



The South Asian



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Oppenheimer Row:
Misplaced Outrage over
Bhagavad Gita



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Vol. 22

Issue 24

Friday 4 August to 10 August, 2023

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'Sad day for America':
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UN bodies call for urgent action over Panama's Darién Gap migration route



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Darién Gap is one of the rainiest and most dangerous places on the planet, a lawless 100-mile stretch of rainforest between Panama and Colombia. It's an unpoliced region, with many drug smugglers and sometimes political rebels. As the number of people crossing Darién Gap hits a new record, many International bodies have called for urgent intervention in the Darién Gap to prevent a further escalation of a humanitarian crisis.

Unplanned Infra Projects and Climate Crisis: A Recipe For Disasters



(Sai Bureau)- If we want to save the country from the Himalayan disaster, prevent desertification of the Ganga valley and progress, the only remedy is to thaw all road, infra and construction activities for some time. Devastating floods, landslides, mudslides in Himachal, Uttarakhand and drowning of large tracts in Delhi because of dam overflows for the first time in 45 years is unprecedented

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For Haryana Violence Petition, A Rare Move By Supreme Court Chief Justice



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Fitch downgrades U.S. long-term rating to AA+ from AAA

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Clinical Laboratory and Its Owner Agree to Pay an Additional \$5.7 Million to Resolve Outstanding Judgement for Billing Medicare for Inflated Mileage-Based Lab Technician Travel Allowance Fees

(Sai Buearu)- BestCare Laboratory Services LLC (BestCare), a now defunct Texas-based company that operated as a clinical laboratory, and its owner and founder, Karim A. Maghareh, have agreed to pay an additional \$5.7 million to settle an outstanding False Claims Act judgment against them. The judgment was entered in 2018 after a court found that BestCare knowingly submitted false claims to Medicare, as directed by Maghareh, by billing for travel allowance reimbursements that did not reflect the mileage that lab technicians had actually traveled when they collected specimens from nursing home residents in Texas. The settlement announced today is designed to resolve BestCare and Maghareh's outstanding obligation under the 2018 judgment. The settlement provides for payments totaling \$5.7 million and the possibility of additional annual

payments for five years based on Maghareh's future income. These payments are in addition to \$789,652 that the United States has already collected since 2018. The settlement amount is based on the Justice Department's ability-to-pay policy.

The original lawsuit was filed in 2008 by Richard Drummond under the qui tam, or whistleblower, provisions of the False Claims Act. The qui tam provisions allow private parties, called "relators," to sue on behalf of the United States individuals or companies they believe have knowingly submitted false claims for government funds. Relators are entitled to receive 15 to 25 percent of any recovery if the United States intervenes in the suit, as it did here in 2011. As part of this settlement, the relator will receive \$1,311,000.

"Health care providers that submit inflated reimbursement claims to Medicare waste

funds intended to ensure access to vital medical services," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Brian M. Boynton, head of the Justice Department's Civil Division. "Today's settlement demonstrates the department's resolve to ensure that those who defraud the taxpayers are held accountable."

"When the greedy manipulate the Medicare system, it affects us all, especially the elderly," said U.S. Attorney Alamdor S. Hamdani for the Southern District of Texas. "It's a waste of resources meant to help those in need. This fraudulent scheme adversely impacted our healthcare system because of the inflated costs associated with transporting lab samples. This settlement brings to bear some economic justice, by requiring those that orchestrated the fraudulent scheme to pay for their actions."

This settlement illustrates the

government's emphasis on combating health care fraud. One of the most powerful tools in this effort is the False Claims Act. Tips and complaints from all sources about potential fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement can be reported to the Department of Health and Human Services at 800-HHS-TIPS (800-447-8477). The resolution obtained in this matter was the result of a coordinated effort among the Justice Department's Civil Division, Commercial Litigation Branch, Fraud Section; the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas, Affirmative Civil Enforcement Section; and the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. The settlement was handled by Fraud Section Senior Trial Counsel Andrew A. Steinberg and Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Karpati for the Southern District of Texas.

New Jersey Tax Preparer Arrested for Fraudulently Seeking Over \$124 Million in COVID-19 Employment Tax Credits

(Sai Buearu)-A New Jersey tax preparer was arrested today on charges related to fraudulently seeking over \$124,000,000 from the IRS by filing over 1,000 tax returns falsely claiming COVID-19-related employment tax credits.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact, Congress authorized an employee retention tax credit that a small business could use to reduce the employment tax it owed to the IRS, also known as the "employee retention credit" or ERC.

Congress also authorized the IRS to give a credit against employment taxes to reimburse businesses for the wages paid to employees who were on sick or family leave and could not work because of COVID-19. This "paid sick and family leave credit" was equal to the wages the business paid the employees during the sick or family leave, also subject to a maximum amount. According to court documents, from November 2020 to May 2023, Leon Haynes of Teaneck, New Jersey, allegedly repeatedly exploited a program created to help small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Acting as a tax preparer, Haynes allegedly prepared and submitted approximately 1,387 false forms to the IRS claiming COVID-related tax credits on behalf of himself and clients. The complaint further alleges that Haynes falsely told his clients that the government was giving out COVID-relief money for businesses and that they were eligible for the money simply because they had a business. Allegedly, without consulting with his clients, Haynes then submitted forms to the IRS on behalf of their

businesses that grossly overstated the number of employees and amount of wages paid. Haynes allegedly submitted similarly false forms for three of his own companies. Based on these and other misrepresentations, Haynes' conduct allegedly sought approximately \$124,751,995 in tax refunds on behalf of his companies and numerous other businesses in his clients' names. The IRS allegedly mailed Haynes multiple tax refund checks totaling \$1,007,966 for his own companies and allegedly disbursed a total of \$31.6 million in refunds to Haynes' clients and himself based on the false tax forms that Haynes submitted. The complaint further alleges that Haynes charged many clients a fee of as much as 15% of the refund they received. If convicted, Haynes faces a maximum penalty of three years in prison for each count of aiding and assisting in the preparation of a false return and 20 years in prison for mail fraud. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Stuart M. Goldberg of the Justice Department's Tax Division and U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger for the District of New Jersey made the announcement. IRS-Criminal Investigation, Social Security Administration-Office of the Inspector General, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service are investigating the case. Trial Attorney Samuel B. Bean of the Justice Department's Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Fatime Meka Cano of the District of New Jersey's Economic Crimes Unit are prosecuting the case.

Mom assumed to have jumped from Royal Caribbean cruise ship is confirmed dead by her family

(Sai Buearu)-The Indian mother thought to have jumped off a Royal Caribbean cruise ship during a voyage from Malaysia to Singapore was confirmed dead by her family Tuesday - on what would have been her birthday.

Reeta Sahani, 64, was declared missing Monday after her husband, Jakesh Sahani, 70, woke up in the middle of the night and noticed she was not in their cabin

7:50 a.m. Monday that a passenger "had fallen overboard in the Singapore Strait," according to the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore. "MRCC Singapore is coordinating the search and immediately issued navigational safety broadcast to vessels in the Singapore Strait and vessels in port to keep a lookout for the missing person and report any sightings to MRCC Singapore," the MPA said in a statement. The Spectrum of the Seas, a 1,139-foot-long behemoth that can carry up to about 4,900 passengers, was returning from a four-day round-trip cruise to Malaysia, according to CruiseMapper.

"Cruise staff are saying she jumped," Apoorv tweeted on Monday, as he complained that the company

was not sharing the footage and "are washing their hands off."

He told the Straits Times that his mother could not swim and disputed suspicions that she had jumped overboard.

Eventually my father was told to get down from the ship because there was another cruise that was going to take place, but we think she may still be on the ship, stuck somewhere," Apoorv told the outlet before receiving the grim update.

"She was on a holiday enjoying herself and then this whole thing happened. It doesn't make sense," he added.

On Tuesday, he thanked people "for showing your overwhelming support in this time of distress for my family," adding that he will be "forever grateful."

Earlier, he reached out to the Indian prime minister's office and the Ministry of External Affairs seeking assistance in locating his mom.



in the Spectrum of the Seas, the Straits Times first reported.

The family has been shown surveillance footage that confirmed the fate of the mom who cannot swim, her son, Apoorv Sahani, 39, tweeted Tuesday.

"With the footage we have unfortunately learned that my mother has passed away," wrote the grieving son, who is a businessman based in Melbourne, Australia.

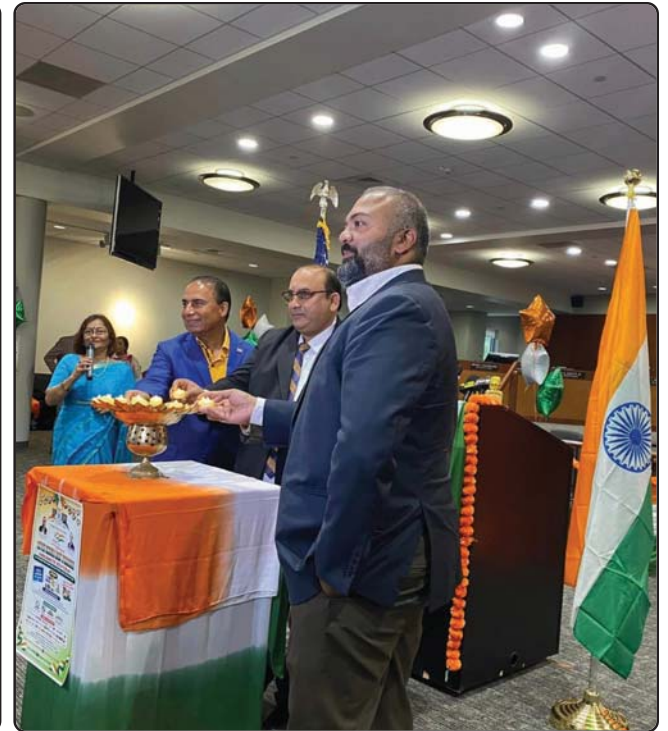
He did not detail exactly what the footage showed, but earlier tweeted that "cruise staff are saying she jumped."

Ironically, today is also her birthday," added Sahani, who was not on the tragic cruise. "Would request you guys to give us some privacy as we mourn her loss."

The giant vessel's overboard detection system revealed that something had gone overboard and the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre was notified about

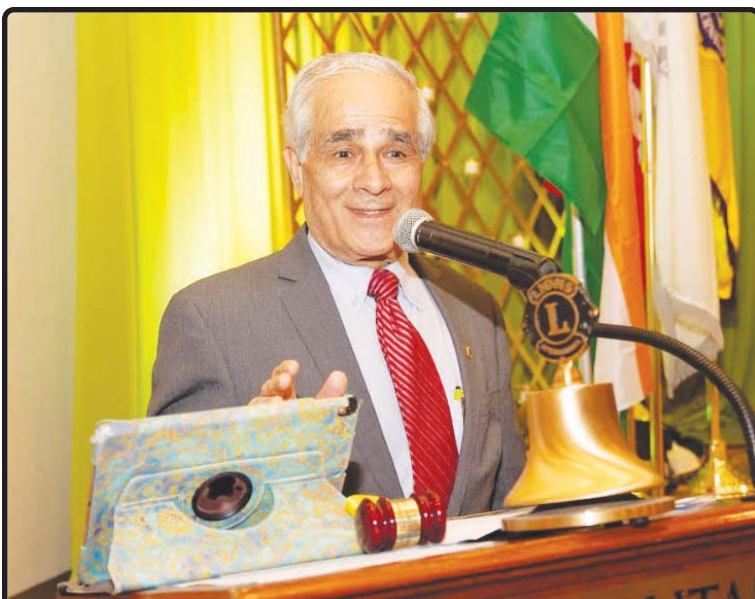
Curtain raiser event held for India Day Parade of Long Island

Hearts and Minds of Indian American Community of Long Island look forward to the parade to be held on Aug 27 in Hicksville



(By our staff reporter) 12th India Day Parade of Long Island will be held under the joint presidentship of Deepak Bansall and Vimal Goyal, in Hicksville, Long Island. An event was recently held in the Nassau County Legislative chambers in Mineola to share information and progress about the event with media and public alike. Many elected and appointed officials attended the event and pledged their support to the parade. Among those who attended were New York State Senator Kevin Thomas, former New York State Senator Anna Kaplan and Nassau County Comptroller Elaine Phillips and Bobby Kalotee, a IDP Founder and Nassau County Human Rights Chairman. (See our YouTube/Facebook Channel Josh India WebTV for Video coverage of the event).

Picture courtesy: Kripa Ranjan Prasad for South Asian Insider



Shyam Gajwani is new President of Long Island Indo American Lions Club for the year 2023-2024. An Installation Ceremony was organized recently in Glen Cove, Long Island at a banquet hall. Founder President Indu Gajwani, Immediate Past President Dr. Sunil Mehra, District Governor Mark Bothello, Past District Governors- Paula Umreiko, Andy Umreiko, immediate Past Governor Rupal Sehgal and Second Vice DG- Maria Leitao were the guests present among many other well known names of the community. Anju Sharma introduced President Shyam Gajwani, and Vote of Thanks was given by General Secretary Sanju Sharma. (By our staff reporter)

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Pearl Banquet Hall and Convention Center Celebrates Grand Opening

Whose who of Indian American community attended the event



(By our staff reporter) Hicksville, Long Island- As part of their mission to provide the best in the hospitality industry, PEARL Banquet Hall opened its doors for the first time on 23rd July 2023. More than 1100 people attended to celebrate the occasion and to experience the Majesty, Brilliance, Elegance, and grandeur of PEARL firsthand.

The Grand Opening program started with Sukhmani Sahib Path, Kirtan and Ardaas, followed by sumptuous Langar Prasad that was catered by Mint. Rubal Sikka, the owner and President of Pearl said with determination and perseverance, anything can be achieved. Pearl is a labor of love and brings an exemplary dining experience in an atmosphere that is both tranquil and exhilarating. Gary Sikka, the Chief Executive Officer, and the Executive Chef said that the Banquet Hall has the capacity of hosting events of up to 400 people on the main floor. Another 100 can be accommodated on the second floor. Pearl is an extension of Mint known for their delicious food for the last 20 years. PearlFixed. will offer not only all kinds of Indian cuisines, but it will also offer Continental, Chinese, Thai, Mediterranean, Italian, Mexican

cuisines. The opulent ambience in gold tones, beautiful chandeliers is a delight to look at. The unveiling of the Banquet Hall was attended by Mr. Sant Singh Chatwal, internationally renowned Hotelier, Mr. Harry Singh Bolla Chairman of a Billion Dollar Bolla Management Corporation, Mr. Naveen Shah CEO of multibillion-dollar corporation Navika Capital Group, Dr. Paila Malla Reddy, CEO of ScieGen Pharmaceutical Company, Mr. Jon Kaiman, Deputy County Executive, Suffolk County, many community leaders and activists attended the event.

Well known names of business and community leaders, appointed and elected officials attended the Opening Ceremony. Among them were Mr. Mohinder Singh Taneja, Mr. Zahid Syed, Mr. Shudh Prakash Singh, Mr. Varinder Sikka, Dr. Sunil Mehra, Dr. Jagdish Gupta, Mr. Harish Thakkar, Ms. Indu Gajwani, Ms. Indu Jaiswal, Ms. Beena Kothari, Ms. Bina Sabapathy, Mr. Deepak Bansal, Mr. Sharanjit Singh Thind, Prof Indrajit Singh Saluja, Mr. Kamlesh Mehta, Dr. Rajinder Jinna, Dr. Vinny Jayam, Dr. Raj Bhayani, Dr. Tarun Wasil, Dr. Avtar Singh Tinna, Mr. Satnam Singh Parhar, Mr. Govind Munjal, Mrs. Suman Munjal, Mr. Sunil Hali, Mr. Ajay Sondhi, Mr. V Nagendra Gupta, and Mr. Jasbir Jay Singh.

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Maharashtra anti-terror squad also probing Jaipur-Mumbai train shooting case

The Maharashtra ATS (anti-terrorism squad) is conducting a parallel investigation into the train shooting case wherein Railway Protection Force (RPF) constable Chetan Singh allegedly shot dead three passengers, including his senior on the moving Jaipur-Mumbai Central Express. The video of the firing incident went viral shortly later.

(News Agency)- The Maharashtra ATS (anti-terrorism squad) is conducting a parallel investigation into the firing incident on board moving Jaipur Mumbai Central Express in which four people were shot dead by a Railway Protection Force (RPF) constable. The RPF constable, identified as Chetan Singh, shot dead his senior colleague and three passengers on board the moving train during the wee hours of Monday. Now, top sources in the ATS confirmed to India Today that a team of Maharashtra ATS is also probing the firing incident. As per police sources, the anti-terror agency sprang into action shortly after the video of the open fire inside the moving train began doing the rounds on the internet.

ACTION TAKEN

Sources confirmed that a team of ATS personnel even visited the Government Railway Police (GRP) police station in Mumbai's Borivali area where the case



was registered. This is the same police station where the accused RPF constable was brought for interrogation. They have undergone all relevant documents in the shooting case so far, said sources, while adding that they have also examined all testimony and statements by fellow officials.

Sources also said that the Maharashtra ATS will also comb through evidence that the police will gather and carry out an independent probe into the material. The ATS will probe the accused RPF constable, Chetan Singh, and also look into the possibility of any terror link in the case, the source said.

RAILWAY CONSTABLE OPENS FIRE
On July 31, around 5:23 am, on duty, RPF train escort staff constable Chetan Singh shot his in-charge ASI Meena using his service ARM rifle (AK-47) while he was performing duty in the B-5 coach of the Jaipur-Mumbai Express at Vaitarna railway station, the railways said.

Singh was apprehended by officers and railway staff and handed over to the local police in Borivali for further legal action.

A high-level committee headed by an ADG of the RPF has been constituted to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the incident. Also, shortly after the incident, the railway board on Wednesday issued a statement that no mental ailment was detected in the last periodic medical examination of the RPF constable accused in the Jaipur-Mumbai train shooting incident but they withdrew it within hours.

Nuh violence: 3 'influencers' booked, 2,300 social media videos under cop lens

Three FIRs were lodged against three people for posting inciteful and hateful posts on social media that triggered the violence in Nuh on July 31. The clashes, which spread to Gurugram and other places, has claimed six lives.



(News Agency)-The Nuh police have registered three FIRs against three people over their inflammatory social media posts that triggered the violence in the district earlier this week. This came after six people, including two home guards and a cleric, were killed in communal clashes that erupted in Nuh on Monday over an attempt to stop a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) procession and spread to Gurugram over

the past few days.

Of the seven FIRs filed by the Nuh police, three were booked against one Shahid, Aadil Khan Mannaka, and a social media account named 'Shayar Guru Ghantal'.

