



# INSIDER

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Why Are Our Cities Crumbling Under Just 30mm Of Rain?



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*Kamala Harris narrows down on seven candidates in hunt for running mate*



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How two Israeli enemies were bumped off within 12 hours



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How Russia-Ukraine war crossed into Africa, got 50 Russians butchered

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## USCIS announces second round of H-1B lottery for FY 2025 regular cap

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced that it will conduct a second round of H-1B lottery selections for the fiscal year 2025 under its regular annual 65,000 visa limit. The USCIS determined that it would need to select additional registrations for unique beneficiaries to reach the FY 2025

"We will notify prospective petitioners with selected registrations from this second round of selection that they are eligible to file an H-1B cap-subject petition for the beneficiary named in the applicable selected registration. We will announce when we have completed this second process of selections and notifications, the agency added.



The H-1B visa, favoured by Indian professionals, is the main pathway for Indian IT companies to send their software engineers to the United States, with Indians consistently being the largest group of H-1B recipients. In March, USCIS held a random lottery for the

regular cap numerical allocation.

However, the USCIS confirmed that there would be no second selection for the advanced degree exemption, also known as the master's cap. The first round had already met the required numbers for this category.

Soon, we will select additional registrations for unique beneficiaries from previously submitted electronic registrations using a random selection process," stated the USCIS.

fiscal year 2025 H-1B visas, including those eligible for the advanced degree exemption. Only petitioners with selected registrations can file H-1B cap-subject petitions during the specified filing period noted in their registration selection notice. The initial filing period for these selected registrations was from April 1 to June 30, 2024.

This second selection process is essential to meet the FY2025 regular cap numerical allocation.

## Indian-origin woman jailed in UK for 10 years after convicted of shoplifting

An Indian-origin woman was on Tuesday sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment by a court in south-west England after she was found guilty of conning retailers and other businesses out of thousands of pounds. Narinder Kaur a.k.a. Nina Tiara, 54, was previously found guilty of 26 counts of fraud, money laundering and perverting the course of justice in March 2023. Prosecutors said she had shoplifted on an industrial scale and deceived shops into refunding her for items that she had never actually purchased. She was sentenced at Gloucestershire Crown Court for stealing from more

her actions and even thought she would get away with submitting false documents to the court with the intention of perverting the course of justice," he said. The police force took ownership of the investigation into Kaur in 2018 and worked with the UK's National Business Crime Solution, an organisation representing retailers, and other police forces as a "multi-agency approach".



"We were able to investigate further into her criminal activity and found fraudulent activity in her bank accounts which subsequently brought her to justice," added Tristram. Kaur was found to have travelled extensively across the country to steal from well-known high street stores and then dishonestly claimed refunds

on those items. Between July 2015 and September 2019, it is estimated Kaur netted around GBP 2,000 worth of refunds per week, equating to over half a million pounds in fraudulent refunds and stolen goods. Knowing that she was under investigation for these offences, she is then said to have embarked upon a scheme to defraud other businesses using the dishonestly obtained credit card details of members of the public.

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## UK bars Indian-origin lawyer from practicing over conviction in 'sham marriage'

A 44-year-old man who qualified as a lawyer in India has been struck off from practicing in the UK by the solicitors' watchdog after a tribunal heard of his conviction eight years ago for organising sham marriages for migrants to settle in Europe.

Mathew Moghan Rajamohan

Tribunal ordered that the Respondent, Mathew Moghan Rajamohan Chellam, solicitor, be struck off the Roll of Solicitors and it further ordered that he do pay the costs of and incidental to this application and enquiry fixed in the sum of GBP 4,058.00," reads the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal order.

"In assessing culpability, the Tribunal took account of the fact that the Respondent's motivation for the misconduct was for monetary gain, the fact that the misconduct arose from carefully planned actions including by using sham marriages with a view to abusing applicable laws, and that the



Chellam faced charges of fraudulent applications by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) and a disciplinary tribunal concluded in its ruling that there was no doubt that he knew or ought to have known that his conduct was in material breach of the obligations to protect the public and the reputation of the legal profession. In a judgment dated July 5 released recently, the tribunal notes that Chellam has since returned to India and that his current address in India was unknown."The

circumstances giving rise to the misconduct were under the direct control of the Respondent and concluded that Respondent's level of culpability was extremely high," it notes.

According to the order filed with the UK's Law Society, Chellam was admitted to the UK's Roll of Solicitors in February 2013 through the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT) route as he was already a Legal Advocate in India. In 2015, he is said to have "self-reported" and confirmed that he

## Indian-origin cab driver jailed in Singapore for stealing mother's jewellery

An Indian-origin Singaporean taxi driver was sentenced to one year and five months jail after he pleaded guilty to four theft charges, including SGD 43,400 jewellery from his 70-year-old mother. Michael Raj, 48, with financial problems stole three Rolex watches worth more than SGD 200,000 in total from three sleeping passengers on separate occasions, and sold the

his debts. On July 5, 2021, his mother discovered that several pieces of her jewellery were missing. She confronted him two days later and then reported the matter to the police.

Michael has since made partial restitution of around SGD 3,000 to her.

On September 2, 2022, he was driving a taxi and picked up a heavily intoxicated 33-year-old man near Orchard Towers

shopping mall at around 5 am. The passenger was asleep when they reached the man's destination.

Michael then removed the man's Rolex watch, worth SGD 45,000, from his wrist.

The following month, he stole a second Rolex watch, worth nearly SGD 67,300, from a 44-



timepieces, The Straits Times reported. Deputy Public Prosecutor Tan Shi Yun told the court: "This was not a case of a careless victim who left her valuables lying around in the open.

"The victim's (valuables) were locked in a drawer in a cupboard and (its) key was kept in another drawer in the same cupboard." After that, Michael pawned the valuables at various pawnshops without his mother's consent and paid

year-old male passenger who had also fallen asleep in his taxi. The two passengers alerted the police when they found their valuables missing. Their watches were not recovered and Michael has made no restitution to the two victims, the court heard. On June 15, 2023, Michael stole a third Rolex watch, worth SGD 88,000, from a 30-year-old man who had boarded the offender's taxi before nodding off.

## Eligible green card holders can get US citizenship in just three weeks: Expert

With the date for the US presidential election approaching, Green Card holders are being urged to secure their citizenship and register to vote. Shekar Narasimhan, Chairman and founder of the Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAP) Victory Fund, said that under President Joe Biden's administration, eligible Green Card holders could obtain US citizenship in just three weeks.

The US votes on November 5 to decide on its President. More than a million Indians are stuck in a long queue for Green Cards, according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data. Many highly skilled professionals from India, including doctors, engineers, and scientists, are facing wait times that could extend for decades to gain permanent residency in the US. "Being excited and translating that into votes are often two rather distinct things. It's how you take that energy, persuade people that it's worth their while, and make sure that they apply for citizenship, which can be obtained in

three weeks," Narasimhan said, as quoted by PTI.

A Green Card, officially called a permanent resident card, signifies an individual's status as a permanent resident in the United States.

"If you have a Green Card and have been here for five years, get your citizenship.



There's time. Register to vote," said Narasimhan, as quoted by PTI.

He emphasised the importance of early registration and meeting deadlines in various states. He also suggested creating WhatsApp groups to remind friends about voting.

"In many states, you have to register in advance, and there are deadlines. And finally, create a WhatsApp group, get 20 of your friends on there, remind each other every day why it's important, and get out to vote," he said.



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## US faces growing threats, and we're woefully unprepared. Here's how to fix that.

The national security threats against the U.S. are as significant as and more complex than they were at the height of the Cold War or even World War II. We are not prepared to meet these threats today and could, in very short order, find ourselves in a war across multiple theaters with peer and near-peer adversaries that we could lose.

This is the key finding of a commission established by Congress, which we chaired, to review the current National Defense Strategy, published in 2022. Our bipartisan, unanimous recommendations lay out the steps needed now to avoid this outcome. Our country has lost its decades-long uncontested military dominance, especially in the Western Pacific. China's military and industrial strength rivals and in some ways outpaces our own. Its cyber and space capabilities are designed to deter or prevent us from interfering with its aggressive actions in the Western Pacific. Despite losses in Ukraine, Russia has transformed itself through a full wartime mobilization and threatens NATO. China and Russia have forged a "no-limits" partnership and they have embraced rogue states Iran and North Korea. Russia receives the means to keep fighting in Ukraine; Iran and North Korea stand to gain weapons and expertise, along with diplomatic and economic protection. All four states seek to counter U.S. influence and their alignment presents a real risk that conflict in any of their three theaters would become a global war.

All this comes when the Department of Defense is struggling to meet current demands. As Ukraine demonstrates, we're straining to produce the weapons and equipment needed for one limited war, let alone the all-out conflict we could soon face. Our commission recommends a new approach, greater use of commercially available technology, fully embracing our allies and partners, and an increased investment in manufacturing capacity and our industrial workforce.

Change at the Defense Department, as hard as that is, will not be enough. Matching China's strength requires a fully integrated approach involving all elements of national power: the strength of the U.S. military in true partnership with our first-class innovation base, plus a coordinated effort involving diplomacy, economic investment, cybersecurity, trade, education, industrial capacity, civic engagement and international cooperation. This strategy was successful in the Cold War but since then our ability to execute it has atrophied. We have asked the military to do too much with too little, allowed new threats to accumulate, and allowed other elements of our government to under-prioritize their own role in national security. There are bright spots. The Biden

administration has expanded and strengthened NATO and enhanced relationships with allies and partners across the Pacific. This is critical as the U.S. cannot deter or win future wars without our allies. Strengthening them, through funding and better information sharing, cooperative industrial relationships and military exports, helps them and us. Our commercial sector is another enormous strategic advantage. It rapidly outpaces the Defense Department at military innovation, including AI, robotics and autonomy. Yet the Defense Department's culture still relies on internal research and development and decades-old platforms better suited to yesterday's wars. Ukraine is integrating new technology rapidly with older systems — on the order of weeks, not years. Russia has learned this lesson; we must as well. Better technology means we need not match our potential adversaries platform to platform, but still the U.S. force structure is insufficient. The U.S. military is the smallest it has been in generations due to policy decisions and recruitment shortfalls. The National Defense Strategy is outdated in calling for a force able to fight in one theater and deter aggression elsewhere. We are already involved in wars in Europe and the Middle East, with a larger threat looming from China.

We recommend a Joint Force able to simultaneously defend the homeland, lead allies in deterring China, and spearhead allies and partners to keep Russia and Iran in check. This demands a worldwide presence — military, diplomatic and economic — including across the Global South, where China and Russia are gaining influence in our relative absence. None of this is possible without the support of the American people, who are largely unaware and unprepared for the dangers we face, including that the U.S. homeland is no longer a sanctuary or immune from attack. Ultimately, the public will have to shoulder the cost of what is needed. Our national security budgets must be broader than Defense and include the critical missions at the departments of State, Treasury, Homeland Security, Commerce, Education and others. We also must spend smarter, not just spend more. That includes divesting from legacy ill-suited to future warfare and quitting governing through continuing resolutions. To overcome the threats of the Cold War, the U.S. spent at minimum 4.9 percent of GDP on defense. Today, we are at 3 percent of GDP and we spend more servicing the interest on debt than we do on defense. On a unanimous basis, our commission recommends paying for additional spending by raising revenues and reforming entitlement spending.

**By Jane Harman and Eric Edelman**

# A new political Era

## Rahul Gandhi and the resurgent opposition

**By Susmita Ghosh**

The recent recovery of India's opposition parties and the raised up profile of Rahul Gandhi have considerably altered the political landscape in the country. Historically seen as a split coalition often overshadowed by the dominant Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the opposition's newfound power echoes a complex and evolving dynamic within Indian politics. Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and a prominent leader of the Indian National Congress (INC), has been a central figure in this shift. His political career has been marked by highs and lows, with periods of criticism questioning his leadership and efficiency. However, recent developments suggest a transformation of his political influence and a more firm stance against the ruling party. Several factors contribute to the opposition's resurgence. First, there is an intense discontent among the electorate regarding various issues like economic management, social harmony, and governance. This discontent has created an opportunity for opposition parties to present themselves as feasible alternatives. Rahul Gandhi, in particular, has capitalized on this sentiment by placing himself as a champion of democratic values and social justice, conflicting sharply with the BJP's agenda. Gandhi's approach has become more nuanced and calculated. He has increasingly focused on grassroots outreach, connecting with diverse voter bases and addressing regional concerns.

His speechmaking has evolved from broad, often vague promises to more targeted criticisms of specific policies and government failures. This shift has helped him resound with a broader audience and build a narrative of responsibility and reform.

Additionally, the opposition's newfound unity, symbolized by the formation of alliances like the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), has strengthened their collective influence. By presenting a united front, these parties are able to consolidate votes and present a credible challenge to the BJP, which has historically thrived on break-up within the opposition ranks.

However, Rahul Gandhi and the opposition still face significant challenges. Despite his refreshed image, Gandhi's leadership remains a subject of debate within political circles and among the public. The Congress party, despite some progress, continues to grapple with organizational issues and a lack of consistent state-level victories. Moreover, the BJP's strong organizational machinery and substantial resources pose formidable obstacles.

The coming months will be crucial in determining whether this resurgence translates into perceptible political victories or if the BJP's rooted position will prevail. As India heads into a crucial period of political engagement, the ability of Gandhi and the opposition to sustain their momentum and address the electorate's concerns will be critical in shaping the future of the country's political landscape.

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# Why Are So Many Tech Graduates In India Unemployable? It's The 'Cliff Effect'

A young tech graduate, full of potential, steps into the job market, only to find their skills outdated and their opportunities limited. This scenario is all too common in India, where despite substantial investments in higher education, a stark divide has emerged among students, particularly in the computer science stream. I call this phenomenon the 'Cliff Effect' as it highlights the precipitous drop in the quality of education beyond top-tier tech institutes like the IITs and IISc. This 'cliff', which leaves many students underprepared and alienated from cutting-edge advancements, underscores the need for comprehensive reform in India's computer science education.

## Squandering The Demographic Dividend

As much as 65% of India's population is under the age of 35. Yet, many lack the necessary skills required to function in a modern economy. According to the recent Economic Survey, just about half of India's youth is employable. Another report, by NASSCOM, flags a significant employability gap among engineering graduates in India. This gap has far-reaching implications, considering that



India aims to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2025.

The quality of computer science education across many Indian institutions is far from what's needed in today's job market. Universities do not update their syllabi frequently, leaving students unprepared for the demands of the industry. The lack of experiential learning and hands-on training further exacerbates the problem. Compounding all these issues is the stagnant entry-level pay offered by some major IT companies in India. Despite the industry's growth, salaries have seen little change over the years. For instance, one major company's campus placement

offer was just about ? 3.5 lakh per annum, compared to an average of ? 4.15 lakh per annum a decade ago. The stagnation indicates the lack of value ascribed to fresh graduates.

India, all in all, needs a systemic overhaul in education and industry practices.

