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Is Your Shot Real Or Plain Water?



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ਅਦਭੁੱਤ ਮੀਡੀਆ

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ਅਦਭੁੱਤ ਮੀਡੀਆ

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FRONT PAGE FEATURE

Is Your Shot Real Or Plain Water?

In September this year, even as scientists in India and elsewhere were busy with clinical trials on an effective inoculation against the novel coronavirus, a drug inspector in Odisha seized a large cache of vials labelled as COVID-19 vaccines, from a village 350 km from state capital Bhubaneswar. The seized drug was found to be spurious, perhaps containing nothing more than tap water. "He is a village guy who created the fake drug on his own and named it COVID-19 vaccine. We got a tip-off from our informers, raided the place and seized everything," drug inspector Sasmita Dehury told Outlook over the phone.

It was a lucky break in a country where manufacturing of spurious medicines is a multi-billion dollar business that puts the lives of millions of people at risk every year. The risk, experts say, has risen manifold with the imminent arrival of a vaccine against the coronavirus, with panic-stricken people eager to get the shot at any cost.

Though government-sponsored studies, conducted thrice in the past 15 years, indicate that only three per cent medicines are of substandard quality in India, pharma companies, industry bodies and non-government organisations estimate the figure to be between 25 per cent to 40 per cent. For instance, industry body Assocham said in 2015 that 25 per cent of medicines in India are fake or of substandard quality. Now there are growing concerns globally that counterfeiters are working parallelly with scientists to create rip-off versions of various reputed brands. Fake drugs contain no active ingredients or may contain incorrect doses or wrong ingredients. Counterfeiters use packaging to make their products look like the original, and pass cursory glance of customers in retail outlets.

Law enforcement agencies and regulators such as US's Federal Drug Agency and the World Health Organization have issued separate warnings to countries against the possibility of counterfeit Covid vaccines. Recently, Interpol too issued an alert to its 194 member countries, asking them to prepare for potential targeting of Covid

vaccines by organised crime networks, both physically and online.

The Big Fight

With Pfizer rolling out the world's first Covid vaccine, and several other agencies on the verge of shipping out their consignments, companies across the world are drawing up elaborate plans to

companies for safeguarding their products.

Counterfeiters are expected to be working overtime because of the high demand for a Covid vaccine. Trade experts say that even if the profit margin is low, the expected high volume of sales makes it a lucrative business opportunity. The Supply Chain

production, counterfeit drugs and cosmetics are smuggled into India from China, Bangladesh, Turkey and some other countries. IPR experts suspect the involvement of a global network which may operate parallel to an authorised supply chain of COVID-19 vaccines. "A fake

the supply chain from theft, pilferage or entry of counterfeit medicine. They say there are technologies like serialisation and traceability with the help of which each packet of vaccines, containing various vials, can be tracked from the manufacturing plant to the distribution warehouse and all the way until it is dispensed to a patient anywhere in the country. They suggest that if the Aadhaar number of an individual can be integrated with the unique code on a vaccine vial on COVIN app, it can maintain data of which vaccine has been given to whom. Thus, this will make the whole process transparent and accountable for everyone—from the manufacturer to the stockist or the hospital. Pharmaceutical companies use the serialisation-and-traceability method to export their products as the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has made it a mandatory provision. However, the same technology is not being used for the supply-chain in the domestic sector as there is a lack of resources in implementing it. GS1 India, a global standards organisation, set up by the ministry of commerce and industries, along with apex trade organisations, has provided a white paper to the government on how to protect Covid vaccines from theft and counterfeiting. S Swaminathan, COO of GS1 India, says that vaccines are in development stages, but their ability to end this pandemic depends on an effective supply chain that can connect diverse production locations to the public. "To tackle this and to ensure that most people benefit out of the initial limited supplies, we need to work on enhancing the effectiveness of the vaccine supply chains," Swaminathan says. "One way to bring in visibility and enhance the effectiveness of supply chains is to implement IT-enabled traceability systems encompassing all supply chain stakeholders such as manufacturers, distributors, stockists, chemists, hospitals etc." He argued that this would enable all stakeholders to capture and share consignment information to enable complete end-to-end visibility—from the point of manufacturing to the patient.



prevent theft, pilferage and counterfeiting of vials as well as the finished products.

Reports say that Pfizer is using GPS software for tracking distribution. So much so that the US pharmaceutical giant is even sending out fake shipments on dummy trucks to confuse counterfeiters who could try to steal the vaccine, The Wall Street Journal reported.

American multinational technology company Corning Incorporated, which is making the glass vials for COVID-19 vaccines, is using black-light verification technology to protect its product from counterfeiters. A vial with this technology shows special characteristics under black light, which can be traced if replicated. "These concerns are justifiable and genuine...Over the past five years, worldwide incidents such as theft and counterfeiting of pharmaceutical products rose nearly 69 per cent, according to the trade group Pharmaceutical Security Institute," says Nakul Pasricha, president of Authentication Solution Providers' Association, which provides technology to pharmaceutical

Companies engaged in protecting intellectual property rights for big pharma brands look at various possibilities of vaccine fraud. They say the sources of substandard and fake vaccines are many. "It can be locally produced with used vials which are tossed away as medical waste. This is the easiest way most of the cosmetics and drugs are counterfeited and supplied to medical stores," says Syed Mashkur Hussain, an IPR firm owner in Noida.

Hussain, who provides services to big companies like Dabur, says that manufacturing vaccines is easier than any other medicine because all the counterfeiters need is water as raw material. They just need to "manufacture a lookalike vial and fill it with water. With digital printing technology, imitating any brand is no big deal," says another IPR firm owner working with a pharma company. Requesting anonymity, he added, "There are instances in which genuine packaging materials are supplied illegally to fraudsters by company employees looking to earn extra money." Besides local

vaccine can be supplied directly to a medical store that operates in cahoots with counterfeiters or it can enter the authorised supply chain with the help of employees of authorised agents or stockists of manufacturing companies," the IPR firm head says.

Outlook wrote to the Serum Institute of India (SII) for comments on safety measures for its vaccine but the company, which is the largest producer of vaccines in the world, didn't respond by the time this report went to print. In India, neither manufacturing companies nor the government are yet to come out with safety features to keep Covid vaccines safe and secure. Rajesh Bhushan, secretary in the health ministry, recently introduced the concept of the COVIN app, which will maintain data of people-to-be-vaccinated and stock of vaccines in the government cold chain. Authentication experts say that COVIN can track patients and vaccine stock on a real-time basis but it is not a full-proof mechanism to safeguard

FRONT PAGE FEATURE FRONT PAGE FEATURE

Fake COVID-19 Vaccines are Already Being Sold Online

ROME—The first Western COVID-19 vaccines have only been in circulation for 10 days, and the scammers of the internet underworld are already cashing in. Both Interpol and Europol issued warnings of a coming onslaught of underworld activity as criminals seek to exploit global pandemic paranoia. There are already doses for sale on the dark web for between \$250 and \$750 that Europol says could be fatal if used. "Criminal networks will also be targeting unsuspecting members of the public via fake websites and false cures, which could pose a significant risk to their health, even their lives," Jürgen Stock, INTERPOL Secretary General, said in a statement. "It is essential that law enforcement is as prepared as possible for what will be an onslaught of all types of criminal activity linked to the COVID-19 vaccine." The likeliest scam is the sale of fake vaccines that could range from being ineffective to lethal for



anyone who takes them. Law enforcement officials are particularly worried that used vaccine vials will be stolen from waste management centers and refilled to look official. Europol has already found a number of companies selling vaccines, promising stealth delivery and double-wrapped packaging, to imply that would somehow keep the vaccines that require constant sub-zero temperatures cold enough.

Several dark web vendors are also hawking Chinese vaccines from Sinopharm and Sinovac for \$750 per double dose. The Financial Times reached out to the vendor, asking how to store the vaccines, to which they were told a refrigerator would be just fine. There were already vaccines being touted on the dark web before the U.K. and later the U.S. authorized Pfizer's for use. Vendors also sold what they advertised as

plasma from COVID-19 survivors and magic elixirs to beat the virus, including the creatively named "Say Bye Bye to Covid19." In every case of suspicious activity, payment is only accepted by Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies. Data research firm Checkpoint Research found more than 1,000 new domains tied to the pandemic and eventual sale of vaccines or cures, of which nearly half include the

word COVID or CORONA. Interpol's Cybercrime Unit also found that of the 3,000 websites associated with online pharmacies suspected of selling illicit medicines and medical devices, more than half contained malware. In Italy, anti-Mafia authorities have warned that organized crime syndicates that started with trafficking personal protective equipment and fake tests and doctored test results to get around quarantines and other restrictions are also expected to be part of the new exploitation by these groups as well. Italy has also seen infiltration by organized crime into the social assistance and public health sectors, compromising some services, especially in the south of the country. Interpol's Stock warned: "High demand combined with a limited supply will make COVID-19 vaccines the equivalent of liquid gold to organized crime networks."

Beware of scams advertising fake COVID-19 vaccines, early access

Experts warn of scammers trying to capitalize on the rollout of coronavirus vaccines.

PORTLAND, Oregon — Law enforcement officials are warning of scammers trying to take advantage of people with the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines. The FBI issued a press release warning of online advertisements selling fake doses or trying to charge you money with false promises to get a vaccine sooner.

There are several real-world examples of this already. Law enforcement officials in Europe shared a bogus ad for a fake Pfizer vaccine they found online. It cost .06882 Bitcoin or about \$1,300.

The FDA sent a warning letter to a Seattle man and owner of North Coast Biologics in Seattle for advertising "unapproved and misbranded" products related to COVID-19 after he claimed he had the vaccine and has given the shot to a dozen people. In fact, the FDA has sent warning

Some dark web markets feature advertisements for fake COVID-19 vaccines. The number of offers is limited at this stage but will likely increase once a legitimate vaccine becomes available. Criminals advertise their fake vaccines using the brands of genuine pharmaceutical companies that are already in the final stages of COVID-19 vaccines may represent a significant risk to public health.

BEWARE OF COVID VACCINE SCAMS

letters to 152 companies about fraudulent coronavirus disease products in 2019. And experts believe it's only going to get worse with people desperate to get the vaccine.

"Law enforcement is warning that you could see tons of these ads and that people could end up getting hurt from this," said Kerry Tomlinson, a cybersecurity and tech journalist with Archer News Network.

Tomlinson said there are three things that can happen if you fall for one of these ads:

1. It's a fake ad and your money is stolen.
 2. The "vaccine" you thought you were buying is fake and doesn't hurt you but it doesn't work.
 3. You buy something that could make you sick or even kill you.
- Bottom line, if you see the COVID-19 vaccine for sale online, it's fake.

2020 SPECIAL

2020 Flashback: 12 stories, 12 months that changed India forever

By any standards, 2020 will forever be remembered as the bearer of a global economic meltdown brought about by a deadly contagion -- the novel coronavirus. Here is an attempt to look back at events and stories that captured the attention of Indians this year.



To describe 2020 as yet another year would be a great injustice. Almost a hundred years after the Spanish Flu instilled fear in the hearts and minds of people across the globe, regardless of their nationality or the colour of their skin, an unholy encounter between a bat and what is speculated to be a pangolin, pushed the human race to the brink of chaos in 2020.

For this reason, 2020 will remain a fresh wound in human memory for as long as we remain to be the sum total of flesh and blood. By any standards, the 20th year of the third millennium will forever be remembered as the bearer of a global economic meltdown brought about by a deadly contagion -- the novel coronavirus. To describe the shared feeling of 2020 in the words of Charles Dickens, "We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition."

While it is extremely difficult summing up the year 2020 in merely 12 news stories, here is an attempt to look back at events and stories that captured the attention and the collective conscience of an India gripped in the throes of a pandemic.

January - JNU besieged!

Five days into 2020, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi turned into a battleground with armed mobs terrorising the campus which is hailed as the cradle of India's brand of socialism. For anyone who chooses to ignore the importance of JNU, it is important to note that apart from retaining its position in the top three of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) rankings for four years in a row, the university is also the alma

mater of two sitting Union ministers -- Nirmala Sitharaman (Finance) and S Jaishankar (External Affairs).

On January 5, a mob made its way through the JNU campus, charging at everything and anyone in its way. With covered faces, members of this mob attacked students inside the Sabarmati hostel. Stones were also pelted at a peace march led by the JNU Teachers' Association (JNUTA).

and the Delhi Police registered a case in this regard.

Interestingly, the police claimed violence occurred in parts of the JNU campus that were not covered by CCTV cameras. Even more interesting was the fact that lights inside the campus, as well as streetlights, were switched off during the attack. To add to it, it is still a mystery why security guards associated with Cyclops, the security agency re-

sponsible for JNU's protection, were not present at the time of the attack, almost like the policemen guarding Marlon Brando's

Complaints were made to the police, both by students and teachers. Videos of the attack were circulated widely on social media but in November, a fact-finding committee of the Delhi Police gave a clean chit to the guard force in connection with the January 5 violence. No arrests have been made in this case.

February - Riots erupt in Delhi While 2020 started off as somewhat of an anomaly with nationwide protests against the Centre's CAA-NPR-NRC trifecta, it took sixty days for the year to take a riotous turn. At a time when US President Donald Trump (who's now on his way out from the White House) was basking in the warmth of India's hospitality, one of the 11 districts in the country's capital city of Delhi erupted into violence.

Reports of a communal riot in parts of Delhi's northeast district, India's most densely populated district, first came to light on February 24. From five on February 24, the death toll rose to 25 in two days and had climbed

over as the new police commissioner of Delhi on February 29, the riots had claimed 53 lives. The Delhi Police registered 254 FIRs and arrested or detained 903 people in connection with the violence. In the chargesheet, the Delhi Police insinuated that the riots were part of a 'conspiracy' by a group of activists protesting against the CAA-NPR-NRC trifecta. Most matters related to the northeast Delhi violence are still being heard in court.

The riots even found mention in Parliament where the Opposition cited instances of Delhi Police allegedly aiding rioters while the central government maintained that the riots were part of a conspiracy.

March - Justice in India: Delayed, not denied

At 5.30 am on March 20, India's quest for closure in the 2012 Nirbhaya gang-rape case met its inevitable end. Four men accused of sexually assaulting and brutalising a 23-year-old medical student, who died of her injuries, were executed for the crime that unleashed a wave of collective anger across the country.

For most, the justice that took eight years to take its form was the same as injustice. However, for Asha Devi and her husband who ran post to pillar seeking justice for their daughter, March 20, 2020, was the beginning of a new chapter in their lives.

All four convicts were awarded death penalties by a fast-track court in 2013. The punishment was later upheld by the Delhi High Court in 2014 and the Supreme Court in 2017. By 2020, review petitions in courts and mercy pleas to the President had been turned down. The 'black' warrants dictating the final moments of the



The fracas can be believed to have originated from disagreements between the Left-led JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) over registration for the winter session. Up in arms against the revised fee structure approved by JNU VC Jagadesh Kumar's administration, the JNUSU issued a call for a "complete university strike". Many believe it is this rift between the JNUSU and the ABVP that resulted in the events of January 5.

The three-hour ordeal of the JNU students triggered outrage with everyone, from the Supreme Court Bar Association to political parties and even movie stars, denouncing the mindless violence. HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal termed the incident "unfortunate"

hospital room in the first edition of the Godfather.



to 42 by February 28. By the time IPS officer SN Shrivastava took

2020 SPECIAL

lives of the four convicts were signed on March 5. The four -- sailants were captured. Shockingly enough, the cops recov-



Mukesh Singh, Vinay Sharma, Akshay Thakur and Pawan Gupta -- were hanged at the Tihar jail as the sun rose over Delhi on March 20.

April - Frontline heroes and the nationwide lockdown

There is no doubt that the last week of March changed the face of the planet forever. In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a nationwide lockdown starting March 25 to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, which originated in China in late 2019. On the day that the lockdown came into effect, India had reported a total of 600 confirmed cases of infection and 12 virus-related deaths.

Since the outbreak, frontline workers have been at the forefront of the fight against Covid-19 with many even losing their lives in the line of duty.

That being said, the story of Punjab Police sub-inspector (SI) Harjit Singh highlighted the many complexities of what initially seems like a straight-forward story. On April 12, SI Harjit Singh was part of the police party on 'naka' duty outside a vegetable market in Punjab's Patiala to minimise movement and ensure compliance to Covid-19 guidelines.

Eyewitness accounts revealed that a group of men drove their SUV through the police barricade near which SI Singh was stationed. When he confronted the men, one of them pulled out a sharp-edged weapon and chopped off the policeman's hand. The assailants fled the spot and were traced to the Nihang Dera Complex which also houses Khichdi Sahib Gurudwara. This was followed by a heavy exchange of gunfire between the assailants and the Punjab Police resulting in a stand-off which though in unequal measure, brought back anxious memories of Operation Blue Star. The police's strength prevailed and 11 as-

May 8. Originally from Madhya Pradesh, 16 migrant labourers who were returning to their native homes on foot were killed when a goods train ran over them between Maharashtra's Jalna and Aurangabad districts. All of the victims were aged between 20 and 30.

The men were employees of a steel firm in the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) zone in Jalna district. Like thousands of others who had no choice but to return to their native homes during the lockdown, the labourers walked alongside the road from Jalna to Badnapur before deciding to move to the railway track. After walking



lockdown, spent 18 days at PGIMER in Chandigarh where doctors managed to reattach his hand. The Punjab Police sub-inspector received a hero's welcome as he returned to his home in Patiala where he was showered with petals.

Many frontline workers who dedicated themselves to India's fight against Covid-19, however, were not as lucky and had to face discrimination, eviction and even social ostracisation simply because they were doing their jobs.

May - Death by exodus: Life on the road

All said and done, no image stuck to the hearts and minds of urban India more than that of a sea of people walking hundreds, even thousands of kilometres, sometimes barefoot, to return to their native homes. There are millions of stories of these labourers who were treated as mere 'migrants' and evicted from their rented homes or refused payment by their employers.

However, the most important of these stories is the one country woke up to on the morning of

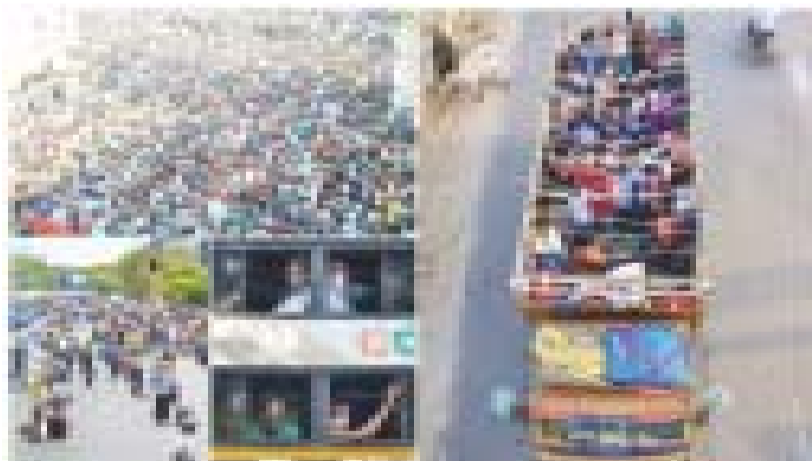
control along India's eastern border on June 16. On the morning of June 16, unconfirmed reports started pouring in about a violent face-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers at Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh. Soon after, statements by the Indian Army and the Ministry of External Affairs confirmed that such a face-off did take place in the early hours of June 16 but neither the Indian Army nor the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) fired a single bullet.

It was later revealed that Indian Army troops led by Colonel Santosh Babu of 16 Bihar Regiment approached the Chinese near a border point to discuss a way forward for disengagement when they were attacked. Sticks, stones and clubs wrapped in barbed wire were used in the face-off that lasted for more than three hours.

As many as 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives in the Galwan Valley clash while the Chinese incurred an unknown number of casualties. The incident prompted both India and China to mobilise tens of thousands of troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. Ever since the Galwan Valley face-off, both New Delhi and Beijing have been struggling to normalise relations.

July - Restarting Indian industry: Lessons learnt the hard way

Less than two months after a gas leak at the LG Polymers chemical plant in Andhra Pradesh's Vishakhapatnam sent alarm bells ringing, an industrial accident in Tamil Nadu's Nevyeli made headlines at a time when



the labourers, killing 14 of them on the spot. Another two died on their way to the hospital. Like them, hundreds of labourers never managed to return to the families that were waiting for them back home.

June - India, China lock horns in Galwan

As if a deadly virus wasn't enough of a worry for India, the situation suddenly spiralled out of

Fourteen workers were killed and another 9 suffered serious injuries. This was the second such boiler explosion at NCLIL's thermal power station-II in Nevyeli in two months. On May 7, a boiler explosion at the plant's Unit VI killed five persons, including two staff members. Reports later revealed that cost-cutting and non-compliance to safety guidelines resulted in the two accidents that claimed 19 lives in a period of 60 days.

Similar negligence resulted in a massive fire in Oil India Limited's Baghjan Oil Field in Assam's Tinsukia district. The fire, that raged for 159 days claimed the lives of two firefighters and caused irreparable environmental and ecological damage.

August - A tabletop tragedy As the country was still getting used to life in a post-Covid world, an Air India Express aircraft skidded off the runway at Kozhikode (Karipur) International airport in Kerala on August 7, killing 18 people. At the time, there were 184 passengers, four crew members and two pilots on board the flight from Dubai to Calicut airport. The aircraft was part of the Government of India's 'Vande Bharat' repatriation initiative to bring back expats from foreign countries.

A total of 18 people, including former Indian Air Force (IAF) test pilot and the commander of the flight Captain DV Sathe and his co-pilot Akhilesh Kumar Sharma, lost their lives in this tragedy. The aircraft, an Air India Express Boeing 737 (AXB1344), overshot the tabletop runway while landing at Calicut airport amid heavy rain. According to reports, the aircraft fell into a valley 35 feet below and broke into two pieces but did not catch fire. Without wasting any time, the Civil Aviation Ministry issued an order to the Air Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) to initiate a probe into the accident. A team of experts was also dispatched to Kozhikode the very next morning following a meeting of top officials of the Civil Aviation Ministry, the Airport Authority of India (AAI), Air India and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

September - 'Historic' Monsoon session of Parliament

A consensus was reached between the Government of India and Opposition parties to hold an 18-day Monsoon session of Parliament from September 14 till October 1.



Indian industry was still in the initial phase of resuming operations in the aftermath of the lockdown.

Around 9.45 am on July 1, a boiler exploded in Unit V of NLC India Ltd's thermal power station-II in Nevyeli. Contractual workers and the plant's engineering staff were trying to revive Unit V after it tripped the night before when the accident took place.

CELEBRITY



Los Angeles Based Nonprofit HOPE B~Lit - Social Content Wing - A Voices Unheard Films

By Staff writer

Los Angeles- Internationally acclaimed Los Angeles-based non-profit organization HOPE B~Lit as a part of its continued support for the community with its Hope Beyond Borders program stepped up and is providing Covid-19 Relief Ground efforts globally.

When isolated, we perhaps realize how closely connected we all really are as one global family.

The team ransuccessful ground efforts by providing much-needed support to more than 50 families in Leela Desai Chawl, Mumbai. They also are actively in collaboration with other nonprofits providing essential PPE Equipment to Los Angeles & other city and county departments. The gallant and selfless direct effort from this international group is supported by Bollywood & Hollywood Celebrities. Popular celebrities such as Mantra, Pankaj Tripathi, Anisa Ani Butt, Eileen Grubba, Shahid Mallya, Archanna Gupta, Tom Ohmer, Jay Thakkar, Rj Piya, Payal Ghosh and more commended their effective impact during these trying times. The Hope B-Lit Team in December 2019 had traveled to multiple cities in India and supported children braving cancer by completely donating proceeds from their groundbreaking short film under, "A Voices Unheard Films" Banner called "Got Cancer!"

"Children are the heart of all we do. Current world scenario of Job losses, foreclosures,

Creating Positive Impact via profound Social films Organization Spreadsthe Message of Hopeand Strength amidst Covid-19

and fear for the future put tremendous stress on families. Unfortunately, those stresses are taken out on the weakest members of our family...the children", said Founder of HOPE B~Lit, Ruhi aka Rohini Hak.

Since the launch of its newest wing 'The Voices Unheard Films', HOPE B~Lit has taken dynamic action towards improving the lives of women and children globally. Through a series of films highlighting social issues, the organization puts a spotlight on the issue to raise awareness and funds to then be able to take real action on the ground. The experimental film "Got Cancer!" wonderfully edited by Kartikye Gupta&musically enhanced by Aalap Desai for its unique concept and altruistic perspective has won multiple awards globally and was also awarded as the Best Human-Interest film featured on National TV in California. "Being a part of the HOPE family has been a profound experience, recognizing the impact of social films on the ground is very relevant in the current world"said Dhirajj Vinodd Kapoor, Board Advisor- A Voices Unheard Films, HOPEB~Lit.

Ruhi Hak shared, "We are excited about our sequel that I recently wrote, produced & directed with line producer Dhawal Pokle, brilliant young Cinematographer Aashay

Wagh, Animation Director Garima Chawla Khurana&San Francisco based Creative Producer Akshaya Sawant;"Got Cancer! - Survivor's Journey", is an innovative unique animation blend with a profound documentary segment based on the true stories of the brave survivors of CANKIDS KIDSCAN- The National Society for Change For Childhood Cancer in India. We are also working on a powerful global music video, "I AM"-Hero of my own story", to be sung by known artists.

We have associated with Akshaya Sawant, director & producer of profound award-winning documentary feature "Talking to the wind" to help farmers in Beed District, Maharashtra. Akshaya Sawant, a dynamic creative producer, is a Dean's Fellow and received her MFA from Emerson College, Boston. Her debut feature documentary received The Virgin Unite Social Impact Film Fund (2017 & 2018) and has won 6 awards from 7 festival selections. The REMI award winning film sensitively depicts the state of the farmers committing

suicide in the villages of Maharashtra, India which on one hand has the neo-rich of Bollywood in metro cities like Mumbai and in others this stark contrast & human pain of poverty.

The gripping film, "Talking to the Wind," In association with A Voices Unheard films banner, directed brilliantly by Akshaya Sawant, & the micro short/ trailer of "Got Cancer! - Survivor's Journey" directed By Ruhi Hak & edited by Kartikye Gupta will be screened at this year's "NewsFest - True Stories" International Film Festival 2020 in Las Vegas.

Making compelling films, bringing these unheard voices to the forefront, and creating a joint positive impact on the community, showcases the true power of the art of storytelling under A Voices Unheard Films banner. The stories told not only drive change in thought, but more importantly translate into a call to action.

Donations raised via these films are used to create the impact on the ground for people in need of support.

For more information & collaborations: Email hopeblit@gmail.com, Web hopeblit.com, IG: @hopeblit / FB: @blitnow / @ruhihak





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2020 SPECIAL



Year Ender
2020: Top 15
Science &
Technology
achievements
of 2020

In 2020, major achievements in the field of science and technology took place globally. As UAE became the first country to launch the first Arab space mission, the Indian government decided to open the doors of ISRO for private players. From the missile testings to the discovery of an Earth-size habitable planet, do not miss the list below consisting of the top 15 scientific achievements.

astronauts into space as in 2011 its Space Shuttle Program retired.
o NASA earlier had to rely on Russia's Soyuz Spacecraft to send its astronauts to ISS which also left the laboratory understaffed.
Click here for more details
Aarogya Setu: India launched its first COVID-19 tracking Mobile App
o The Government of India on April 2, 2020, launched Aarogya Setu app which is the country's first COVID-19 tracking app.
o The app can be easily downloaded from the Google play store as well as the Apple app store. It had garnered more than 5 million downloads in just 3-4 days of its launch
o The app aims at informing the users about the best practices,

risks, and advisories for the containment of COVID.
Kepler-1649c: Earth-sized habitable zone planet founded by NASA
o An earth size exoplanet was founded by a team of scientists. The planet was discovered while reanalyzing the data of the Kepler Space Telescope.
o The zone is said to be habitable because of the area around the star where the planet can easily support liquid water.
o Of all the exoplanets discovered, this one is located 300 light-years from Earth and is very much similar to Earth's size and temperature.
SMART: DRDO successfully test-fires Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo The Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo- SMART was

successfully test-fired by DRDO on October 5, 2020.
o SMART is a missile assisted release of the anti-submarine Torpedo system for anti-submarine warfare.
o It will help in establishing and strengthening India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities.
SMART: DRDO successfully test-fires Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo
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o It will help in establishing and strengthening India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities.
NASA names its headquarters after its first African-American female engineer
o NASA's headquarter building in Washington, D.C. will be named after Mary. W. Jackson. She was the agency's first African-American female engineer.
o Jackson was an aerospace engineer and a mathematician who had led programs that worked on the upliftment of women within NASA.
o W. Jackson also inspired the story behind the non-fiction movie and book 'Hidden Figures'.
IN-SPaCe: Government welcomes private industries in space activities The government of India announced IN-SPaCe (Indian National Space

Centre) on June 24, 2020. The institution aims at guiding the private industries in the space activities with the help of encouraging policies.
o The centre is not a new institution but the government has decided to extend its role into ISRO where they will be supplementing each other's work.
o ISRO will carry out activities or projects and the new facility with the help of the private sector will help in filling the gap and fulfilling the demand.
The first female head of the Human Space Flight Program of NASA
o Kathy Lueders has become the first female head of NASA's Human Space Flight Program.
o She was earlier a commercial crew manager and has been directing the space agency's efforts of sending astronauts to space on private spacecraft.
o Kathy Lueders was able to successfully manage both the commercial cargo and commercial crew program. She began her career in NASA in 1992.
Successful test firing of Hypersonic Technology Demonstration Vehicle by India
o DRDO on September 7, 2020, successfully test-fired the Hypersonic Technology Demonstration Vehicle, off the coast of Odisha.
o The successful flight test enabled the demonstration of Hypersonic air-breathing scramjet technology. It is also a major technological breakthrough for India.
o This testing has also paved the way for the development of more critical materials, technologies, and hypersonic vehicles.
Hope Mars Mission: First-ever Arab space mission launched by UAE The United Arab Emirates on July 19, 2020, launched Hope which is an unmanned space probe to Mars. It was launched from the Tanegashima Space Centre in Japan.
o The mission which aims at studying the atmosphere of the red planet is a historic one as it made UAE the first Arab country to achieve this feat.
o The probe is expected to reach Mars by March 2021. It was delayed twice earlier because of the bad weather.
Sputnik V: Russia became the first nation to launch a Coronavirus Vaccine
o Russia became the nation to launch the world's first Coronavirus vaccine. It became the first country to officially and successfully register the vaccine.

2020 was bad — but not nearly the worst

2020 will go down in infamy for all the obvious reasons, but history shows it doesn't actually rank among humanity's worst years.
Why it matters: The past is a foreign country, and that goes doubly so the deeper we dig. Understanding just how far we've come from the years when life was nasty, brutal and short can help us put the pain of 2020 in perspective, and appreciate the progress we need to defend.
What's happening: You could take your pick of statistics that underscore just how terrible 2020 was. Here's an obvious one: the U.S. is on track to record more than 3.2 million deaths this year, the highest in the country's history. That represents more than 400,000 additional deaths from the previous year, for an annual increase of about 15%. It wasn't just the pandemic — drug overdose deaths this year are on track to be the highest ever in the U.S. The

big picture: It's numbers like these that prompted my former colleagues at TIME magazine to give 2020 the Adolf Hitler treatment. Yes, but: As even the TIME piece acknowledges, the U.S. has had worse years. In 1918 the U.S. lost tens of thousands of people in the trenches of World War I and hundreds of thousands more in the Spanish flu pandemic. Deaths that year rose an astounding 46% from 1917, and life expectancy dropped by nearly 12 years, compared to a likely three-year decline in 2020. Background: Go back further and

widen your lens, and far more terrible years begin to crop up. Take 1816, known as the "Year Without a Summer" thanks to a massive volcanic eruption in 1815 that spread sun-blocking ash throughout the atmosphere. Average global temperatures fell and crops failed, leading to what one historian called "the last great subsistence crisis in the Western world." Or 1349, perhaps the worst year of the Black Death pandemic, which would eventually kill a third or more of Europe's population alone, equivalent to at least 247 million deaths today. And don't forget 536, which the journal Science memorably called "the worst year to be alive." A vol-

canic eruption in Iceland early that year cast Europe and parts of the Middle East and Asia into a literal dark age, intensifying famines and hastening the spread of bubonic plague. Be smart: What those anni horribili have in common is that they concentrated the two conditions that have been the default state of most of humanity until fairly recently: disease and starvation. For all but a tiny elite, humanity until the 20th century was caught in a Malthusian trap, with any opportunity for significant population growth or material improvement constrained by limited agricultural productivity. In fact, it was only during terrible pandemics like the Black Death that living standards in medieval England leapt up, simply because the survivors — nearly all of whom were subsistence farmers, like the vast bulk of humanity — were able to take advantage of suddenly vacant but still fertile land.





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BUSINESS

Apple removes Vybe Together app used to arrange parties during Covid



Apple has pulled an American app that encouraged users to meet at secret underground gatherings during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Vybe Together app, which promoted private parties, has

been removed from the Apple App Store, had its account on TikTok banned, and scrubbed most of its online presence, with the app's creators telling The Verge that Apple had banned it. Vybe Together billed itself on

TikTok and its website as a place to organise and attend mostly illegal parties in contravention of social distancing laws, using the tagline "Get your rebel on. Get your party on."

"Miss playing beer pong, flirting with strangers, and generally just having a blast with the crew? Vybe is here for you," the website read.

Users were asked to submit a profile before they were allowed to sign up, an application process that involved submitting the applicant's Instagram handle, as well as uploading pictures of themselves partying. The application allowed people to create private events "no randoms

will show up" at. Users could then apply for invites to events, hoping the host would deem them "interesting" enough to approve them. Once on the list, guests would wait to receive details of the location two hours before the event's starting time. One of Vybe Together's co-founders said the app had a few thousand users, and that a few thousand additional applicants had requested access since the company started publishing videos on TikTok. The app's FAQ page - now deleted - acknowledged that Covid-19 was "a major health problem to the country, our communities, our friends and family", but

claimed the app was designed to promote "small gatherings" rather than "large scale parties", which it described as "dangerous". "But Vybe is a compromise [...] We could be living, at least a little during these times with Vybe." It remains unclear whether the app - which has only a few hundred followers on Instagram - substantially instigated illegal or unsafe gatherings, although it promoted "gatherings every weekend" in a TikTok video. Vybe Together's creators have been contacted for comment. Their Instagram account includes the message: "App Store took us down!!! We will be back!!!"

If you want to travel next year, you may need a vaccine passport

Now that coronavirus vaccines are starting to roll out in the US and abroad, many people may be dreaming of the day when they can travel, shop and go to the movies again. But in order to do those activities, you may eventually need something in addition to the vaccine: a vaccine passport application.

Several companies and technology groups have begun developing smartphone apps or systems for individuals to upload details of their Covid-19 tests and vaccinations, creating digital credentials that could be shown in order to enter concert venues, stadiums, movie theaters, offices, or even countries.

The Common Trust Network, an initiative by Geneva-based nonprofit The Commons Project and the World Economic Forum, has partnered with several airlines including Cathay Pacific, JetBlue, Lufthansa, Swiss Airlines, United Airlines and Virgin Atlantic, as well as hundreds of health systems across the United States and the government of Aruba.

The CommonPass app created by the group allows users to upload medical data such as a Covid-19 test result or, eventually, a proof of vaccination by a hospital or medical professional, generating a health certificate or pass in the form of a QR code that can be shown to authorities without revealing sensitive information.

For travel, the app lists health pass requirements at the points of departure and arrival based on your itinerary.

"You can be tested every time you cross a border. You cannot be vaccinated every time you cross a border," Thomas Crampton, chief marketing and communications officer for The Commons Project, told CNN Business. He stressed the need for a simple and easily transferable set of credentials, or a "digital yellow card," referring to the paper document generally issued as proof of vaccination.

Large tech firms are also getting in on the act. IBM (IBM) developed its own app, called Digital Health Pass, which allows companies and venues to customize indicators they would

require for entry including coronavirus tests, temperature checks and vaccination records. Credentials corresponding to those indicators are then stored in a mobile wallet.

In an effort to address one challenge around returning to normalcy after vaccines are distributed widely, developers may now have to confront other challenges, ranging from privacy issues to representing the varied effectiveness of different vaccines. But the most pressing challenge may simply be avoiding the disjointed implementation and mixed success of tech's previous attempt to address the public health crisis: contact tracing apps. Early on in the pandemic, Apple (AAPL) and Google (GOOG) set aside their



smartphone rivalry to jointly develop a Bluetooth-based system to notify users if they'd been exposed to someone with Covid-19. Many countries and state governments around the world also developed and used their own apps. "I think where exposure notification ran into some challenges was more of the piecemeal implementation

choices, lack of federal leadership ... where each state had to go it alone and so each state had to figure it out independently," said Jenny Wanger, who leads the exposure notification initiatives for Linux Foundation Public Health, a tech-focused organization helping public health authorities around the world combat Covid-19.

Tiffany shareholders back LVMH takeover, ending long-drawn dispute

U.S. jeweler Tiffany & Co's shareholders on Wednesday approved a \$15.8 billion deal with France's LVMH, ending an acrimonious dispute between the two luxury retailers that had stretched for more than a year.

At a virtual special stockholder meeting, more than 99% of votes cast were in favor of the deal. Billionaire Bernard Arnault-led LVMH made the first offer late last year, but as the luxury industry slipped into a turmoil due to the COVID-19 pandemic the company backed out from its promise to close the deal. LVMH also cited French political

intervention to delay completing the acquisition until Jan. 6, pushing

Tiffany into a legal battle in September to force LVMH to honor the deal. