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WhatsApp group scam on rise in India



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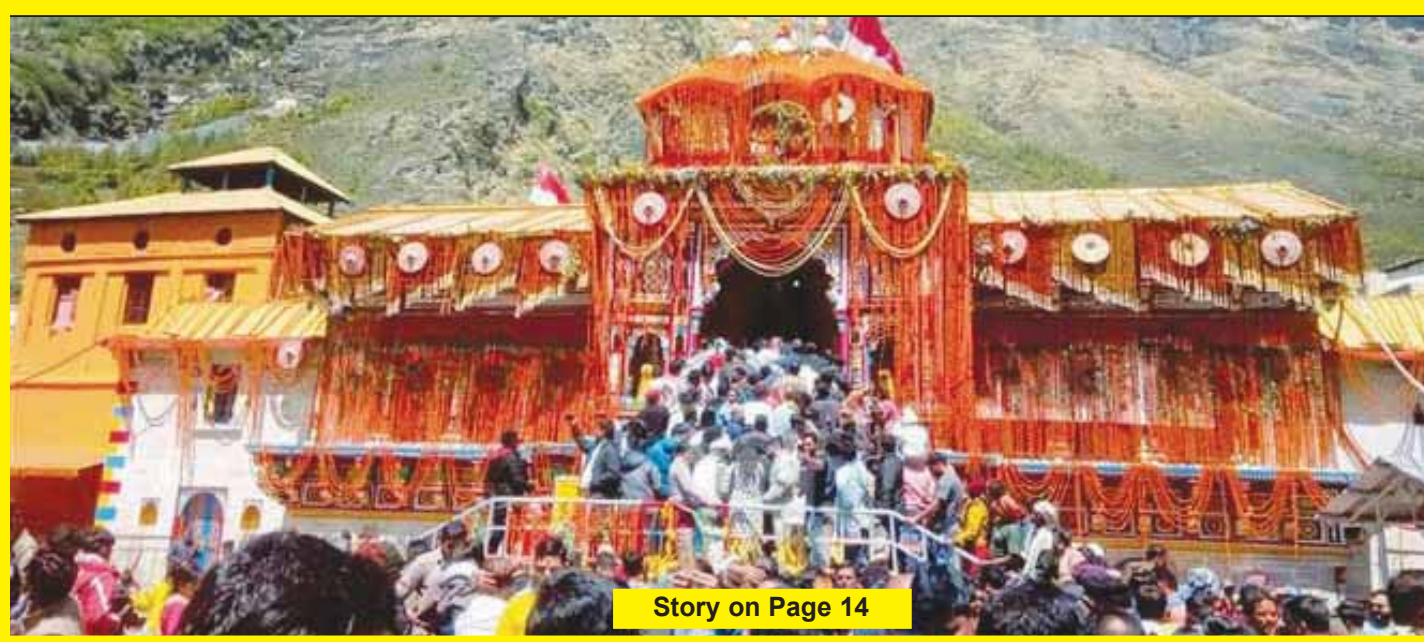
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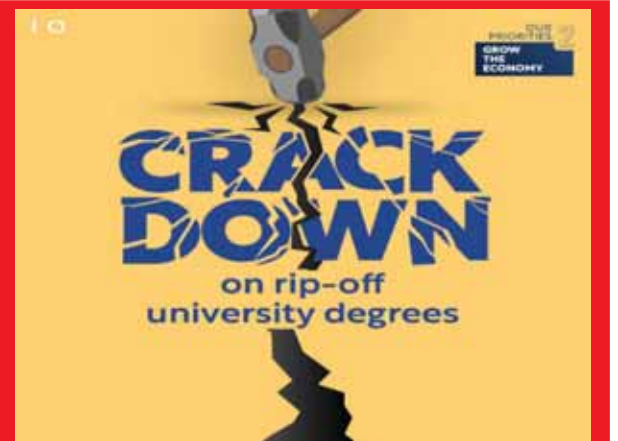
Do drivers called Muhammad pay more for car insurance than men called John?



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'Rip-off' university degrees, Mickey Mouse Courses' to be banned in UK

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Faster than fast charge: Indian-origin researcher discovers way to charge laptops, phones in just a minute

The breakthrough could lead to the development of more efficient energy storage devices, such as supercapacitors, said Ankur Gupta, an assistant professor of chemical and biological engineering.

†(Sai Bureau)-In the modern world of science and technology, we spend most time charging our electric appliances. But what if we tell you that you will now be able to charge your dead laptop or smartphone in just a minute? Well, the technology is here. Recently, an Indian-origin researcher has revealed a novel technology that can help in charging a laptop and phone in one minute. Moreover, using the same way, you can charge your electric car in 10 minutes only. Let's see what this technology is. How is it possible?

Ankur Gupta, an assistant professor of chemical and biological engineering at the US-based University of Colorado Boulder and his team of researchers discovered this new technology. In a study, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, researchers explained how tiny charged particles,

called ions, move within a complex network of minuscule pores. The breakthrough could lead to the development of more efficient energy



storage devices, such as supercapacitors, said Gupta, an assistant professor of chemical and biological engineering. Gupta said, "Given the critical role of energy in the future of the planet, I felt

inspired to apply my chemical engineering knowledge to advancing energy storage devices. It felt like the topic was somewhat unexplored and, as such, the perfect opportunity." Gupta explained that several chemical engineering techniques are used to study flow in porous materials such as oil reservoirs and water filtration, but they have not been fully utilised in some energy storage systems.

The study stated that this discovery is not only for storing energy in vehicles and electronic devices but also for power grids, where fluctuating energy demand

requires efficient storage to avoid waste during periods of low demand and to ensure rapid supply during high demand.

Supercapacitor: An efficient energy storage device Supercapacitors, energy storage devices that rely on ion accumulation in their pores, have rapid charging times and longer life spans compared to batteries. The researcher said that the primary appeal of supercapacitors is their speed. "So how can we make their charging and release of energy faster? By the more efficient movement of ions," said Gupta. The discovery also redefines the Kirchhoff's law, which has governed current flow in electrical circuits and is a staple in high school students' science classes. Unlike electrons, ions move due to both electric fields and diffusion, and the researchers determined that their movements at pore intersections are different from what was described in Kirchhoff's law.

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Telangana woman studying in US university killed by speeding car in Florida



†(Sai Bureau)-A 25-year-old student from Telangana's Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district was killed in a road accident in Florida, US.

Guntipalli Sowmya, who had completed her master's from Florida Atlantic University, was hit by a speeding car while crossing the road on May 26.

She was killed on the spot. Sowmya had been returning to her accommodation after buying groceries when the accident occurred.

She went to the US two years ago to pursue her studies. After completing her master's degree, she was trying to find a job, according to reports.

Sowmya, originally from Yadagaripalle village, Telangana, was actively seeking a job.

Her parents, Koteshwara Rao and Balamani, were devastated upon receiving the tragic news of their daughter's death.

Sowmya's family has appealed to the government for assistance in bringing her body back to Telangana.

Koteshwara Rao, a former CRPF jawan, shared that his daughter had recently celebrated her 25th birthday on May 11. "I even sent clothes for her," he said, mourning her loss, according to TOI.

Sowmya's father struggled immensely to arrange the money for her studies, sacrificed a lot to ensure she had the opportunity to pursue her dreams, according to GoFundMe website.

Rao currently operates a general store (kirana shop) in Telangana.

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Facing deportation from Canada, Indian students to go on full hunger strike

†(Sai Bureau)-The hunger strike by Indian students, protesting the immigration cuts in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island, has entered the fourth day. The protestors will now go on a complete hunger strike for 24 hours on May 28.

Indian students, facing deportation from the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island, have been on a hunger strike for four days. Now, they have threatened to go on a full hunger strike by avoiding even fluid intake on May 28. The hunger strike comes as hundreds of Indian students are facing deportation after a change in the provincial laws related to immigration. One of the Indian protesters said around 50 students had already left Canada.

After the hunger strike for four days, the protestors will start a dry hunger strike on May 28, Canadian media outlet, CBC, reported on Tuesday. A dry hunger strike means these protestors would be without any liquids as well and this puts their lives at more risk than if they were at least

having liquids.

This comes against the backdrop of the Prince Edward Island (PEI) government's decision to reduce the number of workers for permanent residency in 2024 from around 2,100 to 1,600. It would decrease



the people from other countries who are nominated for permanent residency in Canada through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).

The nominees will be cut by 25% in 2024, as there is stress on PEI's healthcare and housing system. The PEI locals are

appreciating the government's new rules. The Indian immigrants say their opportunities are being taken away.

Jaspreet Singh Sivia, one of the protestors, blames the government for disrupting the life of people who were already in the process of getting permanent residency in Canada.

The Indian students plan to step up the protests if the government refuses to listen.

"There have been no actions taken. It looks like the government has become deaf," Sivia said. "We will be doing a 24-hour dry hunger strike effective Tuesday if we still don't hear from the government officials. We will be there 24/7, every day." Sivia said the protestors realise the health risk they are taking, but they also want

to fight for fair opportunity.

These protests began on May 9 and involved 60 protestors with their posters in front of the Colest Building at the PEI legislature.

Now, from May 28, the protestors will move to the site permanently, reports CBC.

WHAT PROTESTING INDIAN STUDENTS IN PEI ARE DEMANDING
The protestors are demanding that people who came before July 2023 should be exempted from the immigration cuts.

Rupinder Pal Singh, one of the protestors even told CBC how around 50 people have left Canada due to the change of regulations. There are some people who have been harassing us ... throwing glasses, cans at us, throwing water while people were asleep," Singh said. "We even saw the harassment from people shouting, making noise all night long because we have been protesting outside, people have been sleeping."

Lok Sabha Elections 2024 phase 7: What to expect

†(News Agency)-The final phase of Indian General Elections will take place on June 1, 2024 in 7 states and 1 union territory for the remaining 57 seats. Read more here about what to expect.

Phase seven of the Indian General Elections will commence on June 1, 2024, in 7 states and 1 union territory states across the country. Uttar Pradesh, the largest legislative constituency, will also hold the final phase of Lok Sabha Elections in 14 of its constituencies. Bihar and West Bengal will hold the Lok Sabha elections once again, having held it in all 6 previous phases as well. The voting will also take place in Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Chandigarh.

Here's what to expect during the final phase of Lok Sabha Elections 2024

The elections will begin from 7 am and last till 6 pm IST during which a dry day will be followed in all 9 states participating in the election.

The seventh phase will also witness the much-anticipated election in the Varanasi constituency of Uttar Pradesh, Shimla under Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh and Kolkata in West Bengal.

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Punjab: Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Khadoor Sahib, Jalandhar (Sc), Hoshiarpur (Sc), Anandpur Sahib, Ludhiana, Fatehgarh Sahib (Sc), Faridkot (Sc), Ferozpur, Bathinda, Sangrur, Patiala

Uttar Pradesh: Maharajganj, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Deoria, Bansaon, Ghosi, Salempur, Ballia, Ghazipur, Chandauli, Varanasi, Mirzapur, Robertsganj

West Bengal: Dum Dum, Barasat, Basirhat, Jaynagar, Mathurapur, Diamond Harbour, Jadavpur, Kolkata Dakshin, Kolkata Uttar

Uttarakhand: Rajmahal, Dumka, Godda

Chandigarh: Chandigarh

KEY CANDIDATES IN THE LOK SABHA POLLS PHASE 7 ARE

Narendra Modi and Ajay Rai, Varanasi

Bharatiya Janata Party has had a stronghold on Varanasi since 2014, Narendra Modi, the current prime minister is contesting for reelection from the constituency for the third time and Congressí Ajit Rai has previously unsuccessfully contested from the same constituency.

Ravi Kishan, Gorakhpur Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded candidates, political and actor, Ravi Kishan from the Gorakhpur Constituency. Samajwadi Partyís candidate Kajal Nishad is contesting against him.

Kangana Ranaut, Mandi Actress and Politician, Kangana Ranaut will be contesting from Himachal Pradeshís Mandi constituency on a Bharatiya Janata Partyís ticket. She is set to face Vikramaditya Singh, son of late former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh. The Mandi constituency has had a strong influence and hold of Congress over the past years, it is also the bastion of the Virbhadra family.

Fifth arrest made in Rajkot gaming zone fire that killed 28 people



†(News Agency)-The number of arrests in the Rajkot fire case has gone up to five with the nabbing of Kirat Singh Jadeja, one of the owners of the TRP Game Zone. The police are on the lookout for another accused, Ashok Singh Jadeja, who is the brother of Kirat, and is also the proprietor of TRP Game Zone. So far, in the Rajkot game zone fire, a total of 5 accused have been arrested. One of the accused, Prakash Jain, died in the incident, and one accused, Ashok Singh, is still absconding, the police stated, as they have intensified their efforts. A case has been filed against six partners of the game zone and another accused on

several charges, including culpable homicide not amounting to murder. Nitin Jain, the manager of the TRP Game Zone, and Yuvraj Singh Solanki, the owner of the game zone, were arrested earlier and a fourth accused, Dhaval Thakkar, was apprehended on Monday evening. On Saturday, a major fire broke out at a gaming zone in Rajkot which took the lives of at least 28 people, including four children under the age of 12. Soon after the tragedy, the Gujarat government on Monday suspended seven officials as the authorities discovered that there was "gross negligence in allowing the game zone to operate without approval."

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Pune crash: Panel to probe Juvenile Board members over teen's bail terms



of two IT professionals. According to the police, the 17-year-old boy was intoxicated at the time.

Hours after the teen was arrested, the JJB granted him bail. The board asked the boy to write a 300-word essay on road accidents, an order that sparked a barrage of criticism. JJB consists a member from the judiciary, and two people are appointed by the state government, said WCD commissioner Prashant Namavare.

"We have formed a committee to probe the overall conduct of the JJB members appointed by the state government, to check whether norms were followed while issuing orders in the car accident case," he was quoted as saying by news agency PTI in its report. "I have powers under the Juvenile Justice Act to probe the overall conduct of the members who have been appointed by the state government. We have set up a committee to assess the overall conduct of the JJB members in connection with the order that granted bail to the juvenile after the accident," said Namavare.

†(News Agency)-The government formed the panel immediately after the bail orders of the teen involved in the Pune Porsche crash case were issued by JJB's Non-Judicial Member Dr LN Danwade.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been formed by the Maharashtra government to probe the conduct of the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) members and check if the norms were followed while issuing orders in the Pune car crash

case, an official said on Wednesday.

Last week, the state's Woman and Child Development Department (WCD) set up a five-member committee.

The panel is led by a deputy commissioner-rank officer from the department and is likely to submit its report by next week. The government formed the panel immediately after the bail orders of the teen involved in the Pune Porsche crash case were issued by JJB's

non-judicial member Dr LN Danwade.

Earlier, on May 19 in the Kalyani Nagar area of Pune, a speeding Porsche, allegedly being driven by a teen, rammed into a motorcycle, resulting in the demise

Rajasthan woman critical after wrong kidney removed, doctor denies charge



†(News Agency)-A woman in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu is said to be critical after a doctor at a private hospital, where she was admitted for the treatment of kidney stones, allegedly removed her healthy kidney instead of the damaged one. However, the doctor has denied the charge, saying that he performed the operation correctly.

The incident took place at the Dhankhar Hospital, owned by Dr Sanjay Dhankhar, who performed the surgery. The 30-year-old woman, identified as Eid Bano of Nua village, had been suffering from kidney stones, due to which she decided to visit the hospital to get them removed. Following a few tests, Dr Dhankhar informed Bano that her right kidney was

allegedly damaged due to the kidney stones, and it needed to be removed urgently. Bano's family agreed to the doctor's observation and surgery was performed on May 15. However, Dr Dhankhar allegedly removed her healthy right kidney instead of the damaged left kidney. Two days later, her condition deteriorated, and she was brought back to the hospital, where Dr Dhankhar referred her for treatment in Jaipur. He also told Bano's family not to disclose to anyone about her operation on May 15.

When she was admitted to the Sawai Man Singh Hospital in Jaipur, the family learnt of Dr Dhankhar's faux pas. The doctors in Jaipur had no choice but to send her back home.



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India must sharpen its balancing act. Russia's limits friendship with China changes things

Putin's visit to China underscores the shifting dynamics of the international order.

By GEN MM NARAVANE (RETD)

In the realm of global geopolitics, every diplomatic move carries significant weight, especially when it involves the leaders of major nations. Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to China has stirred considerable interest and speculation, particularly regarding its implications for India. As two of the world's most influential powers, Russia and China forging closer ties undoubtedly has repercussions that extend beyond their immediate bilateral relationship. Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping have, in recent times, had a number of in-person summit-level meetings apart from numerous online interactions.

The launch of the special military operations by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 was preceded by a meeting between the two heads of state. Here, the two countries declared a "no-limits partnership" with each other. For India, situated in the middle of this geopolitical turn, the implications are multifaceted and require careful analysis.

A worrying camaraderie

One of the declared key areas of cooperation between Russia and China has been in the realm of energy. The two countries have engaged in significant energy deals, including the construction of pipelines and the sale of natural gas, which have strengthened their economic ties. Putin's visit to China included discussions on further deepening energy cooperation by operationalising the Power of Siberia-2 gas pipeline, which could have implications for India's energy security. As Russia strengthens its energy partnership with China, India may need to diversify its energy sources to reduce dependence on any single supplier.

Moreover, Putin's visit may have repercussions for the strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific region, where India and China have competing interests and geopolitical ambitions. The closer alignment between Moscow and Beijing could potentially embolden the latter in its assertive actions in the region – including territorial disputes with India along the Himalayan border. Russia's tacit support or neutrality in such conflicts could complicate India's strategic calculus and necessitate a reassessment of its foreign policy priorities. Given a no-limits partnership and the premise that China is undoubtedly supporting the Russian war effort, India can no longer assume Russia's support in reining-in China in the event of a clash.

Another aspect to consider is the impact of Russia-China cooperation on India's relations with the US. India has sought to

maintain a delicate balance between its traditional partnership with Russia and its burgeoning strategic ties with the US. A closer Russia-China axis may push India further into the arms of the US. New Delhi will, of course, try to counterbalance this growing pressure of the China-Russia partnership. It could manifest in increased defence cooperation between India and the US, as well as closer alignment on regional and global issues. However, one of the most important pillars of India's foreign policy, strategic autonomy, will be severely tested in the face of deepening Russia-China ties.

Furthermore, Putin's visit to China underscores the shifting dynamics of the international order. Power is gradually shifting away from Western nations and toward emerging economies in the East. As Russia and China strengthen their partnership, they are likely to challenge the existing global order dominated by Western institutions and norms. This could create opportunities for India to play a more assertive role in shaping the emerging multipolar world order, leveraging its strategic location and growing economic clout. India's efforts to energise and be the voice of the "Global South" – which received enthusiastic support in the G-20 – is a step in this direction. India must be careful

India must tread cautiously to safeguard its interests. It must realise that closer Russia-China ties also offer opportunities for India to enhance engagement with both countries on issues of mutual interest such as counterterrorism, regional stability, and economic development.

The decades old Russia-India relationship cannot be brushed aside so easily, more so in the context of military cooperation. Over the decades, India has acquired a diverse array of Russian weaponry, including iconic platforms like the Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighter aircraft, T-90 tanks, and the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. Not to mention the S-400 missile system that was contracted in the face of stiff US opposition and under the shadow of the US' CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act).

Moreover, Russia has been willing to transfer critical defence technology to India, allowing for indigenous production and customisation of certain weapons systems. The Russia-China bonhomie and India's balancing act between Moscow and Washington only reiterates what the 19th-century British statesman and Prime Minister Lord Palmerston apparently once said: "There are no permanent enemies, and no permanent friends, only permanent interests".

The US must recognize Palestine as a state. It's time to look to the future, not the past

Israel reacted with predictable outrage to the move last week by three European countries to formally recognize the state of Palestine. The foreign minister accused Ireland, Norway and Spain of "being complicit in inciting genocide against Jews", recalled Israel's ambassadors from Dublin, Oslo and Madrid, and reprimanded their representatives in Tel Aviv. Yet only a decade ago, Israel itself was insisting on recognition – from the Palestinians. It was an often ignored moment in a long-forgotten round of peace negotiations that went nowhere, but it offers a crucial lesson about the century-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the only way forward is forward.

That's one thing I'm certain of after a dozen years of intensely covering this saga, first as Jerusalem bureau chief of the New York Times and now as editor-in-chief of the leading American Jewish news outlet, the Forward. There is no hope for resolving the dueling historical narratives of the Holy Land. A peace agreement is possible only if it takes today as its starting point and focuses on the future. A future in which Palestine and Israel exist side by side, recognized by each other and all the world as the nation-states of their respective peoples. That's the language that the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, used back in 2013, when he elevated the idea of Palestinian recognition of Israel as the Jewish homeland to a top-tier concern.

It was a few months into talks brokered by the then US secretary of state, John Kerry, that most Middle East watchers never thought would go

anywhere. It caught my attention because it was something new after years – decades – of stalemate in which the top priorities had always been how to divide the land, the fate of Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem and security. Suddenly, Netanyahu was talking about a different issue altogether. He had begun asking European leaders to declare Israel a Jewish homeland. And he wanted the Palestinians to do the same. "The core of this conflict has never been borders and settlements – it's about one thing: the persistent refusal to accept the Jewish state in any border," he said in a video statement to the Saban Forum, a premier Washington DC gathering of US and Israeli leaders.

"We recognize that in peace there will be a nation-state for the Palestinian people," Netanyahu added. "Surely we're entitled to expect them to do the same." It seemed to me a major opportunity for the Palestinians. Imagine you're selling a house, and have been haggling back and forth with the buyer on two things, price and closing date. After multiple rounds, the buyer suddenly announces that what they really want is for you, the seller, to support their bid to change the name of the street where the house sits. You'd jump at the chance – if you're moving anyway, to your own new house and street, hopefully in a safe and friendly neighborhood. What do you care what they call the old place? The only question would be how much movement you can get in exchange on the previous sticking points, price and closing date, or whatever else matters most to you.



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Wake Up, Dhaka! China's 'Help' Comes at a Steep Price

Written By: Arun Anand

China's investment and lending in South Asian and African countries has dramatically increased following the iGoing Global strategy of 1999, reaching new heights with the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013. This strategic expansion positioned China as a key trading ally for many middle and low-income countries, especially in South Asia. Chinese government's interest in Bangladesh gained prominence around 2009 and intensified after Xi Jinping's landmark visit to Dhaka in 2016—the year Bangladesh joined the BRI and cemented its status as Beijing's strategic partner.

Post-2016, Chinese investments in Bangladesh have boomed, particularly in large infrastructure projects. Additionally, since 2015, Beijing has been Dhaka's largest trading partner in both economic and defence sectors. Given these developments, analysing the impact of China's growing investments and loans on Bangladesh, a steadfast ally in Beijing's network, is crucial. Since Bangladesh joined the Belt and Road Initiative in 2016, Chinese investments in the country have skyrocketed, surging sevenfold to \$1.346 billion in 2022 from \$241 million in 2016. Bilateral trade also soared, reaching \$25 billion in 2022 from \$15.3 billion in 2016, with Beijing injecting \$800 million in investments last year alone. To further enhance economic ties, China granted duty-free access to 97 per cent of Bangladeshi products in 2021, later increasing this to 98 per cent. In terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), China has become the frontrunner, contributing over \$2.6 billion to Bangladesh over the past decade and emerging as a top investor in the country's exclusive economic zones. Unquestionably, Chinese investments have significantly boosted Dhaka's economy. Nevertheless, the Dragon's embrace may carry more curses than blessings. Chinese lending in Bangladesh demands special scrutiny. According to the Economic Relations Division (ERD), Chinese loans



to Bangladesh have reached \$3 billion over the last four fiscal years, constituting about 40 per cent of the nation's total external lending. In each of the last two fiscal years, Dhaka received at least \$1 billion in Chinese loans, positioning China as the second largest bilateral lender and the fourth overall, accounting for 10 per cent of Dhaka's total annual borrowings.

However, these loans come with an interest rate of about two per cent and a commitment fee of about 0.25 per cent, but with a notably short repayment period of 10-15 years—much shorter than the 30-40 years typically offered by multilateral lenders like the World Bank. This

shorter repayment timeline results in higher instalment payments, exerting additional pressure on the repayment capacities of economically vulnerable countries like Bangladesh.

A glance at Dhaka's economic landscape paints a concerning picture: the country has been grappling with inflation, hitting an 11-year high in May 2023, with rates hovering around 9.74 per cent as of this April. Food inflation escalated to 10.22 per cent last month. Its foreign reserves have been dwindling since September 2021, standing at a gross of \$18.42 billion and a net of \$13.22 billion currently. External debt has breached the \$100 billion mark

for the first time, and the trade deficit last fiscal year hit \$15.49 billion. A dollar shortage exacerbates these issues, with the currency depreciating to 117 Bangladeshi Taka this year. Given these circumstances, the structure of Chinese loans undoubtedly adds to Bangladesh's economic burdens.

In terms of bilateral trade, there exists a stark trade imbalance in favour of China. During the last fiscal year, Dhaka imported goods valued at \$22.9 billion from China but exported merely \$677 million in return. Despite the duty-free advantages, Dhaka's exports to Beijing have remained disappointingly low for three consecutive years. Regarding bilateral external debt, Bangladesh ranks among the top 10 nations indebted to China. According to the World Bank's International Debt Report (2023), Bangladesh's bilateral external debt to China stands at \$6.05 billion, representing 9 per cent of its total external debt and 24 per cent of its bilateral external debt as of the last fiscal year. This debt has seen a dramatic increase, climbing from \$0.97 billion in 2016 to \$6.05 billion in 2022, driven largely by Chinese funding for infrastructure

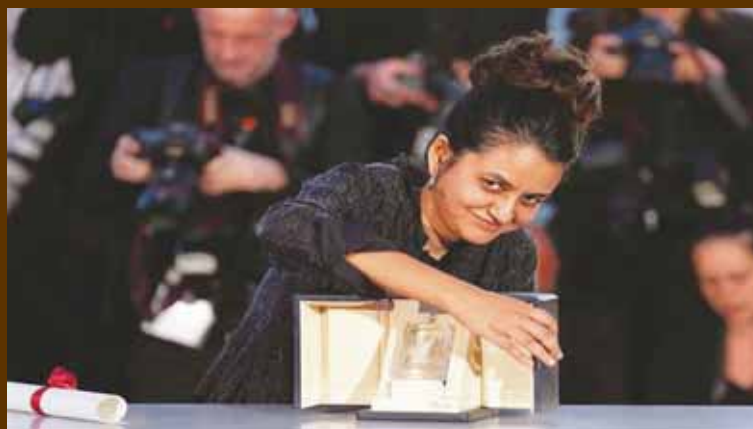
projects in Bangladesh.

During Xi Jinping's 2016 visit to Bangladesh, China pledged loans totalling \$24.45 billion across 27 deals under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, the disbursement of these funds has been notably sluggish. Delays in Beijing's loan approvals have led to significant cost inflations, as observed with projects like the Dhaka-Ashulia Expressway, which waited four years for financial clearance, resulting in escalated costs. According to the Economic Relations Division (ERD), five projects involving \$2.47 billion in Chinese loans are currently experiencing setbacks due to these prolonged approval and disbursement processes, further inflating costs. Additionally, concerns about Chinese debt-trap diplomacy have surfaced in Bangladesh, similar to cases in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, highlighted by underperforming initiatives like the Payra Power Plant. A report from US-based AidData indicates that 59 per cent of Chinese-backed projects in Bangladesh are grappling with ESG risks, with the affected project value skyrocketing from \$1 billion in 2015 to over \$12 billion by 2021.

Cannes acclaim Talent of Indian filmmakers, financing in focus

INDIA's presence at the 77th Cannes Film Festival marked a significant milestone for its independent filmmakers. This year, India celebrated multiple firsts, showcasing its film industry's immense talent and potential on a global platform. The festival's recognition of Indian films and artistes is cause for national pride, highlighting their artistic excellence and the evolving landscape of cinema.

Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine as Light* securing the prestigious Grand Prix, the festival's second-highest honour, is a landmark achievement. This film's nomination in the main category is the first for India in 30 years and represents a noteworthy breakthrough for our



cinema. Kapadia's film offers a nuanced perspective that challenges conventional narratives. Anasuya Sengupta becoming the first Indian actor to receive the Best Actress award in the *Un Certain Regard* segment for her role in *The Shameless* exemplifies the growing appreciation of Indian talent

beyond Bollywood. Chidananda S Naik's *Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know*, which won the La Cinef top prize for best short film, underscores the creative prowess of emerging filmmakers. The accolades extended to the technical side, with cinematographer Santosh Sivan receiving the Pierre

AngÈnieux Excellens in Cinematography award—the first Asian to receive this honour. While commercial successes like *RRR* and *Pushpa: The Rise* have garnered global attention, the wins at Cannes are a testament to the diversity and depth of Indian cinema. Notably, the success of these films was made possible through innovative financing strategies, including crowd-funding, international co-production and support from the government in the form of incentives. These funding avenues were instrumental in bringing genre-bending works to life, allowing filmmakers to explore the broader spectrum of Indian culture and creativity.

Here's why Haryana is as tough for BJP as it is important

Amitabh Tiwari

Haryana is witnessing an intense political battle with 10 seats going to polls in the sixth phase on May 25. The Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies swept the state in 2014 and 2019. This time, however, its aircraft is facing heavy turbulence.

The Congress, riding on anger amongst Jats and inflation-unemployment, hopes to make a significant dent in the BJP tally. On the other hand, the BJP hopes the split of Opposition votes between the Congress, the Jannayak Janta Party, and the Indian National Lok Dal will help contain the damage. Since 1999, parties that won the majority of seats in Haryana formed the government at the Centre. In the last five pairs of general and Vidhan Sabha elections, the party or alliance winning the Lok Sabha polls in Haryana went on to form the government in the state as well. It's hence imperative for the BJP to do well in the state to have an upper hand in the perception battle going into state polls due later this year. Balakot and INLD split helped BJP sweep 2019

In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, Congress won nine of the 10 Haryana seats with a 42 per cent vote share. The BJP-INLD alliance bagged just one seat with a 28 per cent vote share. In 2014, the BJP partnered with Haryana Janhit Congress (Bhajan Lal) and won seven seats with a 35 per cent vote share, helped by the anti-Congress mood in the nation, which lost the grand old party a massive 19 per cent vote share. The division of votes between the INLD and the Congress, which bagged 24 and 23 per cent vote shares respectively, helped the BJP in a triangular contest.

In 2019, BJP swept the state contesting alone, riding on the nationalist fervour generated post the Balakot airstrikes. The split in the Chautala family with Dushyant Chautala forming the JJP, also helped it split Opposition votes. The BJP won all 10 seats with a 58 per cent vote share, reducing the INLD to just two per cent. The JJP made its debut with a five per cent vote share and the Congress bagged 28 per cent of the votes.

Jat anger

Jats are the most influential community in Haryana, accounting for around 27 per cent of the population. Hisar, Bhiwani, Mahendragarh, Rohtak, Jhajjar, Sonapat, Sirsa, Jind, and Kaithal

form the heart of Haryana's Jat belt. In 57 years of its existence, the state has had a Jat chief minister for 33. All the competitors of the BJP in the state — the Congress, the INLD, and the JJP — have Jat leadership at the helm.

In 2014, after winning a historic

mandate, the BJP adopted a non-dominant caste appeasement politics in Haryana, ignoring Jats and installing a Khatri Punjabi ML Khattar as chief minister. This visibly irked the community. It adopted a similar experiment in Maharashtra, appointing a Brahmin (Devendra Fadnavis),

ignoring Marathas, and an OBC in Jharkhand (Raghubar Das), ignoring Scheduled Tribes. These strategies flopped, with the BJP losing in Jharkhand in 2019 and the party installing a Maratha chief minister in 2022 (Eknath Shinde). In the 2014 Lok Sabha, 33 per cent of Jats backed the

BJP, which fell to 24 per cent in the Vidhan Sabha polls six months later. In the 2019 Lok Sabha, 42 per cent of Jats backed the BJP because of the Balakot airstrike and the popularity of PM Modi. This declined to 34 per cent in the Vidhan Sabha polls.

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Modi in Punjab

Amid farmers' protests, PM plays Sikh card

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi addressed three election rallies in Punjab in two days against the backdrop of farmers' protests. His visit to the state came more than two years after the Ferozpur fiasco of January 2022, when a road blockade by protesters had forced him to turn back without addressing a rally in the run-up to the Punjab Assembly elections. The PM has had a troubled relationship with the state's farming community ever since the Centre enacted three contentious farm laws in September 2020. The legislation had triggered a year-long agitation by farmers of Punjab and other states at Delhi's borders, where they braved the elements with remarkable resilience. What peeved the protesters was the apparent indifference and apathy of the




powers that be. It was only in November 2021 that the Modi government finally relented and decided to repeal the laws. However, even this historic climbdown has failed to placate the state's farmers, whose main demand is a legal guarantee for the procurement of all crops at the minimum support price

(MSP). The ruthless scuttling of the Dilli Chalo march in February further widened the trust deficit. Talks on the MSP issue have proved inconclusive, even as BJP candidates have been facing stiff opposition in many villages, where the saffron party is being accused of betraying farmers. Amid such bitter resistance, PM

Modi chose to play the Sikh card in Punjab, patting himself on the back for the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor in 2019. He added that had he been the PM in 1971, he would have taken Kartarpur Sahib from Pakistan before releasing their 90,000-odd soldiers in the wake of the Bangladesh war. He

also lauded his government for reopening files of cases related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. But his outreach to Sikhs may cut no ice with the irate farmers, who are in no mood to forgive the BJP for the humiliation and vilification suffered by them, especially during the 2020-21 stir.