These FIRs were registered following complaints lodged by Assistant Sub-Inspector Suresh Kumar, the incharge of Nuh's Cyber Cell.

The police are yet to reveal who runs the

'Shayar Guru Ghantal' account, where inciteful posts and videos were uploaded. According to the FIRs, five posts were uploaded by Shahid, one by Aadil and two in 'Shayar Guru Ghantal' account. One of the accused, Aadil, had allegedly posted songs on social media which were indecent and some posts were communally charged.

The respective sections under which the FIRs have been filed include -- 153, 153A, 295A, 298, 504, 109 and 292.

Close to 2,300 videos from July 31 are currently under the scanner that the police believed could fanned the violence in Nuh.

On Wednesday, India Today reported that inflammatory social media posts had fuelled the communal clashes in Haryana.

An investigation by India Today's Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) discovered a troubling sequence of unchecked aggression propagated through social media, which led to violence on the streets of Nuh.

The violence later spilt into the

Survey underway at Gyanvapi premises amid tight security, Muslim side boycotts

(News Agency)-A team of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Friday morning arrived at the Gyanvapi mosque premises in Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi, where a scientific survey of the complex began at nearly 7 am, amid tight security. The survey will go on till 12 noon and will again be undertaken from 3 to 5 pm today. The development comes a day after the Allahabad High Court on Thursday allowed the ASI to conduct the survey, which aims to determine whether the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple. Only the people appointed by the district administration were present at the premises when the ASI survey began. Meanwhile, the members of the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid committee boycotted the survey. Sohanlal Arya from the Hindu side said that during the previous survey, several artifacts, including sculptures of Shiva and Parvati, a statue of Varaha (boar avatar of Vishnu), bells, tridents, and many other pieces of evidence, were found inside the premises, indicating the site is a temple.

On Thursday, the Allahabad High Court

'Tumhare ghar ED na aa jaaye': Row over minister's remark in Parliament



(News Agency)- Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi on Thursday warned the Opposition to maintain silence during a discussion on the Delhi services bill in the Lok Sabha else the "Enforcement Directorate (ED) may arrive at your homes".

"...Ek minute, ek minute. Shaant raho, tumhare ghar ED na aa jaaye," (One minute. Keep quiet or else the ED may arrive at your home) Lekhi said in response to an Opposition member who interrupted her while she was speaking in the House.

Lekhi's comments in the House have not gone down well with the Opposition. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) spokesperson Clyde Crasto said Lekhi's "insinuating threat" in the Lok Sabha "proved" the Opposition's allegations

that the government was "misusing" central agencies.

This insinuating threat given by Meenakshi Lekhi in the heat of the moment in the Lok Sabha proves what many have been saying, 'Misuse of central agencies...' he said in a tweet.

Indian Youth Congress president Srinivas BV questioned whether Lekhi's remarks in the Lok Sabha were a "warning" or a "threat".

"Is it a warning or a threat?" he wrote on his X (formerly Twitter) handle.

Trinamool Congress (TMC) spokesperson Saket Gokhale described Lekhi's ED comments in Parliament as "shocking". He said the ministers were now "openly threatening" to use the ED against Opposition leaders.

"Today, shockingly, Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi threatened the Opposition in Parliament and said: 'Keep quiet or ED may arrive at your home'. BJP Ministers now openly threaten to use the ED against the Opposition just for speaking in Parliament. The vendetta isn't even hidden anymore," Gokhale said in a tweet.

Senior Haryana cop transferred, was on leave during Nuh communal clashes

(News Agency)- Varun Singla, a senior police officer in Nuh, Haryana, who was on leave when deadly communal clashes broke out at the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) rally that killed six people, has been transferred. Late on Thursday night, Superintendent of Police Varun Singla was posted to Bhiwani. IPS officer Narendra Bijarniya, who was the acting SP since the violence started, has replaced Varun Singla. The order said Narendra Bijarniya, SP, Bhiwani, who was also functioning as OSD to Additional DGP (law and order), in addition to his present duties to assist her in maintaining the law and order situation in Nuh and surrounding areas, has been transferred and posted as SP, Nuh. The rioting in Haryana was sparked by a religious procession taken out by VHP and Bajrang Dal in Nuh. The incident started a series of communal flare-ups in Gurugram, Sohna and other areas.

As many as six people, including two home guards and a cleric, have died in the clashes that erupted in Nuh over an attempt to stop a VHP procession. The

violence soon spread to Gurugram, Sohna, Manesar and other districts, with the mob going on a rampage and burning down various shops and establishments, leading to huge losses. Various police cars and private vehicles were also torched in the violence. In the wake of the communal clashes, the state government suspended internet services and clamped prohibitory orders in several areas.

According to police, a total of 176 people have been arrested and 78 taken into preventive detention in connection with the communal clashes in Haryana. The Haryana government on Wednesday sought four more companies of central forces as arson and vandalism continued in Gurugram. As per an FIR filed by a police officer, a mob of around 800-900 men attacked the Hindu rally when it began from Shiv temple in Nalhar, India Today has learnt. The strong mob chanted 'pro-Pakistan slogans' and tried to stop the procession with sticks, stones and illegal weapons with an 'intent to kill', the FIR said.



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Rahul Gandhi brings home Jack Russell Terrier puppy after Goa visit

Rahul Gandhi, who was on a personal trip to Goa, visited a dog kennel and brought a three-month-old Jack Russell Terrier puppy to Delhi with him on Thursday. He has also selected another puppy, which will be sent to him later.



(News Agency)- Rahul Gandhi, who returned to Delhi from Goa, brought with him a three-month-old Jack Russell Terrier puppy. The Congress leader had arrived in Goa on Wednesday night and returned to the national capital on Thursday morning.

Shivani Pitre, who runs a dog kennel in Mapusa town in North Goa along with her husband Stanley Braganca, told PTI that while Gandhi left with one

puppy, he has selected another one, which will be sent to him later.

Pitre said Gandhi had sent his representative earlier to inquire about the puppy and he himself wanted to see it before taking him. The Congress leader arrived at the shelter in Mapusa at around 9 am on Thursday on his way to Manohar International Airport, Mopa in North Goa.

Pitre said Gandhi was at the

kennel for a short time before he left for the airport. She said the Congress leader was humble and down to earth. She said most of the time, Gandhi was busy playing with dogs during his visit to the shelter home.

Gandhi had met Congress leaders, including Goa MLAs and Goa Pradesh Congress committee president Amit Patkar, on Wednesday night in a hotel.

Tomato farmer attacked, robbed by 5 men in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor



(News Agency)- A group of five men attacked and robbed a farmer of Rs 4.5 lakh cash while he was carrying tomatoes to the market in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district. The incident was reported from the Nakkabanda area in Punganuru here.

The farmer, identified as Loka Raj, was carrying tomatoes to the Palamenaru market when the perpetrators attacked him with beer bottles. They then robbed him of Rs 4.5 lakh, which he was carrying in cash. Sources said the perpetrators were under the influence of drugs when they carried out the attack. The injured farmer was shifted to Punganur government hospital by the locals. He is currently under treatment there. The Punganur police have

meanwhile registered a case and launched an investigation into the incident.

The soaring prices of tomatoes in India have made them a valued commodity in the markets. Tomato is currently selling at a rate of more than Rs 200 a kilo and its prices are likely to touch Rs 300 per kilogram in the coming days, according to wholesale traders. Earlier this month, tomatoes worth Rs 2.5 lakh were stolen from a farm in Goni Somanahalli village in Belur taluk of Karnataka's Hassan district. In another such incident, a couple from neighbouring Tamil Nadu was arrested by the police for hijacking a truck laden with 2.5 tonnes of tomatoes in Bengaluru after faking an accident to extort money.

RSS-minded doctors' instigating their colleagues to go on strike: Ashok Gehlot

(News Agency)- Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot accused "RSS-minded doctors" of inciting their colleagues to go on strike in the state. He emphasized that while doctors may have political affiliations, they should prioritize humanity above all else.



Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday alleged that some "RSS-minded doctors" were instigating their colleagues in the state to go on a strike. He said doctors can be affiliated with the Congress, the BJP, or the RSS, but they should always put humanity first.

"I would like to appeal to those who talk about strike and instigating to the doctors with RSS background that do

not instigate doctors," he said during a programme at his residence here.

Gehlot said his government provides the best facilities to the doctors compared to their counterparts in the country. "Today pay scale, pay grade facilities are being given (to doctors) in Rajasthan," he said, asking doctors not to go on a strike.

"Protest at chief minister's house, tie a black ribbon, I will understand. The black ribbon (tied around the arm) will have more impact than the strike," he said.

Gehlot said that the government's vision of organ donation will be fulfilled only when there is awareness in society.

"Today, two-and-a-half-lakh people die every year due to accidents in the country," he said.

During the programme, the chief minister interacted with the beneficiaries of organ transplant under the state's Chiranjeevi Health Insurance scheme through video conference.

Delhi-NCR wakes up to light showers, more rain likely



(News Agency)- Parts of Delhi-NCR witnessed light rainfall early on Friday with the weather office predicting cloudy skies and more showers later in the day.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), winds with speeds up to 40 km/hour are likely to occur over and adjoining areas of many places in the national capital. Similar weather conditions were also likely to prevail over many places in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and

Haryana.

On Wednesday, the IMD had forecast intermittent rains over the next few days with the intensity peaking over the weekend. Bountiful rainfall in July gave Delhi its best air quality for the month in five years, while the average maximum temperature also dropped to its lowest level since 2016, according to data from the IMD and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The city recorded 384.6 mm of rainfall in July, which is the second-highest in the month in

the last 15 years, compared to the normal of 195.8 mm.

It gauged above-normal rainfall in the last four months -- 53.2 mm against a normal of 17.4 mm in March, 20.1 mm against an average of 16.3 mm in April, 111 mm against a normal of 30.7 mm in May and 101.7 mm against a normal of 74.1 mm in June.

The average maximum temperature in July was 34.7 degrees Celsius, the lowest since 2016 when it was 34.5 degrees Celsius.

Rajya Sabha passes Advocates (Amendment) Bill aimed at regulating legal profession

The Rajya Sabha passed the Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023, with the objective of regulating the legal profession under a unified Act, on Thursday.

The Rajya Sabha on Thursday passed the Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023, which aims to regulate the legal profession by a single Act and seeks to target "touts".

The amendment would help to regulate the legal profession through a single Act, the Advocates Act, 1961, according to statement of objects and reasons of the legislation.

Replying to a debate on the Bill in the Rajya Sabha, Union Law and Justice Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal said the legal profession is a noble profession and unlawful practices should be dealt with firmly.

The Bill was passed by a voice vote, following which the House adjourned for the day.

The Bill provides that every high court and district judge can frame and publish lists of touts (those who procure clients for legal practitioner in return for any payment). As per the provisions, such persons named in the list of touts will be excluded from



entering the court premises. Any violation of this provision will entail punishment with imprisonment up to three months and a fine. In keeping with the Centre's policy of repealing all obsolete laws or pre-independence Acts which have lost their utility, the government in consultation with the Bar Council of India has decided to repeal the Legal Practitioners Act, 1879, and to amend the Advocates Act, 1961, by incorporating the provisions of section 36 of the Legal Practitioners Act, 1879, in

the Advocates Act, 1961.

This will reduce the number of superfluous enactments in the statute book. Also it will help to regulate the legal profession by a single Act, the Advocates Act, 1961, the statement of objects and reasons of the legislation said.

BJD member Sujeet Kumar said there should be a single database to carry details about all the practicing advocates in the country, saying it will help in bringing a social welfare scheme for them.

He demanded to bring advocate's protection act to enable them practice fearlessly.

"Advocates are the officers of the court. Advocates are the most important stakeholders in the administration of justice," Kumar said.

BJP member Vijay Pal Singh Tomar said the Bill has provision that will end touts from courts.

AIADMK's M Thambidurai asked the government to change the name of Madras High Court to Tamil Nadu High Court, and similarly, the names of all high courts in the name of the state and not in the names of cities.

YSRCP MP V Vijayasai Reddy said lawyers charge between Rs 5 to Rs 50 lakh per hearing in the Supreme Court which is very high and demanded to put some cap on the fees.

YSRCP members S Niranjan Reddy and V Vijayasai Reddy, BJP member Ashok Bajpai, TMC (M) member G K Vasani, BSP member Ramji participated in the debate.

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India is Right to Distance Itself from China-Dominated BRICS and SCO

As South Africa gets ready to host the BRICS summit later this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin will not be the only head of state to not be in attendance. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi too is unlikely to travel to South Africa for the summit. Both PM Modi and President Putin will be attending the summit virtually. However, the reasons these two leaders are giving an in-person attendance a miss are quite different. While Russia is wary of President Putin getting arrested on a warrant passed by the International Criminal Court, PM Modi's absence has more to do with India's growing tilt towards the West.

Hear it from the horse's mouth. An Indian government official has been quoted by Reuters as saying that there is growing discomfort in New Delhi about being part of groupings like BRICS and SCO which China dominates, especially as India inches closer to the United States and other Western powers.

Remember, India hosted a virtual SCO summit days after Prime Minister Modi's state visit to the United States. New Delhi provided no official reason for hosting the summit virtually. However, when seen together with PM Modi's reluctance to attend the BRICS summit in-person, the chips seem to fall in place. You see, China is attempting to make a comeback on the global stage after being bogged down by the Covid-19 pandemic. This was a pandemic that hit China's image pretty hard. Today, tensions between China and the United States are running at an all-time high. The US has the Western bloc on its side. China is hopeful of creating a bloc of its own to challenge the West. The question is, which bloc does India figure in?

Surely not in the bloc China wants to control. China and Russia are pushing aggressively for the BRICS to be expanded. At least 30 countries have conveyed their willingness to join the group, while 22 of them have formally applied. India views such a rapid expansion of a rather exclusive grouping with suspicion, which is why it is resisting. What particularly unnerves New Delhi is how China is putting its weight behind the proposed expansion of the BRICS grouping. Already, BRICS accounts for more than 40% of the world population and about 26% of the global economy. So, in China's mind, expanding BRICS will effectively create a counterweight to the US-led Western order.

WHY INDIA REMAINS CAUTIOUS

India's approach to what's happening to the present world order can best be described as cautious. India fundamentally recognises the threats posed to the world by a hegemonic order

influenced primarily by a few nations in the West. At the same time, India is a democracy. It has much more in common with Western democracies than it does with China. In fact, India is the only country that has exchanged physical blows with China. The military standoff with China continues. As such, the Prime Minister sharing the stage with Xi Jinping in South Africa would not have been a good look.

You might argue that the Prime Minister has shared the stage with the Chinese ruler in the past as well - case in point being the G20 summit in Indonesia last year. But remember, the summit in Indonesia was one in which several Western powers participated as well. BRICS, on the other hand, is being staged as a group which seeks to challenge the West and its influence over the world order. That is not a position India is comfortable to take. India is now drawing a line. It has a long and trusted partnership with Russia. So, when Russian troops marched down Ukraine, New Delhi consciously chose to not take sides in the conflict. It still calls for dialogue and diplomacy between the two warring nations to end the conflict. PM Modi even famously told President Putin that "this is not an era for war". At the same time, India has stepped up oil purchases from Russia in an unprecedented manner.

But with China trying to make BRICS and SCO groups that challenge the West, India has had to reevaluate its strategy. New Delhi can justify keeping its partnership with Russia intact. What it cannot justify is being part of a Chinese campaign to directly take on the West. After all, India has robust ties with almost all Western nations. These are ties that intertwine India's economy with the West and also help it reduce reliance on Russian military hardware.

To top it all, India is locked in a military standoff with China. China has a reputation of being an expansionist and aggressive power in the Indo-Pacific. This is a country that is expected to eventually invade Taiwan. So, India knows it cannot aid Beijing's campaign to take on the West. After all, if a conflict between the West and China does break out, it is quite predictable whose side India will be on. In fact, in the event of a conflict between India and China, New Delhi knows it can count on countries like the United States. After all, it is quite a known fact that the US has been sharing crucial intelligence with India that has helped it counter China in the Himalayas. Being hand-in-gloves with China to challenge the West would not augur well for India's own interests. India has strong ties with the West.

By: Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra

The Donald Trump and Hunter Biden surprises

Writing "to a mouse," the Scottish poet Robert Burns offered consolation for the little "beasties" eviction from its home by a "cruel" plough that turned up a field. "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men" often go awry, Burns explained.

But some plans aren't made to be broken. When a plea bargain is hammered out after months of negotiation, the formal acceptance of it in court is usually carefully choreographed - and predictable. So it was remarkable Wednesday when the deal for Hunter Biden to plead guilty to two misdemeanors for his failure to pay taxes on time fell apart in a federal courtroom after the judge raised questions about it.

That wasn't the only legal surprise of the week. Special counsel Jack Smith unexpectedly added a major allegation to the indictment charging former President Donald Trump with mishandling classified documents. It came as Trump's team was bracing instead for possible charges arising out of Smith's investigation of efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

In a "superseding indictment," Smith alleged that Trump wanted employees at Mar-a-Lago to erase subpoenaed security camera footage to stop it from being given to a grand jury. Trump replied to the charge by accusing prosecutors of "election interference" and misconduct. The Trump and Hunter Biden developments underlined how America's political climate is being shaped by what happens in the courts. Norman Eisen wrote that while revising the indictment against Trump risks delaying a trial, the move was worth it: "While the Justice Department already had powerful evidence on obstruction, this is a leap forward because it hammers home the extent of the degree to which he and his co-defendants went to conceal potential evidence from a jury. This addition, an alleged surveillance tape conspiracy,

almost reads like a spy novel."

"It features Trump employee and co-defendant Walt Nauta's surprise clandestine trip to Florida. And it is followed by Nauta and the new co-defendant, De Oliveira, observing and pointing out the surveillance cameras, and then De Oliveira having a conversation about 'the boss' wanting the IT server deleted..."

"If the facts bear out as charged, this is slam dunk legal proof that also has a strong human dimension. Like the unflattering nature of the Bedminster tape and the Fox News appearance, a former president allegedly dragging two of his workers into a criminal scheme is an extremely unsympathetic look," Eisen observed.

To W. James Antle III, it was the Hunter Biden plea deal snafu that brought to the forefront the "powerful split screen that drives" how Republican voters see the emerging 2024 presidential race.

"Republicans have long claimed that President Joe Biden's son has gotten special treatment from prosecutors looking into his business practices and allegations of tax and gun crimes, even as former President Donald Trump has faced the strictest legal scrutiny for any and all potential offenses. On Wednesday, the GOP position on Hunter Biden received vindication from US District Judge Maryellen Noreika, who rejected an 'unusual' plea bargain the Department of Justice had offered him." "Noreika had been asked to approve a plea deal that would have spared the president's son prison," wrote Antle. "The deal, brokered in June, was presented to her even though IRS whistleblowers last week told Congress they weren't able to treat Hunter Biden like a typical target of their investigations, couldn't pursue leads against his family members and recommended far harsher charges than were leveled."

