



The South Asian



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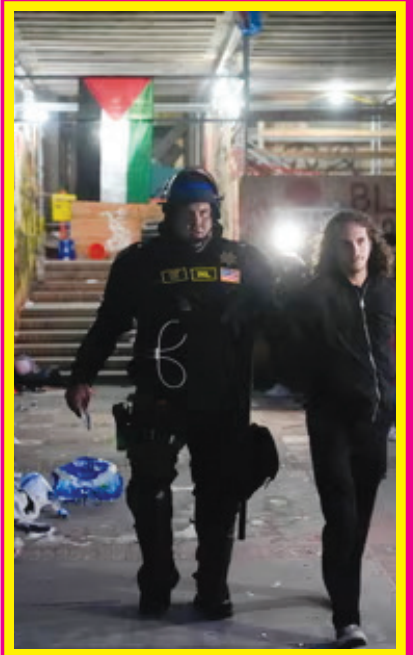
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Why this Indian-origin fugitive is on Canada's 25 most-wanted list

(Sai Bureau)-An Indian-origin fugitive, Dharam Singh Dhaliwal, wanted in connection with the murder of 21-year-old Pawanpreet Kaur, has been placed on Canada's 25 most-wanted list by the Canadian Police. Any information leading to Dhaliwal's arrest would get an individual a reward of up to 50,000 Canadian dollars. Dhaliwal, who was last known to be a resident of Mississauga, Ontario, is considered "armed and dangerous". Dharam has connections in the Greater Toronto Area, Winnipeg, Vancouver / Lower Mainland, and India, according to Canada Police. Peel Regional Police want Dharam Dhaliwal on a Canada-wide warrant for first-degree murder.

Dharam Dhaliwal is on the BOLO (Be On the Look Out) programme, which focusses on individuals wanted for serious crimes, utilising social media and technology to engage citizens in the search for Canada's most wanted suspects.



Pawanpreet Kaur, 21, was fatally shot multiple times at the Petro-Canada gas station where she worked in Brampton, Greater Toronto Area (GTA), in December 2022.





In the months leading up to the murder, Dhaliwal had been charged with domestic-related offences against Kaur. Dhaliwal even staged his suicide prior to Kaur's murder in order to evade

police. "Dharam Dhaliwal intentionally went missing in September 2022, but investigation has revealed that this was part of a plan in the murder of Pawanpreet Kaur," the release added. Last April, PRP's Homicide Bureau announced a warrant for 31-year-old Dhaliwal's arrest for First Degree Murder. Peel Regional Police (PRP) chief Nishan Duraipappah emphasised the importance of public assistance in apprehending Dhaliwal, stating, "The murder of Pawanpreet Kaur forever changed her family's life and significantly affected our community." Dhaliwal, described as 5 foot 8 inches tall, weighing 75 kg, with a tattoo on his left hand, is considered armed and dangerous. Two of Dhaliwal's family members, Pritpal Dhaliwal and Amarjit Dhaliwal, were arrested on April 18, 2023, in Moncton, New Brunswick, and charged with Accessory to Murder After the Fact. "Investigators stress that anyone assisting Dhaliwal in evading arrest will face the same charges," said the police.

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Pro-Khalistan slogans at Toronto event, Trudeau says will protect Sikh rights



(Sai Bureau)-Pro-Khalistan slogans were raised while Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau delivered a speech at the Khalsa Day event in Toronto. "We will always be there to protect your rights and your freedoms," Trudeau told the Canadian Sikh community.

Pro-Khalistan slogans were raised at an event in Toronto as Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau addressed the crowd. The pro-Khalistan slogans were raised at the Khalsa Day celebration on Sunday. In his speech, Trudeau went on to assure the Sikh community that the Canadian government would protect their rights and freedoms at all costs.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, and Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow

were among those who attended the Khalsa Day celebration in Toronto. Khalsa Day is known as Vaisaki, the day that marks the celebration of the Sikh New Year. Pro-Khalistan slogans could be heard during Trudeau's speech.

The pro-Khalistan slogans had started while Trudeau walked to address people at the Khalsa Day event.

"We gather here today to remember that

one of Canada's greatest strengths is its diversity. We are strong, not in spite of our differences, but because of our differences. But even as we look at these differences, we have to remember and get reminded on days such as this and every day, that Sikh values are Canadian values," said Justin Trudeau during the Khalsa Day celebration in Toronto. Thousands of people gathered in downtown Toronto on Sunday for one of the biggest yearly gatherings in the city.

"To the nearly 800,000 Canadians of Sikh heritage across this country, we will always be there to protect your rights and your freedoms, and we will always defend your community against hatred and discrimination," said Trudeau. The Canadian Prime Minister mentioned that they're improving security and infrastructure by adding more security to community centres and places of worship, like Gurdwaras.

"Your right to practice your religion freely and without intimidation is exactly that - a fundamental right, guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that we will always stand up and defend you for. We will stand with you. Once again on this wonderful day of celebrations, Happy Baisakhi! Vaheguru ji ka khalsa Vaheguru ji ki fateh," said Trudeau.

Against extremists, says Indian-American politician seen with Khalistani flags

Jenifer Rajkumar, the first Punjabi-American elected in New York, faced criticism after sharing photos with Khalistani flags. A day later, she clarified that she opposes extremist groups and highlighted the work she has done for Hindus in the US.

(Sai Bureau)-A day after Jenifer Rajkumar, the first Punjabi-American elected to New York state office, sparked a controversy after sharing her photo with Khalistani flags, the Indian-American politician tried to clear the air, saying she was against extremist and fringe groups that spread hatred. She also tried to highlight her Hindu credentials.

Jenifer Rajkumar faced backlash online after she shared a photo of herself at the Sikh Day Parade as the guest of honour. The photo had several Khalistani flags in the backdrop. Angered by the photo, people said that by "affiliating with Khalistani separatists" she had "disappointed Hindus". In a statement sent to IndiaToday.in, Jenifer Rajkumar highlighted how she made history when she became the "first Indian-American woman and first Hindu ever elected to a New York State office against all odds". Countering her critics, she went on to

highlight the work she had done for Hindus in the US.

"Against impossible odds, I made history yet again when I led and won the fight to make Diwali a NYC School Holiday. I later led the charge against the anti-Hindu hate crime at NYC's Tulsi Mandir, garnering the attention of the White House and ensuring the offence was prosecuted as a hate crime," Jenifer Rajkumar said.

Regarding the Sikh Day Parade, a photo of which fuelled into controversy this year, she said it was her usual practice to attend it. "Every year, I also attend the Sikh Day parade with the Sikh leaders from gurdwaras across the Northeast. I stand with the Sikh community and its practice of seva, caring for all of humanity. As a proud American, I work tirelessly to build peace and unity among all people in our great country," Rajkumar said.

She, however, tried to distance herself from the Khalistanis, who have been behind



terror attacks, including the deadly bombing of the Air India Kanishka flight that killed 329 people, calling for prosecution of extremist groups.

"I have always said that fringe, extremist groups that sow seeds of hate and violence in the world should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," Jenifer Rajkumar said. Her reaction came even as India summoned the Canadian Deputy High Commissioner after pro-Khalistan slogans were raised at an event attended by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Toronto. The Ministry of External Affairs said the Canadian diplomat was conveying India's "deep concern and strong protest" at such

"disturbing actions being allowed to continue unchecked at the event".

The Khalsa Day event in Toronto was also attended by Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, and Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow, among others.

In his speech, Trudeau went on to assure the Sikh community that the Canadian government would protect their rights and freedoms at all costs.

The mail has been sent to IndiaToday.in by Jacob Gross, Senior Advisor of Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar.

Rajkumar is a Democrat member of the New York State Assembly from the 38th district.

Delhi-born Tarun Ghulati challenges Pak-origin Sadiq Khan in London mayoral polls

(Sai Bureau)-Pakistani-origin London Mayor Sadiq Khan is facing stiff competition in his bid for a third term. His closest challenger, in the polls to be held on May 2, is Conservative candidate Susan Hall. What actually makes the London mayoral race interesting for Indians is a Delhi-born entrepreneur, Tarun Ghulati, who is among the 13 challengers.

An Independent candidate, Tarun Ghulati, has trained his guns on both Sadiq Khan and Susan Hall. "There is a growing belief that the current incumbent [Sadiq Khan] has lost support and another major party contender [Susan Hall] is considered very uninspiring by the voters," said Ghulati. He said that Susan Hall, the main challenger, was "part of the problem" because she was on the committee that made the policies that "took London years back".

The topmost on his list of attacks is obviously Sadiq Khan.

"You are unbelievably 'SAD' with IQ missing. You only make promises and never fulfil them. Why



were you waiting for the third term to correct your mistakes of two terms. Give Londoners a break from your falsity. Focus on your book and take us off your hook," Tarun Ghulati posted on X, sharing a video of Sadiq Khan.

Ghulati calls himself a "proud Hindu".

"Being a person of Indian origin, I wear that as a badge of honour. It is a matter of pride for me. I am a proud Hindu. But I believe in the

concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. My upbringing in India, the cultural traditions have helped me in my journey across the world. I view London as a global bank. It is a place where people come in for opportunities and growth, and different cultures thrive," said Ghulati in an interview with ANI.

"As Mayor, I will build the balance sheet for London such that it is a premiere choice for investments,

safeguarding safety and prosperity for all its residents" Ghulati added.

Ghulati is one of the two Indian-origin candidates. The other being real estate entrepreneur Shyam Batra.

Shyam Batra, a 62-year-old finance and property broker from Uxbridge, West London, is running for London mayor.

Batra did not see himself as a "party political candidate", but

rather as someone who "just wants to fix London and give people a voice", reported BBC. SUSAN HALL TRAILING SADIQ KHAN BY NARROW MARGIN Susan Hall, the Conservative candidate, is the one who is giving the toughest fight to Sadiq Khan, and is trailing by just 13 percentage points. According to the poll conducted by the Conversation states that if the election were to be held tomorrow, 46% of the vote would go to the Labour Party candidate (Khan) and 33% to Hall. This 13-point lead is much smaller than the 20-point leads Khan had in polls from March and early April.

People who plan to vote for Hall in the London mayoral election are mainly concerned about crime, immigration, and the National Health Services (NHS). While those supporting Khan prioritise the NHS, inflation, and the cost of living and housing. It is interesting to note that both the candidates have a similar agenda, i.e., the NHS, which becomes the vote-motivating issue in common for London people.

Three Indians killed in US as car crashes after flying 20 feet over bridge



(Sai Bureau)- Three Indian women from Gujarat died in an accident in the United States after their overspeeding vehicle lost control, rammed into a divider, and flew 20 feet into the air before crashing into trees on the opposite side of a bridge. The incident happened on Interstate

85 in Greenville County, South Carolina.

The women have been identified as Rekhaben Dilipbhai Patel, Sangeetaben Bhaveshbhai Patel, and Manishaben Rajendrabhai Patel. They were from Borsad tehsil of Anand district.

The wreckage of the vehicle was

found wedged against a tree, shattered into multiple pieces. "When the vehicle jumped all four lanes of traffic, it actually struck trees probably at least 20 feet above the ground," Chief Deputy Coroner Mike Ellis from the Greenville County Coroner's Office told foxcarolina.com.

"When you have got family, probably related, three deceased is nothing that you want to ever see," Ellis further said. As per the report, the driver of the vehicle was taken to the hospital with injuries. Ellis said the SUV was travelling above the posted speed limit. "Very seldom do you see a vehicle that leaves the roadway at such a high rate of speed that it jumps 4-6 lanes of traffic and lands in the trees approximately 20 feet," he further said. He said no other vehicles were involved in the accident, indicating that the vehicle's high speed was solely responsible for the horrific accident.

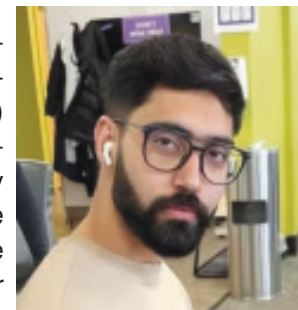
Indian man stabbed in Canada tried to chase down attacker before dying

(Sai Bureau)-A 28-year-old man has been arrested in connection with the fatal stabbing of 26-year-old Indian national Kulwinder Singh Sohi in White Rock, British Columbia, Canada. Sohi tried to chase down the attacker after being stabbed but collapsed and died.

The Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) announced the arrest on Monday but did not release the identity of the suspect. Further investigation is on.

Sohi, who worked as a plumber, was stabbed on the White Rock Promenade on the evening of April 23.

Witnesses reported seeing him in a physical fight with the suspect before being chased, according to White Rock police. The IHIT took over the investigation from the White Rock RCMP. Sohi tried to chase down the person who stabbed him, CBC News quoted police as saying.



The arrest comes after another Indian-origin man, Jatinder Singh, was stabbed near the White Rock Pier two days ago. Singh survived the attack, reported the local media. The two stabbings have shaken the community, and White Rock RCMP has increased patrols

in the area. A town hall meeting is scheduled for Tuesday to address public safety concerns.

"We know that community members have concerns about safety in White Rock following the two re-

cent events on our waterfront. To that end, we will be hosting a Town hall on Tuesday, April 30, 2024 at the community centre on Russell Ave," said Canada police. Sohi's family has launched an online fundraiser to transport his remains back to India. His brother, Gurleen Sohi, said on the fundraiser page, "Kulwinder was a hard-working and really passionate person. I'm really shocked and depressed after this tragic loss."

PM Modi and Amit Shah inciting one religious community to fight against the other, alleges Sukhbir Badal

By JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Chandigarh— Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Wednesday said no Prime Minister should talk of one religion alone and asserted that it was unfortunate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home minister Amit Shah were not talking about the farmers or the poor but were inciting members of one religious community to fight against the other. The SAD president was speaking at a massive Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) rally at Kurukshetra after accompanying INLD secretary general Abhay Chautala when the latter filed his nomination papers for the Kurukshetra Lok Sabha seat.

Speaking at the rally, Mr Sukhbir Badal said "our country belongs to everyone, be it Hindu, Sikh, Christian or Muslim. The Prime minister of the country represents everyone and should not take up cudgels on behalf of one religious community alone. He also should not represent two to three businessmen but instead should talk about the welfare of crores of farmers and the poor".

Giving a clarion call to strengthen the INLD, which he said was a regional party like the SAD; Mr Badal said "both these regional parties have always stood up for the interests of farmers". He said in stark contrast a national party like the Bharatiya Janata Party had framed the three agricultural laws without consulting farmers or even their ally – the SAD. "This is why we chose to leave the NDA government. Abhey Singh Chautala also resigned as member of the Vidhan Sabha. Both of us did this because we understand the pain of the farmer and are committed to safeguarding the interests of the annadata".

Detailing how the BJP had started a war with the SAD after the latter quit the NDA government, Mr Badal said "the BJP government in Maharashtra has handed over control of Takht Sri Hazur Sahib to the RSS". He said similarly the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was broken and a separate gurdwara committee was made in Haryana to give its control to the RSS.

The SAD president also warned the people to beware of both the



Congress and AAP. He said Sikhs could never forgive Indira Gandhi for attacking Sri Darbar Sahib with tanks and mortars besides the Congress sponsored genocide of the community in 1984. He said as far as AAP was concerned; the people of Haryana should take feedback from their neighbours in Haryana to assess how AAP had reneged on all promises made to Punjabis. "A party which won 92 seats in the Vidhan Sabha elections is set to be wiped out in the parliamentary elections in Punjab now", Mr Badal added.

The SAD president also spoke about the 'sanjh' between the SAD and INLD. He said both parties had been connected with each other for decades with Late Choudhary Devi Lal and S Parkash Singh Badal forming an inseparable alliance. SAD Haryana unit president Sharanjit Singh Sohta was also present on the occasion.

Also slamming the central government in a rally at Sardulgarh, on April 29, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal had alleged that central agencies started a campaign against the SAD immediately after it quit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led NDA government and even planted their own men to accuse the SAD of committing sacrilege.

The SAD president, who was addressing a huge gathering of the party's candidate Harsimrat Kaur Badal, said those who had attacked the SAD virulently for the acts of sacrilege eight years

back, including self-styled panthic leader Baljit Singh Daduwal, had now joined the BJP. "This proves there was a sinister

agenda to defame the SAD and weaken it". Mr Sukhbir Badal said the SAD was known for selfless service. "Leaders like S Parkash Singh Badal have been jailed for as long as sixteen years in far off places like Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore and Panchmari. Badal Sahab even did not avail bail to attend his daughter's wedding".

Mr Badal also took on the BJP for taking over Sikh religious bodies. He said the BJP government in Maharashtra had tinkered with the Sri Hazoor Sahib gurdwara managing board and nominated 12 members to

the Board to take it in its control. He said members of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee had been co-

opted into the BJP even as the SGPC had been broken to create a separate Gurdwara committee for Haryana. He said Sikh bodies under the control of BJP like the Delhi Committee led by Manjinder Singh Sirsa were now even denying 'langar' to those who were holding 'dharnas' against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The SAD president also asserted that the central government had virtually taken over the AAP government in Punjab. He said chief minister Bhagwant Mann was already functioning as a B team of the BJP and was ready to become the BJP's chief minister in Punjab in case the party formed the government at the centre. Mr Badal also appealed to the voters to support the SAD. He assured the people that the party would continue to live by its principles come what may.



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Not 'uniter vs divider', Indian politics is 'divider vs divider' right now

We grew up learning that a democracy speaks through its votes. But then, as they say, no system is perfect. Criticisms are made of the American electoral college and also of the "first past the post" system. But then, voting is only one form of expression in a democracy. There is, before that, just regular speech too. Words, ideas, stories; about the past, present, and future. Sometimes, they inspire and elevate. More often, they don't. I was recently on a podcast where we talked about media and elections. The hosts were concerned with what they said was the lack of equal representation for the opposition in the media. We agreed that the principle of equal coverage that would inform the public honestly so they could make the best choices was a noble one. Where we had a different view was on the question of whether such an ideal condition ever existed considering the roots of news in European colonialism and global exploitation. But we did share one more conclusion — the culture of loud, screaming panelists on TV news channels was not good for the health of democracy, or even listeners.

Continuing in the spirit of conversations that somehow remain civil despite differences of opinion, and concerned about where our words are taking us as a democracy, a nation, a civilisation, and indeed maybe as a species considering one way human beings were told to be kind to animals by our elders was by reference to their inability to speak, I share some thoughts on the state of media, politics, and education.