## Beyond Just 'Coding'

Knowing how to code is no longer enough. Thanks to AI, the job landscape is evolving rapidly, and employers in the coming years will seek candidates with deep domain knowledge and an interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving. This shift will be crucial because technology alone cannot drive innovation; it

must be complemented by a thorough understanding of the domain in which it is applied. Only then can solutions be developed to effectively address real-world problems.

For instance, a coder with a deep understanding of agriculture can design AI-driven solutions to optimise crop yields, manage pest control, and predict weather patterns, thereby enhancing productivity and sustainability in the agricultural sector. Similarly, a coder who understands pedagogy can develop advanced learning platforms that cater to diverse educational needs, personalise learning experiences, and track student progress effectively.

India stands to benefit significantly from computer scientists who possess interdisciplinary skills and don't rely solely on technical knowledge. In that light, integrating interdisciplinary courses in computer science education is important to foster a holistic understanding of technology and its impact on society. It is essential that the next generation of technologists embodies responsible and trustworthy AI values and is aware of and actively addressing challenges like privacy, security, and other ethical concerns.

## An Interdisciplinary Framework

To build an interdisciplinary approach to India's computer science education, it is essential to foster collaborations between universities, industry experts, and policymakers to ensure that the curriculum is both relevant and future-proof. Universities should design programmes that include mandatory courses on ethics, data privacy, cybersecurity, and AI. Incorporating case studies and practical examples from various industries can help students grasp the real-world applications of their technical skills.

# The China-Pakistan Nexus: Fuelling Unrest in Bangladesh

By: Rahul Pawa

China, Pakistan, geopolitical interest groups, and international stakeholders may have contributed to the current wave of violent protests in Bangladesh, which resulted in 130 fatalities. These players may have used the anger against quotas for government jobs to fuel dissent against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League government. The recent wave of violent incidents appears to have been fueled by actions from China's Communist Party, and Pakistan, who have taken adversarial positions towards Sheikh Hasina's government and spread discontent.

Protests erupted after the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court decided on July 10, 2024, to maintain the status quo on the quota system intended for

freedom fighters and their families for four weeks. This decision followed a High Court ruling on June 5, 2024, which declared the 2018 government circular that had cancelled the 30 per cent quota for freedom fighters' descendants in government jobs illegal. This ruling sparked widespread anger among students and the broader population, culminating in violent clashes and a rising death toll. Students from various universities in Dhaka united to demand

quota reforms. After an initial postponement due to Eid and summer holidays, the student movement resumed on July 1 with demonstrations. Students and teachers from public universities such as the University of Dhaka,

Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, and Jahangirnagar University were soon joined by counterparts from private institutions like North



South University and BRAC University. Under the banner of the Anti-discrimination Students Movement, they launched "Bangla Blockade" (Bangladesh Shutdown), disrupting domestic train and road transportation

networks. Online activism surged with calls for "another 2018" in reference to the previous quota reform movement. Protestors' calls for a "Bangla Blockade" intensified on July 7. As demonstrations spread nationwide and intensified on July 7, clashes with police on July 11 marked a significant escalation.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's remarks on July 14, referring to Razakars (Bangladeshis who collaborated with Pakistan during the 1971 war) during a press conference after her return from China, coupled with the ruling Awami League's hardened stance intensified the situation. Chhatra League's violent suppression of the protests

resulted in hundreds of injuries. The kindling for this unrest had been laid well before the court's ruling, as flames were fanned during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Beijing from July 8 to 10, 2024. The visit, intended to secure significant financial aid, ended abruptly, hinting at Hasina's deep-seated dissatisfaction with the Communist Party of China (CPC). China offered only \$100 million in financial assistance, a far cry from the initially promised \$5 billion. Adding to the discord, Xi Jinping gave Hasina very little time as Beijing proposed a controversial ten-year re-education policy aimed at countering Islamic culture and promoting Chinese lifestyles, similar to measures implemented in Pakistan in 2010.

# Is Sam Altman Wrong About India's AI Capabilities? Yes, And No

By Umakant Soni

On June 7 last year, Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, was asked this question when he was in India: Can Indian entrepreneurs compete with OpenAI, or should they even try? His answer, a blunt and definitive "No", was jarring to most of us. Altman followed with an even more fundamental question of his own: was India even a player in this massive technological shift.?

While Altman may have a point, he is wrong in assessing the depth of talent that India has and the potential it holds to contribute to the AI revolution. India is a country with more than 5,000 years of sustained human history, which has witnessed massive wars, famines, occupations and diversity. It holds the civilisational knowledge and accumulated thought processes that can and will play a critical part in building a safe and sustainable future for a man-machine society. India can act as a crucial counterbalance to an AI framework developed in the echo chambers of San Francisco.

## Silicon Valley's Flawed AI Playbook

In typical Silicon Valley fashion of moving fast and breaking things, OpenAI has chosen to open up the AI revolution to everyone. ChatGPT was developed by training AI on the vast and free human knowledge available on the internet. We have Elon Musk unleashing his bots developed on Twitter data, and humanoids on the shop floors of Tesla. Mark Zuckerberg is unloading billions on AI development and computing, while releasing large open-source models. Amazon is buying power utilities in gigawatts as the Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) race gets real. The GPU-guzzling, greed-driven AI boom is already scary, and adding fuel to this are the geopolitical dynamics between the US and China. The world is set to witness an unprecedented "Intelligence explosion". And we as a society probably aren't ready for such a rapid transition shaped purely by the Silicon Valley playbook.

## Personal Stake In AI's Future

As a parent of two young kids, I think selfishly. While I have been



dabbling with AI for more than 15 years, I want my kids to grow up in a world that is truly open to exploring human potential. It was a rainy afternoon in Bengaluru in 2008 when I came across an article by Ray Kurzweil, which said that the sum total of all AI would be more than human intelligence by 2029. The claim shook me; I realised that this would be a game-changing moment for humanity, primarily because we are unsure of what lies beyond that point - a 'Singularity' - and the shape society would take after that. Soon after, I made the crazy decision to resign from my well-paying job at Wipro to start India's first AI chatbot company, 'Vimagino', with three friends and fellow IIT Kanpur alumni. Some remnants of this chatbot demo can still be found on YouTube. Mind you, this was two years before OpenAI was born (even before the pre-deep-learning era), and it was all done in India. We even went live on two websites, [Indiatimeshopping.com](http://Indiatimeshopping.com) and [Yatra.com](http://Yatra.com). Unfortunately, we couldn't grow because not many back then practised risk-funding that could back such companies in India. Perhaps we were a little too early (or were we).

I eventually ended up co-founding pi Ventures, an early-stage venture fund, with Manish Singhal. The idea was to back risky AI bets in India, one of which is tracking well today and is on its way to

becoming a revenue-making AI unicorn - a rarity in this GenAI era. However, I can see that while these AI companies from India could do well, eventually, for-profit companies would have to optimise functions like revenue and, of course, profit. It rankled me that if for-profit businesses made their way to AGI, the pursuit of profit might lead to AI ignoring humanity. We could end up being just dressed-up animals in a cage, well-fed with a universal basic income, but, in all actuality, complete non-players in the grand scheme of things. That is a very depressing scenario. So, I stepped back from pi and helped co-found ARTPARK (AI & Robotics Technology Park), a not-for-profit organisation whose motto is to make AI work for humanity.

## Languages, 'Shruti', And 'Smruti'

ARTPAR, supported by a ₹ 230 crore seed grant from the Department of Science & Technology and the government of Karnataka, is a unique effort incubated by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc). The organisation recently released 16,000 hours of spontaneous speech from 80 districts under project Vaani, open-sourced under Bhashini. Such initiatives can help in the development of geographically anchored models in a country like India, which is packed with diverse languages and local dialects that sometimes change in a matter of a few kilometres.

These languages are rivers of knowledge, overflowing with rich human intelligence and enriched

by centuries of usage, feedback, and historical chronicling of local events. This longitudinal data of human effort spanning thousands of years, trying to describe the world around, is a living, thriving body of human, annotated knowledge. There's another unique thing about India: a lot of its collective knowledge exists in "shruti"(in voice) and "smruti"(in memory) as centuries of invaders destroyed its written knowledge and manuscripts. This method even allowed the Upanishads to survive over time. For centuries, this knowledge has been practised as living traditions, weaved into the daily lives of billions. The physicist Erwin Schrödinger, who worked on the nature of reality and is known for his Schrödinger's cat experiment, reportedly carried a translation of the Upanishads and revered its core insights about the nature of apparent duality. Indeed, its unique views on self-knowledge, the nature of reality and consciousness can help chart a new way of thinking about safe AI as we race towards the so-called 'AGI'.

## The 3 Stages Of AI Development

There are three stages that mark the learning and development of AI.

Stage 1 is learning from freely available data on the internet, which resulted in ChatGPT and other such systems powered by LLMs. It has become useful in creating text and solving other problems, though it's still not alarmingly influential.

Stage 2 is about creating AI agents, that research, co-work

with and co-learn from human feedback. It's here that India, with a population of 1.4 billion brought up on a rich diversity of thought and action, can play a big role. We are expected to get to some aspects of AGI at this stage.

Stage 3 is all about learning and augmenting from the physical and digital world. This is going to be tricky and critical, and we will have to be careful about what AI ends up learning, because it will soon power 40-50% of the workflow in real-life situations. It's this stage that will truly power a man-machine society of 7.5 billion humans working with more than 30 billion intelligent machines. Unlike human beings, biases in AI technology can grow exponentially, and in a much shorter span of time, humbling creators if they are not careful. India Must Take The Lead

The US, with its powerful internet and social media giants driven by profits, may end up creating a path to AI that puts profit ahead of humanity. China, which is prone to imprinting its central leader's thinking onto algorithms to exact control, may power a future where AI might rule over human beings. Both scenarios are not sustainable. On the other hand, India, with its rich, sustainable, civilisational history, has the potential to shape a future where humans can realise their full potential, together with AI.

Sam Altman might have been wrong about India's potential contribution, but he was spot-on about the inadequate resources we are putting into becoming an AI force to reckon with at a global level. The India AI mission is a great start, but we need to double down with a sizable private capital pool and AI compute resources that can support our talented technologists and researchers. We need to enable them at warp speed to digitize and mine the rich civilizational knowledge India possesses for building AI. Otherwise, our kids may not like the 'Matrix' future we may leave for them. Maybe it's time for India to take the 'Red Pill' and stomach this unsettling reality that we are undoubtedly hurtling towards.

# Delhi Coaching Centre Tragedy: The Buck Stops Nowhere

Three young bright minds were lost in a coaching institute's basement in India's capital city, New Delhi, on July 27. Shreya Yadav of Uttar Pradesh, Tania Soni from Telangana, and Navin Delvin from Kerala died after the basement of the building housing Rau's IAS Study Circle in Old Rajinder Nagar was flooded. The police have arrested five people, including the owner and coordinator of the coaching centre, and booked them for various charges.

In typical bureaucratic fashion, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) was quick to seal the basements of many other coaching institutes in the area right after this tragic incident; earth movers were pressed into service at Old Rajinder Nagar to raze illegal portions of institutes. But no action will bring back the dead students to life. Just days before the basement drowning, a 26-year-old man had died by electrocution when he touched an iron gate electrified by a naked wire.

The dreams of all four aspiring civil servants came to naught due to callous, indifferent, apathetic, perpetually under-prepared civic agencies. The two incidents amount to criminal negligence. They also bring to the fore the constant political wrangling between the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) of Delhi.

### Failure On All Fronts

Local authorities' inaction at checking the unregulated growth of coaching centres, overcrowded with students operating in residential buildings, and flouting safety norms, is a gross administrative failure. Old Rajinder Nagar and Mukherjee Nagar, the hubs of civil service coaching in Delhi, are not new to tragic incidents. In June 2023, as many as 61 students in Mukherjee Nagar were injured while trying to escape a four-storey commercial building as a fire on the ground floor engulfed the structure. The Delhi High Court had back then taken suo motu cognisance of the fire and asked the authorities to examine the safety status of all such institutes. The court instructed the Delhi Fire Service Department to examine the fire safety certificate of all coaching centres in the city. Likewise, it had asked the MCD to look into the sanctioned building plans of such

establishments. In the latest case, investigations have revealed that the basement, misrepresented as a parking and storage area, was being illegally used as a library by the coaching institute, violating building and fire department regulations.

MCD building bylaws specify the activities permitted in basements. Running a coaching centre or a library are not among them. "The officials and staff get away with their errant behaviour as they fear none. They know that after a while when the issue is no longer

grabbing the headlines, nothing will change and they will get away with criminal acts. It is not an episodic but a systemic problem," says Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences, Delhi. "Teaching shops are flourishing under the worst conditions because of the

rot in the education system. It is essentially a governance problem where accountability is missing. Citizens suffer as officials dodge their responsibility," he adds, emphasising the rot in the multi-core but unregulated coaching industry in India.

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By Bharti Mishra Nath

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### A Stringent Law

Lakhs of students around the country are compelled to study in unsafe conditions in such institutes, pointing to the need for a law that can enable regulation of the industry. Mere guidelines, like those issued earlier this year, are not enough. In any case, the guidelines could achieve little as they were not legally binding. Because education is a concurrent subject, the central and state governments need to amend their laws and make new rules.

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# Presenting Gulzar, A Poet Who Embraced Quantum Mechanics Like No Other

By Arup K. Chatterjee

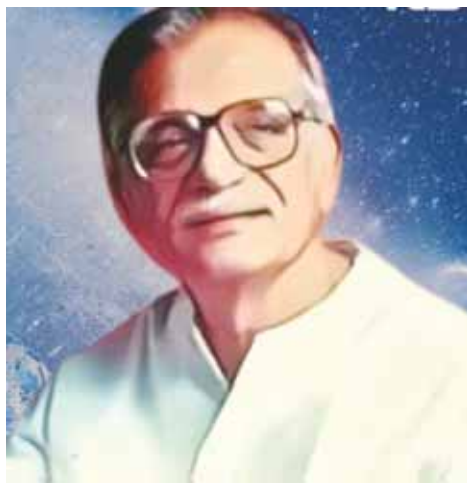
Writing in the Times Literary Supplement in October 1921, English poet and critic Thomas Stearns Eliot remembered John Donne thus: "Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think, but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility."

Eliot's assessment of Donne was true of some others too whom Samuel Johnson had in the eighteenth century called the the-extinct "race" of metaphysical poets. Not incidentally, however, the crown of thinking-as-experience is also befitting for Indian poet, lyricist, author, and filmmaker, the Sahitya, Oscar and Jnanpith awardee, Sampooran Singh Kalra, better known by his takhallus (pen name), 'Gulzar'.

Renowned Indian poet and novelist Padma Sachdev once called Gulzar saab the Pablo Neruda of Urdu poetry. But it would be as precise to call him the John Donne of 'Indian popular culture'. And I use this composite phrase instead of 'Hindi cinema' or 'Bollywood' because a bulk of Gulzar saab's unexplored philosophical insights far exceed his filmography, poetry, and writings. What is often missed in his language and poetics are his metaphors from quantum mechanics.