By Richard Galant



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

REGD & MAILING OFFICE :

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America's credit rating got downgraded again. Here's what happened the last time

Fitch Ratings downgraded US long-term debt late on Tuesday from AAA to AA+, citing this spring's debt ceiling standoff as a major reason.

That's a huge blow to the US. The global financial system relies on the promise that the US government will always pay back its debts. That trust makes the US dollar the most widely held currency worldwide. This downgrade threatens to complicate that.

Still, US markets barely reacted to the news in after-hours trading on Tuesday, and US Treasuries were holding steady.

But that doesn't mean they won't react, eventually. US stock futures were pointing to a weaker open Wednesday, and global markets stumbled overnight.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results, but a look back at market history can give us an idea of what might happen.

In the midst of the very tense debt ceiling standoff of 2011, Standard and Poor's downgraded US debt for the first time in history. That downgrade happened on a Friday



afternoon, so investors had a weekend to think about their next move.

It didn't help.

On the first trading day after the downgrade the S&P 500 plummeted by 6.5%. Markets experienced their most volatile week since the global financial meltdown in 2008, and it took another six months for stocks to climb back up to their previous highs. Still, this time could be

different. Investors know this devil - they've been through it before, and they saw that the downgrade didn't actually raise US borrowing costs significantly or hurt Treasury markets. US Treasuries actually rose as investors barreled out of stocks. "My sense is that the Fitch downgrade of the US credit rating is an insignificant development and will not move financial markets or the economy," said Joseph Brusuelas, chief economist at

RSM US. "As long as the Federal Reserve continues to treat US issued paper as AAA rated credit so will financial market participants." A little bit more: This May, Fitch agency put the country's perfect AAA rating on watch as the debt ceiling fight raged on. During that time, lawmakers in Congress were engaged in a bitter dispute over raising the debt limit to keep the federal government from defaulting

on its financial obligations. The deal was ultimately signed on June 2, just three days before the US Treasury said the US could run out of money to pay its bills.

"In Fitch's view, there has been a steady deterioration in standards of governance over the last 20 years, including on fiscal and debt matters, notwithstanding the June bipartisan agreement to suspend the debt limit until January 2025," Fitch said of the downgrade.

The downgrade, said Fitch, reflected the "expected fiscal deterioration" of the country over the next three years. The rating agency cited the "high and growing" government debt, which currently stands at more than \$32 trillion (that's just under \$100,000 for every single person in America). Former US Treasury Secretary, Larry Summers, called the decision bizarre. "The United States faces serious long-run fiscal challenges. But the decision of a credit rating agency today, as the economy looks stronger than expected, to downgrade the United States is bizarre and inept," he said on Twitter, now formally known as X.

US Congress is a cozy club of ageing multimillionaires hoarding power

BY Arwa Mahdawi

Enough with America's gerontocracy

"When hell freezes over, there will be three things left: Chuck Grassley, Mitch McConnell and cockroaches," the Republican senator John Kennedy recently told NBC News.

While that sounds like a pretty terrible deal for the cockroaches, Kennedy isn't wrong in his assessment. Grassley, the 89-year-old Republican senator from Iowa and McConnell, the 81-year-old Republican leader in the US Senate, are remarkably tenacious. They got jobs in government decades ago and they've clung to power ever since.

Still, while the two men may like to think otherwise, they are both mere mortals. The world got a rather dramatic reminder of this on Wednesday when McConnell appeared to suffer a medical incident during a news

conference on Capitol Hill. The Kentucky Republican stopped speaking mid-sentence and, for 23 very awkward seconds, stared silently into the distance. Eventually one of his aides led him away. What happened? Did his decades of underhanded political scheming suddenly flash before his eyes? Did the man who jokes about his opponents suddenly realize he'd spent his entire life working to make the US a more miserable, less equitable, place? Or did he have some sort of seizure? It's not entirely clear. McConnell's own explanation of events was to jokingly say he'd been "sandbagged". This was a reference to Joe Biden tripping and falling over a sandbag at an air force graduation last month. McConnell's first instinct, having suffered a moment of vulnerability, was to get a dig at Biden in. Charming, charming

man! Still, his deflection hasn't stopped questions being raised about his physical and mental fitness - particularly as this latest episode comes after reports the lawmaker has fallen multiple times this year. McConnell wasn't the only high-profile politician to suffer some mental confusion this week. Ninety-year-old Dianne Feinstein seemed muddled during a vote on a defense appropriations bill on Thursday. Instead of just responding with "aye" or "nay", as expected, she began to deliver a speech. About 15 seconds in, an aide whispered to her "Just say aye." Feinstein obliged. This moment of confusion might not have been a big deal had it not been for the fact that there have been a lot of questions asked recently about the senator's cognitive and physical health. Feinstein was absent from Washington for several months this year because of shingles, holding up important

efforts to advance federal judges for confirmation. There have been numerous reports about her forgetfulness and confusion: at one point she even seemed to forget that she'd been absent from the Senate.

McConnell and Feinstein's back-to-back cognitive incidents should serve as a wake-up call: the advanced age of America's top politicians isn't normal and it isn't healthy. Biden, of course, is already the oldest president ever; if he wins in 2024, he would be 86 by the end of a second term. Biden is prone to weird gaffes (like the time he ended a speech on gun control with the words "God save the Queen, man") and falls. Will he really be fit to lead at 86? Meanwhile, the median age of the Senate is 65.3, according to FiveThirtyEight's calculations, the oldest ever. That's over two decades older than a median age of 38.8 in the US as a whole.

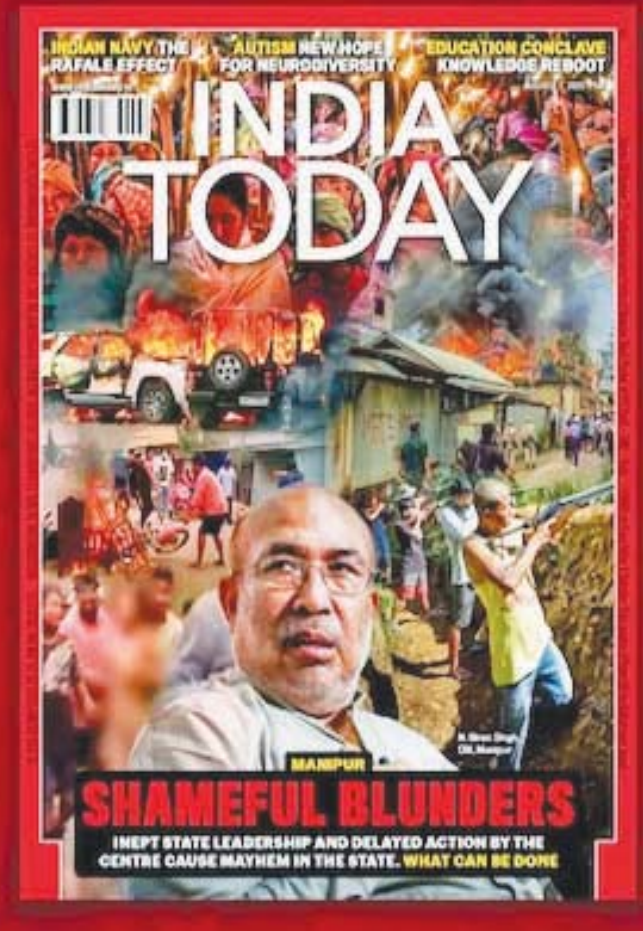
To be clear: it's not age in itself

that's the issue here. I have no doubt that some of the octogenarians in government (81-year-old Bernie Sanders, for example) have way more energy than I do. The issue here is the sheer number of octogenarians who have been in government for decades. The ridiculous number of career politicians who seem to have no intention of ever leaving office unless they're carried out in a coffin.

I'm not sure if there should be age limits in government but there should certainly be term limits. A healthy democracy requires a constant stream of fresh blood and fresh ideas. It requires mechanisms that stop people becoming complacent in their ivory towers. What we have now, however, is a cozy club of multimillionaire boomer lawmakers who have been hoarding power and who refuse to make any space for a younger generation.

Shameful Blunders

The scenes playing out now in the Imphal valley and the high ranges surrounding it are shocking in a modern India



By Aroon Purie

For a state that does not always make it to the mainstream of news, it is tragic that it took near-civil war conditions for Manipur to register on the national consciousness. The scenes playing out now in the Imphal valley and the high ranges surrounding it are shocking in a modern India. Two warring ethnic groups, the Meiteis and the Kukis, have barricaded themselves against each other after a near-complete population transfer. No Meitei is left in the hills, no Kuki in the valley. This includes those in civil administration, health services, education, banking and policing. The police, in fact, is split down the middle on partisan lines. It has either stayed a mute spectator or perhaps even collaborated in anarchy, having commonly alleged to have facilitated lynching and rape and the loot of armoury. In fact, the armouries were not exactly looted but, in an unprecedented manner, the arms were handed out to mobs and civilian vigilantes on either side. That encapsulated Manipur's descent into chaos. The numbers are scary: 179 killed, 60,000 displaced, nearly 4,000 cases of arson, and well over 10,000 FIRs. Confronted with this spiral, the Indian State, too, is in retreat. The only role for national security forces at present is to stave off further hostilities, mostly by patrolling the no man's land between the

two sides, marked off by bunkers manned by armed civilians.

This scenario is all the more tragic because of what preceded it. All the causative elements of conflict were present when the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power for the first time in the state in 2017, but these had been lulled into a zone of subdued latency. In fact, in March 2022, the BJP secured a second term with a majority on its own, winning 32 of Manipur's 60 seats, with Biren Singh re-elected chief minister. That spoke of a disarming level of normalcy. The catastrophic fall we have seen in the summer of 2023 shows that was a delusion. Manipur is now a man-made catastrophe. Pardon the gender bias, for women have been part of it too. Not just as victims-like the Kuki women in the viral video, who had to bear the burden of bringing Manipur to national attention on their bodies-but also as agents and participants in the breakdown of law and morality. Women's groups that once stood proudly for the honour and selfhood of Manipur now not only disrupt food truck movement and ambush security forces to have militants released but have even faced allegations of being enablers of crimes against women. That it is even being thought and said reveals the depth of the ethnic chasm. What brought this beautiful state to this unholy mess? The root cause is old-style 'blood and

soil' politics. The Meiteis, mostly Hindu, dominate the state's population, polity and culture but have of late exhibited majoritarian tendencies. One tangible factor is that Meiteis, who constitute 53 per cent of the population, live on 11 per cent of the land, even if it's all in the fertile Imphal valley. The Kukis and Nagas, who constitute 16 and 24 per cent respectively and are mostly Christian, inhabit the state's forested high ranges. The Meiteis want a piece of those hills, mainly those occupied by the Kukis, but can't get it. The tribal status of Kukis protects their ownership. Part of a mountainous continuum straddling Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and contiguous areas of Myanmar, this swathe was partitioned into its modern boundaries only in the 20th century; Manipur got statehood only in 1972. The Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic continuum still spills over those boundaries, and that's feeding a new insider/outsider narrative of xenophobia in Meiteis. They routinely raise the "illegal immigrant" red flag these days, a lightning-rod slogan of chauvinist politics familiar from other contexts. A less abstract part of this story is opium. All hands in Manipur are in the till when it comes to drug money, and UN reports speak of a surge in opium cultivation next door in Myanmar after the 2021 coup, with suggestions of an

inevitable spike in inflow into Manipur. Kuki refugees too are fleeing the civil war on the other side. The influx came to carry a more loaded meaning in the context of the ongoing war on drugs, where the Biren Singh government claimed poppy cultivation in the Kuki hills to have grown three-fold between 2017 and 2022, from 1,853 acres to 6,743 acres. Biren, who initiated the anti-poppy drive in the hills, is commonly seen to be acting for Meitei interests. So the drive was perceived to be part of a larger Meitei incursion into the hills, aided by the labelling of Kukis as "illegal citizens" engaged in illicit narcotics business. A high court order on granting tribal status to Meiteis-rescinded for now-added to that impression. Biren's actions, therefore, tied up the diverse threads of majoritarian assertion, ethnic rivalry, land, religion and xenophobia into an incendiary cocktail. After it caught fire, his inaction did the rest.

This week's cover story describes this eruption of darkness in the India story and the human folly behind it. Executive Editor Kaushik Deka brings his intimate understanding of the Northeast to look at why things went so terribly wrong, and who is to blame-an analysis held together by an exhaustive ground report for which he and Deputy Chief Photographer Chandradeep Kumar travelled across Manipur. It is our common concern now

to look at possible solutions. The Centre has a dilemma on its hands. The Opposition has mounted a sustained attack on the Modi government for largely remaining a spectator to the strife engulfing Manipur. Prime Minister Modi's nearly three-month-long silence, broken only to condemn the horrible incident whose video went viral, has also come in for flak. The embarrassment of a state unravelling so spectacularly under BJP rule should be the lesser of its concerns. It should not even be thinking of future electoral gains from this mess. Undoubtedly, the situation is complicated. Even the Meiteis are angry with the Centre for not being harsh enough on the Kukis. The question is only what must be done to bring normalcy to the state. We review various options. Should it sack Biren Singh and impose President's rule? The pros seem obvious enough: he has presided over a breakdown of the state. The con is that the chief minister is a hero for the Meiteis and also has Naga support, and it may all go from bad to worse. But if the Meiteis are talking about their old separatist agenda and the Kukis about a separate state, and the heat is spreading to Mizoram, it's surely time for urgent action. The Centre has finally initiated talks with both sides, a process the PM is personally monitoring. Hopefully, it will bring an end to the bloodletting-a chapter that has been a blot on a rising nation.

Parliament's Weapons Of Mass Disruption

By CR Kesavan

The parliament gridlock over Manipur is a subject of concern. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed that the guilty will not be spared. Home Minister Amit Shah wrote to opposition leaders and declared in parliament that the government is ready to discuss the sensitive border state of Manipur. Yet the opposition is intransigently demanding a statement from the PM, when the issue comes under the Home Ministry.

In Lok Sabha, instead of resorting to adjournment motions, the opposition could have sought a short duration discussion without a vote under Rule 193 or a detailed debate with a vote under Rule 184. Another option was a motion to consider a policy situation or any other matter under Rule 342.

In Rajya Sabha, the logjam was about the opposition insisting on Rule 267 that allows suspension

of the day's business to debate Manipur. A former Lok Sabha Secretary General observed that Rule 267 is being "used wrongly" as a substitute for an adjournment motion. Except Rule 167, there is nothing in the Rajya Sabha rulebook that enables a discussion on an urgent and serious matter like Manipur. Given their comparative numerical advantage in Rajya Sabha, why did opposition not opt for Rule 167, which enables a detailed discussion with voting?

The opposition has turned a Nelson's eye to all the above alternatives. While a no-confidence motion has been moved, no opposition party individually, including the Congress, has the required 50-member threshold. Is the opposition really interested in dialogue or is it mere political theatrics?

Edmund Burke, in a speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774, said

"parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests... but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good.."

The disruption of parliament should be an instrument of last recourse. The Indian parliament used to convene for 120-140 days every year. Now this has reduced to 60-70 days. The running cost is said to be at ? 2.5 lakh per minute. Productivity in the last Budget Session of the Lower and Upper house were 34% and just 24.4%. The Rajya Sabha chairman had even remarked, "Let's ponder over the dismal performance of the House and find a way out."

Experts have suggested various methods to deter disruption, like increasing the number of sitting days, fixing a substantial

threshold of MPs to permit a debate motion, proportionate pay cuts for MPs and developing a parliament disruption index to oversee and restrain indiscipline. The recurring refrain of the opposition is its inability to articulate its views in parliament on important issues of public interest. This can be tackled by introducing the concept of opposition days, when the non-ruling parties decide on the business. Though decisions of the two Houses will be non-binding, issues raised by the opposition will undoubtedly draw people's close attention. UK and Canada currently have 20 and 22 opposition days per parliamentary session.

Parliament's weapons of mass disruption have been the adjournment motion in Lok Sabha and Rule 267 in Rajya Sabha. The first Lok Sabha Speaker called the adjournment motion a "very exceptional thing which the

members should resort to only when something very grave affects the whole country, its safety, its interests". A former Vice President of India had observed that one cannot run the House seeking recourse to Rule 267; it is like a 'Brahmastra' and if you start taking recourse to it, it becomes an 'astra'.

Given the history of parliament disruption on a frequent basis, amendments incorporating a regulatory clause to both the adjournment motion and Rule 267 can be considered. This could act as a deterrent and ensure that both these rules are invoked only in rare circumstances, for issues of national importance.

Reducing disruptions will help foster a vibrant parliamentary democracy. Our Indian parliament which has come up with unwritten innovations like Zero Hour could explore new ways to amicably deliberate and effectively legislate.

