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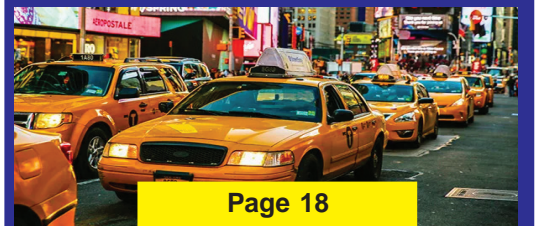


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# Tulsi Gabbard rejected Robert F Kennedy Jr's running-mate offer

***Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu-American lawmaker, turned down an offer to be Robert F Kennedy Jr's running mate for his independent presidential bid. She turned down the offer after "careful consideration".***

(Sai Bureau)- Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu-American lawmaker and 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, has revealed that she turned down an offer to be Robert F Kennedy Jr's running mate in his independent presidential bid. Tulsi Gabbard left the Democratic Party in 2022.

"I met with Kennedy several times, and we have become good friends. He asked if I would be his running mate. After careful consideration, I respectfully declined," ABC News quoted Gabbard as saying. Gabbard did not explain her reasons for rejecting the offer. This information was not previously disclosed. Kennedy had considered various individuals for the role, including former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura and TV host Mike Rowe.

Kennedy announced at a rally in Oakland, California, last week that he had chosen



Silicon Valley lawyer Nicole Shanahan as his running mate because of her youth and work in health and artificial intelligence.

"There were definitely meetings, but it didn't work out. We talked to a bunch of people. Tulsi's a rock star no matter

what," a person close to Kennedy told ABC News.

Tulsi Gabbard's name also popped up when former President Donald Trump was looking for a potential vice-presidential pick.

Gabbard, a former Hawaii Representative, ran an unsuccessful campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2019 before leaving the party three years later. Tulsi Gabbard has written a book titled 'For Love of Country: Leave the Democratic Party Behind', which is set to be released this month.

Gabbard criticised the Democratic Party upon announcing her departure, blaming "warmongers" in the party "who are driven by cowardly wokeness, who divide us by racialising every issue".

She has also clashed with the party's mainstream on issues such as Florida's controversial ban on LGBTQ+ topics in public school classrooms, which she supported.

During her 2019 White House run, Gabbard made history by becoming the first woman of colour since 1972 to secure a delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

## Indian PhD student and former NITI Aayog employee dies after being run over by truck in London



An Indian student died after being run over by a truck in London. The incident took place last week. The deceased has been identified as 33-year-old Cheistha Kochhar, a PhD student in London School of Economics. Kochhar, who passed away in London after an accident last week, had earlier worked at NITI Aayog. She was pursuing a PhD in Behavioural Science from LSE. She was the daughter of retired Lieutenant General Dr SP Kochhar, Director General at Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI). Former NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant posted the news of Kochhar's death on X (formerly Twitter).

"Cheistha Kochhar worked with me on the #LIFE programme in @NITIAayog. She was in the #Nudge unit and had gone to do her Ph.D in behavioural science at #LSE. Passed away in a terrible traffic incident while cycling in London. She was bright, brilliant & brave and always full of

life. Gone away too early. RIP," he said. Cheistha Kochhar was hit by a garbage truck on March 19 while she was cycling home. Her husband Prashant, who was cycling ahead of her during the accident, rushed her to the hospital. She could not be saved.

Her father, retired Lieutenant General Dr SP Kochhar, wrote an emotional LinkedIn post remembering his daughter.

"I am still in London trying to collect the remains of my daughter, Cheistha Kochhar. She was run over by a truck on 19 Mar while cycling back from LSE, where she was doing her PhD. It has devastated us and her large circle of friends," he wrote on X. Cheistha Kochhar had moved to London in September 2023, prior to which she resided in Gurugram, Haryana. Ahead of getting admission in LSE, she had completed her studies at Delhi University, Ashoka University, and the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago.



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# Special module to prepare kids for formal education in UP

(News Agency)-The Uttar Pradesh education department is carrying out a special drive to prepare kids, who have no access to formal pre-primary education, through a specially designed 12-week readiness programme. Under this, children, who have directly enrolled in Class One this year, will be taught pre-literacy, pre-numeracy and social skills through a series of activities.

This 12-week play-based module is a transition aid to help students ease into physical classes for the first time.

The programme, said a government spokesman, is aimed at filling gaps in pre-primary education.

"Children in schools will be



encouraged to learn while playing. The readiness programme follows NEP which

stresses pre-primary education. "Pre-schooling is a key strategy to equip young children with

school readiness. Special efforts are put by the department to strengthen the early childhood

education systems," said the spokesman. The state government is also introducing NCERT books for classes one and two from the new session. School readiness helps children to develop essential skills, knowledge and attitudes that are required to succeed in school and to continue learning later in life. Physical, cognitive, social and emotional development is an essential ingredient of school readiness. To reach out to the maximum number of kids, the department will also carry out the programme in Bal Vatikas. Besides, the first 15 days of the new session from April 1 will be spent in admissions and orientation programmes for parents.

## One killed, many injured in bee attack in UP's Etawah



(News Agency)-One person was killed and 15 others injured when a swarm of bees attacked them in Uttar Pradesh's Etawah, said police. The incident took place on Tuesday afternoon as a group of devotees, led by Radhe Shyam, were on their way to the Pilua Mahavir temple in Jaswant Nagar in Etawah. Accompanied

by the family members and fellow villagers, they were travelling in three tractors and two loaders towards their destination. As they reached the area between the villages of Putna Sakrauli and Singhawali, a swarm of bees attacked them. Panic ensued as the devotees

scrambled in all directions to escape the relentless onslaught of the bees.

Tulsi Ram, 70, a member of Radhe Shyam's family, died. He collapsed to the ground, overwhelmed by the sheer number of bee stings.

The swarm of bees targeted not only Tulsi Ram but also several other devotees, inflicting multiple stings on their bodies. The injured were rushed to the district hospital for urgent medical attention.

Among the injured were Radheshyam's son, Mahesh along with his children Ajay and Poonam, Mamta Devi, and her husband Dinesh.

Radhe Shyam's relatives Vivekanand, Rajendra, Shivam, Pradeep, Devendra, and Manish were also among those injured in the attack.

## Amit Shah to campaign in five TN LS constituencies on Thursday

(News Agency)-Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be in Tamil Nadu on Thursday to campaign for five NDA candidates. He will reach Tamil Nadu in the afternoon and attend four roadshows in four Lok Sabha constituencies —



Ramanathapuram, Tenkasi, Kanyakumari, and Theni. He will attend a rally at Anna Nagar in Madurai Lok Sabha seat to campaign for senior BJP leader, Raama Srinivasan.

Amit Shah will attend the roadshows of the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and NDA-backed independent

candidate, O.Panneerselvam (OPS) at Ramanathapuram. The senior BJP leader will also attend the roadshow of B. John Pandian, TMMK leader at Tenkasi.

The Union Home Minister will participate in the roadshow of senior BJP leader and former Union Minister, Pon Radhakrishnan at Kanyakumari. The Tamil Nadu unit of the BJP is expecting to wrest this seat from the Congress.

The Minister will attend a campaign programme of AMMK leader TTV Dhinalaran at Theni. Theni is the only Lok Sabha seat where the NDA alliance had won a seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu.

The Union Home Minister will return to Delhi on April 5th morning.

## LMC sets April 30 deadline for pet licences



The Lucknow Municipal Corporation (LMC) has set April 30 as the deadline for getting licences for pet dogs. Fines will be imposed on pet owners after the deadline. Abhinav Verma, animal welfare officer, said that currently there are approximately 5,500 registered dogs in the city, including 400 of 23 banned ferocious breeds.

For renewal of a licence or for getting a new licence, pet owners

are required to pay Rs 1,000 per dog and Rs 500 per cow by April 30, otherwise, they will have to pay a fine of Rs 500 between May 1 and May 31.

Further delay will incur an additional Rs 50 per day fine, retrospectively from April 1.

Verma emphasized that to obtain or renew a licence, owners must visit the Lucknow Municipal Corporation (LMC) head office and bring their pet's vaccination

card issued by a veterinary doctor.

Last year, the LMC collected Rs 50 lakh in licence fees. This year, they aim to collect Rs one crore. To achieve this, random checks will be conducted after April. Verma said that he is receiving queries from owners of 23 foreign dog breeds that have been banned regarding the renewal of their pets' licences.



## J&K's Gulmarg Gondola cable car project earns record Rs 110 cr in FY 2023-24



(News Agency)-Breaking all previous records, the Gulmarg ski resort Gondola cable car project has earned a revenue of Rs 110 crore in FY 2023-2024 ferrying over a million tourists and locals. As a result of the remarkable tourist footfall and because of it being the main attraction for adventure lovers, the Gondola cable car project has become a symbol for those visiting the ski resort.

J&K tourism department said on its official X-post handle, "Gulmarg Gondola soars to new heights! For the first time ever more than 1 million tourists took the Gulmarg Gondola Cable Car Ride in FY 2023-24. Revenue crosses more than 110 Crores. J&K Tourism sees unprecedented growth which continues to surpass all previous figures." Gulmarg Cable Car project

comprises two phases, one from Gulmarg resort to Kongdori and the second from Kongdori to Afarwat Peak. The first phase reaches an altitude of 8,694 feet, while the second ascends to the towering Afarwat peak at 13,058 feet. The project has 108 cabins and 18 towers designed to the minutest detail of safety standards specified for such projects in the World.

## PM Modi to address booth workers through NaMo app



(News Agency)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually address a 'NaMo' rally through the NaMo App to connect with booth-level cadres of the Bharatiya Janata Party across 10 Lok Sabha constituencies on Wednesday. PM Modi will also interact with some booth-level presidents, said the party's state General Secretary Sanjay Rai. The constituencies where PM Modi will connect with booth-level cadres include Sambhal, Badaun, Bareilly, Aonla, Etah, Hathras, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Firozabad, and Mainpuri — all scheduled for polls in the third phase on May 7. "At 1 p.m., Prime Minister Narendra Modi will connect with the workers through the NaMo App at 22,648 booths of all these Lok Sabha seats," Rai said. "He will address both booth-level committee members and 'panna pramukh' in-charges through the NaMo rally," he said. He further stated that the BJP leaders would also join this NaMo rally by visiting their respective booths. Sanjay Rai added that PM Modi would engage in discussions with some booth presidents about party activities.

## Divya Pahuja murder case: Police file chargesheet, cite altercation as reason

(News Agency)-The police in Gurugram on Tuesday filed a chargesheet at a court in connection with the murder of Divya Pahuja, a former model and ex-girlfriend of slain gangster Sandeep Gadoli. Divya Pahuja, a former Gurugram-based model, was murdered on January 2.

In the chargesheet, the police said that Divya was shot dead by Abhijeet, the owner of a hotel where she was staying, following an altercation, in an inebriated condition.

However, in the FIR, Divya's sister had also accused gangster Sandeep Gadoli's brother Brahm and his sister of being involved in the murder.

Seven persons involved in the murder have been arrested and sent to jail so far.

The police said that the role of gangster Sandeep Gadoli's family in the incident has not been revealed yet, and his family members would be asked to join the investigation.

During the police investigation, a notice has also been issued to Vijay, the operator of Hotel City Point where Divya was murdered by Abhijeet.

Vijay was accused of misleading the police team that reached the spot on the day of the incident. The police will also record his statement.

It has been alleged that had Vijay timely helped the police team in the

investigation, Divya's body could not have been taken out of the city.

During the investigation, the police came to know that an arms smuggler, Nadeem, had supplied the murder weapon to Abhijeet's PSO Parvesh, who then handed it over to Abhijeet, who killed Divya. The police team is still conducting raids in search of Nadeem.

Sandeep Gadoli was killed in an encounter by the Gurugram Police at a

hotel in Mumbai in 2016.

At that time, Divya was with Sandeep Gadoli.



The police personnel were accused of carrying out a "fake encounter", and Divya Pahuja was also involved in it. After being in jail for a long time, Divya Pahuja came out of jail only in 2023.

After getting bail, Divya Pahuja came in contact with Abhijeet Singh.

On January 2, Abhijeet along with his companions Balraj and Divya had

reached Hotel City Point where Abhijeet shot and killed Divya after an altercation when Divya refused to disclose her mobile phone password.

After killing Pahuja, Singh handed over her body to his associates Balraj and Ravi Banga by giving them a BMW car and Rs 10 lakh.

The accused had thrown Divya's body in the Bhakra Canal in Patiala, Punjab.

Divya's body was recovered from the Bhakra Canal in Fatehabad district of Haryana, 12 days after she was killed. So far, the police have arrested Balraj, Abhijeet Singh, his PSO Pravesh, his friend Megha, hotel employees Hemraj and Om Prakash in this murder case.

## Udhampur LS seat: Over 16.23 lakh voters to decide fate of 12 candidates

(News Agency)-The fate of 12 candidates will be decided by over 16.23 lakh voters of the Udhampur Lok Sabha seat in the first phase of General Elections to be held on April 19. The Udhampur parliamentary constituency is spread over five districts including Kishtwar, Doda, Ramban, Udhampur and Kathua. According to the office of the Returning Officer 4-Udhampur Parliamentary constituency, there are 16,23,195 registered voters in the

constituency, which includes 8,45,283 male; 7,77,899 female; and 13 transgender electors. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has set up 2,637 polling stations across the constituency, of which 2,457 are situated in rural areas and 180 in urban areas, ensuring accessibility and convenience for voters from all corners of the constituency. "Of notable mention is the inclusion of 23,637 Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) within the electoral roll,

encompassing 14,362 males and 9,275 females. The young voters, aged 18-19 years, stands at 45,825 male voters, 38,641 female voters and 2 transgender, totalling 84,468 potential first-time voters," said an official statement. "The constituency boasts a considerable elderly population, with 12,020 male voters and 13,612 female voters aged 80 and above, totalling 25,632 seasoned voters contributing to the electoral discourse," it added.



## Manmohan Singh to bid adieu to Rajya Sabha after over three decades



Narasimha Rao government. He was re-elected in 1995, 2001, 2007, and 2013.

He also unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha elections from South Delhi in 1999.

Manmohan Singh, who served as the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha from 1998-2004, chose to remain a member of the Upper House during his stint as the Prime Minister (2004-14)

His tenure as a Rajya Sabha member from Assam ended on June 14, 2019, but he was re-elected to the Upper House from Rajasthan on August 19, 2019, in a by-election, following the death of sitting BJP member Madan Lal Saini.

(News Agency)-Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (91) will retire from Rajya Sabha on Wednesday after an over three-decade-long, nearly continuous stint. The Congress leader was first elected to the Rajya Sabha from Assam in October 1991, after being appointed the Finance Minister in the P.V.

## Discussions underway to seek support of 10 INDIA bloc partners for Cong in K'taka: D.K. Shivakumar

(News Agency)-Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar has said that discussions are on to seek the support of 10 political parties of the INDIA bloc in the state. Addressing a joint press conference of the INDIA bloc parties on Tuesday, he said, "We are discussing the support of about 10 parties of the INDIA bloc in Karnataka. It is not important how many votes they bring to the table but we are more keen on the people who follow their ideology."

"Congress and JD-S fought the 2019 elections in Tumkur together. CPI party secured 17,000 votes and Deve Gowda lost the elections by a mere 12,000 voters. We don't want similar situation in 2024 elections. Hence, we want all the alliance partners to work unitedly. We are discussing this," he added. Shivakumar, who is also the Karnataka Congress chief, accused the Centre of levelling unnecessary allegations on opposition leaders. "We condemn these action in one voice. BJP is not giving a clear response in the election bonds case. They have given a notice to the Left parties for Rs 11 crore. Prime Minister Modi has to answer the people of the country on these things," he said.

He further claimed that the Congress will win more than 20 seats in Karnataka. "We will form a coordination committee of all INDIA bloc parties for better coordination. All alliance partners have given us a letter of support," he said.

## ED summons former CPI-M MP in Kerala co-operative bank scam

(News Agency)-The Enforcement Directorate (ED) issued notice to top CPI-M leader and former MP P.K. Biju, summoning him on Thursday in connection with the Karuvannur Cooperative Bank scam case. Incidentally, it was just a few days back that Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised tough action against people involved in the case.

A few CPI-M leaders and employees of the Trissur-based Karuvannur Cooperative Bank are already behind bars.

Biju has been summoned after it surfaced that he had close links with Satheesh Kumar, who has been behind bars in the case for a while.

Among those who already have been questioned by the ED in this case include senior CPI-M legislator and former State Cooperative Minister A.C.Moideen, former CPI-M legislator M.K.

Kannan, and CPI-M district Secretary M.M. Varghese.

Incidentally, the CPI-M had tasked Biju with probing the incident and he submitted his report to the top leadership. However, the ED, according to those in the know of things, has been able to get a copy of Biju's highly confidential report and this has left the ruling party shocked. Meanwhile, Varghese on Tuesday told the media that even though he has been asked by the ED to appear on Wednesday, it's unlikely that he will get time as he is busy

with the filing of nominations of the Left Front candidates in his district.

The ED is moving cautiously too and with the Lok Sabha polls around the corner, they have brought this scam to the notice of the Election Commission, Reserve Bank of India and the Union Finance Ministry.

## Three from Kerala found dead in Arunachal hotel

(News Agency)-Three people from Kerala, including two women, were found dead under mysterious circumstances in a hotel at Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Subansiri district on Tuesday,



police officials said. Police, quoting the hotel staff, said that Naveen Thomas, 39, from Kerala's Kottayam, had checked in at the hotel, along with his wife Devi B., 39, and their friend Arya B. Nair, 29, from Thiruvananthapuram on March 28. However, according to the hotel staff, the trio had not been seen since Monday and early on Tuesday, on suspicion, the

employees checked their room and found it locked from the inside. "The hotel staff broke the door to find that all the three guests dead," the official said. While the body of Nair was on the bed with her wrist cut with a blade, Devi B's body was found lying on the floor with cut marks on her neck as well as on the right side of the wrist. Thomas was found lying dead in the washroom with cut marks on his left wrist.

The post-mortem report is expected on Wednesday, the official said, adding that an extensive probe, considering all possible angles, was on in the mysterious incident. During the initial probe, it was known that there was a missing person FIR registered against Nair in Thiruvananthapuram.

## Gurugram eatery where 5 customers vomited blood after consuming mouth freshener sealed

The Food and Safety Department here has sealed an eatery and also cancelled its licence after five persons vomited blood after they consumed mouth freshener there after having dinner, the police said on Tuesday. The incident happened at La Forestta cafe-cum-restaurant here in Sector 90 on March 2, police said.

The five persons who vomited blood, instead of mouth

fresheners, were served dry ice which is dangerous for human



consumption and can also cause death.

Gurugram Food Safety Officer Ramesh Chauhan told VOICE:

"A reply was sought from the restaurant management within 15 days, but they failed to file a reply. Hence, we acted against them and their licence was cancelled."

In connection with the incident, the Gurugram Police had arrested the manager of the restaurant identified as

Gagandeep, a resident of Kirti Nagar in Delhi. He was, however, later granted bail.

The complainant, Ankit Kumar, had alleged that he had gone to the cafe with his wife Neha Sabarwal, and friends Manika, Deepak Arora and Himani. After having dinner, they were offered "mouth fresheners" by restaurant staff, which resulted in an immediate deterioration of their health.

According to Ankit, his wife and friends, who consumed the "mouth freshener", began to vomit and bleed from their mouths.

He also alleged that despite their worsening condition, the restaurant management and staff did not assist them, and later, they informed the police. A case under relevant sections of the IPC was registered against the cafe manager.



# 30 'suspected smugglers' escape from Lucknow airport

(News Agency)- About 30 passengers detained on suspicion of smuggling gold, managed to escape from the custody of customs officials at the Chaudhary Charan Singh airport here. The incident took place on Tuesday. Lucknow police along with the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and customs authorities have begun a massive hunt for the accused all of whom remain untraceable.

The suspects were detained at the airport following a tip-off from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) that 36 passengers were arriving with



illegal gold and cigarette sticks worth Rs 3.5 crore from the UAE.

The detained passengers disembarked from the Sharjah-Lucknow flight on Monday.

Custom officials seized Rs 25 lakh from them.