## A 'Phenomenological' Poet

Born in 1934 in Deena, now in the Jhelum



district of present-day Pakistan, Gulzar saab's early life and his harrowing journey to India before the Partition of 1947 - memories that found lauded expressions in Shyam Benegal's 1994 classic, Mammo - would make for a fertile backdrop for many a biographer. But not many may pay attention to the cosmic and quantum-like figures of speech that decorate his perceptions of reality. "NASA is my favourite website," Gulzar once acknowledged. "The universe with its abstract nature attracts me. The abstract element in my poetry comes from there." Had Gulzar saab's modesty allowed him, instead of calling his poetry "abstract," he might have called it "phenomenological". The word 'phenomenology' means the study of experience, along with studying the

nuances 'qualia', that is, the way fundamental units of reality are experienced. Gulzar saab's poetry often represents reality in minuscule slices. "Qatra qatra milti hai" ("droplets and droplets appear to us"; Ijaazat, 1987), or "jale qatra qatra, gale qatra qatra" ("the kindling of slivers, the melting of slivers"; Saathiya, 2002).

In certain other cases-as in "main chaand nigal gayi, daiyya re" ("I swallowed the moon, my gosh!"; Omkara, 2006)-Gulzar saab appears to swap the microscopic reality for the cosmic, where swallowing the moon signifies the quest of a mythical oscillatory body, or, in worldly terms, a lover in heat who swallowed the moon to soothe herself. However, his deeper aesthetic sense resurfaces in moon-related metaphors elsewhere, as in "dhaage tod laao chandni se noor ke" ("pluck slivers of moonlight from the cosmic ray"; Jhoom Barabar Jhoom, 2007). The metaphor reminds one of that famous 'double slit' science experiment, where photons split to reveal wave-particle duality. Gulzar saab's words are nowhere 'abstract'. In a liminal way, they escort the listener into a scientific world.

## Reality, Bite-Sized

This miniaturisation of reality or spacetime has over the last century come to be known to physicists as 'quantisation'. Neither poets nor quantum mechanics have a

monopoly over the art of quantising. However, both enchant us by deconstructing and experiencing reality at a subatomic level. Among physicists and mathematicians who did that with ease and panache, we recall James Maxwell, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger, Wolfgang Pauli, Paul Dirac, David Bohm, and even modern-day names like Sean Carroll and Jim Al-Khalili. Among psychologists and cultural thinkers, we find Carl Jung and Jiddu Krishnamurti at the helm. And, among poets, Gulzar saab qualifies as a natural citizen of a sphere that was once dominated by Albert Einstein's contemporaries, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound (to take a reference from Daniel Albright's 1997 study, Quantum Poetics). It is amusing and staggering at once to witness how quantum entities-whether with conscious will or subconscious genius-inform Gulzar saab's figures of speech. "Ik baar waqt se lamha gira kahin/ wahan daastan mili, lamha kahin nahin" ("once upon a fickle time, a moment dropped somewhere/ there a legend sprouted its wings, and blurred the moment in air"; Gol Maal, 1979). Heisenberg's uncertainty principle-that is, the limits of human measurements in calculating the momentum and position of subatomic particles simultaneously-is writ large upon this couplet.

# Modi's BJP: Not Just an Inheritance, But a Reinvention

By: Rasheed Kidwai

Having secured a momentous third term with a clearly outlined vision, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's overarching legacy, according to a new book, will be that of transforming his party into an electoral machine, a party that can win elections.

'Indian Renaissance – The Modi Decade' (Westland Books), edited by Aishwarya Pandit, argues that Modi's biggest contribution lies in dismantling a perception that the BJP, being a purely ideological party, had no mass base. "Modi is responsible for making the party and the RSS's ideology palatable to a larger audience, both within and outside the country. The party's ideology, which was seen as unsuited for the push and pulls of national and regional politics, had been a limiting factor to its growth so far. However, Modi has achieved the unthinkable by making the BJP hegemonic, commanding the narrative of elections and development, and ushering in a dynamism into the office of the prime minister that has few parallels across the world," writes



Pandit. In her essay, Pandit, who teaches legal history at Jindal Global Law School, OP Jindal Global University, makes an interesting observation. She notes that each time election results have been announced since 2014, the prime minister has visited the central party headquarters to congratulate and interact with his karyakartas. "His messaging is clear; he is speaking directly to his cadres who form the backbone of the party. Modi has

communicated that the party comes first," Pandit argues. She emphasises this point by describing his visits to the party office: "He reinforces it every time... reminding workers that no matter how complete and stupendous a victory you may achieve, no individual—not even him, despite being the prime minister—is higher than the party. This is the enduring legacy he will leave behind: strengthening not only the party but the belief that the party is

supreme." To substantiate her argument, Pandit cites Modi's 2019 victory speech to party cadres: "We the workers of BJP, our friends in NDA, we dedicate the victory at the feet of the people... Just like what our president said, the crores of BJP workers, their efforts and the purpose—I feel so proud that my party, which I am a part of, is full of generous people... We have to accept the election results with humility. A government is formed with the people's mandate, and we have to work with the spirit of inclusion."

Pandit reminds readers that Modi inherited a BJP with no clear vision, a party unable to recover from the debacle of 2009. The loss had demoralised the cadres—and more so the RSS, which many believe decided to fully back the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, in 2002.

Fighting the battle of perception had been a monumental task for Modi, as the BJP was seen as an ideological party with little to offer beyond expanding its base to urban voters in small towns and capital cities in India.

# Here's Why Jammu Is Seeing An Escalation In Terrorist Activities

By Nazir Masoodi

The Indian Army's 28th Infantry Division was deployed in Kargil following the capture of Siachen by the Army. It was subsequently moved to Kupwara in 1991 as militancy gripped the Valley. Nine years later, Pakistan captured the Kargil heights, leading to the Kargil War.

In his book *Gorkha Hat and Maroon Beret*, Lt Gen Chandra Shekar notes the decision to release the 28th Infantry Division for deployment in the Kashmir Valley. This involved removing dedicated reserves from the Ladakh sector, a necessity that was acutely felt during the Kargil War in May 1999.

A large contingent of troops in Kashmir was redeployed to Kargil, contributing to India's victory in the conflict. The silver jubilee of this victory was observed on July 26.

**How Pakistan Exploited A Gap** However, following the end of the Kargil War, a security gap in the Kashmir Valley allowed Pakistan to deploy highly indoctrinated *fidayeen* (suicide squads), which significantly altered the nature of militancy in the region. The Valley experienced a surge in ruthless attacks, resulting in the deaths of numerous security forces, civilians, and political leaders. This wave of violence was only



mitigated when infiltration was largely halted, thanks to the Army's fencing of the 700 km-long Line of Control and a ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan in 2003.

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Army's fencing of the 700 km-long Line of Control and a ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan in 2003.

In June 2020, after a deadly confrontation between the Indian and Chinese armies in Eastern Ladakh, the Army withdrew one division from the then-peaceful Pir Panjal region (Poonch and Rajouri districts) and redeployed it to Eastern Ladakh. This was part of a massive mobilization to match the number of Chinese troops stationed along the Line of Actual Control. Early this year, the Army was compelled to redeploy a division to the now-troubled Pir Panjal region.

Much like the post-Kargil situation in Kashmir, the security gap in the Pir Panjal region was exploited by handlers in Pakistan. They began pushing highly trained militants, many believed to be Afghan war veterans and ex-Pakistani regulars.

By October 2021, Pakistani militants had entrenched themselves in the forests of Poonch and Rajouri. They launched precise attacks on the army, causing casualties among troops while suffering few or no casualties themselves.

## From Kashmir To Jammu

The spate of deadly attacks has now spread across the Jammu region. Recently, the Army had to

deploy additional troops as districts like Kathua, Udhampur, Reasi, and Doda became as vulnerable as Pir Panjal. The government has also revamped civilian militias, known as Village Defense Guards (VDGs), which now number around 28,000, to defend against terrorist attacks. So, why has the theatre of militancy shifted or expanded from the Valley to Jammu?

While security challenges on India's borders, military engagement, and militancy in Jammu and Kashmir are intertwined, local factors seem to have enabled a shift in militant strategy. Here's why...

During long periods of militancy, the Valley acted as a buffer, insulating the Jammu region and the rest of the country. According to police records, over 20,000 militants have been killed in Kashmir over the last three decades. This includes hundreds of foreign militants from 14 different nationalities, who were pushed into the Valley to sustain the conflict. Effectively, the Valley absorbed these militants and, in the process, suffered greatly.

The buffer in the Valley that once absorbed the brunt of Pakistan-sponsored insurgency has eroded. Pakistan no longer views Kashmiri mainstream leaders as Indian puppets.

# Rahul Gandhi's Lotus Remark: Ignorance, Arrogance or Both?

By: CR Kesavan

Rahul Gandhi, on July 29, attacked the BJP while discussing the Union Budget in the Lok Sabha. Drawing parallels from the Mahabharata, he said that there's an atmosphere of fear in the country, adding that the country is now trapped in a "Chakravayuh of lotus," referring to the BJP symbol.

The Lotus symbolises India's national identity and civilisational heritage. Three of our most honoured civilian awards are called the Padma awards: the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Vibushan. The Lotus flower is embossed in these three Padma medallions. The National Emblem of India, an adaptation of the Lion Capital of Ashoka, stands on a full-bloomed, bell-shaped inverted Lotus. The Lotus features prominently in



the state symbols of deities such as Saraswati, Maharashtra, Haryana, Sikkim, Lakshmi, Padmanabha Swami (Vishnu), and Brahma. The highest attainable rank in our Indian Army is Field Marshall. This insignia carries the wreath of a Lotus. The symbol of revolt for the valiant 1857 Uprising, also known as the First War of Independence, was Lotus and bread.

The Lotus holds a sacrosanct position in Hindu dharma, intrinsically linked with revered

deities such as Saraswati, Lakshmi, Padmanabha Swami (Vishnu), and Brahma. The Bhagavad Gita's essence lies in the concept of Karma Yoga, narrated by Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the Mahabharata. Here, Lord Krishna explains Karma Yoga with a simile of an unattached lotus leaf which, despite being in water, remains unaffected by the water rolling over and around it. Similarly,

Jainism portrays its founders (tirthankaras) on Lotus thrones, highlighting its significance. Rahul Gandhi's statements, disrespectful of the revered Lotus symbol, are a blatant affront to Hindu dharma and other faiths that hold it sacred.

The Lotus by Sarojini Naidu is a fascinating sonnet dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi. Throughout the poem, lotus is used as a metaphor to extol his virtues. Is Rahul Gandhi even aware of this? Did previous Congress governments ever cast aspersions on the Lotus? The National Film Award for Best Feature Film, instituted in 1953, is called the Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus). The Lotus was showcased prominently in the symbol of the 1983 Non-Aligned Movement Summit held in New Delhi. Even the Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskar, instituted in 1987 by the Union Ministry of

Environment and Forests, includes a Silver Lotus trophy. What does Rahul Gandhi have to say about the above? In his blind animosity towards the BJP, and particularly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi has lost his sense of balance. He would do well to recollect that both his father, Rajiv, and great-grandmother, Kamala, had names which meant Lotus. Rahul Gandhi's remarks on the Lotus unequivocally expose his ignorance of our nation's history and parampara. His remarks have denigrated both our nation and its cultural legacy. It is time he conducts himself with more dignity and propriety when speaking in Parliament again, whether as Leader of the Opposition or simply as a Member of Parliament.

# How Russia-Ukraine war crossed into Africa, got 50 Russians butchered

Rebel fighters moved across the sand, their boots crushing through a macabre scene of fallen Russians. This was seen in a video which ended with a man begging for his life. This scene is not from the Russia-Ukraine war. It is from a battle where Russians were solely victims. It's from Northern Mali in Africa, where 50 Russian mercenaries were killed. The Russia-Ukraine war has now crossed over to Africa.

A rebel group fought Russian paramilitaries helping the Malian government in West Africa. Now, reports say that information relayed by Ukraine to the Malian rebel group about the Russian mercenaries got them butchered. The toll of 50 Russians from the Wagner Group is the highest in

recent times outside the Russia-Ukraine theatre of war. What more? The rebels are planning to hand over the 15 captured Russians to Ukraine.

**RUSSIA VS UKRAINE IN AFRICA. TANKS AND TRUCKS CAPTURED**

The Russian mercenaries of the Wagner Group were killed as they were with the Malian government troops on patrol last week near a region where only Jihadi and Tuareg rebel groups have been active for a long time, reports CNN.

Mali has been fighting an Islamist insurgency for years now.

Warner Group, is a private Russian paramilitary group active in Africa. It is a part of what Russia now calls the African Corps. They said they had inflicted heavy

losses on the fighter rebels. It also played an important role in the Russia-Ukraine war, but its future was questioned after the death of its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was killed last August.

A Russian helicopter belonging to the Wagner Group was also destroyed in the battle, along with the capture of tankers and trucks. Nikita Fedyanin, the editor and owner of the Grey Zone Wagner Telegram channel, also died in the attack in Mali, reports The Telegraph of the UK. Fedayin had posted pictures as his last message. It had heavily armed Wagner fighters posing near a burning tree.

A Tuareg rebel group and the al-Qaeda affiliate in the Sahel region, JNIM (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin) has claimed

responsibility for initiating the attack against the Russians.

Around 50 Russians and Malian soldiers have died, claims JNIM. It has also released videos showing dozens of dead bodies in the area. A Tuareg militant group spokesperson told CNN how Malian troops and Russian fighters had been taken hostage during the battle.

According to unofficial Russian telegram channels, around 80 Russians were killed. This is the biggest loss for Russian paramilitaries in the region.

**BIGGEST LOSS TO RUSSIAN PARAMILITARY IN THE REGION**

Russia has used them to challenge the Western influence in the area and in Central Africa.

# The Fight of Trump's Political Life

Those who think about politics and history as a profession can't resist comparing presidential years. "This is 1968 all over again." "We're back to the dynamics of '72." We do this because we know political history and love it, and because there are always parallels and lessons to be learned.

But it should be said as a reminder: This year isn't like any previous time.

This is the year of the sudden, historically disastrous debate, the near-assassination of one of the nominees, the sudden removal of the president from his ticket, the sudden elevation of a vice president her own party had judged a liability, and her suddenly pulling even in a suddenly truncated campaign.

We have never had this year. And it continues to astound.

Kamala Harris just got two excellent weeks in the clear. Donald Trump's campaign had to take her down early or at least hit her hard—and didn't. She has the wind at her back; he's scattered and stuck on the back of his heels. This week she had a good rally in Atlanta; he went before a hostile National Association of Black Journalists, was taken aback by his first questioner's accusatory tone, matched her energy, and revealed, if you didn't know, how cutting and personal the coming months will be.

What is remarkable is how surprised the Trump campaign seems to have been by Ms. Harris. Why? Smart people understood Joe Biden would eventually have to step aside, and she was his most likely replacement. Why have they responded as if shocked? We have a trough of videos of her talking, it's devastating. Where is it? Is that all you'll need to make a coherent case? When are you going to locate the meaning of this thing?