Nuh Was Waiting To Explode And It Was An Open Secret

By: K Yatish Rajawat

It's an old aphorism that the biggest building that crumbles in the smallest earthquake is the one which had many small cracks that were never attended to. This is what the Nuh riots in Haryana show - the many cracks that have been ignored in the district and now have burst out as a riot that never happened in the history of the district. A public attack on police and its assets shows the anger that was rippling below the surface. The district is sensitive not just because of being dominated by the Muslim population but also because of the influx of Rohingyas and radicalisation brought out by the Tablighi Jamaat. For the uninitiated, the Jamaat was founded in the district and has a deep connection with almost every masjid and madrasa. And this is what has changed the social structure or the rapid turn of the angst of the unemployed youth into anger towards the government and all it represents. The rising influx of Rohingyas is not a recent phenomenon, it has been happening for the last many years. And successive district administrators have written about it to the state and Central government. Unfortunately, the



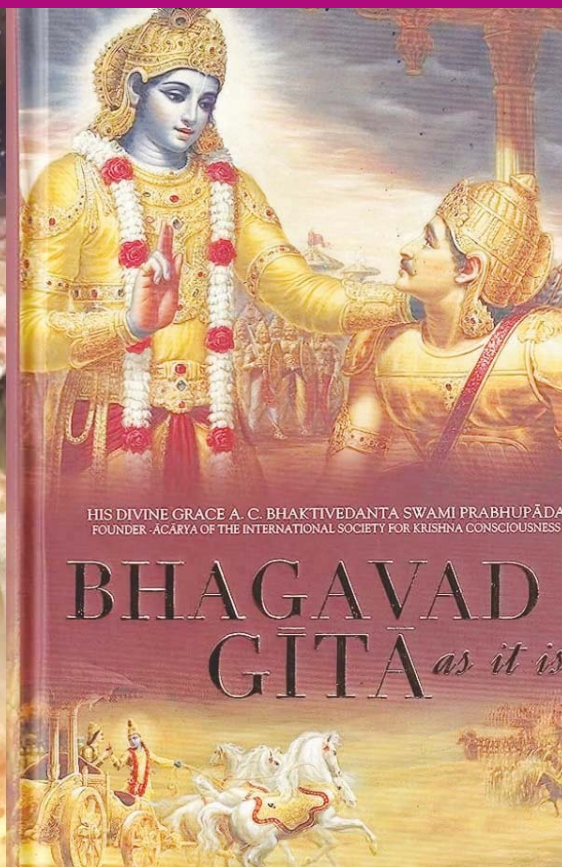
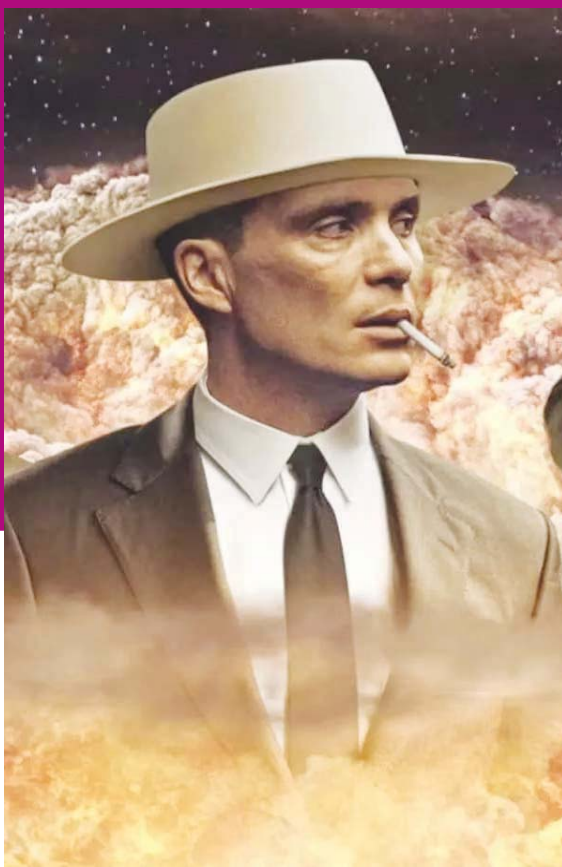
Home Ministry has ignored these reports, while the state government is so poorly run that not much can be expected from it. The administration in the state government is so poorly managed that one IAS officer holds control over multiple departments, reporting to different ministries. It is assumed in the state of Haryana that a civil servant is capable of multi-tasking much better than any other state government, hence the state never fills its full quota of IAS officers. There were 117 IAS officers, 118 IPS officers and 247 odd HCS officers according to the last data available for Haryana. This gives a ratio of 1 officer for 2,17,834 citizens of Haryana, whereas geographically comparable states like Himachal Pradesh have 1 officer for 64,000

citizens. More importantly, a posting to Nuh is considered a punishment posting by everybody in the administration. Hence, whether it is the DC, SP, or even the junior officers, nobody actually stays in the district. They generally leave on the weekend. Even when the riots happened, the SP was on a long leave and the DC was absent as he had left for home on Friday and did not come in time on Monday, July 31 when the riots or the Jal Abhishek Yatra took place. Now, smart alecks might say that even an IPS officer deserves his leave but whoever approved his leave should have considered that the most sensitive religious procession in the year is going to happen during this leave period. Therefore, the police force did not have direct leadership on

the ground to take quick decisions to control the crowd. The administration head was missing and by the time he came back to the district, the worst had already happened. This is not an isolated incident of administrative failure, it is a crack that runs through the system and becomes visible only when disaster strikes. It goes to the top about how sincere the system is about solving the citizens' problems or whether it is busy pandering to the political masters. And the politicians have still not learned how to manage the administration. There is a perception about the district built by the administrators in Gurgaon - that it is a den of criminals. This is a symptom of a bigger problem - the huge population of unemployed youth in the district

that is falling prey not just to criminal activities but also to radicalisation by Jamaat or Rohingyas. The Nuh district is dominated by a backward population of Meos, a native tribe also referred to as Khanzade, as they were Rajputs who converted to Islam in the 17th century. The area is hardy, scarcity of water is endemic and overall development on all parameters is low. The demographic change being ushered in by the entry of Rohingyas will push the district towards an abyss. Whether this is happening because of the Tablighi Jamaat or is being facilitated by them is not known. The Tablighi Jamaat, which was founded in Nuh, has been expanding its presence globally and may be facilitating the entry and settlement of the Rohingyas in the area.

The congregation of the Rohingyas along with the Tablighi Jamaat followers does not augur well for the security of NCR. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan looking for ideological continuance in the region will also find resonance with the Rohingyas. Their entry into the border areas with Bangladesh has already created a nuisance.



Oppenheimer Row: Misplaced Outrage over Bhagavad Gita

By: Pavan K Varma

blockbuster biopic Oppenheimer, where the 'father of the atomic bomb' recites a couplet of the Gita after making love. Their collective angst can be summed up in this letter written by Uday Mahurkar to Christopher Nolan, the director of the film. Mahurkar is an Information Commissioner appointed in 2020, and also the founder of the 'Save Culture and Save India Foundation.

In that letter he writes: 'It has come to our notice that the movie Oppenheimer contains a scene which make a scathing attack on Hinduism. As per social media reports, a scene in the movie shows a woman makes a man read Bhagwad Geeta aloud while getting over him and doing sexual intercourse. She is holding Bhagwad Geeta in one hand, and the other hand seems to be adjusting the position of their reproductive organs. The Bhagwad Geeta is one of the most revered scriptures of Hinduism. Geeta has been the inspiration for countless sanyasis, brahmacharis and legends who live a life of self-control and perform selfless noble deeds. We do not know the motivation and logic behind this unnecessary scene in the life of a scientist. But this is a direct assault on religious beliefs of a billion tolerant Hindus, rather it amounts to waging a war on the Hindu community and almost appears to be part of a larger conspiracy by anti-Hindu forces.' The letter goes on to say that Hollywood "is very sensitive about the fact that Quran and Islam is not depicted in any manner that may offend the value system of

a common Muslim, even if you make something based on Islamist terrorism," and asks, "Why should not the same courtesy be also extended to Hindus?" The letter urges Nolan to "remove this scene from your film across world" and adds, "Should you choose to ignore this appeal it would be deemed as a deliberate assault on Indian civilisation."

Mahurkar's anger, in my view, is highly misplaced, as is the endorsement of his views by Anurag Thakur, the Minister for



Information and Broadcasting, who went to the extent of

threatening action against the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) for clearing the film. The truth is that in Hinduism - unlike many other religions - there is no fundamental opposition between spirituality and sensuality. True, spirituality can be pursued without the sensual, but the

countenancing the greatest sensuousness'. Their form of worship was 'to a great extent disgusting and immoral', and the Hindu himself suffered from 'unparalleled sexual degradation'. It is unfortunate that today, the new evangelists of 'saving' Hinduism and 'culture' have begun to echo the same colonizer's view. Hinduism is not a semitic religion, but has a highly nuanced and sophisticated viewpoint on the myriad aspects of life. That is why Krishna, who delivers the immortal sermon on Nishkama Karma in the Bhagwat Gita is also the most consummate lover, whose dalliance and raas with the gopis is outlined in explicit detail in the Vishnu Purana, Harivamsha and the Bhagavata Purana. His romance with Radha, is the core of a vast corpus of ethereal and unambiguously erotic literature, whether it be Jayadeva's Gita Govind or the poems of Surdas, Bihari, Vidyapati, Chandidasa, Mira, Andal and many others. Oppenheimer considered the Bhagavad Gita, one of his most favourite books. As a young man he learnt Sanskrit at the University of California, Berkeley. He read the Meghaduta of Kalidasa with 'delight and great enchantment'. He knew the Hindu cycle of time, origination, existence and pralaya, or annihilation. When the atom bomb was tested in the deserts of Mexico, the lines of Verse 12 of the Gita came to his mind: 'If the radiance of a thousand sons were to burst at once into the sky, that would be the splendour of the mighty sky'. But he was acutely aware of the misuse of his invention. That is why the lines of the Gita came spontaneously to him: 'Now I become Death, the Destroyer of the World'. The fact that he said this before, during or after making love, should matter the least to enlightened Hindus aware of the greatness of their religion.



sensual is not considered to be antithetical to either spirituality or Dharma. That is why the four highest purusharthas or goals in the Hindu world-view are Dharma (Right Conduct), Artha (the pursuit of material well-being), Kama (desire and the sensual) and Moksha (salvation). Thus, Hinduism is perhaps the only major religion in the world which gives philosophical validity to Kama, not in isolation but as part of an overall balanced life, where - as Vatsyayana explains in the Kama Sutra - each of the four purusharthas is pursued in proportion not in exclusion. The revulsion to the enlightened acceptance of the sensual in our philosophical tradition was that of the British. The British were colonisers. They sought to impose their Victorian morality and Christian ethics on the 'depraved' moral fibre of the 'native'. According to them, the Hindus were 'tied to hateful, horrible belief and customs - unmentionable thoughts'. Their world of darkness was filled with 'lust', and their culture had 'no moral codes - tolerating both polyandry and polygamy and





Chinese chatter reveals resumption of military dialogue is priority of US outreach

Beijing believes that at the centre of the Biden administration's ongoing China outreach programme is the issue of resumption of military-to-military exchanges between the US and China.

By Antara Ghosal Singh

High-level interactions between the United States and China seem to have resumed of late, promising signs of a thaw between the two sides. In just a month's time, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry visited China in succession, restoring high-level contacts between the two countries in the fields of diplomacy, economy, and climate change respectively. Before that, William J Burns, the director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, secretly visited China in May, closely followed by Daniel Kritenbrink, the current US Assistant Deputy Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. More recently, the "unofficial" trip to China by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (who played a central role in US-China rapprochement during the Cold War) made global headlines. Going forward, a visit by US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo has also been put on the agenda.

Washington's sudden intense engagement of Beijing amidst a serious downturn in bilateral ties has attracted the attention of the global community, and many are keen to understand what's transpiring between the two largest economies of the world. Beijing believes that at the centre of the Biden administration's ongoing China outreach programme is the issue of

resumption of military-to-military exchanges between the US and China. The high-level military dialogue between the two has been put on hold since August last year, when Nancy Pelosi, the then Speaker of the US House of Representatives, visited Taiwan, and China retaliated with multiple countermeasures, including the "three cancellations" involving military exchanges (cancellation of China-US theatre commanders' talks, defence policy coordination talks and military maritime consultative agreement meetings). Since then, the US has been particularly eager to re-establish contact with China at the military level. In the following months, various high-ranking officials from Biden's cabinet have made efforts towards resuming exchanges with the Chinese military but with limited success. In a somewhat desperate move, Xie Feng, Chinese ambassador to the United States, was recently invited to meet US Assistant Secretary of Defence for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner at the Pentagon to discuss the issue.

Explaining the reason behind Beijing's persistent rebuffing of Washington's overtures, Shi Yinhong, professor at the School of International Relations, Renmin University, noted that since late April 2022 onwards, the number one priority of the US policy toward China has been to ensure absolute prevention and

avoidance of military conflicts between the Chinese and US militaries. But China has always resisted such absolute guarantee, as it believes that it will further strengthen US support for Taiwan without major worry of retaliation.

As a result, the Chinese government has little interest in the restoration and strengthening of high-level military communication with the US. Instead, it wants to keep open the option of an armed conflict with the US in the West Pacific, relying more on the decision of its forward troops and betting on Washington's hesitance.

In this backdrop, the Biden administration's high-intensity, high-level contact with China is being read in Beijing as "the US panicking". That the mighty US is "becoming more and more worried, more anxious, and even more fearful of China". That it is being increasingly nervous of a military conflict with China so close to the general election. The reason behind the US reticence being: 1) its preoccupation with the Ukraine crisis, and 2) Biden's own reputation of prioritising diplomacy over conflict.

The back-to-back visits of high officials from Washington has thus become a matter of ridicule for the Chinese commentators. It is being argued that the current US officials are "at their wit's end" in communicating with China.

As Blinken, Sullivan, Austin failed in their objective and left Beijing

empty-handed, the US government was forced to send centenarian Kissinger to use his influence to negotiate peace with China. Although China, they say, has given Kissinger enough "face" (in the form of holding one-to-one with President Xi Jinping, Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu and others) due to his past contribution to China-US relations, but it will not accept the proposals of the US government (about reestablishing military level contacts), which he tried to lobby. Instead, the Chinese side hopes that Kissinger will be able to summarise China's stance on various issues of contention and reverse the US government's thinking on China based on the discussions at their meeting.

Message from Beijing

The message emanating from Beijing is that the Biden administration cannot deal with China from the 'position of strength' and any easing of Sino-US relations must be achieved under the premise of respecting China's core interests. What is China's asking price for easing tensions with the US? In this round, it wants lifting of all sanctions against Chinese officials, citizens, and companies, cancelling of all Trump-era tariffs on Chinese goods, ending the crackdown on Chinese high-tech companies, and relaxing export restrictions on high-end chips to China, among others.

It is important to note what senior

scholar Zheng Yongnian, professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), has to say about the way ahead for US-China relations. He believes that the economy and trade, climate, public health, etc, are topics for daily exchange and maintenance of contact, but not really the basis for a really big negotiation between the US and China.

He subscribes to the view that just as during the Cold War the basis for negotiation between the United States and the Soviet Union was nuclear weapons, going ahead, new technologies like AI (which has the potential of being militarised) will play a similar role in the case of the US and China. If both sides can evenly match each other in the field of AI, then he says, that will perhaps be a new basis for a Grand bargaining between the two.

Analysing the Chinese discourse, one can infer that China's current proposition to the US is as such: rather than preventing, the US must facilitate China's technological advancement and hope for "Cold Peace" to prevail like in history. Otherwise, it must brace up for greater risk of military crisis in the Western Pacific. Washington's response under such circumstances will be closely followed by its allies and partners, including India, and have immense impact in their respective China policy.



This band of IAS has become non-adoptive, rusty and outdated. For the vision of our PM Modi to take India to the league of developed nations, we must disband the IAS.

Time to disband IAS

By Rajiv Tuli

The two ways through which the British ruled India were: education and the Indian Civil Service (ICS). It was through the steel-frame of the all-pervasive, all penetrative and all intrusive ICS that the English were able to not only establish their rule but were able to maintain law and order over Indians. ICS was the major vehicle of making India a colony where the rules and regulations were so unfair, unjust and arbitrary that the whole of India was made subservient to the interests of Britain. The British Empire was made 'great' through the exploitation of Indian economic, social and political life through the instrumentality of ICS. As per Bipin Chandra, the Leftist

historian, it was not through military force but through the force and power of ICS, the British were able to exploit and perpetuate their exploitation of India. Sadly, when India attained independence, we preferred this steel-frame on the logic of regularity and continuity with a hope that it would be a vehicle of Indian-oriented development. We simply replaced ICS with IAS (Indian Administrative Service). In the early idealistic decades after freedom, there was deep public faith in the uprightness and service orientation of the higher civil services. Though considered elite, it was sympathetic to minorities and the poor. But, it is a time to take stock of what IAS has delivered in India. We have

completed 75 years of freedom, but the level of development in absolute terms as well as in comparison to other countries has been far from qualitative, encouraging or satisfactory. Anybody familiar with the body-politic of India would know that the ruling political power is like a brain which sets the broader outline of the direction in which the government of the day will head. Policy making as well as execution from the smallest level of sanitation to the most significant and vital field of defence is manned, controlled and regulated by the IAS. The all invasive and pervasive IAS have not been able to deliver what is expected from them. It has emerged as a ruling elite in itself

which functions as an autonomous centre of power. Over the years, a narrative has been woven that it is the political power - be it leaders, politicians and ministers who have been corrupt and have ditched people in the deliverance of the public good. A district magistrate of any district is the de-facto and de-jure ruler of that district. From cradle to grave, all powers vest in him. Even the state-run enterprises like the PSUs and others are manned by the IAS. Policy formulation and coordination is done at the secretary level. So, virtually, how and why a policy is made and implemented is the sole prerogative of the IAS. Because of the concept of anonymity, they get scot-free from

the responsibility of blame for either failure or non-execution, or even lopsided execution. Is it possible that there can be any case or cases of corruption without the involvement or connivance of IAS? It is practically impossible for a politician to have his way of corrupt practices without the tacit or articulate role of an IAS. But, we have been told that India is corrupt because it is the politicians who have been corrupt. There are many instances of the political head being above corruption but the bureaucrat who is to implement is corrupt unknowing of the minister. Recently, an IAS officer from Jharkhand was caught with estimated illicit earnings of more than Rs 190 crore. Imagine that this was just 3 to 4 per cent of the total public expenditure under her. It maddens your mind if you quantify the total loss to the public fund she has done.

The burden of ethnicity - Mizoram's response

By Patricia Mukhim:

It was the late BG Verghese, a noted journalist who spent considerable time in India's North-East and wrote the book - India's Northeast Resurgent, who said that there are at least 238 ethnic communities in this region. This makes the north-eastern frontier of India inhabited by people of Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic races a sort of outlier. The people here feel greater kinship with their Southeast Asian neighbours than with people of Aryan and Dravidian descent. This is not intended to create divisions but to point to the sociological-anthropological patterns of behaviour. Many in the rest of India have not read Verrier Elwin, the first known anthropologist, who wrote extensively about the tribes of the North-East. Only scholars like Ramachandra Guha, who understood what drove Verrier Elwin to write what he did, are able

to understand this region and its people. The British came to the region in 1826 after vanquishing the Burmese and signing the Treaty of Yandabo with them in 1826. The British started their civilising mission by bringing in missionaries to "enlighten" the people here because their indigenous knowledge systems were considered inferior to that of the colonisers. Then came in schools started by the British and they also gave the Roman script to the Khasi tribals in 1841. Until then, the Khasis were an oral tradition people who have no recorded history of their antecedents or their folk tales. Large sections of tribals were slowly converted to Christianity and those who refused to be converted were termed "pagans", a derogatory word. In his book,

'Savaging the Civilised', Ramachandra Guha points to the fact that Elwin had so well elucidated that some tribal customary practices and behaviours were perhaps more civilised than the arrogance and cruelties of the British. India's North-East is, therefore, several countries that were brought under the umbrella of "India" by coercing the maharajahs of Tripura and Manipur and the tribals' chieftains to sign the

Instrument of Accession (IoA) to the Indian Union. Only the Naga and Mizo chieftains never signed the IoA. At the time of signing the IoA, the maharajahs and chieftains ceded only defense, currency and external affairs. But we know the Indian government never respected that agreement and these principalities were all subsumed into the Indian state. This is the reason why the Nagas rebelled and demanded sovereignty, because they said they were never a part of British India and could, therefore, not automatically be subsumed into the Indian nation. The Indian government sent the Indian Army to subdue the Nagas and we are all aware of the atrocities that visited the Naga people, especially their women then, and until the time when Nagaland became a state in 1962,

when the violence subsided but was always a tinder box that could ignite any time. Among the tribes of the North-East, the Mizos, who are a branch of the Kuki-Zo community, reside in present-day Mizoram. Other sub-tribes under this larger Kuki-Zo umbrella are also settled in Mizoram, the hills of Manipur and as far as the Cachar valley in Assam. The ethnicities are so tightly wound that an injury to one of them is likely to meet with reprisals on the aggressor. Since May 3, when the conflict broke out in Manipur, the Kukis fled their homeland out of fear of being physically attacked by their rivals -- the Meiteis -- and gone to Mizoram in droves. Mizoram currently faces a huge burden in having to provide shelter to the refugees from the Kuki-Chin community who are fleeing from the junta in Myanmar and are now burdened with the fresh inflow from Manipur.