Sources said the standard operating procedure (SOP) says that passengers subject to suspicion must undergo an X-

ray examination, typically authorized by the court.

Six passengers, including a woman, complied with the procedure and admitted to concealing gold and cigarettes. They were detained and subsequently escorted to court," said a senior officer.

However, due to the large number of detainees, the process encountered delays as others awaited their turn for X-ray screenings. One of the suspects feigned illness on Tuesday evening and that prompted the other suspects to protest against the customs department. They alleged mistreatment and danger

to the life of the sick passenger. In the ensuing chaos, 30 suspects managed to flee out of the airport. The Customs officials alerted the police. DCP South Zone, Tej Swaroop Singh, said on Wednesday that a team was dispatched to the airport to address the situation. "We were informed of a law-and-order issue at the airport," he stated.

Police sources said they are awaiting a formal complaint from the customs department regarding the incident. Meanwhile, efforts are on to trace the escaped passengers.

## BJP nominee Arun Govil has movable assets worth Rs 3.19 crore



The 72-year-old BJP candidate is a resident of Versova in the Andheri West area in Mumbai.

Govil has Rs 3.75 lakh cash in hand, while his wife has a little over Rs 4.07 lakh cash in hand.

He has over Rs 1.03 crore in his bank account, while Shrilekha has more than Rs 80.43 lakh in her bank account.

The actor-turned-politician has invested over Rs 1.22 crore in shares and over Rs 1.43 crore in mutual funds. His wife has invested more than Rs 1.43 crore in shares.

Govil has jewellery weighing 220 gm worth Rs 10.93 lakh, while Shrilekha has jewellery weighing 600 gm worth Rs 32.89 lakh. Govil also owns a plot in Pune, while his wife has a flat in Andheri West.

(News Agency)- Actor Arun Govil, the BJP candidate for the Meerut Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh, has moveable assets worth over Rs 3.19 crore, while his wife Shrilekha Govil has moveable assets worth over Rs 2.76 crore. He owns a Mercedes worth Rs 62.99 lakh.

As per the assets declared by him during the filing of his nomination papers, the worth of total immovable assets of Govil is over Rs 5.67 crore, while that of Shrilekha is more than Rs 2.80 crore.

The BJP candidate owes over Rs 14.64 lakh as car loan.

## Webcasting will be done in each polling booth in Bengal this time

(News Agency)-The Election Commission of India has decided to conduct webcasting in each polling booth in West Bengal for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls to be held in seven phases from April 19 to June 1. Sources in the office of the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said that besides webcasting, assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will also be taken to prevent election malpractices in the booths.

It needs to be mentioned here that the poll panel has already announced its decision to deploy as many as 920 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel in West Bengal for the seven-phase polls, the highest among all Indian states.

During his visit to West Bengal before the election dates were announced, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar hinted at ensuring maximum webcasting coverage for the Lok Sabha



polls in the state.

During the 2021 Assembly elections in West Bengal, around 51 per cent of the polling stations were covered under webcasting. The total number of polling booths in West Bengal this time is 80,453, higher than the figures of 79,501 in the last elections.

## India again objects to China's attempts to rename places in Arunachal

(News Agency)-The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) as well as Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam on Tuesday strongly condemned China for renaming some places in India's easternmost state of Arunachal Pradesh. In response to media queries about renaming places in Arunachal Pradesh by China, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in Delhi that China has persisted with its senseless attempts to rename places in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

"We firmly reject such attempts. Assigning invented names will not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India," Jaiswal said.



Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, slamming China, posted on X: "Another gimmick from China. Being a proud citizen of Bharat and a native of Arunachal Pradesh, I strongly condemn this act of naming places within Arunachal Pradesh which have been an inalienable integral part of India. Proud citizens and patriots of Arunachal Pradesh are rejecting such antics." Despite India's strong objection to these renaming attempts in the past, China on Monday reportedly released a fourth list of 30 new names for various places in Arunachal Pradesh. Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday suggested that India should counter by assigning its own names of 60 places in "Tibetan areas of China".



## US Presidential Polls: Trump or Biden, India's Stakes Are Higher Than Ever

Scores of countries around the world are set to go to polls this year. The most consequential elections among those, to my mind however, will be the one in November in the US, given the global pre-eminence of the country.

Last month, it became clear that the 2024 US election will be fought between the incumbent president, Joe Biden of the Democratic Party, and Donald Trump, the opposition Republican Party nominee. Robert Kennedy Jr is not being seen as a serious contender, though the worry is that he may eat into Biden's votes. Opinion polls show that Trump has a slight edge, but predicting who will be the President of the United States is an exercise fraught with danger.

### An Inflexion Point For The World

These polls, however, come at a major inflexion point globally. There are the Russia-Ukraine and Gaza wars for one, and attendant secondary problems like the shortage of food, fuel and fertilizer, and the Houthis targeting shipping in the Red Sea. The unpredictability of China and its Taiwan posturing add to the uncertainties, as does Beijing's desire to redraw the global architecture. On the economic front, the International Monetary Fund predicts that the growth momentum will remain "tepid" in 2024.

Against these imponderables, the US polls will be most intently watched. India, which itself is preparing for general elections, is also keeping a close eye. Once, the popular belief had been that Republican presidents are better for India given their focus on national security and little interest in issues like human rights and climate change. This assumption is simplistic, even erroneous. Consider this: Republican President Richard Nixon was unsympathetic to India's situation during the East Pakistan crisis in 1971, given that his priority at the time was to ensure a rapprochement with China, for which the conduit was Pakistan. Another Republican President, Ronald Reagan, transferred F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan, the frontline state in the war to dislodge the Soviets from Afghanistan. It was during Reagan's watch that Mujahideen fighters were trained for the proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, which eventually had serious implications for India.

### Growing India-US Ties

Post the Cold War, India-US ties underwent a transformation. Today, the momentum is such that the argument that one US president might be better for India than another, is redundant. That India is a natural partner for the US is an opinion endorsed by current US politicians across the political divide. On its part, the US began to view India as a country with security interests paralleling its own, says former US diplomat Teresita C. Schaffer in her 2009 book India and the United

States in the 21st Century: Reinventing Partnership. "The growing economic and military power of China enhanced US interest in the continent's other rising power. And India's economic growth, now one of the fastest in the world, made India an interesting economic partner in its own right," she writes.

The days when India and the US were described as "estranged democracies" are gone. The two are now "engaged democracies". The US and India, who have overcome "the hesitations of history" - as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his speech to the US Congress in 2016 - are now in a "Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership" that is "anchored in a new level of trust and mutual understanding" (2023 India-US joint statement). Yes, there are differences, but these are now 'managed' mostly behind closed doors. Differences over the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan, India's oil imports from Russia in the middle of the Ukraine conflict, the controversy over alleged Indian involvement in the killing of Khalistani figure Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, India's record on human rights, and, more recently, the US's remarks on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, are a few examples of issues that entered the public domain.

### What A Biden Presidency Would Mean

Should we see four more years of Biden, it will mean continuity in policy with a familiar set of interlocutors in Washington. Under Biden, ties have seen a remarkable consolidation in areas like strategic technology and defence. The joint statement issued after PM Modi's US visit in June last year hailed the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), which promotes cooperation in areas like AI, quantum computing, semiconductors and wireless telecommunication. Following the iCET launch, the Idaho-based memory chipmaker Micron Technologies in September 2023 laid the foundation for building its first semiconductor plant in Gujarat. The US has also been silently pushing investment by foreign chipmakers in India. Last month, India greenlighted three projects, including a semiconductor fabrication plant and two assembly units, to be jointly developed by local conglomerates and firms from Japan, Taiwan and Thailand. In defence, there has been tangible forward movement. In June 2023, India and the US announced a pact between Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and GE Aerospace to produce fighter jet engines for the Indian Air Force. It involves around 75% technology transfer to HAL and is expected to boost the export prospects of India's indigenous Tejas fighter aircraft.

By Elizabeth Roche

## China's growing influence in Indian Ocean is worrying. It harms the region's stability

American naval officer and historian Alfred Mahan popularly said: "Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia. This ocean will be the key to the seven seas in the 21st Century. The destiny of the world will be decided on its water". This oft-cited statement remains a timeless adage, more pertinent than ever in light of China's activities in the Indian Ocean region.

China's increasing military presence and expanding influence in the Indian Ocean have understandably caused concern in countries like India, Australia and the United States. The establishment of China's military base in East Africa's Djibouti in 2017 alongside the development of dual-use facilities in Pakistan's Gwadar unequivocally highlights its aspiration to dominate the region. Since the late 2010s, China has been deploying covert spy ships disguised as ocean research vessels near strategic locations like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Maldives. Reports by think tanks and media houses validate these concerns. They highlight China's systematic endeavours to strengthen its naval capacities for blue water supremacy, as well as the country's attempt to expand its influence into critical areas while fortifying its maritime capabilities. Of particular note is China's possession of the world's largest fleet of dual-purpose civilian research vessels, ostensibly deployed for scientific and commercial pursuits but also aligned with its broader strategic objectives.

China-India strategic contest

India was especially disturbed by the presence of the Yuan Wang 5, a Chinese ballistic missile and satellite tracking and

survey ship, at Sri Lanka's Hambantota port. The 99-year lease of Hambantota to China, amid Sri Lanka's economic challenges, underscored Beijing's weaponisation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to advance its interests in the Indian Ocean region. Wuhan University's Liang Meng underscored the interplay between the BRI and the imperative of fostering relationships with the island and littoral nations of the Indian Ocean.

In addition to the Yuan Wang 5, the Xiang Yang Hong 3 was docked at Malé last month. The Xiang Yang Hong 1 was spotted in the Bay of Bengal earlier this month as India tested two nuclear-capable ballistic missiles: the K4 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) and the Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV)-equipped Agni V.

Recently, India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar emphasised that the differences between India and China go beyond the border dispute. This unquestionably expands to the Indian Ocean Region. In September last year, the EAM had stated: "There's been a very sharp increase in the size of the Chinese navy [and deployment in the Indian Ocean Region]...from an Indian point of view, it is very reasonable for us to prepare for a far greater Chinese presence than we have seen before." Both India and China have been competing for influence within the maritime domain. And this rivalry is prompting both countries to actively engage with smaller states in the Indian Ocean region.

By SANA HASHMI



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

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P.O Box 7005 Hicksville New York 11801

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# Modi's War on Corruption:

## Time to Stop Defaming the Enforcement Directorate

By: Sanju Verma

The Enforcement Directorate (ED), in the last few years, has been in the eye of a storm, with India's debilitated Opposition blaming it for all its woes. Is the ED draconian? Has it been targeting the Opposition unfairly? Let the truth be told. The Opposition has failed miserably to match Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unrelenting popularity which shows no signs of waning. The ED is being used merely as a lame excuse by the Opposition to justify its resounding electoral losses in one election after another.

Let it be known that the ED has been doing a phenomenal job with full integrity. With reference to the ED's sweeping powers, the Supreme Court on April 5, 2023, refused to entertain a petition filed by fourteen political parties from the Opposition space. These parties alleged that central investigating agencies such as the ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) were being weaponised by the Modi government to clamp down on dissent, by arresting Opposition leaders. This verdict, therefore, came as a stinging slap on a combined Opposition that had the gall to doubt the bona fides of our premier probe agencies and then had the audacity to file such a petition in the apex court. Surely, the Congress and these Opposition parties were caught on the wrong foot when the Supreme Court said that political leaders cannot claim a higher immunity than ordinary citizens and hence a special set of guidelines cannot be issued for them. Imagine the entitlement of the Opposition that it even dared to demand that politicians are a privileged class and need to be treated with kid gloves. The BJP on the other hand, has always stood for inclusivity and has never played the politics of entitlement, bordering on narcissism.

Abhishek Manu Singhvi, the lawyer for the Opposition, eventually had to eat humble pie. He took the court through certain statistics to argue that centrally controlled investigating agencies are being increasingly deployed in a 'selective and targeted' manner against political opponents. He argued that while between 2004 and 2014, of the 72 political leaders investigated by the CBI, 43 were from the Opposition, now, this same figure has risen to over 95 per cent. The same pattern, he alleged, is reflected in ED's investigations as well, with the proportion of Opposition leaders from the total number of politicians investigated rising from 54 per cent (before 2014) to 95 per cent (after 2014). After outlining the said figures, Singhvi argued that there is a skewed application of CBI and ED



jurisdictions and the skewed application of law has a chilling effect on our democracy. Well, Singhvi clearly suffers from selective amnesia, because if democracy has indeed ever been threatened in India, it was only when the Congress regime was in power, including the dark era of emergency under the draconian Indira Gandhi, from 1975 to 1977.

"Are you saying that because of these statistics, there should be immunity from investigation?" Chief Justice Chandrachud asked Singhvi in the April 2023 hearing. Political leaders can't claim higher immunity, the CJI further added, saying, "The problem with this petition is that you are trying to extrapolate statistics into guidelines, where the statistics only apply to politicians. But, we cannot have guidelines exclusively for politicians." Singhvi, in a futile bid to score some brownie points for his petitioners, added, "Mass arrests are a threat to democracy. It is a sign of authoritarianism. The process becomes the punishment." To this absurd and devious charge by Singhvi, the CJI went on to say, "Political leaders stand absolutely on the same standing as the citizens of the country. They do not claim a higher identity. How can there be a different set of procedures for them?"

Chief Justice Chandrachud in April 2023 also, while asking the Opposition/ petitioners to come back with specific instances, said that the top court could not lay down abstract guidelines, adding, "It would be dangerous to formulate general guidelines in the absence of such specific facts." However, clearly, the biggest rebuttal and a clear snub to the 14 Opposition parties came when the CJI told Singhvi, "When you say that space for Opposition has shrunk, the remedy is in that space, the political space. Not the

court." With those words, the CJI called out the bluff of India's electorally vanquished Opposition which was desperately trying to find a judicial remedy to a political matter, after repeatedly losing elections at the hustings. This petition by Singhvi, on behalf of the Opposition, was put in the trash can by the apex court, sending out a loud and clear message that any attempts to de-legitimise the ED and CBI or the Modi government's war against corruption, will not find any takers in the highest echelons of the judiciary, unless backed by hard facts.

What the Congress and the TMC say is of little relevance because the mother-son duo of Sonia and Rahul Gandhi are out on bail in the National Herald scam. They have still not been given a clean chit. Again, Abhishek Banerjee, Mamata Banerjee's nephew, is also out on bail in the ongoing Cash for Jobs scam. The limited point is this—for decades together, the Opposition-led parties, particularly the Congress which ruled India for 54 out of the first 67 years in post-independent India, have been guilty of institutionalising corruption. PM Modi after taking charge in 2014 started the process of clean, transparent and accountable politics, with zero tolerance for corruption. And it is precisely this nonsense attitude of PM Modi that has completely unnerved and rattled the Opposition. Speaking of PM Modi's unrelenting anti-corruption crusade, besides the April 5, 2023 verdict which came as a shot in the arm for the Modi government, even back in July 2022, the apex court upheld the constitutional validity of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002, thereby dismantling the puerile hopes of a debilitated Opposition which wanted

PMLA provisions to be diluted. The verdict relied on a judgement given earlier, under Vijay Madanlal Choudhary versus Union of India. It was pronounced by a bench of Justices AM Khanwilkar, Dinesh Maheshwari and CT Ravikumar on a batch of 241 petitions challenging the validity of the law. The court upheld the validity of Sections 3 (definition of money laundering), 5 (attachment of property), 8(4) (taking possession of attached property), 17 (search and seizure), 18 (search of persons), 19 (powers of arrest), 24 (reverse burden of proof), 44 (offences triable by special court), 45 (offences being cognizable and non-bailable). The court also held that the supply of Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) under PMLA proceedings by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is not mandatory, since ECIR is an internal document and cannot be equated to a First Information Report (FIR). Supply of ECIR to the accused is not mandatory and only disclosure of reasons for arrest to the accused, during the arrest is enough. Even the ED manual is not to be published since it is an internal document, the court held. It also rejected the argument about the proportionality of punishment under the PMLA Act, with respect to scheduled offences as wholly "unfounded". The court added that the stringent conditions for bail under the PMLA Act are legal and not arbitrary. Enforcement Directorate, Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials, and not 'police' statements recorded during an inquiry are valid evidence, the Court added, in a stinging rebuttal to Modi baiters and the Opposition which has been making frivolous allegations about the supposed high handedness of the ED. This landmark judgement by the Supreme Court upholding powers of the ED under PMLA came at a time when the Congress party had been desperately trying to shield the Gandhi dynasty from persistent ED summons to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi who are out on bail in the National Herald money laundering scam. Sonia's lackey, P Chidambaram, is also out on bail in the INX Media scam. What an irony that while the entire top brass of the Congress is out on bail in either money laundering or tax evasion charges, including the much-maligned Deputy CM of Karnataka, DK Shivakumar, Rahul Gandhi and his minions preach about ethics and integrity to all and sundry. Besides the Congress, Mamata Banerjee's TMC has been floundering, with key TMC heavyweights like Partha Chatterjee convicted in the SSC scam, Anubrata Mondal convicted in the Cattle scam and many others from the TMC behind bars.



## BJP is going after AAP not because it's opposed to it but because they're too similar

By **DILIP MANDAL**

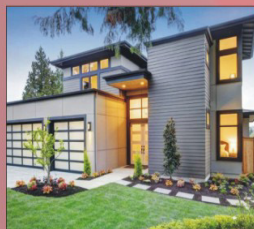
The Aam Aadmi Party seems to be in disarray. Despite sharing identical views on ideological issues such as the Ram Mandir, Article 370, the Economically Weaker Section or EWS quota, and the demonisation of Tablighi Jamaat during the Covid-19 pandemic, why is the Bharatiya Janata Party trying to destroy the AAP? Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal flaunts his religiosity quite overtly. At the same time, why is the BJP not acting aggressively, or at least decisively, against its ideological foes, including the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Rashtriya Janata Dal, or Communist Party of India (Marxist)? Why don't we see the same vengeance by the BJP against these parties?

Even in the case of the Congress, the BJP government has not put any prominent leader behind bars other than P Chidambaram. But I see Chidambaram's case as a personal score-settling by Union Minister Amit Shah rather than a political act. Those who know will understand what I am inferring. Putting leaders under legal scrutiny and sending them to jail to settle political scores is not unique to any political party or government in India. At different points in time, leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan, Indira Gandhi, Charan Singh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, J Jayalalithaa, M Karunanidhi, Sharad Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Amit Shah, Parkash Singh Badal, and Shibu Soren were sent to jail for various reasons. The reasons vary from sedition to corruption charges or some other sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or some special Act. But the underlying reason most of the time was political or personal vendetta. In the case of AAP leaders, the reason for arrest is corruption. In India, and perhaps in other countries as well, contesting an election is a costly business, and parties and leaders accumulate money for this purpose too. In most cases, the methods for accumulating money are shoddy or at least suspicious. It's true for most of the political parties. So when a government takes action against a political party or leader on charges of corruption, it may be right, but the choice in acting against a specific party or leader is always political. Why is BJP going after AAP? The BJP is going after the AAP not because it is

ideologically opposed to it but because it is ideologically close to it. That makes it difficult for the two parties to operate, as they have the same arena and voters with similar choices. If you just remove the Savarkarite core from the BJP, it looks quite similar to the AAP. Or if you add aggressive Hindu-Muslim binary politics to the AAP (the soft part it always has), it will look like the BJP.



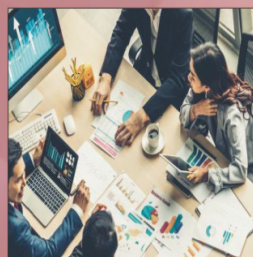
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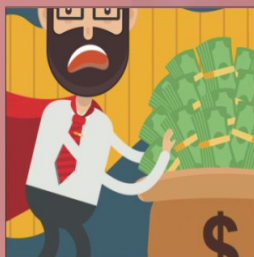
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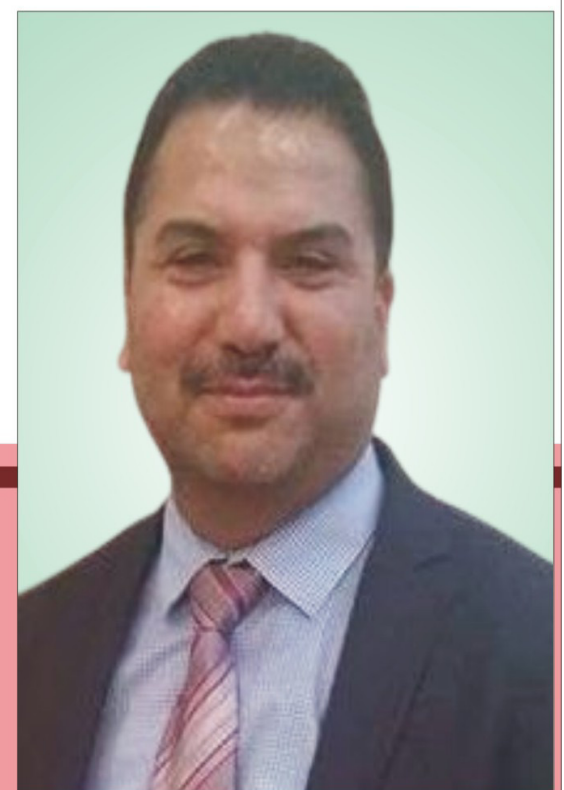
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# Don Mukhtar Ansari's Demise Births Disturbing Questions About Political Morality

By: Rahul Shivshankar

Pardon the lack of objectivity. But it speaks volumes about the moral bankruptcy of some if a murderous, entitled convicted gangster-politician's death has become a rallying point for their politics.

No sooner had Mukhtar Ansari died of a cardiac arrest that parties opposed to the BJP in Uttar Pradesh were falling over each other to pay credence to an unsubstantiated claim that Ansari was poisoned by the Yogi Adityanath government.

The Opposition could have at least paused to note that the wild claims were originally made by the gangster's family — almost all of whom are history sheeters. Wasn't the conflict of interest apparent to the Opposition? Or did political expediency impel (Ansari had immense political influence on Muslims voters in Uttar Pradesh) the Opposition to glorify him in death?

Indeed, at least one leading state-based party referred to him as a martyr — a convenient posthumous bequeathment designed to consolidate its traditional vote base. Expediency, of course, may be only one reason; loyalty could be the



other. It's no secret that Ansari has enjoyed political patronage, which meant he was beyond the reach of the long arm of the law for most of his life. Which is why even though the first criminal case was registered against him at the age of 17, and the first murder case was

registered against him when he was 25, Ansari was only convicted when he turned 61. In the interim, he committed 60 serious crimes that included 16 murders.

For four decades, Ansari reigned supreme as terrorist-in-chief so

cossetted by obliging politicians — especially those almost always inimical to the BJP — that even when an honest policeman dared to prosecute him, the officer in question ended up in jail.

Ansari's political benefactors stood solidly behind him even when he was eventually convicted.

Here's an illustration. Ansari was lodged in Punjab's Ropar Jail under the Congress government till April 2021.

This two-year jail stint sparked a controversy. When the Congress lost the elections to the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab, the latter ordered the recovery of Rs 55 lakh from the erstwhile Congress government to pay the bills of a senior lawyer called Dushyant Dave. Dave was engaged by the Congress government to make out a legal case to ensure Ansari would remain in Ropar jail even though his crimes were committed in Uttar Pradesh. Ansari knew that life in prison would be a lot tougher under the BJP's Yogi Adityanath government. Creature comforts for one would be denied.

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# America Should Know Fellow Democracies Must Be Respected, And Not Scorned

By: Kanwal Sibal

Western countries have dominated the rest of the world for centuries. This has ingrained in them some pernicious habits of lecturing the non-Western world, assuming superior moral positions, imposing their own ways of thinking on them, expecting them to accept their political, economic and social models, and so on.

The West still dominates global institutions established after World War II. The Western countries are the richest, the most advanced in technology, the strongest militarily, and they control the international media. This gives them the tools to exert power over the non-Western world, intervene militarily to oust governments or even change the maps of countries, employ the tools of sanctions to coerce others to fall in line with their policies, intervene in the internal affairs of other countries on grounds of promotion of human rights, democracy and protection of minorities.

The dominant Western powers have lost the capacity to introspect about the deficiencies in their own polities and societies, the glaring double standards that animate their external policies, the willingness to discard their "values based" foreign policies if they clash with their parochial national interests. Lately, of course, the challenge to the power of the West has grown. The biggest challenge has come from China, a country that Western capital built up on the assumption it could be co-opted in the West-dominated international system. China's huge store of cheap labour and its massive market drove the West's investment in China, trade with it and use of the country as an export base. Its authoritarian government provided the assurance that they could do business and invest without having to worry about trade unions, rights of workers, strikes, questioning by local interests, and the like.

It was a win-win formula which the Chinese now repeat on every occasion to promote cooperation with the West in the face of moves by Western governments to reduce over dependence on China. China's mercantilist policies, its unfair trade practices, forced technology transfers, the systematic control over critical raw materials and technologies that China has acquired through state controlled industrial policies has created a backlash. More than that, it is China's open challenge to the dominating power of the US in the international system that has led to the West



seeking to "re-shore" manufacturing, pursue "de-risking strategies", questioning globalisation and imposing restrictions on technology transfer to China, and so on. Relations between the West and Russia have collapsed over the Ukraine conflict, although it was clear for some time that treating Russia as a security threat, seeking democratisation of Russia before it could be considered a worthy partner of the West, accusing it of human rights violations, promoting colour revolutions in Russia's periphery to instigate a similar revolution in Russia, portended a break-down of the West's ties with Moscow.

Unlike in the case of China, the West, led by the US has intervened in Russia's internal affairs, promoting select opposition leaders, as in the case of Navalny, to put pressure on President Putin internally.

The West's international agenda of promoting democracy, protecting minorities, highlighting human rights violations, and markets, and so on, has not been limited to what it calls "authoritarian" regimes. It is extended to even friendly democracies like India.

Ever since Prime Minister Modi has come to power, even as the West has engaged India and built productive ties, it has not been able to shed its ingrained patronising habits of lecturing India, accusing it of violating human rights, democratic backsliding, persecution of minorities, and so on. This is largely done by the mainstream press, the think tanks and their associated journals, academics, NGOs, etc. At the official level, the US State Department in its annual report on human rights at the global level highlights violations of human rights in India. Other than this, quite often

the State Department comments on sporadic incidents in India of communal tensions, rioting, and legislation seen as anti-minority such as the CAA, etc. The latest provocation comes from Germany which gratuitously commented on the arrest of Kejriwal by the ED, patronisingly asking for the standards relating to independence of judiciary and basic democratic principles to be applied to his case, and for him to get a fair and impartial trial and make use of all available legal avenues without restriction as well. This implies that all this may not be available in the normal course. This is a presumptuous statement that calls into question India's political and legal system. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) summoned the German Deputy Chief of Mission to lodge a strong protest which was made public. The US State Department then jumped into the fray by also patronisingly "encouraging" a fair and transparent trial of Kejriwal by India. This was in response to an emailed question, which suggested that the US was keen to quickly back its ally Germany, ignoring that India had already made public its strong displeasure to Germany for interfering in our judicial process etc. The State Department showed scant regard for India's legitimate annoyance at Germany's unwarranted interference in our internal affairs.

If India had ignored the offensive remark by the US, it would have meant that we had one standard for Germany and another for the US, which is why for the same provocation a senior US diplomat was called in by the MEA for a protest. Surprisingly, the US State Department instead of backing off as Germany has

done, doubled down on its earlier intrusive comment by not only calling for a fair and transparent trial of Kejriwal but also added the issue of hampering electioneering by the Congress party by the closure of its bank accounts.

The State Department was fully aware that by its comments it was supporting the opposition parties in the run up to the elections, which made its interference openly politically partisan. It is now widely accepted that Modi and the BJP will come back to power in the coming elections. Normally any country would not like to create a misunderstanding with a leadership likely to come to power by showing support for the opposition. This is standard book diplomacy. Yet, the State Department has not hesitated to show that they have special interest in Kejriwal and the Congress party.

A concerted campaign against India has been set in motion by foreign lobbies in connivance with lobbies in India after the Kejriwal arrest. The Economist and Le Monde Diplomatique of France have questioned in their latest issues the direction the Indian democracy is taking. India can easily retort by showing the mirror to the US, Germany and others about the problems these countries face at home with regard to treatment of minorities, rise of right wing forces, media restrictions (access to Russian media is banned), and general recourse to double standards in their external policies. The judiciary in the US is highly politicised. The efforts being made to legally hound Trump and prevent him from fighting the presidential election is there to see. The US is very watchful and intolerant about foreign interference in its election process. But there is nothing to be gained by resorting to polemics with countries we consider as friends and partners. The need is to build trust, not undermine it. We respect their democracies and leave their leadership to deal with internal problems. We have no desire to give lessons to them. We expect them to also follow this sensible and friendly course, especially as India is managing, without any historical parallel, the most populous democracy in the world with its incomparable diversity and centuries of external exploitation.



# India And United States: An Old Friend, An Older Frenemy



**By: Minhaz Merchant**

In the movie *Godfather 2*, Michael Corleone says, "Keep your friends close, your enemies closer."

Apply that to contemporary geopolitics. India is surrounded by both friends and enemies. Complicating matters is a category Don Corleone hadn't thought of—frenemies.

## FLUCTUATING TIES OVER THE YEARS

The United States is an old friend but an older frenemy. During India's freedom movement, the US was a steadfast friend. US President Franklin Roosevelt lectured British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on the contradiction of fighting Nazi fascism in Germany while practising colonial fascism in India.

After Independence, America remained a friend but drifted apart from India as India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru leant towards the Soviet

Union, followed socialist economic policies, and became a founder of the non-aligned movement (NAM). By the 1970s, Washington under Nixon-Kissinger had turned into a frenemy, tilting towards Pakistan in the Bangladesh war and trying to intimidate India by sending the Seventh Fleet into the Bay of Bengal. India and America restored the relationship after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's successful visit to Washington in 1985. The friendship solidified in the 2000s under the George W Bush administration following the India-US nuclear deal.

The US regarded India as a strong but not mission-critical ally. The rise of China over the past ten years changed the dynamic.

In the parabolic arc from the Middle East to the South China Sea, only India provided the US with the geostrategic depth to counter China in the Indo-Pacific. However, a problem arises in a relationship when one

partner seeks equality with the other dominant partner. That is what we saw playing out in the kerfuffle between Washington and New Delhi over India's internal politics.

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller had two options when a Bangladeshi journalist with ties to George Soros-funded NGOs asked him about the US position on Arvind Kejriwal's arrest. He could have said the US does not comment on the internal affairs of other sovereign nations. Instead, he said: "We continue to follow these actions closely, including the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal. We encourage fair, transparent and timely legal processes for each of these issues."

India's response was unusually curt. The ministry of external affairs (MEA) under minister S Jaishankar does not mince words these days. It told the US to mind its own business. It had said the same to Germany the day before.

To make sure the message was understood, a senior diplomat from the US embassy was summoned to the MEA and given a polite dressing down.

After a further back-and-forth between the US State Department, a United Nations spokesperson, and a strong rebuttal by India's Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, the matter settled down.

## INDISPENSABLE INDIA?

For neo-con elements in the Joe Biden administration, India's geostrategic importance as a counterweight to China is a source of occasional frustration. Washington likes obedient allies. It does not care too much for those who follow an independent geopolitical path as India does. And yet, Washington is practical. It knows it has to live with a rising India in the long term. It knows that India will be the world's third-largest economy by 2028. Grin and bear it, say Biden's advisors.

For India, China poses a more

serious concern. It is obviously neither a friend nor a frenemy — just simply an enemy. But cracks in its hostility to India are showing. At a recent media event, a senior Chinese embassy diplomat asked the audience to "visit China and experience Chinese friendship". Beijing has watched with interest the terse exchange between Delhi and Washington over Kejriwal's arrest and the Congress's tax notices. China's President Xi Jinping tried hard between 2014 and 2019 to wean India away from the US geopolitical orbit. Three summits between Xi and Modi in Ahmedabad, Wuhan, and Mahabalipuram during these five years failed to dilute India's strategic partnership with the US.

The four-year-long standoff from April 2020 in east Ladakh, months after the Mahabalipuram summit, is an expression of Chinese anger at its failure to stall the India-US strategic partnership.

Washington was pleased with this outcome. It gave Modi a state reception in June 2023 and helped make India's G20 presidency a success.

But even as Biden travelled to New Delhi for the G20 Summit in September 2023, tensions had begun to build in the relationship.

The murder-for-hire allegations against fugitives in Canada and the US were only a ruse. The problem is America likes to be in absolute control of its strategic partnerships. In NATO, with its European allies, it has the last word. In East Asia, with its Japanese and Korean allies, it calls the shots. In West Asia, with its Gulf Arab allies, America is the unquestioned leader.

India is more complicated. For the first time in decades, it is an ally that the US needs at least as much as the ally needs the US. America's paranoia over a strengthening China-Russia-Iran-North Korea axis makes it imperative to have a strong, dependable ally in the region.



# Dragon Shadow Over Arunachal and the One-China Myth

By: Utpal Kumar

Centuries before the Christian Era, Central and West Asia were predominantly Sanskrit cultures. And they continued to flourish till the advent of Islam. Such has been the affinity and closeness that Kumarajiva (344-413 AD), a foremost Sanskrit scholar and translator, studied Buddhism in Kashmir, but for Vedas, he chose to visit Kashgar, today's Xinjiang region, located near China's border with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The story of Kumarajiva, born to a Kashmiri father and a Kuchean mother, is a stark reminder of not just India's deep connection with the Central Asian region but also how much its civilisational/cultural spread has shrunk in the last two millennia. For those not

well averse with India's real history, Kucha, in the northern Tarim basin, was a centre of Buddhist learning, and it was from here that Indian music had spread to China. Here it needs to be mentioned that Yarkand and Khotan (which tradition says was built by King Ashoka's son Kutsan) in northern Tarim valley were centres of Mahayana Buddhism, while Kashgar, Kucha and Turfan were the hub of



Hinayana Buddhism. Kumarajiva's story is significant because it singlehandedly — and quite forcefully — brings out in the open the civilisational/cultural footprints of Hindu/Buddhist India. Historically and civilisationally, thus, India's claim over Tibet and Xinjiang has been far stronger than China's.

Cut to March 2024, China renewed its claim over

Arunachal Pradesh for the fourth time within a month, saying the state has "always been" its territory. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said, "Zangnan (the Chinese name for Arunachal Pradesh) in the eastern sector has always been China's territory." China had all along exercised effective

administrative jurisdiction over the area "until India's illegal

occupation", he said, claiming this as a "basic fact that cannot be denied". "In 1987, India formed the so-called 'Arunachal Pradesh' on China's territory under India's illegal occupation. China issued a statement right then to firmly oppose it and stress that India's move was illegal and null and void. China's position remains unchanged," Lin continued. You May Like External

affairs minister S Jaishankar took the Chinese challenge head-on, denouncing its repeated claims on Arunachal Pradesh as "ludicrous" and that the northeastern state was a "natural part of India".

Jaishankar is right in calling China's claim "ludicrous" and ahistorical. Bharat should, therefore, not waste its energies in telling the "deaf" what's obvious. Instead, the time has come for the Narendra Modi government, under the able generalship of S Jaishankar, to open a new front: To cross the diplomatic Lakshman Rekha unilaterally drawn by the Indian leadership in 1949 and question the one-China policy.

In fact, historically, as the Kumarajiva saga suggests, India's claims over Tibet and Xinjiang are far stronger and credible than China's. But then Jaishankar and his team need to realise that this Chinese characteristic of loot and scoot of both resources and territories isn't an aberration. Unlike the China of the past, which saw its relationship with Bharat in a guru-shishya terminology, the communist dispensation of the day has long discarded such civilisational mores.

## Elections 2024: Why Gujarat Continues To Be BJP's Fortress

By Bharti Mishra Nath

Gujarat has been a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) bastion ever since the party's historic win in the state in 1995. For the upcoming general elections, the party is confident that it will retain all 26 Lok Sabha seats in the state. The Congress is set to contest 24 seats, while the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has fielded candidates in Bharuch and Bhavnagar. In the 2022 state assembly polls, the BJP had secured a record 156 out of 182 seats. This was when the Congress and the AAP were contesting separately. The results and the campaign underlined the fact that 'Brand Modi' was unshaken and that Prime Minister Narendra Modi continued to be the BJP's biggest trump card for voters.

Impressive Track Record

The BJP has won seven consecutive assembly elections since 1995, an incredible feat in itself. By the time the current assembly completes its term in 2027, the BJP government will have been in the state for 32 years — just one year and 11 months less than the Communist Party of India-Marxist's (CPI-M) nearly 34-year reign in West Bengal from 1977 to 2011.

In the 2022 assembly elections, the BJP won a record 156 seats in Gujarat with a



52.5% vote share, while the opposition Congress and AAP, got around 27% and 13% votes, respectively. The Congress could win just 17 seats, while the AAP managed to secure five. Independents won three seats and the Samajwadi Party picked up one. The BJP has managed to maintain its supremacy in Lok Sabha elections as well. In 1998, the party won 19 of the 26 seats, while in 1999, it won 20. The BJP's tally dropped to 14 seats in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls, just two more than the Congress's 12 seats. In 2009, the BJP managed to improve its tally by one, securing 15 seats. It has

been a clean sweep in the last two Lok Sabha elections.

Region-Wise Battle

Gujarat can be divided into four regions, namely, Saurashtra and Kutch, and the northern, southern and central parts of the state. The eight Lok Sabha seats in the Saurashtra and Kutch region have been with the BJP for a long time.

North Gujarat has seven seats, including the high-profile Gandhinagar, which is represented by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The two seats of Ahmedabad are also part of this region.

Central Gujarat has six seats, including Vadodara and the tribal-dominated Dahod, Panchmahal and Chhota Udaipur seats. Tribal votes in this area are crucial for the BJP if it wants to repeat its clean sweep of 2014 and 2019.

South Gujarat has five seats. It includes the diamond hub Surat, and Bharuch and Navsari. Gujarat BJP chief C.R. Paatil is contesting from Navsari, a seat he has won previously with record margins. In Bharuch, the contest may turn interesting given that the AAP is contesting in an alliance with the Congress. The candidate it has chosen for the Bharuch battle is MLA and an emerging tribal leader Chaitar Vasava. He will face BJP MP Mansukh Vasava, who has been elected from the seat several times.

Historically, Patidars, or Patels, have always been loyal to the BJP. Political watchers opine that the community turned against the Congress in the 1980s, when its chief minister Madhavsingh Solanki started nurturing the "KHAM" vote bank (Kshyatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims). The combination proved successful for the party — it bagged 142 seats in 1980 and 149 seats in 1985.



# Ukraine's India Outreach, And The Search For New Friends

By Harsh V. Pant

The Russia-Ukraine war shows no signs of ending any time soon. The death and destruction is all-pervasive, but both sides continue to insist that they will fight on. For Ukraine, it's a matter of survival, and for Russia, it's a matter of national pride. Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure now extend well behind the frontlines even as its missile strikes and shelling have escalated in an attempt to turn the war decisively in Moscow's favour. Last week, Russia fired around 100 missiles and drones on Ukraine, leaving several regions experiencing partial blackouts, a set of tactics that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called "missile terror". Ukraine, meanwhile, is scouring for support from across the world as it tries to shore up defence production at home and build an integrated electronic warfare control system.

## India's Significance

Amidst this deepening turmoil on the battlefield, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba paid a visit to India last week during which the two sides agreed to restore the level of cooperation that existed prior to the Russia-Ukraine war. Kuleba talked of India as a global power and how Prime Minister Narendra Modi "can take global security to the next level because of the role



India plays in the global security architecture".

He underscored that "India is well-positioned, not only in terms of bilateral relations between India and Ukraine but also in terms of the high regard India enjoys in the Global South. So, if India takes a step, many countries will follow. This is how leadership is built."