Media: From ritual to addiction

The period when news came mainly from print and broadcasting, say, the 1950s to 1980s in India, was marked by a sense of ritualistic commonness. You got one dose in the morning, and one in the night, with a few radio bulletins in between. Radio and TV were perhaps always slightly biased in favour of the ruling party, but print was more diverse. And even if citizens had disagreements, there was little divergence in what they knew or thought they saw on the news. But with the rise of multiple satellite channels, and now the digital online world, there is more fragmentation, and a different institutional imperative driving discourse — ratings for TV, and "engagement" for the online world.

All this affected the content, naturally. In the US, Newsweek opinion editor Batya Ungar-Sargon has written a lot about how technology, economic changes in journalism (including the gentrification of the profession), and a click-bait-driven obsession with Donald Trump and racism distorted the picture, and alienated a large section of the audience. Another critic of mainstream news, journalist-author Matt Taibbi, has called news a "rhetorical addiction." The desperation for attention is of course also understood by advertisers

who design ever more creative ways to get it. On that note, I thought the BJP's advertising campaign started off cleverly with the "Dulha kaun hai (who is the groom)" video. It set up a context most Indians could relate to — that of a facilitated marriage meeting (although some critics would have perhaps found a dating-app like swipe-left setting more with the times).

The pacing, acting, and most of all the music was nicely harmonised. The soundtrack was comical, but with a hint of menace. And, of course, the bride has the last word, with a close-up to express her refusal.

If the "disunity" of the INDIA coalition was the message the BJP wanted to convey, it was a good case of "show, not tell." But sadly, it has been all "tell," and "yell," in the campaign since. The other ads got grating, and speeches of course have been in free-fall all around.

Politics: How should a president or PM speak?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has built a careful communication legacy over the last ten years, coming across as a down-to-earth elder to his fans, always confident enough to disarm his challengers without losing his cool. Internationally, despite a largely critical press, he has stuck to a certain line in his many large public speeches. Given this record, his recent tone seems a bit jarring, even for some of his admirers, and it remains to be seen how it will play not only at the ballot-box-office but in the long run too.

In America, no one has been able to stand up to Trump's communication style, distasteful as it may be to many. As persuasion expert Scott Adams wrote in Win Bigly, Trump took on Barack Obama, a charismatic President himself, with the most unpresidential of tactics ("birtherism"). But it was already a time when politics and the media were saying "facts don't matter." Only attention did.

In both democracies, the form and content of political discourse is waning. It would seem that everyone only wants to be heard, even if it takes only a loud voice to secure that moment of attention, and possibly fear. A big heart would play the game as a "uniter versus divider" (as the BJP's marriage ad did). But now, it all sounds like "divider vs divider," and a voter has to pick a camp based on simply whether they fit in the "protected" camp or not.

Education, propaganda, the future

The proposed dividing lines that have surfaced in this heated rhetoric about OBCs and Muslims need to be seen in relation to deeper and older assumptions about the Indian identity landscape — assumptions that come from the social sciences in Western and Indian academia, and are reflected in the school curricula of millions of children year after.

By Vamsee Juluri

Donald Trump's Legal Saga: From Impeachments to Investigations, Untying Legal Challenges

Depending on individual perspectives and political likings, opinions on Donald Trump's legal troubles can widely vary. Some people view the investigations and lawsuits against Trump as evidence of his alleged wrongdoing. It points out instances like his impeachment, various allegations of misconduct, and ongoing investigations into his business dealings. Others may see them as politically motivated attacks or attempts to undermine his presidency and legacy.

Regardless of personal opinions, it's essential to let the legal process play out fairly and impartially. All individuals, regardless of their status or political affiliation, deserve due process and a fair trial.

It's crucial to uphold the principles of justice and the rule of law certainly, beyond the polarized viewpoints. Trump, like any other citizen, is entitled to the presumption of innocence until proven guilty in a court of law. It's essential for the legal system to investigate any allegations thoroughly and fairly, without political prejudice or undue effect.

The outcome of these legal proceedings will shape Trump's personal future. In addition it will also have broader allegations for the responsibility of public figures and the integrity of democratic institutions. Regardless of one's political connection or status, transparency, reliability, and adherence to legal norms are essential to maintain public trust in the justice system.

Ultimately, the resolution of Trump's legal troubles will likely have significant ramifications for American politics and society. It determines perceptions of accountability, transparency, and the rule of law in the years to come.

Here lies some of the legal challenges and controversies surrounding Donald Trump:

Impeachment Proceedings: Trump faced impeachment twice during his presidency. The first impeachment in December 2019 was related to allegations of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress regarding his dealings with Ukraine. The second impeachment in January 2021 was for agitation of insurrection following the storming of the U.S. Capitol by his supporters.

Investigations into Business Practices: Trump's business empire has been under scrutiny for various reasons. It includes allegations of tax evasion, fraud, and improper financial dealings. Investigations by prosecutors in New York, led by the Manhattan District Attorney's office and the New York Attorney General's office, have focused on Trump's financial records and business transactions. **Civil Lawsuits:** Trump has faced numerous civil lawsuits, both during his presidency and afterward, ranging from defamation suits to cases related to his business dealings, including lawsuits related to the Trump Organization's handling of finances and allegations of sexual misconduct.

By Susmita Ghosh



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Editor in Chief & Publisher :

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Managing Editor :

Susmita Ghosh

Deputy Managing Editor :

Amaninder Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) : Aruna Singh

Special Correspondents: Gagandeep Singh (India)

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

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REGD & MAILING OFFICE :

P.O Box 7005 Hicksville New York 11801

Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

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Saudi Finance, Campus Radicalisation and the Far Left Usurpation of America: How they are Connected



By: Sandeep Balakrishna

Among the several eerie elements in the DEI narrative and its practical consequences, nothing is deadlier than the transformation of students into full time activists of the Far Left. The methods and processes of this transformation include a wholesale rigging of textbooks at all levels, which are then enforced and dinned into students by a committed faculty. And when they emerge with useless and unemployable degrees, they know of no reality.

But it is even more sinister. Their very capacity of recognise other realities has already been obliterated from a very early age. From this perspective, substantial sections of the American academia resemble madrassas where students are taught only the Islamic scripture and nothing else. It is instructive to read this insightful analysis by V.S. Naipaul on the consequences of such an "education".

"A convert's worldview alters... His idea of history alters. He rejects his own... The convert has to turn away from everything that is his... People develop fantasies about who and what they are... there is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries can be easily set on the boil." We observe precisely these consequences in action across

America. The destruction of the statues of America's founding fathers. The recurrent bouts of campus violence. The repudiation of America's history and its recasting as a history of nothing else but upper class oppression. And the simultaneous embrace of the worst of the fanatical Islamist elements. All this has happened primarily because of a twofold destruction: history and family. These twin destructions have created at least three generations of rootless Americans.

In 2010, widespread protests erupted in New York and elsewhere in the US against the proposed construction of a mosque and an Islamic community centre just across the site of the Twin Towers which were brought down by jihadis on September 11, 2001. The protestors viewed the proposal as an expression of the triumph of the 9/11 jihad on American soil, dubbing it "Ground Zero Mosque." Unsurprisingly, a big backer of the aforementioned real estate project named Park51 was Sharif El-Gamal and his partner, Nour Mousa is the nephew of Amr Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League. Around the same period, in 2005, Harvard University received a whopping \$20 million

endowment from Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal of Saudi Arabia for an Islamic Studies Chair. Fast forward, today, Harvard and other major American universities boast of a slew of academic programmes that teach various aspects of Islam to Americans. Concomitant with this was a steady growth of all kinds of radical Islamic student groups on US campuses. Chief among these is CAIR, which has repeatedly come under fire for having links with jihadi outfits like Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

Elsewhere, American foreign policy in the last two and half decades has embarked on a reckless pursuit of Muslim immigrants. This sounds eerily similar to what the successive Left governments did in Bengal for more than three decades: A wholesale importing of illegal Muslim immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh.

And two plus decades later, the proverbial chickens have come home to roost. A thoroughly subverted education system has created two generations of rootless American youth brainwashed into supporting Islamic terror groups. And this indoctrinated generation has spilled into all realms — tech, finance, education and policy

making. In 2017, a storm hit the tech industry and corporate America when James Damore was fired by Google for "circulating an internal memo asserting there are biological causes behind gender inequality in the tech industry." This had nothing to do with his job as an engineer at Google. It had everything to do with the stranglehold that the Far Left has acquired in the corporate world. This is what Damore said in a lengthy YouTube interview with Stefan Molyneux, a podcaster. "I went to a diversity programme at Google, it was totally secretive and shameful. I heard things that I definitely disagreed with in some of our programmes. I had some discussions there, there was lots of just shaming, and 'No you can't say that, that's sexist' and 'You can't do this.' ... There's just so much hypocrisy in the things they are saying... the left-wing was getting so bad... Lots of upper management was shaming me."

The Far Left hijacking of corporate America reminds us of Ayn Rand's bestselling *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, which describe in excruciating detail the methods and tactics that the Left uses to seize economic power from the people and then destroys the whole existing order. While these two novels concentrate their

narrative only on economics, what the Far Left-Woke combine is now doing goes far beyond economics — it is a call for total annihilation, and its methods include a conscious support for jihadi terror.

From James Damore's firing for being politically incorrect to Google employees supporting Hamas, the fall has been swift and deadly in just seven years. In the coming years, this self-perpetuating vicious cycle will only inflict more harm.

But at the moment, Google did the sensible thing by firing the twenty-eight Hamas supporters last week. However, it would do better to vacuum-clean the Far Left gangs that have near completely usurped tech companies in Silicon Valley and corporate America in general.

Sinister job titles like "President: Diversity" in these companies augur a return of a deathly phenomenon that violently exterminated the existing society in Russia in 1917 and China in 1949.

Back then, Lenin and Mao had to unleash vast armies of their communist cadre to do this job. This time around, the same thing is being accomplished through a steady but certain subterfuge both in the government apparatus and the private sector.

It is befitting to conclude this essay series with an excerpt from Vladimir Putin's brilliant speech delivered in November 2021: "This conservative approach is not about an ignorant traditionalism, a fear of change... it is primarily about reliance on a time-tested tradition, the preservation and growth of the population, a realistic assessment of oneself and others, a precise alignment of priorities... and a fundamental rejection of extremism as a method... for us in Russia, these are not some speculative postulates, but lessons from our difficult and sometimes tragic history. The cost of ill-conceived social experiments is sometimes beyond estimation. Such actions can destroy not only the material, but also the spiritual foundations of human existence, leaving behind moral wreckage where nothing can be built to replace it for a long time."

India, Philippines Are Growing Closer Over A 'Common Cause' - China

By Maha Siddiqui

India is all set to send its first-ever defence attaché to the Philippines. The military attaché is expected to take charge in about three to four months after the final clearance from the Defence Minister's office. A defence or military attaché is part of the diplomatic establishment in the host country and is tasked with tracking military developments in the region. According to a source, the move is in sync with India's geostrategic and geo-economic efforts to shape a narrative in the Indo-Pacific.

China's growing aggression in the Indo-Pacific, especially in the South China Sea, has been a matter of concern for the region, especially for an ASEAN country like the Philippines. China claims most of the South China Sea and uses what it calls the 'nine-dash line' to assert its control over the fish-rich Scarborough Shoal, as well as the Second Thomas Shoal, which has become another point of friction between Manila and Beijing.

The Significance Of The Defence Attach

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The defence attaché's role assumes greater significance in the current times as tensions between the Philippines and China rise. The former has accused Beijing of repeated military provocations in the South China Sea over the last few months. On April 13, the Chinese

coast guard blocked a Philippine maritime research vessel and its escort just 35 nautical miles from the coast of the island nation. They are also accused of firing water cannons. China has also been stopping the Philippines' resupply to the Second Thomas Shoal. In the last two

resupply missions, Philippine boats were damaged and a few crew members were injured. Calling these attacks illegal, coercive, aggressive, and dangerous, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has stated that his country could take retaliatory measures.

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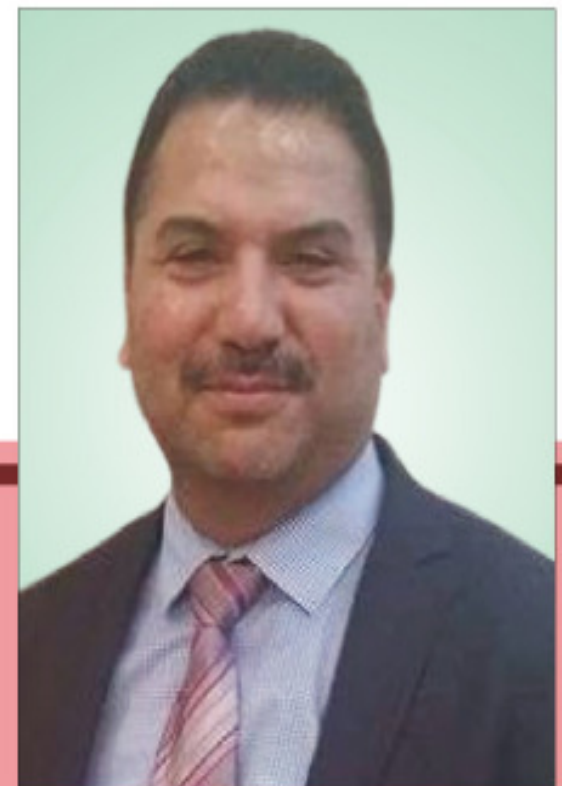
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What's Ailing Foreign Media in India?

By: KA Badarinath

Why is it that global media operating in Bharat is acerbic? Being bitter or sour on substantive work issues is understandable given that Bharat may look complex for many of them. For those who are first-timers in Bharat, understanding this country may not be easy at all. Sensitivities, socio-economic matrix, clutch of movements, and political ideologies across 28 states and eight union territories, might virtually stump even the hardnosed journalists with experience.

Many news organisations, internationally, have made it a point to have bases in Bharat given its growing clout on global forums, strong and consistent growth showing and soft power clout that it enjoys. From G20, and BRICS to WTO, banks and financial institutions, there's no significant global project in which Bharat goes unrepresented or its indulgence is sought.

Given the potential for Bharat to emerge as the third-largest economic powerhouse in a couple

of years during the possible third five-year term of Prime Minister Modi and a huge appetite to know more about developments in this country has made it mandatory for top media companies to have



offices and representatives here. From the early '90s, especially when Dr Manmohan Singh as finance minister kicked off economic reforms, Bharat began its arduous journey to reconnect with the world in its own unique way. It's only now that Bharat is asserting and carving

out a niche space for itself. In these last 30-odd years, several global media houses either sent their correspondents here or opened full news bureaus. Some have had multiple teams like the

British Broadcasting Corporation that even began offering news packages in Indian languages. Television, digital media and radio networks apart from print newspapers from all continents have had their presence before and after economic reforms were rolled out. Capturing trends in a

nation on the move has become an inevitability for media outlets. From CNN, and Fox to ABC, you name the news outlet and it has been represented in this country. Similar is the case with the top four news agencies and beyond. Both European and the US media houses have, over the years, evolved content-sharing arrangements with Bharatiya counterparts. Most foreign media companies' editorial policies may have been driven or influenced by their Indian partners. Also, top Bharat-bred journalists have anchored news operations for top-notch media brands internationally. Given the globe-trotting nature of Bharatiya professionals, several of our big names helm news outlets internationally. In this backdrop, a couple of foreign media professionals leaving Bharat due to circumstances 'beyond normal' have kicked up a debate in the community. Avani Dias, South Asia Bureau Chief of Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) exit for personal reasons has been twisted to say that it was due to "undue pressure" from the

Indian government. French journalist Vanessa Dognac's departure a few months back also hit the front pages in Bharat and France. In both these cases, facts are diametrically opposite to what appeared on the news networks.

A new assignment at 'Four Corners' clinched in June 2023 and a wedding in December 2023 were reported by Australia Today as prime reasons for Avani Dias's to return to Australia. Reported violation of journalists' work visa conditions led to the exit of French journalist Vanessa Dognac. Interestingly enough, both claimed that "there was no press freedom in India" or it was "very difficult" to function as a newsperson in Bharat. Well, if that were true, how is it that hundreds of news stories are routinely despatched by foreign media outlets each day from Bharat? How is it that dozens of foreign journalists have made Bharat their second home though they came here due to professional assignments?

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India First | Beyond Modi-Hate:

Opposition Needs a Vision, Not Desperation



By: Sudesh Verma

Two phases of elections are over. Analysts will keep discussing claims and counterclaims on the impact of lower voting. The desperation in the Opposition camp on projecting the INDI alliance as an alternative has led to a bizarre proposal that there could be one prime minister for one year to avoid conflict of leadership. Strange but true that the Opposition would do everything to convert their hatred of Narendra Modi — a hatred that emanates from fear — into a tool for political mobilisation. They are fighting a losing battle with their feet on the edge. One more term for Modi and the country would witness a great transformation in the political, social and economic lives of the nation. This is something that happened in Singapore under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew who got rid of corruption and created a system that delivered economic and social prosperity to the people of the tiny Island state. India is no Singapore and hence it would take more time to achieve the same transformation. Modi has already started a movement where opening a business establishment is more rewarding than trying to make money out of politics. The old system is getting replaced gradually. The Damocles Sword hangs over the heads of everyone who has made money by misusing the system. The need to maintain compliance has gone down the throats of habitual violators who thought they could deal with the system using political clout.

Many others are unhappy with Modi because his determination to cleanse the system demanded that the bottlenecks be removed. The middlemen who

pocketed 85 of the government largesse meant for the poor would definitely be not happy. They have lost money and also the control over the system which they managed by posing as benefactors to the poor. Now the prime minister interacts directly with the beneficiaries to know their lives. It was always fashionable amongst youths to be a Leftist because the Utopian ideology inspired them and allowed them to live an existence where dreams and imagination met the idea of arm-chair revolution. The Leftists tried to maintain their hegemony by giving ideological support to the Congress and, in exchange, got a big share of the booty that the education department provided such as scholarships, foreign tours, teaching assignments and also control over the minds of children by manipulating the NCERT syllabus.

The Modi regime has changed that. While some Leftists may have sneaked into the system by posing as nationalists (a term anathema to any genuine Leftist), by and large, the system is getting cleansed. Real issues of cultural rootedness and survival as representatives of one of the oldest civilisations have started figuring prominently in the intellectual discourse. Those who believe that India is a nation of nationalities imagine India emerging out of the womb on August 15, 1947. Ideologues of this thinking often articulate that unity is a forced one and if enough pressure is exercised from within, the society would explode. It is this thinking that sees a Tamil as different from a Bihari, or imagines cutting off India from the chicken neck. The counter viewpoint which is the nationalist narrative recognises the

constitutionality of 1947 or 1950 but sees India as a unity that evolved over generations whereby, a national identity was created in the past of India or Bharat being one nation. Nation here is not a mere state defined by a definite boundary. It exists in the hearts and minds of people when they crisscross from one place to the other. It is this unity and cohesion that has withstood the 400 years of Islamic rule and more than 200 years of British rule. Modi has accentuated the nationalist narrative and mixed it with a liberal economic ideology that would remove fretters and enable every Indian to dream big and realise his dream. The dream of a \$5 trillion economy would be realised only if the country is able to have more and more entrepreneurs and businesses. This thinking is opposed to those who created some rich people by funding cronies and in return got favours during elections. The era of the Raj where Indian businesses survived at the whims and fancies of British officials transformed into the era of the Brown sahibs where license and permit ruled the roost. A fresh breath of air came during the regime of former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. Dr Manmohan Singh could have done much better but the retrograde Leftist and NGO mentality did not give him free hands. Modi has unleashed energy that would make rollback impossible. He has converted the development and faster development into an ideology. In earlier times, the government used to change but Lutyens' Delhi always prevailed. This was understood in the adage prevalent in Delhi, shown in the movie The Kashmir Files: "They have the government but the

system is ours". The Vajpayee government brought many changes but it could not take the Lutyens' Delhi by the horns since he was dictated by coalition compulsions.

There used to be an unwritten law that the holy cows (important leaders) in Opposition parties would not be touched but the lesser minions could be sacrificed. Change of government, therefore, did not matter much till there were pliable bureaucrats and friendly politicians who would oblige by doing a few errands for the Opposition as well. In such a vast system of government and administration, nobody would actually notice. The media would also keep these holy cows happy.

Modi's ascension changed this overnight. Modi had come on the promise of change and transformation and was bound by his promises. In trying to fulfil these promises, he had no other way but to ride roughshod over those who had hijacked the system. The Congress and other Opposition parties are clueless on how to tackle Modi. He has no friends who can influence him though he may listen to their advice if given in the interest of the country. Those who had indulged in corruption when in power are finding the noose of the law closing in on them in a gradual way. The agencies of the government have been given the freedom to do their job without fear. Whether it is Rahul Gandhi or Mamata Banerjee or Lalu Prasad Yadav, the thread that unites them is the same: the fear of the law and the failure to discover ways to tackle Modi.

Congress's 'Wealth Redistribution' Plan And The Battle for 2024

By: Sandip Ghose

The way political narratives are playing out in the Lok Sabha polls of 2024 has a ring similar to the title of Luigi Pirandello's famous play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Except in this case, the playwright is Narendra Modi, who seems to be writing not just his own script but also for his adversaries by continuously setting the agenda. So, if anyone thinks he is being reactive, that is wide off the mark.

The consummate politician is still the master puppeteer who is stringing along his detractors. Therefore, it is so amusing to watch the euphoria of the Opposition after the first two rounds predicting a defeat for Modi exactly the same way they have done during many state assembly and Lok Sabha elections in the past. Some are gleefully predicting the BJP's numbers falling below 200, while others are salivating at the prospects of a "palace coup" in the party. The sense of déjà vu is unmistakable. It is touching to find how kindergarten psephologists come up with analyses that they like to believe Narendra Modi and Amit Shah had missed. The debacle of the BJP's "Shining India" campaign is cited as an example. There lies the fallacy. This is because, unlike 2014, or 2019, the BJP is not approaching these elections with any overarching theme. It is not Ram Mandir, as some expected, nor Viksit Bharat or India as the Vishwaguru in making. Even Labharthi schemes get a passing mention. There are multiple themes and planks on which Modi is fighting these elections, and he is deftly shifting the goalposts as he moves from one geography to another. It's like a 'plat du jour' restaurant that serves a different main course each day of the week. Only here, it is not seven days but seven phases.



One is not getting into the prediction game. That is not this columnist's line of business. The idea is to sift the strands of the story as it is evolving so that one can savour every layer and dimension of the drama without getting distracted by the surround sound and being confined to isolated echo chambers. Much as observers have labelled the polls as uninteresting or *thanda*, this is not an ordinary election. The Opposition may see it as India's second tryst with democracy and supporters of Narendra Modi perceive it as the gateway to "Amrit Kaal". But, no matter which end of the political spectrum one belongs to, it is clear to all that 2024 is going to be as much of a watershed year for India as 2014 was. Thus, all sides are going for broke as it were. So far, in the first two phases, about 190 constituencies have gone to the polls. Of these, nearly forty per cent were from south India. It is being posited as if the BJP was aiming to make a clean sweep of these seats by substantially increasing its tally in the south, particularly in Kerala and Tamil

Nadu, where the party's seat share has been nil to negligible in the past. This is a gross underestimation of Modi-Shah's political acumen. While the disproportionate amount of resources and energy invested, especially by Narendra Modi, may be intriguing, it would be naive to think that he was banking on a southern bonanza to compensate for losses in the north.

Personally, I believe the story there is not yet over. There may be an epilogue in store that we are not aware of. But even assuming a rout for the BJP in the south, even a ten per cent negative swing (which is possible on account of natural anti-incumbency) can hardly lead to a rout. So, if Modi's call for "400 paar" was rhetoric, Congress's claim of "Dakshin mein saaf, Uttar mein half" is premature exultation. Similarly, much is being read about the lower voter turnout. Some pundits are interpreting it as bad news for the BJP. Again, it is simplistic to assume that this was not factored in by the BJP. It did not require a Met

Department forecast or AccuWeather prediction to figure out that April and May are going to be hot months. The popular prognosis seems to be that it is the BJP voters who, being complacent about their party's prospects, did not come out to vote. In fact, it is likely to be the contrary. It would require a very high level of anti-incumbency sentiments and ground mobilisation to bring out opposition voters in larger numbers against the BJP's formidable ground machinery.

Congress cheerleaders in the commentariat and media are already discerning signs of nervousness among the BJP leadership and interpreting Modi shifting gears to raise the Hindutva pitch as a vindication of their diagnosis. However, what people may be missing is that this could have already been part of Narendra Modi's planned script as the elections moved towards the Hindi heartland. The Congress and Rahul Gandhi may have handed over to him on a platter the lever for changing the course of the campaign by talking of

'wealth redistribution'. Any amount of protestations that this is nowhere mentioned in its manifesto cannot do away with the impacts of the words once uttered by the self-anointed "shadow prime minister" of the party. Congress thought, perhaps, with some justification, that it had served successive aces with its "NYAY" promises, talk of caste census, and 'X-ray' of the economy. With his powerful return volleys, Modi has seized the advantage, and Congress is left scurrying to pick up the balls hit out of the park. The best of sportsmen or artists talk of the need to experience an amount of performance anxiety to bring out their best in a major game or an event. The Congress could have inadvertently contributed to removing any lethargy or smugness that may have crept into the BJP cadres and supporters by creating a perception of crisis. To remain in the game, it is important that it does not slip into a comfort zone lulled by its own self-talk. The fourth of June is still five weeks away.

Social Populism, Identity Politics: A Self-Goal or a Saviour for Congress?

By: Akshay Ranade

Sam Pitroda's casual comment on utility and perhaps also the necessity of inheritance tax in India during an interview has triggered a national debate on the economic direction the Congress is willing to take India to, if given the chance. The tax issue has further emboldened the BJP's counterattack on the Congress, and the BJP is using it with all its manoeuvres.

The impracticality of certain promises in the Congress manifesto and sheer pandering to identities – religious as well as caste – betrays the underlying desperation of the Congress party to somehow be relevant in the elections. Rahul Gandhi has ensured that the Congress is at its nadir since the inception of the grand old party and he is intelligibly doing everything that would save the face for him and his party. And desperate times call for desperate measures! In the case of the Congress party, it is the recourse to populist and arguably divisive identity politics. The Congress flirting with social populism and identity politics should not surprise us beyond a point. History suggests that the grand old party has always used these political tactics for its own survival and also, more importantly, for the revival of the Gandhi dynast within the Congress. What is however worrisome is that almost every time the Congress resorted to it, it had severe consequences for India.

The socialist cauldron that Nehruvian economics pushed the Indian economy into was premised on the marginalisation and further exodus of the liberal voices from the Congress – voices which could have checked the excesses of state interference in the economy. John Mathai's famed exit from Nehru's cabinet after presenting the 1950 budget in protest of the excessive centralisation of power in the state and unconstitutional incorporation of the 'Planning Commission' is just one case in point. But even then, Nehru nominally sported the trope of mixed economy which suggested that private capital and relatively free enterprise and state control can co-exist in a mutually fulfilling way. The reality however was the State was comfortably being



entrenched beyond a point, the consequences of which were disastrous for India in the decades to follow. The economy further plummeted into the socialist gallows when Mrs Gandhi, in an effort to trump over the syndicate, allied with the socialist radicals within the party to sail through inner-party factionalism. The context here was the declining electoral results of the Congress, evident from the 1967 elections, and also the decline of the relative significance of Mrs Gandhi within the party in front of rivals like Morarji Desai. Mrs Gandhi's cunning socialist turn was a strategy to revive her political fortunes – both within the Congress and also nationally. This was facilitated by the radicals within the Congress who wanted a radical reorientation in the Congress' economic outlook. The 'Young Turks' – as they were called then – led by Chandra Sekhar of Praja Socialist Party assisted, or rather entirely navigated, Mrs Gandhi to adopt the policies that would take India in the direction of a socialist state. Indira Gandhi's ten-point program, which was a carbon copy of the Young Turk's blueprint for the Indian economy, was the indication of the decisive departure from a symbolic mixed economy championed by Nehru to a highly state-controlled and dictated one. Mrs Gandhi's tactical adoption of social populism through the rhetoric of Garibi Hatao and through policies like

nationalisation, Monopolistic and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) was premised more on the political calculations of her own survival than on the genuine assessment of India's economic needs. That Indira's government in this phase was supported by the Left parties made the issues even more problematic. After the dismal performance of the Janata government, when Mrs Gandhi came to power once again without the compulsions of the Left, she finally started the process of reforming the economy when she realised the revival through socialist principles was almost impossible. The modernist Rajiv Gandhi, who nurtured no lost love for the outdated economic principles adopted by her mother earlier, took forward her reformist initiatives on the economy, though not with the urgency the situation would have demanded. The consequence was an impending economic crisis. Rajiv Gandhi however played with the diabolic game of identity politics to appease a section of community he thought was central to Congress' political fortunes. The Shahabuddin and the Shah Bano blunder that his government got into dented the secular mask of the Congress at a point of no return. Not that the Congress was genuinely secular before, but the appeasement earlier had a veneer of subtlety before Rajiv openly flirted with competitive communalism in the case of Shah

Bano and later with the opening of the gates of Ramjanmabhoomi. Little did he know that, in the process, he was supporting the political force which would go on to challenge the Congress nationally. It took Narasimha Rao, a non-Gandhi PM from the Congress assisted by the reformist economist Dr Manmohan Singh, to finally put to rest the controlled economy and pave the way for economic independence India desired and deserved. The sagacity of Dr Singh was to continue on the path of the economic direction of his predecessor Vajpayee, which yielded strong economic dividends for Dr Singh's government. Congress' victory in 2009, despite the disastrous 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, was a result of Manmohan Singh's economic performance. In the process, he had battled hard against the imperious National Advisory Council (NAC), which was an unconstitutional body housed with the cronies of the dynast, which attempted to derail the Singh government's reformist agendas. Manmohan Singh invested a lot of personal and political capital to have an upper hand over the NAC, the successful completion of the nuclear deal is just an example of that. In the second tenure, however, the NAC was successful in pushing down the throat of the Singh government the policies which were closer to the dynast. The political objective was clear

once again.

This was the time when the Congress guard was attempting to catapult a non-performing, incompetent Rahul Gandhi to lead the Congress in upcoming general elections. The embrace of socialistic principles once again was aimed at projecting Rahul as an emerging leader of Congress with a pro-poor socialist agenda. The economic meddling by the NAC, coupled with crony capitalism facilitated by a dysfunctional UPA II, led to a crippled economy and resulted in the complete decimation of the Congress in 2014 general elections.

Now, when the Congress is literally fighting the battle of survival and relevance, it is returning to the old trick from its kitty, albeit with the scale of concoction that is unprecedented by its own standards in the past. Congress' manifesto and the speeches by its leaders once again suggest that it is flirting with the toxic combination of social populism and divisive identity politics, masked under the convenient garb of social justice, to put up a fight for its survival. The Congress, helmed by Rahul, tested these tactics in the Karnataka Assembly elections earlier. Emboldened by its success in Karnataka, the rhetoric is now loud and shrieking, replete with regressive religious appeasement, divisive caste-based utterance and allusion to the redundant calls, subtle or otherwise, to the disastrous idea of 'wealth redistribution'.

Whatever revolutionary ways Rahul is talking about falls flat on the credentials of the Congress party given its record in dealing with the economy in the past. In fact, data suggests that the nature of income inequality may have been worse in the two UPA eras as compared to the NDA, essentially before the Covid-19 outbreak. And the record of dealing with crony capitalism during the UPA is not very inspiring when we look at the series of scams that brought the Congress government to its heel. The subsequent defeats of the Congress in elections have pushed the party to the extent that its relevance is not being questioned in the political space today.

Amethi and Rae Bareli: At Stake is the Cult of The Gandhis

By: Rahul Shivshankar

Why has the Congress appeared so stricken with confusion in declaring their candidates for the Gandhi family bastions of Amethi and Rae Bareli? Is it solely down to the fear of defeat? It isn't as if the Gandhis don't know what it is like to lose Amethi and Rae Bareli. Amethi first played truant with Sanjay Gandhi in 1977 when he was defeated by Janata Party's candidate Ravindra Pratap Singh. That defeat was comparable in shock value to the defeat Rahul Gandhi suffered at the hands of BJP's Smriti Irani in 2019. The comparison works because both Sanjay Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi were anointed successors. Both looked to be on an unassailably upward political trajectory. By the mid-1970s, Indira Gandhi had declared Sanjay Gandhi as her successor and two years before the 2019 Lok Sabha clash, Sonia Gandhi had handed the Congress throne or its presidency to Rahul. In comparison to temperamental Amethi, Rae Bareli has been more steadfast. Indira Gandhi's husband won the seat in India's first-ever Parliamentary election in 1952. Indira ruled Rae Bareli unchallenged from 1967 to 1977. It is said that her win in 1967 from Rae Bareli saved her from certain political oblivion. Had she lost, the party reins would have passed on



to rebellious Nehru-era Congress stalwarts who rejected Indira's purely dynastic claim over the party. Only once have Rae Bareli's voters turned their back on a Gandhi family member. In 1977, they punished Indira Gandhi for her despotism. "Giant killer" Raj Narain of the Janta Party, a well-to-do Brahmin politician from Varanasi, proved to be an enduring nemesis. In 1975, he had succeeded in securing her disqualification in an electoral

malpractice case. The unseating created the circumstances that led Indira Gandhi to suspend the Constitution and declare the infamous "emergency" in a fit of absolutism. But these blips, some more consequential than others, haven't unseated the Gandhis from atop the commanding heights of India's political firmament. They've always found a way to return to Parliament and to power. On balance, it is fair to even

postulate that the voters of Rae Bareli and Amethi have returned like homing pigeons to the Gandhi "gharana". But all these Houdini acts belong to the pre-Modi era of Indian politics. Today, with the Congress reeling on the ropes like the hapless victim of a Joe Frazier hiding, with its kingdom reduced to a sliver, the crown sits precariously on the Gandhi head. Unlike the Tharoors, Chidambarams, and Kharges, the Gandhi dynasts are

not incidental to the Congress. They are the Congress. The Congress is grand because they are still grand. Deluded, the Congress grandiloquently proclaims that it is the sole guardian of the "idea of India". It is so ludicrously unaware of its waning influence that it truly believes that it is the only entity holding back what it terms are "the forces of Hindu revanchism" from overrunning the Constitution. In this pyramid of inverted vanities, the Congress accords to the Gandhis a larger-than-life role. One not unlike the heroic part reprised by Hindu king Jaipal in 1001 AD when he stood eyeballing the forces of Mahmud of Ghazni.

When the Gandhis are placed on such a pedestal, they must naturally also be above any risk which could inestimably diminish their cult. The Gandhi family managers are aware of the stakes. One (in this case two) decisions taken in haste exposing the scions to a defeat, they estimate, will rob the Gandhis of that carefully constructed cult status. Miniaturised Gandhis will only underline just how miniaturised the Congress has become. In this calculus, the pay-off of holding onto pretensions is infinitely greater than the value of two seats in Parliament.

Canadian laxity

Anti-India elements continue to have a field day

THE pro-Khalistan slogans raised at a public event, which was attended by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other leaders in Toronto on Sunday, validate India's claim that Canada has been giving space to separatism and extremism. India summoned the Canadian deputy high commissioner on Monday and lodged a strong protest over the incident, which was described by the Ministry of External Affairs as 'disturbing'. New Delhi has stated that such actions not only impact the India-Canada relations but also encourage a climate of violence and criminality in Canada. The ties between the two nations have been under strain after Trudeau announced in



September last year that Canadian agencies were probing the alleged involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was designated as a terrorist by India's National Investigation

Agency (NIA). Canada, however, has failed to substantiate the charges, which were promptly dismissed by India as 'absurd'. Having repeatedly asked Ottawa to share credible evidence in the

Nijjar case, India has been asserting that its core issue with Canada continues to be the latitude given to separatists, terrorists and anti-India elements in that country. New Delhi has also

taken exception to a Washington Post report that named an Indian official who allegedly hatched a plot to kill NIA-designated terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. India has said that the report makes 'unwarranted and unsubstantiated' imputations on a serious matter. A high-level committee set up by the Indian government is already carrying out an investigation into the security concerns shared by the Biden administration on networks of criminals and terrorists. The US, which has affirmed that India has been taking the Pannun case seriously, needs to ensure that its territory is not misused by troublemakers to whip up anti-India sentiment.

Why Iranian President's Much-Hyped Pakistan Visit is a Non-Starter

Written By: Arun Anand

Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi's three-day trip to Pakistan from April 22-24, is being hailed as a major diplomatic milestone by Pakistan. This visit, the first by any foreign leader to Pakistan since the hotly disputed elections on February 8 — which were riddled with accusations of fraud and misconduct — takes on added significance against the backdrop of escalating Middle Eastern geopolitical tensions involving Israel and Iran. Meanwhile, Tehran and Islamabad, through a strategically staged military display in January 2024 — largely viewed as a manoeuvre to satisfy domestic political agendas — have further intensified their international presence.

For both nations, this visit represents a critical moment as they navigate a labyrinth of significant internal and external pressures. For Pakistan, particularly its military brass, this event is a strategic gambit to balance against traditional allies like the Gulf states and the United States, aiming to extract



enhanced financial perks—a tactic honed over decades. Hosting Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi as the first foreign leader post its contentious elections also highlights Islamabad's growing geopolitical isolation and diminishing influence, even within its own region. Pakistan is besieged by relentless challenges: its

economy is shattered, security is irreparably compromised, and its foreign policy — especially regarding Afghanistan — has come apart at the seams. The nation's economy, gasping for air, clings desperately to intermittent bursts of foreign aid. In March 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) dispensed its latest

loan instalment, staving off Islamabad's imminent balance of payment crisis. With external debt towering at an overwhelming \$131 billion, Islamabad spends nearly three-quarters of its government revenue on servicing this mountainous debt annually. Similarly, Islamabad's Afghan policy has disintegrated just two years after aiding the Afghan

Taliban's ascension in Kabul; a manoeuvre once hailed by many in Pakistan as a regional policy victory. The subsequent deterioration in Islamabad-Kabul relations underscores the flawed and absurd assumptions that colluding with a guerrilla group to supplant an established republican government and shatter the nation's fabric could yield long-term benefits. This stark failure speaks volumes about the misguided strategy's repercussions. For Iran, long branded an international outcast primarily due to its controversial nuclear program and Middle Eastern policies, this visit is a chance to bolster or at least project a strengthening of its regional alliances and assert its influence amid escalating tensions with Israel and the United States. Furthermore, Tehran has executed its most daring military manoeuvre in the volatile Middle East by carrying out its widely publicised direct military strike against Israel, its regional arch-enemy. This response came after Tel Aviv's airstrike on Iran's consulate in Damascus, which resulted in the deaths of several of Iran's Revolutionary Guards senior commanders, including Mohammed Reza Zahedi and Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi. In a situation where Israel is urgently trying to expand the conflict from Gaza to a wider arena, Iran sees securing a visit to Pakistan — a nation viewed through the lens of American influence due to its pivotal role in the US-led war on terror — as a strategic advantage. Pakistan's alignment within the Western sphere of influence has stymied any potential for a mutually beneficial relationship with Iran, breeding mutual distrust as both nations viewed each other through this ideological lens. This estrangement is evident in their dismal economic exchanges. For instance, in 2022, Iran-Pakistan bilateral trade was barely under \$800 million; a figure embarrassingly low considering the economic potential. This grim reality has most likely spurred the Iranian president during his visit to commit to boosting Iran-Pakistan trade to \$10 billion within the next five years.

ED under fire

Court condemns agency's high-handedness

A Delhi court has pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for its heavy-handed approach, exemplified by its action against doctors treating a person accused in a money laundering case. The court's rap underscores a concerning trend of powerful agencies, tasked with upholding the law, overstepping their boundaries and violating the civil liberties they are supposed to protect. The ED's use of stringent provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to record statements of doctors, without any substantive link to the accused, highlights a worrying abuse of authority. Special Judge Vishal Gogne's remark about strong



leaders, laws and agencies coming back to 'bite the citizens they vow to protect' is a stark reminder of the dangers inherent in unbridled power. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has questioned the timing of

the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the ED. The SC has highlighted the delicate balance between the pursuit of justice and the protection of civil liberties, emphasising the

importance of the need for justification in depriving individuals of their freedom. Justice Sanjiv Khanna's pointed enquiry about Kejriwal's arrest in the context of the ongoing elections raises concerns about the potential misuse of Central agencies for political gains. The allegations of coercion and manipulation in the probe further underline the need for conducting an impartial investigation. These developments bring to light critical issues surrounding the actions of probe agencies. This calls for transparency, accountability and scrupulous adherence to due process. The ED and others must demonstrate probity and integrity in their functioning.

What will happen if the ICC charges Netanyahu with war crimes?

The Israeli government believes that the international criminal court (ICC) in The Hague is about to file war crimes charges against Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials. We can't know for sure – the ICC has kept its plans close to the vest – but the Israeli prime minister has good reason to worry, and the defenses he has offered so far are unlikely to help him.

The ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan's most likely target is Netanyahu's starvation strategy for Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Because the Israeli government has refused to let ICC staff enter Gaza, it will take time for Khan to complete the detailed investigation required to demonstrate other possible Israeli war crimes, such as indiscriminately bombing civilian areas and firing on military targets with foreseeably disproportionate civilian consequences. But the facts surrounding Israel's obstruction of humanitarian aid are readily available. During his two recent visits to the region, Khan stressed that, as international humanitarian law requires, Palestinian civilians in Gaza "must have access to basic food, water and desperately needed medical supplies, without further delay, and at pace and at scale". He warned the Israeli government: "If you do not do so, do not complain when my Office is required to act." The standard he cited is endorsed by virtually every government in the world including Israel, Britain, the United States, and, as a United Nations observer state, Palestine.

For much of the war Israel has allowed just enough food into Gaza to avoid widespread death, but not enough to prevent pervasive hunger and, in some parts of Gaza according to the USAid administrator, Samantha Power, "famine". Oxfam calculated that hundreds of thousands of people in northern Gaza were receiving on average only 245 calories a day, about one-tenth of normal requirements. At least 28 children younger than 12 were reported to have died of malnutrition as of 17 April.

Israeli authorities have been blaming anyone but themselves for this deprivation, but the evidence points primarily to Netanyahu's government. Israel understandably wants to stop the smuggling of arms to Hamas, but its understaffed, convoluted procedures for inspecting aid trucks can take three weeks, with trucks often rejected for carrying a single innocuous item that Israel deemed of military value, forcing them to start the process all over again. Items rejected include anesthetics, cardiac catheters, chemical water quality testing kits, crutches, maternity kits, oxygen cylinders, surgical tools, ultrasound equipment, wheelchairs and X-ray machines. When the UN secretary general, António Guterres, visited the Egyptian side of the Gaza border in March, he saw "long lines of blocked relief trucks

waiting to be let into Gaza". Israel has allowed much-publicized airdrops and sea delivery of food, but they provide only a tiny fraction of what land transport could deliver.

It is thus not surprising that Khan reportedly will initially charge Netanyahu, as well as the defense minister, Yoav Gallant, and Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, Lt Gen Herzi Halevi, for having "deliberately starved Palestinians in Gaza". Just as Khan initially charged Vladimir Putin and his children's rights commissioner with abducting Ukrainian children, and only later began to address Russia's factually more complicated bombing campaign starting with attacks on electrical infrastructure, so is Khan likely to start with the straightforward charges in Gaza before moving on to more complex ones.

Khan will undoubtedly also charge senior Hamas officials in the military chain of command, as he should. The killing and abduction of Israeli civilians on 7 October are clear war crimes. But a basic premise of international humanitarian law is that war crimes by one side never justify war crimes by the other. The duty to comply is absolute, not reciprocal. Netanyahu has already begun to offer his defense. In a post on Twitter/X, he said: "Israel will never accept any attempt by the ICC to undermine its

inherent right of self-defense." But that is nonsense. ICC charges will have nothing to do with Israel's right to self-defense. Rather, they will focus on the way the Netanyahu government has chosen to carry out that defense – by not only targeting Hamas but also committing war crimes against civilians.

Assuming that starvation is the ICC's focus, Netanyahu may note that in recent weeks, the Israeli government has allowed more food into Gaza. Indeed, after the 1 April killing of seven World Central Kitchen staff members, when Joe Biden on 4 April implicitly threatened to condition future US military aid and arms sales on an easing of Israel's obstruction of humanitarian aid, Netanyahu promised to open an additional border crossing and allow somewhat more aid into Gaza. Since then, humanitarian deliveries have increased, but are reportedly still insufficient. But this calibration according to US pressure only underscores the deliberateness of the starvation strategy. And easing that strategy now is no defense to having pursued it for many months.

The Israeli government may argue that Israel has a well-developed legal system and can prosecute its own war criminals. Under what is known as the principle of

complementarity, the international criminal court is supposed to defer to conscientious national justice efforts. But Israel has no history of prosecuting senior officials for war crimes, and no case has been brought for Netanyahu's starvation strategy in Gaza. The Israeli government undoubtedly will argue that because it never joined the ICC, Israeli officials shouldn't be prosecuted by it. But the Rome Statute creating the ICC gives it jurisdiction not only over the nationals of governments that have joined the court, but also over crimes committed on the territories of its members. That makes sense because addressing crimes on a country's territory is a key attribute of sovereignty. Palestine has joined the court and granted it jurisdiction over crimes in its occupied territory – the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

During the negotiations to establish the ICC, the US government opposed territorial jurisdiction, but the other governments present overruled it. US opposition to territorial jurisdiction was behind the sanctions outrageously imposed by Donald Trump on the prior ICC prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, when she opened investigations in Afghanistan that could have implicated George W Bush-era torturers and in Palestine that could reach Israeli officials.

More than 2,000 pro-Palestinian protesters arrested across US campuses

More than 2,000 people have now been arrested during pro-Palestinian protests across dozens of US college campuses in recent weeks.

Police arrested more than 300 pro-Palestinian demonstrators on college campuses on Wednesday night into Thursday morning, pushing the total past 2,000, according to an Associated Press tally. More than 200 students were arrested at the University of California, Los Angeles, as police cleared a fortified encampment, and more than 90 students were arrested at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.

Dozens more were arrested at the University of New Hampshire and at the University of Buffalo. In Oregon, police moved into the school's library on Thursday, which has been occupied by demonstrators since Monday.

"We are not an authoritarian nation where we silence people or squash dissent," said Joe Biden. "But," he continued, "order must prevail." "Violent protest is not protected – peaceful protest is," he said. Biden criticized what he called "violent" protests.

"Vandalism, trespassing, breaking windows, shutting down campuses, forcing the cancellation of classes and graduations – none of this is a peaceful protest," Biden said in a brief statement on Thursday morning.

"There's the right to protest, but not the right to cause chaos," the US president said. In response to a reporter's question, he said he did not think it was the right time to call the national guard. In a Thursday report, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project said that although some clashes have broken out, "the overwhelming majority [of protests] – 99% – have remained peaceful". The protests are part of a movement to force schools to divest from businesses that support the war in Gaza, and

they reflect how the war has become a major flashpoint in US politics. More than 34,000 people have been killed in Gaza since Israel began a campaign to dismantle Hamas, the Gaza health ministry has said. More people in Gaza have been thrust into near starvation, as Israel has limited food aid to the area.

On 7 October, Hamas killed more than 1,200 people and took roughly 250 hostages in an attack on Israel. Since the campaign against Hamas began, the US has provided substantial military support to Israel, including most recently in a \$15bn aid package.

Student protests have grown across the country since an encampment sprang up at Columbia University in New York in mid-April. In many cases, faculty members have joined or supported student protesters, as police and universities have responded with force to demonstrations that threaten to continue into commencement season. Hundreds have been arrested in the weeks since the protests began.

Police cleared out a protest camp at UCLA in the early hours of Thursday, and arrested at least 200 demonstrators. The police operation followed a brutal hours-long attack on the encampment on Tuesday night by masked "instigators" who came to campus and assaulted students with projectiles and chemical agents, while campus security and police retreated or stood by without intervening. At least 1,000 people gathered on UCLA's campus late on Wednesday night, before police moved in, tearing down plywood and pallets that protesters had used to reinforce their encampment. Students described again being attacked with projectiles, fireworks and chemical agents.

US campus crises: Are America and a fragile world order at risk of coming apart?

Are America's enviable institutions of higher learning coming apart? Viral videos of duelling student groups, police handcuffing protestors across campus quads and a parade of university presidents laid low by a single combative Republican legislator suggest a crisis of monumental proportions.

Before we write them off, remember, we have been on these troubled quads before. Consider April 23, 1968. The United States was still reeling from the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and many parts of the country — especially Harlem, the neighbourhood around Columbia University — was a tinderbox. The campus, normally an island of calm with the madness of Manhattan just outside its wrought-iron gates, was anything but calm. Community activists opposing the building of a racially segregated university gym in Morningside Park abutting the campus joined hands with a student group that had taken issue with Columbia's connections with a think tank conducting weapons research for the Vietnam War. They ended up occupying five campus buildings and taking a dean hostage. On April 30, New York City police moved in to clear the occupied buildings. Arrests, violence, and suspensions followed, and the university closed for the balance of the academic year. Columbia inspired protests elsewhere, on and off campuses. Robert F Kennedy, the leading candidate for president from the Democratic party was assassinated in June, followed by anti-war riots at the Democratic National Convention in August. The cumulative effect was a backlash against chaos. The "law and order" Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, was elected president later that year.

Now, here we are in April 2024. Columbia's South Lawn looks about the same as it did 56 years ago, with students parked on it once again. And once again, the New York City police moved in, and arrested and removed students. The students were protesting the flattening of Gaza by Israel and the deaths of over 34,000 people, mostly innocent civilians. Israel was responding to the brutal attack by Hamas on its citizens on October 7, last year. Jewish students on campus were feeling threatened by the protests and feared a return of anti-Semitism. Pro-Palestinian students felt their voices were shut down more often by the administration. Just the day before, Columbia's president, Minouche Shafik, had committed to countering acts of anti-Semitism on campus; a swift invitation to the police to clear the grounds seemed like her way of showing she meant it. Now, protests in solidarity with Columbia students have broken out on campuses across the country, including my own. While we can

legitimately worry about the state of American universities, I have confidence in their resilience. Of all places, they are better equipped to withstand the collision of ideas, clashing groups, and opposing worldviews than most other institutions; and this is despite the evidence of groupthink and "cancel culture" at far too many top universities. In the aftermath of 1968, Columbia suffered a decline in applications and funding, but today many kids would sell their parents to attend the school and the university makes enough to build a \$600 million campus for its business school. US universities are still places where breakthrough discoveries happen and there are instructors who are legends in the classroom. I am far less sanguine about the larger story unfolding beyond the quad and the wrought-iron gates.

For one, anger is rising over the cascading events in the Middle East within and beyond the university. Acts of hate have spiked: Complaints over both anti-Semitic acts and anti-Muslim incidents have gone up dramatically. The American Left has splintered. In a country that religiously upholds the right to freedom of speech many are self-censoring or speaking in

hushed whispers for fear of offending others or being called out by one group or another. This atmosphere offers a perfect breeding ground for political bottom-feeders. There are many of these, as America is gearing up for a presidential election in November. The ghosts of the 1968 elections sit at this year's electoral table as well. Of course, 1968 was an exceptional year in the US. Amidst a sense of chaos, far too many in the Democratic base chose not to turn up to vote and Nixon won with the clarity of his message. Also, Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate and supporter of the Vietnam war alienated the Democratic base, especially the campus protestors.

We find ourselves, again, in an exceptional year. Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican candidate is juggling a criminal trial and 91 felony counts. He is looking to unseat the incumbent Joe Biden, who can point to more legislative accomplishments than most other presidents in recent memory, but is also the recipient of the lowest approval rating of any other first-term president besides Jimmy Carter. Once again, Trump's message is so clear

he can wear it on a hat and its four-letter acronym, MAGA, is his entire vision for America. Biden's message cannot fit on a hat. His age turns off young voters. His support of the war in Gaza has alienated many in the Democratic base. And yes, that includes those campus protestors. So, instead of fretting over whether America's celebrated institutions of higher learning are coming apart, we ought to ask a more critical question: Are America and an already fragile world order at risk of coming apart? Imagine a Trump presidency 2.0 alongside the famine and flattening of Gaza, the fanning of flames across the Middle East, with war raging in Ukraine and a sword dangling over Taiwan. The world may not be resilient enough to survive two rounds of Trump. If Nixon left a permanent scar, Trump will leave a perpetually open wound.

We need to find a resolution to the crisis in Gaza and Israel not so much to save America's universities but to prevent further loss of innocent lives, to save America itself and the global order that hinges on the country not being led by an unhinged man. With a Trump return, campus protestors will have much more to protest about.

H-1B visa lottery applications drop by 40% after crackdown on fraud

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reports a significant drop in the number of H-1B visa lottery applications this year, attributing it to a successful crackdown on fraudulent practices. The number of lottery entries has dropped by nearly 40% in 2024.

The USCIS revealed that the number of entries for this year's lottery stood at 470,342, marking a substantial 38% decline from the 758,994 entries received in 2023, according to a report by the Associated Press.

Interestingly, while the count of workers applying remained relatively stable, with around 442,000 this year compared to 446,000 last year, it indicated a sharp decrease in individuals attempting multiple submissions.

The H-1B visa bids tripled from 2021 to 2023 after the government slimmed down the bulky paperwork to be eligible for the lottery, saying that the time-consuming, expensive task could wait until they had won one of up to 85,000 slots awarded annually in the H-1B visa programme.

Instead, a simple \$10 electronic registration fee became the only requirement, making it easier for people to participate. However, the USCIS found evidence that some companies and individuals were trying to game the system. Last year, over 400,000 out of 759,000 registrations were duplicates.

The USCIS implemented the new one-entry rule in 2024 after uncovering evidence of "gaming the system" by some

companies and applicants.

"We realised that the gaming of the system was not helpful for anybody," said Jaddou, reported AP.

Previously, individuals could submit multiple applications to increase their chances of winning the lottery, creating an unfair advantage.

"We want to make sure that [the visa] is in the hands of people who are going to use it and help the nation," stated USCIS Director Ur Jaddou.



The H-1B visa programme grants visas to highly skilled foreign workers in speciality occupations, often in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) fields. Major tech companies, including Amazon, Microsoft, Apple, Meta, and Google, heavily rely on H-1B visas.

In recent years, Indian tech professionals have dominated the H-1B cap-subject visas, securing about 70% of the 85,000 visas available, including the 20,000 master's cap for advanced US degree holders, according to Forbes. In 2022, Indians secured 77% of the 320,000 approved H-1B visas. This year, the USCIS anticipates around 350,000 applicants, a decrease attributed to new measures against fraud.

According to USCIS -- the US agency that takes care of the visa process -- random selections have been made, and notifications being sent to my USCIS accounts.

Hindu marriage not valid unless requisite ceremonies performed: Supreme Court

A Hindu marriage is not an event for "song and dance", "wining and dining" or a commercial transaction, the Supreme Court has observed and said it cannot be recognised in the "absence of a valid ceremony" under the Hindu Marriage Act. A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih said a Hindu marriage is a 'samskara' and a sacrament which has to be accorded its status as an institution of great value in Indian society.

In its recent order passed in the matter of two trained commercial pilots, who sought a divorce decree without performing a valid Hindu marriage ceremony, the bench urged young men and women to "think deeply about the institution of marriage even before they enter upon it and as to how sacred the said institution is, in Indian society".

"A marriage is not an event for 'song and dance' and 'wining and dining' or an occasion to demand and exchange dowry and gifts by undue pressure leading to

possible initiation of criminal proceedings thereafter. A marriage is not a commercial transaction. It is a solemn foundational event celebrated so as to establish a relationship between a man and a woman who acquire the status of a husband and wife for an evolving family in future which is a basic unit of Indian society," the bench said.

Terming the marriage as sacred as it provides a lifelong, dignity-affirming, equal, consensual and healthy union of two individuals, the bench said a Hindu marriage facilitates procreation, consolidates the unit of family and solidifies the spirit of fraternity within various communities.

"We deprecate the practice of young men and women seeking to acquire the status of being a husband and a wife to each other and therefore purportedly being married, in the absence of a valid marriage ceremony under the provisions of the (Hindu Marriage) Act such as in the instant case where the marriage between the

parties was to take place later," the bench said.

In its April 19 order, the bench said where a Hindu marriage is not performed in accordance with the applicable rites or ceremonies such as 'saptapadi' (taking seven steps by the groom and the bride jointly before the sacred fire), the marriage will not be construed as a Hindu marriage. "We further observe that a Hindu marriage is a sacrament and has a sacred character. In the context of saptapadi in a Hindu marriage, according to Rig Veda, after completing the seventh step (saptapadi) the bridegroom says to his bride, 'With seven steps we have become friends (sakha). May I attain to friendship with thee; may I not be separated from thy friendship'. A wife is considered to be half of oneself (ardhangini) but to be accepted with an identity of her own and to be a co-equal partner in the marriage," it said.

In Hindu Law, marriage is a sacrament or a 'samskara' and it is the foundation for a

new family, the bench noted, and said, "There is nothing like a 'better-half' in a marriage but the spouses are equal halves in a marriage."

Observing that with the passage of centuries and the enactment of the Act, monogamy is the only legally approved form of relationship between a husband and a wife.

"The (Hindu Marriage) Act has categorically discarded polyandry and polygamy and all other such types of relationships. The intent of the Parliament is also that there should be only one form of marriage having varied rites and customs and rituals," it noted.

The bench said after the Act came into force on May 18, 1955, it had codified the law relating to marriage among Hindus and it encompasses not only Hindus as such but Lingayats, Brahmos, Aryasamajists, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs also who can enter into a valid Hindu marriage coming within the expansive connotation of the word Hindu.

Prajwal Revanna 'sex abuse' allegations: Gag order to warning letter to pen drives – how the case unfolded

The story of how hundreds of sex videos allegedly shot by JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna (33) on his cellphone came to light is steeped in intrigue, alleged blackmail and conspiracy.

Finding the technical origin of the videos — the phone from which these were shot and sources of copies — is crucial to the Karnataka Police Special Investigation Team's probe against the MP, who is also the party's Lok Sabha candidate from Hassan and the grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda.

There are several key persons from Hassan, including friends-turned-foes and political rivals of Prajwal, who are likely to be investigated as part of the process to establish that the videos are genuine and not morphed, as is being claimed by the MP and his close associates.

Earliest public reference

One of the earliest public references to the videos was made by Prajwal himself in an original suit that he moved in a Bengaluru civil court on June 1, 2023 against 86 media outlets and three private persons. The suit against the media sought a gag order (which was granted on June 2, 2023) on the grounds that "there is a threat of broadcasting, publishing and circulating such fake news,

morphed photographs/video against the plaintiff by the defendants". One of the three private persons named among the 89 defendants in the suit was Prajwal's former driver, who had quit the service of the Revanna family in March 2023 after working for nearly seven years. There is speculation that the driver, who was considered a member of the family and had access to Prajwal's phones and electronic devices, fell out with the MP in 2023 and began threatening him over the videos. In December 2023, the driver filed a police complaint in Hassan alleging that he and his wife had been kidnapped by Prajwal and his mother after he failed to agree to hand over 13 acres of land.

Second major public reference

The second instance where the videos were raised in public was in January 2024, in Hassan, by an advocate and local BJP leader G Devaraje Gowda, whose plea in the Karnataka High Court had led to the disqualification of Prajwal as an MP in 2023 (this was stayed by the Supreme Court).

Devaraje had also contested from Holenarasipura in the 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections and lost to Prajwal's father, H D Revanna.

"Revanna is calling me a dirty fellow. It is his son who is a dirty fellow. His obscene pictures are part of a case he has filed in court (for the media gag order in June 2023). He has obtained a stay. Let him produce any videos of me sleeping with women. I go back to my family every day," he said at a press conference in Hassan in January. Devaraje claimed he got access to the videos after he began representing Prajwal's former driver in a case filed against the Revannas in December 2023. "It was from (the driver) who I was representing that I came to know about the videos and pictures of Revanna's son. I do not know how he got the videos," he told The Indian Express.

The driver, however, denied all knowledge of the videos at a press conference in Hassan in January.

Devaraje also claimed that he considered bringing some of the women victims before the media but later backtracked as it involved their dignity and self-respect in a small town. "Out of respect for the women, I did not release the videos. It would have caused a calamity in their homes. Who would be held responsible if the women committed suicide?" he said.

Second Boeing whistleblower dies after short illness

Joshua Dean, a Boeing whistleblower who warned of manufacturing defects in the planemaker's 737 Max, has died after a short illness, the second Boeing whistleblower to die this year.

Dean, 45, a former quality auditor at Boeing supplier Spirit AeroSystems, filed a complaint with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) alleging "serious and gross misconduct by senior quality management of the 737 production line" at Spirit. In 2018 and 2019, two 737 Max planes were involved in fatal crashes, which killed 346 people. Dean was fired by Spirit last year, and filed a complaint with the Department of Labor alleging that his termination was in retaliation for raising safety concerns.

According to the Seattle Times, Dean was

hospitalized after having trouble breathing. He was intubated and developed pneumonia and a serious infection before dying two weeks later. "He passed away yesterday morning, and his absence will be deeply felt. We will always love you Josh," Dean's aunt, Carol Dean Parsons, said via Facebook.

Dean was represented by the same law firm that represented Boeing whistleblower John "Mitch" Barnett. Barnett, 62, was found dead in March from what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Barnett spent almost three decades at Boeing, and told the New York Times in 2019 that he had found "clusters or metal slivers" hanging over the wiring of flight controls that could have caused "catastrophic" damage if they had penetrated wires. He alleged that management had ignored his

complaints and moved him to another part of the plant.

Last month, another Boeing whistleblower, Sam Salehpour, told Congress there was "no safety culture" at Boeing, and alleged that employees who raised the alarm were "ignored, marginalized, threatened, sidelined and worse". He said he feared "physical violence" after going public with his concerns.

US regulators are now investigating Boeing after a mid-air door-panel blowout in January on a Boeing 737 Max 9. Reuters reported last month that the justice department is now weighing whether Boeing violated an agreement that shielded it from criminal prosecution over the fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019.

Indonesia volcano eruption shuts more airports, ash reaches Malaysia



(News Agency)-At least 12,000 people were evacuated after Mount Ruang erupted three times in Indonesia. It also led to at least six airports closing their operations and ash spreading as far as Malaysia. Eruptions at a remote Indonesian volcano forced more than half a dozen airports to close with ash spreading as far as Malaysia, officials said

Wednesday, while authorities rushed to evacuate thousands due to tsunami fears.

Mount Ruang erupted three times on Tuesday, spewing lava and ash more than five kilometres (three miles) into the sky and forcing authorities to issue evacuation orders for 12,000 locals. A rescue ship and a warship were dispatched to help move thousands from

neighbouring Tagulandang island north to Siau island because of a warning about parts of the volcano falling into the sea, potentially causing a tsunami. Rosalin Salindeho, a 95-year-old resident of Tagulandang in Indonesia's outermost region of North Sulawesi province, spoke of her fears when Ruang erupted after arriving in Siau.

"The mountain exploded. Wow, it was horrible. There were rains of rocks. Twice. The second one was really heavy, even the houses far away were also hit," she said.

The country's meteorological agency (BMKG) shared a map on Wednesday morning that showed volcanic ash had reached as far as eastern Malaysia on Borneo island, which the country shares with Indonesia and Brunei.

The spread of volcanic ash forced seven airports to close, the biggest in provincial capital Manado and the city of Gorontalo, according to a notice from state-run air traffic control provider AirNav

Indonesia. Julius Ramopolii, head of Mount Ruang monitoring post, said the volcano was still billowing ash and smoke above the crater on Wednesday morning.

"The volcano is visibly seen, the plume of smoke is visible, grey and thick, and reached 500-700 metres (2,300 feet) above the crater," he said in a statement. He said the alert level remained at its highest of a four-tiered system and called on locals to remain outside of a seven-kilometre exclusion zone.

The tsunami fears were informed by recent experience.

The crater of Mount Anak Krakatoa, between Java and Sumatra islands, also partly collapsed in 2018 when a major eruption sent huge chunks of the volcano sliding into the ocean, triggering a tsunami that killed more than 400 people and injured thousands.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation, experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

Pakistan to block mobile SIM cards of over half a million tax evaders



(News Agency)-Authorities in Pakistan have decided to block the mobile phone SIM cards of over half a million tax defaulters as part of the drive to take action against tax evaders.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in an Income Tax General Order (ITGO) said the mobile SIMs of 506,671 individuals, who failed to file their tax returns for 2023, will stay blocked until restored by the FBR or the Commissioner Inland Revenue having authority over the person. It ordered the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and all telecom providers to immediately implement the ITGO no 01 of 2024 to block their SIMs and file a

compliance report by May 15, Dawn News reported. An official source said the FBR has identified 2.4 million potential taxpayers who did not exist on the tax rolls. Notices were subsequently issued to these individuals.

The FBR has selected over 0.5 million individuals out of the 2.4 million for SIM blockade based on one criterion: they must have declared taxable income in one of the past three years and these individuals did not file their returns for tax year 2023.

According to the Active Taxpayers List (ATL), the FBR received 4.2 million taxpayers until March 1, 2024, as against

3.8 million returns received during the same period last year. This shows a marginal increase during the period under review. In the tax year 2022, FBR received a total of 5.9 million income tax returns. According to the FBR official, SIMs will be automatically restored for persons who file tax returns for 2023.

Every Monday, the FBR updates its ATL listings.

Every Tuesday, the names of persons who appear on the ATL list will be identified and submitted to the PTA and telecom companies for restoration.

The officer emphasised that there would be no separate restoration procedures, and the entire process would be completed automatically.

The blockade of SIM cards is a new easy measure taken by the FBR to encourage low-income people to submit their tax returns to increase the number of return filers, which appears to be a good idea on paper.

The FBR's introduction of high withholding tax rates for non-filers follows a similar blueprint.

The FBR has focused its campaign on broadening the tax base for persons who did not appear on the tax roll.

According to sources, persons who have filed their returns once can avoid paying high withholding tax rates in subsequent years and non-filers include one-time tax filers.

Singaporeans cannot disavow India, China ethnic roots, says PM Lee

(News Agency)-Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in his last speech before stepping down from the leadership in two weeks, highlighted the importance of unity among multi-faith, multi-national Singaporeans, emphasising their diverse ethnic roots with India and China, and religious affiliations.

Speaking at a May Day Rally on Wednesday, Lee emphasised the lasting importance of social unity despite the usual divides of race, language, and religion. "We cannot disavow our diverse ethnic roots and religious affinities - Chinese Singaporeans with China, Indian Singaporeans with their various ancestral homes in India, Malay Singaporeans with the rest of our region, and with the global Muslim Ummah," Lee said, impressing on the citizens of prosperous island state nestled in the heart of Southeast Asia. Lee cautioned against potential divisions, including socio-economic disparities, tensions between Singaporean-born and naturalised citizens, and ideological differences.

As he prepared to hand over leadership to Deputy Lawrence Wong on May 15, Lee urged vigilance in maintaining racial and religious harmony while addressing emerging tensions.

Highlighting Singapore's system anchored on trust, Lee praised the People's Action Party (PAP) government's commitment to delivering results for Singaporeans.

US claims global chemical weapons ban breach by Russia in Ukraine war

The US alleged that Russia violated the chemical weapons ban by deploying the choking agent chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops and using riot control agents "as a method of warfare" in Ukraine.

(News Agency)-The United States on Wednesday accused Russia of violating the international chemical weapons ban by deploying the choking agent chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops and using riot control agents "as a method of warfare" in Ukraine.

"The use of such chemicals is not an isolated incident and is probably driven by Russian forces' desire to dislodge Ukrainian forces from fortified positions and achieve tactical gains on the battlefield," the State Department said in a statement.

The Russian embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Chloropicrin is listed as a banned choking agent by the Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which was created to implement and monitor compliance with the 1993

Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

German forces fired the gas against Allied troops during World War I in one of the first uses of a chemical weapon.

Earlier this month, Reuters reported the Ukrainian military as saying Russia has stepped up its illegal use of riot control agents as it presses its biggest advances in eastern Ukraine in more than two years.

In addition to chloropicrin, Russian forces have used grenades loaded with CS and CN gases, the Ukrainian military says. It says at least 500 Ukrainian soldiers have been treated for exposure to toxic substances and one was killed by suffocating on tear gas.

While civilians usually can escape riot control gases during protests, soldiers stuck in trenches without gas masks must either flee under enemy fire

or risk suffocating.

The State Department said it was delivering to Congress its determination that Russia's use of chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops violated the CWC.

Moscow's use of the gas "comes from the same playbook as its operations to poison" the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2020 and Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in 2018 with the Novichok nerve agent, the statement said.

Russia denied involvement in both cases.

The department also determined that Russia breached the CWC's prohibition on the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare, the statement said.

It said it was sanctioning three Russian state entities linked to Moscow's chemical and biological weapons programs, including a specialised military unit that facilitated the use of



chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops.

Four Russian companies that support the three entities were also sanctioned, it said.

The sanctions freeze any US assets belonging to the targeted entities and generally prohibit Americans from doing business with them.

Separately, the US Treasury imposed sanctions on three entities and two individuals involved in purchasing items for Russian military institutes involved in the country's chemical and biological weapons programs. The sanctions were among new measures announced by the United States on Wednesday targeting Russia over its 2022 full-scale invasion

of Ukraine.

The CWC bans the production and use of chemical weapons. It also requires the 193 countries that have ratified the convention, which include Russia and the US, to destroy any stocks of banned chemicals. The State Department was expected to convey its determination that Russia violated the CWC to the OPCW.

Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of breaching the treaty in OPCW meetings. But the organisation says it has not been formally asked to open an investigation into the use of prohibited substances in Ukraine. Reuters has not been able to independently verify the use of banned chemical substances by either side.

Australia's \$600 million plan against gendered violence, checks on internet porn



(News Agency)-Australia will spend almost A\$1 billion (USD 647 million) on payments for those fleeing domestic violence and introduce new measures to police pornography and violence on the internet in response to what the government is calling a "national crisis" of gendered violence.

Thousands took to the streets on Saturday to protest violence against women, which the government says has killed a woman every four days this year. Five women were killed during a mass stabbing in April, the same

month a high-profile defamation case concluded a rape took place in parliament. Speaking after an emergency meeting of state and federal leaders to address the issue, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced A\$925.2 million (\$600 million) to make permanent a programme of financial support for those escaping domestic violence. "Today is about who we are as a nation and as a society," he said. "This is an issue for the whole of society, not just for governments. It's an issue for civil society, it's an issue for the media,

it's an issue for all of us." Australia will also introduce legislation to ban the creation and non-consensual distribution of deepfake pornography, where people digitally alter pornographic images into the likeness of someone else. 34 women were killed by an intimate partner in Australia in the year ending June 30, a 28% jump from the previous year, despite only a 4 per cent rise in overall homicides.

Attacking "toxic male extremist" views online, Albanese also announced a range of measures to police porn on the internet and promote healthier attitudes towards women. A A\$6.5 million pilot will test ways to stop children accessing inappropriate content online with the results informing new rules for internet companies being developed by the online safety regulator. But in a sign of how difficult implementation is likely to be, the e-Safety Commissioner is already embroiled in a court battle to have social media platform X remove posts showing an Australian bishop being stabbed during a sermon.

Colombia to sever diplomatic ties with Israel over Gaza war



(News Agency)-Colombian President Gustavo Petro said on Wednesday he will break diplomatic relations with Israel over its actions in Gaza.

Petro has already heavily criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and requested to join South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide at the International Court of Justice.

"Here in front of you, the government of change, of the president of the republic announces that tomorrow we will break diplomatic relations with the state of Israel ... for having a

government, for having a president who is genocidal," Petro told cheering crowds in Bogota who marched to mark International Worker's Day and back Petro's social and economic reforms. Countries cannot be passive in the face of events in Gaza, he added.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz accused Petro of being "antisemitic and full of hate". He said Petro's move was a reward to the armed group Hamas, which on October 7, 2023 led a deadly attack on Israeli military bases and communities.

300 arrested on two New York campuses at pro-Palestine demonstrations

Around 300 people were arrested at Columbia University and City College amid pro-Palestine demonstrations.

(News Agency)-Nearly 300 people were arrested by the New York City police on Tuesday (local time) at pro-Palestine demonstrations on Columbia University and City College campuses, Mayor Eric Adams said. Police also cleared Columbia's Hamilton Hall, which was occupied by the protesting students.

The protesters were arrested after Columbia University called in the New York police to clear the protesters from campus, nearly two weeks after they had set up a pro-Palestine encampment, CBC news reported. As per reports, as many as 109 protesters were arrested at Columbia and 173 at nearby City College. However, it is unclear how many of the arrested were students. The Columbia spokesperson, in a statement said, police entered the campus after the university requested it.



"After the University learned overnight that Hamilton Hall had been occupied, vandalised, and blockaded, we were left with no choice. The decision to reach out to the NYPD was in response to the actions of the protesters, not the cause they are championing.

We have made it clear that the life of campus cannot be endlessly interrupted by protesters who violate the rules and the law," the University said. The New York Mayor, following the police action, said that there is "no place for acts of hate in

our city" and blamed people who are "professionals at radicalising young children" for escalating the situation. "We cannot allow what should be a lawful protest to turn into a violent spectacle that saves and serves no purpose... There is a

movement to radicalise young people, and I'm not going to wait until it's done and all of a sudden acknowledge the existence of it. This is a global problem that young people are being influenced by those who are professionals at radicalising our children," the Mayor said.

POLICE DEPLOYED AT UCLA AFTER CLASHES

Meanwhile, at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), duelling groups of protesters clashed, grappling in fistfights and shoving, kicking, and using sticks to beat one another, news agency AP reported.

Witness footage from the scene, verified by news agency Reuters, showed people wielding sticks or poles to attack wooden boards being used as makeshift barricades to protect the pro-Palestine protesters. Police in riot gear entered the campus following the clash and the violence was quelled.

Saudi Woman Jailed For 11 Years Over Social Media Posts, Says Amnesty



vAmnesty International called on Saudi Arabia to free a 29-year-old fitness instructor it says has been sentenced to 11 years in prison for her choice of clothing and social media posts urging an end to the kingdom's

male guardianship system. Manahel Al-Otaibi was sentenced in January and details of her case emerged in Saudi Arabia's formal reply to a request from the United Nations human rights office, London-based

Amnesty said in a statement on Tuesday. Amnesty and the London-based Al-Qst, a Saudi group that focuses on human rights in the kingdom, said Al-Otaibi was charged for posting the social media hashtag "Abolish male guardianship" and videos of her wearing what were deemed to be "indecent clothes" and shopping without an abaya, a long robe.

Saudi Arabia's international media office did not respond to Reuters' questions about the information given by Amnesty.

Saudi Arabia, in its formal reply to the U.N. rights office, denied that Al-Otaibi was sentenced for social media posts. It said she was "convicted of terrorist offences that have no bearing on her exercise of freedom of opinion and expression or her social media posts".

The Saudi response, seen by

Reuters, did not provide further details.

Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism law, under which Al-Otaibi was convicted, has been criticised by the United Nations as an overly broad tool to stifle dissent.

The U.N. human rights office did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment or to confirm the details of this case.

Amnesty said Al-Otaibi's sister, Fawzia, faced similar charges but fled Saudi Arabia after being summoned for questioning in 2022.

"With this sentence the Saudi authorities have exposed the hollowness of their much-touted women's rights reforms in recent years and demonstrated their chilling commitment to silencing peaceful dissent," Bissan Fakihi, Amnesty's campaigner on Saudi Arabia, said in the statement.

The de facto Saudi ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman,

came to power in 2017 promising sweeping social and economic reforms, and he eased some curbs in male guardianship laws. Saudi women have since been able to drive cars, get a passport and travel on their own, register births and deaths, and divorce. The laws, however, still make it more difficult for women to obtain a divorce than a man.

The kingdom still faces scrutiny over its human rights record including a 2022 personal status law that codified many aspects of male guardianship, including male custody over children and permission for a woman to marry. Some provisions could facilitate domestic abuse, according to Amnesty.

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Saudi Arabia eased dress codes for foreign women in 2019, but rights activists say that Saudi women continue to face restrictions.

Decreased deep sleep may signal Alzheimer's disease: Study

The brain changes that lead to Alzheimer's, a disease that affects an estimated 5.7 million Americans, start slowly and silently.

The brain changes that lead to Alzheimer's, a disease that affects an estimated 5.7 million Americans, start slowly and silently.

Up to two decades before the characteristic symptoms of memory loss and confusion appear, amyloid beta protein begins to collect into plaques in the brain.

Tangles of tau appear later, followed by atrophy of key brain areas. Only then do people start showing unmistakable signs of cognitive decline.

The challenge is finding people on track to develop Alzheimer's before such brain changes undermine their ability to think clearly. For that, sleep may be a handy marker.

To better understand the link between sleep and Alzheimer's disease, Lucey, along with David Holtzman, a professor at Washington University, and

After controlling for factors such as sex, age and movements while sleeping, the researchers found that decreased slow-wave sleep coincided with higher levels of tau in the brain and a higher tau-to-amyloid ratio in the cerebrospinal fluid. "The key is that it wasn't the total amount of sleep that was linked to tau, it was the slow-wave sleep, which reflects quality of sleep," Lucey said. "The people with increased tau pathology were actually sleeping more at night and napping more in the day, but they weren't getting as good quality sleep," he said.

colleagues studied 119 people 60 years of age or older.

Most -- 80 per cent -- were cognitively normal, and the remaining were very mildly impaired.

The researchers monitored the participants' sleep at home over the course of a normal week.

Participants were given a portable EEG monitor that strapped to their foreheads to measure their brain waves as they slept, as well as a wristwatch-like sensor that tracks body movement.

They also kept sleep logs, where

they made note of both nighttime sleep sessions and daytime napping. Each participant produced at least two nights of data; some had as many as six.

The researchers also measured levels of amyloid beta and tau in the brain and in the cerebrospinal fluid that bathes the brain and spinal cord.

Thirty-eight people underwent PET brain scans for the two proteins, and 104 people underwent spinal taps to provide cerebrospinal fluid for analysis.

Twenty-seven did both.



Older people who get less deep sleep have higher levels of the brain protein tau, a sign of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease, according to a study. Slow-wave sleep is the deep sleep people need to consolidate memories and wake up feeling refreshed, said researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in the US. The findings, published in the journal Science Translational Medicine, suggest that poor-quality sleep in later life could be a red flag for deteriorating brain health.

"What's interesting is that we saw this inverse relationship between decreased slow-wave sleep and more tau protein in people who were either cognitively normal or very mildly impaired, meaning that reduced slow-wave activity may be a marker for the transition between normal and impaired," said Brendan Lucey, an assistant professor at the Washington University.

"Measuring how people sleep may be a non-invasive way to screen for Alzheimer's disease before or just as people begin to develop problems with memory and thinking," Lucey said.

This is how you can counter the ill effects of long-time sitting

If you wish to live longer, reduce your sitting time and replace it with just 30 minutes of physical activity.

These



for long stretches at a time - an hour or more without interruption - had a greater risk of early death than those who were sedentary for the same total amount of time but got up and moved around more often. They also found that people who sat for less than 30 minutes at a time had the lowest risk of early death, suggesting

are the findings of a recent study which appear in the American Journal of Epidemiology. The results highlight the importance of movement - regardless of its intensity or amount of time spent moving - for better health. "Our findings underscore an important public health message that physical activity of any intensity provides health benefits," said lead author Keith Diaz of Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. About one in four adults spends more than eight hours a day sitting, according to a recent study. In a previous paper, Diaz and his team discovered that adults who sat

that taking movement breaks every half-hour could lower your risk of death. But just how intense, and for how long, does the physical activity need to be to counter the ill effects of sitting? The study found that replacing just 30 minutes of sitting with low-intensity physical activity would lower the risk of early death by 17%, a statistically significant decrease. Swapping the same amount of sitting for moderate to vigorous activity would be twice as effective, cutting the risk of early death by 35%. The researchers also found that short bursts of activity - of just a minute or two - provided a health benefit.

Even small amount of cannabis can alter brain

Few studies have looked at the effects of the first few uses of a drug, said Hugh Garavan, a professor at the University of Vermont (UVM) in the US.

Using even a small amount of cannabis may cause changes in the brain volume of teenagers, according to a study. The study, published in The Journal of Neuroscience, is the first to find evidence that an increase in grey matter volume in certain parts of the adolescent brain is a likely consequence of low-level marijuana use.

Few studies have looked at the effects of the first few uses of a drug, said Hugh Garavan, a professor at the University of Vermont (UVM) in the US. Most researchers focus on heavy marijuana users later in life and compare them against non-users. These new findings identify an important new area of focus.

"Consuming just one or two

joints seems to change grey matter volumes in these young adolescents," Garavan said.

The study included 46 children who reported having used cannabis once or twice by age 14. Their brains showed more grey matter volume in areas where cannabis binds, known as cannabinoid receptors, compared to the children who did not use the drug.

The biggest differences in grey matter were in the amygdala, which is involved in fear and other emotion-related processes, and in the hippocampus, involved in memory development and spatial abilities. The researchers ruled out the likelihood that the cannabis-using kids had pre-existing differences in grey matter thickness or that they had

specific personality traits that might correlate with the difference in brain makeup.

"The implication is that this is potentially a consequence of cannabis use," Garavan said.

"You are changing your brain with just one or two joints. Most people would likely assume that one or two joints would have no impact on the brain," he said.

However, the researchers said that what the increased brain matter volume means is unclear. Typically at that age, Garavan said, the adolescent brain undergoes a "pruning" process, where it gets thinner, rather than thicker as it refines its synaptic connections. "One possibility is they have actually disrupted that pruning process," Garavan added.

5 tips for building healthy relationships with people

Relationships can be tricky, but with the right advice, you can help create positive relationships with your friends and family.

We are social animals, but we all struggle to maintain our relationships with others. Humans spend most of their time with other humans, then why do we have to make those relationships complicated? Wouldn't it be nice to be surrounded by people who truly appreciate and support you?

This would only happen if you put in a little bit of your efforts and try to build positive relationships. It might sound like a lot of work, but it's actually not that difficult. You just need to follow these tips and see the changes for yourself.

1) Differences don't create differences: People are often heard saying that their friends or loved ones just don't understand them. Well, that's because everyone has their own perception and way of processing things. In relationships major problems arise when two people

are different, but it's not the differences which create problems. It is the lack of understanding which create these differences. You need to be able to see things from other's perspective and understand that everyone does not think the same way. Learn to appreciate the differences.

2) Listen effectively: This has been stressed a lot of times but, it is worth mentioning every single time. You can make a person feel valued and supported by just listening patiently to what they have to say. Communication isn't complete unless you listen and understand others. Remember, don't just pretend to listen but actually listen. In active listening you listen to the person speaking with interest and make conscious effort to understand them. After reflecting on their message, you



verify and give your feedback which makes the communication effective.

3) Take out some time for people: In this fast paced world, giving people time has become the hardest thing to do. If you do manage to give your time, you are busy on your phone texting or scrolling through social media. Being present in the moment is very crucial for building meaningful relationships with people. Don't worry about the

past or future when you are with someone just enjoy their company.

4) Empathy is the key: Develop empathy towards others. When people share their thoughts, they want you to understand how they feel. Empathy doesn't mean you need to fix their problems or give them solutions. It means that you are able to understand others without belittling and criticizing them. Empathy also helps in

developing meaningful relationships with others.

5) Feedback is also important: We don't always like when someone gives feedback, but it is really important for your progress. Constructive feedback helps you grow as a person, though it might not always be what you want to hear but it's useful. So, don't let feedbacks bring you down because they are just free information for you to take or reject.

Virat, Shikhar are now aam: Cricket fever grips mango growers back home

At the upcoming 31st Mango Festival in Delhi, there will be mangoes dedicated to Indian cricketers such as Virat Kohli and Shikhar Dhawan.

It's the 31st year when mango growers from across the country will gather under one roof with their choicest produce, to compete for the top slots that offer cash prizes to the best mango varieties. But, it's the first time ever that they have let the

cricket fever take over them, and named some of the new varieties of mangoes after Indian cricketers. Well, looks like the World Cup fever has caught on. So, when you visit this year's Mango Festival at Dilli Haat, Janak Puri, that begins July 5,

you will be able to taste Virat Kohli, ahem, the mango called Virat Kohli. In the past years, some varieties of mangoes have been named Yogi aam and Modi aam.

Tariq Mustafa, a mango grower from UP's Muzaffarnagar, says, "I've been participating in this festival for about 16-17 years, and every year bring around 300 varieties of mangoes. Every time we grow a new mango, we look for an appropriate name for it, and this time we have got a variety that we have named after cricketer Virat Kohli. This Virat mango is a bit whitish in colour, has a length of more than six inches, and in taste we feel that it's as powerful as the sixers of the Indian captain!"

Another mango grower, Ramveer Singh Chauhan, from Saharanpur, UP, says he plans to name a mango after Shikhar Dhawan. "When people come to the mango festival this year, they will see Shikhar Aam, which will showcase the strength and



endurance of the cricketer's performance in this World Cup... I have also named a new variety of mango after Shaheed Udham Singh, and strongly feel that like he avenged Jallianwala Bagh massacre by assassinating General Dwyer in England, this mango will make everyone speechless in England."

The organisers of the festival validate that it's the first time that cricket fever has gripped the mango growers. "Over the years, the Mango Festival has become one of the most-awaited events of the season. It will have around

500 varieties on display. Some fun-filled activities including a mango-eating competition is lined up for this three-day event. Mango growers also put their best foot forward to showcase the different varieties by giving some interesting names to their fresh produce through this platform. As the World Cup fever grips India, the growers are dedicating this year's new variety to famous Indian cricketers, which should create interest among the mango lovers," says Sudhir Sobti, chief manager, PR and events, Delhi Tourism.





Prachi Desai decodes response to 'Silence 2': 'Good content works across platforms'



Actress Prachi Desai, who is receiving a lot of positive responses to her recent release 'Silence 2', feels that good content works across platforms of the exhibition. "I think good and engaging content is platform agnostic. However content is being consumed via various platforms and tools and that's the reason why content is being tailored to suit them," she elaborated.

The actress believes that it's a wonderful time for everyone who is part of the entertainment industry as the opportunities are unlimited.

About 'Silence 2', the actress thinks that it cuts across the strata of audience because of its universal appeal.

She said, "It's a thriller and a murder mystery. I think films from this genre have a universal appeal. Also on OTT, people all over the world are looking for engaging content irrespective of the language. I think that's where 'Silence 2' scores highly".

About her process as an actor, she said, "I read the script and follow the director's vision. Whether it's a mystery thriller or a romantic film, I ensure that as an actor I know my character well, (and) I am on the same page as my director."

'Silence 2' is available to stream on ZEE5.

'Mr Perfectionist' Aamir Khan a brilliant visualiser: 'Laapataa Ladies' writer

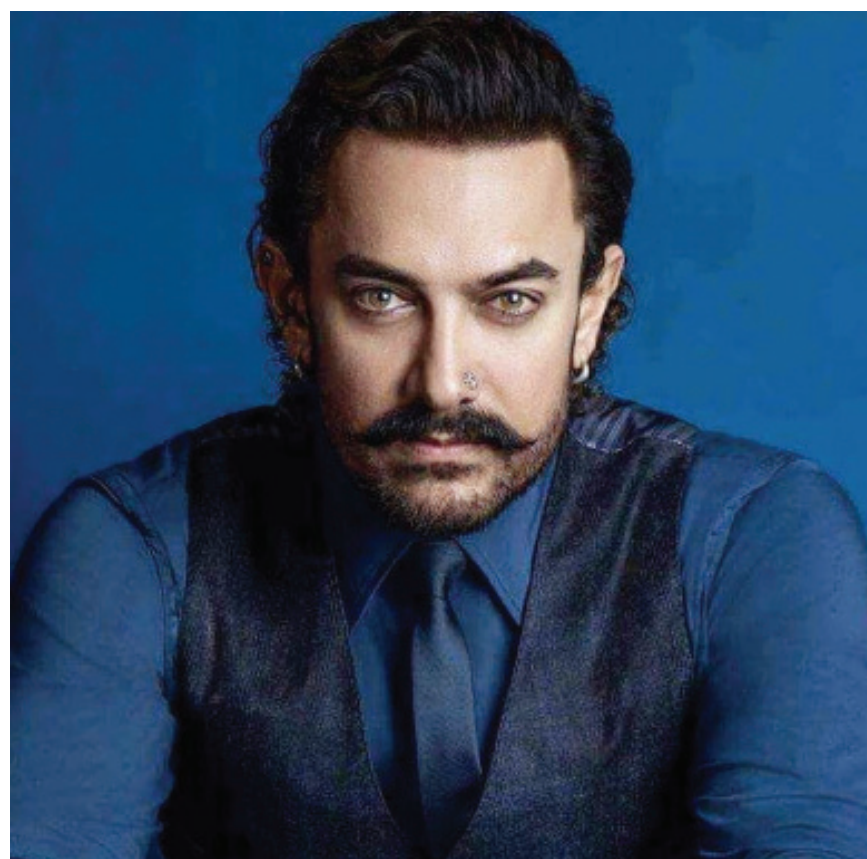
'Laapataa Ladies' writer Sneha Desai was all praise for Aamir Khan's power of visualisation at Vartalaap, a forum featuring conversations with screenwriters and lyricists in Mumbai. Aamir Khan is known as 'Mr Perfectionist' in the industry, so the media asked Desai if she felt she was under pressure when she was working with Kiran Rao, the much-acclaimed film's director, or Aamir Khan, the producer.

Desai said, "Getting perfection in the writing wasn't a compulsion, It was more of pleasure. Aamir Khan is given this tag of perfection because cinematically his brain is so brilliant that when you take the story to him, which is still on paper, he can visualise the writing being translated on the screen as he's reading the script, which we might not be able to see." Delving deeper into Aamir's ability to visualise scenes, Desai said, "Whether you call it his experience or craft, or his ability, he can visualise the edits of the scene, and he can visualise how the audience will react to the scene."

She added, "The same goes for Kiran Rao. She has done so much work as an assistant and producer, she has handled so many projects, that she has a ready solution for every problem and if there is something wrong, she can explain logically why it is so."

So, how do they transmit their perfection to the others who work with them? "It is not like they try to force their perfection on others," Desai noted, adding, "They explain the whole thing very lovingly to you, and when you take your work to such intelligent and correct people, you tend to quality control your own work beforehand, so that you can give work worthy of their level."

'Laapataa Ladies', helmed by Kiran Rao, backed by Aamir Khan Productions, and featuring Nitanshi Goel, Pratibha Ranta, Sparsh Shrivastava, Chhaya Kadam and Ravi Kishan in lead roles, tells the story of two brides who lose themselves during a train ride. The screenplay and dialogues of 'Laapataa Ladies' are written by Sneha Desai with Divyanidhi Sharma.



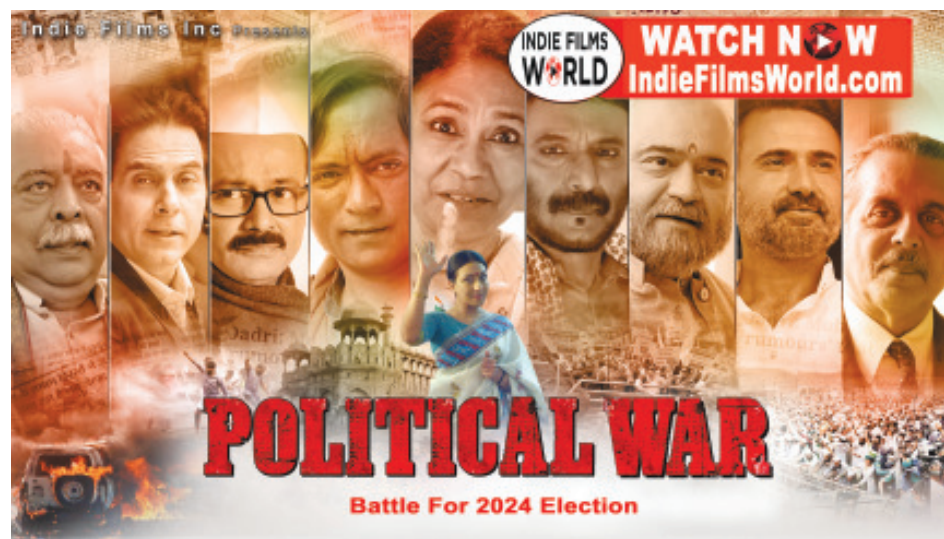
Modi says everyone must watch Film "Political War" Banned Theatrical Release in India by Indian Censor Board now streaming at IndieFilmsWorld.com Streaming (OTT) Platform



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's now streaming on IndieFilmsWorld.com OTT Platform.

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 on IndieFilmsWorld.com platform, showcasing Modi's resilience in the face of adversity.

About the Film

Political War is a fictional story showcasing how the external powers are trying to break India with the help of corrupt

leaders. This film is based on 2024 election, Modi says Political War is an eye opening film, everyone must watch this film to understand the dark side of politics."The Hindi film "Political War," starring Seema Biswas and Rituparna Sengupta, started streaming on Indie Films World Streaming (OTT) Platform. As the country is amidst elections, there is a lot of buzz in the political alleys. In such times, watching filmmaker Mukesh Modi's

movie "Political War," which sheds light on the darker aspects of politics, would be quite intriguing. Starring Seema Biswas, Rituparna Sengupta, Milind Gunaji, Prashant Narayanan and several other talented artists, the Hindi film "Political War" is now streaming on Indie Films World OTT. It's worth mentioning that the censor board had rejected certifying the film "Political War." Otherwise, the film would have been re-

leased in cinemas. However, now the film is shown on the OTT platform Indie Films World.

It's notable that the powerful trailer of film-maker Mukesh Modi's Hindi film "Political War" has been viewed and shared by millions of people. The producer-director hopes that just like the trailer, people will also shower love on the film. Several songs from the film have already become quite popular among the audience.

The film featured a grand Ram Bhajan dedicated to the majestic Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Then, in another song titled "Roshni," it is shown how people stoop to any level in politics, and politicians can do anything to win elections. The film also includes a motivational song "Ekta Banaye Rakhein" and an item song.

The film, produced under the banner of Indie Films Inc., was shot in Lucknow, Varanasi, Mumbai, and the United States. With performances by Seema Biswas, Rituparna Sengupta, Milind Gunaji, Prashant Narayanan, Abhay Bhargava, Shishir Sharma, Aman Varma, Jiten Mukhi, Prithvi Zutshi, Dev Sharma, Arun Bakshi, the film "Political War" is directed by Viivek Srivastava and Mukesh Modi. The film is produced by Mukesh Modi, edited by Manish Sinha, DOP India Chandan Singh and Ketak Dheeman (USA). The screenplay and dialogues are written by Manoj Ji Pandey.

Takeaway from Political War

Through Political War, Modi aims to instill a message of unity and resilience, cautioning against divisive politics fueled by religion and caste. Amid India's growth, he advocates for awareness and unity, urging audiences to resist political manipulation and embrace solidarity. "Today, unfortunately we are surrounded by people who are taking advantage of religion and caste biases. I want people to open their eyes and see the impact of religion bias. You have to be one, you can't let anyone divide you."

Why you must see the film "Political War"

Political War is showcasing the problems and the SOLUTIONS to the problem. Most of the films are made on the past (what has happened) most of us know what has happened but without giving any solutions.

Political War is identifying what kind of problems we are facing and what more problems can arise along with the solutions.

It's not a film, it's a mission which we need to make sure is completed.

Objective of the film "Political War"

Motivate Community to Vote
Bring awareness about dirty politics
Expose Foreign Resources who wants to destroy India

Sofia Vergara reveals why she can't be too picky about men

Actress Sofia Vergara feels she can't be too "picky" about who she dates, as it is already hard for women over 50 to find someone.

Vergara, who parted ways with Joe Manganiello last year, remains open to the idea of dating another celebrity.

"I mean, it's already hard for a 50-something-year-old woman to find someone. I'm not going to be now picky about, 'Oh, he can only be a doctor. Oh, he can only be

an astronaut.' No, I mean, I'm not that picky," the actress told people.com, reports femalefirst.co.uk. The actress has learned that love can be a "tricky" thing.

The Hollywood star, who married Joe in 2015, said: "You never know what the future is going to bring."

"You need to always give the best that you can, be the best person to the other person. Be there for them when they need you, when

they're going through the hardest time. Hopefully that will one day come back to you," she said.

Looking ahead, Vergara anticipates the joy of becoming a grandmother one day.

"I already kind of like what he does with me. Manolo has a dog, and on the weekends he just drops the dog at my house. And I used to drop him at my mom's house during the weekend so that I could at least go out every once in a while."



Janhvi Kapoor turns host for Sridevi's Chennai home, says it was her 'prized possession'

The Gen-Z diva Janhvi Kapoor, who has turned a host for her childhood home in Chennai, owned by her mother, the late actress Sridevi, shared sweet memories of the residence, describing it as a special chapter in her mother's legacy. Sridevi's home in Chennai has been listed on the vacation rental company Airbnb's under the category titled 'Icons'. Speaking at the launch event, Janhvi said: "I think this house symbolises such a special chapter in my mother's legacy and in all of our lives. It was her first major purchase once she started working and her 'prized possession' really."

The 'Dhadak' fame actress went on to narrate the sweetest memories of her childhood home, saying, "Growing up it was always like a theme in our lives, alright we are going to Chennai, and we have a city house, My mother loved the

beach." At her family's Chennai holiday home, Janhvi will be hosting two guests, providing access to one bedroom and bathroom.

"So what you can expect is very good energy, we have made a lot of special memories in that house, an amazing view, access to the beach, and just a nice place to relax and be with yourself," she added. In the Airbnb property, guests can enjoy authentic South Indian cuisine, indulge in Janhvi's beauty secrets, and practice yoga with ocean views. It will be available from May 12. On the professional front, Janhvi next has romantic sports drama 'Mr. & Mrs. Mahi' alongside Rajkummar Rao. She also has the action thriller 'Ulajh'. The film stars Gulshan Devaiah, Roshan Mathew and Rajesh Tailang as lead.

Janhvi is also the part of Telugu action drama 'Devara', starring NTR Jr in the lead.

Sizzling Tara Sutaria drops 'Instagram vs reality' photoshoot video

Actress Tara Sutaria treated her massive fandom to a scintillating 'Instagram vs reality' video, giving a peek into her sizzling hot photoshoots and what she actually does behind the scenes (BTS). Taking to Instagram, the 'Student of the Year 2' fame actress who enjoys 8.6 million followers shared a Reel video, in which she can be seen posing in a transparent black outfit for a photoshoot.

The montage video further shows a BTS of another photoshoot in which Tara is wearing a white tube top and blue denim.

The video ends with Tara making a rose in an ice cream cup. It was captioned: "What you see on Instagram Vs reality – a smol pup who makes ice cream flowers and sounds like a two year old ... " A rose for the lady? " @piasutaria."

On the work front, Tara was last seen in the 2023 survival thriller 'Apurva'. The film also stars Rajpal Yadav and Abhishek Banerjee.

Earlier, she had worked in movies like 'Ek Villain Returns', 'Tadap', and 'Heropanti 2'.

Amyra Dastur shimmers in a golden saree; says 'winging it – life, eyeliner, everything'



Actress Amyra Dastur, on Wednesday, treated fans to some mesmerising pictures of herself in a golden shimmery saree, and shared how she is "winging" her life, eyeliner and everything! Amyra, who is known for her work in 'Judgementall Hai Kya', 'Kaalakaandi', 'Jogi', etc, took to Instagram and shared a string of photos, in which she can be seen wearing a golden-coloured saree. She paired the shimmery saree with a matching tube blouse, which has heavy embellishments on it.

For the makeup, she opted for peach brown lips, winged eyeliner and brown eyeshadow. She has kept her hair open, and accessorised it with silver pearl earrings.

The post is captioned: "Just winging it. Life, eyeliner, everything."

Amyra was last seen in the period crime thriller series 'Bambai Meri Jaan'.



Jasmine Bhasin enjoys a swing in secret beach in Mauritius, calls it 'paradise'

Actress Jasmine Bhasin on Wednesday shared a glimpse of a secret beach in Mauritius, calling it 'paradise', and saying that she didn't want to leave the island. Jasmine, who participated in 'Bigg Boss 14', was on a holiday with her boyfriend Aly Goni.

Taking to Instagram, Jasmine dropped a new Reel video from her adventurous vacation, in which she can be seen wearing a knee-length breezy red dress, which she paired with slippers.

The visuals show Jasmine running on the white sand towards the mesmerising beach. The video also features her enjoying a swing on the beach.



The post was captioned: "Paradise... Secret beach @anantaraikomauritius was my favourite spot..."

Commenting on the video, Aly said: "Videographer is so good na". To which Jasmine replied: "best videography and editor. What would I do without you".

On the work front, Jasmine, who has been a part of 'Naagin 4', 'Dil Toh Happy Hai Ji', and 'Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 9', has Punjabi films 'Carry On Jattiye' and 'Ardaas Sarbat De Bhale di' in the kitty.

Alec Baldwin talks about his plan to have another baby with wife Hilaria

Hollywood star Alec Baldwin has revealed his potential plans for having another baby with his wife Hilaria.

The actor, who appeared on the Our Way with Paul Anka and Skip Bronson podcast, is father to daughters Carmen Gabriela, 10, Maria Lucia Victoria, 3, and Ilaria Catalina Irena, 16 months, as well as sons Rafael Thomas, 8, Leonardo "Leo" Angel, 7, Romeo Alejandro, 5, and Eduardo "Edu" Pao Lucas, 3, with Hilaria.

He also has a daughter named Ireland, 28, with former wife Kim Basinger, 70.

"I'm the only person I know who drops four kids off at school in the morning and comes home, and I still have three kids waiting for me when I get home," Baldwin said.

Reflecting on his family size, Baldwin humorously added, "I have eight children. I got my oldest daughter. She has a baby, and she and her boyfriend are living in Oregon. I met my wife, and we got married and had seven kids in nine years. It's crazy."

When asked if he is done having children, Baldwin jokingly responded, "Oh man, how dare you ask me that question," before admitting, "I think I'm done."

"I found that as I got older, work became less interesting to me. I'm interested, you know, I wanna work and I like to work. But they just don't make that many films anymore that I think are interesting," Baldwin continued, reports people.com.

"Plus, we're all older. Whatever I've done in the past, I try not to be duplicative of that."

"Then all of a sudden I met my wife, who I love dearly. And every time the (youngest) baby would get to be two years old, we go, 'Maybe it's time for one more baby – just one more baby...' So we have seven kids."



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Pipeline To Nowhere: How An Iran Deal Became Pakistan's Bane

By Aditi Bhaduri

Pakistan is once again caught in a bind - and a knottier one than what it has had to contend with in the past. This time around, it needs to balance its relations with Iran and the US, a task much more complex than walking the tightrope between its Sunni allies and Iran.

In the spotlight is the decades-old Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, also known as the Peace Pipeline. The 2,775-km pipeline, which promised to supply around 750 million to a billion cubic feet of natural gas per day for 25 years from Iran's South Pars gas field to energy-starved Pakistan, was mooted more than a decade ago in 2010. Iran has the world's second-largest proven natural gas reserves, estimated at 1,203 trillion cubic feet. On the other hand, Pakistan, with abundant natural resources but decades of structural mismanagement, has to import its energy and power supplies. Neighbouring Iran is naturally the most logical source for such procurement.

Pakistan's Quandary

Iran has already fulfilled its part of the agreement by completing a 1,100 km section from the South Pars gas fields to the Pakistan border. In 2014, on Pakistan's request, it extended the deadline by a decade. That is set to end in September this year, and Pakistan is yet to complete its part of the pipeline. The global sanctions against Iran and the resultant geopolitical pressure on Pakistan are the main reasons for this severe delay.

Iran and Pakistan have had uneasy relations for years, strained in part by the latter's close ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Iran's rivals in the region, as also by Pakistan's geopolitical and economic dependence on the US. Iran has frequently blamed Pakistan for fomenting terrorism in its border regions of Sistan-Baluchistan and of nurturing the Taliban to weaken it. Discrimination against the Shia minority in Pakistan has added to the friction over the years. Nonetheless, from time to time, Pakistan has taken care to strike a more conciliatory tone towards Iran given Islamabad's rivalry with



India on its eastern borders. For instance, Pakistan's refusal to send troops to Yemen in support of the Saudi-led Sunni coalition was majorly due to this factor.

The Tit-For-Tat Strikes

But things came to a head recently after the tit-for-tat strikes in January that Iran and Pakistan carried out against each other to preempt "terrorists". Soon after the strikes, Iranian Foreign Minister Abdolathein visited Islamabad as a gesture of reconciliation. These attacks had come against the backdrop of heightened tensions in the Middle East over the Israel-Hamas war and the disruption of shipping lines by the Iran-backed Houthi militias. Tehran's fear was that Pakistan's territory might be used by the US to attack it, just as it had been used in the past to target the Soviet Union during the Afghan jihad, and later, the Taliban.

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In that context, the recent Pakistan visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi can also be seen as a bid to smooth ruffled feathers. During the visit, both sides inked six economic agreements, vowing to take trade beyond the current volume of a paltry \$2 billion. A joint statement issued during the trip included plans for cooperation in the energy domain, including the pipeline project.

Penalty Blues

While tensions with Iran seem allayed for now, Pakistan's

headache is now the question of whether to move ahead with the pipeline or face the threat of penalty. According to reports, Tehran has issued an ultimatum to Pakistan to finish the pipeline segment by 2024 or incur financial repercussions amounting to nearly \$18 billion.

In the past two years, Pakistan has experienced inflation rates exceeding 20% on a year-on-year basis. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, big industry production has contracted significantly over the last two years, resulting in high levels of unemployment. Domestic coal and gas prices have risen considerably, hitting power supply. Against these circumstances, Iran's ultimatum is an added nightmare.

American Pressure

In February this year, the caretaker government in Pakistan approved the construction of the first phase of the pipeline, which would comprise an 80 km line (of a total of 780 km) from the Iranian border to Gwadar. However, the US responded swiftly. Last month, Donald Lu, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia cautioned Pakistan against importing gas from Iran, warning it that this would invite US sanctions. While the Pakistani Foreign Office spokesperson has said this is an "internal" matter, it remains to be seen whether Pakistan can withstand US pressure.

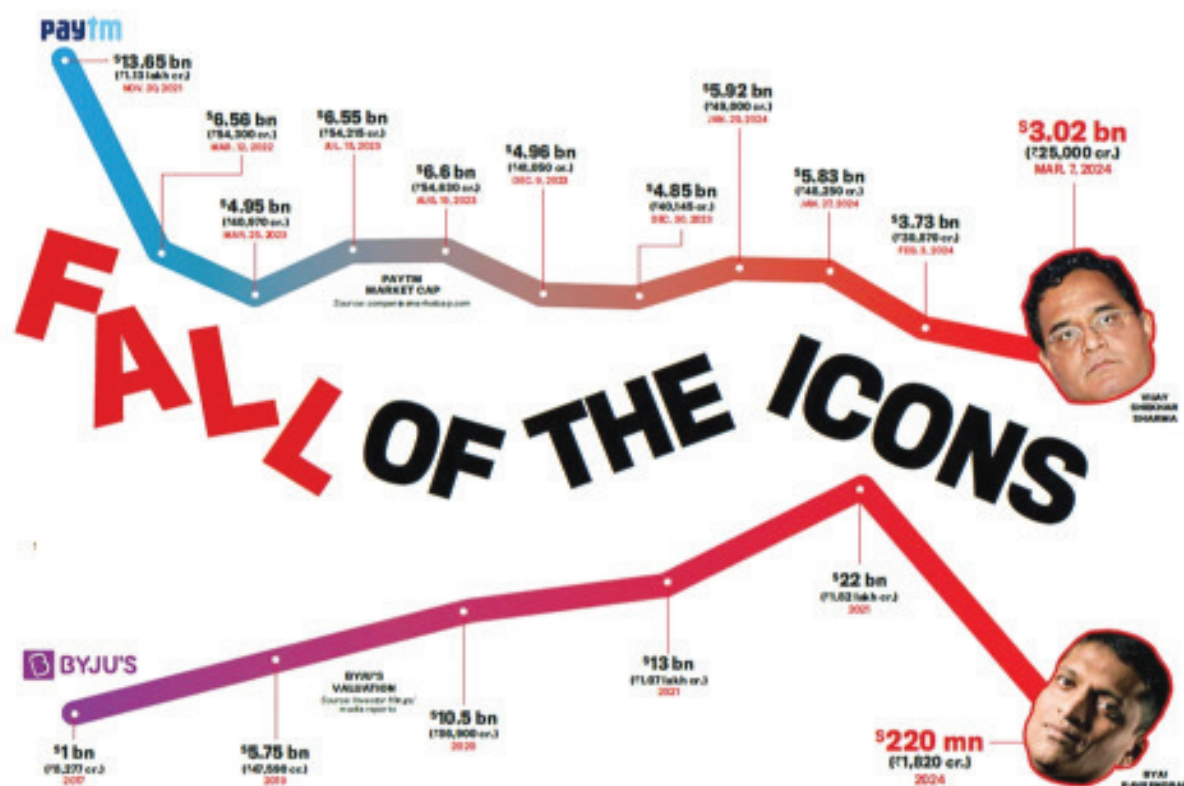
The US is Pakistan's largest export market; it bought Pakistani goods worth more than \$5 billion in 2021. America has also been a leading investor in the country for the past 20 years. Last year in August, the two countries signed the Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement, or CIS-MOA, which covers joint exercises, operations, training, basing and equipment, as well as sales of military hardware to Pakistan. Last year, it was the US that helped facilitate a much-needed \$3 billion bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which helped Pakistan avoid a default on its international payments.

Paytm and BYJU'S | Fall of the icons

By MG Arun & Ajay
Sukumaran & Sonal
Khetarpal

The inside story of how the two poster boys of India's start-up ecosystem—Paytm's Vijay Shekhar Sharma and Byju Raveendran of BYJU'S scaled great heights only to script their own downfall

In terms of personality, Vijay Shekhar Sharma, founder of digital payments start-up Paytm, and Byju Raveendran, co-founder of edtech start-up BYJU'S, could not be more different. Sharma, 45, is outgoing and aggressive,



24,961 crore, a fourth of its valuation in November 2021. BYJU'S fortunes plummeted likewise—from a peak valuation of \$22 billion (Rs 1.8 lakh crore) in 2022 to \$220 million (Rs 1,820 crore) currently—a fall of 99 per cent. While both Sharma and Raveendran are struggling to scale their way back up from their respective nadirs, their rapid rise and steep fall has had a sobering impact on India's galloping start-up ecosystem, with investors becoming increasingly wary and circumspect about funding them. From exemplars of innovation, both have become cautionary tales of how overambition and overreach can lead to disastrous follies and dramatically destabilise your empire, holding lessons for all Indian businesses. To find out how it all unravelled, we need to know how it first began. Here, then, is the story of the rise and fall of Vijay Shekhar Sharma and Byju Raveendran.

ENTERPRISING CHILDHOOD
-Grew up in Aligarh, UP, with six siblings; their father was a teacher. At his Hindi-medium school, many of Sharma's classmates came barefoot. "I never wanted to go back to that world," he says

-Devised a Hindi-English dictionary to learn English, comparing the NCERT book with the UP board textbook in Hindi to figure out, for example, what 'momentum' or 'distance' meant

-Later, at the Delhi College of Engineering (he read electronics and communications), lyrics from Pink Floyd, The Doors, U2 and Coldplay become his doorway to learning English. "I'd learn the lyrics, play them back in my head in a loop&•œin them, I found the unlikely of teachers." Favourite lyrics: "I want to run/ I want to hide/ I want to tear the walls that hold me inside", from U2's 'Where the Streets Have No Name' **STRUGGLE FOR SUCCESS**

-Started programming/ coding around 1995-96; wrote programmes for firms, including the Delhi-Bombay schedule for Jet Airways. "It got me Rs 1,000&•œwe celebrated with pizza that night"-Quit his first job after six months and started XS Corps! with three friends. In 1999, sold it to a US firm for \$1 million. He was just 20

and wears his emotions on his sleeve, be it in office or outside. Raveendran, 44, on the other hand, is said to be shy and somewhat of an introvert, a man of few words, except when he gets down to doing what he loves the most—teaching.

However, there is plenty the two have in common, too. Both grew up in small towns, went to local schools and learnt English on the fly—one by memorising rock music lyrics and the other by listening to cricket commentary. From humble beginnings, both built formidable companies that rapidly became unicorns and they the poster boys of their respective businesses. Sharma, in digital payments, with 330 million digital wallets in his firm Paytm's payments bank, 118 million customers who took Rs 15,500 crore loans through its tie-ups and 60 million users for its

FASTag service that allows digital payments at toll booths across the country. One97 Communications, the parent company of Paytm, posted revenues of Rs 6,028 crore in FY23 and had a market capitalisation of Rs 1.1 lakh crore at the time of its listing on the Bombay Stock Exchange on November 18, 2021, via an IPO (initial public offering). Raveendran, meanwhile, made his mark in online education, where he built an enterprise that was valued at \$22 billion (Rs 1.8 lakh crore) in 2022, earned revenues of Rs 5,298 crore in FY22 and had 120 million students and 600 offline centres. Sharma featured in Forbes' World Billionaires list in 2022 with a net worth of \$1.2 billion (Rs 9,950 crore); Raveendran had debuted on the list two years before, in 2020, with a fortune of \$1.8 billion (Rs 14,900 crore).

The billionaire entrepreneurs hogged the limelight as torchbearers of a vibrant start-up ecosystem in the country, characterised by a crop of young go-getters who defied conventional rules to float companies that, more often than not, disrupted businesses. Both of them thrived on the back of black swan events. Sharma's nascent payments bank, Paytm, flourished as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's demonetisation move in 2016 sucked out cash from the economy and pushed the use of digital currency. BYJU'S was propelled to the stratosphere as the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world in 2020 and fuelled an unprecedented boom in online education. Both start-ups became the darlings of investors, who pumped crores into them. Sharma had money pouring in from domestic as well as foreign investors that, until November

2020, totalled \$3.5 billion (Rs 29,000 crore). He used the money to make acquisitions and fund a massive expansion of his payments business. Between 2020 and 2023, Raveendran received as much as \$4.8 billion (Rs 39,750 crore), which he used to acquire a chain of complementary companies, Indian as well as foreign. However, like meteorites blazing through the sky before fizzling out, both companies began to experience rapid burnouts by the end of 2023, albeit for different reasons. The duo saw not just a crash of their impressive valuations, but also of their credibility and reputation as the whiz-kids of India's start-up blitz. From a peak of Rs 1,564 two years ago, Paytm's share price stood at Rs 393 on March 6 and its m-cap at just Rs



CAN I.N.D.I.A. TOPPLE MODI?

THE ODDS SEEM HEAVILY STACKED AGAINST THEM, BUT A CONCERTED STRATEGY AND NARRATIVE CAN HELP THE OPPOSITION LIMIT THE BJP'S OUTSIZED AMBITIONS



By Kaushik Deka

It would take nine months and the arrest of Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor Arvind Kejriwal to bring together the top leaders of the Opposition parties on a single stage. On March 31, at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan, leaders representing the 27 parties that constitute the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (I.N.D.I.A.) assembled for a mega show of solidarity against the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arresting Kejriwal for his alleged involvement in the Delhi liquor policy case. They also protested the arrest of Hemant Soren, who resigned as Jharkhand chief minister on January 31 after the ED questioned him on an alleged land scam.

But even as its leaders attended the rally, the Congress, the largest party in the Opposition, received a series of notices from the income tax (I-T) department for alleged tax violations, for which it was liable to pay a fine of some Rs 3,500 crore. It was only after the Congress approached the Supreme Court and charged the I-T department with mala fide intention to choke its funds during a crucial election campaign that the tax officials were forced to back down—duly assuring the court that they would not take coercive action against the party till after the Lok Sabha polls. But there was no mistaking the intent of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Beyond its

rallying cry of a brute majority of 'char sau paar', the BJP's rivals sense a more sinister design—to annihilate all opposition. To do so, the ruling party is willing to use all means at its disposal—engineering splits, poaching or arresting leaders and choking party finances.

Up against the BJP's relentless poll machinery—powered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal popularity, his perceived performance record along with his party's Hindu nationalist agenda and the plank of development—this Lok Sabha election has become a test of political relevance for the Opposition camp. The BJP has humiliated them twice, winning back-to-back majorities in the 543-member House on its own—282 seats in 2014 and 303 in 2019. Its combined tally with its allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was 352 in 2019. This time, the BJP is gunning for 370 seats on its own and 400-plus for the larger alliance.

In what appears to be a completely dismal scenario, the Opposition can draw solace from the fact that the BJP's vote share in 2019 was 38 per cent and the NDA's 45 per cent; 55 per cent of the electorate had voted for parties opposing the BJP. That statistic demanded that Opposition parties combine forces to try and halt the BJP juggernaut. Ergo, the formation of I.N.D.I.A. last June. That promise, though, was soon belied by Bihar chief minister and Jan-ata Dal (United) or JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar bolting to the saffron side, robbing

the alliance of a crucial pivot. In neighbouring battlefield West Bengal, where the BJP as the main opposition force had captured more than 40 per cent of the vote share in 2019, the Mamata Banerjee-led ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) continued support for the I.N.D.I.A. bloc but decided to fight the election solo. Dealt these crushing blows, does I.N.D.I.A. still have it in them to topple Modi and the BJP? CONGRESS IS STILL KEY

Despite its apparent disarray, the Grand Old Party remains the single-largest challenger to the ruling BJP. Congress success or failure at the hustings will make or break I.N.D.I.A.'s chances of ending the NDA rule. In at least 200 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress is in direct contest with the ruling party. Of the 303 seats the BJP won last time, the Congress was its primary rival in 190. However, the GOP managed to win only 15 of them, with the remaining 175 going to the BJP, a strike rate of 92 per cent for the saffron side. The overall difference in vote share was 20 percentage points, to fill which gap the alliance will require a massive wave in its favour. "It's an extremely challenging task for the Congress to bridge this gap," says political strategist and election analyst Amitabh Tiwari. In 125 out of the 421 seats the Congress contested in 2019, the party had lost by a margin of more than 15 percentage points. In 309 constituencies, the Congress has not won even once in the past three polls. In

another 183, it has won only once. Of the 25 parliamentary seats in the Northeast, once a Congress stronghold, it now has just four in two states. But if the Congress can mount a challenge in even a small critical mass of seats where it faces the BJP directly, it could hope to depress ruling party numbers below the 272 majority mark and diminish the Modi aura. In that endeavour, the Congress is sharpening three strategies. First, as the only party in I.N.D.I.A. with organisational presence across states, the party has been working towards weaving a coherent national narrative against the BJP. Congress scion Rahul Gandhi has since 2022 completed two yatras—one on foot, from south to north; the other by bus, from east to west. The impulse behind both yatras was the same: countering the BJP's "communal" politics, ensuring equitable growth focused on marginalised socio-economic sections, social justice for all and protecting the constitutional values of the country. The party has also kept up its relentless attack on the Modi government on unemployment, price rise and its alleged nexus with big corporate groups—never mind if issues such as threat to democracy or misuse of central agencies may have no tangible impact on voters given that most parties in India are guilty of such oversteps. "The Ram temple and direct transfer of benefits are tangible for voters. Threat to democracy is not," says Prof. Varun

Chhachhar of Lucknow University. Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress president and I.N.D.I.A. convenor, feels otherwise (see accompanying interview). "There is already an undeclared Emergency," he tells india today. "Modi is an autocrat." The Opposition may also still have a plank in the national caste census despite losing Nitish, who conducted a caste survey in Bihar, to the BJP. It will be crucial in Opposition attempts to woo the Other Backward Classes, who have been a mainstay of the BJP's electoral victories in recent times. Secondly, the Congress, which won Karnataka last year on the back of the five guarantees it promised voters, is expanding on the theme to counter the 'Modi Guarantee' of a Viksit Bharat (developed India) by 2047. It is hoping to attract the socially backward classes, farmers, women and youth with 25 guarantees, including a caste census, removing the 50 per cent cap on reservations, appointments to 3 million government posts, apprenticeship with an annual stipend of Rs 1 lakh to every graduate and diploma-holder, a new law to curb paper leaks, Rs 1 lakh a year to a woman in every poor family, 50 per cent quota for women in central government recruitment, legal status to MSP and a national minimum wage of Rs 400 a day. To take its message to the masses, Kharge launched the 'Ghar Ghar Guarantee' initiative on April 3 to reach out to 80 million households.

Modinomics

Hits & Misses

With the state of the economy a major election issue, a stocktaking of the Modi government's achievements and failures on key economic parameters

By Raj Chengappa & MG Arun

The advantage of doing one's praising for oneself is that one can lay it on so thick and exactly in the right places,' wrote Samuel Butler in his novel, *The Way of All Flesh*. While tabling a White Paper in Parliament this February, which compared Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic agenda over the past decade with that during Manmohan Singh's tenure, Union minister for finance Nirmala Sitharaman said, "From the Fragile Five (under Manmohan Singh), we moved to the League of Top Five in just above a decade." It is true that the Indian economy has moved from being the tenth largest in the world when Narendra Modi took over from Manmohan Singh in 2014 to now being the fifth largest with a GDP of \$3.7 trillion (Rs 308 lakh crore). And from the depths the Indian economy had sunk to during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Modi government has resurrected it by clocking an impressive 7.6 per cent growth in FY2024. This has made us the world's fastest-growing large economy. Achievements that have become the leitmotif for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s war cry for Election 2024 and its bid to win a third consecutive majority at the Centre. Referring to himself in the third person, the prime minister in campaign rallies talks of 'Modi ki Guarantee' while enunciating his vision for a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047, when India will complete a century of Independence. There is also the more immediate promise of becoming the world's third largest

economy in the next three years that he says will vastly improve the lives of the poor, the youth, women and farmers if he is given a third term. Butler's comments about self-praise are apt even when it comes to denouncing others. To counter the BJP's economic pitch, the Congress, the country's main Opposition party, not only simultaneously released a Black Paper where it sought to counter the criticism against Manmohan Singh's economic track record, but also listed the Modi government's "failures", including "high rates of unemployment, economic catastrophes such as demonetisation and GST that have only increased the divide between the rich and poor and devastated the future of millions of farmers and daily wage workers". If the BJP can't stop singing its own praises, the Congress can't stop taking it down in its election campaign, with Rahul Gandhi calling it "a battle for nyay (justice) against dus saal anyay kaal (10 years of injustice)" and declaring a war on unemployment, rising prices and inequitable growth, turning them into the party's prime economic plank.

The economic discourse, especially over the lack of jobs, inflation and inclusive growth, has indeed emerged as a key factor in Election 2024, with even opinion polls recording its primacy in voter concern. Elections in India are won and lost on many counts, be it emotion, perception, national security, political stability or family and caste considerations, but economic issues cut across

all divides and have on many occasions even determined the outcome. In the wilderness after the Emergency, for instance, Indira Gandhi rode back to power in 1980 using soaring onion prices as one of her main campaign planks to oust the Janata Party government. More recently, Manmohan Singh earned a second consecutive term as prime minister in 2009, after the economy recorded one of its highest ever average GDP growth figures. It was also an endorsement of the massive welfare schemes he had launched, including the flagship Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Modi, too, has staked his claim for a third term on the basis of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas", that devolves on development, inclusion and trust.

As claims and counterclaims about the economy—its progress or the lack thereof—fly thick and fast in the campaign pitches of both the ruling and the Opposition alliance, India today decided to shun the rhetoric and embark on a realistic assessment of the Modi government's track record on key parameters. Spanning both terms of the prime minister, they include both hits and misses, all documented and analysed in these pages. "Rather than being just black or white, the truth about India's economic progress under the Modi government has plenty of shades of grey," says Subhash Chandra Garg, a former Union finance secretary in the Modi government. For any prime minister to make a lasting impact

on the economy, Garg believes a leader's core agenda for a developing country like India must tick three main boxes. The first is transforming the structure of the economy in terms of interrelationships between government and business as well as domestic and foreign investors to ensure rapid economic growth. The second is the redistribution of resources in favour of the poor to ensure equitable and inclusive growth. And the third is the leader's ability to leverage the rapid technological changes to further growth while respecting environmental imperatives for sustainable development. In addition to these, say experts, every prime minister brings his or her own personal philosophy, ideology and conviction to bear on economic policy, thus making comparisons difficult. So, 'Manmohanomics' was focused on rights-based economics that worked towards ensuring entitlements for the individual, especially those belonging to the weaker sections. 'Modinomics' is about ensuring fiscal prudence, with massive investment-led development and welfare schemes. It is also about harnessing technology to ensure that beneficiaries get cash transfers directly rather than via intermediaries, making delivery efficient and free of corruption. A clear thread unites Modi's actions and schemes, all of which add up to a larger gameplan that may not be evident at first but reveals itself once all the parts are in place. In his interview to India Today in January, the prime minister talked of exactly this "progressive

unfolding" of his vision. And one of the examples he cited was the massively successful public digital infrastructure that his government had instituted. In his first term, Modi had launched a major drive to bank the unbanked through the Jan Dhan scheme, which saw over 500 million people open bank accounts. He then followed it up with directing the cash transfers for sundry government welfare schemes into these beneficiary accounts with the Aadhaar card as the basis of identification and the mobile number for digital payments. Called the JAM or Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile trinity, it has proved to be a game-changer, with these accounts boasting over Rs 2.32 lakh crore as their current balance. India also emerged as a global leader in digital public infrastructure, with e-transactions surging to 134 billion last year, accounting for 46 per cent of all global digital payments. When Modi assumed power in 2014 after several months of the 'policy paralysis' that afflicted the Manmohan Singh regime, the popular expectation was that his government would revive the economy quickly and create the millions of jobs the country badly needed. He was also expected to roll out several reforms to pave the way for faster economic development while ensuring, as he put it, "more governance and less government". In his first term, Modi did usher in a slew of reforms, especially in the financial sector, besides initiating massive infrastructure development projects, especially in the roads sector.