"San Francisco liberal," "way too radical." All that feels tired, the reflex of an aged muscle. It sounds like the 1990s. This isn't the '90s. New ages need new arguments, or at least arguments freshly cast.

Can Mr. Trump shift gears? He grew up, as I did, watching "The Ed Sullivan Show." I'm sure it was on every Sunday night at 8 at the Trump house in Queens. On that show you saw every week the great Borscht Belt comics of 1950-70. Their timing—"Take my wife—please!"—is ingrained in him. What he does now is shtick, because he likes

to entertain and is a performer. The boat's sinking, the battery's spitting, the shark's coming! As Hannibal Lecter said, "I'd love to have you for dinner!" This works so perfectly for those who support him. For everyone else it's just more evidence of psychopathology. He has to freshen up his act. Can he?

Ms. Harris will dominate the coming week with the unveiling of her vice-presidential choice. Then there will be the convention, in which they'll pull out all stops. And then August will be over. Meaning a third of the 100-day campaign will be over. Does Mr. Trump know that he's fighting for his life?

I want to take a quick look at some factors that are major pluses for Ms. Harris.

- She is new. She seems a turning of the page away from Old Old Biden and Old Old Trump. She looks new, like a new era. She displays vigor and the joy of the battle. The mainstream media is on her side. Coverage hasn't been tough or demanding.

On policy she is bold to the point of shameless. This week she essentially said: You know those policies I stood for that you don't like? I changed my mind! Her campaign began blithely disavowing previous stands, with no explanation. From the New York Times's Reid Epstein: "The Harris campaign announced on Friday that the vice president no longer wanted to ban fracking, a significant shift from where she stood four years ago." Campaign officials said she also now supports "increased funding for border enforcement; no longer supported a single-payer health insurance program; and echoed Mr. Biden's call for banning assault weapons but not a requirement to sell them to the federal government." It's remarkable, she's getting away with it, and it's no doubt just the beginning. It will make it harder for the Trump campaign with its devastating videos.

Will the left of her party let her tack toward moderation? Yes. She's what they've got, and in any case people on the wings of both parties have a way of recognizing their own. Progressives aren't protesting her new stands: That's the dog that didn't bark.

- She too is a born performer. She knows what she's doing when she's campaigning. She is less sure of what she's doing when she's governing. But she gets a race. Running for the 2020 Democratic nomination,

she wasn't good at strategy or policy, but the part involving performing and being a public person and speaking with merry conviction—she gets that and is good at it.

- She is beautiful. You can't take a bad picture of her. Her beauty, plus the social warmth that all who have known her over the years speak of, combines to produce: radiance. It is foolish to make believe this doesn't matter. Politicians themselves are certain it matters, which is why so many in that male-dominated profession have taken to Botox, fillers, dermabrasion, face lifts, all the cosmetic things. Because they're in a cosmetic profession.

- She has a wave of pent-up support behind her. By November we'll know if something big happened. Barack Obama deliberately, painstakingly put new constituencies together. He created a movement. It had fervor and energy. What we may see this year is something different—that a movement created Kamala Harris. That is, the old constituencies held, maintained fervor and rose again when Mr. Biden stepped aside and Ms. Harris was put on top. I'm not sure we've seen that before.

She has many particular challenges. One is this: When you see Mr. Trump, that's Trump. He is what you think he is. He doesn't hide much. You look at him and think (pro or con), OK, I get it, I know who that guy is. When you see Ms. Harris, is that Harris? Is what she is showing you her? You wonder, "Is this real and genuine?" I wonder how she'll address that or answer it.

Another: She stumbles in interviews. Will she try to get away with not doing any?

Another: People will continue to wonder how liberal she is, and how strong she is, but I think an equally or more important question will be how serious she is. Does she think seriously, deeply, soberly? I haven't seen her betray this tendency. Mr. Obama was a serious man, Hillary Clinton was fully understood as a serious woman. (That's why her campaign could produce and she could capitalize on the famous "3 a.m. phone call" ad.) Is Ms. Harris? Is she a credible commander of the U.S. nuclear arsenal?

Some will respond, "But Donald Trump isn't serious!" My answer would be: That's why he lost the popular vote twice. If Democrats lose the popular vote, they almost certainly lose the election.

# SUV driver denied bail in Delhi coaching centre deaths: 'He was warned, didn't heed'

A Delhi court on Wednesday rejected the bail plea of an SUV driver accused of driving his vehicle through a flooded road in front of an IAS coaching centre in Old Rajinder Nagar, causing the water to swell and breach the gates of the building. The sudden flooding of the institute led to the death of three students on July 27. The court noted that the allegations against the accused Manuj Kathuria are "serious in nature" and observed that the CCTV footage shows he was "warned of the dangers ahead by some passers-by, but he did not pay any heed".

The court further observed that the accused can be seen driving the vehicle at high speed on an already heavily waterlogged road, causing a large displacement of water, which entered the basement and "resulted in the loss of innocent lives". Bail pleas of the four co-owners --Tejinder Singh, Parvinder Singh, Harvinder Singh, and Sarabjeet Singh-- have also been rejected by the court.

The court also noted that the basement of the building was unauthorisedly used for commercial purposes, in violation of building norms. "Lease deed dated 05.06.2022 executed between them and the alleged coaching institute shows that the leased premises were being used for commercial purposes contrary to the conditions of the completion cum occupancy certificate issued by the North Delhi Municipal Corporation in complete violation of law," the court said.

On Sunday, a magisterial court had Rau's IAS Study Circle owner Abhishek Gupta and coordinator Deshpal Singh to 14 days in judicial custody.

The three civil service aspirants-- Shreya Yadav (25) from Uttar Pradesh, Tanya Soni (25) from Telangana, and Nevin Delvin (24) from Kerala--died on July 27 when the basement of their coaching centre flooded amid heavy rain. The incident has stirred massive uproar, with people questioning the institute's flouting of norms and the authorities' failure to ensure proper enforcement of laws.

# Puja Khedkar's candidature cancelled by UPSC, barred from future exams

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Wednesday cancelled the provisional candidature of controversial trainee IAS officer Puja Khedkar and barred her permanently from appearing in all future exams conducted by the commission, officials said.

Puja Khedkar is accused of misusing the disability and Other Backward Class (non-creamy layer) quotas to secure her candidature in the civil services exam. The announcement by UPSC comes after a detailed review of Puja Khedkar's eligibility and the circumstances surrounding her application. The commission found her guilty of violating the rules of Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2022. "UPSC has examined the available records carefully and found her guilty of acting in contravention of the provisions of the CSE-2022 Rules. Her provisional candidature for the CSE-2022 has been cancelled and she has also been debarred permanently from all the future Examinations/Selections of the UPSC," an official statement by UPSC read.

The UPSC panel, in its statement, also highlighted that a Show Cause Notice (SCN) was issued to Puja Khedkar on July 18 for fraudulently availing attempts beyond the permissible limit provided for in the examination rules by "faking her identity". However, the deadline was later extended by July 30 and the commission made it clear that it was the "final opportunity" and "no further extension in time" would be allowed. "Despite the extension in time allowed to her, she failed to submit her explanation within the prescribed time," the panel said.

Puja Khedkar was booked by the Delhi Police Crime Branch for misusing the disability and Other Backward Class (non-creamy layer) quotas to secure her candidature in the civil services exam. A team led by the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) level of the Crime Branch was tasked to collect the documents from various government departments.

A case under section 420 (cheating), 464 (making a document in the name of a fictitious person), 465 (forgery) and 471 (passing off a forged document as genuine) of IPC and under sections 89 and 91 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and 66D of the Information Technology Act was registered against her.

The 2023-batch IAS officer, previously serving as a probationary assistant collector at the Pune district collectorate, was transferred to Washim from Pune earlier this month amid allegations that she misrepresented herself under the physical disabilities category. During her tenure in Pune, Puja Khedkar allegedly misused her power and privileges by demanding perks and facilities she was not entitled to. Even her mother, Manorama Khedkar, is currently in judicial custody in a criminal case linked to a land dispute.

# Kamala Harris narrows down on seven candidates in hunt for running mate

The list of potential candidates to run alongside Kamala Harris, the presumptive Democratic US presidential nominee, has narrowed down to seven likely picks. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer are both out of the running mate list. The decision has gained major attention since Vice-President Harris became the leading Democratic candidate for the November election, following President Joe Biden's decision to end his White House bid for re-election just over a week ago. Harris, who has been serving as the first female, first Black, and first South Asian vice president since 2021, is considering vice-presidential nominees to balance her ticket and appeal to a wider section of voters. According to Reuters, she is weighing a list of mostly white, male candidates. On Monday, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, who is in



his second term, said he won't seek the vice-presidential role in Harris' campaign. "I strongly support Vice-President Harris' campaign for President. I know she's going to win and I was honoured to be considered for this role," Cooper wrote on X.

"This just wasn't the right time for North Carolina and for me to potentially be on a national ticket. As I've said from the beginning, she has an outstanding list of people from which to choose, and we'll all work to make sure she wins," he added. Also on Monday, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer said on CBS Mornings that she was "not a part of the vetting" process to be a running mate. "I have communicated with everyone, including the people of Michigan, that I'm going to stay as governor until the end of my term at the end of 2026," she said, reported Reuters. Harris took a break from campaigning this weekend to have private talks with several potential running mates, including Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, according to two sources, reported Reuters. Other candidates being considered are Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, Governor JB Pritzker, US Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, Governor Gavin Newsom and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg.

# How two Israeli enemies were bumped off within 12 hours

Two high-level killings of Iran-allied militant commanders in the space of just 12 hours have raised concerns that the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza could quickly turn into a wider regional conflict in the Middle East. Experts said the killing of Hamas's top leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran's capital Tehran and Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in Lebanon's capital Beirut was Israel's attempt to show it can get anyone, anywhere, Reuters reported. Israel has denied any role in Haniyeh's killing, even though it has claimed responsibility for the airstrike in Beirut that killed Fuad Shukr. However, a US official told CBS News that it believed both Haniyeh and Shukr were killed in Israeli strikes.

Israel had promised to eliminate all Hamas leaders in the wake of the October 7 attack by the Palestinian outfit. In fact, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu had publicly said that he had instructed intelligence agency Mossad to act against "Hamas leaders wherever they are". While Haniyeh was more of a moderate face in Hamas and did not have a direct role in the October 7 attack, Israel believed the action had his blessings. The fears of a broader escalation in the Middle East are not completely unfounded. Haniyeh's killing isn't just a massive blow for Hamas, but also a big loss of face for Iran, Israel's arch enemy. Haniyeh was killed in Tehran a day after Iran attempted to show off its alliance with powerful regional militias at the inauguration ceremony of its President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Not only representatives of Hamas, but top leaders from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Yemen's Houthis and Lebanon's Hezbollah gathered in Tehran amid chants

of "Death to Israel", the Washington Post reported.

But even before the sun rose the next day, Haniyeh was killed at 2 am in an airstrike on his Tehran residence. Hamas said an "Israeli" raid killed Haniyeh and its military wing vowed to "take the battle to new dimensions".

Iran has also threatened retaliation, with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei saying that retribution for the killing of Haniyeh was "Tehran's duty".

**HEZBOLLAH COMMANDER KILLED IN AIRSTRIKE HOURS AGO**

Haniyeh's killing came hours after the Israeli military said it had killed top Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in an airstrike in Beirut.

Fuad Shukr, believed to be a close aide of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, has been in the crosshairs of Israel and the United States for a long time.

However, the latest provocation was a drone strike, purportedly by Hezbollah, that killed 12 children in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. This was the highest number of civilian casualties in Israeli territory since Hezbollah started firing missiles towards the country on October 8, 2023. Hezbollah, which has demanded a ceasefire in Gaza, has supported Hamas by firing missiles and mortars into northern Israel.

Shukr was also wanted by America for his role in the 1983 bombing of a US Marines barracks in Beirut. The US has announced a reward of \$5 million for information about him and his whereabouts.

Most of Hamas's senior leaders are still believed to be in Gaza, including Yahya Sinwar, the outfit's top commander who masterminded the October 7 attack on Israel.

## Why Are Our Cities Crumbling Under Just 30mm Of Rain?

Three UPSC aspirants, Nevin Dalvin, Tanya Soni, and Shreya Yadav, met a tragic end as they drowned in the flooded basement of Rau's Coaching Centre in Old Rajinder Nagar in Delhi. Just days before that, Nilesh Rai, returning to his paying guest accommodation in South Patel Nagar, was electrocuted while crossing a waterlogged lane. These tragedies are not confined to Delhi; in Maharashtra, torrential rains have claimed six lives, injured 12, and submerged countless homes. Our cities are paralysed by a mere 30mm of rain. The death of these young aspirants is a stark reminder of failure at multiple levels.

### No Herculean Challenge

However, most of the administrative lapses that have led us here cannot be attributed to 'complexity'. For instance, the failure to properly maintain storm drains is a manageable challenge compared to other municipal responsibilities. Ensuring that libraries are appropriately situated and that classes are not conducted in the basements of buildings is a straightforward task. Likewise, the enforcement of mandatory fire safety equipment in every building is not a herculean undertaking.

These are basic, fundamental duties that should be executed with precision and diligence. When local governments falter in these areas, it is not due to the inherent complexity of their roles, but rather a blatant disregard for the safety and well-being of the community. Such failures are inexcusable and reflect a dire need for accountability and reform within local governance structures.

### The Local Bureaucracy

Apart from the political leadership, one

should also blame local bureaucracy. A lot has been written about corruption. But one should talk about bureaucratic inaction too. Inaction can be theoretically classified as a form of corruption, particularly within municipal bodies, when it involves the deliberate neglect of duties for personal or political reasons. This concept aligns with the broader definition of corruption provided by Rose-Ackerman (1999) and Klitgaard (1988), who emphasise the misuse of public power for private benefit. Municipal bodies are entrusted with the responsibility of delivering essential services like waste management, water supply, and infrastructure maintenance. When officials fail to enforce laws, overlook malpractices or neglect these crucial services, they engage in "passive corruption". This form of corruption is characterised by non-action that benefits a select few at the expense of the public good (Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2002). Passive corruption within municipal bodies can manifest in various ways, including the failure to address illegal constructions, ignoring health and safety violations, or not maintaining public infrastructure. These actions, or lack thereof, disrupt the equitable distribution of resources and erode institutional integrity by allowing inefficiency and injustice to persist unchallenged (Jain, 2001). Both commission and omission can undermine governance and public trust (Treisman, 2000). In the context of municipal bodies, passive corruption not only hampers service delivery but also perpetuates a cycle of neglect and inefficiency that can have long-term detrimental effects on urban development and public welfare.

### Corruption Goes Both Ways

Corruption is a two-way street, driven by both demand and supply. It often manifests as bribery, where officials use their power to enforce or overlook regulations in exchange for financial or other incentives from businesses or individuals seeking advantages. This mutual participation creates a self-reinforcing cycle, normalising corruption and compelling even honest actors to engage in such practices. Enough has been written about how there is a need for transparency and accountability, enforcing strict penalties for both givers and takers of bribes, encouraging whistleblowing, streamlining regulations, and promoting ethical practices within the private sector. However, this is not enough.

One way to deal with corruption, inaction and non-enforcement is to introduce punitive damages and the law of torts in India. Introducing punitive damages, fundamental to legal structures across many developed and developing nations alike, serves as a formidable deterrent against wrongdoings and a means to uphold justice and accountability. Levied over and above the actual damages incurred by victims, they are regularly imposed in cases of egregious negligence. Nations like the US, China, Australia, Canada, and the UK utilise this legal provision, reinforcing accountability. In stark contrast, India presents a sorry picture. The concept of punitive damages remains relatively alien to Indian jurisprudence, which has conventionally been inclined towards compensatory damages that are mostly symbolic. They are touted to cover the victim's actual loss. The absence of a comprehensive law of torts in India, coupled with an inconsistent pattern of ruling on damages

alone, muddies the waters.

### Punishment As A Deterrent

Such legislation would ensure that parties, including government entities, are held accountable for negligent actions. Establishing a comprehensive law of torts would amplify expectations of civic responsibility and foster greater trust in the legal mechanisms that safeguard society. Inconsistent rulings on punitive damages by Indian courts in major incidents, such as the Uphaar Cinema tragedy and the Morbi Bridge collapse, highlight a significant legal incongruity. The disparity in rulings, coupled with an absence of clear legislative guidance, creates a perplexing precedent and underscores the pressing need for a standardised law of torts in India. Such a law would streamline the legal landscape, providing a consistent approach to all civil wrongs, leading to better risk management and efficient use of resources. Its deterrent effect, discouraging negligence and rash public behaviour, fosters safer practices in various sectors. It also champions fairness, equalising power dynamics between individuals and influential entities. Unfortunately, this law never made its way to India's legal system. Despite the British introduction of common law in the 18th century and the comprehensive codification of criminal, commercial, and procedural laws by 1882, tort law remained uncoded, standing as the only major field without a legal framework. The Fourth Law Commission in 1879 emphasised the importance of implementing tort law in India, leading Frederick Pollock to draft a Law of Torts for India in 1886. However, this draft never progressed to legislative action.

# Kamala Harris Collapsed in 2020. Here's How to Avoid a Repeat.

*The vice president's shaky 2020 presidential run tarnished her image. She'll need to sharpen her message and clean up her org chart this time.*

Kamala Harris launched her first presidential campaign five years ago to great expectations. She had a growing profile as a no-nonsense interrogator in the Senate, heavyweight support from Hollywood to Wall Street and the raw talent of a once-in-a-generation leader. Harris' admirers — not to mention aides and members of her inner circle — detest the mere thought of that painful time. She's been vice president for four years, they say, standing in for President Joe Biden around the world and becoming the party's preeminent voice on abortion rights. She's confident, they contend, and battle-tested. The Kamala Harris of 2024 is light-years better than the Harris of 2019.

But the searing experience remains an indelible stain on her image, even after the 59-year-old Democrat spent the last half-decade steadily improving on the biggest stage imaginable. Her near-perfect introduction as the Democrats' standard-bearer is a testament to the hard work she's put in. But Harris has never dealt with an opponent as ferocious as former President Donald Trump. He'll seize on any perceived weakness and attack every vulnerability.

That means she needs to figure out how to neutralize her exposure on the border and immigration. Harris will need a crisp answer when talking about stubbornly high inflation. She must stem the slow-rolling erosion of the Democratic coalition that occurred on Biden's watch and energize young voters, Latinos and other voters of color while holding Biden's white working-class support across the industrial Midwestern battleground states. As a woman of color, she has to worry about calibrating her approach in ways that may seem unfair, and, at times, limiting. She has a momentous decision to make — her own vice presidential pick — and very little time to make it. In short, there is no margin for the kind of errors that plagued her first presidential

bid.

To do all these things, and win the 100-day sprint to Election Day, she'll need to bury the ghosts of that first bid. Here's how she can do it: The multi-headed structure Harris installed atop her 2020 campaign was a disaster. It was chaotic, creating choke points that nearly ground the operation to a halt. Decisions took forever to make, advisers struggled to put a check on her family's influence and it radiated uncertainty and dysfunction across her organization. It wasn't a new dynamic for her. The first year in each of her elected offices had been marked by a failure to settle on a solid organizational structure and an inability to find her own footing within it.

Like many high-achieving elected officials, she's a demanding boss who puts top aides through the paces and expects the same level of preparation and focus down the chain of command. And when she's made mistakes, it has rippled downstream to everyone's detriment, including in the vice president's office, where her first year was rocky. Since then, Harris has become more grounded. She found a solid core of advisers. She's tapped into her network of former aides and advisers for outside advice, even before taking over as the de facto nominee.

But she'll need to rely on — and trust — the plug-and-play aspect of Biden's campaign apparatus. In a compressed, three-month timeline, maintaining continuity, carefully integrating Wilmington and Harris world and ensuring an effective transition is essential to exorcising the organizational demons of 2020. So is having a campaign organization marked by clear lines of authority and responsibility. Harris tripped herself up in 2019 by straying too far from what was then her political North Star: crafting an image as a tough-minded and empathetic prosecutor.

In the run-up to the Democratic primaries, Harris allowed

“Kamala is a cop” critiques from activists and members of her own party to get inside her head. While Harris was progressive by the standards of her era in law enforcement, she was nowhere near as permissive as today's crop of liberal district attorneys. Still, she readily submitted to the left's endless purity tests, and backtracked on key pieces of her record as a prosecutor and attorney general. In doing so, she undermined what Harris and her closest advisers viewed as one of her greatest strengths: her career-long commitment to pursuing justice through the legal system. The act of creating a policy platform on the fly while simultaneously trying to prove her ideological bona fides yanked her further left and outside her comfort zone. At different moments in the primary, you could almost see her calculating answers in real time during TV interviews, which had the effect of making her appear wishy-washy.

Harris won't need to worry about liberal carping about her prosecutorial background anymore. It may have been a liability in a Democratic presidential primary, but in a general election, it's more likely to be an asset. And whereas she once struggled to articulate her views on broader issues like health care, she now can largely rely on the policy framework created under the Biden-Harris administration.

At the moment, Trump is throwing everything he has at Harris to see what sticks. It's no coincidence he's toggled between using two nicknames for Harris: Lyin' Kamala (with her first name pronounced incorrectly), and Laffin' Kamala. The latter, a nod to the wave of videos that capture Harris' big, full-bodied laugh, is designed to paint her as unserious and phony.

Her ability to fend off those attacks may hinge on her ability to confidently return to her tough, pragmatic prosecutor motif, the space where she is most at

ease. She's already moving in that direction. “As attorney general of California, I took on the big Wall Street banks and held them accountable for fraud,” she said in Wisconsin last week. “Donald Trump was just found guilty of fraud on 34 counts.” The act of creating a policy platform on the fly while simultaneously trying to prove her ideological bona fides yanked her further left and outside her comfort zone. At different moments in the primary, you could almost see her calculating answers in real time during TV interviews, which had the effect of making her appear wishy-washy.

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**Consistency of Message**  
One of the most serious flaws of

Harris' 2020 bid was the inability of the messenger to settle on a consistent, coherent and compelling message.

In large part, that was a function of her attempts to break out of a crowded primary field. Biden occupied the moderate path, promoting narrow, incremental change. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, who proposed more sweeping initiatives, crashed in a pile-up on the left. Others sought to establish themselves as candidates of generational change, laying out competing versions of the Democratic future — the mensa vibes of Pete Buttigieg, the Gen-X mystique of Beto O'Rourke, the spirituality of Cory Booker. Harris wasn't any of that.

By the time she pivoted to her “3 a.m. Agenda,” a late-stage phase of her run that purported to address issues that kept voters up at night, much of the party had already moved on. Now that she's about to be handed the Democratic nomination, Harris doesn't need to compete for eyeballs against a massive field of serious competitors. She's free to focus on a straightforward mission.

It won't be enough for Harris to just be the anti-Trump candidate. Her task will be laying waste to Trump while also articulating a forward-looking vision of a brighter future.

Balancing those ideas and integrating them into a cohesive message won't be easy. But Harris has already gotten started, showing a zeal for attack in her characterization of Trump as a fraudster and an abuser of women while wrapping her campaign around the theme of fighting for the middle class.

It's worth remembering that Harris also had a wildly successful presidential campaign rollout in 2019. Things went downhill after that. This time around, she's far better prepared. There isn't a lot of time to get it right, but she has the advantage of a clear enemy, an inherited campaign structure and a well-defined objective.

# UK 'Kicking' Incident: The 'Civilised' West Must Do Some Soul-Searching

Syed Zubair Ahmed

Earlier this week, a disturbing video emerged from the UK, in which a young Asian boy could be seen being kicked and punched while he lay defenceless on the floor of Manchester Airport. Most reports said that three Greater Manchester police officers were first assaulted - one of whom was left with a broken nose - and that this led to the police response. One officer has been suspended after the incident - which, by the way, the right-wing Reform Party took no time in politicising as it praised the police action.

No national outrage followed the incident, barring some feeble debate about the alleged police brutality. Had a similar act been committed by an Indian police officer, the Western media would likely have judged the entire police force, emphasising India's poor human rights records.

Akhmed Yakoob, the lawyer for the Asian boy, described it as police brutality against people from BAME (British Asian and minority ethnic) backgrounds. A few people took to streets to protest the police action as the incident reminded them of the George Floyd assault in 2020, which spurred the Black Lives Matter movement across the West.

Racism, discrimination, and misogyny within Britain's police forces are pervasive. Last year, after a year-long official review of London's Met Police, reviewer Baroness Casey stated, "the force suffers from institutional racism, misogyny, and homophobia", further adding that "it was time for the force not to be in denial about these deep-rooted issues".

## The Many Types Of Racism

Racism is not a feature limited to the police forces alone in the UK. Several recent official reports have highlighted racism in some premier British institutions, including the BBC, the armed forces, and various government offices. All of these are controlled primarily by White males. For non-Whites, reaching top positions in these institutions is next to impossible, and if at all that happens, it's mostly just tokenism. Greg Dyke, former director-general of the BBC, famously said in 2001 that the media house was "hideously White", highlighting the lack of diversity within its workforce at the time. His comment sparked a broader conversation about the representation of ethnic minorities in British media and other institutions. True, some improvements have been made since then, but not a lot.

There is overt racism too, which comes



alive during the 10 months of the football season (August-May) across Europe. I am a football fanatic and an avid follower of European club football; not only have I witnessed racism first-hand in and outside stadiums, but I have also been at the receiving end of it. After being called a "Paki" or a "chutney" on occasion, I now prefer to watch matches on TV.

Even so, there is little guarantee you will be spared because you are watching the match in the company of your White mates. But even as I say so, I've managed to escape the worst of racism. Think of those Black players who suffer humiliation and inhuman treatment from fans of rival teams on a daily basis. Some call them "monkeys", and throw bananas at them.

## Colonialism, Slavery and Subjugation

White, western racism has persisted for decades, even centuries. The Western hemisphere calls itself 'civilised', a notion perpetuated by media, writers, academics and leaders, who position themselves as champions of bringing 'civilisation' to third-world countries. One form of that 'civilising' role was donned by religious missionaries long ago, who believed the people outside of Christendom needed to be "led to the right path".

Historical figures like Rudyard Kipling and Winston Churchill have espoused these ideas. The former's *The White Man's Burden* promoted this self-espoused 'colonial duty' to civilise colonised societies. Churchill once said, "I do not admit for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia... by the fact that a stronger race, a higher grade race... has come

in and taken their place." Churchill, who is seen in India as racist and imperialist, is Britain's - more specifically England's national hero.

More recently, Viktor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary, said in 2019, "We are the guardians of a civilisation that has been developed over millennia... We are the ones who have built the modern world, who have built the West, who have built the European Union. We are the ones who have written the rulebook of the world." The statement does not only reflect Hungarian Prime Minister's arrogance but also exposes him as an ignorant fool. Sadly, this arrogance is endemic in the West.

## Western Hypocrisy

In this same context, the speech made by US President George W. Bush in November 2003 during his official visit to London was interesting. "The United States and Great Britain share a mission: to bring the values of freedom and democracy to the world... We will not be deterred. We will not be defeated. We will bring freedom and civilisation to the world," he said.

Bush's comments came several months after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The two "civilised" nations, the US and the UK, had invaded a faraway country to civilise its people by implanting democracy there and imparting Western values. However, getting rid of weapons of mass destruction was the rationale presented to the world. The entire Western media jumped on to the 'civilising' narrative, completely disregarding their duty to question the real reason behind the invasion. Ultimately, no weapons of mass destruction were found. It was all a pack of lies, spread by the "most civilised country in the world".

## 'The Greatest, The Most Powerful'

Who can forget the gaffe by President Donald Trump - the commander in chief of the world's deadliest military force and the President of the most powerful country - when he mistakenly claimed to have met the "President of the Virgin Islands", not realising it was a U.S. territory? How can we expect Trump to know about the ancient civilisations of India, China, Syria and Egypt, when he isn't sure of the geography of his own country? And yet, Trump once confidently stated in 2017, "We are the greatest country in the world. If you think about it, we are the greatest. We're the greatest because of our values, because of our principles, because of our Constitution, because of our system of government, because of our economic system. We're the greatest because we're a beacon of hope for the rest of the world."

The West's superiority complex and its fervid need to civilise others continue to shape attitudes and policies. The challenge is to recognise and dismantle these deep-seated prejudices. While Tuesday's incident at Manchester Airport may not have the severity of some past events, it still is an example of systemic racism and the West's inflated self-image poisoning institutions. These issues require continuous scrutiny and action to foster a more equitable society. Indeed, several laws have been passed in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, and things have got better compared to where we stood in the 20th century. But legislation is barely enough. One needs to change the mindset, right from schools and police forces to media houses and private institutions.

# New Zealand woman jailed after 53-kg 'severely overfed' pet dog's death

**The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals described Nuggi as "one of the most obese animals we've ever encountered." The dog was so overweight that it could barely walk and suffered from severe health complications.**

(News Agency)-A woman in New Zealand has been sentenced to two months in prison after her severely obese dog died. The dog, named Nuggi, weighed a staggering 53 kg when rescued by authorities in 2021.

According to a Newsweek report, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) said Nuggi was in such a critical condition that it could barely walk 10 metres without stopping to catch his breath. Its legs were visibly buckling under his immense weight.

The dog was removed from his owner's home, where multiple dogs were found, and placed in the care of the SPCA. A veterinarian who examined the dog concluded that the excessive weight caused severe long-term discomfort and distress. It is reported that the owner fed Nuggi up to 10 pieces of chicken a day,



in addition to dog biscuits, and failed to provide it with adequate exercise. Despite losing nearly 9 kg in two months, Nuggi died from a liver haemorrhage. An autopsy revealed underlying health issues including liver

disease and Cushing's disease.