## Ukraine's Changed Outlook

Ukrainian leadership has been highly critical of India's position on the Ukraine conflict ever since the

war began. Kuleba's visit was clearly an attempt at reaching out to New Delhi at a time when Western support for the Ukrainian war effort is not as strong as Kyiv would like. Washington remains divided on the scale and scope of support for Ukraine in a hyper-polarising election year. And leaders in Europe are conflicted about the extent of the support they would get from their public at a time when the economic situation is

not getting any better for most. Ukraine's recently appointed commander-in-chief, Gen Oleksandr Syrskiy, has acknowledged that Russian forces outnumbered Ukrainian troops by approximately six to one on the frontline, underlining that Ukraine had ceded territory that could have been preserved if provided with adequate ammunition and air defense systems by its allies. For Ukraine, therefore, it is now key that a country like India, which has a track record of speaking its own mind on global affairs, is part of the global effort in ensuring that some sort of peace process can be ushered in. Ukraine aspires to convene a summit of global leaders, excluding Russian participation, in order to promote its peace plan, which includes a "formula" advocating, among other measures, the withdrawal of Russian forces from its sovereign territory. India's presence at the high-level peace conference being organised by Switzerland in the next few months can be an important marker in shaping global public opinion.

India's Position Unlikely To Change Anytime Soon- While External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reiterated India's "commitment to strengthen the overall relationship", it is unlikely that New Delhi's

carefully calibrated stance on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will change anytime soon. India has been consistent in emphasising the importance of dialogue and peaceful resolution to the crisis, urging all parties to exercise restraint and seek diplomatic solutions through negotiations.

While expressing concern over the situation and calling for respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, India has refrained from outright condemnation of Russia's actions. India has advocated for a peaceful and inclusive resolution to the conflict, which takes into account the interests of all stakeholders involved. In fact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has publicly made it clear to the Russian President that the current situation is not conducive to conflict and underscored the imperative for peace. This has happened despite India and Russia sharing a multifaceted relationship spanning decades, characterised by strategic cooperation, economic ties, and cultural exchanges. The foundation of this relationship was laid during the Cold War era, marked by close diplomatic relations and military cooperation. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship of 1971 cemented this bond, which has since evolved into a strategic partnership.

## How 'Victim' Mindset, Lack Of Narrative Is Hurting The INDIA Bloc

By Shubhabrata Bhattacharya

On Sunday, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) parties held an impressive 'Loktantra Bachao' (Save Democracy) rally at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan. It presented no narrative to counter the Modi government's policies, nor was an alternative agenda put on the table. Instead, what was apparent was a 'victim' mindset, buttressed by allegations of being targeted by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dispensation.

## 'Match-Fixing' Allegations

The fairness of the 18th general election was challenged too. Rahul Gandhi stated that Modi, with the help of central agencies and "four capitalists", was indulging in 'match-fixing' by arresting leaders like Hemant Soren and Arvind Kejriwal. The fact that it was the Congress that had first accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi of facilitating a liquor scam - in connection with

which Kejriwal is behind bars today - was easily papered over. The bonhomie between the AAP and the Congress leadership at this rally perhaps underscores the extent of the latter's plummeting fortunes.

On January 25, Sam Pitroda, the Congress's overseas chief, held a virtual press conference to question the fairness of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). During the presser, however, he skirted a question on the victory of his party in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana polls, where the same EVMs were used. Also, following Kejriwal's arrest, the US, Germany and even the United Nations have questioned India's fairness. Clearly, Rahul Gandhi's frequent trips overseas are paying off.

## Ironies Abound

The rally at Ramlila Maidan was the third such event held by the INDIA bloc. On March 3, they organised a mammoth 'Jan Chetna

Rally' in Patna, and a fortnight later on March 17, the parties congregated in Mumbai to mark the culmination of Rahul's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. An impressive rally was held in Kolkata too on March 10, but it saw the Trinamool Congress (TMC) suo motu announce names for all 42 seats in the state. The TMC had stayed away from Rahul's Mumbai rally, and no bloc partners were invited by the party in Kolkata, whose spokesman Derek O'Brien declared at Ramlila Maidan on Sunday that "Trinamool was and is with the INDIA bloc".

The Ramlila Maidan was the venue of Anna Hazare's India Against Corruption (IAC) movement in 2011, which took on the then-Congress-led Central government. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which was an offshoot of the IAC, saw the emergence of Kejriwal as an anti-corruption crusader. That the

same venue on Sunday saw a rally to protest against his incarceration in a corruption case is ironic. A hundred kilometres away in Meerut, Narendra Modi, flanked by the BJP's Uttar Pradesh alliance partners, including newcomer Jayant Choudhury of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), launched his 2024 campaign on the plank of fighting corruption and ensuring vikas (development). The difference between the BJP's agenda and that of its opponent is stark. Negativity continues to drive the Opposition, while Modi promotes his government's achievements and projects them as a "trailer" of things to come.

## Mamata Maintains Distance

The Ramlila Maidan rally was attended by Sonia Gandhi, who due to ill health rarely makes public appearances now. Accompanied by Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vadra, she sat beside Sunita Kejriwal and Kalpana Soren, wives of the jailed

Delhi and Jharkhand chief ministers. Two empty chairs were symbolically placed on the dais for Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren. Two other chief ministers, Mamata Banerjee and M.K. Stalin, were absent from the stage. No empty chairs were placed in their honour. They were represented by their respective MPs. Mamata preferred to be in Krishnanagar on Sunday to campaign for Mohua Moitra, her party's candidate who lost her membership in the 17th Lok Sabha due to a cash-for-query case. Notably, this was Mamata's first public appearance in a fortnight after she suffered a head injury at home.

Mamata empathised with Kejriwal after his arrest. However, neither she nor her nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, general secretary of her party who had been active in bloc meetings, found it worth their while to be at the Ramlila Maidan rally.



# India's Growing Defence Needs Can Force It To Make A Tough Choice Soon

The Stockholm Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) annual report on the international arms market, released last month, compared two periods: 2018-2022 and 2019-2023. While substantial global changes occurred across the world, India, all the while, remained the highest importer of arms, accounting for nearly 10% of global imports in 2019-2023.

Before talking about India though, it is important to acknowledge the change in Russia's position. International sanctions and domestic re-arming requirements following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 pushed the country from being the second-largest arms exporter, just behind the United States, to the third-largest today. The second place is now claimed by France, while China retains the fourth position. India, both as an arms importer, and increasingly, an exporter too, will naturally have to adjust to these changed dynamics, primarily because Russia is a leading supplier of arms to the country.

## Russian Imports Waning

Though Russia is still the top supplier for India, the share of imports has decreased to 36%, compared to over 76% between 2009 and 2013. France was a close second, making up 33% of the imports in the 2019-2023 period, while the U.S. accounted for 13% of the imports. The slide in Russian imports, however, is not new and is a product of three well-known factors.

First, increasing threats from China have necessitated the need for more

sophisticated weapons, and this has elevated the position of suppliers like the U.S., Israel, and France, which are more capable of supplying advanced systems. Second, the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 had already created obstacles in procuring Russian equipment. The subsequent invasion of Ukraine in 2022 exacerbated New Delhi's predicament as the U.S. sanctions regime threatened to hurt companies and countries that continued to import Russian products. Third, India's policy to domestically manufacture arms under the Make in India initiative promotes indigenous production. Why India Needs More Sophisticated Equipment

India's demand for more sophisticated technology than what Russia can offer arises from the need to offset China's numerical superiority in weapons systems, from aircraft and drones to submarines and aircraft carriers. This is in line with the rationale underlying the US's 'Second Offset Strategy', which focuses on the development of precision weapons to counter Soviet numerical superiority in the European theatre. Thus, among others, India last year acquired the Scorpene submarine from France and transferred the technology for indigenous production. It also acquired precision capabilities and munitions such as the Apache helicopters (with 12 Longbow radars), the Harpoon anti-ship missiles and the Excalibur guided artillery shells. The US approved the purchase of a contract of roughly \$4 billion for the MQ9 Reaper and Hellfire missiles this year,

a testament to India's continued reliance on US sophisticated technology and the deepening defence ties between the two countries.

## Fallout Of The Russia-Ukraine War

The effects of the Russia-Ukraine war on Indian defence procurement cannot be understated. From 2014 onwards, sanctions imposed by the US and many other NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) states led to problems in financing Russian imports. Most important among them was the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) of 2017, which sought to penalise countries that acquired defence equipment from Russia. Although India has repeatedly managed to win waivers from these measures, they still add an extra set of diplomatic and security-related transaction costs.

Russia's loss of equipment in Ukraine in 2022 also stymied exports to India. Deliveries of pre-existing orders have hindered the Indian Air Force. Less commonly understood is the fact that because of its critical role in the Soviet defence industrial complex, Ukraine was also a defence supplier to India—especially in naval technology, like propulsion systems for Indian frigates—for complementary goods offered by Russia. This relationship is now over because of the war and the subsequent destruction of Ukraine's naval construction capacity. India's push toward indigenous manufacturing of weapons is not new. Since the 1950s, India has sought to develop a domestic defence manufacturing sector with a combination of licensed production of foreign arms and indigenous development of new arms,

through a group of public sector units and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). However, achievements like the Integrated Guided Missile Programme, initiated in the early 1980s, are exceptions. This has been due to both funding hassles for research and development and difficulty fulfilling the requirements issued by the armed forces. There is also criticism from some sections that requirements by the Indian military are allegedly modified and made more stringent for domestic manufacturers, while foreign firms are allowed to circumvent these.

## India's Strategic Reality

India has often used its imports to enhance its indigenisation efforts. Like Israel, this allows for affordable but higher quality products that are suited to Indian needs. For example, it uses indigenous components in combination with systems like radars from Israel and platforms like the Embraer 145 jet from Brazil, and the Airbus A-321 from France. India's Light Combat Aircraft, Tejas Mark 1, also has a GE-404 engine from the US and an ejection seat made by Martin-Baker of Britain. In conclusion, India's strategic position and realities today necessitate having a strong, functional military that's capable of patrolling the Indian Ocean and maintaining border deterrence. There is now a complex choice that India has avoided making for years: rely either on Western states led by the US or on an increasingly inconsistent Russia. While the first option draws India further into an alignment with the existing global order, the latter requires dealing with a country that's beset with increased domestic demand, a sanctioned industrial base, and failing exports.

## Scandal-hit CEO of California rehab site that was shut down after being raided by FBI has new mental health facility run out of his \$3M MANSION - sparking fury from his neighbors

The home of a controversial CEO who previously ran a scandal hit mental health facility is now being used as a rehab facility, angering neighbors.

Sovereign boss Tonmoy Sharma had previously been the head of the Orange County facility, which was once one of the largest rehab companies in the country.

In 2018, following an FBI raid and multiple lawsuits filed against Sovereign, the company was officially closed down. Now, his San Juan Capistrano home is being used as a residential treatment facility, much to the chagrin of his former neighbors.

Dana Shores Recovery promises 'expert and private addiction and mental health recovery' within the \$3,000,000 home. According to records seen by NBC, the CEO of Dana Shores Recovery is listed as a Charles Hohman.

When the outlet appeared at the address to speak to the owner, Hohman answered the door and repeatedly told them he had no idea who Sharma is.

Despite his claims, further records obtained by the outlet indicate that

Hohman is paying \$10,000 a month in rent to Galahad Asset Management and Trust. While there is no mention of Sharma on the agreement, Galahad Asset Management and Trust is managed by him. Stunned neighbors told the outlet how they had been horrified to find out a facility had opened up on their doorsteps.

One neighbor told them: 'It was really kind of terrifying. It's something you see on TV. You never think it's going to happen in your neighborhood.'

Another added: 'I was stunned. Even though I knew who Sharma was, even though I knew his history, it was his primary residence.'

While another said: 'This has all happened in the last few weeks, with what appears to be a full-blown business in a residential community. I think all the neighbors are really concerned.' Further investigation by NBC shows that Hohman is involved in ongoing litigation with the city of Montclair after allegedly running an illegal cannabis dispensary.

The new facility, which is only certified to treat six residents, treats those with 'marijuana addiction', amongst other drugs.

## Crew Box Office Collection Day 1: Kareena Kapoor, Tabu And Kriti Sanon's Film Off To A Flying Start

Crew, the heist comedy film directed by Rajesh A Krishnan and starring Tabu, Kareena Kapoor, and Kriti Sanon has begun its theatrical run with a promising start. According to a report from Sacnilk, the movie minted ₹ 8.75 crore at the domestic box office on its opening day. The Good Friday holiday bolstered the film's business, especially in metropolitan areas like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, and Kolkata, which significantly contributed to the first-day earnings. The film recorded an overall 26.34% Hindi occupancy on Friday. Although the film's opening day collection of ₹ 8.75 crore shows promise, it falls slightly short compared to Kareena Kapoor's previous chick flick, Veere Di Wedding, co-produced by Rhea Kapoor and Ekta Kapoor, which earned an impressive ₹ 10.7 crore on its opening day in 2018.

The storyline of Crew revolves around three dedicated friends who work as cabin crew members for Kohinoor Airlines. Their tranquil lives take a

chaotic turn when they find themselves entangled in a complex situation engineered by someone with hidden motives. Reportedly, Crew has been released across 2000 theatres. It premiered in over 75 countries, spanning more than 1100 locations. The estimated budget for the film, covering production and advertising expenses, reportedly stands around ₹ 60 crore. Crew opened to largely mixed reviews. Film critic Saibal Chatterjee, in his review for NDTV, gave the film 2 stars out of 5 and wrote, "Crew would have been much more fun if only it knew how to buoy things up with strokes of genuine inspiration. Yes, that is what is sorely missing in a film that goes for gold but fails to find a source of sustained sparkle.

Produced under the banners of Balaji Telefilms and Anil Kapoor Film & Communications Network, Crew not only features the three leading ladies but also includes Diljit Dosanjh, Kapil Sharma, Saswata Chatterjee, Rajesh Sharma, and Kulbhushan Kharbanda in its ensemble cast.



# 'This could be 100 times worse than Covid': Bird flu warning from scientists who say HALF of infections with H5N1 in people are fatal

A bird flu pandemic could be '100 times worse than Covid' and kill up to half of everyone it infects, experts have warned — as the White House says it is 'monitoring' the situation.

Speaking at a briefing, virus researchers said the H5N1 strain of bird flu may now be getting 'dangerously close' to triggering a pandemic.

Multiple cases of the infection in a variety of mammals, including cows, cats and, more recently, humans, are all raising the risk of the virus mutating to become more transmissible, they said.

But others attending the briefing said it was too early to panic because there were still too many unknowns about recent cases to warrant sounding the alarm.

A White House representative said today it was tracking bird flu in the US, adding: 'We take the health and safety of the American people seriously.' The panel was quickly convened off the heels of news that a dairy farm worker in Texas tested positive for the virus, alongside 12 herds of cows in six states and three cats also in Texas that subsequently died.

Testing done on the worker showed the patient's virus had already mutated to spread more easily — although the CDC said this mutation had been recorded before, that the risk was low and that there was no sign of human-to-human transmission.

The briefing was attended by bird flu researchers, doctors and officials from government agencies who were alarmed by the bird flu case in a human.

John Fulton, a pharmaceutical industry consultant for vaccines and founder of Canada-based pharmaceutical company BioNiagara, organized the meeting after receiving enquiries from the media.

Speaking at the briefing, Dr Suresh Kuchipudi, a bird flu researcher in Pittsburgh, warned: 'This virus [has been] on the top of the pandemic list for many, many years and probably decades.

'And now we are getting dangerously close to this virus potentially causing a pandemic.'

He added: 'H5N1 viruses have already demonstrated several important features of a potential pandemic virus.

'So these are, the virus is already globally distributed, and this virus particularly, that is often perceived as an avian virus, it can, and it has shown, the ability to infect a range of mammalian hosts including humans.

'We are not really talking about a virus that is yet to make a jump, we are talking about a virus that is globally present, already infecting a range of mammals and is circulating.

'So, therefore, in my view, I think this is a virus that has the greatest pandemic

threat [that is] playing out in plain sight and is globally present.'

'It is really high time that we are prepared.' His concerns were echoed by Fulton, who warned the H5N1 strain of influenza A could trigger a worse pandemic than Covid.

He said: 'This appears to be 100 times worse than Covid, or it could be if it mutates and maintains its high case fatality rate.

'Once it's mutated to infect humans, we can only hope that the [fatality rate] drops.'

The World Health Organization estimates the fatality rate for H5N1 at 52 percent, based on the 462 deaths recorded since

'There is a huge lack of knowledge that we need to fill.

'Let's look at the facts and look at them with reason, we don't really know that much today because of the knowledge gaps that we need to fill.'

Dr Francois Balloux, an epidemiologist in the UK, added on X this morning: 'People not professionally involved in pandemic prevention/mitigation being worried/feeling miserable now won't make any material difference to what may hit us, except that their life would suck, far more than it should.'

To become a pandemic, a virus needs to be able to infect humans or animals easily and spread between them.

to farms in Texas.

For the human case, there are also many unknowns — including how the patient was infected.

It could have been from direct contact with cows or from touching a surface contaminated with the virus and then touching their face.

Although many mammals are being infected, experts say there is one species they focus on in particular: Pigs. These animals have the same receptors in their lungs as humans, meaning an outbreak among them could predict a similar episode in humans.

But, infections are not currently being recorded in pigs.

However, a person in Pennsylvania was diagnosed with a flu infection from pigs earlier this year and hospitalized, but they made a full recovery. The individual had close contact with pigs and was infected with the H1N2 strain of influenza A, slightly different from H5N1.

Scientists warn pigs could also become infected with human and avian flu viruses at the same time, which could then swap genes — in a process called reassortment — to create a new version of the virus.

The situation has a potential wider impact than just causing panic, however, with the price of milk and eggs also likely to rise.

Milk from infected cows cannot be sold, while egg farms have to cull all their birds when bird flu is detected — which takes months to recover from.

This was behind the surge in egg prices in 2020, when the price of a dozen large, Grade A, eggs surged from \$1.72 to \$3.59 over the year to November 2022.

At their peak, they reached \$4.82 for a dozen eggs.

Officials say there is a very low risk from of contracting bird flu from milk because nearly all the supply is pasteurized, which inactivates viruses and bacteria before milk heads to stores.

Bird flu started to take off in 2020 after a wild bird flu MIXED genes with a version of the virus from domestic poultry.

It spread rapidly via migrating birds and in May 2021 it was confirmed to have crossed the bird-mammal barrier for the first time — after two baby foxes in the Netherlands tested positive for the disease.

One died from the infection, while the other was euthanized because of its symptoms. The route of infection was not confirmed, but scientists said it was likely via eating the carcass of an infected bird.

In January 2022, the first case was then diagnosed in a human — in 79-year-old Alan Gosling from the UK.



2003 among the 887 people diagnosed with the virus. For comparison, Covid currently kills less than 0.1 percent of people it infects — although at the beginning of the pandemic this was around 20 percent.

Since 2020, when the new strain of bird flu emerged and spread around the world, seven out of 26 people infected with H5N1 have died — or nearly 30 percent.

Some experts warn that in more serious but rare cases, H5N1 could infect the respiratory tract triggering pneumonia. It can also infect other areas, such as the eyes — where it causes inflammation.

Dr Gabriel Girouard, a microbiologist in New Brunswick, warned the death rate of H5N1 was currently around 50 percent, although there were few human cases.

But he said that if the virus did start to spread between people this would likely 'drop' but still 'remain high'.

Newer infectious diseases have high fatality rates because people do not yet have a defense against them, allowing the virus to evade the immune system and cause a more severe infection.

Other experts attending the panel called for calm, however, including David Swayne, who has worked on bird flu infections in animals for decades.

He said: 'Right now, for the cattle cases — there is no knowledge, so that's easy for the alarm to be raised.

But researchers are yet to establish whether the virus is now able to spread from mammal-to-mammal — with studies underway on infected cattle.

The White House press secretary said today, when asked about the US bird flu outbreak: 'This is something we are certainly monitoring.

'We have been, the CDC has been working and focusing on this.

'We take the health and safety of the American people seriously. It is very important to this President. Our top priority is to keep communities healthy, safe and informed.'

So far, 12 farms across six states have reported H5N1 infections in their cows — including five in Texas, as well as farms in New Mexico, Michigan, Ohio, Idaho and Kansas. Cows in Iowa are also being tested.

Infected cattle are described as 'lethargic', eating less food and producing less milk. But they are not dying from their infections.

But it is not clear how the cows became infected, whether it was via exposure to infected droppings, bird carcasses or another route.

It also is not clear whether the virus is spreading between the animals or if they are being infected by a single source, such as their feed. Most of the cases across the country have been linked back



# A million simulations show US debt is on an 'unsustainable' path

The U.S. is almost certainly on an unsustainable path with regard to the astronomic rise in its national debt, according to a million simulations run by Bloomberg. Bloomberg reported Tuesday that it conducted a million simulations on the U.S. debt outlook and found 88% of them show borrowing is on an "unsustainable path."

The findings come after a forecast by the Congressional Budget Office that indicates the national debt will grow to an astonishing \$54 trillion in the next decade, the result of an aging population and rising federal health care costs. Higher interest rates are also compounding the pain of higher debt. Payments are expected to triple from nearly \$475 billion in fiscal year 2022 to a stunning \$1.4 trillion in 2032. By 2053, the interest payments are projected to surge to \$5.4 trillion. To put that into perspective, that will be more than the U.S. spends on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and all other mandatory and discretionary spending programs. When factoring in the market's current outlook on interest rates, the debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to rise to 123%



in 2034, according to Bloomberg. But that's a fairly optimistic outlook, given the assumption in Washington that the sweeping tax law passed in 2017 by former President Donald Trump will likely be extended once certain provisions expire in 2025. In a "higher simulation" scenario, the debt-to-GDP burden could be as high as 133.9% in 2034 and 185% in 2050, the report shows.

Should that debt materialize, it could risk America's economic standing in the

world. The national debt, which measures what the U.S. owes its creditors, hit \$34.5 trillion on Friday afternoon, according to new data published by the Treasury Department. By comparison, just four decades ago, the national debt hovered around \$907 billion. The spike in the national debt follows a burst of spending by President Biden and Democratic lawmakers. As of September 2022, Biden had already approved roughly \$4.8 trillion in borrowing, including \$1.85 trillion for a

COVID relief measure dubbed the American Rescue Plan and \$370 billion for the bipartisan infrastructure bill, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), a group that advocates for reducing the deficit.

While that is about half of the \$7.5 trillion that former President Trump added to the deficit while he was in office, it's far more than the \$2.5 trillion Trump had approved at that same point during his term. Biden has repeatedly defended the spending by his administration and boasted about cutting the deficit by \$1.7 trillion. "I might note parenthetically: In my first two years, I reduced the debt by \$1.7 trillion. No president has ever done that," Biden said recently.

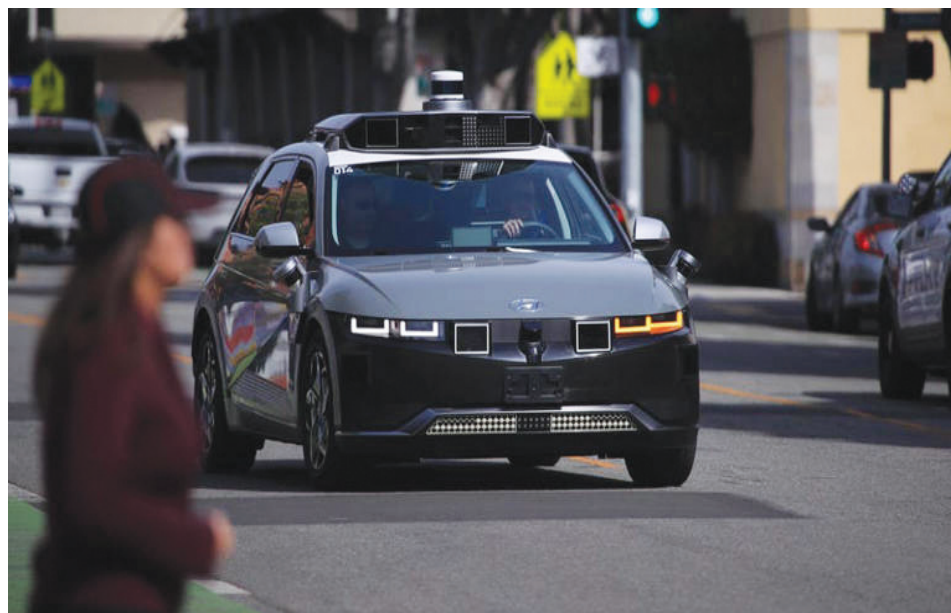
However, that figure refers to a reduction in the national deficit between fiscal years 2020 and 2022. While the deficit did shrink during that time period, that is largely because emergency measures put into place during the COVID-19 pandemic expired.

The White House has also tried to blame Republicans for the astronomical rise in debt in recent years.

## Uber Eats Working With Waymo to Get Rid of Pesky Delivery Drivers

Not content with having depressed wages in the transportation industry, Uber is teaming up with Waymo to eliminate food delivery drivers entirely. The two companies are ramping up a collaboration begun last year that involves driverless delivery, CNBC reported Wednesday.

Uber Eats launched the autonomous food delivery service in the Phoenix metropolitan area Wednesday. Food orders will start via the app, then Waymo's automated vehicles will complete deliveries, and yes, you will have to go outside to get your food from the car. Fortunately, you won't be asked for a tip for the robot car's hard work. An Uber spokesperson told CNBC that the number of restaurants that will be eligible for autonomous deliveries is expanding, as is the geographical area where the service is available. Uber previously tried similar efforts in other cities but this is the first one involving Alphabet's Waymo. If you're a delivery driver, you officially have permission to freak out about this. When companies like Uber originally launched "gig work" a little over a decade ago, there was consternation that the tech industry was using the guise of "innovation" to degrade industries that previously enjoyed certain labor protections. Uber claimed it was just giving workers the flexibility and the freedom to work independently, but now we know that "gig work" was always just



a transitory phase in Silicon Valley's bigger plan to replace traditional forms of human labor with fully automated, worker-less production systems. Indeed,

once they can get a robot to make a halfway-decent meal, companies like Uber will have an employment-free monopoly on food production and

delivery. From the corporation's point of view, that means no more pesky union drivers, no more need to shell out wages and benefits, and no need to continue arguing with state governments over whether it's employing "employees" or "contractors," since there won't be any.

That said, even if and when that unfortunate scenario does unfold, it seems likely there will still be humans around. As the internet recently learned, "automation" is actually just a hundred poorly paid people from India wrapped in a trench coat. That said, those precarious workers, themselves, are in the process of being replaced by the very software they're training. The point of data labeling is to usher in AI that is actually autonomous. Thus the valiant C-suite effort to get company head count down to zero will continue.

## Omaha man ordered to pay nearly \$200,000 in restitution for COVID-19 relief program fraud

An Omaha man was sentenced on Wednesday in federal court for wire fraud. In 2020 and 2021, Richard Kelly, 61, was assisted by another person to apply for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) loans, which were created to help the community during the pandemic. His

applications "misrepresented" how much Kelly's business paid his employees and the amount of revenue the business was taking in.

The loans the applications sought were over \$675,000, but he only received nearly \$190,000.

Kelly was sentenced to five years



probation, and he was ordered to pay almost \$200,000 in restitution.



# New York City payroll website has been down for a week, following phishing attack

NEW YORK — The administration of Mayor Eric Adams took its payroll website partially offline for the last nine days in response to a recent phishing scheme targeting city employees — leaving the city's roughly 300,000 full time workers with limited access to essential forms as Tax Day nears.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the New York City Automated Personnel System, Employee Self Service (known as NYCAPS/ESS) site was offering this brief message:

"Due to scheduled maintenance, Internet ESS is temporarily unavailable. We apologize for the inconvenience this may cause." But the full story was more complicated.

Last month, the city's cybersecurity team was made aware of a text message phishing



campaign in which hackers tried to steal NYCAPS users' personal information, a spokesperson for the Office of Technology & Innovation said in a statement.

Since then, the team has been conferring with the city's payroll office and the Department of

Citywide Administrative Services — which manages municipal buildings — "to implement enhancements to security measures," which shut down access to the site, the technology office further said.

"City employees have been advised to remain vigilant and confirm the legitimacy of any NYCAPS and

payroll-related communications and activity," the statement added.

City Hall spokesperson Amaris Cockfield confirmed the site was taken down, but said it's still accessible on the city's intranet. The head of the union representing emergency medical technicians and fire inspectors said his members discovered the mishap after looking up their paychecks last week.

"Nothing was working for anybody," Oren Barzilay, president of Local 2507, said in an interview. "Living paycheck to paycheck, they like to know what bills they can pay this week." Employees received text messages asking them to activate multi-factor authentication for the NYCAPS system, Department of

Education's newly appointed Chief Information Officer Intekhab Shakil wrote in the email, which was obtained by POLITICO. But the texts were a scam, trying to get city employees to hand over their usernames, passwords and even a picture of their driver's license. The fake site used to trick people "is a phishing scam domain out of Lithuania," Naveed Hasan, a technology consultant and member of the city's Panel for Education Policy, posted on X, formerly Twitter, last week.

And Hasan said the city's outdated NYCAPS website — the design of which looks like a relic from the 1990s internet — is partially to blame: "This (is) a user education issue to not fall prey to these scams, but the real site is antique & easily cloned."

# Airport taxi dispatchers charged with taking bribes

## *Payoffs Were to Allow Drivers to Pick Up Arriving Passengers at JFK Without Waiting in Line Defendants Worked for Private Contractor*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that nine taxi dispatchers were arraigned today on bribery charges for taking cash in exchange for letting drivers pick up passengers at Kennedy International Airport without waiting behind fellow cabbies in often long lines at the central dispatch lot. Four of the defendants are accused of accepting more than \$1,000 in bribes and are charged with first-degree commercial bribe receiving, a felony.

District Attorney Katz said: "The victims of corruption, without fail, are honest, hardworking men and women. As if the challenges of making a living as a yellow cab driver were not already enough, the cabbies at JFK had to overcome greed and corruption in their effort to put food on the table for themselves and their families. We will not allow that to stand. My office conducted a lengthy and in-depth investigation into these allegations and will hold the corrupt accountable."

Port Authority Inspector General John Gay said: "The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has zero tolerance for anyone, including individuals working for private contractors, who seek to abuse their positions for private gain and enrich themselves at the expense of the hardworking people who provide services to our airport customers. We thank the Queens District Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners for working with us to root out these contractor employees who improperly seek to gain from others, and bring them to justice."

Taxi & Limousine Commissioner David Do said: "I'd like to thank District Attorney

Katz, the Port Authority, and our own dedicated Enforcement officers, who assisted in cracking down on this reprehensible bribery scheme. More than 90 percent of our drivers are immigrants, and many of them came here to avoid exactly this kind of corruption in their native lands. Public safety and playing by the rules are precursors for prosperity, and that goes for drivers, too. Any time we learn of drivers bribing dispatchers or operating illegally, we will move to revoke their licenses."

The nine defendants (see addendum) were arraigned today in Queens County Criminal Court on complaints charging them with second-degree commercial bribe receiving, official misconduct and receiving unlawful gratuities. The four defendants accused of accepting more than \$1,000 in bribes were additionally charged with first-degree commercial bribe receiving, a felony. An arrest warrant has been obtained for a 10th dispatcher, who is now being sought. The defendants are employees of a subcontractor retained by the Port Authority, which operates the airport.

Taxi dispatchers at JFK regulate the movement of yellow cabs from a central holding lot to the various terminal pick-up areas in order to ensure both that arriving passengers have access to taxis and that terminal frontages do not become overly congested. The taxis are released from the holding area in the order in which they arrived at the lot. At the terminal pick-up location, the dispatcher on site maintains the same sequence when directing a fare to a specific taxi. According to the charges:

- In 2022, the Port Authority received complaints alleging that some taxi dispatchers at JFK were taking bribes to allow yellow cab drivers to pick up arriving passengers at terminals without first waiting in the central taxi holding lot.
- After a preliminary review, the Port Authority's Office of the Inspector General and the Queens District Attorney's Airport Investigations Unit launched a probe.
- The joint investigation found that between January 2022 and February 2024, the defendants accepted a total of over \$12,000 in bribes via cash, Zelle, or CashApp payments.
- The bribes were accepted in small increments, often \$5 to \$10 per trip.
- Eight of the defendants were arrested on March 12 when they showed up at JFK for what they believed was a training session. The ninth defendant was arrested separately on March 27. They all received Desk Appearance Tickets at the time of their arrest.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Nicholas Ciancarelli and Luis Santibanez of the PAOIG, under the supervision of Mia Chang, Supervising Confidential Investigator. Assistant District Attorney Sean Murphy and Senior Deputy Chief Catherine Kane of the District Attorney's Major Economic Crimes Bureau, Airport Investigations Unit, are prosecuting the case, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Mary Lowenburg, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive

Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard Brave.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

### ADDENDUM

ADRIAN GRULLON, 32 of Brooklyn, is charged with first degree commercial bribe receiving, second-degree commercial bribe receiving, official misconduct and receiving unlawful gratuities, for accepting bribes on 128 occasions totaling \$2,560. If convicted, he faces up to a 1 and 1/3 to 4 years in jail. His next court date is May 8.

YOLANDA RODRIGUEZ, 67, of Laurelton, Queens, is charged with first degree commercial bribe receiving, second-degree commercial bribe receiving, official misconduct and receiving unlawful gratuities, for accepting bribes on 91 occasions totaling \$1,851. If convicted, she faces up to a 1 and 1/3 to 4 years in jail. Her next court date is June 5.

JOVANE JOHNSON, 21, of Jamaica, Queens, is charged with first degree commercial bribe receiving, second-degree commercial bribe receiving, official misconduct and receiving unlawful gratuities, for accepting bribes on 85 occasions totaling \$1,175. If convicted, he faces up to a 1 and 1/3 to 4 years in jail. His next court date is May 13.

JOSEPH WOODWARD, 56, of Brooklyn, is charged with first degree commercial bribe receiving, second-degree commercial bribe receiving, official misconduct and receiving unlawful gratuities, for accepting bribes on 60 occasions totaling \$1,296.



# Moscow Concert Hall Attack: Did US Warn Russia About Crocus City Hall Being A Potential Target?

(News Agency)-The US government reportedly warned Russian officials that Crocus City Hall was a potential target, more than two weeks before over 140 people died in a deadly terrorist attack last month. More than 140 people died and dozens others were injured in the Moscow concert hall massacre of March 22, the most deadly terrorist attack Russia has seen in years. While the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack, Russia President Vladimir Putin had said the arrested suspects were "headed to Ukraine". Armed assailants stormed the concert hall in



Russia's Moscow, in the attack tightened his grip on power after winning the elections as that came just days after Putin

country's war in Ukraine dragged into a third year.

While it was reported back then that the United States had issued a security alert to US citizens on March 7 saying it was monitoring reports that extremists had "imminent plans to target large gatherings" in Moscow, US' identification of the Crocus concert hall as a potential target has not been previously reported. The Russian authorities has so far maintained that the US warning were "too general" to help preempt the attack. The U.S. officials familiar with the information that Washington shared with Moscow spoke on

the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive conversations and intelligence, according to a report in The Washington Post. The report said that a spokesperson from the National Security Council (NSC) declined to comment over the matter. The NSC had previously acknowledged that the US told Russia "about a planned terrorist attack in Moscow" but did not say that Crocus City Hall was named as a possible target.

The March 7 warning advised US citizens to avoid large gatherings for the coming 48 hours. The bloody attack came just over two weeks later.

## Taiwan: 9 Dead, Buildings Tilt, Bridges & Cars Shake In Island's Strongest Earthquake In 25 Yrs



office complexes. Hualien was among the worst-hit cities in Taiwan.

In 2018, a deadly earthquake collapsed a historic hotel and other buildings in Hualien.

Many other purported videos have surfaced on the internet, one such claiming to have captured the impact of the earthquake on a busy road through a car dashcam.

**Schools Evacuated, Train Service Stopped**

Schools evacuated students to sports fields, handing them protective yellow head coverings

to guard against falling objects amid continuing aftershocks.

Train service was suspended across the island which houses 23 million people, as was subway service in Taipei, where a newly constructed above-ground line partially separated. The national legislature, a converted school built before World War II, also had damage to walls and ceilings, according to an Associated Press report.

Tsunami Hits Japan

The Japan Meteorological Agency said a tsunami wave of 30 cm (about 1 foot) was detected on

the coast of Yonaguni island about 15 minutes after the earthquake struck. Smaller waves were measured in Ishigaki and Miyako islands.

Japan's Self Defence Forces sent aircraft to collect information about the tsunami impact around the Okinawa region and were preparing shelters for evacuees if necessary, the AP report mentioned. China issued no tsunami warnings for the Chinese mainland. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre said there was no tsunami threat to Hawaii or the US Pacific territory of Guam.

(News Agency)-A massive earthquake of over Magnitude 7 hit Taiwan on Wednesday morning, killing nine people, damaging buildings, creating a tsunami and disrupting train service. The earthquake in Taiwan on Wednesday is the strongest the country has seen in the last 25 years. Taiwan's fire department said on Wednesday that seven people died in Hualien County which was the epicenter of the earthquake that struck around 8 am on Wednesday. Taiwan's worst earthquake in recent years struck on September 21, 1999 with a magnitude of 7.7, causing 2,400 deaths, injuring around 1,00,000 and destroying thousands of buildings.

Taiwan's earthquake monitoring agency measured the

Wednesday quake at Magnitude 7.2, while the US Geological Survey put it at 7.4. It struck at 7:58 am about 18 km south-southwest of Hualien and was about 35 km (21 miles) deep.

**Taiwan Earthquake Caught On Cam**

The earthquake was caught on multiple videos that showed scary scenes that the strong jolts led to. Several multi-storey buildings were damaged or were dangerously tilted and on the verge of collapse in parts of Taiwan after the earthquake.

Another five-story building in lightly populated Hualien appeared heavily damaged, collapsing its first floor and leaving the rest leaning at a 45-degree angle. In the capital, Taipei, tiles were seen falling from older buildings and within some newer

## World Central Kitchen Workers Halt Food Delivery In Gaza After Israeli Strike Kills Seven Workers

(News Agency)-Some of Israel's closest allies, including the United States, on Tuesday condemned the deaths of seven aid workers who were killed by airstrikes in Gaza — a loss that prompted multiple charities to suspend food deliveries to Palestinians on the brink of starvation. The deaths of the World Central Kitchen workers threatened to set back efforts by the US and other countries to open a maritime corridor for aid from Cyprus to help ease the desperate conditions in northern Gaza.

President Joe Biden issued an unusually blunt criticism of Israel by its closest ally, suggesting

that the incident demonstrated that Israel was not doing enough to protect civilians.

"Israel has not done enough to protect aid workers trying to deliver desperately needed help to civilians," he said, adding he was "outraged and heartbroken" by their killings.

"Incidents like yesterday's simply should not happen," he added. "The United States has repeatedly urged Israel to deconflict their military operations against Hamas with humanitarian operations, in order to avoid civilian casualties."

Ships still laden with some 240 tonnes of aid from the charitable group turned back from Gaza

just a day after arriving, according to Cyprus. Other humanitarian aid organisations also suspended operations in Gaza, saying it was too dangerous to offer help. Israel has allowed only a trickle of food and supplies into Gaza's devastated north, where experts say famine is imminent.

The dead from Monday night's strikes included three British citizens, Polish and Australia nationals, a Canadian-American dual national and a Palestinian. Those countries have been key backers of Israel's nearly 6-month-old offensive in Gaza, and several of them denounced the killings.



# Former Principal in Oyster Bay-E Norwich School Dist Charged with Falsifying Employment Applications

MINEOLA, N.Y. — Nassau County District Attorney Anne T. Donnelly announced that the former principal of James H. Vernon School in the Oyster Bay-East Norwich Central School District was arraigned today on charges she submitted falsified employment applications to the school district and the Online Application System for Educators (OLAS) omitting the prior suspension of her teaching certificate for engaging in an inappropriate relationship with a student in 2005.

Jessica Bader, previously known as Jessica Zimble, 52, of Nesconset, was arraigned before Judge Jaclene Agazarian on charges of three counts of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree (an E felony) and three counts of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the Second Degree (an A misdemeanor). The defendant was released on her own recognizance. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 1-1/3 to 4 years in prison. She is due back in court on April 11, 2024. "After engaging in an inappropriate relationship with a student at East

Meadow High School, this defendant was given a second chance and the option to return to the teaching profession in the future," said DA Donnelly. "Bader squandered that chance and again exercised poor judgement when she allegedly concealed her certificate suspension on applications for two high-level positions in the Oyster Bay-East Norwich Central School District. Parents across Nassau County entrust their children to the care of educators and administrators every day. These professionals must be held to the highest standards of honesty and integrity."

