higher than contemporary entrance exams, at least when properly conducted. NEET, for example, has a success rate of 7–8 per cent. Getting into the Great Monastery was just the beginning. Similar to PhD programmes today, students needed a master to accept them as a disciple. Foreign students at Nalanda were generally there to refine their understanding of complex and esoteric subjects, with much learning conducted through argument and debate. Xuanzang claims there were nearly 10,000 resident disciples and 1,500 masters—about six students per teacher. (Archaeology, however, suggests that only a fraction of this number could actually have lived on the site).

The Disappearing Tucker Carlson

By MICHAEL SCHAFFER

A major publisher just canceled a big-budget book on the former Fox News star, cementing his mainstream

For Tucker Carlson, it has to be the ultimate good-news, bad-news moment: A major publishing house has canceled a prominent political journalist's upcoming biography of the far-right media figure.

The good news, for Carlson partisans, is that the book in question — *Hated by All the Right People: Tucker Carlson and the Unravelling of the Conservative Mind*, by Jason Zengerle — was likely to be a less-than-fawning look at the former Fox host's journey from establishmentarian to conspiracy theorist. The bad news, though, is that the cancellation stems at least in part from the belief that Carlson, once the biggest name on cable, no longer has the kind of cultural footprint to warrant a pricey, complicated book by a top-shelf writer. According to several sources in the publishing industry who have followed the project, a combination of delays and the changes in Carlson's once dominant media presence caused a loss of enthusiasm on the part of a publishing house going through its own internal tumult. It's a far cry from the situation in 2021, when Carlson was zooming past Sean Hannity to become cable's top talker, with a legion of fans on the right and an army of detractors in the center and on the left — and even speculation about a possible presidential bid. That's when Little, Brown and Co. tapped Zengerle, a *New York Times* Magazine contributor and one of the leading magazine writers on contemporary politics, to do a book on the political-media titan. At the time, with Trump-driven fury selling books all over the place, the contract seemed like a no-brainer. For editors interested in enriching readers' minds, understanding the Carlson phenomenon was seen as key to understanding American politics. For publishers interested in enriching shareholders' wallets, there was potential gold in a tome on the man blue America loves to hate. Since then, it's been a rocky ride for both Carlson and the political-book business. Carlson was famously bounced from Fox last year, soon after the



network spent \$787 million to settle a defamation lawsuit by Dominion Voting Systems. A racist text message and derision of Donald Trump had been uncovered as part of the discovery process, and he had been expected to testify in court. The spectacle would have riveted the media. After the shock firing, Carlson quickly reestablished himself on Twitter, now X, finding a devoted audience. But his programming — including a softball interview with Vladimir Putin — has rarely generated the kind of sustained attention or outrage of the closely monitored Fox monologues he did when he was the highest-rated host in history. Like Oprah Winfrey or Howard Stern, becoming his own brand made him less relevant to the broader conversation. This week, he announced plans for a 15-city arena tour alongside figures like Alex Jones and Marjorie Taylor Greene, a classic example of the sort of thing that can draw huge throngs of the devoted but not register on the media radar of a fragmented country. (Janet Jackson and blink-182 are also on arena tours this summer.) Publishing, meanwhile, saw the political book boom of the Trump years turn into a Biden-era bust. The 46th president and his circle have spawned almost no bestsellers, and neither have their cast of rivals. And to the chagrin of booksellers, the return of the 45th president to electoral contention has not yet brought about another "Trump Bump" of interest in political influencers. Zengerle, my colleague a decade ago at *The New Republic* and a former *POLITICO* Magazine writer, declined comment. So did Carlson.

Representatives for Little, Brown and Co. did not respond to multiple requests for comment. But sources at other houses tell me that Zengerle's agent has been shopping the title to other publishers. Of course, publishers cancel books all the time, for all sorts of reasons. Many Washington classics, even bestsellers such as Mark Leibovich's *This Town*, were marooned by their initial publisher. Writers blow deadlines, and that includes Zengerle, who got an extension to do more reporting after Carlson left Fox, but still missed a subsequent due date. Editors leave for other jobs, and top brass exit in corporate shake-ups — both scenarios that also apply to Zengerle's book. It's a fickle business. Little, Brown, which is undergoing a restructuring and layoffs this month, may be particularly tumultuous. But plenty of projects that face these issues don't get shelved. The travails of the Carlson book also say something about the publishing and intellectual climate in Washington and in the political world more generally.

I got a peek at a 60,000-word chunk of draft from Zengerle's reporting, and it presents a nuanced portrait of a generation of conservatives who grew up in the Reagan era, came to Washington in the 1990s, and were pulled in wildly different directions as the Bush administration floundered and the new GOP embraced Trump. That's fascinating stuff — if not exactly the kind of scathing hate-read whose scandalous allegations will send books flying off shelves in blue-city bookstores. In a polarized country, fury sells. Beyond attracting readers hungry for outrage, it also snags the attention of the TV bookers and podcast hosts who can put a book on the radar screen. Complexity doesn't work as well: The lefties who loathe Carlson might not want to spend 400 pages with a three-dimensional version of the guy, and the righties who hero-worship him still won't want to shell out for something from a non-fan.

There's a possibly even bigger challenge when chronicling a figure like Carlson — and it's a challenge that is becoming more common as the worlds of politics and media collide: Many of the biggest outrages happen in plain sight, which makes the investigative biographer's role feel less crucial. Shortly before Carlson's firing, for instance, *The New York Times* published "American Nationalist," a sprawling investigation of the TV host's rise to a leading role in the political right. But few of the three-part, 20,000-word story's most talked-about details involved digging up dirt. There weren't jaw-droppers about Carlson secretly mistreating puppies or misbehaving around his Maine home. Rather, the juiciest stuff was gleaned from rewatching 1,100 episodes of his Fox News program — i.e., things that were said in front of millions and millions of witnesses. For a lot of people,

the video clips were the story. Which brings us to the current challenge, for Carlson as well as those who would attack him. When those video clips are no longer connected to a dominant outfit like Fox, they start to feel a lot less vital. Carlson may have a vast audience on X, but for a lot of casual observers, the formerly most powerful figure in conservative media just looks like another random person streaming angry content into the ether. That goes for a lot of the professional observers who report on his content, too, and in the process help boost awareness. Washington Post media critic Erik Wemple used to write frequently, and scathingly, about Carlson. But he's scarcely covered Carlson's X programming.

"I wrote about him when he was at Fox News for the simple reason that Tucker had bosses," Wemple — a former colleague and longtime close friend — told me. "And those bosses weren't accountable. They weren't really journalists, as we discovered in the Dominion suit. But they were sensitive to criticism, and my role as a media critic was to play all this stuff out and seek accountability from Fox and seek explanations from Fox." Untethered from larger institutions, a bomb-thrower attracts less attention, even if plenty of people are still influenced by his opinions.

Paying less attention may be sound logic if your business is media criticism, or even the daily news cycle. But it's a shame if that logic affects book publishing decisions, too. In fact, a thoughtful look at how the bow-tied CNN preppy became the immigrant-baiting Putin admirer also gets at the biggest question in American politics: What the hell happened to that guy? Whether we're talking about a Trump-venerating senator like (onetime John McCain acolyte) Lindsey Graham, an election-denying attorney like (onetime Al Gore lawyer) Kenneth Chesebro or just some random converted MAGA acolyte in the St. Louis suburbs, the journey from comfort in the mainstream to aggrievement on the margins is one of the most fascinating evolutions in today's society. Carlson still may be the highest-profile example, even without 3.21 million nightly Fox viewers.

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