

# The Asian Era

*Building Bridges Beyond Boundaries*



*A voice vote was held on the motion of no confidence, and the motion was declared defeated.*

## MODI WINS TRUST, NO MANIPUR IN TRUST

Lok Sabha on Thursday defeated the no-confidence motion brought by Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi after the Opposition walked out of the House during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address, complaining that the speech is not about Manipur.

Debate on the no-confidence motion against the central government regarding the Manipur riots began on Tuesday. The discussion continued on Wednesday for the 2nd day. Opposition MPs including Congress, DMK, AAP, Communist, Samajwadi and NCP spoke. Central ministers and BJP MPs spoke in response to this.

On the third day, the prime minister responded to the debates on the no-confidence motion. He seized on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's now-ex-punged reference to Modi government's alleged assault on 'Bharat Mata' in Manipur, during his speech a day before, to launch a blistering counter-attack. PM Modi alleged the politics of the grand old party as the root cause of problems plaguing Manipur and the entire northeast region which he described as his "jigar ka tukda" (piece of heart).

PM Modi's searing speech lasted well over two hours, during which he tore into the Opposition

ranks, questioned the Congress party's commitment to the northeast, and pitched the ruling National Democratic Alliance as the future.

The parliamentarians of the parties of the opposition bloc INDIA staged a walkout complaining that there was no reference to Manipur in the first 90 minutes of the prime minister's speech.

As the opposition walked out, a voice vote was held on the motion of no confidence and the motion was declared defeated.

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# Opposition playing divisive politics on Manipur: Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his reply to the no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, said that Opposition bloc INDIA was “playing divisive politics” on violence-hit Manipur and alleged that the “dynastic rule” of Congress was responsible for creating problems in the northeast. As the Opposition walked out even before Modi mentioned Manipur in his address, the motion was defeated by a voice vote.

In his 133-minute reply, Modi exuded confidence for 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, “In a way, Opposition’s no-confidence has always been lucky for us. Today, I can see that you (Opposition) have decided that NDA and BJP will come back in 2024 elections with a grand victory, breaking all previous records, with the blessings of the people.”

The PM began his address by questioning the Opposition’s intent behind disrupting the House proceedings. “There were such important bills before the House — they were for the welfare of tribals, the youth and the deprived sections of the society. A responsible Opposition participates in debating these bills but all you were interested in was politics. You proved that the country is not your priority,

politics is. You are not worried about the hunger of the poor, you only stand for the hunger of power. You are not bothered about the future of the youth, but worried about your political future,” the PM alleged.

PM Modi termed the Opposition alliance INDIA as “Ghamandiya” (arrogant). He tried to wedge a divide within the Opposition ranks by questioning the policies of the Congress-led governments and attacked Rahul Gandhi for his “mohabbat ki dukaan” slogan and called it “loot ki dukaan”.

Attacking the Gandhi family and Congress, he said, “You are following someone — whose family, generation after generation, could not understand the difference between green chilli and red chilli?” He was alluding to Rajiv Gandhi’s so-called suggestion to farmers to grow red chilli and not green as it could fetch them higher price. Modi tried to differentiate between his “poor man’s son” image and the “far removed from reality” Gandhi family and said, “They have been launching one face. Every time this launch fails... You are calling it mohabbat ki dukaan, but have you forgotten Emergency and the atrocities against Sikhs? You should be ashamed and call it ‘nafrat ki



PM Modi replying to the no-confidence motion in Lok Sabha on Aug 10

dukaan’.” Alluding to Rahul’s recent videos where he is seen working in the fields and driving tractors, Modi said, “People who haven’t grown a single radish in a pot will obviously be surprised if they go down to the ground in the fields. The family which has seen poverty only by rolling down the car windows will be surprised with everything. When these people speak about poverty they are, in a way, admitting to the failure of their governments because they forget that one family has ruled India for 50 years.”

In reference to Rahul’s expunged remarks, Modi said he was shocked by the ‘disrespect shown’ to Ma Bharati and questioned why anyone would ‘wish the death of Bharat Mata’.

The PM appealed for peace in Manipur. Terming the northeast as “jigar ka tukda”, he said the heinous crimes against women which took place in Manipur were “unforgivable” and the Centre and the state government were trying their best to punish the guilty. “We could have discussed Manipur if they would have shown interest. The

home minister wrote and said that we are ready to discuss Manipur. The home minister spoke for over two hours on Manipur. State government and central government are trying their best to give severe punishment to the accused. I want to assure the nation that the way attempts are being made peace will prevail. We want to assure mothers and daughters of Manipur that this country is with you, this House is with you,” he said.

Modi spoke in detail about his government’s development work for the northeastern states, noting that he alone had visited the area over 50 times and his ministers over 400 times. It was the Congress government under the then PM Indira Gandhi which used the Air Force to attack citizens in Mizoram in 1966 and also launched a military attack on Akal Takht in the 1980s, he said.

PM Modi also had an investment advice for those interested in stock market, “Those interested in stocks know they should invest in government companies’ shares.”

The prime minister said opposition parties had spread lies about government-run companies like HAL and LIC and public sector banks, but only to find them emerge stronger and reach new heights of success.

“Now they are cursing the country, the country to going to get stronger”, the prime minister added.

## Opposition walks out of Lok Sabha during PM's speech

Opposition MPs staged a walkout from the Lok Sabha on Thursday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi was replying to a debate on the no-confidence motion, complaining that there was no reference to Manipur in the first 90 minutes of his speech.

Opposition MPs were seen chanting ‘Manipur, Manipur’ during the prime minister’s reply as they urged him to speak on the ethnic violence in the northeastern state. The parliamentarians of the parties of the opposition bloc INDIA then staged a walkout while the prime minister was speaking.

Members of the Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) also walked out of the House subsequently. Despite supporting the no-confidence motion against the NDA government, BJP ally, Mizo National Front, did not walk out with the Opposition but backed the motion in the Lok Sabha. Upset over the way BJP-led government in Manipur handled the ethnic violence, MNF had announced to vote against the government on the motion. MNF’s lone Lok Sabha MP C Lalrosanga said he



“backed the motion against the government but did not walk out with Opposition as MNF wasn’t with Opposition”.

Later on in his over-two-hour speech, the prime minister spoke on the situation in Manipur and added the Centre and the state governments were making all-out efforts to restore peace there.

Gaurav Gogoi, who moved the no-confidence motion in the House, said, “This no-confidence motion had two objectives — first, people of Manipur should get justice and second, PM Modi should speak on Manipur issue.”

“After so long, the nation could see the PM speaking in the House. We forced him to break his silence...but the

objective of getting justice for Manipur was not achieved. PM Modi is running away from his responsibility,” he said.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said, “We asked the PM to address the nation on Manipur. After one hour and 45 minutes (of his speech), he had not mentioned the word Manipur. He was making a purely politi-

cal speech, there were all the old attacks on Congress party and the opposition, insults, but there were no answers to questions raised by the no-confidence motion.”

Dravida Munnetara Kazhagam MP T R Baalu said the opposition was expecting to hear from the prime minister about the situation in Manipur and other parts of the country where incidents of violence have been reported.

“He has given a political speech,” said Baalu. “The intention of the no-confidence motion was... to hear his response on Manipur and Haryana, and other areas where violence is taking place. We intervened many times but he did not respond,” he added.

The Opposition has jammed a significant chunk of the monsoon session demanding PM Modi speak on Manipur inside the House, and has argued that it brought the no confidence motion — the second faced by the Narendra Modi government and the first after 2018 — to make the PM speak on the issue. The first two days of the debate saw Opposition members attacking the government over Manipur.

# Centre has divided Manipur: Rahul Gandhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday accused the Modi government of 'murdering Bharat Mata' in Manipur and of 'dividing Manipur into two parts', drawing a fiery response from Union ministers Amit Shah and Smriti Irani.

Participating in the debate on the no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, Gandhi blamed the Centre for its handling of Manipur since violence erupted three months ago.

"I say Manipur, but the truth is there is nothing of Manipur left. You have divided Manipur into two parts. You have killed Bharat Mata in Manipur. My one mother is sitting here (pointing to Sonia Gandhi) and the other

mother has been killed in Manipur," he said in his first speech since revocation of his disqualification. Gandhi said he favored deployment of the Army to end the violence in Manipur.

He asked why Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not visited Manipur after the violence began. "PM Modi did not visit Manipur because for him, Manipur is not in India." Gandhi then clubbed Manipur with the Haryana incidents: "You have sprinkled kerosene everywhere. You have set fire to Manipur. You are now trying the same thing in Haryana." Gandhi alleged that the PM listened to only two people,



Congress MP Rahul Gandhi speaks in Lok Sabha on Manipur issue during the ongoing Monsoon Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Wednesday (Photo: Sansad TV)

## The Asian Era GIANT LEAP AWAY FROM DEMOCRACY

The Narendra Modi government refused to yield to the simple request of Opposition parties that the Prime Minister make a statement in Parliament on the lingering ethnic violence in Manipur between Meiteis and Kukis, which started less than a month after Parliament's last session ended.

Winning an election is just the first step towards democracy. For realizing the true potential of democracy, a government elected to administer a state or nation needs to listen to different voices of its people and representatives. A party and its leaders elected for a term cannot lord over everyone in disdain because democracy is not kingship that may be renewed after a term.

Unfortunately, disdain for the Opposition has become the hallmark of the current government. Every criticism is greeted with a counter on what previous governments apparently did. The irony of citing precedents of Congress governments after seeking votes in the name of providing better governance is lost on BJP leaders. Participating in the debate on a no-trust vote — a desperate move by the Opposition to make the PM speak in the House on Manipur — Home Minister Amit Shah said that no PM till date made a statement in Parliament after riots in any state.

While the statement requires research before endorsement, what he did not acknowledge was that no state, barring Gujarat of 2002, has seen riots lingering for over three months. Not that a statement from the PM would pacify communities in Manipur that are at war with each other. But the cussedness to not even make a statement shows pure disdain for parliamentary democracy.

Amit Shah and Gautam Adani, just as Ravan paid heed to only Meghnad and Kumbhakaran.

Gandhi started his speech dwelling on his Bharat Jodo Yatra. "The yatra is still not over," he said, possibly hinting about a second Bharat Jodo Yatra.

"I walked from one end of the country to another, from the coast to the snowy mountains of Kashmir. Many people asked me, 'Rahul why did you walk?'

What is your aim?' I did not know why I wanted to walk but I soon realized that it was to understand what I love and for what I was willing to die and go to Modiji's jail — the thing for which I bore abuse for 10 years; I wanted to understand it," he said.

Gandhi started his speech by referring to the Speaker. "In my last speech in the House, I spoke about Adani. I might have hurt many people. So, I apologize... today I want to tell my friends in the BJP that there is no reason to be scared as my main speech will not be around Adani."

Narrating his experience of visiting relief camps in the violence-hit Manipur, Gandhi said, "I asked a woman about what happened to her and she replied that her little son, her only child, was shot before her

**"India is a voice of the people. You killed that voice in Manipur. This means that you murdered Bharat Mata in Manipur," Gandhi alleged amid thumping of desks by Opposition leaders**

eyes. She told me that she spent the whole night with the body and then left her house as she was scared. When I asked her if she had brought along something with her, she responded 'only the clothes I wear and a photo'. In another camp, when I asked another woman what happened to her, she started trembling and fainted," Gandhi said. "These are the two examples. In Manipur, they (BJP) have murdered Hindustan. Their politics has not killed Manipur but Hindustan has been murdered in Manipur," he said. "India is a voice of the people. You killed that voice in Manipur. This means that you murdered Bharat Mata in Manipur," Gandhi alleged amid thumping of

desks by Opposition leaders.

Speaking after Gandhi, Irani came down heavily on the former Congress chief for his remark, saying this is for the first time in parliamentary democracy that someone has made such a statement.

"I condemn the behavior that was displayed. This is the first time in Parliament's history that someone talked about Bharat Mata like that, and Congress leaders were thumping desks," the BJP MP said, asserting that Manipur is an integral part of India.

She also accused Congress leaders of supporting the idea of dividing India. "Manipur is not divided, it is part of this country". As BJP members booed the Congress leader when he was leaving the House after his speech, he turned towards them and gave them a flying kiss.

Minister Irani took on the Wayanad MP and expressed outrage over his 'indecent gesture'. "The person who spoke before me... an indecent gesture was made... only a misogynistic man can give a flying kiss to Parliament which seats female Members of Parliament," she said.

Later, many women MPs of the BJP sought 'stringent action' against Gandhi in a complaint to Speaker Om Birla.

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# Opposition politicizing Manipur ethnic violence: Amit Shah



Union home minister Amit Shah led the government's charge against the Opposition's no-confidence motion on Wednesday.

Speaking on the second day of the no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha, Shah said that the Centre had no intention to alter the demography of the state, announced the fencing along the Myanmar border had been expedited, and presented data to show that the clashes were ebbing in Manipur.

Home Minister Shah appealed with folded hands for peace in Manipur and urged the warring Kuki and Meitei communities to hold talks with the Centre to resolve the issue that has triggered the ethnic violence.

After Rahul Gandhi's speech in the Parliament, a combative Shah hit back and spoke on a range of issues including on the several scams during the tenure of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Shah slammed the Opposition for "politicizing" the ethnic violence in Manipur and demanding a statement from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said there was no such precedent. He referred to incidents of ethnic violence of 1993, 1994, 1997 and 2004 — when Congress and United Front governments were in power — and said no prime minister had given a statement in the House and clarifications were left to home minister and ministers of state. "We are not quiet. I have been saying from Day 1 that allow me to speak in the House and give a statement. But they [Opposition] did not want it. They just

want to protest. And if they were unhappy with what I had to say, then they could have asked for the PM's statement. But they have not let any debate take place in the House. They have not let the home minister deliver arguments on an important issue like Manipur, what kind of democratic system do they want?" he asked.

He also attacked the Congress.

"During the Congress rule, there were numerous incidents of violence in Manipur, yet no home minister visited there. I stayed there for 3 days, and our MoS (minister of state) Nityanand Rai stayed there continuously for 23 days," he said.

He cited Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's recent Manipur trip as an example of politics during the violence and said Gandhi refused to go to Chura-chandpur in a helicopter and insisted on travelling by road. "He only wanted to do politics there," the minister said.

He said during PM Narasimha Rao's time, a conflict between the Naga and Kuki communities killed 750 people and displaced 45,000. "Despite such a tragic incident, did the tribal minister go there? No, they didn't. Did the social welfare minister go? No, they didn't," Shah said.

Shah defended his government's response to the violence and said the PM had followed the developments closely and called him up at 4 am once and even woke him up at 6.30 am. "There have been 16 video conferencing calls. We flew in 36,000 security personnel, the chief secretary was changed. The DGP was changed. An advi-

sor was brought in from Surat," Shah said, adding the President's rule was not imposed as the state was cooperating.

"They ask why Article 356 (President's Rule) was not imposed. Article 356 can only be invoked when the state government is not cooperating with the Centre. The CM should only be changed when he is not cooperating," he said.

Shah used the two and-a-half-hour speech to spell out government's achievements. He led a highly political show of strength, which included sloganeering by the Treasury benches. Taking potshots at the Opposition, Shah said: "Today Mahatma Gandhi had given 'Quit India' slogan against the British. Today, Modi ji has given a call for corruption to Quit India."

As Shah chanted "corruption, dynastic rule and appeasement", the Treasury benches matched his call with slogans of "Quit India".

He said that the most religious and communal riots in the country occurred during the times of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Indira Gandhi imposed restrictions on JNU, kept CAG away from government affairs, and undermined the authority of UPSC. "In 2008, the memorandum of understanding was signed with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Who signed it? There is an image of the Gandhi-Vadra family on a Chinese website. In the picture, the Chinese are hosting this family for the Olympics. This was not an international dia-

**"It's absolutely shameful that the home minister is questioning the timing of the release of the horrific video from Manipur. By claiming on the floor of the Parliament that the intelligence agencies did not know about the existence of such a video, he's only accepting his own incompetence..."** Ramesh posted on X, formerly known as Twitter

logue or conference."

He said during the tenure of Congress and UPA scandals like Bofors, 2G spectrum, Satyam, Commonwealth, Coal, Tata Trucks, Notes for Votes, Adarsh, National Herald, Vadra's DLF, Fodder, Food Security Bill, Ghaziabad Provident Fund, Harshad Mehta Stock Market, Hasan Ali, IPL, LIC Housing, Madhukoda occurred. He said, "After scams and scams worth lakhs of crores, the name certainly has to be changed."

The Lok Sabha adopted a resolution read out by Speaker Om Birla appealing for peace in Manipur and it was enthusiastically supported by the BJP-led NDA members in the presence of the opposition.

Shah said 152 people were killed, 14,898 people arrested and 1,106 first information reports (FIRs) registered since violence erupted on May 3.

Though the bulk of his speech was devoted to Manipur, Shah also spoke at length about the achievements of the Narendra Modi government, and described how the internal security situation had drastically improved in Jammu & Kashmir, Maoist-affected areas and the Northeast. He announced that the government will not hold dialogue with Pakistan but will speak to young people in the region. He also assured the House that Tahawwur Rana, an accused in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, will be deported to India soon to face trials.

The home minister argued that the BJP had brought peace to Manipur over the last six years with a drop in militant activity.

Shah condemned the horrific video of the two women paraded naked during the violence at B Phainom village in Kangpokpi district on May 4, calling it a "blot on society". However, he questioned the timing of the video going viral. "This is a very unfortunate incident and nobody can condone it. This idea did not come to me, but a question was raised by the friends in the media — why did this video come just one day before the beginning of Parliament session? If someone had this video, shouldn't they have given it to the police? Why would anyone make it viral?" he said.

I don't want to get into the politics of this, but if whoever had the video handed it to the police when it happened, then we would have made the arrests on May 5 (the day after the incident took place). The day we came across the video, we used facial recognition software and ran it against the government database and managed to identify all the nine people who are now facing trial," he said.

He also presented data to show that the violence was ebbing. "Of the people that have died in the violence, 107 died in May, another 20 died in June, 15 were killed in July, and so far four people have died in August... I am stating these numbers to show that violence is slowly abating and we should not be taking actions that add fuel to these flames," he said.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh hit back, saying it was "shameful" that Shah questioned the timing of the release of the video. "It's absolutely shameful that the home minister is questioning the timing of the release of the horrific video from Manipur. By claiming on the floor of the Parliament that the intelligence agencies did not know about the existence of such a video, he's only accepting his own incompetence..." Ramesh posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

# NY rights groups call for fast-track work permits for asylum seekers

Labor and immigration rights organizations in New York are calling on the Biden administration to expand rights for migrants that would fast-track work permits for them and help alleviate strain on social services, as shelter systems overflow.

A coalition of union and human rights advocacies has urged Homeland Security secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to give more people Temporary Protective Status (TPS), a provision giving migrants the ability to live and work in the US legally for an extended period.

Asylum seekers admitted into the US have to wait a minimum of 180 days – often much longer – before being authorized to work, preventing them from earning to support themselves and their families amid limited access to public services and, in the latest crisis, scenes of migrants forced to sleep on the streets of midtown Manhattan.

The coalition includes organizations such as African Communities Together (ACT), Make the Road New York and Proyecto Faro (Project Lighthouse). The group sent a letter to Mayorkas, cc-ing US Vice-President Kamala Harris and the secretary of



In midtown Manhattan, asylum seekers are sleeping on the sidewalks outside the Roosevelt Hotel

state, Antony Blinken, on Monday, noting that while migrants fleeing danger deserved more help and more rights, the US labor market could also benefit significantly – and that government leaders including US president Joe Biden had options.