DA Donnelly said, according to the charges, in March 2022, the defendant applied for a position as the Director of Humanities at the Oyster Bay-East Norwich Central School District (OBENCSD) and was hired two months later. Bader later applied and was hired for the principal position at James H. Vernon School in July 2023.

For both positions within the school district, the defendant submitted online applications with OLAS which inquired if

an applicant was ever required to resign from a position, resigned from a position as an alternative to facing charges or termination, and whether an applicant had ever had a professional certificate suspended by a government agency.

The defendant allegedly falsely answered "no" to these questions on the OLAS online application, which she submitted on two occasions for each job she held in the OBENCSD.

The defendant also filed a separate electronic application directly to the school district for the Director of Humanities position in which she allegedly falsely answered in the negative to a question asking if the applicant had ever been asked to resign rather than be discharged or denied tenure.

The defendant also allegedly omitted her previous employment at East Meadow High School, where she was the subject of disciplinary action, from her applications.

Bader was previously known as Jessica Zimble and had been an English teacher at East Meadow High School from 1999

to 2005. In June 2005, the defendant was asked to resign or face disciplinary action for engaging in an inappropriate relationship with a student.

Bader resigned and the allegations were referred to the New York State Department of Education for a disciplinary hearing. The Department of Education suspended Bader's teaching certificate for a period of four years on December 17, 2007.

After her teaching certificate was reinstated, Bader worked at schools in Brooklyn and Queens, and held an assistant principal position at a Queens middle school.

Bader resigned from her position as principal at James H. Vernon School in September 2023.

The defendant surrendered to NCSA Detective Investigators on April 1, 2024.

The case is being prosecuted by Senior Investigative Counsel Jennifer Boyle of the Public Corruption Bureau. The defendant is represented by Joseph Carbone, Esq. The charges are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty.

## Florida Man Indicted for E-Prescribing Scheme, Issuing Thousands of Prescriptions Nationwide'

MINEOLA, N.Y. — Nassau County District Attorney Anne T. Donnelly announced a Florida man was indicted on criminal sale of a controlled substance and criminal diversion charges for allegedly commandeering the e-prescribing privileges of multiple doctors across the country to issue thousands of narcotic prescriptions for controlled substances. Devin Anthony Magarian, 21, from Kissimmee, Florida, was arraigned before Judge Robert A. Schwartz on charges of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the First Degree (an A-I felony), two counts of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Third Degree (a B felony), Criminal Diversion of Prescription Medication and Prescriptions in the Second Degree (a D felony) and 15 counts of Criminal Diversion of Prescription Medication and Prescriptions in the Fourth Degree (an A misdemeanor). The defendant faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted. The defendant's remand was continued, and he is due back in court on April 23, 2024.

"Devin Magarian is a central player in a wide-ranging drug operation to hijack the e-prescribing credentials of doctors across the United States and use those fraudulently obtained accounts to issue and fill tens of thousands of prescriptions for dangerous narcotics including Oxycodone," said DA Donnelly. "Our investigation into this alleged criminal conspiracy continues. We thank our partners in local and federal law

enforcement as we pursue the case against this defendant and attempt to unravel this operation."

DA Donnelly said that in February 2023 an unnamed defendant was arrested outside a Great Neck pharmacy after picking up two prescriptions that were not in his name. After an extensive investigation, it was determined that the unnamed defendant was in contact with Devin Anthony Magarian, a Florida resident. Magarian is allegedly a leader in an elaborate, multi-state conspiracy that has fraudulently compromised the e-prescribing credentials of doctors throughout the United States and then used those credentials to issue tens of thousands of prescriptions for narcotics across the country. Magarian typically used the privileges to create prescriptions for Oxycodone, and Promethazine and Codeine, a common cough syrup that is abused by drug users.

As part of the scheme, associates of Magarian, or runners, picked up prescriptions at pharmacies in multiple states. The prescriptions were typically issued in fictitious names and sent to both chain and mom-and-pop pharmacies.

The defendant allegedly operated a channel on the Telegram mobile app that served as an advertisement board. Magarian allegedly let his customers know when the next round of prescriptions — via a compromised doctor's e-prescribing privileges — was coming, so that they could place their orders.

## South Hempstead Woman Charged with Stealing More than \$22,000 in Rental Subsidy Benefits

MINEOLA, N.Y. — Nassau County District Attorney Anne T. Donnelly announced that a South Hempstead woman was arrested and charged yesterday with allegedly falsely applying for and receiving more than \$22,000 of rental assistance benefits from the Nassau County Housing Choice Voucher Program to which she was not entitled.

Melissa Beltre, 42, was arraigned Thursday before Judge Marie McCormack on charges of Grand Larceny in the Third Degree (a D felony); Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree (a D felony); and three counts of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree (an E felony). The defendant pleaded not guilty and was released on her own recognizance. She is due back in court on March 20, 2024. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 2-1/3 to 7 years in prison.

"Rental assistance benefits are essential to thousands of low-income families, elderly, and disabled citizens in Nassau County to ensure they can afford to live in safe and sanitary housing," said DA Donnelly. "This defendant allegedly submitted false paperwork to obtain those benefits for herself, while holding several jobs and contributing to her 401K. It is also alleged that the defendant purchased a \$585,000 home in South Hempstead while collecting benefits. I thank the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Inspector General for their partnership in holding individuals

accountable for abusing these public programs."

"HUD OIG is committed to protecting the integrity of the Housing Choice Voucher Program and bringing to justice those who abuse these programs for personal gain," said Acting Special Agent-in-Charge William Woolard with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Inspector General. "We will continue to work with the Nassau County District Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners to investigate and hold accountable bad actors and protect the programs that HUD beneficiaries rely on." DA Donnelly said, according to the charges, on October 23, 2018, the defendant submitted a "County of Nassau Office of Housing and Community Development Applicant/Participant Certification" to the Nassau County Office of Housing, Housing Choice Voucher Program (NCHCVP) claiming to live at an Oceanside address and attested to her weekly income to receive rental benefits. The defendant's application was approved and benefits for calendar year 2019 were provided.

In October 2019 and October 2020, the defendant submitted additional certifications, attesting to her weekly income and address in Oceanside, to apply for annual recertification for the NCHCVP benefits. Beltre's applications were approved, and the benefits disbursed in calendar years 2020 and 2021.



# Woodbury Man Indicted for Allegedly Raping and Assaulting a 13-Year-Old Child

MINEOLA, N.Y. — Nassau County District Attorney Anne T. Donnelly announced that a Woodbury man was indicted on Criminal Sexual Act, Rape, Assault, and other related charges for allegedly repeatedly sexually abusing and assaulting a 13-year-old child between February and November 2023. Adrees Omar, 25, was arraigned today before Judge Robert McDonald on grand jury indictment charges of Criminal Sexual Act in the First Degree (a B violent felony); Assault in the Second Degree (a D violent felony); Endangering the Welfare of a Child (an A misdemeanor); four counts of Rape in the Second Degree (a D violent felony); two counts of Assault in the Third Degree (an A misdemeanor); Criminal Obstruction of Breathing or Blood Circulation (an A misdemeanor); Criminal Sexual Act in the Second Degree (a D violent felony); and Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Fourth Degree (an A

misdemeanor).



The defendant was also charged in the indictment with three counts of Criminal Contempt in the First Degree (an E felony); four counts of Criminal Contempt in the Second Degree (an A misdemeanor); Attempted Assault in the Second Degree (an E felony); and three counts of Harassment in the Second

Degree (a violation) stemming from alleged conduct that violated a previously issued order of protection on behalf of the defendant's father who also lives in the Woodbury home.

The defendant pleaded not guilty and was remanded. Omar is due back in court on February 7, 2024. If convicted of the top charge, the defendant faces a potential maximum of 25 years in prison.

"This defendant allegedly preyed upon a vulnerable child for months in some of the worst ways imaginable," said DA Donnelly. "We must protect our children from these predators. This office remains committed to prosecuting abusers who harm our kids and seeking justice for victims."

DA Donnelly said that, according to the investigation and indictment, Adrees Omar allegedly began a relationship with a 13-year-old child in February 2023. During the relationship, the defendant

allegedly physically and sexually abused the victim at a home in Woodbury.

On November 28, 2023, the victim allegedly fled the defendant's home naked after a sexually violent incident.

When police arrived, the defendant allegedly barricaded himself inside the home for nearly eight hours.

Omar was arrested on November 28, 2023, by the Nassau County Police Department's Special Victims Squad.

If you believe you or someone you know may have been victimized by Adrees Omar, please contact NCD's Special Victims Bureau at (516) 571-1266.

Assistant District Attorney Mila Kelly of the Special Victims Bureau is prosecuting this case. The defendant is represented by Kenneth Russo, Esq.

The charges against the defendant are merely accusations and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty.

## No official word on Quran-burner Salwan Momika's death rumours

Even hours after reports first emerged that Salwan Momika, a former Iraqi militia leader who became a fierce critic of Islam, had been found dead, there was no official reaction from Norway. Momika, who gained global prominence and notoriety for championing "free speech" and the public burning of the Quran, had recently moved to Norway from Sweden.

A far-Right website, Document, quoted the Norwegian Police's Immigration Unit as saying that it wasn't aware that Salwan Momika had been found dead in Norway. "The police's immigration unit is not aware that someone with the above name [Salwan Momika] has died in Norway recently," the communications department of the police unit said. However, there was no official public statement issued by the Norwegian government.

A Christian who turned atheist, Momika described himself as "a liberal atheist critic and thinker".

On Eid, in June 2023, Salwan Momika stunned the world as he stomped on a copy of the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, and then burnt it in front of Stockholm's largest mosque. A friend of his filmed this act of defiance.

Radio Genoa on Tuesday reported that the 37-year-old had been found dead, only to inform some moments later that further confirmation was awaited.

The news of his death was making waves on social media all through Tuesday, but there was no confirmation or denial from Norwegian authorities for hours.

Those who announced Momika's death with over 1 million impressions deleted the tweet. We are waiting for further



confirmation," Radio Genoa posted on X. Earlier it said: "The lifeless body of Iraqi refugee and Islamic critic Salwan Sabah Matti Momika has been found in Norway. Momika was known for organizing demonstrations in Sweden where he publicly burned the Koran several times." Even after 12 hours of the reports by RadioGenoa and a couple of other outlets, there was no official word from Norway. A Community Note on X, later flagged the RadioGenoa posts and said the "rumours" had "been debunked". There were also inputs that multiple attempts had been made to update Momika's Wikipedia page since April 1.

**SALWAN MOMIKA FLED IRAQ TO REACH SWEDEN**

Salwan Momika has been in the news after he shifted to Norway from Sweden. He was granted a Swedish residency permit in 2021.

Momika moved out of Iraq in 2018, seeking asylum. Though a Christian who turned atheist, Momika behaved like an extreme

Ex-Muslim.

Ex-Muslims are individuals who identified as Muslims once, left the religion due to personal reasons, differing beliefs, or disillusionment with its teachings, practices, or community norms.

Facilitated by the internet, a movement of Ex-Muslims has gained ground across the world. "Today I left Sweden and am now in Norway under the protection of the Norwegian authorities," Salwan Momika posted on March 27.

"I applied for asylum and international protection in Norway because Sweden does not accept asylum for philosophers and thinkers, but only accepts asylum for terrorists. My love and respect for the Swedish people will remain the same, but the persecution I was subjected to by the Swedish authorities does not represent the Swedes," he added in the post.

**SALWAN MOMIKA, ISLAM'S VOCIFEROUS CRITIC**

Sweden had faced the anger of Islamic countries for hosting Salwan Momika, the

well known and vociferous critic of Islam. He called the Quran, the holy book of the Muslims, the "most dangerous book of the world".

"I will continue my struggle against Islamic ideology. Since I started the struggle against Islam, I have paid and continue to pay the price, and I am ready for that, whatever the cost," Salwan Momika said in the March 27 update, stressing his resolve.

Sweden withdrew Momika's residence permit but put his deportation on hold, saying his life would be in danger if he were returned to Iraq, according to an Associated Press report.

Momika had staged a series of public desecrations of the Quran in 2023.

Clashes broke out in Malmo, Sweden's third-largest city, in September last year after an angry mob tried to prevent Momika from burning a copy of the Quran.

Sweden allowed his protests on the aegis of free speech. But questions were also asked if the Swedish authorities had gone too far by allowing Momika to burn the Quran. Momika's burning of the Quran was termed "Islamophobia" by the Swedish foreign minister. Police had denied him permission for the act, but a court gave him the go ahead based on the principles of free speech.

Swedish police, however, filed preliminary hate speech charges against him.

Sweden's Migration Agency decided to revoke Momika's residence permit after finding out that the Iraqi asylum-seeker had provided false information in his application for asylum, according to Swedish broadcaster TV4.



## Urvashi Rautela breaks her silence on controversy over her and Rishabh Pant

Actress Urvashi Rautela, who recently got embroiled in a controversy surrounding cricketer Rishabh Pant, has issued a clarification expressing that her recent remarks were not directed towards anyone but were a part of a script.

The actress recently featured in an advertisement for a matrimony brand.

Instagram, and wrote: "It's a generic brand script given by the brand and it's their prerogative. Not directed towards anyone, #spreadpositivity. As a responsible individual, I understand the impact individuals can have from me as the brand's basic ambassador #hope #inspirekindness."

Meanwhile, on the work front, Urvashi is



In the video, Urvashi was talking about actors, businessmen, singers and batsmen and said "Kuch log toh meri height ke bhi nahi hai." While the advertisement went viral, the actress found herself entangled in an unnecessary controversy in which it was alleged that she indirectly mocked Indian cricketer Rishabh Pant in the video. The actress has now issued a clarification on the rumours in order to shut all trolls. On Monday, Urvashi took to the Stories section of her

currently enjoying the success of 'Love Dose 2.0' with Yo Yo Honey Singh, and is currently gearing up for 'Jahangir National University' (JNU) where she is playing a college politician.

The actress also has projects like 'Welcome 3' with Akshay Kumar, 'NBK109' with Bobby Deol, Dulqueer Salman, Nandamuri Balakrishna, 'Baap' (remake of Hollywood blockbuster 'Expendables') with Sunny Deol and Sanjay Dutt and 'Inspector Avinash 2' with Randeep Hooda in the pipeline.



## Diljit recalls Imtiaz Ali sending emails about how Chamkila would be thinking in a situation

Diljit Dosanjh got a lot of help from director Imtiaz Ali to step into the shoes of musician Amar Singh Chamkila, who was called 'Elvis Presley Of Punjab', for the upcoming film 'Chamkila'. The actor-singer said that the filmmaker would send him emails about how the late singer must be thinking in situations.

The film is based on the slain singer, whose themes majorly consisted of women objectification, sexual violence, domestic violence and alcoholism. He met a tragic end in 1988, after the singer and his wife were assassinated.

To step into the world of Chamkila, Diljit just followed Ali's lead.

"I followed Imtiaz Ali. When he is making a biopic, he is very sure of what is being made. I followed his guidelines. I did whatever he wanted me to do," Diljit told VOICE. The 40-year-old star then went on to share that Ali would send him emails about how his character would think in a particular situation. "I feel he thinks about this every



day, whatever would cross his mind, he would send me an email on it because I have a very raw way. So, maybe he took this way for me or he must be thinking about the character."

It was not for the story or the dialogues, he stressed.

"What he was sending across was different from the story and the dialogues. It was a characterisation about what Chamkila is thinking or would be running in his mind." He has kept the mails safe and even shared that he has exclusive pictures of the late singer. "I still have those mails with me and I have some pictures of Chamkila sent by him that are not out anywhere. It helped me a lot," he added. Amar Singh Chamkila is an upcoming Hindi biographical drama film based on the life of musician Amar Singh Chamkila. It is directed and co-produced by Imtiaz Ali. The film stars Diljit Dosanjh in the titular role, with Parineeti Chopra as his wife. The film is set to release later this month on Netflix.



# “Unveiling 'Zee Family Pack': Elevating South Asian Entertainment with Nationwide Access on YouTube TV!”

Mumbai, India, Los Angeles, CA – [March 20, 2024] – Embark on an immersive journey into South Asian entertainment with the much-anticipated launch of Zee’s new video packages, now gracing screens nationwide on YouTube TV. Unveiling the “Zee Family” package, this strategic partnership introduces an impressive selection of 18 premium channels on the YouTube TV platform, dedicated to captivating the diverse and vibrant South Asian community across the United States.

Asia TV USA Ltd. and YouTube TV are thrilled to announce the successful launch of 18 channels from Zee Entertainment in the USA. This partnership marks a significant milestone in catering to the diverse needs of the South Asian population in the USA, particularly regional language speakers such as Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Marathi etc., the regional languages have seen tremendous growth in the last decade as per the data released in the 2020 US Census. This landmark collaboration not



only reaffirms the availability of the flagship Hindi general entertainment channel Zee TV, but also introduces a total of 17 additional ZEE channels, offering a rich variety spanning multiple languages. The expanded lineup includes popular channels such as Zee Cinema, &TV, Zee Bangla, Zee Tamil, Zee Telugu, Zee Kannada, Zee Keralam, Zee Marathi, Zee Punjabi, Zee World, and others.

Mr. Punit Misra, President of Content and International

Markets at Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd., emphasizes the strategic significance of the U.S. market within ZEE’s global strategy. “The rising South Asian population in the U.S. not only underscores our commitment but also presents a unique prospect for us to fulfill the evolving content preferences of this expanding demographic in the U.S. The strategic partnership with YouTube TV will enable viewers in USA, access to a vast repertoire of

rich, multi-lingual content from India showcasing the Country’s culture and traditions, ensuring an immersive and fulfilling viewing experience for consumers.

This collaboration with ZEE marks a significant stride in delivering a premium suite of channels tailored to the South Asian audience to YouTube TV customers nationwide. Emphasizing the importance of this alliance, Mr. Ashok Namboodiri, Chief Business Officer for International Business at Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd., affirms, ‘Our partnership is pivotal in realizing our growth objectives in the U.S., guaranteeing the provision of a diverse range of entertainment options specifically curated for the South Asian audiences subscribing to YouTube TV.

For more details on our South Asian TV packages on YouTube TV, immerse yourself in the India Family pack experience at <https://tv.youtube.com/store>. Elevate your entertainment and embrace the diversity! “ About YouTube TV

YouTube TV is a subscription streaming service that lets viewers watch live and on-demand TV from over 100 channels through a simple and award-winning experience. Viewers have access to local and national live sports, breaking news, shows, movies and more, and can tune in on any screen (phone, tablet, TV, computer). With over 8 million subscribers, YouTube TV offers features such as unlimited cloud DVR storage space, multiview, the ability to view key sports plays, hide spoilers and check out real-time stats.

About Asia TV USA Ltd. “Asia TV USA Ltd. distributes the services of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd. (Zeel) in USA. Zeel is a media company offering content for entertainment of diverse audiences. With presence in over 190 countries and a reach of more than 1.3 billion people around the globe, ZEEL is amongst the largest global Media & Entertainment Companies across genres, languages, and integrated content platforms.”

## Aladdin, already among the biggest hits in Broadway history, celebrates 10th anniversary

In the decade since Aladdin opened, only the mega-hits The Lion King, Wicked and Hamilton have grossed more at the box office. Aladdin, already among the biggest hits in Broadway history, recently celebrated its 10th anniversary at the New Amsterdam Theatre, having opened to critical acclaim on March 20, 2014. The hit production has played over 3,500 performances and welcomed nearly 6M guests to the New Amsterdam Theatre. It ranks #15 on the list of all-time Broadway long runs and has appeared on the Top 10 list of highest-grossing Broadway shows virtually every week of its run.

In the decade since Aladdin opened, only the mega-hits The Lion King, Wicked and Hamilton have grossed more at the box office.

A special celebratory performance commemorating the anniversary was held on



Thursday, March 28. Director-choreographer Casey Nicholaw staged a slate of hidden Easter eggs and an epic surprise in the show’s signature production number “Friend Like Me.”

Globally, Aladdin has achieved reach and enduring popularity rare among Broadway musicals. There have been 11 productions on four continents showcasing the spectacle created by Nicholaw and his extraordinary creative team,

winners of a collective 24 career Tony® Awards.