Will BJP's longest-serving Chief Minister Shivraj Chouhan survive this election?

Shivraj Singh Chouhan has occupied the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister's official bungalow, located close to the picturesque Badi Jheel of Bhopal, for more than 16 years.

By Milind Ghatwai

Being the longest-serving BJP chief minister in the country is no mean achievement but it definitely does not guarantee a future, especially when the central high command calls the shots. Shivraj Singh Chouhan has occupied the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister's official bungalow, located close to the picturesque Badi Jheel of Bhopal, for more than 16 years. In his fourth term, he has realised the going is no longer smooth as the central leadership has almost taken charge of the election management in the state in what most observers describe as "clipping of his wings". Home Minister Amit Shah visited Indore on Sunday (July 30), three days after he made an unscheduled late-evening visit to the Madhya Pradesh capital on July 26. He addressed the party workers as he launched the poll campaign. Sunday's visit was his third in less than three weeks. Early this month, BJP president JP Nadda appointed two Union ministers -- Bhupendra Yadav and Ashwini Vaishnaw -- as in-charge

and co-in-charge of Madhya Pradesh. Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar was made the convenor of the poll management committee. Though such an arrangement was made for other poll-bound states too, the central intervention began in Madhya Pradesh much before and will continue as the election draws close. The BJP has accorded priority to Madhya Pradesh because it's the only big, party-ruled state among the five states going to the polls later this year. The saffron party had received marginally more votes than the Congress in 2018 but got fewer seats that allowed the grand old party to form a government headed by Kamal Nath. Unlike the tight contest in MP, the Congress had made a sweep in Chhattisgarh. In Rajasthan, the margin was close enough to fuel speculation about a possible coup by deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot in cahoots with the Opposition BJP but it didn't come to pass. Though Chouhan is the longest-serving BJP Chief Minister, he owes his current term to the rebellion by

Jyotiraditya Scindia and his supporters who walked on the Congress. Chouhan steadied the ship by winning a majority of the seats in the by-elections caused by the resignation of Congress legislators. There used to be speculations, stemming mostly from contenders within, and rumours floated by the rival Congress about his removal even in his past terms. The speculations, however, gained currency during his fourth innings, with his rivals justifying it on the ground that the party lost the 2018 Assembly elections on his watch. He has managed to continue in office. The 64-year-old usually took out Jan Aashirwad Yatras across the state ahead of the Assembly elections to seek a mandate on his governance. This time, the party has decided to take out similar yatras, either with the old name or a different name like Vijay Sankalp Yatra, but the focus will not be on Chouhan alone as others like Scindia and Kailash Vijayvargiya are expected to be



given equal responsibility as well. The shift in strategy has as much to do with the prospect of facing a massive anti-incumbency. The party has been in power since 2003-end, barring the 15-month period from 2018-end to March 2020 as with the fatigue over Chouhan's face, who has been in office since November 2005. Chouhan's BJP predecessors were Babulal Gaur and Uma Bharti, the face of the 2003 elections. To cite an example, the state Cabinet had tinkered with the idea of renaming Deendayal Rasoi Yojana, under which the poor get heavily subsidised meals, as "Mama ki thali" (the Chief Minister is popular as mama or maternal uncle) in June. While briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting, Home minister and

government spokesman Narottam Mishra had said the scheme will be expanded further. Chouhan was quick to issue a video statement later, saying there will be no change in the nomenclature. To make matters worse, the Congress has started circulating surveys that point towards the declining graph of the ruling BJP and the chief minister. Strengths Chouhan has survived because he has his own following, especially among women and farmers, both huge constituencies. His image largely built on the initiatives he took on his own or copied from elsewhere, as also the largesse bestowed. The soft-spoken politician carefully nurtured his image as the benefactor.

Pakistan Can No Longer Control Its Monster

Harsh V. Pant

Hours before Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng landed in Islamabad for an event marking a decade of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), another reminder came about the perpetual abyss that Pakistan has been staring at for the past several years. At least 45 people were killed and more than 200 injured in a suicide bombing at a political rally earlier this week. The rally was called by the Islamist Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) in the tribal district of Bajaur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, near the border with Afghanistan. JUI-F is part of the governing coalition in Pakistan, the Pakistan Democratic Alliance, and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif underlined his government's commitment to eliminate terrorists "from the face of existence" as they have "targeted those who speak for Islam, the Quran and Pakistan". While the Pakistan Taliban, or TTP, have been carrying out a spate of

attacks across the country after ending their cease-fire with the Pakistani government in November, they were quick to respond after the latest attack and said it was aimed at setting



Islamists against each other. The Afghan Taliban also criticised the bombing. It is the Islamic State Khorasan in Pakistan (ISKP) that finally took the responsibility for the attack, which it said was part of an "ongoing war against democracy." The ISKP has been quite active in the region and has

targeted JUI-F's officials in the past. The challenges are mounting for Pakistan on multiple fronts and the latest attack, one of the worst in northwestern Pakistan since 2014, underscores that the

country that was quite blasé about using terrorism as an instrument of state policy in the past is today struggling to confront a rising terrorism challenge. Pakistan's state institutions, be it the military or the government, do not seem capable of managing internal security threats.

At a time when the economic situation in Pakistan remains precarious, this state weakness can be particularly damaging. While China has helped Pakistan in avoiding its debt default, a Pakistan perpetually on the brink is not a healthy sign for the China-Pakistan partnership. In his message to celebrate a decade of CPEC, Chinese President Xi Jinping said, "No matter how the international landscape may change, China will always stand firmly with Pakistan." While he suggested that the project is a "vivid testament to the all-weather friendship between China and Pakistan", and provides "an important underpinning for building an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era," it has been clear for quite some time that the internal security challenge facing Pakistan is also impacting the pace of CPEC. In fact, there has been hardly any movement on various projects over the last few

years. The northwestern region of Pakistan has been opposing CPEC, with Chinese nationals also targeted in recent years. In an attempt to deflect responsibility, Pakistani authorities have been blaming Afghanistan and its Taliban regime for providing safe havens to insurgents targeting their country. This is a remarkable turnaround for a nation that has been at the forefront of exporting terrorism to its neighbouring states. Pakistan's ties with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan have also suffered because of this challenge. The visit by Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng saw Pakistan and China sign six more pacts to enhance cooperation and to give a new momentum to CPEC projects. In the absence of state capacity in Pakistan to tackle internal security challenges more effectively, how the signing of new pacts helps the CPEC is anybody's guess.

Unplanned Infra Projects and Climate Crisis: A Recipe For Disasters

but experts say these are natural outcomes of three factors - climate crisis, a young mountain range and unplanned infrastructure projects.

This year's devastation has been precipitated by intense constructions like road widening, dam construction and other poorly planned activities, which weakened the hill slopes and triggered major landslides. Crucial road links between Kalka and Shimla, Kullu and Manali, Chandigarh and Manali, Manali and Leh, and Dehradun and Haridwar have been disrupted as roads caved in or landslides occurred. A total of 170 routes had to be closed in Uttarakhand alone. In both Himachal and Uttarakhand, it is visible that the blasting of the hills has changed the hydro flow pattern that winded through the forests and myriad hilly tracks. The rainwater earlier used to replenish the aquifers and would flow through hundreds of natural paths. Having now destroyed this naturality, it flows straight down the pucca, often concretised roads, which turn into massive artificial drains with logs and boulders rolling down. As the roads were built, trees were felled. Those that could not be sold were dumped under the roads. It dislodged with heavy rain and dangerously flowed through habitats.

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) physicist Dr Vikram Soni, who has closely studied the river systems of



North India, told a researcher that he repeatedly emphasised the need to ban construction on the floodplains completely. "The Sutlej and Beas have wreaked so much havoc because indiscriminate construction was allowed on their flood plains. During the monsoon, when the river flow increases, so does its velocity. The situation is worsened with the dumping of debris and other muck from road construction." According to the Landslide Atlas of India prepared by the National Remote Sensing Centre, ISRO, all 12 districts of Himachal are susceptible to

landslides. These also have the maximum construction activities. Earlier, a different pattern was followed for hill constructions. Now tall concrete constructions are the most susceptible. The landslide exposure analysis carried out in the mountainous areas covering 147 districts in 17 states ranked Mandi district of Himachal at 16th place, followed by Hamirpur 25, Bilaspur 30, Chamba 32, Solan 37, Kinnaur 46, Kullu 57, Shimla 61, Kangra 62, Una 70, Sirmour 88 and Lahaul and Spiti 126 in socio-economic parameter risk exposure map.

The scale of disasters in the hilly

regions has multiplied with the creation of smaller states like Uttarakhand. Checks and balances that a larger Uttar Pradesh ensured have been thrown to the winds. UP was blamed for neglecting the region but nobody talked of how it prevented major disasters. Construction, building and real estate greed has been yet another major setback.

Scientists at the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology have repeatedly warned that 51 percent of Uttarakhand has crossed the "very high susceptibility zone". Therefore, landslides will increase, as will

flooding. These scientists have documented Uttarakhand's 300-plus landslides in 2023. In such a situation, even mitigation measures will not work.

In Uttarakhand, the railway tunnel to Karnaprayag is a disaster. It has not only weakened the hill structure, but also devastated the aquifers that used to feed the various water bodies and natural falls, causing severe water scarcity in the villages. The greed may cause the entire Ganga Valley to turn into a desert. Everybody can see now how methodical the colonial rulers were. Their ecologically crafted roads exist till today without damaging the Himalayan ecology. A stark replica of that is seen at the India Gate Central Vista. During rains, Delhiites used to throng the Boat Club lawns. It never submerged. But now, even the redone lawns submerge.

Most devastations are along the roads and riverside, which were encroached upon for the convenience of driving vehicles and real estate activity to boost tourism. Nobody can estimate how much is lost. It will be all guesses. The obvious is that the spree of investment since the Himalayan Char Dham roads has literally gone down the rivers. Innumerable bridges and culverts, resorts, townships and vehicles have been washed away. Himalayan warnings are grim and a reality. If not heard, a sub-continental disaster may be an epochal reality.

For Haryana Violence Petition, A Rare Move By Supreme Court Chief Justice

Chief Justice DY Chandrachud - who was leading a constitution bench - went to his chamber, examined the documents related to the application and quickly formed a special panel of judges for the Haryana case.

In an unusual move, a constitution bench of the Supreme Court - a special panel of at least five judges that can rule on matters involving the constitution - was interrupted as Chief Justice DY Chandrachud rostered an urgent hearing for a petition on the riots in Haryana's Nuh district on Wednesday.

The court halted the constitution bench's discussions on the now-scrapped Article 370 of the constitution - which gave special rights to the former state of Jammu and Kashmir - to take up a request calling for a ban on rallies held by right-wing groups Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Following the violence that has claimed six lives, including two security personnel, and triggered widespread vandalism and arson, petitioner journalist Shaheen Abdullah's lawyer, CU Singh, approached Justice Aniruddha Bose on Wednesday morning, requesting an early hearing.

Following Justice Bose's advice to approach Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, Mr Singh presented the case before him, emphasising the need for immediate intervention. While the Chief Justice was requested to consider the case in the morning, at lunchtime, CU

Singh reiterated the urgency of the matter.

In response, Chief Justice



Chandrachud - who was leading the constitution bench - went to his chamber, examined the documents related to the application and quickly formed a special bench

consisting of Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice SVN Bhatti, ordering the registry to list the matter for hearing at 2 pm, sources said.

Justice Sanjiv Khanna, a constitution bench member, participated in the Nuh case hearing, which concluded at 2:15 pm. The constitution bench resumed hearing on Article 370 at 2:20 pm.

In response to the petition on the Nuh situation, the Supreme Court directed the central and state governments to prevent any hate speech or violence during marches held by the VHP and Bajrang Dal

following the communal clashes in Nuh.

The order by Justices Sanjiv Khanna and SV Bhatti also asked for the deployment of additional police or paramilitary forces and the installation of CCTV cameras in sensitive areas.

Six deaths, including two home guards, have been linked to communal violence in Nuh after a mob attempted to stop a VHP procession on July 31.

The state government has arrested 116 people to date, and 23 demonstrations have been organised by the VHP and Bajrang Dal across the National Capital Region (NCR).

Lok Sabha Speaker Upset, Won't Attend Parliament For Now: Sources

Om Birla was notably absent Wednesday.

from the Speaker's seat when the proceedings started today. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has expressed deep displeasure with both the ruling party and the opposition over the continued disruption of parliamentary activities, stating he will not attend sessions until lawmakers behave according to the dignity of the house, sources close to him said on Wednesday.

Mr Birla was notably absent from the Speaker's seat when the Lok Sabha proceedings began on Wednesday. Loud protests continued, leading to its adjournment until 2 pm and for the day later.

The lower house was adjourned for the day as opposition members continued their protests on the Manipur issue, demanding a statement from

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the situation in the state, which has been affected by months-long ethnic violence. BJP member Kirit Solanki, who led the proceedings, urged opposition members to maintain order, but ultimately adjourned the proceedings for the day.

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2023, was scheduled for consideration and

passage today in the lower house, but due to the adjournment, it could not be discussed or voted upon. This also rendered the BJP whip moot.

According to sources, Mr Birla was upset with the behaviour of both the opposition and treasury benches during the passage of bills in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

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The Speaker holds the dignity of the House in the highest esteem and expects members to maintain decorum during proceedings, they said.

Both the opposition and treasury benches have been informed of the speaker's displeasure over the repeated disruptions in parliament since the monsoon session began on July 20.

Fitch downgrades U.S. long-term rating to AA+ from AAA

Fitch Ratings downgraded the United States' long-term foreign currency issuer default rating to AA+ from AAA on Tuesday, pointing to "expected fiscal deterioration over the next three years," an erosion of governance and a growing general debt burden.

"The repeated debt-limit political standoffs and last-minute resolutions have eroded confidence in fiscal management," said Fitch.

U.S. stock futures opened lower after the rating agency issued its

downgrade, with Dow futures sliding about 100 points. In May, the agency placed the nation's AAA rating on negative watch, blaming the debt ceiling fight. At the time, lawmakers in Washington butted heads over an agreement that would keep the federal government from running out of money. President Joe Biden signed the debt ceiling bill on June 2, just days away from the "X-date" on June 5.

The country's recent debt limit feud was mentioned again in Tuesday's downgrade.

"In Fitch's view, there has been a steady deterioration in standards of governance over the last 20 years, including on fiscal and debt matters, notwithstanding the June bipartisan agreement to suspend the debt limit until January 2025," the ratings agency said.

Fitch also highlighted the rising general government deficit, which it anticipates will rise to 6.3% of gross domestic product in 2023, from 3.7% in 2022.

"Cuts to non-defense

discretionary spending (15% of total federal spending) as agreed in the Fiscal Responsibility Act offer only a modest improvement to the medium-term fiscal outlook," Fitch said.

The agency also noted that a combination of tightening credit conditions, weakening business investment and a slowdown in consumption could lead the economy into a "mild" recession in the fourth quarter of 2023 and first quarter of next year.

The White House disagreed with

Fitch's downgrade. "It defies reality to downgrade the United States at a moment when President Biden has delivered the strongest recovery of any major economy in the world," press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

This isn't the first time a rating agency has downgraded the U.S. Standard & Poor's cut the nation's credit rating to AA+ from AAA in 2011 after Washington managed to avoid a default. At the time, the agency highlighted political risk as part of its reasoning.

UN bodies call for urgent action over Panama's Darién Gap migration route

International bodies have called for urgent intervention in the Darién Gap to prevent a further escalation of a humanitarian crisis as new figures showed that record numbers of people are risking their lives to cross the lawless 100-mile stretch of rainforest between Panama and Colombia.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) also called for the creation of more legal pathways to migrate to the US in order to help reduce irregular migration.

The calls come after the Panamanian government revealed on Monday that 250,000 people took the perilous journey in the first seven months of 2023 - more than the entire total for last year.

About 52,000 people crossed the Darién in July alone, prompting concern among regional authorities as the beginning of the rainy season normally brings a fall in migration.

Civil society groups have been warning of the grave humanitarian and human rights crisis in Darién since the flow of migrants surged in 2021 but the continued increase in numbers - predicted to reach 400,000 this year - means action is even more pressing.

"The unimaginable risks people face, plagued by hostile natural conditions and organized crime, demand a unified response based on human rights," said Michele Klein Solomon, IOM regional director for Central America, North America and the Caribbean. "It is our collective duty, not only Panama's, to offer humane and sustainable

solutions that prevent future tragedies." Many migrants walking the swath of swampy jungle on their way to the US never emerge from the other side of the rainforest due to the treacherous terrain, attack by armed groups and bandits and the sheer physical challenge of the 10-day-trek.

Most are malnourished and poorly equipped when they set out, meaning relatively minor illnesses like fungal infections can quickly become life-threatening.

At least 36 people did not survive the crossing in 2022, according to the IOM, which says many more deaths go undocumented. Migrants frequently describe passing decaying bodies left unburied along the route.

But despite the Darién's dangers the number of migrants taking the perilous trek continues to climb due to political crises and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions across the region and further afield.

"Multiple interconnected factors, ranging from limited access to fundamental rights and essential services, to the impact of violence and insecurity, continue to push people into displacement," said UNHCR's director for the Americas, José Samaniego.

The UN agency is ramping up its operations supporting the Panamanian government's response, "mainly by providing critical support in areas such as food, shelter and medical care", Samaniego said.