“Fortunately, the President does have a tool – TPS – that would allow these new asylum seekers to have immediate access to work authorization,” read the letter, sent Monday.

The letter requested that Mayorkas expand TPS for

migrants from the 16 countries of origin already eligible, including El Salvador, Honduras and Venezuela, but who are not eligible for TPS themselves based on when they arrived to the US.

“We ask that the Biden administration use TPS for migrants inclusive of those countries of origin, allowing them an opportunity to contribute their skills and talents to New York’s work force,” read the letter.

The letter also requested that the Biden administration design-

ate several countries as eligible for TPS, including Guatemala and Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are experiencing civil unrest.

TPS is a DHS program that protects migrants from deportation, grants them work permits and allows travel.

Many of the asylum seekers the group wants the Biden administration to assist arrived at the US-Mexico border having fled from South and Central America as well as Haiti.

New York City Mayor Eric

Adams is also urging the federal government to take swift action to address the unprecedented surge in the city’s migrant population, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to tackle the issue that is straining resources and causing asylum seekers to sleep on the streets. Local leaders are currently struggling to house more than 57,000 asylum seekers in the city’s care — with more arriving each week.

Nearly 100,000 asylum seekers have arrived to New York City alone since last year, and more than 57,200 remain in the city’s care. City officials, including Mayor Eric Adams, have announced that resources such as the shelter system are at capacity as upwards of 500 migrants arrive each day.

Scores of migrants were forced to sleep on the street outside a Manhattan hotel last week while they waited at an intake center, while others have been stuck on the streets because of overcrowded shelters or security concerns. Sky-high rents and ineligibility for city rental assistance are exacerbating the problem, especially while work permits remain out of reach.

## NJ hires law firm King & Spalding in NYC congestion pricing battle

The state of New Jersey hired law firm King & Spalding at highly discounted rates to mount a legal challenge against New York City’s plan to reduce traffic congestion by imposing tolls on vehicles in Manhattan, the Reuters reported citing hiring documents.

King & Spalding, an Atlanta-founded firm with a prominent national litigation practice, is charging \$250 per hour for the work of partners, counsel and associates on the matter; according to a copy of the state’s letter retaining the firm, which Reuters obtained through a public records request. The cost will be covered by New Jersey taxpayers.

The firm is representing New Jersey in a lawsuit filed last month claiming that the Federal Highway Administration’s review of New York’s congestion pricing plan was inadequate.

New Jersey filed a lawsuit in federal court on July 21 against the US Department of Transportation, which gave final approval for New York City’s plan.

New York City’s plan could toll drivers entering Manhattan below 60th street up to \$23 and is set to begin as soon as spring 2024. It’s designed to reduce carbon emissions from cars and pollution, improve public transit, and make the nation’s largest city more livable. It would be the first congestion price program in the United States.

Funds from the congestion program would go to the Metropolitan Transporta-



tion Authority (MTA) and bolster public transit, the dominant form of transportation in New York City.

The plan aims to generate a critical source of revenue to fund \$15 billion in capital improvement projects to modernize the city’s 100-year-old public transit system.

“Congestion pricing will reduce traffic in our crowded downtown, improve air quality and provide critical resources to the MTA,” New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said last month.

While no other US city has implemented congestion pricing, Stockholm, London and Singapore have had it for years. These cities have reported benefits like decreased carbon dioxide pollution, higher average car speeds, and congestion reduction.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, a Democrat, announced in June that he hired King & Spalding to explore avenues to block the plan, which he said would impose a financial and environmental burden on New Jersey residents.

Partners at King & Spalding have

billed between \$1,160 and \$1,590 per hour on a range of matters, the firm disclosed in a court filing in an unrelated case last year. It is not unusual for law firms to offer at least modest discounts for work on taxpayer-funded cases.

The two lead lawyers in the case, Craig Carpenito and Randy Mastro, have handled high-profile matters in New Jersey in the past.

Carpenito served as US Attorney for New Jersey during the Trump administration and joined King & Spalding in 2021.

Randy Mastro was hired by former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, now a candidate for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, to investigate the seemingly politically motivated shutdown of traffic lanes near the George Washington Bridge in 2013.

The probe by Mastro, who at the time worked for law firm Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, cleared Christie of wrongdoing. The report cost taxpayers an estimated \$8 million, according to media reports at the time.

## Flashmob dance to What Jhumka at Times Square goes viral



YouTube/@Shaimak New York

A flashmob dance performance to the song What Jhumka from the film Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani has grabbed the attention of people on social media. It shows a group of dancers performing to this song at Times Square in New York.

“The Shiamak USA team taking over @TimesSquareTSq with this trending song #whatjhumka,” wrote the official YouTube channel of Shaimak New York. The clip shows a group of dancers energetically performing to the song What Jhumka. As they groove, onlookers are stunned by their moves.

This post was shared on July 21. Since being posted, it has been viewed more than seven lakh times. The share has also received more than 6,000 likes. Several people were in awe of this performance, and many expressed their reactions to this video in the comments section.

# Riot unfolds as thousands gather at NYC's Union Square for free giveaway

A chaotic scene unfolded in New York City on Aug 4, when thousands of people gathered at Union Square Park after Twitch streamer Kai Cenat promised to give away free PlayStation 5 consoles.

The crowd became unruly and violent, throwing objects at each other and at the police, who tried to disperse them.

Cenat, is a popular comedian on Twitch and YouTube, who announced on his social media that he would hand out free PS5s to some of his fans at 4 p.m. in Union Square. His post went viral and attracted a huge crowd of people, who blocked the traf-



fic and the subway station near the park.

Cenat posted a photo of the crowd on his Instagram sto-

ry, showing the massive turnout for his giveaway. However, things quickly got out of hand, as the crowd became aggres-

sive and disorderly. Some people climbed on a gazebo and a statue of George Washington, while others threw paint cans and other items at the police.

The police said they were assaulted and hit with rocks, bottles, and other debris, as they tried to clear out the park. They also said they arrested several people, but did not give an exact number as of early Friday evening. They also said they took Cenat into custody for safety reasons, and that they would discuss with their legal department about possible charges against him.

"Most of it was within the park. The young people in the park were throwing objects at each other. They were dancing. They were doing a whole lot of stuff but they were hurting

each other while doing it," New York Police Chief Jeffrey Maddrey said at a press conference on Friday (August 4).

"We have encountered things like this before but never to this level of dangerousness where young people would not listen to our commands, they were fighting each other, they were hurting each other and they were turning their attacks on us."

Maddrey said that several people in the crowd and some officers sustained injuries during the incident. He also said that most of the crowd had left the area by 7 p.m., but that some groups were still roaming around Manhattan.

NYPD police chief said the department would work to prevent future occurrences like this.

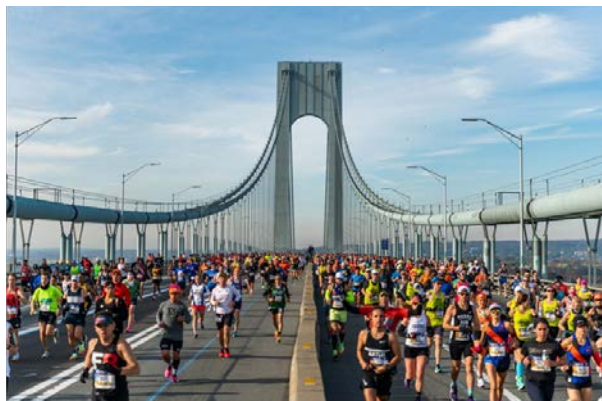
# Top names announced for 2023 New York City Marathon

New York Road Runners just announced some of the top professional women who will headline the 2023 New York City Marathon on November 5.

The list includes defending champion Sharon Lokedi, reigning Boston Marathon and United Airlines NYC Half champion Hellen Obiri, Olympic gold medalist and 2021 New York City Marathon champion Peres Jepchirchir, and marathon world record holder Brigid Kosgei. The full professional runner fields will be announced at a later date.

It's the first time in the race's history that a reigning New York City Marathon, Boston Marathon, and Olympic champion, as well as a world record holder will line up against each other at the historic event. The four Kenyans have numerous top victories between them, making for an exciting lineup.

Last year was Lokedi's marathon debut, and she became the eighth athlete to win the race in her first try at the dis-



tance, pulling away in the last two miles for a 2:23:23 finish. But since then, she's barely raced. After her victory, she was sidelined for most of the year due to injury, and was forced to withdraw from the Boston Marathon.

"Last year, I came into the TCS New York City Marathon with the goal of being in the thick of the race, and the result was better than I could have ever hoped for," Lokedi said in a press release. "This year, I'm returning with a different mindset, hungry to defend my title and race against the fastest women in the world."

# Mukesh Ambani sells his Manhattan apartment for \$9 million

Indian business magnate Mukesh Ambani has sold a residence in Manhattan's esteemed West Village for \$9 million, as per a report by New York Post.

Situated at 400 W. 12th St, recognised as Superior Ink, the residence in question is a fourth-floor condominium. This elegant dwelling, previously valued at a noteworthy \$9 million, spans an area of 2,406 square feet, as per the publication.

Offering a panorama of the Hudson River, the residence boasts two bedrooms, which have been meticulously converted from an initial count of three, alongside 3 1/2 baths. The home's interior exudes sophistication, characterised by a fusion of lavish elements and modern design. Distinguishing features encompass 10-foot-high ceilings, exquisite herringbone hardwood floors, noise-resistant windows, and an impeccably designed chef's kitchen, the Post added.

Over the years, Superior Ink has welcomed a prestigious array of residents within its walls. Notable names such as Hilary Swank, Nascar's celebrated figure Jimmie Johnson and the renowned



designer Marc Jacobs have all graced the building with their presence.

The opulence of the residence is further underscored by billionaire Leslie Alexander, who notably acquired a raw-space penthouse at a significant investment of \$25.46 million. Impressively, Alexander subsequently orchestrated a successful sale of the same penthouse for an impressive \$31.5 million to the intriguing "space tourist" Mark Shuttleworth back in 2010.

Constructed in 2009, the building harmoniously melds contemporary amenities with its historical origins. Residents enjoy access to diverse facilities, including a lounge, fitness centre with a dedicated yoga/Pilates room, a children's play area, and even a designated space for bicycles.

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# 16-year-old Tanishka Dhariwal raises funds for Odisha train tragedy victims

A 16-year-old Indian American girl, Tanishka Dhariwal, has raised over \$10,000 for the PM Cares fund towards the victims of the deadly triple train tragedy in Odisha's Balasore district.

Tanishka Dhariwal, accompanied by her dad and mom Nitin and Sapna Dhariwal, on Friday handed over the funds to Randhir Jaiswal, the Consul General of India in New York.

She raised the amount from her friends of diverse backgrounds, underscoring the unity and global community spirit nurtured among these young individuals.

"I used to be in a position to begin a GoFundMe web page. I reached out to varsities, districts, family and friends and raised over \$10,000. Hopefully, this cash will be capable of go and assist the individuals who have been affected deeply by this. I consider slightly goes a good distance and hopefully it is a good begin to it," Dhariwal told ANI.

The donation ceremony was attended by Haridas Kotewala, patron member of Rajasthan Affiliation of North Amer-



Tanishka Dhariwal handed over the funds to Randhir Jaiswal, the Consul General of India in New York, on Aug 4.

ica (RANA); Ashok Sancheti, advisor at Jaipur Foot USA; Ravi Jargarh, joint secretary of RANA; and Chandra Sukhwal, a senior member of RANA.

Tanishka is a youth member of the Rajasthan Affiliation of North America (RANA), which is a strong and influential organization representing non-resident Rajasthanis across

the globe with a mission to unite and empower those hailing from Rajasthan and residing outside India.

Prem Bhandari, president of RANA and founding chair of Jaipur Foot USA, underscored the exceptional efforts undertaken by young Indian Americans like Tanishka.

"In Tanishka's heartfelt ges-

ture, it's not about the amount. It's about the emotion behind it. This also highlights stronger ties that are still alive among US-born Indian youth and their homeland. These connections take on greater significance against the backdrop of India's ongoing pursuit of self-reliance under PM Modi," Prem Bhandari told ANI.

Bhandari commended India's self-reliance and its substantial role in international humanitarian assistance. In the past decade, India's outreach has extended to more than 100 nations, culminating in aid exceeding \$25 billion. Especially noteworthy is India's steadfast support during the Covid-19 pandemic, as the nation extended critical medical aid and vaccines through the Vaccine Maitri Program to over 150 countries, while also providing supplies to various other countries in dire need.

Former RANA president KK Mehta was the first NRI to generously donate Rs 1 crore after PM Narendra Modi announced the PM CARES Fund on March 28, 2020, at the peak of the pandemic in India.

Prem Bhandari applauded 16-year-old Tanishka's efforts in the face of Odisha tragedy.

Tanishka says she will continue to raise funds for victims of the tragedy in Odisha where at least 288 people lost their lives. Another 1,200 folks had been significantly injured in the crash.

(With inputs from ANI)

## Soundarya Balasubrami, helping young Indians facing immigration challenges

Soundarya Balasubramani was able to figure out the huge challenges that were ahead of her as an international student soon after she started her course of masters of science at Columbia University, after graduating from NIT Trichy. Later as a professional, born in India, she realized the difficulty in getting a green card.

But the challenges that she faced made her stronger in her own journey as an immigrant and it also gave her a deep sense of empathy and solidarity with the Indian community in America. The tough choices that Indian students face in

the US after they finish their higher education, such as trying to get lucky in the H-1B work visa lottery and after that being stuck for decades on backlogs for a green card, were some of the harsh realities that she had observed first hand.

"As an international student, getting a job and networking was one of the hardest things I had to do. I received over 50 rejections before one selection. And now, starting my own company this year, came with another host of challenges," Balasubramani says.

After working for a few years, she decided to give it up

and launched her own start-up venture to support non-resident Indians and help them address several challenges that they face in the immigrant journey, including the toughest one - long delays in getting permanent resident status or green cards.

"The goal in starting my venture was educating people; bringing them together into a community and connecting those who need help to those who can offer it," says Balasubramani. And at the heart of her venture is a book that she has written with Sameer Khedekar, an immigration lawyer, called Unshackled which is a blend of real-life stories of what it means to be an immigrant; along with tactical advice on navigating the complex immigration system in America for young Indian professionals and students.

"With the Unshackled book and community, my mission is to lower the barrier to entry for high-skilled immigrants to reach their full potential; this could mean starting their own company, obtaining a talent visa (O-1/EB-1), or deciding to leave the US for something better," she says.

Her goal is to bring together

formative experiences from her life and that of others to help young Indians in the US, who are facing challenges, reach their potential, and live fuller lives.

Though she hadn't planned to become an entrepreneur in the immigration space, even as a student at Columbia, she was always open to helping other students who reached out to her with questions similar to the ones that she was facing herself. "People reached out asking for help, consistently. When you hear the same question come up over and over again, you can't help but wonder, 'What's going on?' When I quit my comfortable \$200k job at Salesforce to join a small start-up and conduct independent research, hundreds of immigrants reached out to me with questions on navigating immigration. The solution was not to repeat my responses; rather step back and look at the systemic issues," she says. And that's where the idea for her venture was born.

As Balasubramani, who is now 27, navigated an immigration system that was outdated, complex, and not set to serve those who contribute to it, the need to help others became clear

to her. "These problems have remained systematically unsolved. Moving to a new country and settling down over there is still one of the most high-friction decisions one can take in their lives. The process to do that is fragmented: you need to get an education loan, health insurance, SIM card, housing, etc, and you generally need to get these from different vendors. Most vendors are focused on selling their product as opposed to solving the user's unique problem," she remembers from her when she was an international student herself.

And she collated her experiences back then in a book Admitted - born out of navigating the complex maze of moving to a new country for higher education, tackling essay writing, preparing for interviews, applying to scholarships, and getting acclimated to a new culture.

Later, negotiating the immigration system for a job was even more challenging since there has been no significant update to the US policy for skilled workers in over 33 years. "The chance of getting picked in the H-1B lottery was 10% in 2023. Over 1 million immigrants are stuck in a green card backlog. There is no startup visa. While I can't solve these systemic dysfunctions, I can make people better equipped because of my experience and by taking an academic approach," she says.

(With inputs from Times of India)





# US lawmakers introduce resolution to declare August 15 as 'National Day of Celebration'

A proposal has been made in the US Congress to celebrate India's Independence Day on August 15th as a National Day of Celebration in the US. This resolution, put forth by Congressman Shri Thanedar and supported by Buddy Carter and Brad Sharman, highlights the bond between the two largest democracies in the world.

The resolution seeks to declare August 15, India's Independence Day as the National Day of Celebration of the World's Two Largest Democracies.

It expresses the belief that the strong partnership between the United States and India,



India, US Flags (Photo Credits: Wikimedia Commons)

rooted in shared democratic values, will continue to advance global democracy and foster peace, stability, and prosperity

for all nations.

The resolution invoked Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US on June 22.

It said that the official state visit ensured a new level of trust and mutual understanding between the countries, based on common interests and shared commitments to democracy, pluralism, freedom, respect for human rights and rule of law.

Indian Americans in the country serve as government officials, military personnel and law enforcement officers and uphold the US Constitution as well as contribute to the enriching diversity of the nation, the resolution stated.

It said that as such it is only proper and desirable to celebrate with Indians and reaffirm the democratic principles.

In June, PM Modi visited the US for three days and met President Joe Biden, First Lady Jill Biden, as well as some of the top Silicon Valley CEOs. Speaking at the Ronald Reagan Centre in Washington, Modi had said, "The partnership between India and the United States will make the world better in the 21st Century. You all play a crucial role in this partnership."

PM Modi also became the first Indian prime minister to address the US Congress twice. He delivered an almost one-hour speech, and spoke on a range of issues including women empowerment and the Ukraine war. (With inputs from PTI)

# US lawmakers to participate in Red Fort address of PM Modi on India's Independence Day

A bipartisan group of US lawmakers will travel to India to take part in the Red Fort address of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the country's Independence Day on August 15, according to an official statement.

The bipartisan Congressional delegation is led by Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna and Congressman Michael Waltz. The two are co-chairs of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans.

"It is an honor to lead a bipartisan delegation to India and be there to celebrate India's Independence Day. My grandfather spent his life fighting for India's independence. So, this is a deeply personal and meaningful trip for me. It is also a historic

moment for the US-India relationship. I plan to meet Prime Minister Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, cabinet ministers and a diverse range of MPs along with business, tech, cricket and Bollywood leaders," Khanna to PTI on Monday.

"This trip will deepen the coordination and partnership between our countries and allow us to engage on important issues like decarbonisation, digitization, economic partnership, defense ties, pluralism and human rights," he said.

The lawmakers will visit Red Fort where the prime minister will address the nation on India's Independence Day.

They will meet business, tech, government, and Bollywood leaders in Mumbai, Hyderabad, and New Delhi and visit Raj

Ghat, the historic memorial dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, the statement said.

Khanna and Waltz will be joined by lawmakers Debrah Ross, Kat Cammack, Shri Thanedar and Jasmine Crockett along with Rich McCormick and Ed Case.

"We must continue to strive to make progress and build our partnership based on our shared founding values of democracy, freedom of the press and assembly, and human rights. This delegation is a historic opportunity to drive further collaboration and advance shared aims," Khanna said

For Congressman Khanna, this is history coming full circle. "His grandfather Amarnath Vidyalkar was an Indian freedom fighter who spent



Ro Khanna

four years in jail alongside Gandhi and later was part of India's first parliament," said the statement issued on Monday.

Earlier this year, Khanna and Waltz hosted a historic US-India Summit on the Hill featuring panels and remarks from government leaders, experts, and



Shri Thanedar

Indian American leaders from across the country.