As of Aladdin’s milestone anniversary, Broadway audiences have been treated to a staggering number of special effects:

- Aladdin and Jasmine have flown over 115 miles on the magic carpet while singing the Oscar-winning “A Whole New World”

- The Genie has set off more than 131,000 pyrotechnics in the showstopping “Friend Like Me”

- In the Act Two opener “Prince

Ali,” the cast and wardrobe team have made nearly a quarter million lightning-fast costume quick changes

- 850 pounds of custom-mixed glitter have been used to create the Genie’s signature sparkle

For Aladdin production photography and b-roll, visit [www.press.aladdinthemusical.com](http://www.press.aladdinthemusical.com). ABOUT ALADDIN

Aladdin, the hit musical based on the Academy Award®-winning animated film, opened on Broadway at the New Amsterdam Theatre to critical acclaim on March 20, 2014 and quickly established itself as one of the biggest new blockbusters in recent years. Hailed by The New York Times as “fabulous and extravagant,” the Broadway production has set 17 New Amsterdam Theatre house records and spawned 11 productions on four continents. Worldwide it has welcomed nearly 20 million people and can be seen currently

on Broadway, on tour across North America and the U.K. and Ireland, as well as in Japan and Spain, with a new production in Seoul, South Korea opening this fall.

The current cast of Aladdin stars Michael Maliakel making his Broadway debut in the title role, Michael James Scott as Genie, Sonya Balsara as Jasmine and Dennis Stowe as Jafar. The show also features Milo Alosi, Zach Bencal and Brad Weinstock as Aladdin’s sidekicks Kassim, Babkak and Omar, JC Montgomery as Sultan and Don Darryl Rivera as Iago. Caleb Barnett, Jeremy Gaston and Wes Hart stand by for several principals. Produced by Disney Theatrical Group, under the direction of Andrew Flatt, Anne Quart and Thomas Schumacher, Aladdin features music by Tony Award and eight-time Oscar® winner Alan Menken (Beauty and the Beast, Newsies, Sister Act), lyrics by two-time Oscar winner



## Shraddha Kapoor croons Karan Aujla's 'Jee Ni Lagda', asks fans for night drive songs

Actress Shraddha Kapoor wants to update her playlist for night drives and requested her fans to share songs with her on social media. Shraddha took to Instagram stories, where she was seen crooning to the Punjabi sensation Karan Aujla's 'Jee Ni Lagda', while she is seen on drive and sitting in the passenger's seat. The actress wrote: "Night drive ke liye... Aur aise gaane batao (For night drives... tell me more songs like this)." She did not reveal who she was on a drive with. On the work front, Shraddha, who is rumoured to be dating Rahul Mody, will next be seen in 'Stree 2'. Mody is credited as the writer of films such as 'Pyaar Ka Punchnama 2', 'Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweetie' and 'Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar'.

### Nushratt struggles to breathe in corset; says all this for the 'prem' of fashion



Actress Nushratt Bharuccha says all for the love for fashion, as she wore a "corset" she couldn't breathe in. Nushratt took to Instagram and shared a video. In the clip, the actress is seen dressed in a white corset and cargo pants as she poses in an elevator. While coming out of the elevator, Nushratt said: "I'm gonna collapse a lung." To which her stylist replies: "That's okay". "She said that's okay to my collapsing lung," Nushratt retorted, and added "I cannot breathe". For the caption, the actress wrote: "Premika ne pyaar se pose bhi karliya! In a corset I couldn't breathe in! All for the prem of fashion." Talking about work, Nushratt will be seen in the second instalment of 'Chhorii', a horror film directed by Vishal Furia. Released in 2021, 'Chhorii' was a remake of the Marathi-language film 'Lapachhapi'.





## Rashmika Mandanna reveals who makes her mornings 'the best'



Actress Rashmika Mandanna took to social media to spill the beans about who makes her mornings the "best". On Monday, Rashmika took to Instagram stories and posted a cheeky picture, featuring her and her furry-friend Aura.

In the image, the two are cuddled up in bed.

For the caption, she wrote: "My mornings are the best with her (heart emoji)."

On Sunday, Rashmika had posted a picture of Aura's paws and wrote: "I've missed these."

Talking about work, the teaser of Rashmika's 'The Girlfriend' will be dropping on the actress' birthday on April 5.

According to the director, she has dubbed in all five languages. However, what makes the teaser special is that she has dubbed in Malayalam for the first time.

The actress then has the action drama 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' starring Allu Arjun in the titular role. Directed by Sukumar, the film also stars Fahadh Faasil. She will also be seen in 'Rainbow' and 'Chaava' in the pipeline.

## Tejasswi Prakash stuns in all-black outfit; fans call her 'mystic beauty'



The 'Bigg Boss 15' winner Tejasswi Prakash on Tuesday dropped scintillating pictures in a black outfit, leaving fans in awe of her 'mystical' beauty.

Taking to Instagram, the 'Naagin 6' actress, who has 7.4 million followers, Tejasswi shared a string of pictures, wherein we can see her wearing an all-black

outfit — a half-sleeves crop top with closed neckline, and a

matching skirt.

She rounded off the look with matching heels and silver necklace.

For the makeup, she went all glam— glossy pink lips, thick eyebrows, and kohl-rimmed eyes. Her hair is tied in a bun.

The post is captioned as: "Can you please take my picture with the mirror?"

Actress Smriti Kalra

commented: "Classy."

One user commented: "The flawless beauty... what fantastic clicks."

Another user said: "mystic beauty."

One fan said: "so elegant."

Meanwhile, the actress is known for her work in 'Silsila Badalte Rishton Ka 2', 'Karn Sangini', 'Pehredaar Piya Ki', and 'Swaragini – Jodein Rishton Ke Sur'.

## Ileana D'Cruz is working on 'self-love' with her 'best man'

Actress and new mother Ileana D'Cruz spoke about self-love and shared that she is working on it with her partner Michael Dolan, whom she tagged the "best man ever."

Ileana took to Instagram stories, where she shared a page from 'How to stop breaking your own heart'. It said about being mistreated, self-worth, toxic situations and also stated that "if we don't love ourselves, we're going to end up around people who don't love us either." She captioned the note: "This. Working on self-love now with the best man ever @dolemite123 (heart emoji)."

Ileana married Dolan in May 2023. The two welcomed their firstborn, a son, in August 2023. The actress announced on social media the arrival of her son, whom she has named Koa Phoenix Dolan.

Ileana will be seen on the big screen in the upcoming romantic comedy 'Do Aur Do Pyaar'. It also stars Vidya Balan, Pratik Gandhi and Sendhil Ramamurthy. Directed by Shirsha Guha Thakurta, who is making her debut, the film is set to release on April 19.





# Adani Group becomes India's 1st 'das hazari' in renewables sector with over 10,000 MW portfolio

In a first for the country, Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL), on Wednesday, said that it has surpassed 10,000 megawatts (MW) of operational portfolio, delivering reliable, affordable and clean power to the national grid.

AGEL's 10,934 MW operational portfolio will power more than 5.8 million homes and help avoid about 21 million tonnes of CO2 emissions annually, moving towards the goal of 45,000 GW of renewable energy by 2030.

"We are proud to be India's first 'das hazari' in the renewables space," said Gautam Adani, Adani Group's Founder and



Chairman.

"In less than a decade, Adani Green Energy has not just envisioned a greener future but has actualised it, growing from a

mere idea to explore clean energy to achieving a phenomenal 10,000 MW in installed capacity," Gautam Adani added.

The company's operational portfolio consists of 7,393 MW solar, 1,401 MW wind and 2,140 MW wind-solar hybrid capacity. "In our drive towards 45,000 MW by 2030, we are building the world's largest renewable energy plant in Khavda — a 30,000 MW project unparalleled on the global stage. AGEL is not just setting benchmarks for the world but redefining them," said Gautam Adani.

"This achievement is a demonstration of the rapidity and scale at which the Adani Group aims to facilitate India's transition to clean, reliable and affordable energy," the Adani

Group Founder noted.

In line with AGEL's pledge to enhance natural and social capital, the company is pursuing sustainable practices across its operations.

AGEL's operating portfolio is certified 'single-use plastic free', 'zero waste-to-landfill' and 'water positive for plants with more than 200 MW capacity'. AGEL is developing the world's largest renewable energy project of 30,000 MW on barren land at Khavda in Kutch, Gujarat. Built across 538 sq km, it is five times the size of Paris and almost as large as Mumbai city.

## Samsung to release new products globally at same time



products are released simultaneously across the world. It will have a bigger impact on the global market."

Samsung said these new appliances are equipped with interactive big screens, offering accessibility in 40 languages and serving as centralised control hubs for other SmartThings-connected devices.

Furthermore, its market-tailored approach ensures that each region receives products tailored to its unique needs.

In the upcoming Paris event, the new energy-efficient, extra wide fridge-freezer and the washer lineup will be introduced as Europe requires an extra focus on sustainability and energy saving.

The US market will see the introduction of the Bespoke Slide-in Range with AI Home, a multi-functional induction range designed to meet American consumers' diverse needs.

Samsung on Wednesday unveiled its latest lineup of home appliance innovations with the global launch of its artificial intelligence (AI)-powered products in a bid to offer synchronising consumer experiences worldwide. At a press conference in Seoul, the tech giant unveiled its latest 'BESPOKE AI' home appliance lineup, including washer-dryer combos, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners, all equipped

with advanced AI capabilities and seamless connectivity.

It said the corresponding events will also take place in Paris and New York later on the same day, respectively, showcasing new kitchen and living appliances for each distinct market, reports Yonhap news agency.

"We hold these media events in Paris and New York later today," Samsung Electronics CEO and Vice Chairman Han Jong-hee said at the event. "All our

## HP launches laptops with industry-leading AI tools for creators in India

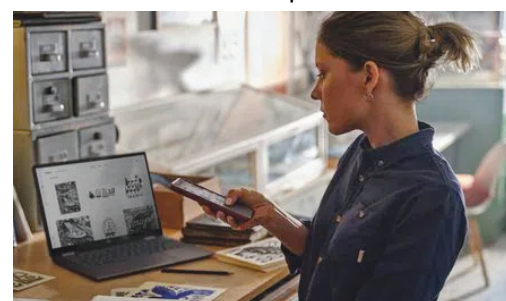
PC and printer major HP on Wednesday launched Envy x360 14 laptops with advanced artificial intelligence (AI) features for the creators' community in India. The new laptops come with a Microsoft CoPilot button on the keyboard to enable generative AI features such as assisted search, content generation and more. The HP Envy x360 14 laptop is available at a starting price of Rs 99,999 in two colours — meteor silver and atmospheric blue.

Weighing 1.4 kgs, the device comes with a 14-inch OLED touch display and is equipped with Intel Core Ultra processors to facilitate high-end creation with apps such as Adobe Photoshop, the company said in a statement.

"The laptops also come with a Neural Processing Unit (NPU) that helps with battery optimisation by 65 per cent for

uninterrupted creativity and productivity," the company added.

The HP Envy x360 14 laptops are equipped with Windows Studio effects for better video features. It provides AI-based



features such as automatically zooming and cropping the image as the user moves around.

"Continuing its commitment towards sustainability, HP has designed the new Envy x360 14 laptops with up to 55 per cent recycled metal," said the company. The device claims to offer more than 14 hours of battery life, fast connectivity with Wi-Fi 7 and advanced thermal solution for powerful performance without generating disruptive noise.

## Canada and Meta Strike Deal to Restore News on Facebook and Instagram

In a significant turn of events, the Canadian government has reached an agreement with Meta Platforms Inc. to reinstate news content on Facebook and Instagram. This development marks a pivotal shift in the ongoing debate surrounding the regulation of social media platforms and the dissemination of news in the country. The agreement follows

months of clandestine negotiations between Canadian regulators and Meta, aimed at addressing concerns raised by Bill C-18. Meta's decision to remove news content in response to the bill had sparked widespread controversy and debate regarding the role of tech giants in supporting and funding news media in Canada. Central to the agreement

is the recognition by both parties that Bill C-18 may have been a misstep. Canadian Minister of Heritage, Pascale Rodriguez, acknowledged the complexities of regulating online platforms and expressed regret for the harm caused by the bill.

Similarly, Meta admitted to its own missteps, acknowledging the arbitrary blocking of news

accounts and the lack of transparency in decision-making processes. The company's new chatbot, 'Priscilla,' issued a public apology for the harm caused to media organizations and the Canadian public. Despite Meta's initial justifications for removing news content, it was revealed that certain widely followed Canadian social media accounts continued

to share news on the platform, raising questions about the fairness of Meta's actions.

Under the terms of the agreement, Meta will reinstate news content on its platforms by October 21, 2025. Additionally, the Canadian government has committed to revising Bill C-18 and reassessing its approach to regulating social media.



# 6 exercises that address an often overlooked key to longevity

A strong handshake generally makes a good first impression, but there is more to your grip than conveying confidence and trustworthiness. Science points to a stronger grip as an important key to overall strength and longevity. The strength of your handshake even indicates heart health, research has found.

While it may seem like a small part of your body's total strength, grip strength is a foundational component of physical fitness, linked to injury prevention, as well as a reliable benchmark for many aspects of health and functional independence as we age.

Stronger grip muscles help stabilize wrists, reducing the risk of strains and injuries during daily activities and physical exercise. Tasks such as carrying groceries, opening doors and jars, and even getting out of a chair all require adequate grip strength. A stronger grip also enables more progressions in fitness training, increasing the ability to get stronger by enabling people to lift more weight and perform more repetitions.

Pro sports prioritize grip strength training for obvious reasons (such as gripping a bat or a ball), but it's seldom considered a staple in general fitness programs. To help you get a better grasp on how your hands measure up, here's a road map to assess and strengthen your grip at home. What makes up grip strength? Grip strength refers to the force generated by the



muscles in the hand and forearm to grasp and hold objects, and has three different aspects:

**Crushing strength** is how strongly you can grip with your fingers and the palm of your hand.

**Supporting strength** refers to your ability to hold onto something or to hang from something.

**Pinching strength** is how firmly you can pinch something between your fingers and thumb.

**How to assess and track your grip strength at home**  
In clinical settings, a hand dynamometer measures grip strength by gauging the force applied when squeezing its handle.

The device provides a quantitative assessment typically expressed in units of force, such as pounds or kilograms.

To test your grip strength at home without a dynamometer, use a

bathroom scale or tennis ball to give you rough, trackable measurements.

## Scale squeeze test

While standing, hold the scale in both hands, one on either side with the heels of your hands on top and fingers wrapped underneath the sides. Squeeze for five seconds. Then perform the test using only one hand at a time. Repeat with both hands and again with each hand.

Record your highest scores for both hands, left and right. Watch this video for a demo.

## Tennis ball squeeze test

From a relaxed, seated position, hold a tennis ball in one hand and squeeze it as hard as you can for five seconds. Repeat three times with each hand, resting for 30 seconds in between repetitions. A stronger grip will result in a firmer squeeze that you can

maintain longer. Compare how tightly you can squeeze the ball with each hand.

These simple tests can provide a rough estimate of your grip strength. To track your progress over time, note the date and your observations of your grip during testing. Reassess your grip strength periodically every two to four weeks to monitor improvements and adjust your training program accordingly.

Be patient and consistent with your training efforts as improvements may take time.

**Editor's note:** Before beginning any new exercise program, consult your doctor. Stop immediately if you experience pain.

Exercises to strengthen your grip  
Improving grip strength involves incorporating specific exercises to address all three aspects of

grip strength.

Below, I've outlined exercises for each, noting basic exercises as No. 1 and advanced progressions as No. 2.

Incorporate the appropriate exercises for your current strength level into your training regimen three to five times per week, allowing for rest between sessions to facilitate recovery and muscle growth. **Crushing strength exercises**

The tennis ball squeeze test noted above also can be used as a basic strengthening exercise. You can increase the difficulty by increasing the duration of your squeeze and number of repetitions.

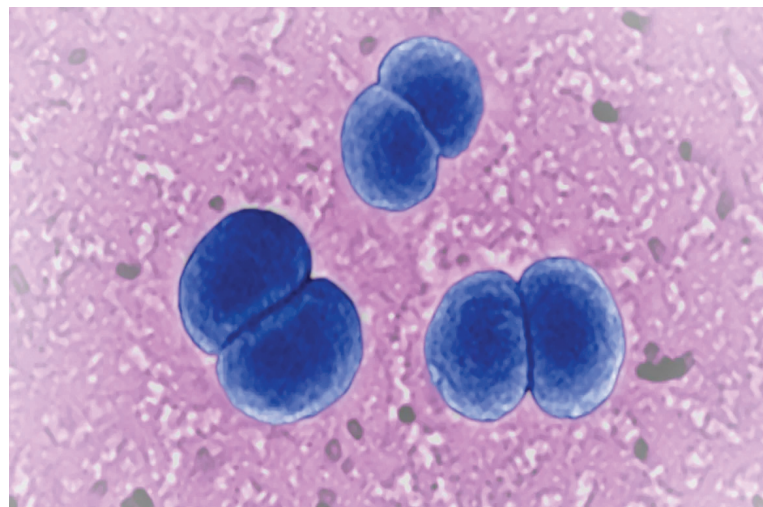
## Dowel rod roll

While sitting or standing, hold on to a dowel rod, stick or rolling pin, with your palms facing down. Moving your wrists alternately, rotate the dowel rod so that it rolls inside your hands in one direction for 15 to 30 seconds and then the other. To make the exercise more challenging, speed up the rolling. You also can perform this exercise with the palms facing up as a variation. Do two to three sets of 10 to 15 repetitions, resting in between sets.

## Wrist curls

Sit on a bench or chair with your forearms resting on your thighs, palms facing up and wrists hanging over the knees. Hold a light dumbbell of 1 to 5 pounds in each hand with an underhand grip. The weight should be enough for a slight challenge but should not feel like a strain.

## CDC alerts doctors to watch for rare, serious bacterial infection appearing with unusual symptoms



Health officials are alerting doctors to be on the lookout for certain types of rare, serious meningococcal infections that are on the rise in the United

States. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a new health alert that these infections, which are caused by a certain strain of

*Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria, may present with unusual symptoms. In the cases identified so far this year, about 1 in 6 people have died, a higher fatality rate than they typically see with meningococcal infections. These cases are also unusual because they are striking middle-aged adults. Typically, meningitis infections strike babies or adolescents and young adults. The CDC's alert comes after the Virginia Department of Health warned about five deaths from the same rare, serious form of meningococcal disease in September.

Meningococcal disease refers to any sickness caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*. The infection can lead to both meningitis and a serious infection of the bloodstream called septicemia, or blood poisoning. The bacteria can spread from person to person through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions, and typically occurs via kissing, coughing, sneezing or living in close contact with others who are infected. There are four different groups of meningococcal bacteria known to circulate in the United States — B, C, W and Y. The CDC says that in 2023, there were 422 cases of disease

caused by these bacteria reported in the United States, the highest number reported since 2014. Most of them were caused by a particular strain, ST-1466, which is in the Y subgroup. So far, 2024 is on track to top that number. To date, 143 cases have been reported in the United States — almost 80% more than had been reported at the same point in 2023. The CDC says most people being diagnosed with this particular strain are adults ages 30 to 60. A disproportionate number of cases, 63%, are among Black people and 15% are in people who have HIV.



# Tesla's weak first-quarter deliveries an 'unmitigated disaster' for Musk

Tesla's quarterly deliveries declined for the first time in nearly four years and fell short of Wall Street analysts' estimates amid a challenging competitive landscape in the EV market and questions regarding the company's direction. The Elon Musk-led automaker's stock declined by 4.9% during Tuesday's trading session and slid a further 0.28% in after hours trading, with the stock down nearly 33% on the year. That followed Tesla's announcement that it delivered roughly 387,000 vehicles in the first quarter – well below expectations of about 443,000 and an 8.5% decrease compared to the first quarter of last year.

"Let's call this as it is: While we were anticipating a bad 1Q, this was an unmitigated disaster 1Q that is hard to explain away," Dan Ives, managing director and equity analyst of Wedbush Securities, wrote in a note to investors. He added that the firm remains "bullish on the long term story given the prospects for growth" but described the delivery figures as a "train wreck into a



brick wall quarter" for Tesla. Tesla faced an escalating price war in China, a key market for the EV maker, as low-cost competitors like BYD forced it to reduce prices and cut into its margins.