Margarida Loureiro, deputy representative for UNCHR's office in Panama, said: "Countries in the region must work together to address the roots of conflict and

forced displacement, strengthen asylum systems and expand regularisation and legal alternatives for refugees and migrants.

"This is not a Panama situation. The Darién reflects a protection and humanitarian crisis beyond Panama and Colombia."

The US Department of Homeland Security launched a joint program with the Colombian and Panamanian governments in April to stop refugees making the crossing and pledged to open new, legal pathways to the US but details have been scarce.

Most migrants are ineligible for the new migration programs so still have little choice but to cross the jungle, experts say.

Refugees come from as far as Afghanistan and China to cross the land bridge connecting Colombia with Panama but the vast majority come from Latin American and the Caribbean.

This year 55% came from Venezuela, where the country's economic collapse under Nicolás Maduro has forced more than 6 million people to flee deep poverty, insecurity and hunger.

The percentage of Venezuelans living on less than \$100 a month rose to 52.6% this year, suggesting the number of people walking the Darién will not drop any time soon.

Fourteen per cent of migrants who made the crossing this year came from Ecuador, which is engulfed in a new wave of cartel-led violence. An equal number came from Haiti which has also been submerged in brutal gang warfare accompanied by "catastrophic" hunger and the re-emergence of cholera.

QUEENS MAN CHARGED WITH MURDERING HIS MOTHER AND BROTHER

Brother's Body Found Wrapped in Bedding on Street; Defendant Faces Up to 50 Years to Life in Prison

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Roscoe Danielson was arraigned today on an indictment charging him with two counts of murder and concealment of a human corpse in connection with the shooting death of his younger brother and stabbing death of his mother. His brother's body was found in a black plastic garbage bag wrapped in bedding on an East Elmhurst street. A short distance away, the mother's body was found inside the family's home.

District Attorney Katz said:

"This defendant is accused of the most gruesome of crimes, taking the life of his own mother and brother and leaving his sibling's body on the sidewalk. We will hold him fully accountable and seek justice for the victims."

Danielson, 40, of 104th Street in East Elmhurst, was arraigned on an 18-count indictment charging him with two counts of murder in the second degree, three counts of criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree, two counts of criminal possession of a firearm, six counts of tampering with physical evidence, three counts of criminal possession of a weapon in the fourth degree,

concealment of a human corpse and endangering the welfare of a child. Justice Kenneth Holder ordered Danielson to return to court on September 13.

If convicted, Danielson faces up to 50 years to life in prison.

According to the charges, on July 5 between about 8:15 a.m. and 8:30 a.m., Danielson was observed on video surveillance pushing a grocery cart that held what looked to be a bleach container on 104th Street. He was then seen dragging a large item wrapped in a comforter and bed sheets down the sidewalk, leaving it in front of 32-41 104th Street, before returning to his home on the same block.

Passersby called 911 later that day reporting a strong odor and what looked like blood leaking from the comforter.

Police found the body of Danielson's brother, 31-year-old Kyle Danielson, inside of the bedding with a gunshot wound to his torso and lacerations to this throat and body.

At approximately 8:00 p.m. that night, Danielson was observed by police officers pushing a 3-year-old in a stroller with a black bag hanging from the stroller handle. A search warrant was issued for the stroller and bag, and a loaded 9mm handgun and a knife were recovered.

A search warrant was executed for Danielson's home and, at

approximately 2:30 a.m. July 6, police discovered the body of Danielson's mother, Cheryl Myrick, 58, with stab wounds to her neck.

Assistant District Attorneys Kenneth Zawistowski, of the District Attorney's Homicide Bureau, is prosecuting the case with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Nicholas Castellano under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys John W. Kosinski, Bureau Chief, Peter J. McCormack III, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, and Karen Ross, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Shawn Clark.

Two US Navy sailors arrested on charges of sharing secrets with China

The two US Navy sailors have been arrested for handing over sensitive national security material to China.

(News Agency)- Two US Navy sailors have been arrested on charges of handing over sensitive national security material to China, US officials said Thursday.

Petty Officer Wenheng Zhao, 26, was charged with conspiracy and bribetaking in connection with taking nearly \$15,000 in exchange for photographs and videos of sensitive US military information, the officials said.

US Navy sailor, Jinchao Wei, whose age was not disclosed, was charged with conspiring to send national defence information to China in exchange for thousands of



dollars.

Assistant Attorney General Matt Olsen told reporters in San Diego that, because of the men's actions, "sensitive military info ended up in the hands of the People's Republic

of China." Zhao is accused of sending his Chinese handler plans for US military exercises in the Indo-Pacific region, electrical diagrams and blueprints for a radar system on a US military base in Okinawa,

Japan and security details for US naval facilities in Ventura County and San Clemente Island outside Los Angeles, according to US officials. Wei is accused of disclosing information about the USS Essex, an amphibious assault ship where he served, as well as other American warships, including dozens of technical manuals laying out the Essex's weapons, power structure and operations. Contact details for Wei and Zhao could not immediately be located.

US officials at the press conference condemned China's espionage campaign Thursday. "There is no bigger,

multigenerational threat to the United States" than China, said FBI Special Agent Stacey Moy. Beijing "will stop at nothing to attack the United States in its strategic plan to become the world's sole superpower."

The Chinese Embassy in Washington did not immediately return a message seeking comment on the allegations. US-China relations have been tense for years over a range of national security and trade issues. The United States has accused China of espionage and cyberattacks, a charge that Beijing has rejected. China has also declared that it is under threat from spies.

Cuba bans company access to ATMs, limits cash transactions

(News Agency)- The Cuban Central Bank issued rules this week banning state and private businesses from using ATMs and limiting cash transactions between them, as it seeks to tame runaway inflation and off-the-books business amid a grave economic crisis.

The regulations went into effect on Thursday. They limit cash transactions to 5000 pesos and will be implemented gradually over six months, official media said.

The government pegs the dollar at 24 pesos and for select



companies, tourists and residents at 120 pesos, though it has few to exchange. The dollar currently fetches 230 pesos on the informal market.

Communist authorities are seeking to curb galloping inflation which the government puts at 45% so far this year and control the devaluation of the

peso by taking a series of measures to promote "banking" in the country and encourage the use of "electronic payments", said a statement published on Thursday in the official media.

Inflation stood at 39% last year, and more than 70% in 2021, according to the government - figures many economists say underestimate the rate as they do not adequately account for a ballooning informal market.

Economy Minister Alejandro Gil said late last month gross domestic product grew 1.8% in the first half of the year, but

remained 8 percentage points below pre-pandemic levels in 2019, causing shortages of food, medicine, fuel and other basic goods, as well as long lines to buy them when they are available.

The crisis has led to a lack of confidence in the state-run banking system, resulting in a lack of cash at some ATMs as businesses use them, leaving residents in the lurch.

The regulations state the objective is that "collections and payments between economic actors are not on a cash basis ... but carried out electronically."

Islamic state confirms leader killed in clashes in Syria, names his replacement

Abu Hussein al-Husseini al-Quraishi was killed during a gun battle with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), the main Islamist group that holds sway in the last opposition bastion in northwest Syria, the spokesperson said.

(News Agency)- Islamic State on Thursday confirmed the death of its leader Abu Hussein al-Husseini al-Quraishi and named Abu Hafs al-Hashimi al-Quraishi as his replacement, the group's spokesperson said in an undated recording published on its Telegram channel.

It appeared to be the militant group's first official announcement on his fate since Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan said in April that Turkish intelligence forces had killed him in Syria.

Erdogan said the Turkish national intelligence organization had pursued Quraishi for a long time.

Quraishi was killed during a gun battle with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), the main Islamist group that holds sway in the last opposition bastion in northwest



Syria, the spokesman said.

"The Sheikh (Quraishi), may God have mercy on him, was killed after they (HTS) tried to take him captive. He clashed with them with his arms until he died of his wounds," the spokesman said, accusing the rival Islamist group

of acting as agents of Turkish intelligence. Islamic State, a shadow of the organisation that once ruled a third of Iraq and Syria, gave no details about the new leader.

The movement reached its peak in 2014 when its then head, Abu Bakr al-

Baghdadi, declared the territory it controlled a caliphate.

It was beaten back by adversaries in both countries, including a U.S.-led coalition, and Baghdadi was killed during a U.S. military operation in Syria in 2019.

Abu Hussein al-Husseini al-Quraishi took over in November 2022 after his predecessor was killed, also in Syria. Islamic State militants continue to wage insurgent attacks in both Syria and Iraq. Its remaining thousands of militants have in recent years mostly hid out in remote hinterlands of both countries, though they are still capable of carrying out hit-and-run attacks. The U.S.-led coalition alongside a Kurdish-led alliance known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is still carrying out raids against Islamic State in Syria

'Sad day for America': Trump after not guilty plea in 2020 election 'lies' case



(News Agency)- Former US President Donald Trump, who is the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, pleaded not guilty on Thursday to charges he orchestrated a plot to try to overturn his 2020 election loss. He said it was a "very sad day for America".

Slamming the election conspiracy charges levelled against him in a Washington court, former US President Donald Trump said he was a victim of "political persecution", after he pleaded not guilty.

"This is a very sad day for America," Trump told reporters

after the hearing before boarding his private plane to return to his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club. "This is a persecution of a political opponent."

"If you can't beat him, you persecute him or you prosecute them. We can't let this happen in America," the former President said.

Trump, who is the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, pleaded not guilty on Thursday to charges he orchestrated a plot to try to overturn his 2020 election loss.

This was the third time Trump pleaded not guilty since April. He was arrested and arraigned on four felony counts

outlined in special counsel Jack Smith's indictment: conspiracy to defraud the US, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding and conspiracy against rights, reported The Guardian.

He was formally arrested at the E Barrett Prettyman federal courthouse, just blocks from the US Capitol.

After entering his plea of not guilty, Trump was released on the condition that he would adhere to all federal, state and local laws and avoid discussing the case with any witnesses. The next hearing in the case has been set for August 28.

Trump's legal woes are far from over. The former US President previously pleaded not guilty to federal charges that he retained classified documents after leaving office and New York state charges that he falsified documents in connection with hush money payments to a porn star. He may soon face more charges in Georgia, where a state prosecutor was investigating his attempts to overturn the election there. The Atlanta-area prosecutor, Fani Willis, said she will file indictments by mid-August.

18 killed as bus, with Indians on board, plunges into Mexico ravine

(News Agency)- At least 18 people died in western Mexico when a passenger bus plunged off a highway into a ravine early on Thursday (local time), state officials said, adding the passengers were mostly foreigners and some were heading for the US border. En route to the northern border town of Tijuana, the bus had been carrying around 42 passengers, including citizens from India, Dominican Republic and African nations.

The bus driver was detained, the Nayarit state government said in a statement, with authorities suspecting him of speeding round a bend in the road. Officials said they were still working to identify those who had died on Thursday afternoon.

Around 20 people were taken to hospital to treat injuries, with one woman's condition described as "delicate", the state government said. The bus, part of the Elite passenger line, crashed near Barranca Blanca on the highway outside state capital Tepic, officials said.

Rescue has been "extremely difficult", said Jorge Benito Rodriguez, security and civil protection secretary for Nayarit, as the ravine was some 40 metres (131 feet) deep.

Neither the bus company nor Mexico's migration institute immediately responded to requests for comment.

China's largest carmaker BYD faces tax investigation in India: Report

The DRI claims that BYD, China's largest electric vehicle (EV) maker, underpaid taxes amounting to \$9 million.

(News Agency)-Chinese automaker BYD is under an ongoing investigation by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) over allegations of underpaid taxes on imported parts used in its assembled cars sold in the country, reported news agency Reuters.

The DRI claims that BYD, China's largest electric vehicle (EV) maker, underpaid taxes amounting to \$9 million.

While BYD has deposited this sum following the preliminary findings, the investigation remains open, and additional tax charges and penalties could be imposed. BYD and the Indian authorities have not provided any official response.

BYD's expansion plan in India faces roadblock

BYD's expansion plans in India have faced challenges amid strained relations between New Delhi and Beijing.

The Chinese automaker is currently under heightened scrutiny from Indian authorities due to a \$1 billion proposal to



build cars locally, in line with India's stricter regulations on foreign investments from neighboring countries, including China.

BYD has told its Indian joint venture partner that it has dropped its investment plans, as it faces scrutiny from authorities.

In recent years, Chinese companies in

India have faced increased scrutiny following border clashes between the two nations in 2020. Smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp has also encountered allegations of illegal remittances to foreign entities in the name of royalties. India imposes different tax rates on fully

built electric cars and car parts imported for local assembly into EVs. While fully built electric cars are subject to 70 per cent or 100 per cent tax based on the vehicle's value, car parts can be levied at 15 per cent or 35 per cent if they are imported without being mounted on a vehicle chassis.

The sources reveal that BYD has not met the necessary conditions to benefit from the lower tax rates, making the automaker liable to pay either 70 per cent or 100 per cent based on the car's value.

The specific time period of the alleged tax violation and the number of cars affected have not been disclosed. BYD, which has invested over \$200 million in India, offers the Atto 3 electric SUV and the e6 EV to corporate fleets and plans to introduce its Seal electric sedan later this year. As of 2022, the company has sold approximately 1,960 cars in India, according to government registration data.

Japan chip equipment supplier Disco to set up center in India

Disco Corp 6146.T plans to set up a center in India to expand marketing to the semiconductor industry. The company is considering an applications laboratory based on client companies' progress in their Indian expansions.



(News Agency)- Japan's Disco Corp 6146.T wants to establish a center in India to support its clients and serve as a base for marketing to the country's semiconductor industry, the Nikkei reported on Tuesday, citing a company executive. The chipmaking device supplier will consider

opening an applications laboratory, which performs test cuts and other experimental processing at the customer's request, in India, the report said.

Plans for the lab will depend on how client companies are progressing in their Indian expansions, the Nikkei said.

RBI says 88% of Rs 2,000 notes worth Rs 3.14 lakh crore returned



(News Agency)- In its latest update on Rs 2,000 currency notes, the RBI said 88 per cent of the high-value denomination has been returned.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revealed that 88 per cent of the country's highest denomination Rs 2,000 currency notes, amounting to Rs 3.14 lakh crore, have been returned since the decision to withdraw them from circulation.

The RBI had announced in May that these high-value notes would be withdrawn, allowing exchange or deposit until September 30. As of May 19, the total value of Rs 2,000 notes in circulation decreased to Rs 3.56 lakh crore from Rs 3.62 lakh crore at the end of the last fiscal year on March 31, according to the central bank's

statement.

Currently, Rs 420 crore worth of these notes remain in circulation.

Data collected from major banks indicates that about 87 per cent of the banknotes received by lenders were deposited, while approximately 13 per cent were exchanged for other denominations, the RBI said.

It may be noted that the high-value Rs 2,000 notes were introduced in 2016 after demonetisation, with the aim of replenishing cash in circulation.

Before finally announcing the withdrawal of Rs 2,000 notes earlier this year, the RBI had expressed its desire to reduce high-value notes in circulation. Notably, the printing of Rs 2,000 notes were stopped almost four years ago.

Increasing omega-3 intake like seafood could lower risk of hearing loss, finds study

Scientists have discovered a correlation between higher levels of the omega-3 fatty acid DHA and a reduced risk of age-related hearing difficulties.

Scientists have found a correlation between blood levels of the omega-3 fatty acid called docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and hearing difficulties.

As per latest research, middle-aged and older individuals with higher DHA levels were found to be 8-20 percent less likely to experience age-related hearing problems compared to those with lower DHA levels. Previous research has already linked elevated DHA levels to a decreased risk of heart disease, cognitive decline, and even mortality. And now, this study takes it a step further, proposing a pivotal role for DHA in preserving auditory function and diminishing the risk of age-related hearing loss. Michael I. McBurney, senior scientist with the Fatty Acid Research Institute, Department of Human Health & Nutritional Sciences at the University of Guelph and the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, is set to present these intriguing findings at NUTRITION 2023, the annual meeting of the American Society for Nutrition.



Drawing data from the UK Biobank, the researchers meticulously analysed the self-reported hearing status and blood DHA levels of over 1,00,000 individuals aged 40-69 in the United Kingdom.

The results stated that those in the highest quintile of blood DHA levels were a

staggering 16 per cent less likely to experience difficulty in hearing compared to their counterparts in the lowest quintile of DHA levels.

Not only that, but those residing in the highest quintile for DHA levels also boasted an 11 per cent lower likelihood of

encountering problems following conversations in noisy environments, compared to individuals in the lowest quintile for DHA levels.

Although these findings shed light on the profound association between DHA levels and hearing, McBurney urges caution, emphasising that a population study of this nature falls short of providing conclusive evidence that DHA actively preserves auditory function or that insufficient DHA levels contribute to hearing loss. Nevertheless, these discoveries state the importance of omega-3 fatty acids, specifically DHA, in maintaining overall health and safeguarding against the inevitable decline associated with ageing. Scientists speculate that omega-3s, including DHA, may act as guardians, shielding the inner ear's cells from harm or mitigating inflammatory responses triggered by loud noises, chemicals, or infections. DHA levels can be amplified by regularly indulging in seafood or by incorporating dietary supplements into our routines.



These two types of exercises could help you keep blood pressure in check

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a global health concern affecting over 40 per cent of adults worldwide. It's associated with severe cardiovascular diseases such as stroke, heart failure, and myocardial infarction. Moreover, hypertension can cause significant functional and structural damage to the brain, leading to cognitive impairment and dementia.

Therefore, effective strategies for managing hypertension are crucial.

While physical exercise like walking, jogging, jumping rope, swimming and

water aerobics, has been recognised as an efficient tool for managing hypertension, recent research suggests that isometric exercises can manage blood pressure as well. Isometric exercises, which involve muscle contractions without any movement in the surrounding joints, are particularly effective in reducing both systolic and diastolic blood pressure, according to a study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

Examples of isometric exercises include wall squats and planks. These exercises improve physical endurance and posture

by strengthening and stabilising the muscles.

"These findings provide a comprehensive data driven framework to support the development of new exercise guideline recommendations for the prevention and treatment of arterial hypertension," said Dr Jamie O'Driscoll, Reader in Cardiovascular Physiology, School of Psychology and Life Sciences, co-author of the study.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends that individuals with hypertension engage in moderate-intensity aerobic exercise 5-7 days per

While walking, jogging, jumping rope, swimming and water aerobics, have been recognised as efficient tools for managing hypertension, recent research suggests that isometric exercises can manage blood pressure as well.

week, supplemented by resistance exercise 2-3 days per week and flexibility exercise at least 2-3 days per week.

Adults should aim for 150 to 300 minutes per week of moderate-intensity or 75 to 150 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise.

Additionally, they should perform muscle-strengthening activities at least two days per week. Regular exercise strengthens the heart, enabling it to pump more blood with less effort, thereby reducing the force on the arteries and lowering blood pressure. Different types of exercises have varying effects on blood pressure. For instance, systolic blood pressure increases linearly with exercise intensity, while diastolic pressure remains stable or decreases slightly at higher exercise levels.



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Immerse in the Musical Charm of "Har Har Mahadev" from "Oh My God 2"

In the colourful tapestry of the eagerly awaited comedy-drama "Oh My God 2," the latest song "Har Har Mahadev" has just dropped. A perfect blend of rhythmic splendour and compelling narrative, the song features megastar Akshay Kumar channelling Lord Shiva, complete with ash-smeared face and body, engaging in the famous Tandava dance.

The song, "Har Har Mahadev," unveils with a compelling visual of Shiva devotees, both men and women, adorned in traditional attire and ash smeared faces,

immersed in Shiva's Tandava dance. Akshay Kumar, watching the devotees from a high podium, finally descends into the crowd to join the fervour and present his own rendition of the dance.

The mesmerising track is brought to life by the soulful voice and creative composition of Vikram Montrose, with lyrics penned by Shekhar Astitwa.

With its rhythmic brilliance and emotional depth, "Har Har Mahadev" offers an immersive auditory and visual experience that perfectly encapsulates the essence of "Oh My God 2."

Releasing on 11th August, "Oh My God 2" is a highly anticipated sequel to the critically acclaimed "Oh My God." Packaged with humour and wit, the film is a bold exploration of spirituality, questioning societal norms and taking audiences on a poignant, thought-provoking journey. Helmed by director Amit Rai, the film stars Akshay Kumar, Pankaj Tripathi and Yami Gautam in lead roles and their on-screen chemistry and combined talent are undeniable, further enhancing the overall appeal of this release.

Karan Johar reveals where Rocky and Rani would live after marriage; teases a sequel



Karan Johar was asked where Ranveer Singh's character Rocky and Alia Bhatt's Rani would live after they marry, and the filmmaker not only shared who could set up their home - and where - but also hinted at Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani's sequel. In a new interview with Film Companion, Karan said he sees Rocky and Rani living 'away from their parents', and neither of them moving in with each other's family. Also read: Karan Johar says Tota Roy Chowdhury's character in Rocky Aur Rani was borrowed from his childhood Veteran actors Dharmendra and Jaya Bachchan are part of Ranveer's family - the Randhawas. Actors Tota Roy Chowdhury and Churni Ganguly as well as actor Shabana Azmi play Alia's family - the Chatterjees - in Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani. The film, which is about people - Ranveer Singh's Rocky and Alia Bhatt's Rani - from two very different families falling in love, was released on July 28.

Karan says Rocky-Rani would set up a home in Delhi

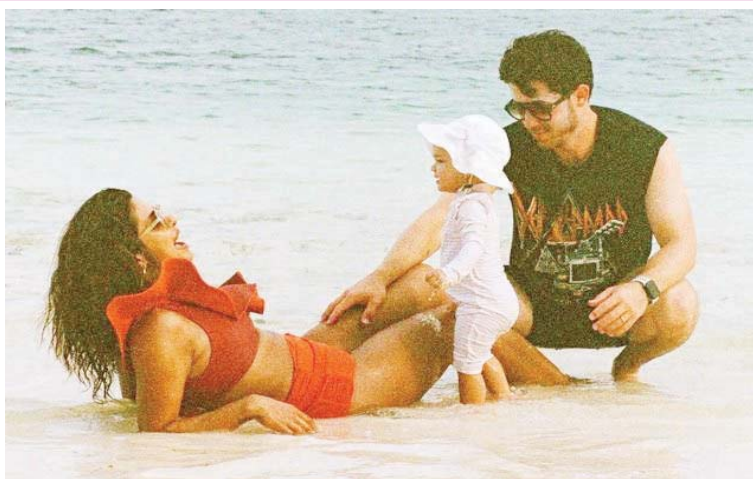
When asked where do Rocky and Rani live after marriage, Karan told Film Companion, "Absolutely valid question to ask. I definitely think that Rani would not move into Randhawa Paradise (Randhawas family's home). I definitely think the Chatterjees would be okay with the fact that they (Rocky and Rani) would move into their separate home because now they get along with each other's families well enough for them to create a world of their own. So, in my head, neither does Rocky move to Rani's, nor does Rani move to Rocky's, they have a place of their own. In my head, Rani would do up that place up. I'm not sure she would be bent on Rocky's aesthetic. Also Rocky would not stop being Rocky."

Karan on Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani 2

Karan revealed his plans for the sequel, saying, "You know we discussed a part 2. We used to chat about it - Alia Bhatt, Ranveer Singh and me. We were like 'What has got to be the story because these two deserve a spin-off'."

Priyanka Chopra takes a dip in the sea with Malti and Nick Jonas watching in pics from their beach vacation

Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas had the best time in July as they let their hair down with their daughter Malti Marie Chopra Jonas during a beach vacation to celebrate Priyanka's 41st birthday and also watched the Wimbledon's finals. Nick has now shared some of their most beautiful throwback pictures from their time together and has called all of it a 'movie'. And Priyanka topped it with new pictures as she and Malti watched the moon on Tuesday. Also read: Priyanka Chopra chills on a yacht in



birthday post by Nick Jonas, he says 'I love celebrating you' Sharing the pictures on Instagram, Nick simply wrote,

"July was a movie," along with a heart emoji. The first picture shows a tanned Priyanka in a check bikini, sitting on Nick's lap at a shack. There is also a perfect family picture of them on the beach as Priyanka, looking stunning in a maroon and orange bikini, lies down in water with Nick and Malti watching her laugh. There is an adorable picture of Nick and Malti too as he stands beside her as she dips her feet in the pool on a yacht. There are more glimpses of them from the month of July, including a picture

of Nick and Priyanka all dressed up at the Wimbledon's final. While Nick was in a beige suit, Priyanka was in a black dress. Priyanka celebrated her 41st birthday on July 18 and a picture shows a banner with 'Happy birthday Pri' too, along with another picture of Priyanka standing with a 'Happy birthday' crown on her head.

Fans loved the pictures, with one of them reacting, "Jiju is goals." Another said, "Sooo wholesome I love it." One more commented, "They're so beautiful together."



Zoya Akhtar denies Jee Le Zaraa is shelved: 'We are just waiting for the dates'

There were rumours that Jee Le Zaraa may get shelved after Priyanka Chopra walked out of the film owing to date issues. But India Today reports that Zoya has denied the rumours. There were also reports that another leading lady will replace her in the all-female buddy road movie also starring Alia Bhatt and Katrina Kaif. (Also Read: Priyanka Chopra out, but Katrina Kaif is not leaving Jee Le Zaraa: Sources) Jee Le Zaraa is co-written by Zoya Akhtar and Reema

Kagti and will mark the return to direction of Farhan Akhtar after Don 2 (2011). It was announced on the 20th anniversary of Farhan's directorial debut Dil Chahta Hai in 2021.

Zoya's clarification

As per the news report, Zoya said, "We're just waiting for the dates," when asked about the status of Jee Le Zaraa. While she hasn't clarified whether the film will be made with the same cast, or whether Priyanka has

walked out of the project, Zoya did make sure that the film is happening for sure.

Farhan returning to direction?

As per a report in Pinkvilla, Farhan was in talks with Aamir Khan, who's on an acting break himself and is focusing on his production house. Aamir Khan Productions is backing the remake of Campeones, Javier Fesser's 2018 Spanish sports dramedy, that was translated to English as Champions.

While Aamir was initially considering Salman Khan for the lead role, date issues have led to him approaching his Dil Chahta Hai director Farhan for the part. The latter has shown interest though casting is yet to be locked for the film. While Aamir was initially considering Salman Khan for the lead role, date issues have led to him approaching his Dil Chahta Hai director Farhan for the part. The latter has shown interest though casting is yet to be locked for the film.

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Ayushmann Khurrana took inspiration from Kamal Haasan in Chachi 420 and Govinda in Aunty No 1 for Dream Girl 2

Actor Ayushmann Khurrana on Tuesday said he has challenged the idea of "toxic masculinity" right from the beginning of his career and is confident his upcoming film

Dream Girl 2 will take the discourse to another level. At the trailer launch of Dream Girl 2, the actor was asked to comment on how Karan Johar's latest film Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani challenges gender stereotypes by showing two men -- characters played by

Ranveer Singh and Tota Roy Choudhury -- perform Kathak on Dola Re Dola, a song from Devdas featuring Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Madhuri Dixit

Ayushmann Khurrana on Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani

Khurrana, who plays the role of a

cross dresser in Dream Girl 2, said he is happy to see the audience accept a film like Rocky Aur Rani... "From the beginning, I've criticised toxic masculinity. I'm glad that

breaking stereotypes. It's not just the messaging in the film (Dream Girl 2), it has a lot of comedy as well," the actor told reporters.

Ayushmann on Dream Girl 2

Khurrana said he is glad to count himself in the company of actors like Kamal Haasan, Govinda, and Kishore Kumar, who have in the past transformed into a woman in different movies. "You take inspiration from Kamal Haasan sir in Chachi 420 or Govinda in Aunty No 1.

A lot of actors have done this, including Kishore Kumar ji. So, actors have got an opportunity every decade to play characters like these. I'm glad I got it too with this film (Dream Girl 2), which says a lot in a light-hearted, fun way," he added.



Shabana Azmi on Javed Akhtar's reaction to her kiss with Dharmendra in RRRPK: What bothered him was...

Shabana Azmi has talked about her kiss scene with Dharmendra in Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani and also her husband and lyricist Javed Akhtar's reaction to the same. Shabana has said Javed wasn't bothered about her kiss scene at all but it was her behaviour while watching the film that left him amused, as told to Zoom. Also read: Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani box office day 5 collection: Ranveer Singh, Alia

Bhatt film remains stable Shabana and Dharmendra play old flames in Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani who share a quick kiss upon their reunion. Shabana plays Rani's grandmother while Dharmendra plays Rocky's grandfather in the film.

Shabana Azmi on kissing Dharmendra

Talking about the kiss, Shabana Azmi told Zoom, "I never thought it would create such a fuss! People are laughing and cheering

when we do the kiss. While shooting it was never an issue. It is true that I haven't kissed much on screen before. But who wouldn't want to kiss a man as handsome as Dharmendra?" Javed Akhtar's reaction to Shabana and Dharmendra's kiss When asked about Javed's reaction to it, she said, "Oh he was not bothered. But what bothered him was my rowdy behaviour. Throughout the film I was applauding, whistling,

cheering and shouting. He was like, 'I don't know this woman sitting next to me.' I went insane with excitement."

Karan Johar on the kiss scene Earlier, Karan also confirmed that filming the kiss scene was no big deal on the sets. He told Film Companion in an interview, "Shabana ji is a trooper. She is a master actor, she is a 'baap' actor as they say. There was no debate, no question. Dharam ji was like, 'haan theek hai karna

hai, fine (its okay, it is to be done, fine)'. Two great veterans, performing with absolute aplomb, no questions asked. It was glorious to see them."

Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani stars Ranveer Singh as Rocky Randhawa, Alia Bhatt as Rani Chatterjee and Jaya Bachchan is in the role of Dharmendra's wife Dhanalakshmi Randhawa. The film opened well in theatres and has collected ₹60 crore in five days of its release.

AI will fuel disturbing 'build-a-child' industry

When parents design children like an accessory, they aren't that different from a child trafficker

By Emma Waters

AI's latest product - Remini - allows users to upload photos of themselves and their partner to generate images of what their future child could look like.

There are two sides to this. First, the app lets people envision themselves as parents - potentially encouraging people to pursue, rather than delay, parenthood. As one woman said, "I can actually see myself being [pregnant] at some point."

On the other hand, new technologies introduce a host of temptations and abuses. As reproductive technology advances, doctors could turn AI-generated images of children into reality. This raises the critical question: What is the purpose of having a child?

With AI, the "build-a-child" industry can create a boutique experience where doctors show parents lifelike images of potential children. Using in vitro fertilization (IVF), fertility clinics can create and test embryos to find a parent's "ideal" child. Seventy-five percent of IVF clinics in the U.S. offer



genetic testing. This allows parents to create multiple embryos and select the one that matches their preferred sex and eye, hair, and skin color. They can also gauge if a child will develop certain health problems. In one controversial case, deaf parents tried to create a child who would inherit their deafness. Of course, clinics destroy the unwanted embryos.

Big Fertility knows its clientele well. IVF is a \$3 billion industry in the U.S.; the overall fertility market brings about \$8 billion. As one convicted surrogacy clinic owner said, "Here is a little secret for all of you. There is a lot of treachery and deception in [the fertility industry] because there is

gobs of money to be made."

Few federal or state laws regulate the fertility industry. It's only a matter of time before clinics harness the power of AI to enhance the baby-making experience. But just because doctors can imagine it doesn't mean that they can or should create such a child.

For example, genetic testing doesn't always work. Last year, a couple sued their fertility clinic because the doctors failed to select a male embryo. Instead, the couple's surrogate, much to their chagrin, birthed a girl.

In contrast, when doctors correctly select a parent's ideal child, this creates eugenic concerns. Many fertility clinics

report parents want children with White skin, high IQs or specific eye colors like blue or green.

Instead of accepting the natural diversity of potential children, AI allows doctors to create the "best" kind of child. In this scenario, the "ideal" child will inevitably succumb to various trends.

Remini, and AI programs like it, aren't limited by what is real, natural or necessarily good. For example, the app shows users a potential child from two women or two men. Science isn't far behind. Scientists have already experimented with mice to turn an egg into sperm that can then fertilize another egg. Scientists call this process "sperm-free fertilization." Science fiction warns people of the dangers of AI masquerading as humans. An example of this is "digital" babies: virtual babies that women can care for from their phone. But these phenomena are usually short-lived. Instead, it's more likely scientists will use AI to create children that are like machines. For example, plastic

surgeons reported an increase in "Snapchat dysphoria." This term describes women who ask their doctors to make them look like the Snapchat-filtered version of themselves. This is the great temptation with technology: that men would become like machines. By nature, such men would be "manu-factured" - quite literally, "handmade." When parents design children like an accessory, they aren't that different from a child trafficker. Even with good intentions, both the parent and the trafficker select a child based on their own desires, not an unconditional acceptance of the child.

Of course, it's not inherently bad for doctors to use AI to help parents envision their future kids. What is a problem is when doctors use AI to build a child with certain looks, sex or even preselected values. Doctors should use technology to reveal what it means to be fully human. They shouldn't use it to reduce the human person to a customizable "meat lego."

Nothing Spontaneous About Nuh Violence: Why We Should Stop Normalising Islamist Vandalism

Written By: Utpal Kumar

Soviet revolutionary Karl Radek, "a sparkling writer, with an equal flair for synthesis and for sarcasm", as author Victor Serge would introduce him in *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, had been associated with a number of political jokes surrounding Joseph Stalin. Long before he was killed in a scripted labour camp scuffle with another inmate at Stalin's behest, Radek - as the story goes - was one day standing naked at the Red Square. A well-wisher soon approached him and asked if he wasn't afraid of the police. Radek stared at him and shot back: "Police? Where are the police?" The man pointed towards a number of policemen all across the Square and said: "There's a policeman. There's another. And yet another... Why, the whole place is crawling with policemen." To this, Radek replied, "You can see them. I can't. I am a party member. I am not supposed to

see them. For party members there are no police anywhere in the Soviet Union."

Today, when one looks at the way the Nuh violence in Haryana is being analysed, explained and

to it. The predominant narrative is that Nuh was a "spontaneous" outbreak which happened because one controversial person named Monu Manesar decided to join the Vishwa Hindu Parishad



reported all across, it instantly reminds of Radek and his selective blindness. For, in all this arson, mayhem, and worse, the killing of five people, including two policemen, the Left-'liberal' commentariat and intelligentsia fail to see any Islamist connection

(VHP) procession on Monday. The 'spontaneity' of the violence can be gauged from the fact that it happened despite Manesar not being a part of the procession. The 'impulsiveness' of the mayhem can be gauged from the fact that stones and iron rods were

already in store for the event. The 'extemporaneity' can also be explained through the fact that the violence began within 10 minutes of the start of the VHP procession, with a mob of around 200 people descending from nowhere, fully armed and well prepared. The Hindu side initially fled, but then reportedly regrouped and retaliated, as media reports say.

Manesar is no doubt a controversial man with a dubious record. He has been booked for the murder of two Muslim men whose charred bodies were found in Bhiwani district in February this year. If he is guilty and still out of jail, it showcases the failure of the police and judicial systems to put him in his place. But to normalise the violence, whose every aspect points towards the fact that it was pre-meditated and pre-planned, by linking it with the presence of an individual is a dangerous trend. For, tomorrow,

the same perverted logic can be applied by the other side when someone like Asaduddin Owaisi joins an event in some other place.

The fact is the Nuh violence was a well-planned, well-executed terror incident - and it should be seen like that. It's also the failure of the police and the state administration to comprehend the scale of conspiracy when there were enough indications pointing towards that direction. Nuh is the manifestation of the utter failure of the state apparatus to take a pre-emptive action.

The most dangerous aspect of Nuh and other such incidents is the normalisation of Islamist violence, first by explaining it through the presence of an individual, Manesar in this case, and then by coming up with all sorts of excuses - the most common being how people were provoked into violence through loud music and incendiary sloganeering.



Manipur Crisis: War on Drugs Or Drugs on War?

By: Dr G Shreekumar Menon

In a classic article "Drugs and War: What is the relationship", writer Peter Andreas, in the Annual Review, Department of Political Science, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA, examines the theme of what is the relationship between psychoactive drugs and war. The article identifies and traces five key dimensions of this relationship: war while on drugs, war for drugs, war through drugs, war against drugs, and drugs after war. Six drugs have proven to be particularly important: alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, opium (and its derivatives morphine and heroin), amphetamines, and cocaine. They range from old to relatively new, mild to potent, licit to illicit, natural to synthetic. Although they have medical applications, all have become extraordinarily popular and profitable global commodities through their nonmedical use. Today's battles between rival drug traffickers can be viewed as a form of criminal commercial warfare, made possible by both the criminalisation of drugs and the availability of military hardware and military-trained foot soldiers. Traditional security scholars may object to classifying this type of organised violence as a war, but the sheer number of deaths and the heavily armed nature of the most powerful players may suggest the need to rethink our conventional definitions of what counts as war. Distinctions between military conflict and criminal conflict can become blurry, especially in terms of lethality, after all, more people have died in Mexico from drug-related violence than in most civil wars. It should be emphasised that the war for drugs can closely interact with and be fuelled by the war against drugs. For example, in the Mexico case, it is clear that the government's strategy of decapitating major drug trafficking organisations has unintentionally helped to unleash violent turf battles between rival traffickers. When one trafficking organisation has been taken down or

weakened by the war against drugs, other trafficking organisations have aggressively engaged in the war for drugs, violently competing for the newly vacated turf—typically meaning control of the major corridors and border entry points. Another interactive effect is that drug trafficking organisations may launch a war for drugs as a response to a war against drugs, with tactics including the assassination of judges, police, and politicians. Although the standard operating procedure for most drug traffickers is to evade rather than violently confront the state—too much violence can be bad for business by attracting unwanted attention and increasing security costs—the exceptions have included declaring an all-out war on the state. The most famous case was the Medellín cocaine trafficking organisation of Pablo Escobar, whose escalating war against the Colombian government in the 1980s and early 1990s took the lives of hundreds of police officers, dozens of judges, and several presidential candidates. That war only ended when Escobar was tracked down and killed with US intelligence assistance.

In light of the above, the war against drugs, currently underway in Manipur, can be better understood. Manipur Chief Minister's 'War on Drugs 2.0' has resulted in the seizure of illegal drugs worth over Rs 182 crore in the international market and the arrest of around 140 drug traffickers since March 2020. The law enforcement agencies destroyed a total of 380 acres of poppy cultivation. Manipur occupies an area of 22,327 km² (8,621 sq mi), roughly about the size of the US state of New Jersey. Most parts of the state are mountainous with rugged hills and narrow valleys, except the area around the capital Imphal, where the landscape is flat. This small landscape is inhabited by Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi hill tribes on one side and the Meitei community on the other. The Chief Minister's War on Drugs has exposed the narco-politics within the state.

According to Manipur government sources, between 2017 and 2018, over 18,664 acres of poppy-cultivated land have been destroyed by state forces, and 963 drug traffickers, including 195 women, were arrested under the NDPS Act between April and June 2019. This has mostly been confined to the hill districts and poppy cultivation is a source of livelihood for many members of the Kuki-Zo-Chin tribes. If 963 drug traffickers have been apprehended in this small State, it gives an indication of the enormity of the narco-politics that it is grappling with. Close proximity of Myanmar, which is a major player in the international drug circuit, adds another dimension, and the involvement of Chinese nationals complicates the drug scenario considerably.

Presently, drug trafficking and poppy cultivation have attained an industry-like status in Manipur, and this means many State government and Central government organisations functioning there have been effectively compromised. The current 'war on drugs' has impacted tribes and non-tribes, living off 'narco-money', especially the Kuki community, who according to the Chief Minister "are encroaching everywhere, whether reserved forests, protected forests, doing poppy plantations and drugs business". The April 19, 2023 order of the Manipur High Court directing the State Government to consider granting the Meitei community Scheduled Tribe status, gave the drug lobby a smoke-screen to start a retaliatory attack against the State government's 'war on drugs 2.0'. The anti-drugs war of the State Government, got a cosmetic make-over to become a Kuki versus Meitei conflict, whose reverberations are crossing ripples across the Southeast Asian drug circuit. The Wars on Drugs is also happening in Thailand and in distant Philippines by President Duterte, as also in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka. In Myanmar, an estimated 50-70% of inmates are in prison on drug charges,

and in recent years lawmakers have upheld the use of lengthy prison sentences even for minor drug offences. As an alternative, drug lords of Myanmar, have for long, made Manipur into an Opium cultivation enclave. The poppies are taken to Myanmar through the porous India-Myanmar border, which runs for 1,643 km through the four states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. The Free Movement Regime (FMR) allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to 16 km inside the other country, without a visa. Unfortunately, the Kuki and Chin tribes of Myanmar, misused this provision to occupy the hills and cultivate opium. Decades of unhindered occupation have resulted in a well-oiled narco-trade where opium is cultivated in Manipur and smuggled into Myanmar for processing into heroin and thereafter sent to major Southeast Asian markets. Myanmar's major drug production centre, the Shan state, which is notorious for the production of illicit heroin, methamphetamine, and yaba, is just 521 km away from Manipur.

The enormously profitable drug production and trade has fuelled ethnic conflicts, criminality, and corruption, which has not been amenable to any kind of control or eradication. Al Jazeera in its report of June 26, 2023, titled "Myanmar authorities burn \$446m in illegal drugs", quoted the head of Myanmar's Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control, to the effect that its efforts to crush the multibillion-dollar trade were having no impact.

Many observers, therefore, opine that Manipur has also become an extended geographical space of the Golden Triangle. Myriad other problems have cropped up due to poppy cultivation, especially large-scale deforestation, environmental pollution due to unrestricted use of pesticides, and finally culminating in the vociferous demands for a separate Kukiland. Western controlled and appointed foreign missionaries, who had an absolutely free reign in large-scale conversions of many tribes including Kukis, did not have success with the Meiteis, hence their present strategy to expel them from Manipur. Between the 1961 and 2011 censuses of India, the share of Hindus in the state declined from 62% to 41%, while the share of Christians rose from 19% to 41%, reflecting the heightened proselytization that has happened in the State. The government is not fighting an anti-narcotics war only, but the fight is also against insurgency, foreign missionaries, and the demand for a separate Kuki homeland. The orchestrated international ruckus in the media and social media platforms is a concerted effort to foment large-scale disturbances in the sensitive North-east. The Chinese hand is also prominently discernible in the ongoing violence, as it has designs on dismembering the Northeast from the Indian mainland.

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Putin's War Is Slowly Destroying Europe's Breadbasket



Ukraine has kept producing and exporting grain despite the Russian invasion. How much longer can that go on?

By COLE S. ARONSON

July begins the Ukrainian wheat harvest, and the stalks from the humus-saturated soil near the Black Sea are chest-high and golden. A 20-minute car ride separates the port city of Odesa from wheat fields that, aside from a line of low trees, extend north and east without visible end. The only natural sound is a loud whisper the wind elicits every minute or so from the expanse of grain. But it isn't a time of plenty in the breadbasket of Europe, and not only because Russia, for now, says it won't continue the arrangement it made with the United Nations and Turkey that for a year permitted 32 million tons of Ukrainian grain to be exported from the country's massive southern ports. The present war has stunted Ukraine's grain industry at every stage, beginning months before harvest time.

Though blessed with an abundance of wheat-friendly chernozem - the Russian term for "black earth" - most Ukrainians fertilize their soil. "There's a great shortage of nitrogen fertilizers," says Denis Tkachenko, who helps run a trade association of Odesa region farms including about 12,000 acres. Fertilization means more grain enriched with the proteins enabling wheat to be baked into bread; poorer crops can be sold more cheaply for animal feed.

Before the war, Russia was a large exporter of fertilizer and also of ammonium, which is essential to the fertilizers used by farmers like those Tkachenko represents. Ukraine has some capacity to synthesize fertilizer for itself, but two of its major fertilizer plants are now controlled by Russia. The price of fertilizer shot up after the February 2022 invasion (and Russia's temporary decision not to export any of



its own) and has since come down, but not enough, Tkachenko says, for farmers to afford enough for every field.

And there are many fewer fields. More than a quarter of Ukraine's grain country lies east of the Dnieper River, and has been controlled or threatened by Russia since the February 2022 invasion. Even in the relatively safe southwest, the Ukrainian military has commandeered - thereby disabling - a lot of farmland. Tkachenko says that about 3 to 5 percent of the fields in his region were fortified early in the war against a possible Russian sea invasion. Another farmer in the area tells me that a third of his nearly 10,000 acres have been used for trenches, mining and the like. Russia's decision not to renew the U.N. Grain Initiative is painful to the industry, but even while the grain corridor functioned, Ukrainian farmers, merchants and officials reconsidered how to produce and to move the 40 percent of exports that 14 percent of the country's

labor force grows in fields. Forty percent of the agricultural total is grain - mostly corn, wheat, and barley - which for generations has departed Ukraine's giant southern ports into the Black Sea, now patrolled by a hostile Russian navy. In 2021, Ukraine produced over 30 million tons of wheat, 9 million tons of barley, and over 40 million tons of corn - high numbers that declined by a third in 2022 and are expected to go down further in 2023.

Wartime changes to the grain industry - likely to be hastened by Russia's withdrawal from the grain deal - have been costly to farmers and to the country, which now finds itself in an unpleasant economic competition with friendly wartime neighbors like Poland and Romania. Shortages of land and labor combined with decent harvests elsewhere compelled many Ukrainian farmers to sell crops at a loss.

For farmers who've been able to work their

land, the largest challenge has been transportation. Before the present conflict, nearly all grain left Ukraine through major ports on the Black Sea. Over the past 12 months, a third has instead traveled on trucks over narrow highways to river barges on the Danube River, or ports in Poland and Romania, where local workers resent competition from Ukrainian crops and truckers.

Because so much of Ukraine's economy depends on agriculture generally and on grain specifically, how the country manages the current grain crisis will help determine whether it can both profitably grow food within its borders and remain popular outside them, even once the war is over.

I spent two weeks in and around Odesa this month talking to farmers, who expressed sorrow about not planting and harvesting all their fields, but not resentment or anger. In fact, I don't think that I met anyone who was resentful about anything having to do with the war (though I'm told there's an ongoing dispute about whether Pushkin Street should be renamed after a non-Russian). The city of Odesa is still dotted with sandbags from an urban self-defense operation at the beginning of the war that encircled the city's grand Vienna-style opera house with fences and guard posts. Air raid sirens go off once or twice per day, most people ignore them, and life seems normal. People go to the beach - against official warnings - and sit at cafes and observe the midnight curfew. A performance of the opera Orfeo ed Euridice enticed over a hundred people to sit for several hours in a large and conspicuous building, on a hot July day, without air conditioning.



Why do some people who support Trump also wind up believing conspiracy theories? There's a scientific explanation for that.

What Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán Understand About Your Brain

By MARCEL DANESI

Why do people believe some politicians' lies even when they have been proven false? And why do so many of the same people peddle conspiracy theories?

Lying and conspiratorial thinking might seem to be two different problems, but they turn out to be related. I study political rhetoric and have tried to understand how populist politicians use language to develop a cult-like following, divide nations, create culture wars and instill hatred. This pattern goes back to antiquity and is seen today in leaders including former President Donald Trump, Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Russia's Vladimir Putin. These leaders are

capable of using words and speeches to whip people into such an emotional tempest that they will do things like march on the seat of Congress or invade a neighboring country.

What makes this kind of speech worrying is that it is not just emotions like aggression they can manipulate; politicians can also use rhetoric to influence the public's thoughts and beliefs, and spread lies and conspiracy theories. Those lies and conspiracy theories are stubbornly resistant to countervailing facts and can sow divisions that destabilize their own societies. My research analyzes real speeches made by politicians past and

present, including those of Trump, Orbán and Putin, using cognitive linguistics - a branch of linguistics that examines the relationship between language and the mind. What I have found is that throughout history, speeches by dictators and autocrats have one thing in common: they use dehumanizing metaphors to instill and propagate hatred of others.

It is well-documented that for example words like "reptiles" and "parasites" were used by the Nazi regime to compare outsiders and minorities to animals. Strongmen throughout history have referred to targeted social groups as "rats" or

"pests" or "a plague." And it's effective regardless of whether the people who hear this language are predisposed to jump to extreme conclusions. Once someone is tuned into these metaphors, their brain actually changes in ways that make them more likely to believe bigger lies, even conspiracy theories.

These metaphors are part of a cognitive process that entraps some people in this kind of thinking while others are unaffected. Here's how it works.

The first step to manipulating the minds of the public, or really the precondition, is that listeners need to be in the right emotional state.

Indian Prime Ministers and Cases of Corruption: Indira's Biggest Racket -- 'Garibi Hatao'

By: Priyam Gandhi-Mody

The Indian National Congress has made relentless efforts for decades to project Indira Gandhi as a legend and martyr. They have tried aggressively to equate her to Ma Durga and raised slogans like 'India is Indira' and 'Indira is India', which have stuck around till today. However, it is also true that for most of the years during which she enjoyed direct power she ran one of the most exhaustive corruption rackets in the history of India.

In 1970, when the older, original Congressmen led by Kumaraswami Kamaraj dismissed her from the original Congress, her faction came to be known as Congress (R). Elections were around the corner and to gather popular support, along with her team she coined the campaign catchphrase - 'woh kehte hai Indira hataao, hum kehte hai garibi hatao'.

While this is genius electioneering and won her the elections, the truth lies in the fact that the policy decisions taken in lieu of the 'garibi hatao' effort are unprecedented when it comes to cheating the country, lies, amount of money looted, manipulation, deceit, and outright misuse of government machinery for personal gain. I will back this up with facts - had the policy

manoeuvres been truly well-intended, they (Indira's government and successive Congress governments) would have come closer to alleviating poverty, albeit over a period of time. However, the fact that the poverty ratio in India did not fall at all after 1947 until 1983. Around the mid-1970s, India ranked 102nd among the nations of the world in terms of per-capita income.

The 'garibi hatao' campaign first began by the stunted bank nationalisation policy. Economists over the years have maintained that without accompanying measures to kick-start growth, it only remained a powerful political tool. Before 1969, banks were fiefdoms of big businesses and by nationalising them, Indira channelised them to make them her own, personal fiefdom. Let me explain, if Indira Gandhi's aim was to help the poor, she could have just ordered the banks to lend to them at lower rates with less collateral, offered government collaterals and government guarantees in cases of default. But her true motive behind the bank nationalisation was to bankrupt the opposition and cut off supply of funds, thus checkmating her political detractors. So, she justified her policies to be so pro-poor and described how she was a lone tigress standing up to big corporations - this

created a wave of public affection towards her efforts. Her economic policies were such a failure that inflation stood at 34.7% in 1974. At one point, the government attempted to lower market demand by freezing wages - an entirely anti-working class, anti-poor move. She kept looking to expand the public sector with more and more strict regulation on the private sector, and almost completely rejected foreign-aid because it was coming at the cost of economic reforms, which would dilute her hold on the exchequer. There was so much policy and ideological confusion that in 1973, the Indira government even took over the wholesale trade of foodgrains. The country panicked. Food stocks 'disappeared' and food trucks were looted. These shortages resulted in the need to import massive quantities of food grains, by which cost of food went up which hit the poor the most. Widespread labour and rural unrest against her began to grow and in a haste, she reversed the foodgrain-trade policy. While these are first order effects of her miscalculated policies, let us consider the second and third order effects - under the garb of 'garibi hatao', she implemented the draconian licence-raj blackmail system even more aggressively.



Why Trump Was Indicted (Again)

By ANKUSH KHARDORI

Believe it or not, President Joe Biden and Attorney General Merrick Garland did not enter office planning to criminally prosecute Donald Trump. They practically had to be dragged into it.

You could be forgiven for questioning this claim considering that Trump was just indicted by the Justice Department for the second time in a matter of months - this time based on his efforts to overturn the 2020 election - and that does not even count the superseding indictment that was filed late last week for allegedly mishandling sensitive government documents and obstructing the federal investigation.

Republicans and Trump supporters on Capitol Hill and in the conservative media have certainly spent much of the last year laying the groundwork for the tendentious narrative of a "weaponized" DOJ - literally going back to the day that Trump's home at Mar-a-Lago was searched by the FBI, before any of them could possibly have known what was going on in that case.

But the notion that Biden or Garland was somehow determined to prosecute Trump relies on a serious distortion of the public record. Indeed, that record vexed some observers, including me, who repeatedly expressed frustration over how the two men seemed to be going out of their way for most of the first two years of the administration to avoid investigating and potentially prosecuting Trump.

What changed?

The best explanation at the moment - the one that most neatly fits the available facts and a robust body of credible reporting - is that the work of the Jan. 6 select committee spurred the Justice Department to action.

The committee's investigation uncovered new and important information that was

impossible to ignore, and their hearings last summer generated intense and legitimate political and public pressure on DOJ and Garland. Ultimately, it appears that they no longer had a choice but to shift course and embark on the path that led to today's indictment, arguably the most serious yet facing Trump.

Even before the siege of the U.S. Capitol occurred on Jan. 6, 2021, it was apparent that a criminal investigation into Trump's



effort to hold on to power was amply warranted as soon as he left the White House. That was still true the following month, even after then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi began exploring the possibility of a congressional inquiry surrounding the events of Jan. 6. By itself, a Capitol Hill probe could achieve some public accountability, but it could not take advantage of the unique and considerable investigative tools available to federal prosecutors, nor could it replicate the powerful punitive and deterrent features of a well-grounded prosecution. At this point, there was serious anxiety among those of us who held the view that Trump's conduct needed to be closely examined

by DOJ. On the campaign trail and shortly after the election in November 2020, Biden had expressed real reservations about the political divisiveness of investigating Trump. He seemed to find a kindred spirit in Garland, who also appeared disinclined to pursue a politically controversial criminal investigation into Trump and those in his orbit concerning their push to overturn the election. By the end of 2021, it appeared

committee before hearings even began, but that was a serious mistake. More than 20 million Americans watched the first hearing in primetime, as committee Vice Chair Liz Cheney - a Republican who bucked her party's leadership and eventually lost her seat in Congress over her decision to lead the panel alongside committee Chair Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) - laid out a wide-ranging theory of the case against Trump.

As the hearings unfolded, there was testimony from former Attorney General Bill Barr, Trump 2020 campaign manager Bill Stepien and other Trump administration officials and campaign advisers indicating that Trump knew he had lost the 2020 election even as he began his monthslong campaign to overturn the results. There was firsthand testimony about the legally baseless effort to pressure then-Vice President Mike Pence to throw the election to Trump that featured White House lawyers and Pence advisers. There was also a hearing, among others, devoted to Trump's personal efforts to pressure - or threaten - state officials to swing their election results to him.

Given the one-sided nature of the committee's presentation, there were reasons to question whether all of the testimony provided the full picture of the underlying events. Still, it quickly became apparent that the committee had exposed some glaring shortcomings at the Justice Department. A series of stories last summer in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal reported that senior officials at the Justice Department were not aware of critical evidence that the committee had obtained, and in fact had been trying to avoid directly confronting Trump and his potential criminal liability.

that the Justice Department was effectively giving Trump a pass. There was no meaningful indication that prosecutors were seriously investigating the former president; instead they were focusing their efforts on the people present at the Capitol. The department also allowed state-level investigations against Trump to proceed despite the fact that the department usually insists on taking the lead in high-profile criminal investigations in which the underlying conduct clearly implicates federal law enforcement interests.

Then came the hearings of the Jan. 6 committee last summer, which shook the political world. Many pundits panned the



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