Khanna, 46, is the second Indian American after Ami Bera to hold the position of co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans since its inception in 1993.

# Moxila Upadhyaya, the Indian American judge who warned Trump

Former President Donald Trump's arraignment and not guilty plea have brought attention to the judicial process, with Magistrate Judge Moxila A. Upadhyaya overseeing the initial proceedings.

During the Trump hearing, the Indian American judge reprimanded the former president, telling him that he cannot bribe or influence witnesses. A House committee that probed the 2021 Capitol Hill riots found out that Trump and his associates tried to contact and influence a witness in that probe.

Judge Upadhyaya is known for her distinguished legal background, pro bono work, and active involvement in the legal



community. Born in Gujarat, Upadhyaya was appointed as a United States Magistrate Judge on September 7, 2022.

Raised near Kansas City, Missouri, she pursued her education with great determination. She earned a Bachelor

of Journalism, magna cum laude, from the Missouri School of Journalism and a Bachelor of Arts with honors in Latin from the University of Missouri. She later attained her JD, cum laude, from the American University, Washington College of Law. During her time there, she was recognized for her exceptional trial work representing clients in the Criminal Justice Clinic and was also a member of the Administrative Law Review.

After completing her law degree, Upadhyaya served as a law clerk to Eric T. Washington, the former Chief Judge of the DC Court of Appeals. She then joined Venable LLP's Washington, DC office, where she

focused on complex commercial and administrative litigation. Her legal acumen and dedication to justice led her to become the first law clerk to Robert L. Wilkins, who currently serves as the US Circuit Judge for the DC Circuit.

Upadhyaya continued her litigation practice at Venable, devoting her pro bono work to representing indigent clients in post-conviction proceedings. She championed the causes of clients challenging under the DC Innocence Protection Act and the DC Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act. In recognition of her outstanding pro bono work, she received the Defender of Innocence Award

from the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project in 2009 and was named Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year by Venable in 2006.

Judge Upadhyaya's commitment to justice extended beyond her professional duties. She served on this court's Committee on Grievances from 2021-22 and previously co-chaired the DC Bar Litigation Section Steering Committee. Additionally, she played significant roles on the boards of directors for the DC Access to Justice Foundation and Council for Court Excellence. Her contributions to the legal community led to her induction as a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation.

While Upadhyaya handled the initial proceedings, the trial was assigned to US District Judge Tanya Chutkan, an Obama appointee with nearly a decade of experience on the bench.

# NYC pays tribute to Dada Vaswani, declares Global Forgiveness Day

New York City Mayor Eric Adams officially declared August 2, 2023, as Global Forgiveness Day, recognizing the day's significance in promoting love, peace, and healing among individuals and communities worldwide. The proclamation pays tribute to visionary spiritual luminary Revered Dada J P Vaswani.

Distinguished leaders and representatives from the State of New York, the City of New York, and the towns of East Brunswick, Closter, Edison, Secaucus, and Guttenberg, New Jersey, joined Mayor Eric Adams in celebrating this momentous occasion.

Global Forgiveness Day aligns with the esteemed spiritual leader's birthday, making it a fitting occasion to embrace forgiveness as a powerful catalyst for positive change. Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker sent special messages of compassion and love to all in commemoration of the day.

The Consulate of India in New York hosted a special event on August 2 to proclaim "Global Forgiveness Day." Notable attendees included Jennifer Rajkumar, New York State Repre-



sentative and Assemblywoman, Mayor of Closter, John C. Glidden, Jr., Dilip Chauhan, Deputy Commissioner of NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs, Consul General Randhir Jaiswal, Jagdish Sehwan, Jonathan Granoff, and several participants, dignitaries, and prominent personalities from New York City. Together, they paid homage to the teachings of Dada J P Vaswani.

The core team of Dada J P Vaswani's mission in New Jersey, led by Chairman Eddie Datwani, CEO Ashok Lalwani, Treasurer Chandru Mahtani and all board and committee members, expressed gratitude and joy for the proclamations. These declarations underscore the commitment of these cities and the state to foster understanding and empathy in a

world seeking healing and unity.

As part of the event, attendees experienced a profound message on the power of forgiveness by Dada J P Vaswani, along with a guided visualization-based meditation led by Didi Krishna Kumari. The event also featured a deeply moving live santoor performance by Vinay Desai, a student of Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma.

During the event, everyone observed "A Moment of Calm" with silence, practicing forgiveness, and reflecting on its significance in their personal and collective journeys. This moment resonated with similar sessions held in numerous cities worldwide, including Pune in India, the headquarters of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission, where millions united in the message of forgiveness and reconciliation.

was the Congressional Reception held on July 18, followed by an eventful day of Capitol Hill meetings and interactive sessions with key members of Congress on July 19.

Vinay Mahajan, President of ITServe Alliance, addressed the gathering with a message about the importance of sustaining the US's leadership in technology and innovation. Citing that the US faces a significant skills gap – a disparity between available workers and the demand for talent in the IT sector, Mahajan underscored the need to attract the brightest minds from around the globe to maintain the country's preeminent position in technology and innovation.

ITServe Alliance, founded in 2010, has consistently strived to empower local communities by generating, retaining, and nurturing employment opportunities within the United States.



## ITServe urges lawmakers to support High-Skilled Immigration Reform for Employment Act

In a historic display of bipartisan support, 180 prominent lawmakers representing both the Democrat and Republican parties converged in Washington DC, for the inaugural in-person Capitol Hill Day organized by ITServe Alliance on July 13. The event helped foster dialog and collaboration between key stakeholders in the technology and innovation sectors, a press release said.

Siva Moopanan, Director of the PAC, shared his enthusiasm for the event's overwhelming response and emphasized the profound support from nearly 180 vital US Representatives and Senators, including influential committee chairs and members from both major political parties. ITServe Alliance urged lawmakers to rally behind H.R. 4647, the "High-Skilled Immigration Reform for Employment Act." This bill, introduced by Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Illinois) on July 14, seeks to strengthen US competitiveness by bridging the skills gap. The proposed legislation aims to increase the current H-1B visa cap

from 65,000 to 130,000, eliminate the cap for those with Master's or PhD degrees, and establish a STEM grant program.

Sarit Kommineni, Co-Chair of the PAC, eloquently articulated the significance of H-1B visa holders in the American context: "H-1B visa holders play a crucial role in bolstering the US economy, fostering innovation, and enriching the fabric of American society through their skills, contributions, and diverse backgrounds."

The day-long event, orchestrated by the PAC, witnessed the participation of over 240 ITServe members from various corners of the nation. A pivotal component of Capitol Hill Day

## King County, WA, declares Shri Guru Bhagavat Day



A large group of people came together here on July 13 to commemorate Shri Guru Bhagavat, an exceptional literary creation that pays homage to the centuries-old Guru-Shishya (master-disciple) tradition. Hosted by the Washington State India Trade Relations Action Committee, the event celebrated the work penned by Dr. Chandra Bhanu Satpathy, a press release said.

Originally composed in Odia in 2001, Shri Guru Bhagavat serves as an avenue for spiritual enlightenment and unity. The King County Executive Dow Constantine declared July 13 as Shri Guru Bhagavat Day, with the cities of Bellevue and Seattle proclaiming the day as the Dr. Chandra Bhanu Satpathy Day. Governor Jay Inslee, Attorney General Bob Ferguson, and Senator Maria Cantwell conveyed their official greetings for the celebration.

Satpathy, a decorated former Indian top cop with 36

years of dedicated service, was felicitated by Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz in the Seattle Police Headquarters prior to the event, the press release said. Satpathy's remarkable journey includes serving as the Director General of Police for Uttar Pradesh, India's largest province, overseeing a police force of over 200,000 officers.

Shri Guru Bhagavat stands as a remarkable anthology, containing over 34,000 verses written in a unique nine-letter poetic meter. Satpathy, renowned for his outstanding public service in India, and thought leadership, crafted this work which resonates deeply with Indian spirituality, has transcended religious boundaries and found its place in countless households. Published in sixteen languages and accompanied by music albums in six languages, the work was acknowledged by India's postal department through a postage stamp and first-day cover issued on April 1 this year.

## Over 700 Prajapati families gather for inaugural 2023 convention in Illinois

Over 700 Prajapati families from across US congregated in Downs Grove, a quaint town near Chicago, Illinois, for the inaugural Convention 2023. The event held on July 29 and 30 was a resounding success, fostering a sense of togetherness and pride within the Prajapati community.

The organizing committee orchestrated a range of cultural and religious festivities that captivated the attendees and showcased the cultural richness of the community. Sanjay Rawal, a distinguished Life Skill Guru from India, graced the occasion as the chief guest on the second day.

A feature of the convention was the benevolent contributions made by various individuals. Leading the way, Pinakinbhai and Snehalben Oza's generous donation of \$21,001 set a benchmark. Notably, Dineshbhai Bababhai and Varshaben Prajapati of Florida contributed

\$7001, while Ashwinbhai and Santu Ben Prajapati from New Jersey donated \$5555. Further enriching the philanthropic spirit, Raj Bhai A. Jinjuwada offered \$5111, and other prominent donors such as Dineshbhai P and Kailashben Prajapati from Ohio, along with Prahaladbhai and Shantaben P Prajapati from GA, gave substantial sums.

Also present at the convention was Chandamal Komawatji, the chairman of Manish Media and a member of the Prajapati Samaj.

Alongside his family, he graced the event and marked a significant occasion by unveiling the book "Life of Shri Vijay Devaratnaji Mistry." This poignant narrative chronicles the inspiring journey of Mistry, originally hailing from Bilimoria and now in the US.

The event also served as a platform to honor notable leaders and dedicated workers for their exceptional contributions.

# Rejani Raveendran to challenge Democrat Baldwin for Senate in 2024

Rejani Raveendran, a 40-year-old India-born college student has announced her bid for Senate from Wisconsin, becoming the first Republican to officially contest against Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin.

Raveendran, chair of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point College Republicans, on Tuesday officially launched her run against 61-year-old Baldwin in Portage County.

The announcement made Raveendran the first Republican Senate candidate in Wisconsin with just under a year to go until the primary, The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported.

"I have met lots of politicians, lobbyists, and policymakers. Many of them were there for 20, 30 and 40 years. We elect them, send them and they become so comfortable in DC and forget all about

us, why we (have) sent them there," she said on Tuesday while announcing her candidacy.

Raveendran's longshot entry would indeed add a new face to the race. The mother of three has not been involved in politics until recently.

She joined the Stevens Point College Republicans this year, she said, and only decided to run for Senate after her trip to Washington earlier this summer.

She plans to graduate with a bachelor's degree in political science next year.

During her interview with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel last week, she said "I see what's going on in our country," noting she recently visited Washington.

"I realized how much DC is (dominated) by these polished politicians. I realized there is a need for a change in our political system. We need some new faces with



Photo courtesy: Twitter

new ideas," she said.

"I am not a politician, and I do not want to be a politician," said Raveendran, who immigrated to the US in 2011 from India, where she was a nurse and midwife.

She lived in California before moving to Wisconsin in 2017. "I'm a regular person who knows the situations in regular people's lives," she added.

Raveendran became a US citizen in 2015.

That means she will have been a citizen for 9 years in 2024 — the minimum number of years needed to be a Senator, media reports said.

Raveendran said her campaign will focus on securing the border and cracking down on illicit drugs like fentanyl, stopping illegal immigration and advocating for "medical freedom," suggesting she is opposed to vaccine mandates.

Republican US Representative Tom Tiffany last week announced he will not run against Baldwin, and Gallagher, Republicans' top choice candidate, has also declined to run.

Raveendran has said that she supported former President Donald Trump in 2016 and 2020 and is supporting him again in 2024. (PTI)

# Vaibhav Taneja named Tesla CFO

Indian-origin Vaibhan Taneja has been named Tesla's new Chief Financial Officer as the previous finance chief Zachary Kirkhorn announced his decision to step down, the automaker said in a company filing on Monday.

Taneja, 45, was appointed Tesla CFO in addition to his current role as Chief Accounting Officer (CAO) of the US-based electric car major on Friday after Kirkhorn, Tesla's Master of Coin and finance chief for the last four years, stepped down from the post.

Kirkhorn's 13-year tenure with the Elon Musk-led American EV giant was described as one of "tremendous expansion and growth" in the company filing.

"Tesla thanks Mr Kirkhorn for his significant contributions. Mr Kirkhorn will continue to serve Tesla through the end of the year to support a seamless transition," it said.

"This morning Tesla announced that I've stepped down from my role as Chief Financial Officer, succeeded by our Chief Accounting Officer, Vaibhav Taneja," Kirkhorn said in a LinkedIn post.

"Being a part of this company is a special experience, and I'm extremely proud of the work we've done together since I joined over 13 years ago. As I shift my responsibilities to support this transition,

I want to thank the talented, passionate, and hard-working employees at Tesla, who have accomplished things many thought (were) not possible. I also want to thank Elon for his leadership and optimism, which has inspired so many people," he said.

Taneja has served as Tesla's CAO since March 2019 and as the Corporate Controller since May 2018. He served as the Assistant Corporate Controller between February 2017 and May 2018, and from March 2016, served in various finance and accounting roles at SolarCity Corporation, a US-based solar panel developer acquired by Tesla in 2016.



Photo Courtesy: Twitter/@VaibhavTanej

Before that, Taneja was employed at PricewaterhouseCoopers in both India and the US between July 1999 and March 2016, the company filing said.

# Bhumi Purohit wins American Political Science Association's top award

Indian American researcher Bhumi Purohit has received the American Political Science Association's (APSA) 2023 William Anderson Award for the best dissertation in the general field of federalism or intergovernmental relations, state, and local politics.

Purohit is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs with a

joint appointment in the Department of Psychology.

Her research examines the behavioral and institutional barriers to women's political representation, as well as institutional barriers to public service delivery in India.

Purohit's research is motivated by questions such as: Why do women's interests remain under-represented in politics,

even with parity of electoral representation? How do gender biases about women politicians affect public service delivery outcomes in women's constituencies?

In her dissertation, she examines this question by examining why and how bureaucracies create barriers for women once they are elected to office, particularly when bureaucrats sit at higher levels of office with the ability to strategically use discretion against lower-level politicians. In the summer of 2023, she will start as an Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Georgetown's McCourt School.

"Laments of Getting Things Done: Bureaucratic Resistance Against Female Politicians in India" presents a path-breaking examination of bureaucratic resistance to locally elected women politicians in India, according to the citation from the award committee.

"It is the first study to systematically examine the gendered nature of bureaucratic resistance at the local level, three decades after decentralization reforms introduced quotas for women in local elections," it notes.

Based on new survey data collated among local bureaucrats and female politicians, the thesis demonstrates that

bureaucrats exhibit bias against elected female politicians, expecting them to be less effective in implementing policies, less able to organize local communities to pressure the state, and that female elected village heads are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to report bureaucratic resistance.

"Local bureaucrats are often described as being forced to ration resources and time," the citation says. "This very fine contribution to our understanding of local politics and power in India provides a convincing explanation for how they make such decisions."

Purohit holds a Master's degree in Area Studies with distinction from the University of Oxford, with a concentration on Modern South Asia. She received her PhD in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley.

Prior to that, she graduated from Duke University with a Bachelor's degree in Public Policy and a certificate in Documentary Film Making.

Purohit earlier worked as a J-PAL Policy Consultant for the Ministry of Rural Development in India to create policy implementation plans for finance management reforms and rural poverty reduction.

She has additional experience with managing experiments and research with One Acre Fund in Kenya and running social enterprises in India and Sierra Leone.



Photo courtesy: Twitter

# Coalition of Indian American organizations meets Congressman Ro Khanna to discuss priorities for India trip

A coalition of Indian American civil society organizations convened on Monday with Congressman Ro Khanna, the first Indian American to lead the bipartisan Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans. The meeting was held ahead of Congressman Khanna's upcoming trip to India, during which he aims to highlight and discuss critical priorities for the region. The coalition presented diverse perspectives, shedding light on various concerns within the Indian American community.

Husnaa Vohra, representing the Indian American Muslim Council, expressed her deep concern about the threat to liberal democracy, pluralism, and human rights in India. Vohra emphasized, "We stand as a diverse coalition of Indian American organizations, seeking to safeguard the fabric of pluralism and democracy in India, and urging Congressman Khanna to address ongoing violent acts and human rights violations."

A spokesperson for India Civil Watch India International, stressed the importance of a democratic alliance against totalitarianism and called for Congressman Khanna to "repo-

sition the India-US relationship around democracy", emphasizing that democracy must be the cornerstone of trade and military deals between the two nations.

Ria Chakrabarty, Policy Director for Hindus for Human Rights, urged Congressman Khanna to embrace progressive Hindu values and support efforts to combat caste discrimination unequivocally. She stated, "It is vital to combat efforts that co-opt and subvert the history of 1971 and ensure that the leadership of Bengalis is central to any recognition of the Bangladesh genocide."

Prachi Patankar, a board member at India Civil Watch International, raised concerns about the extremist groups and ideologues that Congressman Khanna has allowed to claim his support, urging the Congressman to distance himself from organizations that spread hate and misinformation. Patankar underscored, "We request you to take a clear step in the pro-democracy direction and support proactive federal action for protection against caste discrimination in the United States."

In response to the testimonies, Congressman Ro Khanna expressed his unwavering



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commitment to upholding democratic values and human rights both within India and the United States. He fully recognized the concerns articulated by the coalition and wholeheartedly endorsed the imperative of fostering a pluralistic and democratic India. He expressed his desire to protect minority rights in India. Furthermore, Congressman Khanna underscored his dedication to these principles by proudly announcing his co-sponsorship of the SAFEGUARD Act, which ensures that the protection and promotion of human rights are intrinsic considerations in the export of

arms and defense services to foreign countries. Finally, the Congressman agreed to hold a public call with our coalition when he returns from India.

Policy Asks for the India Trip:

The coalition outlined several policy asks for Congressman Khanna, including:

- Advocating for visa bans against individuals accused of human rights violations, especially in Manipur, Haryana, and Uttarakhand, to deter communal violence.
- Integrating human rights considerations into the security analysis of the US-India

relationship and cosponsoring the SAFEGUARD Act to strengthen human rights reporting requirements for arms exports.

- Combatting Caste Discrimination: Strengthen your stand against caste discrimination by clarifying your separation from far-right factions. Support proactive federal action to counter caste discrimination in the US.
- Engaging with the coalition before, during, and after the trip to foster an open dialogue and inclusive discussion about the US-India relationship with a focus on human rights. This includes a public readout with our coalition after the trip.
- Disassociation from Extremist Influences: We ask you to distance yourself from extremist groups and their harmful narratives, sharing details of their far-right affiliations with your office.
- Championing Democracy and Accountability: Lead an India Caucus conference to address concerns of civil society, spotlighting the BJP's role in eroding democracy and rights. Invite credible experts to testify.

## Vivek Ramaswamy courts controversy with comments on Juneteenth

Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy has advocated single-day voting on a national election day holiday. However, the Indian American courted controversy by suggesting removing another "useless" or "made up" holiday like Juneteenth.

"Single day voting, on Election Day. We will make Election Day a holiday. Cancel Juneteenth or one of the other useless ones we made up," he told voters at an event in Iowa on Aug 5. "We can't have like every day be a holiday, but we can cancel one of the other ones and make Election Day a holiday, paper ballots, and government-issued voter ID that matches the voter file," he was quoted as saying by NBC News.

Asked whether he thought Juneteenth was a "useless" holiday, Ramaswamy replied, "I basically do." He, however, declined to call Memorial Day and Veterans Day too as "useless" holidays.