SPCA chief executive Todd Westwood described Nuggi as "one of the most obese animals we've ever encountered." He stated that the dog was clearly suffering due to severe overfeeding and lack of exercise.

Instead of seeking help or fixing the dog's diet and lifestyle, Nuggi's owner continued to overfeed it until it could barely walk, he said.

The owner pleaded guilty to neglecting the dog's physical, health, and behavioural needs and was sentenced in the Manukau District Court. In addition to jail time, she was fined NZ\$1,222 (Rs 60,313 approximately) and banned from owning dogs for a year.

## Mexican drug kingpin El Chapo's son pleads not guilty to drug charges in US

(News Agency)-The son of the former Sinaloa drug cartel leader Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman pleaded not guilty Tuesday to a raft of charges linked to one of the world's biggest illicit narcotics operations, prosecutors said.

Joaquin Guzman Lopez was arrested in a scheme allegedly orchestrated by Washington without the involvement of Mexico, in which he was detained in Texas last Thursday.

The judge in the case denied bail and remanded him in custody, ordering a case management hearing for September 30, the assistant US Attorney's office said in a statement to AFP. Many of the details of the arrest operation, in which co-founder of the cartel Ismael Zambada

Garcia, known as "El Mayo," was also taken into US custody, remain murky. US media have quoted law enforcement sources as saying that Zambada was unwittingly lured across the Mexico border by Guzman Lopez, one of "El Chapo's" four sons. According to a US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) report released in May, the sons were engaged in an "internal battle" against Zambada, their father's former partner. Guzman Lopez was indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of drug trafficking, money laundering and weapons charges, according to court documents previously released by prosecutors.

Broadcaster CNN reported that Guzman

Lopez's lawyer, Jeffrey Lichtman, told reporters his client faces the death penalty in the case. Lichtman did not return an AFP request for comment. There was "no agreement between Joaquin Guzman and the government. Period," Lichtman told reporters in Chicago. Zambada's lawyer, Frank Perez, has maintained since Sunday that his client was "kidnapped" and taken to the United States against his



will. Zambada pleaded not guilty on Friday to drug trafficking and money laundering charges before a federal judge in Texas, and has another court appearance scheduled for Thursday in El Paso. Guzman Lopez, aged in his 30s, is among the sons of "El Chapo" known collectively as "Los Chapitos," or "The Little Chapos." "El Chapo" was convicted of drug charges in New York in 2019 and is serving a life sentence in a maximum security prison. DEA chief Anne Milgram said Zambada's arrest "strikes at the heart of the cartel that is responsible for the majority of drugs, including fentanyl and methamphetamine, killing Americans from coast to coast."

## US denies involvement in Hamas leader's killing: 'We were not aware'



(News Agency)-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday the United States was not involved in the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, and reiterated the importance of a ceasefire in Gaza. "This is something we were not aware of or involved in. It's very hard to speculate," Blinken said in an interview with Channel News Asia during a visit to Singapore. Iran's Revolutionary Guards confirmed Haniyeh's death, hours after he attended a swearing-in ceremony for the country's new president. Haniyeh, who leads the Palestinian group and is normally based in Qatar, has been the face of Hamas's international diplomacy as the war set off by the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7 has raged in Gaza. "I've



learned over many years never to speculate on the impact one event may have on something else," Blinken said when asked what impact Haniyeh's death might have on the war. The assassination, less than 24 hours after Israel claimed to have killed a Hezbollah commander it said was behind a deadly strike in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, could be a major setback for chances of a ceasefire agreement in the 10-month-old war. Blinken, who has been in Asia since late last week, said a ceasefire and the release of hostages being held in Gaza was crucial and the United States would do everything to make that happen. It's vitally important to hopefully put things on a better path for more enduring peace and more enduring security, so that focus remains."



# Gulf nations 'concerned' over behaviour of Pakistani expats

(News Agency)-A number of Gulf nations, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, have raised grave concerns over the conduct of Pakistani expatriates and the labour force, a report by Geo News stated.

The matter was raised by Secretary Overseas Pakistanis Dr Arshad Mahmood at a Senate Standing Committee meeting in Islamabad on Overseas Pakistanis, where he said that a number of Gulf countries have voiced reservations about the behaviour of overseas Pakistanis. Dr Arshad added that Pakistanis' work ethics, work attitudes, and criminal activities are big issues. In the UAE, they said, Pakistanis are involved in 50 per cent of crimes, as communicated by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. He said that a rather concerning issue has been raised by these countries pointing at the "inappropriate" behaviour of Pakistanis in the UAE, including them making videos in front of women in Dubai.

Kuwait has raised an issue concerning Pakistani nurses, who are reportedly



refusing to perform certain job-related duties and instead put the onus on ward boys for regular day-to-day activities. Moreover, they do not try and learn the local language, but also want to go to Europe after only a six-month stay in the country.

Meanwhile, Qatar, as per the officials of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, complained about Pakistani labourers

refusing to wear safety helmets during work. Earlier in September 2023, officials had said that Pakistani beggars travel to countries like Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the pretext of 'Ziarat' (pilgrimage) and then indulge in begging-related activities.

As per official data, Pakistani nationals accounted for 90 per cent of beggars arrested in these countries.

Furthermore, the officials added that

around 2 million Pakistanis are living in Saudi Arabia and 400,000 move to the country every year.

Meanwhile, the Saudi Arabian authorities, the officials said, have asked Pakistanis not to send "beggars and sick people".

The officials said that Pakistanis visit Malaysia for a year, and are then sent to jail after they extend their stay there.

Meanwhile, Senator Nasir Abbas also apprised the forum that in Iraq, Pakistanis are "helpless" as they get hired as cheap labour, adding that they are kept as "prisoners" there.

The ministry noted that these nations are now looking towards African nations for even cheaper labour.

To counter this adverse situation regarding the future of the Pakistani labour force in GCC countries, the officials said that the ministry is compiling data regarding job availability and opportunities in various countries.

A cabinet committee has been set up under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif regarding matters related to immigration, they said.

## *Pakistan has laid a trap for itself in Gwadar — by letting conspiracy theories dictate policy*

(News Agency)-From his palace balcony, the Sultan of Muscat and Oman watched his slaves swim in the pool below, amusing himself by occasionally shooting at the fish near their bodies. Tiring sometimes of this murderous entertainment, a visiting correspondent recorded, Sheikh Said bin Taimur passed the time by sexually assaulting young girls and torturing his servants. Educated at Mayo College in Ajmer, and a habitué of London's Dorchester Hotel, Taimur ensured his people remained backward. In 1970, the sultanate had 75 per cent infant mortality and 5 per cent literacy. Together with magazines and books, spectacles were banned, to make sure.

Late in 1957, a top-secret letter arrived in London, warning Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that Taimur was taking time between rape, torture, and murder to design a plan that would mean war. A covert defence treaty that would see the coastal enclave of Gwadar handed over to India.

Ethnic Baloch crime cartels, the four-page intelligence dossier annexed to Prime Minister Huseyn Suhrawardy's now-declassified letter alleged, were conspiring with "Indian Hindus and Arab smugglers" to ruin Pakistan. Taimur allowed Gwadar cartels to flood Karachi with smuggled gold and consumer goods, hollowing out the value of the Pakistani rupee. Employees of Pakistani origin were being "replaced by Madrassi and Gujerati Hindus". An Indian diplomat was soon to be appointed

Gwadar's governor. Throughly half-baked," foreign secretary Mirza Osman Ali Baig privately admitted when he was confronted about the intelligence reports. "He knew this was nonsense," the United Kingdom's High Commissioner in Karachi, Morrice James, recorded. The country's top leadership, though, went along with the spies' lies—with consequences that are still working to



push Pakistan deeper into the abyss. For weeks now, Pakistani troops have been facing off against protestors in Gwadar, who are demanding accountability for the thousands of extra-judicial killings and disappearances that have taken place during Pakistan's long counter-insurgency in Balochistan. Led by the activist Mahrang Baloch, the protestors have also been demanding Gwadar residents receive equitable compensation for China-funded development projects. Like they did in 1957, Pakistani officials have been hinting the protestors are tied to a pro-India plot, run

by the Research and Analysis Wing. Though R&AW would be guilty of incompetence if it didn't have ties with Baloch rebels, there's little evidence that India is fuelling the deep political anger in the province. The maniacal conspiratorialism of Pakistan's intelligence services is once again pushing the country's leadership to make disastrous missteps.

A land without borders "Gwadur has failed to kill Lieutenant Mockler for four years," wrote colonial General Charles McGregor when he arrived in the village on New Year's Day in 1887. "So of course that officer praises it." "The only materials for a landscape," the General complained, "are a glaring, glittering, glabrous sea for a background, a shining, sandy plain for mid-distance, and bare volcanic hills for the background." Then, he reflected: "There is no man so bad that some woman won't speak up for him, and no place so bad on this earth that someone won't speak up for it." The many peoples who lived along the Makran coast inhabited a world without frontiers: Traffickers and traders, pirates and fishermen, mercenaries and defeated rebels all coexisted. From

the coastal villages, small vessels carried fish, wool, weapons, mercenaries and slaves to great ports like Hormuz and Muscat.

Luís de Almeida, the Portuguese naval admiral, burned down homes and ships in Pasni and Gwadar in 1581 to punish villagers who supported pirate raids on his fleet, historian Willem Floor records—but the region just didn't generate enough revenue for empires to spend money occupying it.

Folk epics of the Baloch describe heroic resistance against the Portuguese, led by the chieftain Mir Hammal Jiand. "In mourning for Mir Hammal," the historian Sabir Badal Khan writes, "Baloch women still do not wash their heads or comb their hair on Saturdays."

Then, in 1784, Sultan bin Ahmad al-Bu'Saidi fled to Makran after a failed coup directed at his father's rule over Muscat. The rebel prince was granted the jagir, or land grant, of Gwadar, gaining permission to gather half its revenues from Nasir Ahmad, the Khan of the Baloch kingdom of Kalat. The jagir might have been intended to be temporary, but a string of Omani forts manned with mercenaries made it permanent. For much of the 19th century, the Persian empire and imperial Britain became locked in a struggle for power with Kalat, local chiefs and Gwadar's Omani rulers. Even though Britain emerged as the preeminent power, scholar Mikiyo Koyagi has noted that territorial control of Balochistan continued to be fractured.



## Bella Hadid breaks silence over Adidas ad row, says lacked sensitivity

The Adidas campaign, which featured the SL 72 "coveted classic" sneakers from the '70s, coincided with the 52nd anniversary of the Munich Olympics, where 12 Israeli coaches and athletes were killed by Palestinian terrorists.

After Adidas launched the campaign, the American Jewish Committee tweeted against the Adidas campaign.

Adidas then apologised and even removed all tweets featuring Hadid from their X and Instagram handles.

**BELLA HADID RESPONDED TO THE UPROAR ON INSTAGRAM**

Supermodel Bella Hadid took to Instagram Stories to express her "disappointment in the lack of sensitivity that went into the campaign".

"I am shocked, I am upset, and I am disappointed in the lack of sensitivity that went into this campaign. Had I been made aware, from the bottom of my heart, I would never have participated," Hadid wrote on her Instagram story on July 29.

She explained that she had no prior knowledge of the historical connection to the 1972 events before the campaign's release.

"I would never knowingly engage with any art or work that is linked to a horrific tragedy of any kind. In advance of the campaign's release, I had no knowledge of the historical connection to the atrocious events in 1972," Bella wrote.

Supermodel Hadid admitted that both her team and Adidas should have conducted more research to avoid such a situation.

"While everyone's intentions were to make something positive and bring people together through art, the collective lack of understanding from all parties undermined the process. I do not believe in hate in any form, including antisemitism. That will never waiver, and I stand by that statement to the fullest extent," she stated.

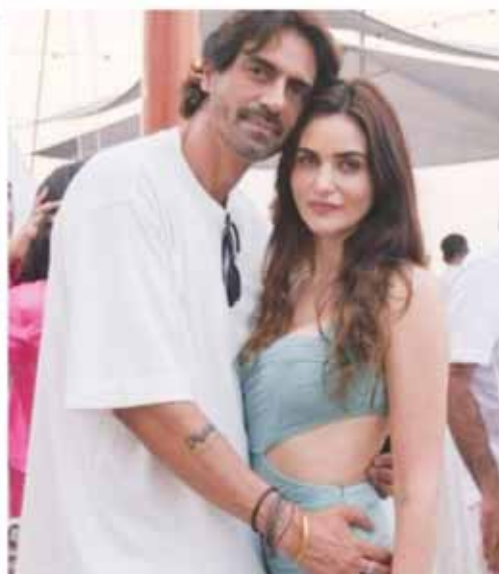
The supermodel also criticised the idea that Palestine is linked to terrorism, rejecting the connection between "the liberation of the Palestinian people" and the antisemitic attack.

Hadid calls herself a "proud Palestinian" and has been vocal in her support for Gaza in the Israel-Hamas war. She had even marched against former President Donald Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

"Palestine is not synonymous with terrorism and this campaign unintentionally highlighted an event that does not represent who we are. I am a proud Palestinian woman and there is so much more to our culture than the things that have been equated over the past week," Hadid wrote on her Instagram story.

I will forever stand by my people of Palestine while continuing to advocate for a world free of antisemitism. Antisemitism has no place in the liberation of the Palestinian people. I will always stand for peace over violence, any day. Hate has no place here, and I will forever advocate for not only my people, but every person world wide," she added.

## Arjun Rampal reflects on marrying at 24, divorce: Men mature far slower...



Actor Arjun Rampal got divorced from Mehr Jesia after being married for almost two decades. He recently spoke about his divorce and also why he and his girlfriend Gabriella Demetriades do not feel like getting married despite being together for many years. Arjun said to have a successful marriage, one must "wait it out" before taking the plunge. Speaking on The Ranveer Show, Arjun said he got married to Mehr too soon. "I got married when I was 24, and I think it is too early; you're too young, and there's a lot to learn and experience. You have to become mature. Guys mature far slower than women do. It's a proven fact that we are idiots. If you want to be successful in it (marriage), wait it out," Arjun said. The Om Shanti Om actor said that though he has seen men being married to their childhood sweethearts and their relationships being successful, he feels those are just

"miracles." Recalling the phase of his life when he was undergoing a divorce from Mehr, with whom he has two daughters, Mahikaa and Myra, Arjun said, "It's very difficult; it is not easy on anyone, and it's the most difficult on children." The actor also mentioned that it might feel like freedom in the beginning, but it eventually starts to feel "uneasy and lonely." He said, "You start to miss home." "I had come from a broken home when I was young, and for me to not have succeeded in marriage was something which I really had to look back upon and see how did this go wrong and how did I not see... then I realised why it went wrong and what were the things, and I take responsibility for it," Arjun shared. However, the 51-year-old actor mentioned that now he, his girlfriend Gabriella, their two sons, his daughters from the first marriage and former wife Mehr are all "very close and loving towards each other."

## Kriti Sanon, rumoured boyfriend Kabir Bahia dine together in Greece

Actor Kriti Sanon's pictures from her Greece holiday with rumoured boyfriend Kabir Bahia have left fans in a frenzy. After Kriti's sister Nupur shared pictures from the trip, a few viral photos featured the 'Mimi' actor enjoying her time with Kabir.

While Kriti remains silent, a new set of pictures shows her sitting next to Kabir and her friends. They can be seen dining at a restaurant while enjoying a meal with friends. The photos were shared by a Reddit user. Additionally, Kriti

Sanon posted a bunch of pictures from the holiday. One of the photos featured her wearing a black shrug similar to the one worn by Kabir. Singer Steben Bin, Nupur Sanon's rumoured boyfriend, also accompanied them on the vacation.



# Dadasaheb Phalke Award winner Mukesh Modi proudly announces the release of his film "Political War" on Amazon Prime in USA & UK

The Hindi film "Political War," produced by Mukesh Modi under the banner of Indie Films Inc., has been making headlines lately as the censor board has refused to pass this political drama. Due to this reason, the film is not being released in Indian cinemas, but it will hit outside India on Amazon Prime Video in USA & UK. Mukesh Modi: My aim is to make films that create awareness and provide solutions. Mukesh Modi, a Mumbai-born filmmaker based in the United States, has embarked on a journey fueled by passion and a drive to convey powerful messages through cinema. His latest project, Political War, though rejected by the Central Board of Film Certification, India is poised for a global release, showcasing Modi's resilience in the face of adversity. Journey into Filmmaking



Modi's journey into filmmaking began with a spark ignited by Bollywood and nurtured by his relentless pursuit of his passion. Undeterred by the lack of connections in the industry, he ventured to Los Angeles, US to master the craft, eventually producing his own film, driven solely by his unwavering passion for storytelling and reaching audiences. "My first film, "THE ELEVATOR" starring Oscar Nominee Eric Roberts, was sold to Amazon, and is doing well on the OTT. This pushed me to take the plunge." After "The Elevator" he has produced another Hollywood feature film "TORN" starring Morgan Freeman son Alfonso Freeman and Indian Web Series "MISSON KASHI" these both contents soon will be released on Amazon Prime. Handling Challenges and Emotions For Modi, filmmaking demands unwavering dedication and detachment



from emotional attachments. Despite the setback of India's censorship rejection, he remains steadfast in his belief that every project requires a hundred percent commitment, regardless of the emotional toll it may exact. "Of course I am hurt. But I believe in doing my good karma and leaving the rest to God. I have made tremendous sacrifices, both personal and financial, to make this film." Impact of Censorship on Global Release The rejection by the Indian censor board

poses significant challenges, but Modi remains undeterred, determined to share his message beyond borders. While the lack of approval hampers domestic distribution, he sees the global release as an opportunity to reach a broader audience, albeit with plans to revisit and resubmit the film for approval in India. "My opinion is that, the board should suggest what needs to be altered in a film. However, just rejecting a film doesn't make sense. They need to look into this."

## Neha Sharma takes "mandatory tuk tuk ride" in Bangkok, then heads back to gym

Bollywood actress Neha Sharma accompanied with an auto and white heart emoji, she wrote: "The mandatory tuk tuk ride... don't know how to keep the hair in place though... #bangkokdiaries."



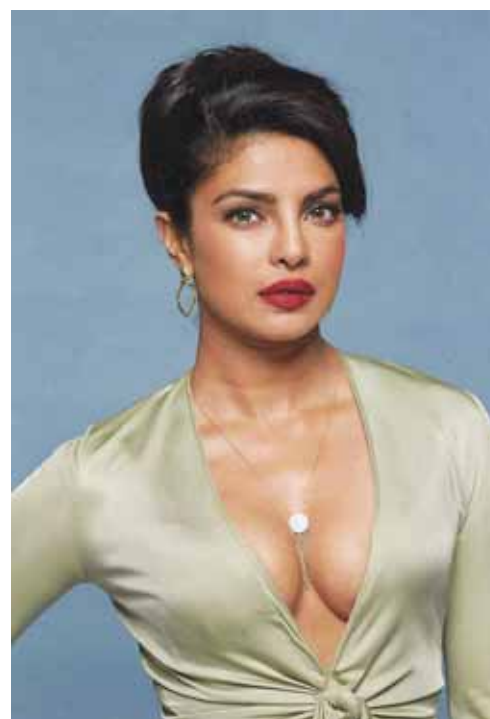
She added the song 'Be Mine' by Shubh to her video. Also sharing pictures of two coconuts in her Instagram stories, she captioned it: "Consuming as much as I possibly can on the last day here... #Thailand." Later, she shared an image of scrumptious-looking food, decorated with flowers. With a white heart emoji, she wrote: "When dinner was too pretty to consume." Following the holiday spree, Neha shared a snap of the gym and wrote: "Back to it after three days." On the work front, Neha is

is a travel freak and shares her pictures and videos with her fans whenever she sets out to explore the world. This time, the actress shared snippets from her vacation in Thailand. Taking to the Stories section of Instagram, Neha shared a video of herself riding the famous 'tuk tuk' in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. Sharing the snippet

currently essaying the role of Farah in the new crime thriller '36 Days'. Set against the backdrop of a serene suburban housing estate in Goa, the thriller takes viewers through a complex maze of lies, deceit, romance, and intrigue, as a mysterious woman shakes up the neighborhood after entering the scene.

## Priyanka Chopra back home after long outdoor shoot, relishes meal cooked by her mom

Global star Priyanka Chopra, who has been continuously shooting for her upcoming action-thriller 'The Bluff', is now back home and has shared a glimpse of a homemade delicacy cooked by her mother. Priyanka, who has 91.7 million followers



Akhouri Chopra. The post was captioned, "When you come home to mom after a long days shoot." Earlier, Priyanka had shared some pictures with her daughter Malti Marie and her mother while they were enjoying a cruise ride and whale watching. The 'Krrish 3' actress captioned the post, "Whale watching made so much fun and easy..." and tagged the location as Queensland, Australia. On the personal front, 'Miss World 2000' is married to American singer and actor Nick Jonas. They tied the knot in December 2018. In January 2022, the couple had their first child, a girl, via surrogacy, named Malti Marie. On the professional front, Priyanka made her acting debut with the 2002 Tamil film 'Thamizhan'. Her Bollywood debut was in 2003 with the spy thriller film 'The Hero: Love Story of a Spy'. The actress will next be seen in the American swashbuckler drama 'The Bluff', co-written by Frank E. Flowers and Joe Ballarini, with Flowers also directing. The movie also stars Karl Urban, Ismael Cruz Cordova, Safia Oakley-Green, and Vedanten Naidoo.

on Instagram, took to her Stories section and posted a picture of palak paneer and a paratha cooked by her mother, Madhu

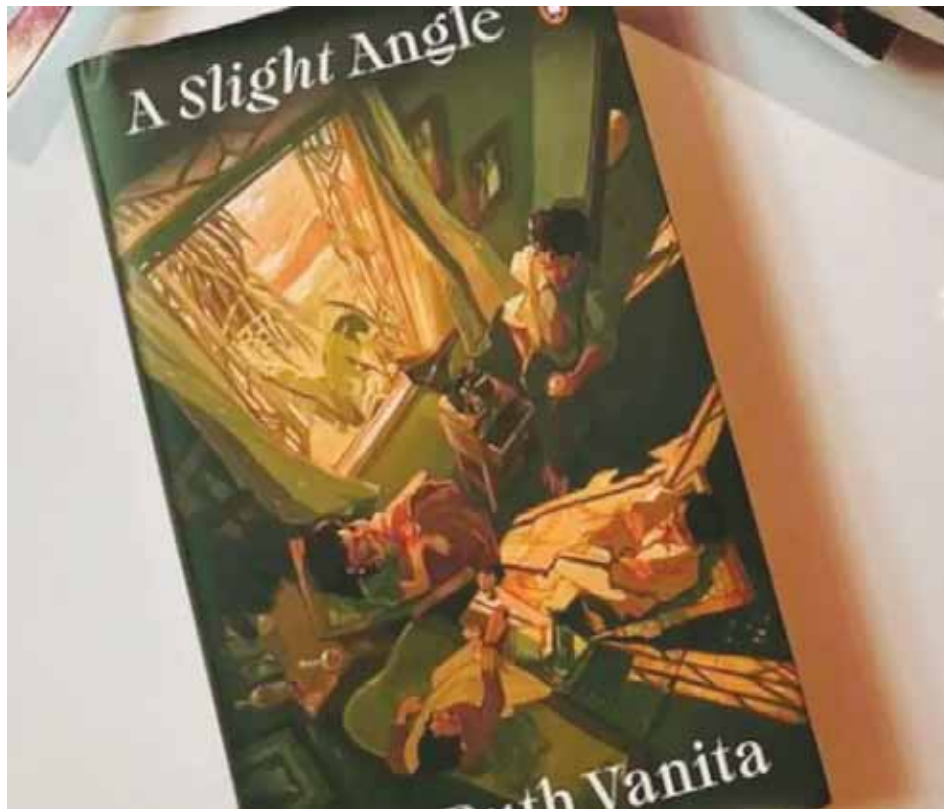
# Ruth Vanita On Love's Rite, Gender, Sexuality, And A Slight Angle

By Shruti Kohli

Both Sharad and Abhik are very clear that they are attracted to men, that they are in love with each other. The difference between them is that Sharad is not ashamed of it but Abhik is very English educated and is confused." Dr Ruth Vanita shared this afterthought on her newest novel, A Slight Angle, during a vodcast conversation with me. The story is set in the midst of socio-political tensions in pre-independence India of 1920s. Fast forward to 1980s. "At least 20 years before any country legalised same-sex marriage, young women in India were already getting married."

The Netherlands was the first to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001. In her other book, Love's Rite, Ruth uncovers the hidden histories of same-sex unions among women often excluded from mainstream narratives. "There was no larger discourse on marriage equality when these young women were first reported as getting married to each other or committing joint suicide," she remarks.

These women, who were students,



factory workers, agricultural workers, domestic workers, and homemakers from all over the country, existed in a world that did not recognize their love. Thingring and Roinathy Basumatary

from Assam are two such women. They not only sought legal equality but also garnered support from their fellow villagers. "These women were the pioneers and martyrs for the struggle

for marriage equality," Ruth passionately describes. A striking moment in our conversation was when I used the word queer to describe people whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression differs from societal norms. Ruth clarified her stance on the term 'queer,' stating, "I don't use the word queer for my work, for my characters. This is a very recent word."

She emphasised how historical contexts in ancient civilizations viewed same-sex relationships as natural variations rather than aberrations. "The basic meaning of queer is strange, that hasn't gone away, that meaning."

In history, especially in the ancient world, whether it was India, Greece, Rome, China, Japan, Egypt, same sex relationships were not seen as strange. They were seen as natural variations. This is how they are depicted, for example, by Plato and in the Kama Sutra.

This perspective is vividly explored in her works, bridging historical literary traditions and contemporary discussions on sexuality and identity.

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# Mushrooms are having a moment



They're popping up in papads, jams and cakes; as health boosts in bread and coffee; and in urban gardens "People are realising that mushrooms are a real superfood," says Anuradha Srivastava, a food technologist at the Indian Council of Agricultural

Research - Directorate of Mushroom Research (ICAR-DMR) in Himachal Pradesh. "They contain no sugar, so they're ideal for diabetics. They're good for those with high blood pressure or cholesterol and they contain many of the trace nutrients that our bodies need."

At the government-run ICAR-DMR, innovations have led to a versatile mushroom powder that is being used to make a multigrain mushroom bread, biscuits and papads. Their mushroom pickles are also now widely available across the country and on e-commerce

platforms. The R&D team is now working on a mushroom spread, murabba, and a mushroom bhujia. Brands like Urban Platter have a range of mushroom powders to choose from. Wholesalers like The Mushroom Co have branched out into the quirky as well. "We make a coffee mix infused with cordyceps mushroom extract, known to be a mild aphrodisiac and widely used for its medicinal and strengthening effects," says founder Rohhaan Gawde. As

chefs return to local, season produce, mushrooms are becoming a favourite ingredient because of their ability to absorb other flavours," says Sarah Edwards, a recipe developer who runs Copper & Cloves in Bengaluru. "They're also easy to cook, with a subtle nutty flavour that complements sauces, savoury dishes and certain desserts." Their fleshy texture and high-protein content make them a go-to meat substitute.

# The good kind of shots

*Ever done shots that are good for health? Try out these nutrient-packed drinks that can be made at home*

Can a shot a day keep the doctor away? It can help, if you're taking the right kinds of shots - wellness boosts packed with antioxidants, minerals, vitamins and nutrients. The most popular are ginger shots, but you can also shoot turmeric, cinnamon or apple cider vinegar. Some have anti-inflammatory properties, others help strengthen your bones. And they can all be made at home. Here's how.

## GINGER SHOTS

Take a 1-inch piece of fresh ginger root, grind and strain it to extract about 1 tsp of concentrated juice. Add lemon or orange juice, turmeric, pepper and honey to taste.

"Ginger contains gingerol, a substance that aids in digestion, and can help treat many forms of nausea, especially morning sickness in pregnant women," says Bhakti Samant, chief dietician at Kokilaben Dhirubhai

Ambani Hospital, Mumbai.

## CINNAMON SHOTS

Soak a cinnamon stick in water, add a bit of honey, and sip (ideally, don't down this in one go; it's absorbed better in small quantities). "Cinnamon influences the manner in which sugar is metabolised, helping to cut fat accumulation," says Samant. This shot can help ease menstrual cramps, adds Seema Singh, chief clinical nutritionist at Fortis Hospital, Delhi.

## TURMERIC SHOTS

The curcumin in turmeric is a very strong anti-oxidant. "This makes turmeric shots a great anti-inflammatory. It helps ease joint pains, and boosts immunity," says Singh. Mix 1 tsp haldi in a cup of coconut water; add ginger, honey and lemon to taste. A pinch of freshly ground black pepper will help the body absorb the curcumin better.

## CHIA SHOTS

"Chia is rich in Omega 3 fatty acids. They are a source of antioxidants, which are believed to have cardiac, anti-ageing and anti-carcinogenic characteristics," says Samant.

Soak 1 tsp chia seeds in water for at least 10 minutes. Down like a shot; it's so filling, you can have it in place of a snack.

## APPLE CIDER VINEGAR SHOTS

Popularly known as ACV, apple cider vinegar is an alkaline, probiotic-rich ingredient known to reduce muscle pain, headaches, and boost digestion.

For an ACV shot, mix 1 tsp of apple cider vinegar in 100ml of water and add ice cubes. Restrict to one shot a day.



# Palace hopping in God's own country



*A visit to the palaces in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, gives an insight into the myriad opulence of the bygone eras*



Ancient forts and palaces are often considered to be portholes for travelling back in time. Standing strong since centuries, they take us on a visual expedition through the many journeys that have shaped history. During a recent trip to Kerala, we decided to explore the lesser-known palaces of the Kingdom of Travancore. These palaces do not seem massive at first sight. However, they have several sections that spread out across acres of grounds. We get to see a cluster of smaller single or double-storeyed structures with gabled and tiled roofs. The architectural brilliance of the place, is reflected through intricate carvings and functionality of layout. Several centuries old, each palace tells

the story of the kingdom and its relations with other kingdoms within and outside India.

Kuthiramalika (150+ years old) Literally meaning the horse palace, it derives its name from the 122 smiling horse heads - visible from the palace's main entrance - carved into the beams that support the roof. Built in the 1840s by the then Maharaja of Travancore, Swathi Thirunal Balarama Varma, the palace is situated near the Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Given that you have adhered to the dress code of the temple, you can club your visit to both the places. Also called Puthen Malika, the palace's architecture boasts of the use of rosewood,

teakwood, marble and granite. While visiting the interiors, you're not allowed to wear footwear. So, it is hard to miss the glossy smoothness of some sections of the floor. The reason behind it is the use of a mixture made of egg whites, charcoal, and limestone, which keeps the floor cool even on hot days. The well-trained guides here take you on a systematic journey explaining to you the many sections of the palace. It is truly a travel back in time as we see the thrones, the ivory cradles, the palanquins, the arms and other artefacts, once used by the royals. Also known as Nedumangad Valiya Koyikkal Palace, it was the royal headquarters of the Perakam

dynasty. It was built in the 16th century for Queen Umayamma of the Venad Royal Family. Currently, the Kerala State Department of Archaeology is the custodian of the palace and maintains the Folklore and Numismatic museums inside the property. The former has a huge collection of ancient artefacts that played a vital role in the day-to-day activities of common people as well as the royals. One can see the rare chandravalayam, the small percussion instrument played while reciting the ballad of Lord Rama, here. The latter has an exhaustive collection of coins and is a must-visit for those who collect them. The coins on display here reflect the ancient kingdom's trade relations with the Roman and Venetian dynasties, among others. Apart from guides, there are kiosks that tell you all about palace's history. Unlike our previous visits, the trip to Kilimanoor Palace, famous for being the birthplace of Raja Ravi Varma (RRV), was filled with surprises. To begin with, we couldn't spot a single tourist, and it was eerily quiet, except for the distant sounds of someone practising Carnatic vocals. The palace was devoid of any signs or guardsmen, too. Past the imposing gate, called padippura,

we found the source of the Carnatic music - a guru and shishya with a harmonium placed at the centre. The room turned out to be the former studio of RRV. Now, it was filled with his paintings and a lamp was lit in his honour, below a massive picture of him at the farthest end. The guru introduced himself as Rama Varma Thamburan, the sixth descendant of RRV, and apologised that he won't be able to let us in for "it was private property". However, as soon as he got to know that we had come from out of state, he showed us the palace grounds and explained the architecture. It resembled most of Kerala's residential homes from that era, adhering to the 'nalukettu', meaning beyond the imposing arch or the main gate, there were clusters of small and medium-sized houses, two ponds, wells, and sacred groves (kaavu). We were denied entry to the sacred forest, but we could witness the exterior architecture - there was a blue French-inspired building, commissioned by RRV, which clearly stood out - the ancient wooden carvings, and paintings. We also got to see one of the two ponds, which in a surreal manner seemed to reflect the stillness of time.

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# Radical preacher raising millions to buy Scottish island, create Sharia country

Sheikh Yasser al-Habib left Kuwait and reached the UK. This was no simple change of country. He was facing 10 years of imprisonment in absentia for spreading extremism in his home country. Now, two decades later, the London-based preacher is buying a small island in Scotland for his community of Sharia followers.

Al-Habib, 45, is already in "advanced talks" to buy the island of Torsa, off the west coast of Scotland, reports The Daily Mail of the UK. He runs military-style training camps and aims to build schools, hospitals and mosques associated with his organisation on the island. "They will have their own army, their own justice system, they will manage their own schools and hospitals," said Sarah Zaami, a deputy director for communications at the American think tank Atlantic Council, who has worked on Al-Habib. "It does challenge the notion of sovereignty."

## MUSLIMS 'FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD' CAN COME HERE

In a recent video, Sheikh Yasser al-Habib asked his supporters to donate £3.5 million to buy the island. He has made a promise of allowing Muslims "from all over the world to get a visa to live in their new homeland". "If you want to live free under the banner of the imam [Shia leader], in a special homeland where you feel everything in it



reminds you of the awaited mahdi, everything is the Shia homeland and support this project," said Al-Habib.

"Here, my brothers, God willing, we want to build a large mosque, a school and a hawza [Shia seminary]. We want this place to be a homeland to the Shias and the believers," he added.

Al-Habib's plan concerns the people living on the neighbouring island of Luing, they told the Daily Mail.

"I've spent much of my life working in Muslim countries, so I have no issues whatsoever with that community, but this group does seem alarming from what I've just seen now", he told The Daily Mail.

## CONCERNS ABOUT THE EXTREMIST

## CLERICAL-HABIB

Al-Habib has been accused of giving rise to sectarian sentiments in Britain and in the Arab world between Shia and Sunni Muslims. He has his headquarters in Fulmer, South Buckinghamshire.

He has been raising funds through his controversial channel, Fadak TV. Nicknamed The Mullah of Fulmer, he spreads sectarian views and even hate on his channel, according to UK media reports.

The cleric has a high following among Britain's 400,000 Shia Muslims and millions across the globe.

Now, the next thing on his list is to buy an island for his group, Mahdi (Messiah)

Servants Union (MSU).

## AL-HABIB'S ORGANISATION BLAMED FOR EMBASSY ATTACKS

The MSU has attacked several foreign embassies on religious issues, such as the Azerbaijani Embassy in August 2022, and the Saudi Arabian Embassy in the same year. Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry said the attack had been done by "radical religious group members."

The British embassy in Azerbaijan condemned the attacks.

"They will have their own army, their own justice system, they will manage their own schools and hospitals, and people from around the world will be able to migrate to this homeland," said Sarah Zaami of American think tank Atlantic Council.

"It does challenge the notion of sovereignty. It's puzzling to me how the UK authorities are allowing such a discourse. You are fundraising for the creation of a sovereign country on the margins of another country," she added.

He also said that he enjoyed the October 7 attack by the Palestinian group Hamas on Israel. "Who among us does not enjoy retaliation of the Zionist enemy? We were all buoyed by this news," he said.

The neighbours of the island joked maybe Taylor Swift would buy it, but nobody had imagined it would be Al-Habib.

# How Israel killed Palestinian commander Wadie Haddad with toothpaste in 1978

By Ananya Bhattacharya

It was an uneventful mid-January day in 1978 in Baghdad when Wadie Haddad began suffering from severe abdominal spasms after a regular meal. Haddad was the chief of the Palestinian organisation, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. His appetite was gone. He lost more than 25 pounds, and was taken to an Iraqi government hospital. The doctors there diagnosed him with hepatitis. They followed by saying it was a case of a very bad cold. Powerful antibiotics were administered. Haddad was treated by the best of Baghdad doctors. But his condition did not improve. The needle of suspicion pointed at poisoning, but what or how, the doctors had no clue. Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, asked an aide to get help from the Stasi, East Germany's Secret Service. This was a time when the Soviets helped the Palestinian fighters and provided them with passports, shelter, weapons and intelligence. When Arafat's aide reached out to the East German Secret Service, or the Stasi, Haddad was moved from Baghdad to East Berlin. He was admitted to a hospital where they treated intelligence and secret-service community members. It was March 19, 1978. By now, Haddad had spent



two very painful months in the Baghdad hospital, without anyone being able to figure out what was wrong with him. When East Berlin intervened, Arafat hoped the results would be a little clearer. Haddad was admitted to the Regierungskrankenhaus. While being airlifted from Baghdad, Haddad's helpers packed a bag of toiletries along. It had a tube of toothpaste too. By the time Haddad reached Berlin, he was a 'dead man walking'.

Forty-one-year-old Ahmed Doukli, the name Haddad was admitted under to the East Berlin hospital, was haemorrhaging

in many places. The pericardium around his heart was leaking blood. The haemorrhaging was at the root of his tongue, his pleural membranes, his tonsils, and even his urine. His platelet count dropped dangerously.

He was put through all possible tests by the doctors at the hospital, but there was nothing to be found. Their conjecture was: either rat-poison or thallium poisoning, given that it was not a sudden death. There was no physical evidence in Haddad to help the doctors come to a conclusion, much like what happened with the doctors

in Baghdad.

For ten days, Haddad lived in the worst of agony. His screams could be heard all through the hospital in East Berlin, and doctors had to keep him sedated all day and night. Then, on March 29, Haddad was dead. A full autopsy followed.

The Stasi received the details of Haddad's death from a forensic expert, Professor Otto Prokop. The report said that Haddad died due to 'brain bleeding and pneumonia by panmyelopathy', and that there was 'room for suspicion that someone had assassinated him'. In short, more of the same.

## So, what really happened to Wadie Haddad?

Wadie Haddad, or Abu Hani, the chief of PFLP, had orchestrated the Entebbe Hijacking of Air France Flight 139 on June 27, 1976. The flight took off from Tel Aviv for Paris via Athens. While in Athens, 58 passengers boarded the plane. There were four hijackers among them. Under the instruction of Wadie Haddad, two PFLP terrorists joined forces with two Germans from the German Revolutionary Cells. The plane was flown to Benghazi in Libya, where the hijackers had to release British-born Israeli citizen Patricia Martell, who cut herself and pretended to have a miscarriage.



# Sarfira To Shehzada, Bollywood's Obsession With Remakes Is Destroying It

By Latha Srinivasan

Akshay Kumar's latest film, Sarfira, was a no-show at the box office. This is possibly his 11th film to fail so badly in a row. Sarfira was the remake of the superhit Tamil film Soorarai Pottru, based on the life of Captain G.R. Gopinath, who founded Air Deccan. Even though the filmmaker behind the original version, Sudha Kongara, directed the Hindi remake too, the film has managed to collect just around ₹ 22 crore since its release on July 12. While one may say that Akshay Kumar needs to relook his career, there's another popular opinion lately: the Hindi film industry's obsession with remakes needs to stop.

A Look At Some 'Big' Films

Vikram Vedha, Bholaa, Selfiee, Jersey, Bachchan Pandey, Shehzaada, Mili, Katputli, Laxmii, Lal Singh Chaddha, The Girl on the Train - what do all these films have in common? They are all remakes of films from other languages, including English, and all failed miserably at the box office. Take a look at Indian box office hits in 2022 - the top 10 films were RRR, KGF: Chapter 2, Brahmastra Part One: Shiva, Vikram, Ponnin Selvan: Part 1, Kantara, Drishyam 2 (Hindi), The Kashmir Files, Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2, and Beast. There are only three original Hindi films in the list,



the rest are all South Indian flicks.

Cut to 2023, and its top 10 films - Jawan, Pathaan, Animal, Gadar 2, Salaar Part 1, Leo, Jailer, Tiger 3, Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani and Adipurush. Of these, seven were Hindi films and none was a remake, while two Hindi films had South directors. In 2024, so far, Munjya, Hanu-Man (Hindi), Kalki 2898 AD, Shaitaan, Article 370 and Kill have been declared hits. While Shaitaan was a remake of Vash, a Gujarati film, Munjya, Article 370 and Kill were original screenplays. In fact, Kill is now set to be remade in Hollywood.

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What this quick analysis clearly underlines is that the Indian audience wants original content. Remakes - especially badly made ones - are something nobody is willing to waste precious money and time on.

## Serena Fleites: Pornhub Victim is Trying to Heal From the Past Now



By Kriti Mehrotra

As a documentary movie that shines a light upon the dark side of the adult entertainment industry, Netflix's 'Money Shot: The Pornhub Story' can only be described as intriguing and haunting. That's because it profiles not just the rise of the titular audio-video platform but also the way it essentially supported sex trafficking, sexual assault, as well as explicit abuse for nearly a decade. Amongst those whose tales have thus been featured is none other than Serena Fleites — so now, if you wish to learn more about

her, her ordeal, and her current standing, we've got you covered. Who is Serena Fleites?

It was back in 2014 when Serena's entire world literally turned upside down despite the fact she was merely in the eighth grade and often did quite okay in her local Bakersfield, California school. The truth is the 14-year-old had recently begun dating a boy a year older — someone she reportedly genuinely had a crush on — just for him to soon pressure her to send a video undressing. Her so-called boyfriend would allegedly declare that if they were indeed in a relationship and she loved him as she said, she should

have no problem making such personal, explicit clips for him.

Serena hence obliged, driving him to ask for more and more videos as the days passed, making her feel both reluctant as well as wholly flattered at the same time, according to her own narrative. Though the one thing she failed to consider was that these tapes could get circulated among the guys in her school and then land on sites like Pornhub, which is sadly precisely what happened. "A lot of people in the grades above me — mostly guys — they would try to harass me and blackmail me," the teen once revealed, detailing a small part of the bullying she subsequently had to endure. Serena continued, "[They would say] if I didn't do stuff with them or I didn't send them more videos..., they would send [old ones] to my family: my grandma, my mom, my sisters, my brother." The boy she'd been dating was actually suspended once the

news broke, yet she still decided to switch schools since she simply couldn't attend any classes at the former in shame as well as in fear. But alas, rumors regarding her clips reached this new place too, practically forcing her to drop out because her efforts to both start afresh and have the video deleted from Pornhub completely failed.

Serena had admittedly pretended to be her mother when she first contacted Pornhub, stating the tape was clearly child pornography, only for them to take a minimum of a week or two to respond. They did ultimately take it down, yet by this point, so many people had already downloaded the entire thing that it was back up on the site within days, which happened again and again and again. Though the worst part is the fact Serena actually has a hormone disorder where she ages slowly, meaning she might've been 14 in the clips, but she looked no older than 9 or 10, and it was evident. Where is Serena Fleites Now? This entire experience went to

such a traumatic extent it unfortunately led Serena to have anxiety, depression, as well as suicidal thoughts going much beyond what she could have ever conceived. She cut herself deep, once swallowed every anti-depressant pill she could find, and even attempted to hang herself in the bathroom, but thankfully medics always arrived just in time to save her. Yet none of it hindered her downward spiral in any way, shape, or form, resulting in the teen being a dropout, homeless, and addicted to meth + opioids without a support system or any sense of self-care. Because Serena had to feed her drug habit in some way, she admittedly began selling nude photos/videos of herself through Craigslist as she believed it was a good way to punish herself. She thought she'd landed herself in this position, so she wasn't worthy of anything anymore since everybody had already seen her body — the truth is she may've been naive, but it wasn't her fault.

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## **Kamala Harris Collapsed in 2020. Here's How to Avoid a Repeat.**

The vice president's shaky 2020 presidential run tarnished her image. She'll need to sharpen her message and clean up her org chart this time.



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