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Scorching Temperatures: Time for India to Embrace Climate-Responsive Pathways

Written By: AS Mittal

It's scorching hot today! For many of us, this exclamation expresses our annoyance at the occasional inconveniences of the year's hottest months. The blistering heatwaves across the country, especially in northern India, persist as the maximum temperature soared to 49 degrees Celsius in Rajasthan, the highest of this season, which caused a couple of people to die due to suspected heat-related ailments. Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh are also reeling from heatwaves. Conditions are expected to worsen as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicts temperatures in northwest India may reach nearly 50 degrees Celsius over the next few days, posing a threat to the millions of workers engaged in farming, construction, and industrial operations, signifying distress. For many economies, this poses a significant threat to productivity. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a climate-responsive action plan.

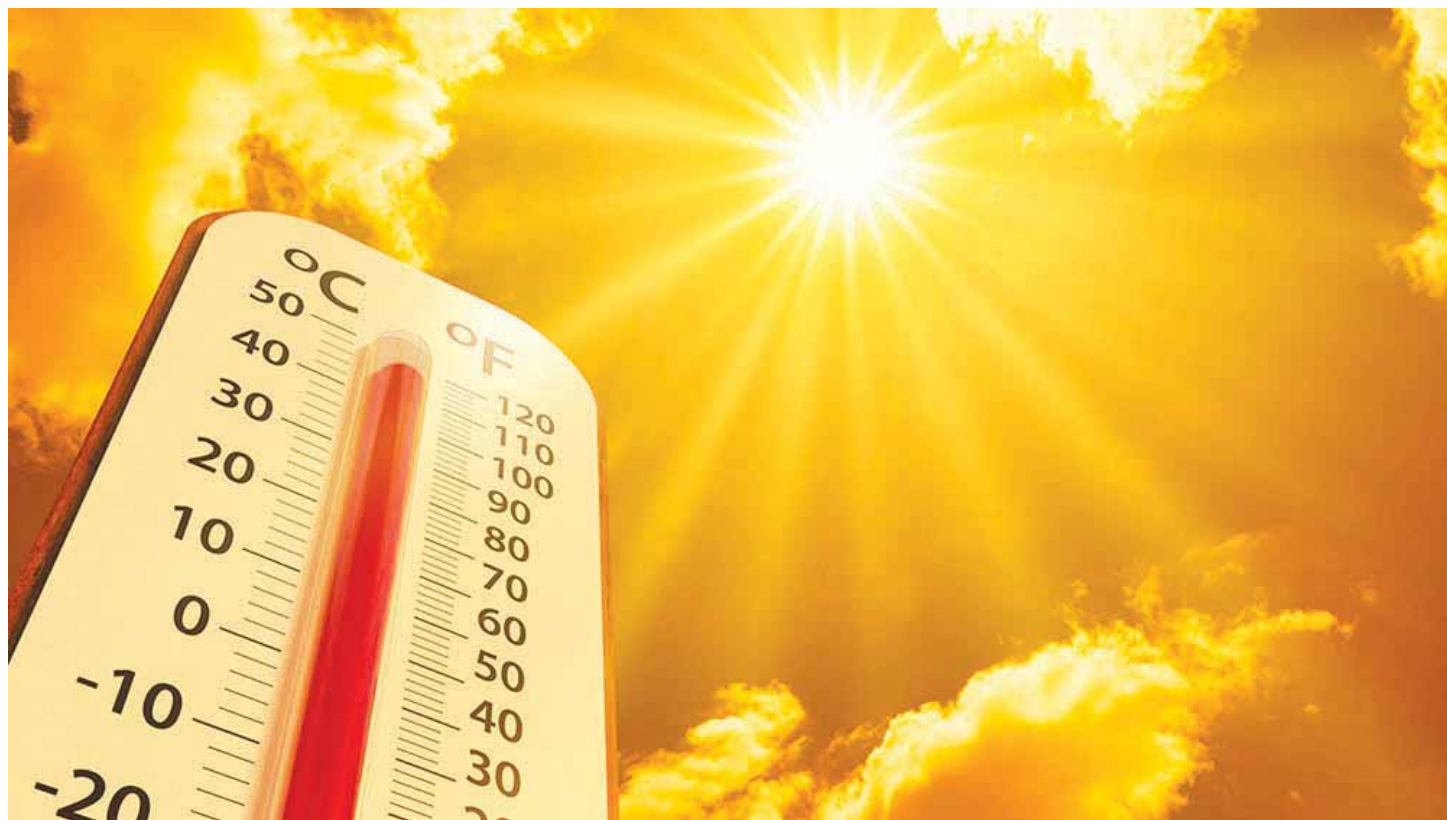
EFFECT ON WORKFORCE AND ECONOMY

The World Bank's report unequivocally states that climate change is causing steadily rising temperatures in India, leading to more extreme heat each year. By 2030, over 160-200 million people across the country could be exposed to lethal heatwaves annually. Additionally, around 34 million people in India are projected to face job losses due to heat stress-related declines in productivity.

The impacts of rising average temperatures are being felt differently across various occupations and employment sectors. Jobs involving high levels of physical exertion or prolonged outdoor work are particularly affected by increasing heat levels. Specifically, agricultural and construction work, as well as work in steel plants and brick kilns, are expected to be the worst affected.

According to a study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in 1995, the working hours lost in India due to heat stress were 5.87 per cent in agriculture and construction, 2.95 per cent in industry, and 0.63 per cent in services. These numbers are anticipated to increase to 9.04 per cent in agriculture and construction, 5.29 per cent in industry, and 1.48 per cent in services by 2030.

Heat stress is increasingly becoming an obstacle to economic activity. It reduces the ability of businesses to operate during the hottest hours, and temperature rises are expected to further diminish labour



productivity, potentially rendering some agricultural areas unproductive and displacing a large number of farm workers. The global economic losses due to heat stress at work were estimated at \$280 billion in 1995, and this figure is projected to increase to \$2,400 billion in 2030.

Currently, the annual food loss due to heat during transportation is close to \$13 billion. By 2037, the demand for cooling is likely to be eight times more than current levels. This means there will be a demand for a new air conditioner every 15 seconds, leading to an expected rise of 435 per cent in annual greenhouse gas emissions over the next two decades. Recognising this challenge, India must deploy new strategic sustainable solutions to help people adapt to rising temperatures.

SCOPE OF SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The World Bank study 'Climate Investment Opportunities in India's Cooling Sector', clearly indicates that utilising alternative and innovative energy-efficient technologies is the key to combating the heatwave crisis. This approach has the potential to open an investment opportunity of \$1.6 trillion by 2040, significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create nearly 3.7 million jobs.

The study strongly suggests that a more energy-efficient pathway could lead to a substantial reduction in expected CO2 levels over the next two decades. India's cooling strategy can save lives and livelihoods, reduce carbon emissions, and position India as a global hub for green cooling manufacturing. The report proposes a sustainable roadmap for

cooling that could effectively reduce 300 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually by 2040. In 2019, the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) was launched to implement decisive and sustainable cooling measures across various sectors. These measures include indoor cooling in buildings, cold chain solar refrigeration in the agriculture and pharmaceutical sectors, and air-conditioning in passenger transport. The plan aims to reduce the demand for electricity-driven cooling by up to 25 per cent by 2037-38, potentially creating two million jobs for trained technicians and reducing the demand for refrigerants by around 31 per cent over the next two decades.

ADOPTING CLIMATE-RESPONSIVE COOLING TECHNIQUES

It is imperative to adopt climate-responsive cooling techniques as the standard in both private and government-funded constructions to ensure that those at the bottom of the economic ladder are not disproportionately affected by rising temperatures. The report strongly advocates for the widespread adoption of such changes in India's affordable housing program, which could benefit over 11 million urban homes and over 29 million rural houses that the government aims to construct. In 2019, the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) was launched to implement decisive and sustainable cooling measures across various sectors. These measures include indoor cooling in buildings, cold chain solar refrigeration in the agriculture and pharmaceutical sectors, and air-conditioning in passenger transport. The plan aims to

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Two-state advocacy

Three European countries recognise Palestine

A coordinated move by Ireland, Norway and Spain to recognise the Palestinian state may be largely symbolic, but it reflects growing public outrage in Europe over the devastation and civilian death toll in Gaza, as well as Israel's deepening isolation. This decision followed discussions among several European nations, rooted in the belief that a fresh thrust for a two-state solution is essential. The diplomatic move in favour of Palestinian statehood signals a significant shift in Europe against Israel's excesses in Gaza, widely condemned as genocidal. Notably, Norway, a key player in the Oslo Accords of 1993, has emphasised that recognising Palestine is crucial for peace in West Asia, asserting that a two-state solution is in Israel's best interest. Ireland and Spain have echoed this sentiment,



underscoring the need to break the cycle of violence that has worsened since the October 7 attack by Hamas and the subsequent Israeli counter-

assaults. Hopefully, it will inspire other Western countries to follow suit and step up international pressure for a ceasefire and meaningful

negotiations. Salman Rushdie has also pitched into the already muddled debate.

India has maintained a consistent policy, advocating for

direct negotiations to establish a sovereign, independent Palestine coexisting peacefully with Israel. It has reiterated its long-standing support for a two-state solution, though Prime Minister Modi's tweet condemning the initial Hamas attack was interpreted by some observers as a shift in its stance. Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants against the Israeli PM and Defence Minister and three Hamas leaders for alleged war crimes. With the International Court of Justice hearing South Africa's appeal to stop Israel's attacks in Rafah, the global clamour for accountability and justice is growing.

Why is the Campaign Against India Spicing Up?

By: Reshmi Dasgupta

Spice is nice. In fact, for much of the world, it is nicer and nicer these days. Adding chilli flakes to everything from soup to pizzas is no longer an Indian obsession but an international phenomenon. The love affair that started with black pepper in Roman times has now expanded to the entire garam masala pantheon, with the five Cs—cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, coriander and cumin—now as ubiquitous as parsley, thyme, and rosemary. So why give spice a bad name and ban it?

Even if people are no longer familiar with the original idiom, there is no doubting there is a witch-hunt for Indian spices after Singapore and Hong Kong red-flagged products of two Indian brands last month because of the alleged presence of ethylene oxide (EtO). The narrative has been picked up suo motu by concerned authorities in other countries, including the UK, Nepal, New Zealand and Australia, though the view on the use of EtO is far from uniform around the world.

Last week, India's food standards regulator, the Food Safety and



Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said that no trace of EtO has been found in samples of spices tested by 28 accredited Indian laboratories from the two major brands MDH and Everest that Singapore and Hongkong hauled up for alleged carcinogenic residue. The Indian products that had been targeted were MDH's Madras Curry Powder, Curry Powder and Sambhar Masala and Everest's Fish Curry Masala.

Fumigating spices and sterilising medical equipment are among the minor uses of EtO; it is actually widely used in the production of plastics, detergents, solvents,

thickeners and organic chemicals like ethylene glycol (used for anti-freeze and polyester fibre) and other compounds. Colourless and sweet-smelling, EtO is flammable, extremely explosive carcinogenic, mutagenic and irritating at room temperatures, therefore it is usually transported as a refrigerated liquid.

Despite being a major manufacturer of EtO, European Union countries have banned it. But the US, which is a huge market for Indian masalas, allows it. In fact, the American Spice Trade Association reiterated to the Spices Board of India that EtO is

approved in the US within specific limits. And Indian authorities have pointed out that international standards for safe EtO levels vary from 0.73 per cent to 7 per cent. India has now pressed for the formulation of more uniform standards.

The Spices Board has also issued guidelines to exporters including Maximum Residue Limits and also suggested alternatives. But if EtO is not used, spices exported to the US will have a higher chance of not meeting FDA food safety standards. And according to data available up to 2022, India remains the biggest source of spices for the US at \$65.2 million, followed by China (\$62.5 million), Turkey (\$34.3 million), Peru (\$31.3 million), and Spain (\$28.6 million). Now the latest nation to sputter about the safety of Indian spices is the UK, whose Food Standards Agency (FSA) has called for extra controls on spices imported from India (triggered by Singapore and Hong Kong) though it has NOT found any dangerous residues. The largest source of spices for the UK is China at 22 per cent, closely followed by India at 17.7 per cent (the opposite of their

ranks in the US market) with Pakistan a distant third at 7 per cent. So, who benefits from India's spice travails?

Interestingly, in August 2023, the EU banned vanilla extract from the US because of EtO and demanded testing and certification before the spice was shipped. But there are no provisions for that in the US. Even more curiously, while cracking down on spices from Indian brands, the Singapore authorities' press note added, 'Although there is no immediate risk to consumption of food contaminated with low levels of ethylene oxide, long-term exposure may lead to health issues.'

According to available information, workers at facilities manufacturing or using EtO are at the highest risk; the very small levels of residue that may be found in spices or medical equipment sterilised with it carry correspondingly lower chances of serious health hazards unless there is sustained exposure. To that extent, increasing the safety levels for staff at spice sterilisation facilities certainly should be a priority for Indian exporters, in order to maintain their primacy.

PM Modi's Game-Changing Ration Schemes: From Garibi Hatao to Garib Kalyan

By: Sanju Verma

In January 2024, the Modi government took a seminal decision pertaining to the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). This is a historic decision that places PMGKAY amongst the world's biggest social welfare schemes aimed at ensuring food and nutrition security for 81.35 crore persons, at an estimated cost of Rs 11.80 lakh crore over a five-year period, a government release said. Without an iota of doubt, rebuilding hope and igniting the spark of an aspirational India that wants more and wants the best, has been the hallmark of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's last 10 years in power.

While Rahul Gandhi mocked the poor, his father, Rajiv Gandhi allowed middlemen a free run at the expense of the poor and his grandmother Indira Gandhi used the 'Garibi Hatao' slogan for self-gratification. In sharp contrast, PM Modi has dedicated himself to the cause of the poor and the underprivileged.

This column attempts to elaborate upon all the schemes associated with PM Modi's



Garib Kalyan initiatives and how they are rapidly transforming India. Speaking at a function in Allahabad in 2013, Rahul Gandhi stirred the hornet's nest by dismissing poverty as just a state of mind. Measuring his words carefully has never been a strong suit of the Gandhi scion. Unfortunately, in the last 10 years, nothing much has changed and Rahul continues to be irresponsible with his wanton public utterances.

Coming back to the issue of

poverty, back in 2013, hailing the role of self-help groups (SHGs), the then Congress vice president, Rahul Gandhi said that SHGs provide the poor with self-confidence to overcome poverty. True, SHGs have played a stellar role under the aegis of PM Modi's dynamic leadership in the last 10 years, but Rahul's insensitive statement 11 years back about self-confidence being the only solution to poverty, smacked of immaturity and worse. Poverty is just a state of mind. It does

not mean the scarcity of food, money or material things. If one possesses self-confidence, then one can overcome poverty, Rahul had said, in a stark display of insensitivity and callousness. Well, he is absolutely wrong. Poverty is indeed the scarcity of food, money, material things and so much more. Most

importantly, poverty is eventually about the lack of access to

basic amenities and the lack of access to hope—the hope for a better life. The Modi government has so far transferred over Rs 34 lakh crore via direct benefit transfer (DBT) under different schemes. If Rajiv Gandhi's remark had remained true even today, then 85 per cent of Rs 34 lakh crore would have been looted. The delivery of bank accounts, loans, housing, property rights, toilets, electricity, and clean cooking fuel, have all been given a whole new dimension under the Modi government, with no

room for middlemen. Our focus is to empower the poor to enable them to contribute to the rapid growth of the country with their full potential, PM Modi had said at an event in New Delhi, last year.

Speaking of welfare economics, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) was launched by the Modi government in December 2016, on the lines of the Income Declaration Scheme (IDS). As part of the Taxation Laws (Second Amendment) Act, 2016, the scheme provided an opportunity to declare unaccounted wealth and black money in a confidential manner and avoid prosecution, but only after paying a fine of 50 per cent on the undisclosed income. An additional 25 per cent of the undisclosed income was allowed to be invested in the scheme which could be refunded after four years, without any interest. Not declaring undisclosed income under the PMGKY attracted a fine of 77.25 per cent if the income was shown in tax returns. In case the income was not shown in tax returns, it attracted a further 10 per cent penalty followed by prosecution.

Meretricious Charms of Socialism

By: Ravi Shanker Kapoor

Socialism is like the Sirens of Greek mythology—the half-bird and half-woman creatures who lured sailors to their doom by singing sweet songs. It continues to entice people, intellectuals, and politicians. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is among the politicians whose fascination with socialism and its perverse theories is so ingrained that he is unable to notice that the statements he is making undermine his own party's position.

So, speaking at Panchkula in Haryana on Wednesday, he said that 90 per cent of the population comprising Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs and minorities are unrepresented across different fields. He went on to assert that there are two different sets of rules. Also, the system is aligned against lower castes. Gandhi reportedly said, I have been sitting inside the system



since birth. I understand the system from the inside. You cannot hide the system from me. How it works, who it favours, how it favours, who it protects, who it attacks, I know everything, I can see it as I have come from inside it. At the Prime Minister's house, when my grandmother (Indira Gandhi) was the PM, Papa (Rajiv Gandhi) was there, Manmohan Singh ji was there, I used to go. I know the

system from the inside. And I am telling you, the system is aligned against lower castes, in a terrifying manner (bhayankar tareeke), at every level. Look at the corporate system, media system, bureaucracy, judiciary, education system, and military. Wherever you look, there is no participation of 90 per cent. And an argument is raised about merit. How is it possible that 90 per cent don't have

merit? It is just not possible. There has to be some flaw in the system. Evidently, in the last 10 years, Rahul has not been sitting inside the system, which means that he has been referring to the 67 years between 1947 and 2014. But during this period, his party was in power for 55 years. The implication of these two indubitable facts is that the grand old party was primarily responsible for the supposed marginalisation of nine out of ten Indians.

I didn't compare socialism with the Sirens without reason. Just as their songs doom sailors, the promises of socialism are so sweet and its charms so meretricious—food and house for all, elimination of poverty, heaven on Earth, in short—that many politicians get hopelessly enticed by them. The temptation is so intense that they lose contact with reality. Rahul's Leftward march has made him enter into such a realm. Otherwise, he would have realised that his remarks alluding to the supposed

marginalisation of 90 per cent of people show his own party in a bad light. I say 'supposed' because the Congress did play a critical role in the modernisation of India. Like any other party, it also made mistakes, but the marginalisation of 90 per cent of people was not one of them.

The marginalisation charge also flies in the face of facts in a country where the top two offices, that of the president and the vice president, are held by persons from the 90 per cent.

On one point, though, Rahul's observation is accurate: There has to be some flaw in the system. Of course, he would loath to accept the correct diagnosis, for that flaw is socialism. His great-grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, foisted it upon the country in the early years of independence, resulting in the amplification of the size and scope of the state and the concomitant miniaturization of the individual.

'Babur: The Chessboard King' - A Book That Has Upset Both The Left and Right

By: Ratan Sharda

It rarely happens that a book of history upsets both the Right and the Left, but a new historian on the block, Aabhas K Maldahiya, has managed this rare feat. This is a complement to his research and objective writing. It is not easy to write about a king who aroused so much hate for his role in opening the gates of Bharat as no other invader had done.

Others came, conquered some parts of Bharat, and declined or some were assimilated into Bharatiya culture, and some returned while Babur's dynasty ruled major parts of Bharat for nearly 200 years. Babur's dynasty is remembered and arouses extreme emotions because it attempted to violently dismantle one of the world's ancient civilisations in every possible way. The Babri Masjid, built over a magnificent Ram Mandir at Ram's birthplace by Babur's commander Mir Baqi, the destruction of Kashi Vishwanath, and the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple—all three being major centres of deep Hindu devotion—are incidents that Bharatiyas cannot forget. These acts were deliberately designed to ensure that Hindus would not forget their humiliation at the hands of invaders. Hindus cannot



forget the genocide of unparalleled dimensions, the rapes and enslavement of women and children, and the massive forced conversions. However, most of us have read the airbrushed history of the great Mughals, revised and rewritten by eminent Marxist historians. They not only glorified the inhuman dynasty of Babur, but also removed much of the history of Hindu resistance to the invaders from the 7th century onwards that prevented any invader from changing the character of this great land. They did not give any space to the glorious Hindu kingdoms of the south, east and northeast. We were left with a sense of inferiority and resentment

because collective memories kept alive by folk tales and folk songs refused to die. History written by the historians and courtiers of that time existed; and historians like RC Majumdar and Jadunath Sarkar (just to name the two), could not be destroyed. However, the myths created by our eminent historians were cemented through school and college education, media controlled by them, and popular cinema that glorified the invaders. The renaissance of Bharatiya writing that began around the year 2000 gained momentum post-2014. Many by-default Leftists also opened their eyes to the reality that had been shut out for

years, having been indoctrinated in the myth-making factories of institutions like JNU, AMU, etc. One of the young thinkers was Aabhas Maldahiya, an architect by profession who had a reawakening when he visited Ajanta-Ellora, a place that was never promoted the way the Taj Mahal was. And this architect researcher finally decided to write on Timurid history wrongly sold to us as Mughal history. As he read through various translations, he realised that he could not depend on any one of them. So, he learnt Pharsi in the language of the chroniclers of the Timurid dynasty and other invaders.

The research turned out to be so voluminous that Aabhas thought a book or two could not do justice to this critical part of Indian history. Thus, what began as a book on Timurid history is turning into a nine-volume mega set of books being published by a highly reputable publishing house, Penguin, known for its academic rigour.

Aabhas is so committed to objectivity that he devotes several pages to explaining the genealogy of Babur's dynasty, asserting that Babur was a Timurid who actually hated the Mughals. The Mughals were not only his competitors but

also an unreliable clan that caused him significant trouble with their duplicitous games. This is the first myth ably busted by the young writer. This upset the professional Mughal fanboys and girls. Then, as the story develops in the book, it also upsets the Mughal dynasty haters. Because, by calling him the chessboard king, they felt he was glorifying Babur. By compiling and presenting his life and times as told by various historians and his own interpretation, Aabhas seems to have presented a seemingly sympathetic view. It is a fact that Babur had a bad childhood, he suffered one setback after another, but never gave up. He was a family man, unlike the debauch Mughals we know about. He is seen as a typical tribal warlord who generally plays by the tribal playbook—punishing some enemies, killing some cruelly, and forgiving some. The critics fail to appreciate the fact that the writer has been able to comprehensively tell us that Babur had homosexual inclinations and affairs, and his poetic narrations are quite amusingly feminine. Although he began drinking alcohol at the relatively late age of 30, he eventually became a regular drinker.

How Reservations Are Usurped For Political Gains in West Bengal

By: Adarsh Kuniyillam

While submitting his report to the President of India on December 31, 1980, BP Mandal had stated, "Our report, however, does not stand in the way of the states, if they want to take in any measure for the upliftment of the weaker sections of people like the women and the poorer and others who are not covered by our terms of reference, it may be noted that there is no bar to make further reservations for them." The report's loophole has resulted in the unconstitutional allocation of reservations for undeserving citizens by specific state governments like West Bengal and Karnataka.

In West Bengal, of the 42 Lok Sabha constituencies, the Muslim community plays a key role in 22 constituencies and has the capacity to influence the electoral outcome. This includes Raiganj, Maldaha Uttar and

Dakshin, Cooch Behar, Birbhum, Balurghat, Bolpur, Jangipur, Murshidabad, Baharampur, Krishnanagar, Bardhaman Purba,



Barasat, Bashirhat, Jadavpur, Joynagar, Mathurapur, Diamond Harbour, Kolkata Dakshin, Uluberia, Howrah and Kolkata Uttar. West Bengal today not only

immigration from neighbouring Bangladesh but also faces challenges related to the distribution of reservations to

ineligible individuals. Regrettably, backward classes within the Hindu community are now being excluded from the constitutional protections they are entitled to, while representations of the

Muslim community under reservation quota are on the rise in the state.

After Indra Sawhney and Ors Vs Union of India, every state government and the Union was directed to establish commissions for identifying OBCs. In 1993, the West Bengal government established the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes. To cater to the Muslim community, which makes up around 28 per cent of the state's population and is the largest vote bank of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Mamata Banerjee's government made certain modifications. Between March 5, 2010, and May 11, 2012, the West Bengal government declared 77 classes as OBC through seven executive orders/memoranda issued by the State. This decision was later contested, leading to the current ruling by the Hon'ble High Court.

The West Bengal government not only wrongly included 77 classes in the State list of OBCs, but also recommended their inclusion in the Central list. This irregularity was brought to the attention of the National Commission for Backward Classes. Out of the 87 communities proposed for inclusion, the state recommended 78 Muslim and 8 Hindu communities. Furthermore, an investigation conducted by the National Commission revealed that the majority of the recommended individuals were Muslim converts from the Hindu religion, providing solid evidence of state-sponsored proselytisation. In order to facilitate the inclusion of the Muslim community under the OBC quota, the state government diluted the statutory provisions of the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes in 2010.

The great Himalayan tragedy

If we don't heed warning bells in the mountains, the Char Dham temple bells may soon fall silent

IN the many years of journeying through the Himalayas, I have never experienced a sense of impending doom as I do now. I have witnessed how in the name of development, there has been relentless spoliation of this sacred space, the scarring of its pristine landscapes, the dispossession of the rarest of the rare birds and animals which have dwelt in its embrace since ancient times and even of human communities which, in their ways of life, traditions and beliefs, have been its most faithful sentinels. The Himalayas are a junction between worlds that touch and do not touch each other (Axel Michaels in *Hinduism Past and Present*). The Sanskrit word *ĕtirthai* or pilgrimage has just precisely that notion of a crossing place, a transition. And that is why this entire mountain zone is sacred and a place of pilgrimage. The memory of its dramatic beginnings runs in our veins. The sea is its mother, and it is for good reason that the people of Nepal call the Everest Sagarmatha or the brow of the ocean. But for human despoilers, the sacredness has become an asset to exploit for profit. The Everest has become a high-altitude rubbish heap and its crest one more tick on a bucket list of adventures. Our Char Dham are no longer hallowed places of pilgrimage but flourishing destinations for religious tourism. Gangotri is now a seedy urban sprawl. The main temple lies festooned with rainbow lights, while loudspeakers belt out raucous bhajans which the roar of the young river cannot drown out. It is only a matter of time before you may book a suite in a modern hotel in Gaumukh, promising breathtaking views of the famous glacier and the Bhagirathi peaks. Gaumukh means the mouth of the sacred cow and has, therefore, immense potential for mass-scale religious tourism.

The Char Dham Yatra, as it has been developed over the past couple of decades, is a pointer to what awaits us across the Himalayan range, for every patch of this space is associated with legends sacred to the many faiths of the sub-continent. Latest reports indicate that since the shrines opened around May 10-11, around 950,000 pilgrims had

already descended on Gangotri, Badrinath, Kedarnath and Yamunotri. We still have over five months to go before the shrines close in early November. The Uttarakhand Government has instituted a registration system to regulate entry to the shrines. But the daily limits permitted 20,000 for Kedarnath, 18,000 for Badrinath, 11,000 for Gangotri and 9,000 for Yamunotri. These are staggering numbers for such fragile and sensitive mountain locations. The speed and scale of expansion of religious tourism is evident from the footfall of 5,600,000 recorded last year, which was 1,000,000 more than in 2022, though it includes Hemkunt Sahib, which has smaller numbers overall.

If one goes to travel websites, there are several two-, three- and four-star hotels listed in Badrinath and Kedarnath. There are daily helicopter services to each of these spots. One chopper nearly crashed near the Kedarnath shrine a few days ago. Over 50 people have lost their lives travelling to these rarefied heights in the past two weeks and the police have arrested more than 50 youth at Kedarnath for drunk and disorderly behaviour. But lots of money is being made. The past two weeks have resulted in an estimated record turnover of over Rs 200 crore for hoteliers, restaurant owners, mule drivers and porters.

For such large numbers, immense quantities of food, bottled water, gas cylinders for cooking and diesel for power generators have to be carried. A government study, conducted a few years ago when the traffic was much less, found that 23,000 tonnes of solid waste was being generated annually along the track to one of the dhams, with no systematic disposal arrangement. One shudders to think what the volume may be now with much, much larger numbers. The four- to six-lane Char Dham highway is bringing devotees and other tourists in droves to the entire Alaknanda river valley this summer. When the 127-km Rishikesh-to-Karnaprayag railway line along this valley is completed by the year-end, even larger hordes of people will crowd into these once-remote and pristine locations. A large number of fancy hotels and guesthouses have come up to cater to the expanding number of

visitors. Even in the protected sanctuary of Binsar, the sides of the road are piled high with solid waste, in particular plastic waste. One cannot just make the mountain zone a no-go area nor can one argue that economic activity, which brings livelihoods and incomes, should be foresworn. But there should be more careful and detailed planning before large-scale infrastructure projects are undertaken in these sensitive locations. These are still

unstable and shifting terrains, which can be easily disturbed, resulting in frequent landslides and avalanches. Long stretches of the Char Dham highway have been repeatedly affected by landslides, requiring expensive repairs. Several hydroelectric projects on the tributaries of the Ganga have been swept away in sudden storm surges and flash floods, resulting in the loss of lives and property. There is no debris control, with vast piles of earth from these projects simply dumped on

the site despite laws requiring their removal. This results in natural drainage being blocked, with waterlogging in the upper reaches and drying up of water channels and natural springs in the lower reaches. One can see this across both Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Whatever be the immediate benefit, such mindless ravaging of nature will bring eventual retribution and greater deprivation to people. The poorest will suffer the most.

WhatsApp group scam on rise in India: What is it, how to be safe

A new WhatsApp Group scam is on the rise in India, defrauding individuals with promises of lucrative stock market investments. Here is how this scam operates and essential tips to protect yourself from falling victim.

In recent months, we have seen a spike in cases of online scams. Thousands of people around the country have reportedly been defrauded by online strangers in the context of work-from-home opportunities or other incentives to earn extra money. The latest of these deceptive tactics is a new WhatsApp Group Scam, through which scammers are luring innocent people with stock market investment plans. In a recent report of the WhatsApp Group scam, two brothers from Pune, India, were defrauded of Rs 2.45 crore (approximately \$295,000). This scam, like many others, began on the popular instant messaging platform WhatsApp. Let's take a detailed look at how this scam unfolds and how you can keep yourself safe from falling victim to such schemes.

How does this WhatsApp Group scam start?

Looking at several cases of the WhatsApp Group scam, the scam begins with a victim being contacted by unknown individuals through calls, social media sites, or on WhatsApp itself. The scammers first try to start a conversation and then suggest ideas for the victim to

earn money. As they build a relationship with the victim, the scammers then add them to a WhatsApp group where they promise substantial profits through online share trading, a lure that can be particularly enticing during times of economic uncertainty. The fraudsters share detailed tips and advice on stock market investments, creating an illusion of legitimacy. The victim, encouraged by the initial discussions and seemingly genuine interactions, invited his brother to join the group as well. Seeing a lot of other contacts, the victim trusts the group and other individuals and starts following the investment schemes the scammers share.

Once the victim is part of the group and follows the instructions, the fraudsters direct them to use a specific 'share trading account' and software. This software, however, is phishing and manipulated to show false profits, making the victims believe that their investments are yielding high returns.

When the victim sees big returns, they attempt to withdraw their supposed earnings. However, like in the case of the brothers reported by TOI, the fraudsters claim that regulatory bodies like SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) have locked their accounts, preventing them from accessing the funds. This revelation prompts the realisation that they have been scammed.

Staying Safe from WhatsApp Group Scams

While scams are well-orchestrated, keeping yourself safe is not that hard. To protect yourself from similar scams, it is crucial to remain vigilant and cautious. Here are some practical tips:

Foremost, do not trust anyone on the internet easily. If someone promises new opportunities and adds you to a group, especially one with many unknown participants, scrutinise the group's name, description, and admins. Groups with suspicious names or admins with generic profiles can be red flags. Second, if someone you know invites you to a group, confirm with them directly why they added you and if the group is legitimate. Don't hesitate to ask questions if something feels off.

Additionally, groups offering unrealistic rewards, miracle investments, or exclusive deals are likely scams. Be wary of messages that create a sense of urgency or pressure you to act quickly.

Another important tip is never to click on links or download files shared within the group, especially from unknown senders. These could be malicious and compromise your device or steal your data. Furthermore, never share personal information like your address, phone number, or bank details within WhatsApp groups, especially with people you don't know well. Scammers can use this information for identity theft or other malicious purposes.

ANDREW NEIL's searing verdict on the Trump trial circus

Robert De Niro the star clown... a VERY prurient porn actress...

Donald Trump's hush-money trial in New York has always had something of the circus about it. So it was only fitting that, on the day prosecution and defense gave their closing statements before the jury begins its deliberations, it should turn into a full-scale Big Top.

Robert De Niro appeared as the Star Clown, haranguing Americans outside the Manhattan court for even daring to think about voting for Trump and claiming, in a rant that got ever more bizarre, that The Donald was going to 'destroy the world'.

Perhaps this is what passes for sophisticated political analysis in Hollywood. Or maybe it was just an embarrassing attempt at clown comedy. Like all actors, De Niro had been given a script from which to read. But only in New York did he had to contend with a car alarm and numerous hecklers, a combination which caused him to stumble over his words and lose his place.

It will have dawned on him that he's treated with rather more respect on the movie set and that perhaps this politics stuff is harder than it looks. Inside the court the closing arguments were treated with respect and silence. We didn't learn anything new but we were reminded of how much of a circus it's all been.

The prosecution has depended on probably the most untrustworthy witness, Michael Cohen, in American legal history.

The defense has denied events, like Trump's one-night fling with Stormy Daniels, which were not germane to the defendant's innocence or guilt but which undermined the defense's credibility.

Throughout it all, it remained something of a mystery exactly what crime Trump had committed, even for those who were following proceedings closely. This was a circus without a cause. But it has had plenty of pyrotechnics.

The trial will be forever remembered for the testimonies of Daniels and Cohen. Daniels provided plenty prurient details of her hotel room encounter with Trump, which the media naturally lapped up but which were irrelevant to the charges against the former president.

Her testimony should not have been allowed but, because Trump was denying anything nefarious ever happened, she was allowed to get away with it. Trump's lawyers suffered for that.

Even so, the titillating testimony notwithstanding, Daniels knew nothing about the crux of the case: the alleged reimbursement of Cohen after he paid her the hush money, and the falsifying of business documents to cover up these repayments to him.

This is why Cohen was the more

important prosecution witness because he knows about all these things which was bad news for the prosecution.

In this particular circus, the porn star was more credible than the lawyer. Only in a Trump trial!

Cohen, once Trump's trusted attorney, took to the witness stand having already done jail time for illegal campaign contributions, tax fraud and other felonies. He also brought with him a reputation for being a serial liar and perjurer not exactly the ideal witness around which to build a case against Trump.

Cohen proceeded to confirm everything bad already thought about him. Perhaps the most emblematic moment came when he freely admitted stealing from Trump. Cohen had invoiced his boss's organization for \$50,000 for a tech company. Cohen passed on \$20,000 and pocketed the remaining \$30,000.

Again, only in a Trump trial would the prosecution's star witness shamelessly admit to being a thief. You could almost hear the prosecution jaws hit the floor.

Understandably, the defense devoted most of its closing remarks to underline just what a shyster Cohen is.

That was the main reason federal prosecutors decided years ago not to proceed with this case. They didn't want to go into battle with Cohen as their main witness.

But Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg was elected on a 'get Trump' platform and doesn't really care who he has to rely on to convict him.

Amid the welter of words and commentary let's try to cut through to some simple truths:

I'm in little doubt Trump had his one-night stand with Stormy and that, when she threatened to go public on the eve of the 2016 election, he sanctioned Cohen to pay her off, then muddied the trail of repayments. I don't believe Trump's denials to the contrary and the evidence against him is strong.

But while much of this case is unsavory, none of it amounts to criminality.

It may be wrong but it is not illegal to have an extra-marital assignation and Trump would not be the first presidential candidate or president to have had one not by a long chalk.

It is not illegal to pay hush-money, even if it is underhand.

It is not illegal to insist on a non-disclosure agreement in such circumstances. America is awash in NDAs.

It is illegal to falsify business documents but that is a misdemeanor under New York law, which usually results in a slap on the wrist and not jail time.

You can regard all this as conduct unbecoming for someone who wishes to

sit in the Oval Office. You might even regard it as reason enough not to vote for him. But it does not amount to criminality.

And so, Bragg has had to argue that Trump falsified his business records with the intent to commit or conceal a crime.

That's what would turn a misdemeanor into a felony (and potential jail time). But what exactly was the crime?

Even as the trial comes to an end, that is something the prosecution has failed to establish.

Bragg has suggested three possible underlying crimes: a violation of state election law; a violation of federal election law; and tax fraud/evasion.

The tax crime possibility seems especially weak. Cohen was reimbursed with far more than the \$130,000 he was out for hushing Daniels

because he would face income tax on the reimbursement. So he was repaid by enough to cover his tax bills too and grossed up in the jargon.

If anything, the taxman was a net gainer from the cover up.

Nor has a violation of election laws been established. Yes, it's reasonable to assume Trump wanted to bury the story to facilitate his election. Politicians try to bury bad news all the time.

The money didn't come from campaign contributions. It came from Trump's own resources. Yes, buying off the porn star might have helped Trump get elected. So might the state of the economy and Hillary Clinton's lackluster campaign.

Tories vow to ban rip-off university degrees:

One in eight face the axe in radical plan to end Mickey Mouse courses and use the spare money to fund 100,000 new apprenticeships

Rip-off degrees will be scrapped under a new law to boost young people's life chances, Rishi Sunak has pledged.

One in eight students could see their course axed in a bid to cut down on Mickey Mouse degrees and pay for 100,000 apprenticeships.

A new law will grant powers to the Office for Students, the independent regulator of higher education, to close underperforming courses and stop students being sold a false dream.

This would lead to the number of university places available decreasing by 130,000, yet the Conservatives argue that one in five graduates would have been better off not going to university.

Drop-out rates, job progression and earnings potential will all be assessed to determine the worst courses and force them to close. Conservative modelling has estimated the measures will generate £910 million by 2029/30, by reducing the number of student loans which are never paid back. This is based on an analysis of 13 per cent of the student cohort, which the party says is a conservative estimate of the impact once changes are enforced.

It would also be a way to incentivize universities to create courses that support apprenticeships and help meet the needs of young people.

The Prime Minister said last night: Improving education is the closest

thing we have to a silver bullet for boosting life chances. So, it's not fair that some university courses are ripping young people off.

Thanks to our plan, apprenticeships are much higher quality than they were under Labour. And now we will create 100,000 more, by putting an end to rip-off degrees and offering our young people the employment opportunities and financial security they need to thrive.

Currently £1 of every £4 borrowed in student loans is never paid back, leaving the government constantly footing the bill, and increasingly reliant on foreign students. Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said: There are no limits to where an apprenticeship can take you. Mine took me from a car factory in Kirkby to the Cabinet. The choice is clear.

Sir Keir Starmer and the Labour Party who have contempt for apprenticeships, or Rishi Sunak and the Conservatives who have a clear plan to give young people the best start to their careers. But Labour's education spokesman Bridget Phillipson said the plan was laughable, adding: Why on earth should parents and young people believe they'll create training opportunities now, after 14 years of failing to deliver for young people?

Last summer, the Government announced that universities offering Mickey Mouse courses would be subject to strict controls to protect students and taxpayers. Ministers vowed to place a cap on the number of students on these courses.

Do drivers called Muhammad pay more for car insurance than men called John? The answer may surprise you

It was one of the more bizarre claims in a list of demands issued to Keir Starmer by a fringe Muslim group, which earlier this month threatened to stand against Labour MPs at the General Election. Pro-Gaza activist group the Muslim Vote handed the opposition leader an extraordinary list of 18 demands at the beginning of May, which it claimed he must agree to carry out to win the support of the four million Muslim voters in the UK.

Included in this list was that Sir Keir ensure that people with the name Muhammad do not pay more for insurance than others just by virtue of their first name. For years

it has been widely known that insurance customers are quoted differently based on various factors, including their age, postcode and medical history.

Insurance companies have taken these personal details into consideration when calculating premiums, using them as tools to assess the risk they run in providing a policy. But can it really be true that a person's first name can influence how much they are charged? Money Mail investigated and put the claim to the test to see whether two people with identical details – living at the same address, with the same car and job – but with different first names would be quoted different premiums for the same level of car insurance cover. We found that, contrary to the Muslim Vote's claim, people with the name Muhammad pay the same as those with other common names – and, surprisingly, in many instances, less on their car insurance than people with the name John.

Across the dozens of quotes we ran on price comparison website GoCompare, someone called John Smith typically paid marginally more than someone with the name Muhammad Smith. We used identical details in our searches across four different scenarios, changing just the first name. The first names we used were Muhammad, John, Sebastian, Darren and Sergei.

In the most shocking example, Muhammad was charged £553.89 less than John and Darren for the same level of cover.

When 65-year-old Muhammad Smith, who lived in Dorset, requested a quote for cover on his Range Rover, he was

charged around a third less than John Smith on five of the ten cheapest quotes. In another test, we ran a search for a 35-year-old man with a



Ford Fiesta, working as an IT consultant and living in Hammersmith, in west London.

Of the top ten cheapest quotes on comparison website GoCompare, seven were cheaper for Muhammad than John, while two charged the same

and just one was more expensive. Meanwhile, John was quoted the same levels as Sebastian and Sergei.

Sometimes running multiple searches from the same computer can raise fraud alerts, however, Money Mail ran the name searches in random order to ensure that there was no bias. GoCompare was contacted for comment. On comparison site MoneySuperMarket, John Smith and Muhammad Smith were quoted the same premiums in most of our searches.

However, in one case, 35-year-old Muhammad, who drives a Ford Fiesta in Hammersmith, was charged £188 less than John. A spokesman for MoneySuperMarket says: 'We are a price comparison site that collects customer information. In another test,

we ran a search for a 35-year-old man with a Ford Fiesta, working as an IT consultant and living in Hammersmith, in west London.

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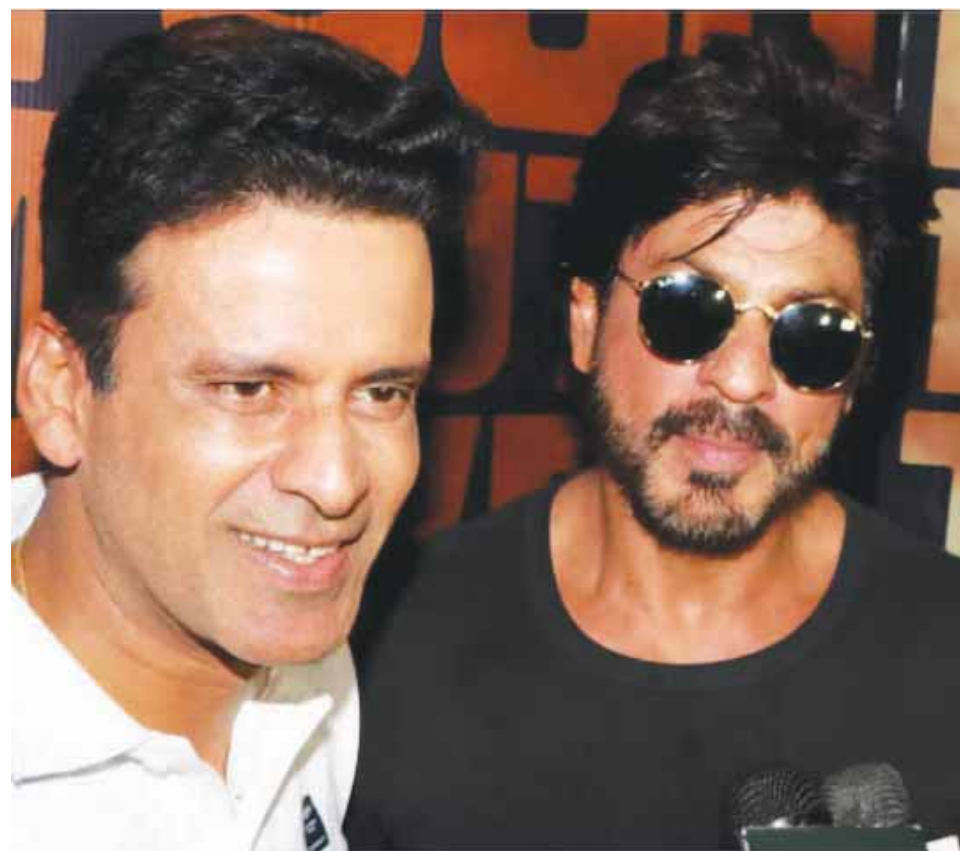
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Manoj Bajpayee Recalls Smoking Cigarettes With Shah Rukh Khan in Delhi: 'Even If He Had Money...'

Manoj Bajpayee has recalled the time he spent with Shah Rukh Khan. The two were part of Barry John's theatre group in Delhi. At the time, both Manoj and Shah Rukh were trying to establish themselves as actors and were struggling with their finances. In a recent interview, Manoj recalled how he and Shah Rukh would share cigarettes during their theatre days.

Speaking to Galatta India, Manoj said, 'When you are in a theatre group, and someone is smoking, they would never smoke alone. No one would smoke one cigarette all by themselves because no one could afford it. So if anyone had one cigarette, they had to share it with four people.' He added, 'Even if he had the money to buy a pack of cigarette, or buy one cigarette, he could not afford to have it alone because others have shared it with him in the past and now it is his turn to share it.' Manoj said that while he stayed in Barry John's theatre group for a few years, Shah Rukh was a part of it for a few months before moving to Mumbai and starting his Bollywood career. Manoj shared that he moved to Mumbai only after he worked in Shekhar's Kapur's 'Bandit Queen'.

Earlier in an interview with Bollywood



Bubble, Manoj had said that SRK was the one who took him to a discotheque for the first time. 'He (SRK) was the only one who used to come in Maruti Van. In those days a Maruti Van, red colour, I still remember. He is the one who has

taken me to a discotheque for the first time in Taj in Delhi. I mean we were very young, we had kind of just gotten out of our adolescent age and we met. He was part of Barry John's group for some time,' the actor said.

Nawaz Sharif admits Pakistan violated 1999 Lahore Declaration signed with India

Apparently referring to Pakistan's Kargil misadventure, Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday admitted that Islamabad had violated the Lahore Declaration and that it was their fault.

Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif admitted on Tuesday that the country had "violated" the 1999 Lahore Declaration agreement with India, which was signed by him and then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Indirectly referring to the Kargil misadventure by General Pervez Musharraf, he said, "It was our fault."

"On May 28, 1998, Pakistan carried out five nuclear tests. After that, Vajpayee Saheb came here and made an agreement with us. But we violated that agreement...it was our fault," Sharif told a meeting of his party Pakistan Muslim League (N). The Lahore Declaration, a peace agreement between the two warring neighbours signed on February 21, 1999, called for maintaining peace and security and promoting people-to-people contact, among other steps. However, a few months later, Pakistani intrusion in the Kargil district in Jammu and Kashmir led to the Kargil War. Starting in March 1999, Musharraf, who was the four-star General



of the Pakistan Army, ordered the secret infiltration of forces into the Kargil district in Ladakh. A full-scale war erupted after New Delhi discovered the infiltration, and India won the war while Sharif was the Prime Minister.

A portion of Nawaz Sharif's speech, aired by the state-owned Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV), has gone viral on

social media. As Pakistan marked the 26th anniversary of its first nuclear test today, Sharif said, "President Bill Clinton had offered Pakistan USD 5 billion to stop it from carrying out nuclear tests, but I refused. Had (former prime minister) Imran Khan like a person been on my seat he would have accepted Clinton's offer". Sharif also stated that the case against him,

which led to his removal from the office of Prime Minister in 2017, was false and alleged that it was orchestrated by Pakistan's spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), to bring the now-jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan to power.

"I ask Imran not to blame us [of being patronised by the army] and tell whether [former ISI chief] Gen Zahirul Islam had talked about bringing the PTI [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf] into power," he said while addressing PML(N)'s general council meeting.

He also mentioned a message received from the ISI chief to resign from the office of Prime Minister in 2014 and said, "When I refused, he threatened to make an example of me."

On Tuesday, Sharif was re-elected "unopposed" as the President of the ruling PML-N party, six years after the three-time former Prime Minister was forced to quit the post following a Supreme Court ruling in the Panama Papers case.

Pakistan swelters under intense heatwave, mercury crosses 52 degrees

Temperatures rose above 52 degrees Celsius in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh, the highest reading of the summer and close to the country's record high amid an ongoing heatwave, the met office said on Monday.

Extreme temperatures throughout Asia over the past month were made worse most likely as a result of human-driven climate change, a team of international scientists

mild winters, and low rainfall, but its limited markets, including bakeries, tea shops, mechanics, electronic repair shops, and fruit and vegetable sellers, are usually bustling with customers.

But with the current heatwave, shops are seeing almost no footfall.

"The customers are not coming to the restaurant because of extreme heat. I sit idle at the restaurant with these tables and

chairs and without any customers," said Wajid Ali, 32, who owns a tea stall in the town.

"I take baths several times a day, which gives me a little relief. Also, there is no power. The heat has made us very uneasy."

Close to Ali's shop is an electronics repair shop run



have said. In Mohenjo Daro, a town in Sindh known for archaeological sites that date back to the Indus Valley Civilisation built in 2500 BC, temperatures rose as high as 52.2 degrees Celsius over the last 24 hours, a senior official of the Pakistan Meteorological Department, Shahid Abbas told Reuters. The reading is the highest of the summer so far, and approached the town's and country's record highs of 53.5 degrees Celsius and 54 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Mohenjo Daro is a small town that experiences extremely hot summers and

by Abdul Khaliq, 30, who sat working with the shop's shutter half down to shield him from the sun. Khaliq also complained about the heat affecting business. Local doctor Mushtaq Ahmed added that the locals have adjusted to living in the extreme weather conditions and prefer staying indoors or near water. Pakistan is the fifth most vulnerable country to the impact of climate change. We have witnessed above normal rains, floods, Rubina Khursheed Alam, the prime minister's coordinator on climate, said at a news conference on Friday (May 24), adding that the

North Korea's bid to put 2nd spy satellite in orbit fails as rocket explodes

A rocket launched by North Korea to deploy the country's second spy satellite exploded shortly after liftoff Monday, state media reported, in a setback for leader Kim Jong Un's hopes to field satellites to monitor the US and South Korea.

Monday's failed launch came hours after leaders of South Korea, China and Japan

main northwestern space centre. But KCNA said the rocket blew up during a first-stage flight soon after liftoff due to a suspected engine problem.

KCNA cited the unidentified vice director of the National Aerospace Technology Administration as saying that a preliminary examination showed that the explosion was related to the reliability

of operation of the newly developed liquid oxygen-petroleum engine. He said other possible causes will be investigated, according to KCNA.

Japan's government briefly issued a missile warning for the southern prefecture of Okinawa, urging

residents to take shelter inside buildings and other safer places. The warning was lifted later because the region was no longer in danger, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said.

Earlier Monday, North Korea had notified Japan's coast guard about its plans to launch a satellite rocket, with a warning to exercise caution in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and China and east of the main Philippine island of Luzon during a launch window from Monday through June 3.



met in Seoul in their first trilateral meeting in more than four years. It's highly unusual for North Korea to take provocative action when China, its major ally and economic pipeline, is engaging in high-level diplomacy in the region. The launch drew rebukes from the North's neighbours because the UN bans North Korea from conducting any such launches, viewing them as covers for testing long-range missile technology.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said it launched a spy satellite aboard a new rocket at its

Amid Gaza war, Spain, Ireland, Norway formally recognise 'Palestinian state'

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said in Madrid that it is a historic decision that has a single goal to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve peace.



Spain, Norway and Ireland formally recognised a Palestinian state on Tuesday in a coordinated effort by the three Western European nations to add international pressure on Israel to soften its response to last year's Hamas-led attack. Israel condemned the diplomatic move, which will have no immediate impact on the war in Gaza. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro

Sánchez said in a televised address from Madrid that "this is a historic decision that has a single goal, and that is to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve peace". Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz quickly lashed out at Spain on X, saying that Sánchez's government was "being complicit in inciting genocide against Jews and war crimes". Ireland and Norway soon joined Spain in

formalising a decision they had jointly announced the previous week. The Palestinian flag was raised in Dublin outside Leinster House, the seat of Ireland's parliament. "I hope (this) sends the Palestinian people a message of hope that in this their darkest hour Ireland stands with them", Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris told lawmakers in Ireland's parliament after his Cabinet

formally signed off on the decision. "It is no longer enough just to condemn. It is no longer enough just to be repulsed", he added. "We must be on the right side of history."

Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said in a statement that "for more than 30 years, Norway has been one of the strongest advocates for a Palestinian state. Today, when Norway officially recognises Palestine as a state, is a milestone in the relationship between Norway and Palestine". While around 140 countries have recognised a Palestinian state, more than two-thirds of the United Nations or none of the major Western powers has done so. Still, the adherence of three European countries to the group represents a victory for Palestinian efforts in the world of public opinion, and will likely put pressure on European Union heavyweights France and Germany to rethink their position. Previously, only seven members of the 27-nation EU officially recognised a Palestinian state.

Five of them are former East bloc countries that announced recognition in 1988, as did Cyprus, before joining the EU. Sweden's recognition came in 2014.

Relations between the EU and Israel have nosedived with the diplomatic recognition by two EU members, and Madrid insisting on Monday that the EU should take measures against Israel for its continued deadly attacks in southern Gaza's city of Rafah. After Monday's meeting of EU foreign ministers, Irish Foreign Minister Micheál Martin said, "For the first time at an EU meeting, in a real way, I have seen a significant discussion on sanctions" on Israel. Harris, the Irish leader, insisted Tuesday that the EU should consider economic sanctions against Israel, saying "Europe could be doing a hell of a lot more". Norway, which isn't an EU member but often aligns its foreign policy with the bloc, handed diplomatic papers to the Palestinian government over the weekend before its formal recognition.

Britain's shrinking army won't be able to fight Russia and is now less than HALF the size of Germany's, says EU general

France has over 110,000 soldiers while Germany is growing its total armed forces to over 200,000 personnel.

An EU general told The Sun: "There is a concern about the British Army."

"You must have mass, you must have numbers."

"In Ukraine you can see, we must have mass to fight the Russian army." A second general, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "the British Army is still in decline".

He added: "None of the recent announcements have moved the dial on that."

PM Rishi Sunak pledged to increase defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2030.

But he is standing by plans to shrink the Army to 73,000 - its smallest size for 300 years. The Sun revealed the Army's budget is being slashed despite the PM's



promise of a £75bn boost for defence.

The cuts worth hundreds of millions will fund new Tempest jets for the RAF and warships for the Royal Navy.

It means plans for new air defence missiles - like Israel's Iron Dome - will be thrown on the back burner.

The MoD said the cuts were

routine "budget flexing".

But it follows a warning that America can't plug gaps in Britain's army if the flag goes up for an all-out war.

General Randy George, head of the US Army, said it would be difficult for another army - such as the US - to help.

He said: "What I would want out of the British army? You have to

have magazine depth.

"Whatever formations you have, do you have all the ammunition you need to sustain yourself over a long fight?" Crucially, he added: "If you are going to come to the fight make sure you have every capability on the battlefield because it will be difficult for another army to provide that."

Major General James Martin, the head of the UK's main war fighting division, warned his force was "less resilient" due to shortages. Asked if the Army was big enough to field a war-fighting division - a measure of Britain's might and a core commitment to Nato - Gen Martin said: "It depends what you mean by a war-fighting division."

A division is 3,000 to 5,000 men and normally consists of three brigades.

But 3rd Division, which he

just one and a half brigades.

It remains Britain's primary war fighting force designed to face a Russian equivalent. But the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank warned - before the war in Ukraine - that it was "highly likely that a Russian tank division would overmatch this much weaker British formation".

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Meta AI chief mocks Elon Musk after he tried to recruit workers on X for xAI company

Elon Musk found himself in the crosshairs of Meta's AI head, Yann LeCun, on his own social media platform, X. LeCun openly mocked Musk on Monday following Musk's appeal for AI talent to join his \$24 billion venture, xAI.

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The latest clash between the tech titans erupted after xAI announced a significant achievement on Sunday: securing \$6 billion in a Series B funding round. In response, Musk posted a recruitment message urging tech workers to join xAI, emphasizing the company's commitment to "understanding the universe" through an unwavering pursuit of truth, devoid of popular or political biases. LeCun, known for his public disputes with Musk, didn't hold back. He sarcastically replied to Musk's post: "Join xAI if you can stand a boss who: - claims that what you are working on will be solved next year (no



pressure). - claims that what you are working on will kill everyone and must be stopped or paused (yay, vacation for 6 months!). - claims to want a 'maximally rigorous pursuit of the truth' but spews crazy-ass conspiracy theories on his own social platform." LeCun's comments

referenced Musk's bold predictions from April, where Musk suggested that artificial general intelligence would emerge by next year, a claim he reiterated last week. Additionally, Musk has estimated a 10-20 percent chance that AI could pose an existential threat to

humanity. LeCun also criticized Musk's stance as a free-speech absolutist, pointing to instances where Musk shared unverified claims on X. Notably, in March, X removed a post reshared by Musk for violating the platform's rules. Besides, Musk recently shared plans for his artificial

intelligence startup, xAI. According to a report by The Information, Musk told investors that xAI is gearing up to make a supercomputer. This advanced machine will power the next iteration of its AI chatbot, Grok. Musk's goal is to have this supercomputer operational by the fall of 2025.

Musk mentioned that xAI is considering a partnership with Oracle to help develop this massive supercomputer. However, when reached for comments, neither xAI nor Oracle provided any immediate responses. The supercomputer, once built, will consist of interconnected groups of Nvidia's top-of-the-line H100 graphics processing units (GPUs). These GPU clusters will be significantly larger than any currently in existence, at least four times the size, according to Musk's presentation to investors in May.

Ottawa Embarks on Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Public Service Efficiency



In a bid to enhance government operations, Treasury Board President Anita Anand has unveiled plans for a new artificial intelligence (AI) strategy in Ottawa. The strategy aims to bolster efficiency and service delivery for Canadians, with a specific focus on incorporating AI into various facets of public service. Anand announced the initiative during a

gathering of experts in Gatineau, Quebec, where discussions are underway to shape the strategy's development. Integral to the effort is the establishment of a dedicated division tasked with retraining existing public servants to harness the potential of AI technologies effectively. The federal government has already begun integrating AI into

its operations across numerous domains, with the technology playing a role in hundreds of applications. As part of broader industry engagement, eight additional private organizations including Mastercard, Lenovo, and the Quebec real estate broker's association have pledged their commitment to a voluntary federal code of conduct for AI.

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Wipro, IISc's Centre for Brain Research tie up to boost AI-based health innovations

IT services major Wipro on Tuesday announced a partnership with the Centre for Brain Research (CBR), a non-profit research organisation, hosted at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) to develop personalised AI-based health innovations.

The partnership will harness the power of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and big data analytics and develop new technologies to prevent and manage long-term health disorders.

Wipro's research and development (R&D) team will design and develop an AI-based personal care engine that will focus on an individual's health history, desired health state, and other behavioural responses. This will help promote healthy ageing, positive lifestyle changes, and psycho-social well-being, as well as focus on reducing and managing the risk of

cardiovascular disease and correlated neurodegenerative disorders, by using AI. The engine will be tested via a digital app-based trial in collaboration with CBR at IISc. Dr. Ajay Chander, Head of Research and Development, Wipro Limited, said

that the collaboration will pioneer personalised care support for some of the most chronic health challenges globally. He noted that cardiovascular conditions that are of global concern are a particular focus for us because of their strong association with long-term cognitive issues and the potential for broad health and wellbeing benefits at lower costs.



John, Jacqueliene, Sunny, Raveena call for stricter laws to end cruelty against animals



Animal abuse has reached a crescendo, with many cases remaining unreported. Ardent animal lovers such as John Abraham, Sunny Leone, and Jacqueliene Fernandez have voiced their opinions and called for stricter laws to safeguard the four-legged friends.

From February to May, numerous cases of animal abuse have been reported, including running over animals, throwing them from great heights, starving, beating, and using them for entertainment.

The most recent case was reported from a society in Greater Noida, where a stray dog was thrown from the 15th floor of a residential tower. The remains were found outside the building by a resident on May 11. Bollywood star John Abraham, who is a doting dad to his fur babies, Sia and Bailey, stated that the surge in cruelty to animals deeply wounds our collective conscience. It's a stark reminder of the urgency to take action. Let's unite in vigilance, reporting every instance of animal abuse and supporting grassroots organisations at the forefront of the fight for animal rights, John told.

Stricter laws must be implemented for the perpetrator, he said.

Governments must not falter; they must implement stringent penalties to deter perpetrators and invest in comprehensive educational programmes to foster empathy and reverence for all life forms, and we all must do what we can to safeguard our community animals, he said.

In India, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, outlines punishments for animal cruelty, including penalties such as a maximum fine of Rs 50 for convicted first-time offenders (although the IPC

prescribes stronger punishments), according to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). However, enforcement of these laws varies, as many cases go unreported.

Actress Sunny Leone said that the alarming rise in animal abuse cases is an affront to shared humanity.

The government holds the key if it must enforce strict laws that leave no room for impunity. As individuals, we can each play our part by reporting any acts of cruelty to the police, she told.

Empathy should be taught to children at an early age.

Children should be taught to be kind to animals to help them grow into adults

who will be kind to everyone. Together, we can build a world where every animal is treated

with the dignity and respect they deserve, she said.

Jacqueliene Fernandez told: We, as individuals, have a great deal of power to create change by using our voices to stand up for animals by opening our doors to animals in need. The government must also prioritise animal protection by introducing legislation to safeguard animals

and ensuring its robust enforcement to build a future where all members of our society, whatever the species, is able to live in peace.

Actress Raveena Tandon, who is vocal about animal rights, told that, as a society, we must not turn a blind eye when animals are suffering at human hands.

We must be vigilant neighbours, keeping a watchful eye and speaking out against any form of abuse.

Priyanka Chopra congratulates Indian winners at Cannes for scripting history

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who recently lent her voice to the wildlife documentary 'Tiger' as a narrator, has congratulated the Indian talents that scored huge victories at the recently concluded 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

On Monday, Priyanka took to the Stories section of her Instagram and sent her best wishes to the winners, Anasuya Sengupta, Payal Kapadia, and Chidananda S Naik.

While Anasuya won the Best Actress Award at Cannes, Payal's film 'All We Imagine as Light' was feted with the 'Le Grand Prix' award, and Chidananda's short film 'Sunflowers' were the first ones to know it was honoured with the La Cinef Award for Best Short Film.

The actress shared three different stories, one each for Anasuya, Payal, and Chidananda.

Lauding Anasuya, Priyanka wrote, 'Congratulations @cup_o_t on your incredible performance and the history you've created! Onwards and upwards.'

For Payal, she wrote that it was a moment for Indian cinema at the Cannes Film Festival. The actress wrote: 'Big shout and congratulations to you all #PayalKapadia @kantari kanmani @divya prabha @chhaya.kadam.75 @hridhuharoon.'

Priyanka wrote for Chidananda, 'Congratulations @chidananda_s_naik So well deserved. India had one of its best years at the Cannes Film Festival this time. Payal's film was screened at the Palme d'Or (main segment) of the Cannes Film Festival, becoming the first Indian film in 30 years to compete in the main segment after 'Swaham', which was released in 1994.'



Kiara Advani celebrates Cannes 2024 for being special for women in cinema



Actress Kiara Advani, who represented India at the Red Sea Film Foundation's Women in Cinema Gala dinner at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, said that the 2024 edition of the prestigious event has been a special year for women in cinema, as they have been celebrated, encouraged, and seen.

Kiara took to Instagram and shared the Vanity Fair magazine cover, posing alongside notable figures such as Aseel Omran, Adhwa Fahad, Ramata-Toulaye Sy, and Salma Abu-Deif. Captioning the image, she wrote: 'A Vanity Fair moment with these wonderful women! Cannes 2024 has been a special

year for women in cinema. We've been championed and celebrated, encouraged and seen.'

The actress then credited Anasuya Sengupta, who became the first Indian actor to win the Best Actress award in the Un Certain Regard segment, and Payal Kapadia's 'All We Imagine as Light', which won the Grand Prix at the celebrated event.

'From witnessing two historic wins for women from India to meeting amazing women from around the world, discussing our passion and love for cinema and our role as women in the growing landscape of film; all of it has given me so much joy,' she wrote.

Bhuvan Bam decodes his success with Titu Mama, whom he played out of a living room

Actor and YouTube sensation Bhuvan Bam, who recently got a trademark for his character Titu Mama, said that it feels unreal to imagine that a character he played from his living room would become such a phenomenon and resonate so strongly with everyone.

The actor shared that when he initially introduced this character in his sketches, he never anticipated the extraordinary rise to fame Titu Mama would achieve among the audience.

Bhuvan said: 'Titu Mama's distinctive traits and charisma have resonated deeply with audiences, and witnessing the affection and admiration for him is truly heartening. To create a fictional character and see it find such longevity in the public space is truly the reason to keep this

character going even today. I didn't imagine a fictional character I made out of my home creating videos would today become so popular, and hence the idea to trademark it.'



In 2018, Bhuvan and his team elevated Titu Mama's presence with 'Titu Talks', featuring notable guests such as Shah Rukh Khan, Johnny Sins, Ram Charan, Junior NTR, and S.S. Rajamouli. The overwhelming response to Titu Talks underscored the character's enduring popularity and potential.

He further mentioned, 'To safeguard and uphold this creative asset, we chose to officially register Titu Mama with Intellectual Property India, ensuring his status as a cherished and distinctive figure in our creative realm.'

Shiwani Chakraborty's 'village girl' look is about 'minimal makeup, cotton sarees, single braid'

Actress Shiwani Chakraborty gave insights about her desi look in the show 'Maati Se Bandhi Dori', sharing that she has a very de-glam look with minimal makeup, and wears simple cotton sarees. Shiwani, who plays Kaveri, the elder sister of Vaiju (Rutuja Bagwe) said: 'This is the first time I am playing a village girl. Although, I have played traditional roles before in my last show 'Nimki Mukhiya'. In my new show, I have a very de-glam look with minimal makeup just enough to appear on camera. I wear small earrings and a simple chain because my character belongs to a family that is struggling.' 'The family is simple and from a small village. My character, Kaveri, has a desire to dress up a little and look nice. So, I wear simple

cotton sarees, and my look includes a single braid. I enjoy playing this character because, in the past, I have always worn heavy jewellery, like big earrings, which often became a trend. In every show, I had heavy makeup and wore gorgeous sarees and dresses,' she said. The actress expressed her excitement saying: 'When my promo came out, my friends, family, and fans gave very positive feedback. They are excited to see me in this new avatar and have told me that there is beauty in simplicity.' 'As an actor, I believe I should portray each character in the best possible way, and I am happy with this role. A lot of time a look sets the tone for the character and I am happy that Kaveri is doing that for me,' she added.



Raashii Khanna looks effortlessly chic in all-denim outfit, soft curls, clear heels



Actress Raashii Khanna on denim! Not so long ago she treated fans to some fresh snaps of herself on Monday, wearing a denim-on-denim outfit, looking effortlessly chic in the attire.

An avid social media user, Raashii, who has 11 million followers on Instagram, shared a string of pictures where she can be seen wearing a sleeveless denim top with a deep neckline, paired with a matching skirt featuring a thigh-high slit in between.

The look was rounded off with clear heels.

For makeup, Raashii opted for pink matte lips, winged eyeliner, and blushed cheeks. Her hair is half-tied and styled in soft curls. She is wearing golden hoops as an ear accessory.

The post is captioned: 'Doubled down

A fan commented: 'Sexy,' while another fan said, 'Stunning as always.'

Another user said: 'Looking gorgeous.'

A fan also called her 'Khubsurat.'

On the work front, Raashii was last seen in the Tamil horror comedy 'Aranmanai 4'. Directed by Sundar C, the film is produced by Khushbu Sundar and ACS Arun Kumar under Avni Cinemax and Benzz Media (P) Ltd.

It stars Sundar, alongside Tamannaah Bhatia, Raashii, Santhosh Prathap, Ramachandra Raju, and Kovai Sarala.

Meanwhile, Raashii also has 'The Sabarmati Report', 'Telusu Kada', and 'Methavii' in the pipeline.

She has also starred in the web series 'Rudra: The Edge of Darkness' and 'Farzi'.

Ananya Pandey's webseries debut 'Call Me Bae' books September 6 release



The streaming series 'Call Me Bae', which stars Ananya Pandey's series debut, has locked its release date. The 8-part series is set to drop on OTT on September 6, 2024. The series sees Ananya in the role of Bella 'Bae' Chowdhary. She will share the screen with Vir Das, Gurfateh Pirzada, Varun Sood, Vihaan Samat, Muskaan Jafari, Niharika Lyra Dutt, Lisa Mishra, and Mini Mathur in the series.

The series follows the story of Bae, who discovers that her most valuable assets are her street-smart skills and style. Broke but refusing to be broken, she navigates the newsrooms of Mumbai. Produced by Dharmatic Entertainment Production with Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta and Somen Mishra as Executive Producers, the show is created by Ishita Moitra and directed by Collin D'Cunha.

Sharvari wanted to do dance number ever since she dreamt of becoming Hindi film actress

Actress Sharvari, who will be seen in *ĕMunjyaĭ*, said she always wanted to perform a big dance number ever since she aspired to become an actress in Hindi cinema.

Sharvari, whose latest track *ĕTarasĭ* from the film dropped on Monday, said: *ĭEver since I wanted to be a leading lady in a Hindi film, the one thing I always wanted to do was a big dance number! I was always fascinated by them.ĭ*

ĭI have been mesmerised by the leading ladies of Hindi cinema, as well as the dancing icons across generations, who have belted out those big chartbusters that the entire nation has danced on.ĭ

The actress added that cinema is showbiz, and song and dance numbers are important tools for people to decide if they want to watch a film.

ĭThese party tracks have time and again also given recognition and validation to actors who have aced their performance in them!ĭ

ĭI have only seen established actors or dancing idols getting big dance numbers because they have the pull and the popularity to hook peopleĕs interest,ĭ she added.

Set to release on June 7, *ĕMunjyaĭ*, which is directed by Aditya Sarpotdar, revolves around the character of *ĕMunjyaĭ*, a rooted myth from Indian belief and cultural system.

The film also stars Abhay Verma and Sathyaraj.

Sharvari said she is just one film old and is happy that her producer, Dinesh Vijan, showed such confidence in her.

*ĭIt is a great pat on my shoulders that I can do it too and try to have a hit dance anthem to my credit! I loved shooting for *TarasĖ* every bit of it.ĭ*

Sharvari is praying for *ĕTarasĭ* to become a massive blockbuster song and for everyone to dance on it at clubs, parties, and every occasion.



Anupam Kher admits he's a 'bad dancer' – and reveals his first acting role

Anupam Kher, who is well-known for his versatile performances in mainstream cinema as well as international productions, admitted at an event here on Monday that he is *ĭa very bad dancerĭ*, but he does *ĭdance with emotionsĭ*. He also went down memory lane and talked about his first outing as an actor when he was in Class V in school *Ė* he played a monkey in Lord Hanumanĕs army. The memory was triggered by the *ĕgadaĭ* (mace) he was carrying at the launch of the live-action film *ĕChhota Bheem* and the *Curse of Damyaanĭ*, where he will be seen along with Makarand Deshpande and Navneet Kaur Dhillon. The film will be released theatrically on May 31.

Talking about his poor dancing skills, Kher said, *ĭThat is why the audience has not seen me dancing quite often.ĭ*

Two songs from the film, *ĕJambooraĭ* and *ĕZara Muskuraĭ*, were unveiled at the event in the presence of the cast and crew. It was in the context of the songs that the actor was asked about how it felt to dance to the songs.

ĭI am a very bad dancer,ĭ

Kher said. *ĭThat is why the audience has not seen me dancing that often. But very soon you will see me in a surprise avatar in this film. I wish I was a great dancer*



too. Actually, I dance with emotions. I believe I dance through my acting.ĭ

The senior actor then shared his experience of working with children in the film.

ĭIt was very difficult to match with the energy levels of the kids,ĭ he averred. *ĭTheir questions, their spontaneity were unparalleled. A very famous director from Hollywood once said to me that when children are in the frame, donĕt act, because nobody is looking at you.ĭ*

He went on to note: *ĭI believe that is very true. Working on this film was like a crash*

course for me. It was a learning experience. I had great fun.ĭ

Holding the *ĕgadaĭ*, Kher said, *ĭCan you believe it? I am holding a *ĕgadaĭ* right now, and my first-ever role, the first-ever, was of a monkey in Lord Hanumanĕs. I was then in the fifth standard. This is the first time after school that I am holding a *ĕgadaĭ*. I feel like a *ĕBada Bheemĭ*.ĭ*

Looking very happy to be in the company of child artistes, Kher spoke about what he learnt from them.

ĭThey are children of this generation. Trust me, I have done a lot of movies with child artistes in my career, but these kids are very straight, they are modern, aware, and know how to use the mobile phone,ĭ Kher said.

Modi represents fight between overbearing, 'rent-seeking' State & citizens of former colonies

Being a 'majority' does not automatically confer power. Prime Minister Narendra Modi knows it & that is why his supporters see him as someone who is enabling a re-awakening.



By Asha Jadeja

India is deep in the throes of an intense general election, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking a third term. A victory would put him in the same league as the country's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru — the only to have been re-elected twice in a row.

But the India of 2024 is distinctly dissimilar from that of 1947. And what Modi represents is crucial to demonstrating that contrast.

Born to an OBC (Other Backward Class) family in what is now the western state of Gujarat, he made his way to the country's highest elected office and has arguably emerged as the most dominant political figure in India since former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Part of Modi's appeal is his unabashed sense of Hindu pride, which he deploys to cultivate support among the 'majority' — Hindus, who constituted 79.8 per cent of India's population as of 2022.

It was Modi who assiduously brought to the fore resentment simmering among the 'majority'. At the heart of this resentment was a realisation that being a 'majority' does not automatically confer power.

For instance, most colonial 'subjects' in Africa and Asia, like Hindus in pre-Independence India and 'coloureds' in South Africa during the Apartheid were an oppressed majority.

In India's case, nearly 500 years of foreign rule had conditioned Hindus to accept subjugation as a path to peace in daily life. A rebellion against this conditioning culminated in the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and of Modi, its



so mysteriously powerful is that his supporters see him as someone who is somehow empowering the 'peaceful majority' to demand what is rightfully theirs — recognition of and respect for their beliefs

current leader. Since his days as chief minister of Gujarat in the early 2000s, Modi has made no bones about the fact that he sees himself as a vehicle for the subdued aspirations of the 'majority'. According to him, he is enabling a re-awakening of 'Hindu pride' by bringing to the forefront cultural values and religious sensibilities that had long been muffled. The reason he is now

and a say in matters of policy. By taking part in events of religious significance such as the 'pran pratishtha' (consecration) of an idol of Ram at the newly-built temple in Ayodhya, the Indian Prime Minister sent a clear message to both his supporters and critics — that, unlike many other political leaders, he was not afraid to wear his religious

beliefs on his sleeve. One can also not emphasise enough that Modi represents a much deeper struggle for freedom from oppression. When colonial rulers vacated the colonies they had lorded over for decades at end, they left powerful rent-seeking nation-states to continue to 'control' black and brown subjects. The design of the 'State' they devised is the reason India and many other former colonies have an overwhelmingly powerful bureaucracy. These relatively younger democracies have been in direct opposition to an overbearing 'State', and the fight is far from over. It is this fight between the governed and the nature of governance that Modi, who rose through the ranks from among the masses, represents. Since assuming office in 2014, he has on numerous occasions voiced the need to rid Indians of the 'colonial mindset' that persisted through the 'licence raj' decades marked by a snail's pace of growth. As Modi himself put it in his Independence Day speech in 2018, 'We don't want the path of confrontation. We don't want roadblocks. We don't want to bow our heads before anyone. The nation will never stop, never bow, never get tired. We have to scale new heights.'

These reasons are perhaps why India's ongoing parliamentary elections will go down in history, regardless of the outcome.

Don't deride public sector. Evidence shows commercial banks in woeful state—Indira Gandhi

On 29 July 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi delivered a speech in Lok Sabha on the nationalisation of 14 banks, saying the move was 'totally justified to ensure that hopes and aspirations of millions of our people are not sacrificed'.

By INDIRA GANDHI

I have followed with keen interest the course of the debate on the Bill which is before the House replacing the Ordinance to nationalise 14 scheduled banks. I have also followed the expression of opinion even outside this House in the newspapers and in other forums. I have been deluged with letters and telegrams and crowds of people.

I must say that the reaction of the people all over the country has proved that the step we have taken commands the support of the overwhelming majority of the people of our country. There are, of course, professional Cassandras who have, throughout these years of Independence, prophesied doom and spread despondency. But like the Trojan prophetess, they are fated to be unbelievers. Fortunately, the noises they make are inversely proportional to the weight of their argument or even to their numbers, as our friend Shri Dwivedy said earlier. The nationalisation of 14 banks is totally justified on strictly economic terms as well as in terms of the broad objectives which we have pursued and shall continue to pursue so as to ensure that the hopes and aspirations of millions of our people are not sacrificed. As early as 1954, the objective of a socialist pattern of society was adopted by Parliament. This was followed by the growth of the public sector investment, which provided the basic infrastructure for further industrial development. One honourable Member opposite pointed out that I have given public expression to the deficiencies of the public sector. But, I have also said, and I do believe, that the debate between the relative merits of the public and private sector is rather artificial. They both have a vital role to play in our economy.

But, when I express criticism of the public sector, let it not be understood that the private sector is the embodiment of virtue. Indeed, its record is not such as

to evoke inspiration or enthusiasm. And if this sort of ill-informed lobbying continues, as my colleague the law minister mentioned the other day, the government has enough evidence to show the woeful state of affairs prevailing in different sectors of private enterprise. I would, therefore, earnestly urge (Interruption) those who deride the public sector day in [and] day out and run it down to act with greater responsibility and prudence.

The more one examines the manner in which most commercial banks in the country were functioning, one is led to the view that the measure which we are debating in this house was inescapable and absolutely necessary. I would like to remind this House and some of the honourable Members who have spoken against the measure that there is a vital difference between banking and other industries, My honourable friend Shri Chandra Jeet Yadav also mentioned this point. The financial stake of the shareholders in the banks is almost negligible. The paid-up share capital and the reserves of the 14 banks constituted hardly 2.4 per cent of the deposits. As against a total deposit of nearly Rs 2,750 crores of these banks at the end of December 31, 1968, the paid-up capital was only Rs 28.5 crores or just a little over one per cent.

The bank managements were thus operating almost exclusively with other people's money. This aspect of banking has always been a source of concern even in countries which do not profess socialism. Indeed, as honourable Members probably know, there are countries with a predominantly capitalist economy who have either thought fit to nationalise their banks or subjected them to extremely vigorous surveillance. France found it necessary to nationalise its banks and the law relating to nationalisation was voted [on] within two days almost without any discussion of the six large banks there, four were nationalised and two were left out



for certain reasons. These two together have only 1/20th of all the banking assets of France. Similarly, in Italy, four out of the five big banks are in the States sector.

In Sweden, the government acquired the capital of two banks, and they were amalgamated in 1950. Frankly, it is difficult to understand the rather wild statements which have been made against the measures and the consequences which are being prophesied. People have raised the question of social control and have asked why it could not have been tried for a longer period. Social control had many useful features, such as the emphasis on professional management, which will still be valid. It had also defined higher priorities for agriculture, export and small industries.

But the weakness of social control was that in many banks, people who had been controlling their policies in the past continued to exercise their influence over them in one way or another, sometimes by the continued presence of the old Chairman or Vice Chairman on the Boards of these banks. The banks might, as some did, obey the instructions and directions given to them. But there is all the difference in the world between people who carry out a policy wholeheartedly and with enthusiasm and those who do so only because of certain instructions. But even these directions given were not followed by some banks. We cannot continue to ignore the impatience

and frustration with which the under-privileged look at our efforts to help them stand on their own feet.

It has also been asked here why we have not included foreign banks in this legislation. Foreign banks are part of a worldwide organisation and this enables them to give certain special facilities and services to exporters and importers, and for this type of service Indian banks do not have an adequate network of branches abroad.

Surendranath Dwivedy: Are you restricting the operation of foreign banks only to this purpose?

Indira Gandhi: We will go into that later. Foreign banks also have an intimate knowledge of parties in other countries on whom export bills are drawn by Indian customers. Foreign banks thus have a distinctive part to play, in raising foreign currency loans and administering them on behalf of their parent office, rendering service to tourists and in the spreading of information about business opportunities in India and in the other countries in which they operate. At the same time, foreign banks are under strict regulation. One of the rules which has been adopted is to restrict foreign banks to port towns only and only such foreign banks as have already opened branches in the interior

Surendranath Dwivedy: Grindlays Bank has 53 branches.

Indira Gandhi: Those who had opened branches previously in the interior are allowed to do business outside port towns. The Reserve Bank of India will permit the expansion of a foreign bank only where it is found necessary, to enable these banks to render more efficient service to the Indian consumers in financing foreign trade and tourism. The other criticism was about leaving out the small banks. The purpose of nationalisation is to promote rapid growth in agriculture, small industries and export, to encourage new entrepreneurs and to develop all backward areas. Banks with deposits of Rs 50 crores and above have

branches in many states. As against this, the operations of smaller banks are limited to certain specific regions. With their wider coverage, the 14 banks which we have taken over would be in a better position to implement the government's objectives than smaller banks. Smaller banks already cater mainly to the smaller borrower, as is revealed by the fact that the average size of a loan account is very much smaller in the case of these smaller banks. Small banks are part of the community in which they function and small businessmen and small industrialists have some say in their operations. Some differentiation is already being made between the bigger banks and the smaller ones in respect of a number of regulations.

We have no intention to set up a central monolithic agency to run all these banks. While we must strengthen the machinery at the Centre, there will be autonomy for each bank and the Boards will have well-defined powers. We will give directions but these will be on policy and general issues, not on specific loans to specific parties. We shall be vigilant about the dangers of too much interference—whether it is motivated by political or other considerations. An honourable member said that these 14 banks would be outside the purview of the Reserve Bank. This is not at all true, because they remain scheduled banks and the Reserve Bank's powers with regard to them also remain.

This will not reduce the Reserve Bank to insignificance. In fact, it can become more significant and purposeful and the Reserve Bank's organisation may have to be strengthened and given new definite directions. I entirely agree with those honourable Members who have said that there should not be bureaucratisation. We must preserve the initiative and incentive as also the identity of these banks. We are taking powers to re-organise them, after preparing a scheme and placing it before the House.

A US power company almost averted first China-Taiwan War. Can capitalism stop the second?

By PRAVEEN SWAMI

The long-forgotten story of the Shanghai Power Company tells us about the missteps and misjudgements that could push two superpowers to war and devastate the world.

Eight thousand feet in the air, illuminated by the searchlights and then disappearing into the darkness, the B14 Liberator and B29 Superfortress strategic bombers appeared over the city like a surrealist nightmare. Sinister black, enormous moths, the poet Albert Giraud had written, With heavy wings fall invisibly the monstrosities, upon human hearts. Fifty thousand people were displaced by the bombing of Shanghai on 6 February 1950. Homes and infrastructure were levelled, and a thousand people were killed or injured.

The key target of the American-made bombers was the American-owned and American-operated Shanghai Power Company. It was a multinational of critical importance and powered the new, revolutionary People's Republic of China. Even as the United States protested Taiwan's air raids in public, the government of President Harry Truman knew they were critical to its policy of containing Communism.

Declassified documents show that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported to Washington a large number of ships being fitted at Shanghai's dockyards. This, the documents said, was in preparation for an invasion of Taiwan. Even after the bombing of the Kiangnan docks by the American-made bombers, armies of workers continued to repair damaged junks.

This week, the People's Liberation Army combat jets and ships have launched around-the-clock exercises intended to intimidate Taiwan's new, pro-independence President Lai Ching-te. To many experts, it seems an eventual invasion of Taiwan is inevitable. Like in 1950, debates are raging on whether to deter China by containment, as President Truman insisted, or through engagement, as the



magnates running Shanghai Power argued.

The long-forgotten story of the Shanghai Power Company and the bombers sent to destroy it offers important lessons. It tells us about the missteps and misjudgements that could push two superpowers to war and devastate the world.

A company dilemma

Ever since November 1948, when the PLA broke out of northern China and began pushing down the lower Yangtze valley, Paul Hopkins had been carefully considering the options. The President of Shanghai Power had, early on, told his headquarters in the US that it should continue operations only as long as the Kuomintang held the city. That month, though, the US embassy had issued an advisory telling non-essential personnel to leave Shanghai, making clear the government's collapse was nearing.

For diplomats, though, the prospect of Shanghai Power shutting down was not a welcome one, historian Warren Tozer has recorded. The US consul in Shanghai, John Cabot, told Hopkins that the communists would also need electricity. The company's influence, he argued, might enable it to lead, guide, or otherwise induce the reds to revise their philosophy of life. Warren Kopelman, Hopkins' boss in Boise, also told him

American authorities in Washington were keen for the company to stay on. The government, Kopelman said, emphasised the desirability of continuing operations regardless of who [was] in power in China. They indicated that they would be very disappointed if the property got out of American hands.

The idea that continued operations by Shanghai Power would be welcomed by the communists was commonsensical. The company generated about 87 per cent of the city's power according to Tozer, and continued operations were necessary to power its life. There were, however, serious problems: Who would guarantee continued fuel supplies to the plant? And how would the power be paid for?

Even though Washington ensured Shanghai Power continued operations, it also mounted pressure on China. The retreating Kuomintang began a blockade of Shanghai port, cutting off fuel supplies with the assent of the US. This forced Shanghai Power to switch to coal, brought in by train despite air strikes carried out by the Kuomintang. The People's Republic also raised power tariffs, Tozer records, and provided loans to enable Shanghai Power to keep operating.

The historian John Service has argued that Chairman Mao Zedong's China was, contrary to popular opinion, keen to maintain

an open door to the US in other words, to maintain at least a trade relationship, in the face of ideological problems, and the reality of American support for the Kuomintang. The government's support for Shanghai Power suggests this was indeed the case.

However, the subsequent events ensured we can only speculate on what happened.

A time of hard choices

Following the outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950, commentator Hsu Chung-mao writes, the PLA dropped its plans to attack Fujian's plans which, according to most American diplomats, would end in defeat for the Kuomintang. The conflict, however, simmered on. In August 1954, the PLA again raided Taiwan's offshore islands, beginning with the shelling of Kinmen and Matsu, and an assault on the Dachens. That November, the PLA encircled Yijiangshan, a base on the northern flank of the Dachens, and occupied the islands.

The US responded by sending in seven aircraft carriers at the head of a fleet that evacuated some 15,000 civilians and 11,000 Taiwan troops. In December 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower's government signed a formal mutual defence treaty with Taiwan, which was enforced in

March of the next year. Although the Dachens islands were successfully captured by the PLA and remain in the control of China even today it moved no further.

In August 1958, the PLA again tested American resolve, shelling the islands of Kinmen and Matsu, and initiating an amphibious landing on Tung Ting. This time, the US sent in a fleet with four aircraft carriers, equipped with low-yield atomic weapons to annihilate the PLA's numerically superior landing forces.

Ever since Xi reinitiated an aggressive Taiwan policy, debates on the arguments over engagement and deterrence, which raged in the 1950s, acquired renewed significance.

Trade and technology sanctions have deepened, together with direct military competition. The eminent scholar John Mearsheimer, among others, has argued that the rise of China enabled by America itself made this confrontation inevitable. The only way for the US to prevail, he argued, is to relentlessly expand the power-gap, to the point where China realises it has no chance of success.

This might well be true, but the case of Shanghai Power shows the importance of nuance. Keeping the corporation running, enabling fuel supplies, and bringing other economic incentives to the table might well have provided tools to temper the PLA's push on Taiwan. Ending economic engagement in 1949 did not ensure the security of Taiwan.

Even a limited war over Taiwan, economists have estimated, would cost the world upwards of \$10 trillion, or 10 per cent of global GDP devastating livelihoods across the world. That cost, in itself, is an excellent reason for adversaries to pull back from the brink. Engagement might not be a substitute for raw deterrence. Ensuring the economies of China and the world remain entwined, though, might yet prove a powerful force for peace.

Constitution & jobs—2 reasons why Akhilesh and Rahul rallies are drawing big crowds

The failure to provide government jobs in UP due to repeated exam paper leaks is fuelling an anti-BJP sentiment in the state.

As the 2024 Lok Sabha election inches closer to its final phase, there is growing debate about whether the Bharatiya Janata Party will reach its ambitious target of 400 seats. Political analyst and Swaraj India founder Yogendra Yadav argues that the party might not even be able to secure a simple majority of 272 seats, while political experts such as Rahul Verma and Prashant Kishore predict a sweep like 2019. Increasing crowds at Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi's election rallies are



being seen as signs of the Opposition's improved performance. So, has it truly outmanoeuvred the ruling party in this battle of narratives? Based on the sequence of events in Uttar Pradesh, I analyse the factors that have likely bolstered the opposing camp's performance, as well as the narratives and issues that have helped the BJP. What is helping the Opposition? Opposition parties appear to have gained significant momentum after the second round of voting. One pivotal factor has been the rumour that the BJP plans to end

reservation and change the Constitution. Statements by Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari and BJP's Faizabad MP Lallu Singh, for instance, have sparked fear about change in Constitution among Dalit voters in the Awadh and Poorvanchal regions. Both leaders belong to the Rajput community, and Dalits in these regions have historically resisted Rajput domination through constitutional rights. Therefore, their fears regarding such statements are understandable. Furthermore, irregularities in implementing reservation policies in state

teacher recruitment and UP CM Yogi Adityanath's reluctance to address it have led to a perception that the government plans to abolish reservation too. Besides, non-Yadav OBC social groups like the Kurmis (who previously supported the BJP) also seem to be shifting toward the Opposition, a pivot likely caused by the issue of a lack of government jobs in the state.

The government's failure to provide government jobs in UP due to repeated exam paper leaks is fuelling an anti-BJP sentiment in the state. Despite Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's frequent rhetoric against corruption, the paper leaks suggest otherwise. This has fostered a narrative that the government is unwilling to provide public sector jobs.

Government jobs are a highly sensitive issue in northern India. This is especially true for regions like Awadh, Eastern UP, and Bihar, where they are seen as a pathway to the middle class. Jobs in the Army, for instance, allow young men from low-income families to significantly improve their family's financial status. The Agniveer scheme has dashed these hopes, creating widespread anger against the ruling dispensation.

Modi in his several recent interviews failed to address the government employment issue adequately. He would switch to discussing private sector jobs every time he was questioned about the problem. Private jobs hold little relevance for students preparing for competitive public sector exams in cities like Prayagraj. These interviews could have contributed to disillusionment among students, resulting in large and chaotic turnouts for Akhilesh and Rahul's rallies in Prayagraj's Phulpur. What works for BJP?

It would be erroneous to

assume that nothing is quite working for the BJP. Its labharthi (beneficiary) schemes continue to support the party. Free ration distribution and the Ayushman Bharat health insurance still resonate among poverty-ridden families who feel left out of reservation benefits. The women voters factor also remains significant and economic empowerment initiatives targeting women through self-help groups and transfer of gas subsidy in their account, continue to bolster the BJP's appeal.

My analysis indicates that the Ayodhya Ram temple still significantly helps the BJP's case, even though some commentators Ashutosh Varshney suggest otherwise. Voters who have visited Ayodhya and witnessed the development projects there are more likely to lean toward the BJP.

Moreover, three issues which are mentioned in the manifesto of Congress party can act as silent killers of the Opposition, potentially resulting in the consolidation of upper caste votes for the BJP. First is the Congress party's promise to extend the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) category to include Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. Second is the promise of proportionate reservation and third is the pledge to ensure that minorities receive a fair share of public work tenders traditionally dominated by upper castes. These promises seem to have alarmed upper-caste voters and could prove detrimental to the Opposition alliance. Besides, the BJP is much stronger in terms of its organisational strength.

Both parties face significant challenges and opportunities as they vie for control in one of the most critical elections in recent history. And the outcome will, perhaps, critically hinge on narratives that resonate more powerfully with voters.

'Tainted, sketchy investigation' – HC order acquitting Ram Rahim in dera manager murder case

Ram Rahim & 4 others convicted in Ranjit Singh's murder acquitted over lapses in CBI probe, such as no recovery of weapons or bullets & no corroboration of witness statements.

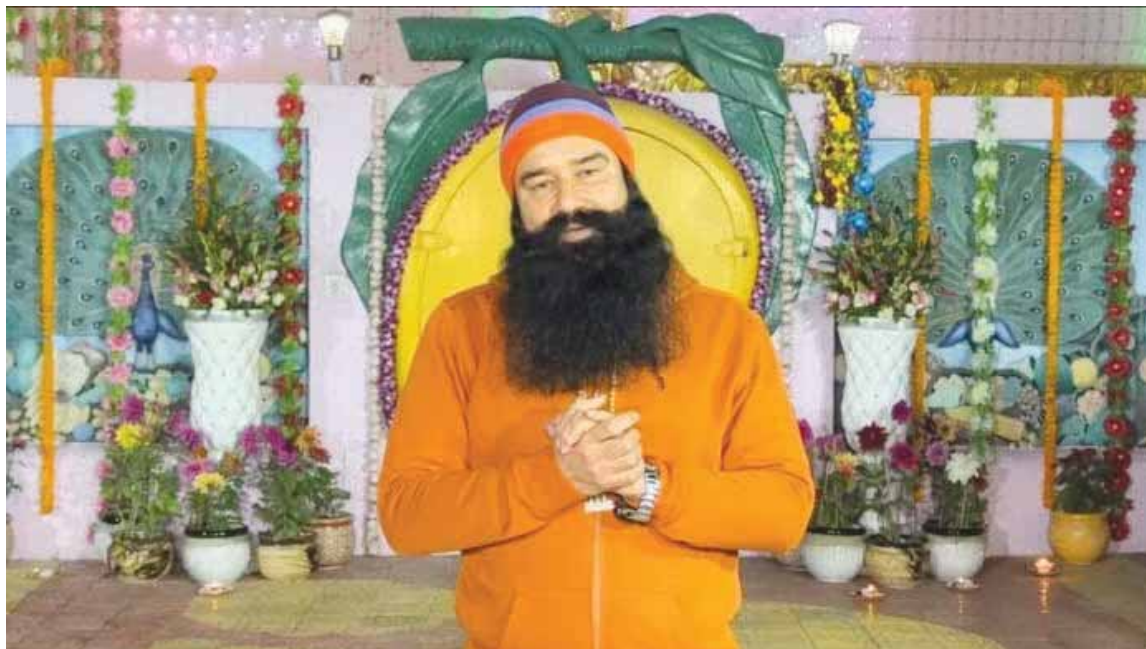
By SUSHIL MANAV

Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was Tuesday acquitted in his dera manager Ranjit Singh's murder case by the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which cited a tainted and sketchy investigation into the crime event by the investigating officer while pronouncing its judgment. Four other convicts were also acquitted.

A division bench of Justice Sureshwar Thakur and Justice Lalit Batra Tuesday allowed an appeal filed by Ram Rahim Singh against the order of a special CBI judge, Sushil Kumar Garg. In October 2021, Garg convicted the accused under sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 302 (murder) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code and sentenced them to life imprisonment. In its 163-page detailed order, the bench alluded to media trials affecting the investigation, observing, "The intellectual strength of the investigating officer appears to become stultified by media publicity whereunder came the crime event besides also they collected evidence which is unworthy of credence (sic)."

Acquitting Ram Rahim and Dera Sacha Sauda functionaries Jasbir Singh, Avtar Singh, Krishan Lal and Subdil Singh, the bench also said that the case is a stark portrayal of the necessity of courts of law making an incisive and objective analyses, of the evidence as exist on record, rather than the said objective analyses becoming attempted to become stultified, through a pro active media trial becoming made of the purported incriminatory role of the accused vis-a-vis the crime event (sic).

The bench also noted multiple lapses in the investigation, which made it faulty. The car, allegedly used in the commission of the crime, was never seized; three of the witnesses said in their



respective statements that four assailants carried firearms, but the CBI didn't seize any of those weapons; also, the CBI didn't prepare a site plan of the place where the accused allegedly hatched the murder conspiracy, did not collect any evidence about Kashish restaurant where a witness,



Khattar Singh, allegedly saw two of the accused celebrating the murder, and failed to examine the owners or workers in the restaurant.

A witness said that his and another the clothes of another became smeared with blood stains while transporting the deceased to the hospital in a car, yet the investigating officer did not collect their clothes, the court further said.

The bench also said that there was no identification parade of the accused despite two key witnesses saying they had previously not seen them; the

postmortem report revealed four metallic pieces in the deceased's brain, but the CBI still didn't recover any of the bullets; and the polygraph tests on three of the accused lost their evidentiary potency because of the lack of clinching corroboration.

After the acquittals, the Dera

Sacha Sauda, in a post on X, hailed the court's judgment, saying the Dera has always believed in the judiciary, and the judiciary has given the Dera justice.

According to an FIR registered by the CBI in December 2003, following high court directions to the agency to investigate rape allegations against the dera chief, Ranjit Singh was shot dead on 10 July 2002 in Haryana's Kurukshetra. Ram Rahim supposedly suspected that the deceased was behind the circulation of an anonymous letter highlighting the sexual

exploitation of his female followers. Cases against Ram Rahim

in its order in October 2021, the special CBI court held that it is proved beyond reasonable doubt that Ram Rahim, aggrieved by the circulation of the letter, conspired to murder Ranjit Singh with the other accused. The dera chief is currently serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples and is a convict in the murder of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati, for which he received a life sentence that will run after the end of the 20-year term. Now, he is in Sunaria jail in Rohtak, Haryana.

After the murder of Ranjit Singh, a Kurukshetra resident and a manager in Ram Rahim's Sirsa-based Dera Sacha Sauda, the police gave the dera a clean chit in the murder investigation. However, the victim's son, Jagsir Singh, moved a petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court in January 2003 seeking an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

In its initial FIR, the CBI did not name Ram Rahim Singh. However, his name was included in the FIR in 2006, based on the statement of Khatta Singh, a former driver of Ram Rahim Singh.

The special CBI court framed charges against Ram Rahim and four others in 2007 and sentenced the five to life imprisonment in October 2021.

While Ranjit Singh was a manager in Ram Rahim's dera, his family members were the dera chief's disciples. Things went topsy-turvy for the family when the anonymous letter, levelling allegations of sexual exploitation of dera sadhvis and addressed to the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and other prominent functionaries, was circulated in 2002. Soon afterwards, Ranjit Singh resigned from his managerial post and left the dera with his family members.

According to the CBI chargesheet, Ram Rahim suspected that Ranjit Singh, whose sister was also a dera sadhvi, was behind making the anonymous letter public. The chargesheet said Ranjit Singh was summoned to the dera and threatened with dire consequences though he denied such a role.

Later, Poora Sach, an evening daily published in Sirsa, carried the anonymous letter. On 24 October 2002, Poora Sach editor Ram Chander Chhatrapati was shot at by two followers of the dera outside his Sirsa residence. Chhatrapati succumbed to his gunshot injuries 21 November 2002.

Ram Rahim's conviction on two counts of rape came in August 2017, and his conviction in the murder of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati came in January 2019. The Dera chief then filed appeals in the high court against both convictions.

In another case, Ram Rahim Singh stands accused of forcing over 400 male followers to castrate themselves by fooling them with a religious belief that it would lead to the realisation of God.

In July 2012, Hans Raj Chauhan, a dera disciple, filed a petition in the high court alleging that he, along with over 400 others, were forced to undergo surgical removal of their testicles by Ram Rahim Singh from 1999-2000.