"I stand with the presumption of time-tested traditions," he said. "I think that if we made a national commemorative



holiday for everything that's important that's happened in our history, we'd have no working days left. But I think the spirit of Juneteenth we already channel into other holidays like Martin Luther King Day. Like Presidents' Day."

"We shouldn't have redundant holidays that celebrate overlapping purposes. It should have a distinctive purpose," he continued. "I think — let's be honest. The reason for making it a holiday was under political duress. It was a political hostage situation on the back of the death of George Floyd and I think that should not be how we create holidays."

Former Rep. Will Hurd of

Texas — a rival presidential candidate and one of the highest-profile Black Republicans in the country — blasted Ramaswamy over his remarks, telling NBC News that the contender "hopes to cancel a holiday that celebrates equality and freedom."

"His gimmicks and shtick aren't serious," Hurd added.

Incidentally, Ramaswamy's stance comes two months after he wrote a post on Twitter where he stated that Juneteenth is a "celebration of the American dream". "We don't just look back and flog ourselves. That's besides the point," he then said. "What we celebrate is how far we've come, and as a first-generation American myself, you better believe that I'm proud of it. Happy Juneteenth, everybody."

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers delivered news of freedom to enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas, two months after the end of the Civil War and two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Congress passed legislation establishing Juneteenth as a federal holiday in June 2021.

## Sikh man, co-worker under probe for 'assaulting' shoplifter at 7-Eleven store in US



A Sikh man is among two convenience store workers in California being probed by the authorities for "assaulting" a suspected thief who tried to rob the shop, the video of which has gone viral.

The incident took place on July 29 at a 7-Eleven store in Stockton city, according to news website cbsnews.com.

In the viral video, a masked man is seen emptying shelves of cigarettes and other products from the store's shelves before two employees of the shop stepped in to stop him. The clip shows one of the employees pinning the alleged thief down, while the Sikh man beats him with a stick.

In an update on its Facebook page on Sunday, Stockton police said they are investigating the

assault of the 7-Eleven robbery suspect by two workers.

"It has been brought to our attention that a video of two 7-Eleven employees assaulting a robbery suspect has been circulating. We are aware of the incident and the investigation is ongoing," it said.

The suspected thief is believed to have robbed the store two other times within the same 24-hour period, online portal kcra.com reported, quoting Stockton police.

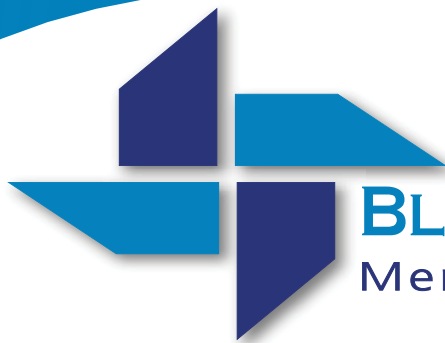
"The case has been assigned to our Investigations Bureau for follow-up interviews and evidence review. Once the investigations are complete the findings will be forwarded to the San Joaquin County District Attorney for review," the police said in the Facebook update.

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# Indiaspora to host G20 Forum in New Delhi from August 22 to 24

In the run-up to the 18th summit of the G20 nations, US-based Indiaspora will host a G20 Forum in New Delhi from August 22 to 24.

The gathering, scheduled to take place at the Taj Mahal Hotel, will bring together influential voices from around the world to discuss critical issues spanning foreign policy, financial inclusion, climate change, gender equality, healthcare, philanthropy, entrepreneurship, sports, trade and investments, and more, according to a press release by the nonprofit.

The G20 summit will be held

at the Pragati Maidan Convention Center in New Delhi on September 9-10.

"The Indiaspora G20 Forum presents an unparalleled opportunity to create a lasting impact on a global scale," said Sreekumar Nair, CEO of Indiaspora-India. "By convening this event we aim to drive tangible solutions that transcend boundaries and foster collaboration. This forum is a testament to the Indian diaspora's collective commitment to creating positive change and leaving a meaningful legacy for generations to come."

According to Indiaspora, the



event will feature a diverse range of plenary and breakout sessions, providing an opportunity for engaging discussions

led by renowned speakers from various fields. The lineup will include government officials, policymakers, businesspersons,

entrepreneurs, accomplished sportspersons, inspiring artists, and dedicated philanthropists, all sharing a common vision for a better world.

"As India assumes the G20 presidency, the Indiaspora G20 Forum couldn't have been planned at a more opportune moment," said Sanjeev Joshipura, Executive Director of Indiaspora. "Indiaspora is assembling 200 diaspora leaders from 25 countries to see how we can contribute to India's journey towards 100 years of independence. The Indian diaspora, working alongside prominent leaders in India, are committed to harnessing our collective strength to foster inclusive growth, sustainable development, and social progress, as India continues to assume its global leadership position."

## Indian diaspora in Michigan protest, condemn violence in Manipur



The groups congregated at the Detroit's Hart Plaza to publicly protest

The Michigan-based Indian diaspora staged a protest on July 30 to express their concerns

regarding the ongoing violence in Manipur. Protestors highlighted that the Kuki and Zomi

tribes, like many indigenous communities, have endured historical injustices.

The protestors came from various groups, including members of the North American Manipur Tribal Association, Ambedkar Association of North America, Indian American Muslim Council, CAPI, and ICA factions in the United States.

The groups congregated at the Detroit's Hart Plaza to publicly protest with signs and slogans.

In a press statement, they said, "Indian Constitutional commitment to the principles of liberty, fraternity, and equality

compels us to raise our voice against these atrocious acts of violence and oppression that have been ongoing for over three months. Over 60,000 have been rendered homeless, 6200 plus houses burned, 320 plus churches burned and over 170 plus villages burned and decimated to the ground."

"There has been an internet ban for over two months, in the region and we worry that more of these videos will come out once internet connectivity is restored," they added.

It further said that the Kuki and Zomi tribes, like many indigenous communities, have

long endured historical injustices and discrimination and today, they are facing an existential threat as evidence of violence, rape, and forced displacement emerges daily.

They called upon international communities and human rights organizations to aid in the investigation and scrutinizing the Manipur events, and that urgent steps should be taken to stop the hostile goings-on.

"We are further pained to see videos in social media of women being paraded naked, gang-raped, tortured and executed by self-styled firing squads and more," the statement said.

"There has been an internet ban for over two months, in the region and we worry that more of these videos will come out once internet connectivity is restored," it added.

## Sujata Tibrewala, Nimisha Doongarwal among immigrant artists at Oakland art show

Indian Americans Sujata Tibrewala and Nimisha Doongarwal are among the four immigrant artists featured at a gallery in Oakland, California. The four artists with immigrant backgrounds, through their works, present diverse stories of being a refugee, an immigrant, or a diaspora member, and how these experiences have affected their lives in the country they chose to call their new home.

Titled "Breaking the Frame," the exhibition opened on August 4 at the ARTtogether Center in 1200 Harrison Street with a reception and talks featuring the participating artists. It will run through September 15.

Through mixed media, collage, and the rupturing of frames and borders, the artists raise questions about our understanding of race, gender, belonging, history, and culture, while expanding our perspectives on time, identity, and tradition.

Each artist brings their unique perspective. One of them, Dalar Alahverdi, is of Armenian descent but grew up in Iran. She earned her bachelor's in painting from Tehran University and her master's in art education from California State University. Her works advocate for social justice and human rights.

Another artist, Sujata Tibrewala, pursued a rewarding career in software, working with some of the top tech firms in the Bay Area.

An immigrant from Jaipur, India, Tibrewala's work addresses topics such as equality, generational repression, women's rights, and questions about patriarchy.

Growing up amid a diverse culture in India and then embracing her new life as an immigrant in America's melting pot – the buzz of big cities like Los Angeles ironically showed

her that the same patriarchy she saw back home in India also exists in one of the most 'liberal' economies, albeit in a different format.

For the show, Tibrewala brought along her series called "Quantum Connection," where she uses her background in science to illustrate how the universe created us all as equals,

but man-made differences divide us.

"It is especially important for Indians back home in India as well as in America to ponder that we all are equal and have the same shared experiences, we are packed with the same atoms that bind the universe," Tibrewala told the American Bazaar from her Bay Area home.



"In today's time of divisive politics, it is important to come and learn that the beginning of us all is an atom and then the end of us all is also the same. My work will try to resonate with the idea that it is better to be one as the universe made us rather than dwell in differences and upset the balance of this world."

The exhibit would also showcase the works of Nimisha Doongarwal, another Indian immigrant artist who moved to the US in the late 2000s to pursue higher education in science. Her works are about finding her own identity as a global citizen.

The fourth artist at the exhibit, Forrest McGarvey, uses digital collage, video, installations, and the medium of paper to create narrative works about identity.

The exhibition holds significance as it provides a platform for artists of color to showcase their unique experiences while also shedding light on the scarcity of spaces where minority artists can freely practice and create awareness about their backgrounds.

# Madhav Chinnappa, Google's Indian-origin news director, laid off

Google laid off Madhav Chinnappa, the Indian-origin director of News Ecosystem Development, who had dedicated 13 years of service to the company. In a heartfelt LinkedIn post, London-based Indian-origin Chinnappa expressed gratitude for his time at Google and spoke about being in a "privileged position" to plan his next move.

Chinnappa, holds a BA (Honors) in Economics and Policy Studies from the Rice University, Texas. He had an impressive 29-year professional journey before joining Google. His career included stints at BBC, United Business Media (UBM), and Associated Press Television News (APTN).

During his tenure at Google, Chinnappa played a significant role in several



Photo courtesy: LinkedIn

key initiatives, such as the Digital News Initiative and Google News Initiative Innovation Challenges. One notable project was the Journalism Emergency Relief

Fund (JERF), which exemplified Google's commitment to supporting the vulnerable segments of the news ecosystem.

In his LinkedIn post, Chinnappa also disclosed his immediate plans for the coming months. "In the near term, I have some pressing family issues that need my fuller attention, so in the spirit of the Zen proverb that the tea cup must be empty before it can be full, I will take August off, then spend September looking after my mum in India," he explained. He also shared that he would start contemplating work in October, aiming to embark on new endeavors in 2024.

The news of Chinnappa's departure elicited heartfelt responses from his colleagues. Ludovic Bleher, Head of Innovation at Google News Initiative, praised

Chinnappa's contributions and partnership, saying, "We've achieved a lot together, and you didn't mention everything in your message. To be clear: this is only the tip of the iceberg, and very few know what it took in the background to make those good things happen. You made it possible. Above all, we kept integrity and honesty at the highest standard, and none can challenge the authenticity of our commitment for the future of news and journalism."

The concept of "gardening leave," wherein an employee receives a full salary without the obligation to come to the office, allowed Chinnappa the space and time to reflect on his career and life. Despite parting ways with Google, he expressed immense pride in the accomplishments achieved alongside his teammates and colleagues.

In January this year, Google announced its plans to cut more than 12,000 jobs and joined other tech giants in scaling back operations amid a weakening global economy and rising inflation.

# Demonstration in Australian Parliament against Manipur violence

An interfaith solidarity gathering with the women of Manipur was organized by concerned members of the Indian diaspora in Gadi/Sydney and hosted by Greens Member of the Legislative Council Abigail Boyd in the New South Wales Parliament on August 3.

It was prompted by global outrage after a video showed two women of the indigenous Kuki-Zo minority tribe being paraded naked and sexually assaulted by a mob of men in the north eastern Indian state of Manipur.

Mary Biakmawii Mizo, a member of the Kuki-Zo tribe, made a moving appeal: "I speak to you with a heavy heart, burdened by the weight of the horrors that my people, the Kuki-Zo tribe, have been subjected to in Manipur.

"As we gather in this hallowed hall, let us not forget that there

are people back home who are living in fear, their lives marked by violence and despair ... My own mother, a government employee in Imphal, and my sister, a nurse, were forced to flee due to the escalating conflict. Many of my relatives found shelter in relief camps, their lives uprooted, their dreams shattered.

"More than 60,000 members of the Kuki-Zo tribe have been forced to flee, displaced, their homes and churches burned, their lives forever scarred by these horrific acts. They are now scattered across [the neighboring states] Mizoram, Assam, and even as far as New Delhi, away from their homeland, their culture, their identity.

"Rape was weaponized and lies were spread to target a genocidal campaign against my people. It is a gross affront to humanity itself. This has left the entire community terrorized



Kuki-Zo woman Mary Biakmawii Mizo addressed the Manipur solidarity gathering

and devastated."

Mizo called on federal and state governments to investigate a number of organizations in Australia with links to the Hindu organisation Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

"These Hindu extremist organizations, which have been accused of fueling hate crimes in India, are registered Australian charities and receive substantial

government grants," she said.

"Can we justify funding organizations implicated in such atrocities?" Dr Haroon Kasim, co-founder of The Humanism Project, a not-for-profit social justice advocacy group of Indians in Australia, told Green Left that public records show several such "fronts" for the RSS in Australia had received millions of dollars in public funding just over the past few years.

"Let us unite in our quest for justice, not just for the Kuki-Zo tribe, but for all oppressed minorities. Let us ensure that our tax dollars do not fund violence, but are used to promote peace, equality, and human rights," Mizo said.

The gathering also heard from Labor MLC Anthony D'Adam; former Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon; Reverend James Jacob; United for Human Rights National Indigenous Coordinator Andrea Nevill; Durga Owen; Philip Immaraj from Narrawee-na Baptist Church; and Salahuddin from the Tamil Australia Muslim Society.

(Source: Green Left)

# Indian-origin UberEats rider's tragic death in Australia spurs gig worker reforms

The tragic death of an Indian-origin UberEats rider in Sydney's north-west on July 22 has spurred gig worker reforms in Australia. The identity of the rider was revealed by Labor Senator Tony Sheldon during a parliamentary statement on July 31, with the permission of the grieving family.

22-year-old Akshay Deepak Doultani lost his life when his scooter collided with an SUV in Epping while working as an UberEats rider. Despite prompt medical attention from paramedics, Doultani succumbed to his injuries at the Royal North Shore Hospital.

Doultani had been pursuing

a master's degree in finance at Macquarie University, having received a scholarship that enabled him to study in Australia. Senator Sheldon highlighted Doultani's aspirations to provide his family in India with a brighter future through his studies and work in Australia.

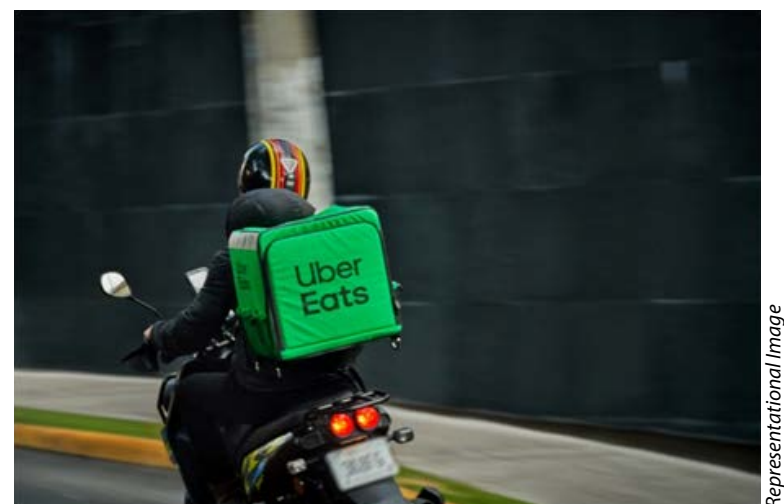
In the wake of this tragic incident, Sheldon also shed light on the plight faced by food delivery riders in the gig economy. He mentioned that since 2017, 12 food delivery riders have lost their lives, though the actual numbers could be higher due to underreporting within the industry.

Sheldon emphasized

Doultani's tragic loss is a reminder about the necessity for gig workers to have a safety net, suggesting that having such minimum protections in place could have potentially saved the lives of those 12 individuals who tragically lost their lives while working in the gig economy.

Senator Sheldon emphasized the lack of basic employment rights for gig workers, such as minimum wage and workers' compensation, leaving them in a vulnerable position where they often have to push themselves to the limit just to make ends meet.

Currently, the Australian government is deliberating on potential reforms to enhance



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protections for gig workers within the industry. These reforms aim to establish minimum pay and working conditions while also granting the Fair Work Commission the authority to regulate workers categorized as "employee-like."

However, the proposed changes have encountered resistance from the business lobby and gig economy companies, who contend that implementing these reforms would escalate costs and consumer prices, ultimately leading to job losses.

# Indian-origin police officer jailed for speeding patrol car death in UK

An Indian-origin police officer who pleaded guilty to causing the death by dangerous driving of a woman has been sentenced to three years' imprisonment and disqualified from driving for over four years by a UK court.

Police Constable (PC) Na-deem Patel, 28, had been behind the wheel of the marked police patrol car responding to an emergency 999 call when it hit 25-year-old Shante Daniel-Folkes in June 2021.

The victim's injuries proved immediately fatal. Fellow officer PC Gary Thomson, 31, who was driving a police car ahead of Patel's vehicle, was convicted of careless driving by a jury at the Old Bailey court in London following a four-day trial on Monday.

"Our thoughts remain with the family and friends of Shante Daniel-Folkes following this avoidable tragedy," said Rosemary Ainslie, head of the Crown Prosecution Service



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(CPS) Special Crime Division. "PC Patel admitted causing the death of Ms Daniel-Folkes by driving dangerously and I hope his sentence, along with today's verdict for PC Thomson, offers some comfort to her family at this extremely difficult time," she said.

The CPS said both officers, although not bound by the 30mph

speed limit in force in the area while responding to an emergency call, were driving at motorway speeds in a built-up urban area, with a number of potential hazards in the vicinity.

"These included pedestrians, cyclists, and cars travelling in the other direction, as well as an open convenience store directly at the scene and a nearby pub

in which 30-40 customers were present for a quiz night.

There was an obvious risk of injury to a person from vehicles travelling at that speed in the dark, and both officers fell below the expected standard of a competent and careful driver that evening," added Ainslie.

The court heard that Daniel-Folkes was walking across

the road around 11:20 pm close to a pedestrian crossing when Thomson's vehicle passed her with its emergency lights and siren activated.

Around three to four seconds later, Daniel-Folkes continued to cross and was struck by Patel's vehicle. He had earlier switched off his front emergency lights to avoid affecting Thomson's vision in the lead vehicle but did have his siren activated.

The CPS said Patel reached a peak speed of 83.9 mph on Stockwell Road just 115 meters from the car's final stopping point. The car was travelling around 55mph at the time of the collision after Patel braked for two seconds from a speed of more than 81mph. The vehicle being driven by Thomson also passed Daniel-Folkes at speeds between 70-79mph, and the prosecution was able to prove that he also drove at an excessive speed for a significant distance.

At the end of the trial this week, Thomson was convicted of careless driving but acquitted of dangerous driving and fined GBP 500 and awarded five penalty points on his driving license. Patel is banned from driving for 54 months starting February this year.

# Indian Australian accountant Kris Agrawal alleged of \$38 mn fraud

Indian Australian accountant Kris Agrawal faces mounting scrutiny as his company's collapse leaves over 130 families (majorly of Indian descent) in Western Sydney fearing the loss of their life savings.

The company, led by Agrawal, had lured investors with the promise of assurances of a substantial 12% return on their investments, totaling a staggering \$38 million. It has now entered voluntary administration, leaving families with a bleak and uncertain future.

Mona Patel and her husband of Indian descent are among those hit hardest by this unforeseen catastrophe.

Their losses amount to a staggering \$750,000. Patel's voice trembled as she revealed the depth of her anguish to 7 News, saying, "We're in a lot of pain right now... Every single night, every single morning. It's hard."

Confusion and despair have become the prevailing emotions for the affected

families, who are struggling to comprehend the sudden disappearance of their investments. "Where's all the money gone?" one investor pleaded, echoing the sentiments of many who are now facing financial ruin. Approximately \$40 million remains unaccounted for, leaving families feeling betrayed and devastated.

Central to the controversy is the company's affiliation with Mansa Suns, an entity controlled by Agrawal. Mansa Suns extended loans to various businesses, resulting in investments in properties across Western Sydney. Locations such as Box Hill, Toongabbie North, Kellyville Austral, Oren Park, and Wentworthville were targeted for development. However, the expected returns have proven to be elusive, leaving investors disillusioned and desperate.

Amid the crisis, Agrawal, once regarded as a reliable financial advisor, was seen apologizing and expressing remorse for the dire situation in the report by 7

News. "I'm very sorry," Agrawal concedes, though his words do little to assuage the anger and disappointment of investors who entrusted him with their financial well-being.

Some investors are finding their voices and demanding accountability. An anonymous creditor, who lost \$300,000, laments, "I truly don't know. Where is my

money? It's gone," capturing the frustration that has gripped many in the wake of this catastrophe.

While the impacted families search for answers and potential avenues for recourse, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) is yet to confirm whether an investigation into the matter is underway. The upcoming creditors' meeting looms as a pivotal moment, holding the potential to provide clarity and perhaps a glimmer of hope for those who find themselves on the precipice of financial ruin.

(With inputs from NRI Affairs)



Screen grab from 7News

# Australian teacher 'vilifies' Indians as 'Uber drivers and Deliveroo people'

A teacher in Australia has been slapped with a disciplinary warning and training by a civil tribunal after he described Indians as "Uber drivers and Deliveroo people" during a business studies class in 2021.

Acting upon a complaint by an Indian-origin former student, who attended James Anderson's class, the New South Wales Civil and Administrative Tribunal has also asked the Department of Education to make an official apology to the pupil, The Sydney

Morning Herald reported.

Anderson of Cronulla High School had played an educational YouTube video, which ran for over 20 minutes, for the class on March 3, 2021, featuring a presenter of Indian descent.

Anderson, according to the student, had mocked the presenter before saying "all Indians are Uber drivers and Deliveroo people, and their service is bad".

Dissatisfied with the school principal's response to the incident, the student and her

parents approached and filed a complaint with the tribunal.

"As the video was playing, I saw Mr Anderson, while smiling, glance at me a few times and continue to mockingly giggle at the lady and her accent," the student said during her evidence at the tribunal, according to The Herald.

"I was distressed and uncomfortable that Mr Anderson was looking at me during the video and mocked the Indian presenter, knowing that I am of Indian

race. It was embarrassing and hurtful."

The student also told the tribunal that Anderson continued to play the video despite another student in the class repeatedly asking for the video to be turned off.

Anderson denied mocking the presenter, but admitted his statements were "inappropriate" and "racial in nature".

"At the time there was nothing in the nature of any reactions by the students in the class that

day to cause me to think that one or more of the students was upset," he told the tribunal.

Anderson remains at the school but received a disciplinary warning and training from the tribunal last week, which found the student's complaint of racial vilification substantiated.

"We reject all forms of racism and are committed to the elimination of racial discrimination in NSW public schools," a spokesman for the Department of Education told The Herald.



## Australian court overturns law banning Sikhs from carrying kirpans in schools

The Supreme Court in Australia's Queensland state has overturned a law banning Sikh religious dagger (kirpan) on school grounds calling it "unconstitutional".

The ruling by the state's highest court came after Kamaljit Kaur Athwal took the state government to court last year, claiming that the ban discriminated against the kirpan – one of five religious symbols that Sikhs are supposed to carry at all times as part of their faith.

Ruling in Athwal's favor, the state's highest court found the legislation to be unconstitutional under the Racial Discrimination Act, ABC News reported on Thursday.

An initial court ruling last year had dismissed the suggestion that the ban on carrying knives was discriminatory. But this week, three judges in the Court of Appeal found that a section of the Queensland Weapons Act of 1990 – which bans carrying knives in public places and schools – is inconsistent with Section 10 of the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act of 1975.

In response, the Queensland Education Department said it is considering the implications of the court decision.



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"As this legal decision has just been handed down, the department will now consider any implications."

Athwal's lawyer was cited as saying by the ABC News that the court had a difficult task "to balance the human rights of individuals to practice their religion and express their faith with the human rights of student and teacher safety".

"Today marks the day that members of the Sikh faith can practice their faith and positively participate without discrimination as proud members of their local school communities," the lawyer said, adding that her client is pleased with the court's decision.

## Canada working to ensure safety of all diplomatic representatives following threats against Indian officials: Govt

Canada's public safety department has said it is working to ensure the safety and security of all diplomatic representatives in the country following the circulation of an online video in connection with threats against Indian diplomats, underlining that there is no place in the country for the "incitement of violence."

The statement by Public Safety Canada came nearly a month after the circulation of Khalistani posters online which named Indian officials. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had said India had asked its partner countries such as Canada, the UK and the US not to give space to "extremist Khalistani ideology" as it is "not good" for relations.

"There is no place in Canada for the incitement of violence. Law enforcement has been engaged following the circulation of an online video in relation to threats against Indian diplomatic officials," Public Safety Canada said on platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

"Canadian law enforcement and the Government continue to work to ensure the safety and security of all diplomatic representatives in Canada," it said last week.

Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly last month assured India of the



safety of its diplomats and termed the "promotional material" circulating ahead of a Khalistan rally "unacceptable".

In June, India slammed Canada after visuals surfaced on social media of a tableau in Brampton that reportedly celebrated the assassination of former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

Canada's response to the Khalistani issue appeared to be constrained by its "vote bank compulsions", and India will have to respond if the activities impinge on its national security and integrity, Jaishankar had said on the issue.

The Khalistani issue has impacted ties between the two countries in many ways in the last few years, he had said.

India has been asking Canada against giving space to pro-Khalistani separatists and extremist elements, Jaishankar had said.

## Indian musician sings 'Pehla Nasha' at Oxford Street; goes viral



A video has been viral on social media in which an Indian street musician can be seen performing the popular song 'Pehla nasha pehla pyaar' from the 1992 film 'Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar' at Oxford Street in London.

The singer, Vish, who is popular on social media, can be seen sitting on a pavement while singing the romantic song. An impressed crowd can be seen gathered around him, and joining him in crooning the song.

The video, shared by Vish on his Instagram handle is captioned, "Look how casually people are sitting and enjoying this Udit Narayan tune in London."

The viral post has garnered more than 19 million views and more than 2 million likes on Instagram.

Reacting to the singer's soulful voice, many people have commented on the post.

A user commented, "Jordan of rockstar in the making."

Another posted, "These 2 little girls in the background is the best part about the video. Such a great gesture of sitting down while the artist was singing on the floor. Simple respect, kudos to the girls."

There were also some who commented that such musical performances on the street side can only happen outside India; had he been performing in India, the authorities would have stopped him from doing so.

This is not the first time that Vish's video has gone viral. He has earlier, too, shared his videos while performing hit Bollywood numbers on the streets of the UK.

## UK cop cleared of misconduct over 'removing' Sikh man's patka



A West Midlands Police sergeant from northern England has been cleared of gross misconduct allegations relating to his treatment of a Sikh man in custody, following an investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC).

The man had complained that his religious head covering, known as a patka, was forcibly removed at the Perry Barr custody suite in Birmingham, leaving him traumatised. He also claimed that the disrespectful manner in which he had been treated during the October 2021 incident, was racial discrimination.

"Part of our role is to address incidents involving the police which have significant community impact. This matter caused local unrest, and we established early on that, contrary to some reports, the man's head covering had not been stamped on," said Derrick Campbell, IOPC Regional Director for the West Midlands.

"We carried out a thorough investigation and from the evidence gathered it was our opinion that for one officer there was a case to answer for gross miscon-

duct. That evidence has now been heard before a police disciplinary panel which found the allegations not proven," he said.

After a two-day hearing earlier this week before an independent panel, led by a legally qualified chair, the sergeant who removed the head covering was found not to have breached police professional standards for authority, respect and courtesy, use of force, and equality and diversity.

The allegations concerned his handling of the situation and his decision to remove the man's head covering.

The panel also made an order that the officer should not be named in any reports from the proceedings, which were organized by West Midlands Police.

The IOPC's overall investigation into the case, which was completed in May last year, had already determined there was no case to answer for misconduct for another six officers whose conduct was assessed, but that four of them would benefit from taking part in reflective practice to learn from the incident.

# France to offer 5-year Schengen visa for Indian alumni under new education program

France on Tuesday said its goal to welcome 30,000 students from India by 2030 is aimed at fostering academic excellence, boosting cultural links and enhancing long-lasting friendship between the two nations.

Under the new program, France plans to offer a five-year Schengen circulation visa for Indian alumni.

France announced major new initiatives to roll out the "red carpet" for Indian students and alumni during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris last month.

The French embassy, giving out details of the program, said France believes that when an Indian student spends even just a semester in France, it creates a connection that "ought to be

fostered and cherished".

"That is why, Indian students who hold a Master's degree or above and have spent at least a semester studying in France are eligible for a five-year short-stay Schengen visa," it said.

This is a special provision for Indian alumni to enable them to keep close links with France and their French counterparts, it noted.

"Our teams are working double time to implement the decisions taken by President (Emmanuel) Macron and Prime Minister Modi in Paris to benefit students," French ambassador Emmanuel Lenain said.

"France has always been an inclusive and diverse country, eager to share our rich cultural heritage and world-class education opportunities with Indian



students," he said.

"My message for Indian students: France will always be your friend, and we will do everything possible to ensure you have an amazing academic and life experience in our country," he added.

The embassy said the specialized programs will provide comprehensive training in the French language and other academic disciplines, enabling Indian students to excel in their studies and adapt seamlessly to the French education system.

It said the decision reflects

France's commitment to making life as easy as possible for Indian students. French President Macron announced France's goal to welcome 30,000 students from India by 2030.

"This ambitious target signifies France's conviction that welcoming more Indian students fosters academic excellence, cultural understanding, and long-lasting friendship between our two nations," the embassy said in a statement.

In the light of the initiative, the embassy and the French Institute announced the upcoming

'Choose France Tour 2023'.

Organized by the French government and Campus France, the education fair will be held in four major Indian cities, Chennai (October 8), Calcutta (October 11), Delhi (October 13), and Mumbai (October 15).

"It will provide an excellent opportunity to Indian students and their parents to interact with the representatives of more than 40 French higher education institutions present at the fair, and explore a wide range of study options," the embassy said.

With 570 French companies employing more than 400,000 staff in India, graduates with French qualifications gain access to a wide spectrum of career prospects, and the chance to work with globally renowned organizations, it said.

## Rishi Sunak unveils social media partnership to curb illegal immigration

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has unveiled a voluntary partnership between social media companies and the UK government to accelerate action to tackle people smuggling content online, such as criminals sharing information about illegal English Channel crossings.

In an announcement over the weekend, Sunak said the move would help meet his "stop the boats" target of clamping down on illegal migrants being charged large sums by human traffickers to make dangerous crossings across the high seas.

The online content being targeted by the new partnership would cover discount offers for groups of people, free spaces for children, offers of false documents and false claims of safe passage - all of which the government says target vulnerable people for profit and put people's lives at risk through dangerous and illegal journeys.

"To stop the boats, we have to tackle the

business model of vile people smugglers at source," Sunak said in a statement released by 10 Downing Street.

"That means clamping down on their attempts to lure people into making these illegal crossings and profit from putting lives at risk. This new commitment from tech firms will see us redouble our efforts to fight back against these criminals, working together to shut down their vile trade," he said.

Figures from the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) claim that over 90% of online content linked to people smuggling is taken down when social media companies are notified. The new partnership between tech firms and the UK government is aimed at driving forward efforts to further crackdown on the tactics being used by criminal gangs who abuse the internet to lure people into paying for crossings.

"Heartless people smugglers are using

social media to promote their despicable services and charge people thousands of pounds to make the illegal journey into the UK in unsafe boats. They must not succeed," said UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman.

"This strengthened collaboration between the National Crime Agency, government and social media companies will ensure content promoting dangerous and illegal Channel crossings doesn't see the light of day," she said.

Under the new initiative, social media companies will look to increase cooperation with the NCA to find and remove criminal content and step up the sharing of best practices both across the industry and with law enforcement. Alongside the partnership, the government will also set up a new center led by the NCA and Home Office to increase the capacity and capability of law enforcement to identify this content on social media platforms.



Known as the "Online Capability Centre", backed by 11 million pound state funding, its work will focus on undermining and disrupting the business model of organized crime groups responsible for illegal crossings and using the internet to facilitate these journeys by intensifying efforts to combat their online activity.

## Canada student visa fraud suspect list cut to 300 from 2,000: Report

The Canadian Border Service Agency have currently narrowed down their suspect list of fraud cases where students entered the country taking unfair advantage of the system to 300, sharply bringing it down from 2,000 cases as were reported earlier.

On June 23, Reuters had reported that Canadian authorities had taken into custody, one Brijesh Mishra, an immigration agent from Jalandhar. On July 24, the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) has laid charges against Mishra for his involvement in defrauding



Representational Image

700 Indian students.

Indian students in Canada were facing mass deportation after the frauds came to limelight. Several students along with India's foreign ministry had requested Canadian authorities to reconsider deporting the students and re-evaluate their credibility and eligibility for studying in Canada.

The Canadian authorities agreed to not deport the Indian students who were defrauded by several immigration agencies.

A Times of India report

cited a letter from Canadian public safety minister Marco E L Mendicino, for the latest update on number of students who might still face the axe of Canadian authorities. The report said that some students, concerned about their visa status in Canada, had written to the minister on June 8, following which the minister updated on the numbers.

"In 2018, CBSA was investigating organized crime groups and became aware of issues with students not attending school and becoming involved in criminality and gangs. This led to new lines of enquiry which ultimately, based on tips received from the public in 2020, led us to identify over 2,000 cases where fraudulent documents may have been used to obtain a student visa. In collaboration with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), we reviewed those cases and we narrowed them down to approximately 300 cases of concern," the ToI report quoted the letter.



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TheSATimes

# Indian students to benefit as US F-1 visa approvals soar to 6-year high

In a promising development for students aspiring to pursue their Masters in the United States, several F-1 visa slots have become available at various consulates in India.

This development has brought relief to many students who had been anxiously awaiting their visa approvals. With the availability of more visa slots, they are hopeful of fulfilling their dream to pursue higher education in the United States.

One such student is Rakesh P, who expressed his ordeal of facing visa rejections in the past. "I have deferred my admission twice since last year as my visa got rejected a couple of times. In my desperation, I even went to Vietnam for a visa interview, but even there my visa was rejected," shared Rakesh P. However, he now has reason to rejoice as he recently attended a visa interview in New Delhi and, to his delight, has been approved to study in the US on his third attempt.

Rakesh P, among others, is now set to embark on his journey to New York on August 14, eagerly looking forward to commencing his academic pursuits.

The F1 visa, valid for a five-year period, presents a golden opportunity for students to pursue their master's degrees in the US.

Among those who have faced visa hurdles in the past, Vijay M shared his journey, stating, "I have been appearing for interviews since June last year. I deferred my admission five times. Finally, my visa has been approved now, and I will be travelling next week." His persistence paid off, and his last successful interview was held in Chennai.

The United States witnessed a remarkable increase in student visas, marking the highest single-year total of F-1 visas since 2016. The US Department of State issued over 411,000 student visas during the 2022 fiscal year, representing a 15% surge from the previous year.

Data from the State Department reveals that not only was this a substantial increase from the previous fiscal year, the largest non-pandemic year-over-year increase since 2010, but it also marked the highest total recorded in six years.

Comparatively, Canada granted over 420,000 student visas in 2022, reflecting a 27% increase over 2021, while the UK witnessed a significant annual growth of 34% in the year ending March 2023.

The F-1 visa denials can be attributed to several common reasons, including the inability to prove non-immigrant intent, lack of financial proof, mistrust regarding academic institutions or goals, weak responses during the interview, and misrepresentation of information on the application form.

The F1 visa, valid for a five-year peri-



The F1 visa, valid for a five-year period, presents a golden opportunity for students to pursue their master's degrees in the US. (Representational Image)

od, presents a golden opportunity for students to pursue their master's degrees in the US, with these recent developments offering renewed hope and excitement for Indian students eager to embark on their educational journey overseas.

The US Department of State has recently unveiled its annual report on Visa Issuance by Class and Nationality, with a strong emphasis on swift recovery. The highlight of the report is the remarkable surge in F-1 visa data, bringing good news for international recruitment offices across the United States. The country experienced the most significant annual growth in US student visas in more than a decade (excluding pandemic years), culminating in the highest number of F-1 visas issued in a single year since 2016.

In ApplyInsights' report, the factors driving this impressive growth are thoroughly examined. The report delves into the historical data of fiscal years, shedding light on the trends leading up to this current surge. Moreover, a glimpse into the potential future of this destination market is also provided.

The ApplyInsights Team provided this analysis, using the most recent government and ApplyBoard internal data, to present a comprehensive overview of trends in the international education industry.

Specifically, during the 2022 fiscal year (spanning from October 2021 to September 2022), the US Department of State issued a staggering 411,000 student visas.

This marked a remarkable 15% increase from the previous fiscal year, representing the largest non-pandemic year-over-year growth since 2010. Additionally, this figure stands as the highest recorded total in the past six years, further emphasizing the resurgence of student visa applications to the United States.

Excluding the exceptional surge in student visas issued from 2020 to 2021 due to the pandemic, the United States has generally witnessed a decline in the number of student visas granted each year since 2017. However, this trend has taken a positive turn in 2022.

Although the US still has a considerable way to go to match its peak of over 644,000 student visas issued in FY2015, the recent numbers instill confidence in the potential for long-term, sustainable growth. This year-over-year growth in 2022 stands as the most significant in a decade, disregarding the pandemic-related impact. The growth can now be attributed to factors beyond COVID-19 deferrals and enrolment backlogs, as international travel restrictions are no longer a hindrance.

Nevertheless, it's essential to recognize that other competing destination markets continue to exhibit higher growth trajectories. Canada, for instance, saw an impressive 27% increase, issuing over 420,000 student visas in 2022, compared to the previous year. Similarly, the UK experienced an annual growth rate of 34% in the year ending March 2023.

Notably, the Asian markets play a vital role in driving the upward trend in US student visa numbers. Seven out of the top eight countries that witnessed the largest increase in student visas issued from FY2021 to FY2022 were from Asia.

The following table displays the top 10 countries with the largest increases in student visas issued during the last year:

1. Uzbekistan (first time topping the list)
2. Nepal (+85%)
3. Bangladesh (+84%)
4. Vietnam (+42%)

These countries have seen extraordinary growth, with all four of them reaching 25-year highs in terms of student visas issued.

Interestingly, India secured the 11th position on the aforementioned list, experiencing a remarkable increase of over 43% in student visas issued from FY2021 to FY2022. With more than 115,000 Indian students obtaining F-1 visas in FY2022, the source market is in a prime position to potentially overtake China as the leading country of origin for international students in the US.

Despite the US's commitment to supporting international education, prospective students have not yet witnessed significant actions to reflect those promises. In contrast, countries like Canada, the UK, and Australia have implemented policy changes to become more appealing to study and work destinations.

While the US achieved one of its best years in terms of student visa volume, approval rates tell a different story. In 2021, the F-1 visa approval rate reached a 10-year high at over 80%, but in 2022, this trend reversed, with only 65% of F-1 visas being approved. Despite the lowest approval rate since 2018, the US managed to achieve a six-year-high in F-1 visas issued.

It's worth noting that the US's student visa approval rate, although historically low, was higher than its northern neighbor's rate in 2022 (57%). Paradoxically, a lower short-term approval rate might benefit the US in the long run.

As the US becomes more popular among African and Indian students, there may be a short-term trade-off with slightly lower approval rates. However, the long-term benefits could accelerate the recovery of the US international education sector.

The US international education sector is steadily progressing towards a full recovery. The combination of a six-year-high in F-1 visas issued, the largest annual increase in a decade (excluding the pandemic), and the emergence of several high-potential source markets contribute to an optimistic outlook.

(with inputs from Agencies)

## Work permit options for TV and film productions in Canada

The Canadian government has recognized the importance of allowing TV and film personnel to enter Canada quickly and efficiently, since their entry is vital in creating jobs in the country and attracting significant investments.

TV and film productions can bring essential personnel to Canada through the TV and Film Production Work Permit Category.

Foreign and Canadian productions companies that are filming in Canada can use this

category to bring in foreign workers if they can demonstrate that the work to be performed by the foreign worker is essential to the production.

Work permits in this category are exempt from the Labour Market Impact Assessment

(LMIA) requirement and hence expedited processing times.

Although exempt from the LMIA, the foreign worker must still comply with all the requirements for temporary work in Canada, including get-

ting a Temporary Resident Visa (TRV). Applicants must provide documentation, such as a letter of support from the production. If an individual meets the requirements to qualify as a business visitor, they do not require a work permit.

# Hawaii wildfires declared 'major disaster' leaving 36 dead

President Joe Biden has issued a "major disaster declaration" after 36 are dead from wildfires on the Hawaiian island of Maui.

The wildfires began on Tuesday and spread quickly, fueled by strong winds generated by Hurricane Dora.

Thousands of tourists and residents have been evacuated to makeshift shelters. Authorities say it's too early to know the extent of the damage, but at least 270 Biden said the armed forces - Hawaii is home to a number of military bases - will be on hand to help.

Biden said Deanne Criswell, the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency which co-ordinates disaster relief, will be in Maui tomorrow.

"We're working as quickly as possible to fight these fires and evacuate residents and tourists," the president said. "In the meantime our prayers are with the people of Hawaii, but not just our prayers. Every asset we have will be available to them." buildings have been destroyed.

The historic town of Lahaina, a famous tourism area on Maui, has suffered



major damage.

The National Weather Service said the flames were fanned by Hurricane Dora, which passed Hawaii at a distance but brought with it gusts of above 60 mph. Maui airport has been turned into an unofficial emergency shelter with an estimated 11,000 people being flown out to other Hawaiian islands or the US mainland. Every year, more than two million people visit the fire-stricken town of Lahaina - about 80% of all Maui tourism.

Many come to the town attracted by Lahaina's rich heritage, which spans the entirety of Hawaii's history.

Lahaina - which in Hawaiian means "cruel sun", a reference to the area's hot, dry

climate - has long been culturally and politically significant, with a history stretching back to long before the arrival of Europeans to Hawaii in 1778.

Until the fire swept through the town, remnants of Lahaina's history were everywhere, ranging from an old fort to a sailor's jail from the 1800s and a 150-year-old banyan tree, believed to be the largest in the United States.

Experts fear that many of these sites may be lost forever. "We take care of 14 different sites, and all of them are heavily damaged, if not completely destroyed," Theo Morrison, the executive director of the Lahaina Restoration Foundation, told the BBC.

# Donald Trump pleads not guilty to latest charges in documents case

Donald Trump and his close personal aide Walt Nauta have pleaded not guilty to the latest allegations in the federal classified documents case.

The fresh charges accuse the two men and a third aide of conspiring to conceal surveillance footage at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort from the FBI.

The former president, 77, and Nauta had already pleaded not guilty to previous charges against them.

Trump is fighting on multiple fronts as he mounts his third White House bid.

The documents case is led by Special Counsel Jack Smith, who is also overseeing a separate indictment of Trump over his alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

Smith's office on Thursday recommended to a federal court in Washington DC that Trump face trial in the election case on 2 January 2024.

In June, he charged the ex-president with 37 counts, for retaining hundreds of confidential files - including about US nuclear secrets and military plans - after leaving office and for lying to investigators.

Nauta, a former Trump White House military valet turned personal aide, was also charged in the indictment and accused of moving files to Donald Trump and his close per-



sonal aide Walt Nauta have pleaded not guilty to the latest allegations in the federal classified documents case. The fresh charges accuse the two men and a third aide of conspiring to conceal surveillance footage at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort from the FBI. The former president, 77, and Nauta had already pleaded not guilty to previous charges against them.

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# US lottery player wins \$1.58bn Mega Millions jackpot



A winning ticket in Florida has matched every number to win a \$1.58bn Mega Millions lottery jackpot, the third largest in US history.

The winning ticket was sold at a supermarket in Neptune Beach in northern Florida near Jacksonville. The winning combination, 13, 19, 20, 32, and 33, along with the Mega Ball number 14, was selected on Tuesday night, marking a life-changing moment for the fortunate ticket holder.

The lucky draw follows 31 consecutive drawings since the Mega Millions' last winning ticket won in New York on April 18.

The odds of winning the jackpot are estimated to be one in

300 million.

The identity of the winner, if they have come forward, has not yet been revealed.

The complete pay-out of \$1.58bn is available to winners who opt for an annuity, meaning that the money is doled out over the course of 30 years.

Winners who seek their winnings in one lump sum will receive an estimated \$783m. The money is subject to federal taxes, and state taxes in many parts of the US.

The prize is among the largest seen in US history.

In November, a winning Powerball ticket sold in the city of Altadena near Los Angeles netted a local man a record-high \$2.04bn jackpot.

# Man who threatened Biden shot dead in FBI raid in Utah

A man who posted violent threats against President Joe Biden and other officials online was shot dead during an FBI raid on Wednesday.

Agents were attempting to serve an arrest warrant on Craig Robertson at his home in Utah, just hours ahead of a planned visit to the state by Biden.

A criminal complaint said Robertson posted threats on Facebook against Biden and a prosecutor pursuing criminal charges against Donald Trump.

The FBI declined to give more details.

The raid happened at about

06:15 local time in Provo, about 40 miles south of Salt Lake City.

A criminal complaint outlined messages that Robertson made on Facebook including pictures of guns and threats to kill Biden and Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney leading an investigation into a hush-money payment by Trump to an adult film star.

According to the complaint, other messages targeted US Attorney General Merrick Garland and New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Robertson posted on Facebook: "I hear Biden is coming to Utah. Digging out my old ghill-

ie suit and cleaning the dust off the M24 sniper rifle."

It was just one of dozens of violent messages and photos of weapons posted on two of Robertson's Facebook accounts.

The complaint said Robertson came to the attention of federal agents in March after he posted a threat against Bragg on Truth Social, the social network owned by Trump. The company alerted the FBI's National Threat Operations Center.

FBI agents then visited the suspect, who told them that the post was a "dream" and ended the conversation by saying: "We're done here! Don't return without a warrant!"

Later posts by Robertson referenced his encounter with the agents, showed him in camou-

flage used by snipers, and repeatedly threatened public officials.

The messages continued as late as Tuesday, when he posted: "Perhaps Utah will become famous this week as the place a sniper took out Biden the Marxist."

Biden will make his first visit to Utah as president on Thursday, with a visit to a veterans' hospital and a fundraising event in Park City.



# Rajya Sabha passes Delhi services Bill, with support of 131 MPs

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was passed in the Rajya Sabha by voice vote on August 7. The Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

The bill that gives the central government control over bureaucrats in the Delhi government was passed with the Rajya Sabha approving it with 131 votes in favor and 102 against.

With BJD and the YSRCP supporting the bill, the opposition pulled all stops, including bringing former prime minister Manmohan Singh on a wheelchair and an ailing Shibu Soren to the House, to shore up its numbers.

Earlier on August 4, the bill was passed in the Lok Sabha by a voice vote.

With both Houses passing it, the bill will now be made into law and will give powers to the Centre-appointed bureaucrats to overrule the elected chief minister and senior officers in the Delhi government.

Home Minister Amit Shah defended the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2023,



Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh attends the discussion on The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2023 in Rajya Sabha on August 7

saying the proposed legislation is aimed at providing effective and corruption-free governance in the national capital.

Earlier, the opposition bloc INDIA and the BRS vehemently opposed the proposed legislation, saying it was unconstitutional, undemocratic and against the spirit of federalism.

The Delhi Ordinance Bill replaces an existing ordinance that overrides a Supreme Court order giving the Delhi government control over most services.

Actions like suspensions and inquiries of the national capi-

tal's officials would be under the control of the center. It will also empower the Lieutenant Governor to exercise their sole discretion on several matters, including those recommended by the National Capital Civil Services Authority and the summoning, prorogation, and dissolution of the Delhi Legislative Assembly. The National Capital Civil Services Authority will consist of the Delhi Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary of Delhi, and the Principal Home Secretary of Delhi.

(With agency inputs)

# Rahul Gandhi reinstated as MP as SC suspends his conviction

Supreme Court of India on Aug 4 suspended senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's conviction in a criminal defamation case. On Monday, the office of the lower house of parliament revoked Gandhi's disqualification, and he has started attending the ongoing parliament session.

Gandhi was sentenced to two years in jail in March for his 2019 comments about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surname at an election rally.

Following his sentencing, Gandhi was disqualified as an MP. Gandhi is a Congress party MP from Wayanad in Kerala.

Friday's court ruling paved the way for him to return to parliament. Gandhi's reinstatement as a lawmaker is a boost for INDIA - an alliance formed by 26 opposition parties - as it means that Gandhi can contest the national election next year.

The SC noted that the reasons given by the trial judge for giving the maximum punishment of two years to Gandhi "are without sufficient reasons and grounds".

The court also cautioned Gandhi that he should have been more careful while making the alleged remarks.

The defamation case against Gandhi, brought by BJP law-



maker Purnesh Modi, revolved around comments the Congress leader made in 2019 during an election rally in Karnataka.

"Why do all these thieves have Modi as their surname? Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi, Narendra Modi," he said.

Nirav Modi is a fugitive Indian diamond tycoon while Lalit Modi is a former chief of the Indian Premier League who has been banned for life by the country's cricket board.

In his complaint, Purnesh Modi alleged that the comments had defamed the entire Modi community. However, Gandhi said that he made the comment to highlight corruption and it was not directed against any community.

A lower court had granted Gandhi bail to appeal against his conviction but in July, the Gujarat high court dismissed his appeal seeking a stay on his conviction.

# 'Ethnic cleansing' by state, High Court questions Nuh demolitions

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Monday issued a strongly worded order halting bulldozer action in communal violence-hit Nuh and Gurugram, and questioned whether the buildings belonging to a particular community were being brought down under the guise of a law and order problem. While issuing notice to the Haryana government, the court also made an "ethnic cleansing" reference.

"The issue also arises whether the buildings belonging to a particular community are being brought down under the guise of law and order problem, and an exercise of ethnic cleansing is being conducted by the State," the order said.

The court, referring to Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij's remark that bulldozers were part of ilaaj (treatment) as the state government is probing communal violence, made a scathing comment. "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," the court quoted English writer and historian Lord Acton in its order issuing notice to the state government.

"Apparently, without any demolition orders and notices, the law and order problem is being used as a ruse to bring down buildings without following the procedure established by law," the court further said while referring to media reports claiming

the houses and shops were being demolished as some of those involved in "anti-social activity" have made illegal constructions.

The court directed the Haryana government to furnish an affidavit as to how many buildings have been demolished in the last two weeks, both in Nuh and Gurugram, and whether any notice was issued before demolition.

Deputy Commissioner Dharendra Khadgata on Monday asked officials concerned to stop the bulldozer action following the high court ruling. The court took up the matter suo motu a week after communal clashes in Haryana claimed six lives, led to a huge loss of property and sparked panic in Nuh and Gurugram.

1,208 buildings and other structures — overwhelmingly Muslim-owned — were demolished in five days by Haryana government in Nuh district alone, according to a report in The Hindustan Times.



Photo courtesy: HT

# Chandrayaan-3 mission enters Moon orbit, sends new photos of lunar surface

The Indian Space Research Organisation has released the first images of the Moon taken by the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft, which entered lunar orbit on Saturday.

The images show craters on lunar surface getting larger and larger as the spacecraft draws closer.

The spacecraft with an orbiter, lander and a rover lifted off on July 14. It will try to set the lander and rover on the lunar surface on August 23 or 24.

If successful, India will be the first country to land near the Moon's little-explored South Pole. It will be only the fourth to achieve a soft landing on the Moon, after the US, the former Soviet Union and China.

After the spacecraft orbited the Earth for more than a week, it was sent into the translunar orbit through a slingshot maneuver. Now that the craft has entered the Moon's orbit, scientists will begin reducing the rocket's speed gradu-



ally to bring it to a point which will allow a soft landing on the Moon.

The third in India's program of lunar exploration, Chandrayaan-3 is expected to build on the success of its earlier Moon missions.

It comes 13 years after the country's first Moon mission in 2008, which discovered the presence of water molecules on the parched lunar surface and established that the Moon has an atmosphere during daytime.

Chandrayaan-2 - which also comprised an orbiter, a lander and a rover - was launched in July 2019 but it was only partially successful. Its orbiter continues to circle and study the Moon even today, but the lander-rover failed to make a soft landing and crashed during touchdown.

# Pakistan parliament dissolved to hold national election

Amid political turmoil and an ongoing economic crisis, Pakistan dissolved its parliament late last evening on the recommendation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, setting the stage for a general election.

The dissolution has paved the way for a caretaker government to oversee elections in which former prime minister Imran Khan will be unable to participate.

Khan was jailed over the weekend after being convicted of corruption in one of the several cases filed against him since his removal from office in April 2022.

The Pakistani president has given the outgoing government three days to appoint a new interim prime minister and 90 days to hold general elections. However, the outgoing government has warned that the elections may be delayed until next year.

According to a BBC report, polls meant to be held within 90 days will likely be delayed. The electoral commission says



electoral boundaries must be redrawn to reflect fresh census data, a months-long process.

A Election Commission of Pakistan official told the BBC: "The elections will be held once the census is done, which will take about four months' time. As a result, the elections may be delayed till next year."

Some feel the election is being delayed as the ruling Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) coalition isn't confident about winning at the polls, due to Khan's enduring popularity, as well as the effects of run-

away inflation despite a bailout from the International Monetary Fund.

Sharif, who warned that the country cannot progress without "national unity", also told reporters recently that polls may not be held this year.

According to reports, the Pakistani government is considering postponing the elections, as it struggles to stymie security and political challenges that threaten to destabilize an already cash-strapped country.

The instability in Pakistan has also put the United States

on alert.

"We're obviously concerned about any actions -- particularly violent actions -- that can contribute to instability in Pakistan or, frankly, any other country with whom we share a set of common interests when it comes to counterterrorism," said White House official John Kirby said, as quoted by news agency AFP.

With general elections looming again, Pakistan's military, which has staged at least three successful coups since 1947, once again casts its shadow across the strife-torn country.

Two draconian laws were tabled in the National Assembly last week, in a bid to further enhance the powers of the military and intelligence agencies.

Proposed amendments to the century-old Official Secrets Act will broadly empower the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Intelligence Bureau (IB) to arrest citizens over "suspected breach of official secrets". In addition, a new bill recommends a three-year jail term for

anyone who discloses the identity of an intelligence official.

The amendments provoked a ruckus in parliament, with both the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and PML-N's coalition partners calling the government out for passing "draconian laws in haste" and without discussion.

Senator Mushtaq Ahmed of Jamaat-e-Islami also warned that the Official Secrets Act amendment will grant intelligence agencies "extraordinary powers" of arrest and search without warrant. "This will have an impact on the human rights, individual rights and press freedom across the country."

The Pakistani intelligence services are regularly accused of illegally detaining opposition members, politicians, activists and journalists, with human rights organizations noting the increasing number of enforced disappearances every month.

In the month of July alone, 157 more cases of enforced disappearances were reported, according to the government-led Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.

The bills have been sent to President Alvi, a co-founder of the PTI, and must be signed by him before they can be legislated into law.

## Former Pakistan PM Imran Khan barred from politics for 5 years

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has been barred from politics for five years.

Khan, who was sentenced in a corruption case over last weekend, was disqualified in line with his conviction, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said in an order on Tuesday.

Under Pakistani law, a convicted person cannot run for any public office for a period defined by the ECP.

Khan, 70, was sentenced to three years imprisonment on Saturday for misdeclaration

of assets he received from foreign countries during the time he was prime minister from 2018 to 2022. He was arrested at his Lahore house and taken to a prison near Islamabad.

Khan has denied any wrongdoing.

His party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won the most seats in the last general elections held in the country in 2018. The former cricket star was sworn in as prime minister three days later.

With general elections looming again, Pakistan's military, which has staged at least three successful coups since 1947,

once again casts its shadow across the strife-torn country.

Experts believe that Khan's popularity, and his ouster, both were largely influenced by the military with whom he fell out routinely.

The former Pakistan cricket captain ran a campaign of dissent against the military, alleging that the military had interfered in politics. He even accused an intelligence officer as the "mastermind" of an assassination attempt on him in November during which he was shot in the leg.

Despite staging protests for



early elections and pulling his PTI lawmakers from the parliament, Khan's crusade against

the military ultimately went kaput as he was slapped with over 200 cases.

## China opposes Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in G20 documents: Report

China has voiced its opposition to the inclusion of the Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in G20 documents, India Today reported on Wednesday. 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which is translated as 'the world is one family', has

regularly been used by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his speeches at various forums including the United Nations.

However, China has objected to the use of this Sanskrit phrase, arguing that it is not recognized by the United Nations, which has Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish as its official languages. Beijing objected to the use of this phrase in documents related to last month's G20 Energy Ministerial Meeting and other grouping documents.

Sources told India Today that China expressed opposition to the formal endorsement of this

Sanskrit phrase. Consequently, the final G20 document only contained the phrase's English translation - 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. The phrase, however, has been retained in the logo and letterhead of all the documents affiliated with the G20 summit.

Sources said that China stood as the solitary objector to the inclusion of this phrase as several nations defended India's right to decide on such matters as the current chair of the G20. India is the current chair of the G20, and the final summit is scheduled to take place on September 9 and 10.

China's objection to the Sanskrit phrase in G20 documents is another reflection of how the bilateral relation between the two neighboring countries

has taken a hit since the border clash in Eastern Ladakh in May 2020.

New Delhi has been exploring the possibility of reaching an understanding with Beijing for the disengagement of troops from the remaining face-off points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) - the de facto boundary between India and China - before the G20 summit.

Though protracted negotiations led to the mutual withdrawal of troops by both the Indian Army and the Chinese PLA from some of the face-off points along the LAC, like Galwan Valley, the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso, Gogra Post and Hot Springs, the stand-off could not be resolved completely so far. A face-off is continuing in Depsang and Demchok.



# Ecuador's presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio shot dead

Fernando Villavicencio, a candidate in Ecuador's forthcoming presidential election who campaigned against corruption and gangs has been shot dead at a campaign rally.

Villavicencio, a member of the country's national assembly, was attacked as he left the event in the capital, Quito, on Wednesday.

He is one of the few candidates to allege links between organised crime and government officials in Ecuador.

President Guillermo Lasso said organised crime was behind the killing.

Villavicencio, a serving con-

gressman and former journalist, had condemned what he said was the lenient approach to the gangs, saying that were he to come to power, there would be a crackdown.

Ecuador has historically been a relatively safe and stable country in Latin America, but crime has shot up in recent years, fuelled by the growing presence of Colombian and Mexican drug cartels, which have infiltrated local criminal gangs.

Villavicencio had received threats from a gang calling itself Los Choneros last month and had been given a security detail.



Following his murder, a video appeared on social media in which heavily armed men wearing balaclavas claimed responsibility for the murder. The men claim to belong to Los Lobos

(The Wolves), who are rivals of Los Choneros.

But hours later, another video appeared online in which another group of men - this time not wearing masks - claimed

they were Los Lobos and denied they had played a role in the assassination, claiming the other video was an attempt by their rivals to set them up for the murder.

Both gangs wield considerable power and the violence they have sowed has been one of the key concerns of Ecuadorians ahead of presidential elections on August 20.

Villavicencio, who was married and had five children, was one of eight candidates in the first round of the election - although he was not the front-runner and was polling around the middle of the pack.

He is not the first politician to be assassinated. Last month, the mayor of the city of Manta was shot dead, while in February, a candidate for mayor in the city of Puerto López was killed.

# Iran releases US dual nationals into house arrest, lawyer says



US-Iranian Siamak Namazi is among those freed from prison under the deal

Iran has released five US-Iranian dual nationals into house arrest, US officials say.

Siamak Namazi, Emad Shargi and Morad Tahbaz, who also has a British passport, were released alongside a fourth unidentified man, a lawyer for one

of the men said.

A fifth American had already been released, a US national security official said. Talks had taken place between Iran and the US to secure their release.

"While this is an encouraging step, these US citizens... should

have never been detained in the first place," said National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson. "Of course, we will not rest until they are all back home in the United States," she added.

Iran's mission to the UN confirmed the release of dual nationals from Tehran's Evin prison, according to state media.

It said the deal had been "mediated by a third country" and that as part of it, frozen funds in South Korea would be "unblocked and transferred to Qatar," according to Reuters, citing state news agency IRNA.

US media report that the Iranian funds frozen in South Korea are worth around \$6bn.

Namazi's brother Babak said: "While this is a positive change, we will not rest until Siamak and others are back home; we

continue to count the days until this can happen."

The 51-year-old was first arrested in 2015 and was sentenced to 10 years in prison on security charges.

The sister of Shargi, 58, said she "has faith in the work of President Biden and government officials" to secure his release following his detention in April 2018.

Tahbaz, a 67-year-old businessman and wildlife conservationist, was first arrested during a crackdown on environmental activists in January 2018.

Iran has detained and imprisoned a number of dual nationals in recent years, usually on national security charges.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said two of the five individuals released "wish to remain private". He contin-

ued: "We are in touch with the families of US citizens involved, and we continue to monitor these individuals' health and welfare closely."

Negotiations have been taking place for years to try to secure their release as part of a prisoner swap with Iranians now incarcerated in American and other western prisons, as well as the easing of US sanctions on Iran.

Citing sources close to the talks, Reuters said it could still take several weeks for the US citizens to leave Iran.

The New York Times reported that Iranian prisoners in US jails could also be freed as part of the deal, but the White House has not confirmed any details of what it offered to Tehran in order to secure the prisoners' release.

# Virgin Galactic completes first tourist space flight

Virgin Galactic has taken a former Olympian, a University of Aberdeen student and her mother to the edge of space on its first flight for tourists.

Ana Mayers, 18, and her mother Keisha Schahaff, 46, both from Antigua, won their tickets in a competition.

They became the first mother-daughter duo to fly to space together.

Jon Goodwin, from Newcastle-under-Lyme, became the second person with Parkinson's disease to go to space, a trip he called "completely surreal".

Goodwin bought his ticket for \$250,000 in 2005.

The carrier mothership VMS Eve took off from Spaceport America, in the state of New Mexico, at 08:30 local time.

Fifty minutes into the flight, the Unity rocket ship separated from Eve as planned.

A short time later, the passen-

gers were given the all-clear to unbuckle and enjoy zero gravity, at an altitude of around 85km.

Mayers, a second-year philosophy and physics student at the University of Aberdeen, immediately reached for the window to take in the views of Earth and the black of space.

The three then returned to their seats and strapped themselves back in ahead of the return journey.

They successfully landed back at Spaceport America just over an hour after taking off.

A BBC graphic shows the flight plan of Virgin Galactic's Unity rocket.

It is scheduled to take off from Spaceport America in New Mexico, after which the Eve carrier plan and the Unity rocket ship will separate, which will be followed by a 90-second climb at close to 4,000 km/h, with the craft then reaching the edge of

space at just under 100km, and then experiencing zero gravity, before re-entering the Earth's atmosphere with folded tail-booms, and then going into an unpowered glide before returning to the ground

Speaking at a press conference after the flight, Schahaff - who won the prize while flying to the UK to visit her daughter in Scotland - said she was still "up there" following the experience.

"Looking at Earth was the most amazing" part of the trip, she said.

Goodwin described his experience as the most exciting day of his life. Despite being diagnosed with Parkinson's several years ago, he was given the all-clear to fly.

"I'm hoping that I instil in other people around the world, as well as people with Parkinson's, that it doesn't stop you doing



Anastasia (Ana) Mayers, Jon Goodwin and Keisha Schahaff, boarded the VSS Unity for a 90-minute trip into space

things that's out of the normal if you've got some illness," he said. "The most impressive thing was looking at Earth from space - the pure clarity

was very moving."

Goodwin was the first on a list of 800 or so individuals who have bought tickets for a ride on the Unity rocket.



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## Credit card debt crosses \$1 trillion, US economy under pressure as cost-of-living soars

With the cost-of-living soaring, economists have expressed concerns over the credit card debt burden on the average American. Experts feel it may hit hard those people who live from pay cheques to pay cheques.

For the first time ever, the US national debt has surpassed \$31 trillion. The overall national debt was \$31.123 trillion on Monday, according to data from the Treasury Department provided on Tuesday.

The new milestone was nonetheless reached, despite the fact that the federal government's excessive spending has drastically decreased as the Covid-19 pandemic has receded. In the months following the pandemic, the national debt doubled in size in a single month, reaching \$1.5 trillion in 2020.

The outcome of this was that the federal government spent \$3.1 trillion more in 2020 than what came in and \$2.8 trillion more the following year.

The projected budget deficit for 2022 is \$1 trillion. Some experts believe that the annual cap for additional debt is \$1 trillion due to the surge in entitlement spending and the new spending goals set by Congress this year. The Inflation



Reduction Act, a piece of health and environmental legislation, and supporting Ukraine in its war with Russia are among the top issues.

Even though a significant percentage of the decline in the annual budget deficit is related to the reduction in emergency Covid expenditure, US President Joe Biden has spoken highly of his administration for slowing down the rate at which the government accumulates new debt.

Republicans have argued for a number of weeks that Americans are ready for less government spending, which they claim is a significant cause of increased inflation rates.

## US to ban American investments in China tech sector

The US will ban American investment in some areas of China's high-tech sector, including artificial intelligence, adding to strained relations between the two superpowers.

US firms will also be asked to disclose what investments they make in China in high-tech sectors.

The much-anticipated move gives the US government new power to screen foreign dealings by private companies.

The US said the measure would be narrowly targeted.

However, it is poised to further chill economic relations between the world's two largest economies.

China said it was "very disappointed". The US "has continuously escalated suppression and restrictions on China," said Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington.

He added that White House claims that the US was not seeking to hurt China's economy or separate the two countries did not match its actions. "We urge the US side to honor its words."

The order by US President Biden formally kicks off the push to craft rules to bar American businesses from investing in firms from "countries of concern" that are active in quantum computing, advanced semiconductors and certain areas of artificial intelligence.

The government will also require US firms to notify the Treasury Department of investments in firms working on a wider range of artificial intelligence and semiconductor technology.



The rules are not expected to apply to so-called portfolio investments, in which firms invest passively in companies via the stock market, but are focused on active investments made by private equity, venture capital and other firms.

They will now enter a public comment period, which is expected to further clarify what kinds of investments are off-limits. The rules are not expected to go into effect for months.

In a briefing with reporters, senior administration officials said the measure was a "national security action, not an economic one". They said the US remained committed to open investment.

The value of US foreign direct investment transactions in China dropped to roughly \$8bn last year, the lowest level in nearly two decades, according to the Rhodium Group.

China has responded to the curbs with its own rules, including limits on exports of some critical minerals used to make computer chips.

## Elon Musk to auction Twitter signs and other memorabilia

Elon Musk is putting Twitter building signs and other items from the company up for auction just weeks after the firm's rebranding as X.

Among the 584 lots on offer are coffee tables, oversized bird cages, and oil paintings of images that went viral.

Also listed are tens of desks and chairs, a DJ booth, and enough musical instruments to equip a band.

Since buying the social media platform last year, Mr Musk has cut thousands of jobs in an effort to lower costs.

The auction has been called "Twitter Rebranding: Online Auction Featuring Memorabilia, Art, Office Assets & More!"

One of the Twitter signs on offer is still fixed to the company's headquarters on 10th Street in San Francisco.

"Bird is still mounted on side of the building. Buyer is responsible for hiring an SF Licensed Company with appropriate Permits," the listing reads.

Last month, an attempt to remove a different Twitter sign was temporarily halted by authorities in San Francisco.

Two oil paintings of photographs that went viral on Twitter will also be



auctioned.

The first is of Ellen Degeneres' star-studded selfie taken at the 2014 Academy Awards.

The other is of the image that then-US President Barack Obama tweeted when he was re-elected in November 2012. At the time it was the platform's most-liked tweet.

The auction also includes musical equipment ranging from guitars to drum kits and amplifiers, as well as a DJ booth with a controller, mixers and speakers.

The minimum offer for each lot is \$25, according to auction house Heritage Global Partners.

Bidding begins on September 12 and is scheduled to end two days later.

## Falling prices in China raise concerns



China's economy has slipped into deflation as consumer prices declined in July for the first time in more than two years.

The official consumer price index, a measure of inflation, fell by 0.3% last month from a year earlier.

Analysts said this increases pressure on the government to revive demand in the world's second largest economy.

This follows weak import and export data, which raised questions about the pace of China's post-pandemic recovery.

The country is also tackling ballooning local government debt and challenges in the housing market. Youth unemployment, which is at a record high, is also being closely watched as a record 11.58 million university graduates are expected to enter the Chinese job market this year.

Falling prices make it harder for China to lower its debt - and all the challenges which stem from that, such as a slower rate of growth, analysts said.

"There is no secret sauce that could

be applied to lift inflation," says Daniel Murray from investment firm EFG Asset Management. He suggests a "simple mix of more government spending and lower taxes alongside easier monetary policy".

Most developed countries saw a boom in consumer spending after pandemic restrictions ended. People who had saved money were suddenly able and willing to spend, while businesses struggled to keep up with the demand.

The huge increase in demand for goods that were limited in supply - coupled with rising energy costs after Russia's invasion of Ukraine - inflated prices.

But this is not what happened in China, where prices did not soar as the economy emerged from the world's tightest coronavirus rules. Consumer prices last fell in February 2021.

In fact, they have been at the cusp of deflation for months, flatlining earlier this year due to weak demand. The prices charged by China's manufacturers - known as factory gate prices - have also been falling.

## CRICKET

## Pakistan confirm they will send team to India for World Cup 2023



Pakistan will send a team to India for October and November's 50-over World Cup, ending months of uncertainty about their participation.

The two sides have only played in World Cups and neutral venues since 2013 because of political tensions.

"Pakistan has consistently maintained that sports should not be mixed with politics," a Pakistan foreign office statement said. They will meet in the Asia Cup on September 2 in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

"Pakistan believes that the state of bilateral relations with India should not stand in the way of fulfilling its international sports-related obligations," the statement added.

The neighbors have fought three wars and have had a number of military clash-

es in recent years. The two both control parts of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir but claim it in full.

The statement did not confirm, though, whether Pakistan are content to play India in Ahmedabad on October 15 as planned or whether they will ask for a change of venue.

It did say Pakistan has "deep concerns" about security, adding: "We are conveying these concerns to the International Cricket Council and the Indian authorities."

"We expect that the full safety and security of the Pakistan cricket team will be ensured during its visit to India."

The World Cup starts on October 5, with Pakistan's first game against the Netherlands on October 6.

## HOCKEY

## Asian Champions Trophy 2023: India thrash Pakistan out of tournament, face Japan in semi-final

Indian hockey team continues their good run with a dominating 4-0 win over rivals Pakistan in the last group-stage game of the Asian Champions Trophy 2023 at Chennai's Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium on Wednesday, August 9. Star forward Harmanpreet Singh scored twice from the penalty corners to kick out Pakistan from the tournament and guided India to the top of the table.

Indian captain broke the deadlock in the 15th minute to finish the first quarter with a 1-0 lead. He added another one in the second quarter to add early pressure on Pakistan. Jugraj Singh scored the

third goal for India to further put India in the driving seat and then Akshdeep Singh added the last goal to finish Pakistan's journey in the tournament.

Pakistan needed to get a draw or defeat with a one-goal difference to secure a top-four finish but the visiting side never seemed in position to threaten India's defence throughout the game.

With just one win from five games, the Pakistan team finished the tournament in the fifth position and failed to qualify for the semi-final round for the second time only in the tournament's history. On the other hand, the Indian team replaced

Malaysia at the top of the group-stage table with four wins and one draw.

India will next face fourth-placed Japan in the second semi-final match on August 11 while Malaysia will take on champions South Korea in the first semi-final. India captain Harmanpreet Singh bagged the Player of the Match award for his two brilliant goals.



## ARCHERY

## India wins first compound and individual golds in World Archery Championships

India's teenage archer Aditi Gopichand Swami scripted history at the ongoing World Archery Championships in Berlin as she became the youngest-ever world champion and helped India achieve its first-ever individual gold in the history of the tournament with a compound women's gold.

The young Indian prodigy defeated Mexico's Andrea Becerra 149-147 in the summit clash to claim glory. The individual gold helped her bag the tag of a 'double world champion', having already won a compound women's team gold medal on Friday.

The Indian women's compound team comprising Parneet Kaur, Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Aditi Swami scripted history on August 4 when it won the first-ever gold for the country in the World Archery Championships after emerging victorious against Mexico in the summit clash.

The Indian trio showed great aplomb in the title decider and was able to put pressure on their Mexican counterparts from the beginning of the match and clinched the historic clash in the end by a margin of 235-229. Though the game was not going to be easy as the Indian women's team was up against the top-seeded side, a praiseworthy display, in the end, helped India open its account in the event.

Since making their debut in the World Archery Championships in Italy (Punta Ala) in the year 1981, this is the first time



Image Source: Sports Authority Of India/ Twitter

the Indian archers have bagged the bragging rights to be called the world champions.

India had a dismal record in the World Archery Championships finals while heading into the summit clash on Friday, having lost in the recurve section four times and meeting the same fate as many as five times in the non-Olympic compound discipline.

The women's team was looking in prime form heading into the finale having caused an upset in the semifinals against Colombia by 220-216. They had previously registered a win over Chinese Taipei in the quarterfinals by a slender scoreline of 228-226.

One of the members of the winning team, Jyothi, mentioned that the team was determined to clinch a gold, having won so many silvers previously.

"We were focused on the process. We had won enough silver medals and we had decided yesterday that we will win the gold. This is a start and we will win more medals," said Jyothi as reported by PTI.

## BADMINTON

## HS Prannoy settles for second place at Australian Open

India's star shuttler HS Prannoy on Sunday went down in the final of the Australian Open Super 500 tournament. The Indian World number 9 lost the summit clash to China's world number 24 Weng Hong Yang in three games 9-21 23-21 20-22 at State sports center in Sydney. Prannoy had a rollercoaster outing as he made a thumping comeback and then squandered a big lead in the decider to lose a 90-minute thrilling finale.

Prannoy began the game on a disappointing note. He suffered a 9-21 drubbing in the finale against his Malaysia Masters final opponent. But the Indian star came back roaring into the contest. He clinched a nail-biter second set to force the game into the decider. The 31-year-old Indian held a 19-14 lead in the decider but gave away his advantage and a championship point at 20-19 to end up on the wrong side.

This was Prannoy and Hong Yang's second meeting, the first one was at the Malaysia Masters earlier in the year. Prannoy won the showdown clash in Malaysia in three sets. Coming into this tournament, the 31-year-old edged past several opponents on his road to the final.



All his games went into deciding sets except the semifinal. He edged past C Y Lee in the round of 32 before cruising past Y Chi in the pre-quarterfinal. Prannoy fended off A Ginting's fight in the quarterfinal and then held his compatriot Priyanshu Rajawat in the last-four clash to book a final berth.

Prannoy secured a place in the final of the Australian Open Super 500 2023 with a win over Rajawat in two straight sets of 21-18, 21-12 to reach his second final of this year.

The 31-year-old badminton star from Delhi failed to progress into the finals of the last five tournaments he played in. He even failed to reach the last-four round at Japan Open and Korea Open last month having last played in the final of the Malaysia Open in May 2023.

# Chetna Maroo's debut novel *Western Lane* makes 2023 Booker Prize Longlist

London-based Indian-descent writer Chetna Maroo's debut book titled 'Western Lane' has been selected among the 13 books announced on August 1, for the 2023 Booker Prize longlist. The novel, written by the Kenya-born Maroo, takes place in the backdrop of the British Gujarati community and has garnered acclaim from the Booker judges for its skillful use of the sport of squash as a metaphor to depict intricate human emotions.

The storyline revolves around an 11-year-old girl named Gopi and her profound connections with her family. The Booker Prize judging panel, led by Canadian novelist Esi Edugyan, who has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize twice, commended *Western Lane* for its ability to artfully weave the sport of squash into both context and metaphor.

They described the book as a profoundly evocative debut, centered around a family grappling with grief, conveyed through exquisite language that resonates akin to the sound "of a ball hit clean and hard... with a close echo."

The "Booker Dozen" longlist for this year's prestigious Booker Prize consists of 13 remarkable books, with four debut novels among them. Chetna Maroo's *Western Lane* stands as one of the notable debuts, accompanied by Jonathan Escoffery's *If I Survive You*, Siân Hughes' *Pearl*, and Viktoria Lloyd-Barlow's *All the Little Bird-Hearts*.

The longlist also features exceptional works from established authors, includ-

ing Sebastian Barry's *Old God's Time*, Paul Harding's *The Other Eden*, Ayobami Adebayo's *A Spell of Good Things*, Paul Lynch's *Prophet Song*, Martin Macinnes' *In Ascension*, Tan Twan Eng's *The House of Doors*, Paul Murray's *The Bee Sting*, Sarah Bernstein's *Study for Obedience*, and Elaine Feeney's *How to Build a Boat*.

The authors of these diverse and captivating books hail from Malaysia, Nigeria, Ireland, Canada, the US, and the UK. Their narratives delve into a wide array of universal and contemporary themes, encompassing deeply moving personal dramas, tragicomic family sagas, the impact of climate change, the struggles of minorities, scientific breakthroughs, and the world of competitive sport.

Esi Edugyan, the chair of the Booker Prize judging panel, expressed that the list is distinguished by its freshness and features both irreverent voices and the iconoclasm of established writers.

"All 13 novels cast new light on what it means to exist in our time, and they do so in original and thrilling ways. Their range is vast, both in subject and form: they shocked us, made us laugh, filled us with anguish, but above all, they stayed with us. This is a list to excite, challenge, delight, a list to bring wonder," expressed Esi Edugyan, the chair of the Booker Prize judging panel.

"The novels are small revolutions, each seeking to energize and awaken the language. Together – whether historical or contemporary – they offer startling portraits of the current," she added.



Photo courtesy: The Booker Prize

Joining Edugyan on the panel were British actor, writer, and director Adjoa Andoh; Hong Kong Chinese poet, lecturer, editor, and critic Mary Jean Chan; American author and professor James Shapiro; and British actor and writer Robert Webb.

The panel's selection process involved assessing 163 books published between October 2022 and September 2023, all submitted by various publishers. The Booker Prize remains an annual platform open to long-form fiction works by writers of

any nationality, written in English, and published in the UK or Ireland.

Gaby Wood, Chief Executive of the Booker Prize Foundation, emphasized the diverse range of experiences, expertise, and sensibilities among this year's judges, which led them to seek novels that not only pushed the boundaries of the literary form but also offered profound insights into the world. Their aim was to find books with a lasting impact and enduring qualities – works that moved them deeply and, above all, displayed exceptional excellence and subtlety, prompting the judges to look forward to revisiting them.

The longlist, comprising 13 novels, will undergo a selection process to be narrowed down to a shortlist of six books. This highly anticipated shortlist will be disclosed on September 21 during an event held at the recently reopened National Portrait Gallery in London. Each of the authors who make it to the shortlist will be granted GBP 2,500 along with a specially-bound edition of their respective book as acknowledgment of their achievement.

The 2023 Booker Prize winner will be revealed on November 26 at a prestigious award ceremony in London. The recipient of this esteemed literary prize will be bestowed with a significant reward of GBP 50,000, and in tribute to the renowned Irish-British author Iris Murdoch, the trophy presented to the winner is named "Iris," commemorating her victory in the 1978 Booker Prize.

## Marathi film *Sthal* to premiere at Toronto film festival

*Sthal* (a match), a Marathi feature film written and directed by Jayant Digambar Somalkar, is all set to have its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival 2023 (TIFF) from Sep 7 to 17.

Now in its 48th edition, the film festival is regarded as one of the prestigious platforms to showcase features in North America. *Sthal* has been chosen in the Discovery Program section which showcases the debut or second features of emerging filmmakers from around the world. The Marathi feature is the only Indian film to be selected under the sec-

tion this year.

Shot entirely in the tiny village of Dongargaon in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, which also happens to be director Somalkar's native village, it is significant that the film will be bringing to the world audience, stories from rural India, which scarcely finds mention in the glitzy Bollywood films telling stories of rich, kids from metropolises often studying and living abroad.

*Sthal* is also an important watch for the western audience as it explores the concept of arranged marriage – a South

Asian tradition often seen with intrigue in the West. *Sthal*, which translates into – a match, quite realistically features the tradition of arranged marriages in rural India, where the relentless pursuit of a girl's marriage overshadows the very sustenance of life.

The story is narrated from the perspective of a young girl, through its plots and characterization that highlights patriarchy, colorism and social evil still deeply rooted in Indian society.

The film also marks the debut of first-time actors from the village starring

Nandini Chikte as the protagonist Savita along with Taranath Khiratkar, Sangita Sonekar, Suyog Dhawas, Sandip Somalkar, Sandip Parkhi, Swati Ulmale, Gauri Badki and Mansi Pawar.

Director and writer, Jayant Somalkar says about the upcoming screening: "I can say that my protagonist Savita found her first 'match' and that too from a foreign land!"

"I am overwhelmed and proud that I will be able to showcase my village and my people on a global platform. People who never dreamt of facing a film camera are going to be part of one the best and most prestigious film festivals of the world, TIFF."

Sharing his thoughts on the same, producer Karan Grover says, "*Sthal* is an ambitious journey to deliver a story which may be the true story of several young women across the country. Its realism and authenticity should drive the change that we drive. Hope it resonates and everybody can get to watch the film."

The Discovery section is curated by a team of international programmers. Dorota Lech, TIFF Lead Programmer, Discovery, & International Programmer for Central, Eastern, & Southern Europe, the Caucasus, Iran, & Turkey says, "It is a bold and exciting showcase of cinema and emerging talent from around the world, and we are honored to highlight new and distinctive voices from artists creating their first or second feature on our global stage. This year's program of 26 titles includes films from 25 countries."

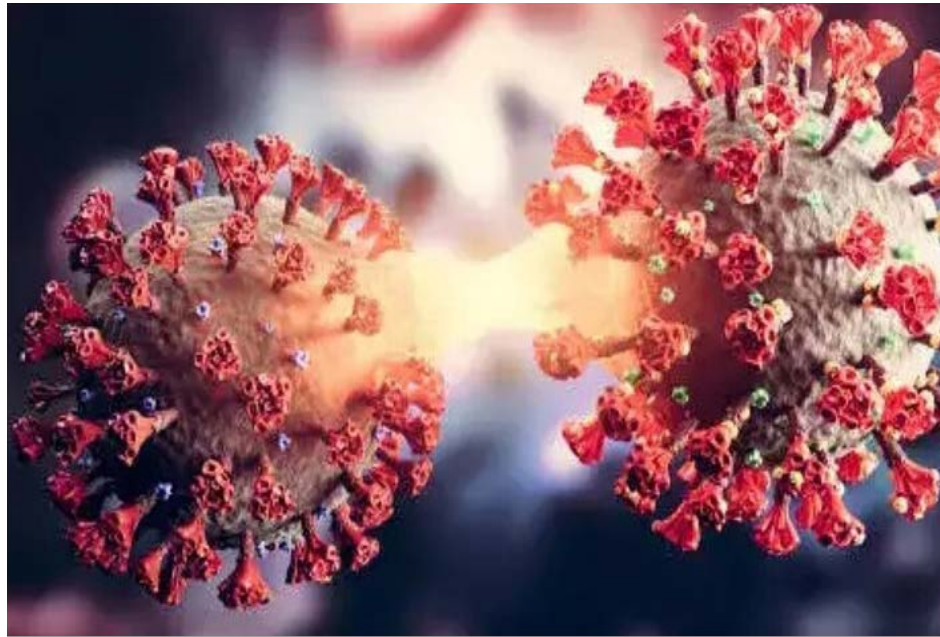


# Maharashtra reports first Covid fatality in months; experts monitor Omicron sub-variant situation

Maharashtra recorded the first Covid-related fatality in months, with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) clarifying that the death had occurred in July but was included in the official records now.

The deceased was a 75-year-old Mumbai resident who suffered from liver carcinoma. While the individual was diagnosed with Covid-19, authorities have stated that the virus was not the primary cause of his death.

Meanwhile, Mumbai reported 10 new Covid cases, elevating the total infection count to 11,64,108, while the latest death took the overall fatality figures to 19,776. This is the second time in August that the city has reported Covid cases in double digits; the previous instance occurred on August 6. Recovery rates continue to inspire confidence, with four more patients recuperating from the illness,



taking the total number of recoveries to 11,44,285. Currently, Mumbai has 47 active cases. A total of 292 tests were conducted in the past 24 hours, raising the cumulative test count to 1,89,17,951, as per the civic body's bulletin.

Though there are indications of an increase in Covid cases in Maharashtra due to the new Omicron sub-variant, EG.5.1, detected in some samples, health experts have emphasized that there is no cause for immediate concern. No significant surge has been noted since the detection of this sub-variant.

The state health department said that it would be premature to attribute the rise in cases to the new sub-variant. The situation will be carefully monitored over the coming week to reach a more conclusive understanding, as all respiratory infections typically show a surge during June to September.

## Know more about new Covid variant ERIS that's spreading across the globe

A rapidly rising Omicron subvariant called EG.5 — which is circulating in Canada, US and multiple other countries — has now been designated a variant of interest by the World Health Organization (WHO).

In a new risk evaluation released on Wednesday, the WHO bumped up EG.5 from a variant under monitoring to the second-highest ranking, putting it alongside XBB.1.5 and XBB.1.6, which are also members of the Omicron family tree.

While experts say EG.5 appears to be more infectious and able to sneak past our immune defenses, there's also not much evidence to suggest that it causes more severe illness.

"It's something to certainly keep a close eye on, but I'm not significantly worried about it at this point," said Dr. Syra Madad, an epidemiologist at the Harvard Belfer Center.

EG.5 has been circulating in Canada since at least May, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The subvariant and its offshoots are predicted to have made up 36 per cent of cases in Canada between July 30 and Aug. 5, according to CBC News.

The agency also said it is aware of EG.5 being found 36 times in municipal

wastewater between May 15 and July 21.

Modelling data from the US estimates that it has made up 17.3 per cent of all cases in the country over the last two weeks, making it the most common strain.

And globally, the subvariant's prevalence was more than 17 per cent by the week of July 17 to 23, a "notable rise" from data reported four weeks prior when it was less than eight per cent of samples, the WHO said.

While EG.5 is spiking in multiple countries, it's unclear where it's driving an uptick in cases as well.

### So what is ERIS?

The SARS-CoV-2 variant EG.5.1 (alias XBB.1.9.2.5.1), is a sub-lineage of the Omicron variant XBB.1.9.2. It has two additional spike mutations (Q52H, F456L) compared to its parent strain lineage. It has been detected in 39 countries and 38 US states, said Dr Rajesh Karyakarte, Professor and Head, Department of Microbiology, B J Government Medical College, Pune. "ERIS is not an official term but used for simplicity. The variant EG.5.1. is a descendent of the XBB variant and seems to have some growth advantage contributing to increase in

proportion of SARS-COV-2 infections in most regions of the world," said Dr Sanjay Pujari, Director, Institute of Infectious Diseases, Pune.

### When was the first case reported in the world?

Globally, the EG.5.1 variant was found as early as March 24, 2023. In India, the first and the only case of EG.5.1 was reported on May 29, 2023 from Maharashtra. Dr Karyakarte, who is the state coordinator for genome sequencing, and his team were able to pick up this Covid variant from among Covid-positive RT-PCR samples that are genome-sequenced at their lab in B J Government Medical College. It was identified and duly reported to all concerned authorities in Maharashtra and the Centre.

In recent weeks, the United States has also seen a jump in cases and hospitalizations. The WHO said Japan and the Republic of Korea have observed EG.5 cases and hospitalization metrics both rising, though "no associations" have been made yet between the subvariant and hospitalization rates.

"However, due to its growth advantage and immune escape characteristics, EG.5 may cause a rise in case incidence and become dominant in some countries or even globally," the WHO noted.

### How infectious is it? What are its symptoms? What is its severity?

As per the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the variant is spreading very rapidly with a weekly growth advantage of 20.51 per cent, and it accounts for about 14.5 per cent of all Covid-19 cases in the UK as of July 20, 2023. Regarding its symptoms and severity, UKHSA and the WHO are closely monitoring Omicron EG.5.1 to assess its impact on public health and vaccine effectiveness. "So far, there does not seem to be any evidence that the Omicron EG.5.1 causes more severe disease or increases the risk of hospitalization or death compared to other variants," Dr Karyakarte said, adding

that teams were monitoring any increase in hospital admissions.

"It seems to be more transmissible but at this stage, this variant doesn't seem to cause higher rates of severe illness among vaccinated individuals. However, a higher number of cases could lead to a longer list of long-COVID cases," Dr Pujari pointed out.

The main symptoms are sore throat, runny or blocked nose, sneezing, dry cough, headache and body pain, but most patients do not report immediate fever or breathlessness.

Right now, it's unclear whether the subvariant causes any unfamiliar symptoms that haven't already been documented by other Omicron offshoots.

"It doesn't seem as if it's causing, you know, an increase in severity of illness or ... impacting the current vaccines and therapeutics," said Dr. Syra Madad, who is also the senior director of the system-wide special pathogens program at New York City Health and Hospitals.

"Based on the available evidence, the public health risk posed by EG.5 is evaluated as low at the global level," the WHO noted in its risk evaluation.

"While EG.5 has shown increased prevalence, growth advantage and immune escape properties, there have been no reported changes in disease severity to date."

### Is genome sequencing being enhanced?

Scientists at the National Institute of Virology have already enhanced genome sequencing. Dr Karyakarte, too, said that they were actively sequencing all RT-PCR positive samples, irrespective of their CT value, and are monitoring new mutations and variants. "In case there is an increase in cases, we have protocols in place and we are prepared to enhance our sequencing activity as needed," he said.

### What about risks and prevention?

The at-risk group will continue to be the elderly, those with co-morbidities and pregnant women. And with waning immunity from vaccination, it is best to go back to hand hygiene, social distancing, avoiding crowded places, mask-wearing, staying at home if one has any kind of respiratory illness.



# Return of El Niño raises risk of hunger, drought and malaria, scientists warn

The return of El Niño against the backdrop of the climate crisis will hurt people's health in many parts of the world, scientists have warned.

The hot natural weather pattern is back after three years of its cooler sister, La Niña, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed last month. As it grows stronger, scientists fear it will raise the risk in some countries of hunger, drought and malaria.

Coupled with hotter global temperatures from burned fossil fuels, the shift could make a host of heat-related dangers worse, from heart disease to suicide.

"Heat is unambiguously dangerous," said Gregory Wellenius, head of the center for climate and health at Boston university's school of public health. "Sometimes it leads to hospitalisation, other times it leads to death. Then there's indirect impacts that follow up on that."



Representational Image

El Niño is the result of natural shifts in winds and ocean temperatures. It brings heavier floods to some parts of the planet while drying others out. The last major El Niño was in 2016, which was the hottest year on record.

Because scientists know that weather patterns have changed this year, people and governments can better prepare in the regions affected.

"El Niño does not mean more

disasters globally than in any other years," said Walter Baethgen, a scientist at Columbia university's international research institute for climate and society. "What it does change is our ability to predict what the climate will be in some parts of the world. That's going to help us take anticipatory actions."

A particular worry is the effect on food security. Shocks to weather patterns could be fatal for farmers in countries already

reeling from the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and extreme weather events made worse by the climate crisis.

"To be realistic, many countries do not have many degrees of freedom," said Baethgen, referring to their ability to stave off hunger they know is coming. But other actors such as the UN and the World Food Programme can use the information to prepare, he added. "They know in El Niño years some areas will have an increased threat of food insecurity."

In Ethiopia, for instance, El Niño typically spells drought in the north of the country, said Madeleine Thomson, head of climate impacts and adaptation at the charity Wellcome. On top of that, there may be a greater risk of infectious diseases. "People who live at high altitude are not normally exposed to malaria because it's basically too cool for transmission."

"We've seen from historical data that when you have an El Niño, you tend to get an increase in transmission in areas in the highlands where the populations are not immune, so they're at risk."

The combination of global heating and El Niño has led to a flurry of temperature records being broken in recent weeks. Before the month was up, the WMO declared July 2023 the hottest month on record.

Greenhouse gases, which have clogged up the atmosphere and heated the planet 1.2C since the Industrial Revolution, drove up the temperatures of deadly heatwaves in July in North America, southern Europe and east Asia, according to the World Weather Attribution network. "We're venturing into uncharted territory," said Chris Hewitt, head of climate services at the WMO. "As it gets warmer and warmer, the impacts are likely to get worse."

For that reason, he added, it was important to stop the planet heating and keep temperature rise "as low as possible". "Every increment increases the risk," he said.

(Source: The Guardian)

# Female tiger cub found dead in Bandhavgarh reserve in Madhya Pradesh



Representational Image

Amidst worries regarding the unexpected demise of Cheetahs in the National Kuno Park,

a seven-month-old female tiger cub was discovered dead under suspicious circumstances at the

Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh, said officials.

Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF) of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, FS Ninama, said that it is suspected cub might have been fatally injured in a fight with another tiger.

The official further revealed that pugmarks belonging to another tiger were discovered close to the body of the deceased cub.

Shortly after the demise of the tiger cub was reported, officials introduced dog squads to assist in the ongoing investiga-

tion of the incident.

Earlier in April, a female tiger cub, which was 7-8 months old, was killed in an attack by a male tiger.

The death of tiger cub was reported a month after Madhya Pradesh regained its status as a prominent tiger habitat, hosting a population of 785 big cats. According to the latest data released by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) on the occasion of International Tiger Day - titled 'Status of Tigers Co-predators & Prey in India, 2022', the state has topped

the list of the highest number of tigers and again became the tiger state.

Madhya Pradesh tops the country in tiger population at 785, followed by Karnataka at 563, Uttarakhand at 560 and Maharashtra at 444.

The NTCA report stated further that Madhya Pradesh is home to the highest number of six tiger reserves in the state - Kanha Tiger Reserve, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Panna Tiger Reserve, Pench Tiger Reserve, Satpura Tiger Reserve and Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve.

The tiger abundance within the Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh is highest in Bandhavgarh (135), followed by Kanha (105) and Pench (77).

# Mars could have conditions suitable for life, reveals new discovery

New revelations from scientists suggest that Mars might have shared more similarities with Earth than previously understood, potentially featuring distinct wet and dry seasons that could have supported life. Through the discovery of fossil evidence, researchers have unveiled indications of a cyclical climate on the Red Planet over three billion years ago, according to reports.

This alternating pattern of wet and dry periods is believed to have created an environment conducive to the development of complex ancient organic compounds. These compounds could have acted as precursors to life,

indicating that Mars could have hosted conditions suitable for life's emergence.

The research outcomes, documented in the journal Nature, not only expand our understanding of Mars but also offer fresh avenues for exploring the natural mechanisms that led to the genesis of life.

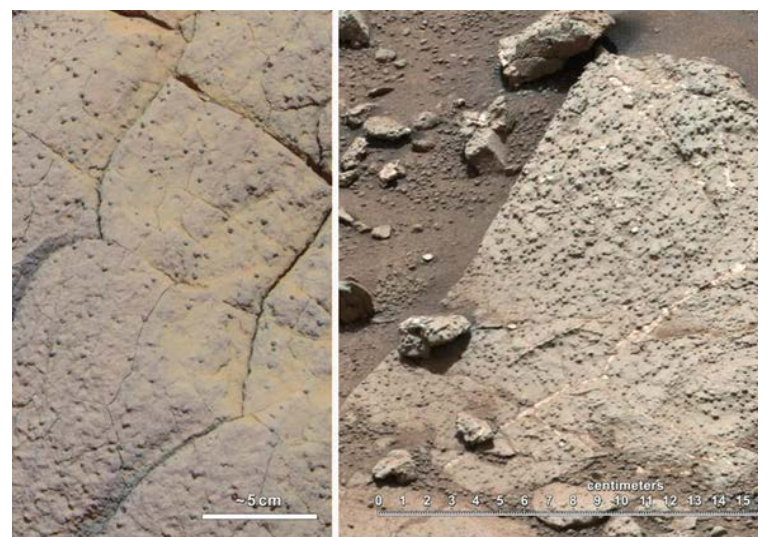
The study underscores a consistent, cyclic climate in early Mars, possibly characterized by seasonal variations that could have supported prebiotic evolution. In contrast to Earth's tectonic plate system, Mars possesses extensive expanses of remarkably well-preserved landscapes, including fossilized riv-

ers and lakes dating back billions of years.

While Mars currently presents a cold and inhospitable environment, evidence hints at a past state where liquid water - a critical component for life - and a dense atmosphere might have existed.

Over vast epochs, Mars underwent a significant loss of atmosphere, causing its climate to shift from one that might have sustained life to its current arid and frigid state, as per reports.

To conduct their study, a team of researchers from the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), Paul



Sabatier University, and Claude Bernard University Lyon 1 in France delved into data from NASA's Curiosity rover, launched in 2012. The rover landed within the Gale Crater, a former lake bed located south of

Mars' equator.

In 2018, NASA disclosed that Curiosity had identified traces of organic molecules, igniting speculation that microorganisms could have once inhabited Mars, our planetary neighbor.



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