High interest rates in the U.S., a byproduct of the Federal Reserve's fight against inflation, have also made it more expensive for American car buyers – a dynamic Tesla has sought to counteract with temporary discounts to entice

customers. The company also experienced production issues at its Gigafactory near Berlin, Germany. It announced a nearly two-week production pause at the facility in late January and early February due to a parts shortage caused by the shipping crisis in the Red Sea precipitated by Iran-backed Houthi militants. The facility also was forced to pause production for nearly a week in March due to an arson attack by an environmental activist against

an electricity transmission facility that helped power the plant.

Having faced a variety of headwinds in the latest quarter, Ives said Musk needs to right the ship to regain investors' confidence in his leadership of the world's most valuable automaker. "For Musk, this is a fork in the road time to get Tesla through this turbulent period, otherwise troubling days could be ahead. With the ongoing debacle around

margins, production and ongoing macro events, Musk will need to quickly take the reins back in to regain confidence in the eyes of the Street with a big few quarters ahead."

loss Gerber, CEO of Gerber Kawasaki, said in an appearance on FOX Business' "The Claman Countdown" that Tesla's dismal quarter should increase scrutiny of Tesla's board of directors and their oversight of CEO Elon Musk.

"How many mistakes can a board make? You've got the pay package issue in Delaware – we know it's not an independent board, even though they've disclosed in documents that they are independent when it's not actually true," Gerber said. Host Liz Claman noted the competitive challenges in China and the production issues in Germany and Gerber said that while some of those factors shouldn't be discounted, he added that Tesla vehicles "are the best vehicles on the road from a quality, performance perspective by a large margin and they're really cool vehicles."

## Chase allowing advertisers to target customers based on purchases



Chase announced Wednesday it has launched a new media business that allows advertisers to target the bank's 80 million U.S. customers based on their purchases. The platform, Chase Media Solutions, allows brands to "connect with consumers' personal passions and interests," while "customers benefit from personalized offers

and the ability to earn cash back with brands they love or are discovering for the first time," the bank said in a press release. According to The Wall Street Journal, which first reported the news, Chase will only charge merchants for the service whenever a customer makes a purchase through a deal on the platform. "Our deep

understanding of consumer spending across categories has driven us to reimagine what retail media networks can offer," said Rich Muhlstock, president of Chase Media Solutions.

"Like retailers, we have first-party data and a dedicated audience," Muhlstock added. "But what sets us apart is the unrivaled scale and insights from our customers – having long served as a trusted guide for their financial decisions." Chase, owned by JPMorgan Chase, said Chase Media Solutions is the first bank-led platform of its kind. The company said the advantages to the platform include the ability for businesses to target customers based on their purchase history, a better return on investment for advertising and a verified audience. The company said some of its initial pilot partners, who have already tried out the service with successful 30-day campaigns, include Air Canada, Solo Stove, Blue Bottle and Whataburger.

## Samuel Bankman-Fried Sentenced to 25 Years for His Orchestration of Multiple Fraudulent Schemes

Samuel Bankman-Fried, also known as SBF, 32, of Stanford, California, was sentenced today to 25 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$11 billion in forfeiture for his orchestration of multiple fraudulent schemes. Bankman-Fried, who was the founder of the cryptocurrency exchange FTX and the cryptocurrency trading firm Alameda Research, misappropriated billions of dollars of customer funds deposited with FTX, defrauded investors in FTX of more than \$1.7 billion, and defrauded lenders to Alameda of more than \$1.3 billion. Bankman-Fried was previously found guilty on two counts of wire fraud, two counts of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit commodities fraud, and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, following a one-month trial before U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan, who imposed today's sentence.

"There are serious consequences for defrauding customers and investors," said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland, "Anyone who believes they can hide their financial crimes behind wealth and power, or behind a shiny new thing they claim no one else is smart enough to understand, should think twice. I am grateful to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York and the FBI for their outstanding work in bringing Mr. Bankman-Fried to justice." "The FBI will aggressively investigate individuals, like Samuel Bankman-Fried, who engage in fraudulent schemes at the expense of the American public and our financial systems," said FBI Director Christopher Wray. "We are proud of the successful collaboration that ended this massive mismanagement and misappropriation of billions of dollars. Today's sentencing should serve as a warning to others looking to use fraudulent means for personal gain — there are consequences for your actions."



# How CPEC Has Become the Curse of Balochistan

By: Arun Anand

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become a contentious issue for the indigenous Baloch population in Balochistan, a province strategically positioned geopolitically. Central to this debate is the Gwadar deep-water port, strategically connecting China's Xinjiang region with the Arabian Sea. Despite the purported economic integration goals of CPEC, the Baloch people express profound concerns regarding potential repercussions on their natural resources and the delicate ecological balance of the region. This sentiment perceives CPEC not merely as an economic corridor but as a project designed to exploit Balochistan's resources, contributing to regional poverty.

The association between CPEC and the oppression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang adds complexity to the Baloch perspective, framing the initiative as a geopolitical instrument entangled in broader regional dynamics. In this context, the intricate relationship between economic development and the preservation of local resources and ecological sustainability becomes a critical concern for the indigenous population.

Recent developments suggest a resurgence of activity, notably characterised by the prominent role assumed by the influential military establishment. The military's pronounced inclination toward fostering stronger relations with China is



underscored by its perception of China as a robust ally in countering India. Reports indicate collaborative efforts between the Pakistani and Chinese governments to expand Pakistan's manufacturing capacity for Chinese military aircraft, weaponry, and related infrastructure under the auspices of a discreetly formulated plan. Concurrently, a nascent institutional entity, the CPEC Authority (CPECA), spearheaded by a retired lieutenant general, actively promotes and defends the corridor. However, the disclosure of substantive details regarding the corridor remains limited. Official documentation on the [cpec.gov.pk](http://cpec.gov.pk) website provides only cursory information, rendering independent verification challenging. This opacity is

further strengthened by the Chairman's restrained interaction with the media, contributing to a discernible lacuna in publicly accessible project specifics.

A recent public awareness session organised by the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) in Gwadar provided a platform for political and social activists, BYC leaders, and local residents to voice their concerns. This session unveiled a collective worry over the adverse consequences of CPEC, contending that the development in Gwadar presented a misleading façade, concealing the detrimental effects of Pakistani and Chinese interests in the region. Panellists at the BYC session highlighted the increase in environmental vulnerabilities in Gwadar due to

infrastructure development, with recent floods and rains leaving the city in a state of helplessness. The unintended consequences of infrastructure projects linked to CPEC have contributed to the degradation of the very region that is expected to play a key role in the economic corridor. A concerning trend of forced displacement, primarily targeting indigenous populations, was underscored by the BYC panellists.

CPEC projects are increasingly perceived as a means to replace locals with foreigners, notably Chinese and Punjabis, posing a significant threat to the socio-economic fabric of Balochistan, as indigenous communities lose ancestral lands and livelihoods. The collective portrayal of CPEC as a threat to Balochistan encompasses concerns of environmental degradation, displacement of local populations, and undermining the region's socio-economic stability.

Despite Balochistan's abundance of natural resources viz, gold, copper, black pearls, oil, coal, natural gas, and various reserves exceeding a trillion dollars, the province bears the lowest human development index in Pakistan. The absence of hospitals and educational institutions dedicated to the welfare of indigenous people exacerbates the situation. Balochistan, with only one university for the entire province, stands in stark contrast to Punjab, where a single city houses seven to eight universities.

## A coal block, unlocked for mining after industry lobbying, awarded to Adani Group'

A coal-rich mine block inside a dense forest, unlocked for auction following lobbying by an association of private power industry players overriding the environment ministry's objection, has been awarded to Adani Group.

Coal Ministry had defied the environment ministry and vetoed its own expert body's advice, to open up the Mara II Mahan coal block in Madhya Pradesh for mining after lobbying by the association, of which Adani is a member, The Collective reported in October last.

Though the lobby group's pitch to the coal ministry in 2021 rode on the rumoured coal shortage, The Collective's report had said it was poised to benefit the Adani Group, a member of the industry group.

On 12 March 2024, an Adani Group firm, Mahan Energen Limited, bagged Mara II Mahan coal block holding 995 million tonnes of coal. Its offer of 6% revenue share is the lowest among what the government fetched in the latest round

of auctions. In an email reply to detailed queries by The Reporters' Collective, an Adani Group spokesperson said, "Your interpretation and claims on the role of Association of Power Producers (APP) members are unfounded and



inappropriate."

"The APP has over 25 members. The members have no role in the decision-making process for allocation of fuel sources. Hence, it is completely unfounded to claim that a specific block was included in the auction at the request of the APP solely for the benefit of a particular power producer," added the

spokesperson.

The Lobbying

Documents accessed by The Reporters' Collective showed the lobby group, Association of Power Producers, had written to the Union Coal Ministry requesting to open up two new coal mines.

Ashok Khurana, the director general of the association and former bureaucrat in the Ministry of Power, emailed the then Coal Secretary in November 2021 drawing attention to the news of coal shortage. The

association said the need for new mines arose since power plants at the time had only 4 days' worth of coal supply left and the country was now staring at a blackout.

Khurana named two blocks that he thought should be included in the coal auctions, one of them was Mara II Mahan of Singrauli and the other was inside

Hasdeo Arand in Chhattisgarh.

In reality, there was enough domestic coal. The Coal Ministry said so in Parliament in December 2021. But heavy rain and a shortfall of railway rakes had created a logistical nightmare leading to depleting stocks in power plants. Yet the Coal Ministry decided to act on the request to open up two blocks.

It in fact went a step ahead and pushed for a review of the environment ministry's suggestions in 2018 that 15 coal blocks, which includes one of the two, should be exempt from coal mining since they fall in areas that have high biodiversity value and need to be conserved.

To pave the way for the review, the Coal Ministry tasked the country's Central Mine Planning and Design Institute to see if portions of these 15 blocks could be carved out to allow mining without disturbing the forests. The Institute, affiliated with the Coal Ministry, is a "specialist consultant for all those in the mineral and mining sector", according to its website.



# Scientists warn one in every 50 Americans in nearly 25 coastal cities at risk of excessive flooding due to sinking land and rising sea levels ‘

By MATTHEW PHELAN

Scientists warn dozens of coastal cities are in danger of being washed over by flooding due to rising sea levels - but two dozen are at higher risks. A team of researchers led by Virginia Tech identified 24 locations that are battling a combination of sinking land and rising sea levels, putting one out of every 50 resident at risk.

Those living along the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic seaboard were deemed in the 'danger zone,' while Pacific coast residents faced less flood risk and 'relatively modest, rock coast cliff retreat' - but are still not out harms way. Miami, true to past estimates, faces some of the highest risks, the researchers said.



South Florida's sun-drenched party city could lose as much as 81,000 homes, coming to a total cost up to \$31 billion dollars and risking the lives or wellbeing of as many as 122,000 Miami-area residents: all figures the study called 'conservative.' The study identified more than 500,000 people in 32 major cities, home to that are expected to be displaced by the flooding, due to home property damages that could cost up to \$109 billion by 2050.

'One of the challenges we have with communicating the issue of sea-level rise and land subsidence [i.e. land sinking] broadly is it often seems like a long-term problem,' said the study's lead author, Virginia Tech geochemist Leonard Ohenhen.

'Something whose impacts will only manifest at the end of the century, which many people may not care about.'

'What we've done here is focused the picture on the short term,' Ohenhen noted, 'just 26 years from now.'

Three core sets of information were used to inform the new analysis, published this month in the journal Nature.

First, the scientists measured the sinking of coastal urban landmasses, to

miniscule millimeter accuracy, using 'interferometric synthetic aperture radar' pointed at the US from aboard the Sentinel-1 A/B and ALOS-1 satellites between 2007 and 2020.

Next, they used this data to develop a 'relative sea level rise' adding it to the rate of true sea level rise recorded by high-resolution, 'light detection and ranging' (LiDAR) devices managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management uses their LiDAR network, a pulsed laser system that operates similarly to radar, to craft digital elevation models (DEMs) at the border between the land and the ocean. Lastly, the authors of the new study pulled in US census data from 2010 to create baseline estimates of the total likely impact of this total or 'relative' sea level rise on US city populations and home properties along America's shorelines.

Along the Atlantic coast, the researchers calculated that as many as 263,000 people across as many as 163,000 properties were at risk of being impacted across 370 square-miles of dense urban landscape, mostly in Miami.

The total financial impact on home-values

by 2050, the team calculated, ranged up to \$64 billion total for the 11 east coast cities they examined. Along the Gulf coast, cities like New Orleans in Louisiana, Galveston in Texas and nine more metropolises face potentially devastating risks as well.

Up to 225,000 people at risk of death, displacement or economic hardship as up to 109,000 homes face rising ocean waters, and thus closer proximity to chaotic weather patterns, like increasing hurricanes, produced by rising world

temperatures.

The study estimated 319 square-miles of crowded Gulf cityscapes may be at risk. But, crucially, the team — which also included a planetary scientist from Brown University and researchers from both India and the UK — chose to focus only on damage to homes in their estimates property damage and economic risks.

'The calculated exposure does not account for the value of critical infrastructure (such as airports, schools, hospitals, power plants, roads and railways),' they wrote, 'as well as economic hubs and landmarks.' Their calculations, ranging from billions to tens of billions in local economic damage, as they put it, therefore 'represents a conservative value.'

Ironically, despite the west coast's vaunted reputation for environmental awareness and legislation, the ten US Pacific coast cities examined by the new study faced significantly less risks than their Atlantic and Gulf counterparts.

By 2050, no more than 16 square-miles of Pacific urban homestead faced a serious risk from rising seas and the exacerbating role of heavyweight

skyscraper sinking.

Somewhere under 30,000 people and 15,000 home properties are at risk, totally no more than \$22 billion in the researchers' conservative worst case scenario.

Across every city in their study, Ohenhen of Virginia Tech noted that the team found economic and ethnic minorities were in the parts of town most at risk from the relative sea level rise.

'That was the most surprising part of the study,' Ohenhen said in a statement.

'We found that there is racial and economic inequality in those areas in that there was an overrepresentation of historically marginalized groups potentially impacted as well as properties with significantly lower value than the rest of the cities.'

The combination of the sea-level dangers and these residents lack of economic resources to cope 'really multiplies the potential impact to those areas and their abilities to recover from significant flooding,' Ohenhen said.

Perhaps most alarmingly, the speed at which sea level is now rising, according to the new study, and other recent investigations, continues to climb faster. Over the past 100 years, the average or so-called global mean rate of sea level rise hovered up to around 0.07 inches (1.7 millimeters) per year.

But by the early years of the 21st Century, that rate leapt up to 0.12 inches (3.1 mm) per year and is still accelerating.

Today the global mean rate of sea level rise is 0.15 inches (3.7 mm) per year.

'Even if climate change mitigation efforts succeed in stabilizing temperature in the future decades,' the researchers warn in their new report, 'sea levels will continue to rise as a result of the continuing response of oceans to past warming.'

In other words, a significant amount of their risk estimates for 2050 may be unavoidable.

Although, as study coauthor Manoochehr Shirzaei noted, their hope is to give these US coastal cities exactly the kind of map they will need to prevent the worst of the likely oncoming tragedies.

'The whole purpose of this paper is to provide data to support decisions,' according to Shirzaei, a geophysicist and associate professor at Virginia Tech's Earth Observation and Innovation Lab.

'Every city, every county has a flood resiliency plan in place. They are required by law to create that.'

'But it's likely nobody has received the entire picture until this study,' he concluded, 'which creates probably the first comprehensive picture of what's happening in the not-too-distant future.'



ignored is the Indian nationals' desperation to take up jobs in countries such as Myanmar and Cambodia. This is a sad commentary on the employment scenario in India. Course correction is required to prevent skilled young persons from falling into this vicious trap.



# Pentagon launches tech to stop AI-powered killing machines from going rogue on the battlefield due to robot-fooling visual 'noise'

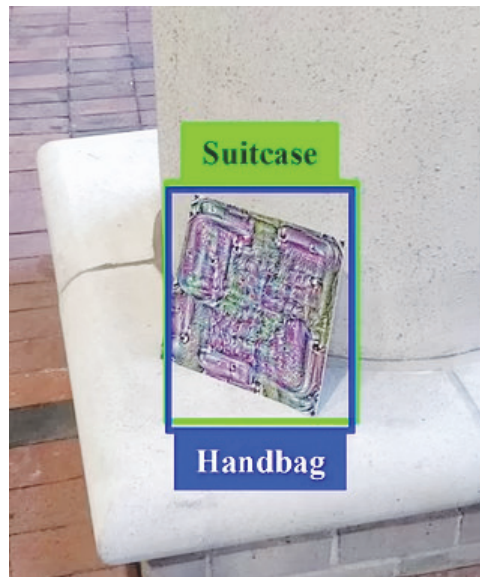
Pentagon officials have sounded the alarm about 'unique classes of vulnerabilities for AI or autonomous systems,' which they hope new research can fix.

The program, dubbed Guaranteeing AI Robustness against Deception (GARD), has been tasked since 2022 with identifying how visual data or other electronic signals inputs for AI might be gamed by the calculated introduction of noise.

Computer scientists with one of GARD's defense contractors have experimented with kaleidoscopic patches designed to fool AI-based systems into making false IDs. 'You can essentially, by adding noise to an image or a sensor, perhaps break a downstream machine learning algorithm,' as one senior Pentagon official managing the research explained Wednesday.

The news comes as fears that the Pentagon has been 'building killer robots in the basement' have allegedly led to stricter AI rules for the US military — mandating that all systems must be approved before deployment.

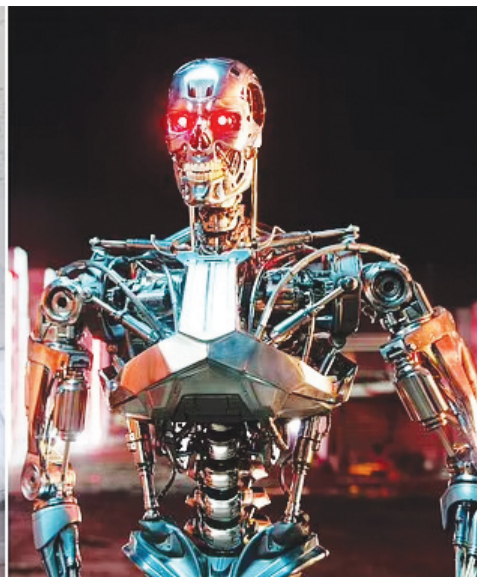
You can also with knowledge of that algorithm sometimes create physically realizable attacks,' added that official,



Matt Turek, deputy director for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's (DARPA's) Information Innovation Office.

Technically, it is feasible to 'trick' an AI's algorithm into mission critical errors — making the AI misidentify a variety of patterned patches or stickers for a real physical object that's not really there.

A bus packed with civilians, for example, could be misidentified as a tank by an AI, if it were tagged with the right 'visual noise,' as one national security reporter with the site ClearanceJobs proposed as an example.



Such cheap and lightweight 'noise' tactics, in short, could cause vital military AI to misclassify enemy combatants as allies, and vice versa, during a critical mission.

Researchers with the modestly budgeted GARD program have spent \$51,000 investigating visual and signal noise tactics since 2022, Pentagon audits show. What is public from their work includes a 2019 and 2020 study illustrating how visual noise, which can appear merely decorative or

inconsequential to human eyes, like a 1990s 'Magic Eye' poster, can be interpreted as solid object by AI.

Computer scientists with defense contractor the MITRE Corporation managed to create visual noise that an AI mistook for apples on a grocery store shelf, a bag left behind outdoors, and even people.

'Whether that is physically realizable attacks or noise patterns that are added to AI systems,' Turek said Wednesday, 'the GARD program has built state-of-the-art defenses against those.' 'Some of those tools and capabilities have been provided to CDAO [the Defense Department's Chief Digital and AI Office],' according to Turek.

The Pentagon formed the CDAO in 2022; it serves as a hub to facilitate faster adoption of AI and related machine-learning technologies across the military. The Department of Defense (DoD) recently updated its AI rules among 'a lot of confusion about' how it plans to use self-decision-making machines on the battlefield, according to US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Development and Emerging Capabilities Michael Horowitz

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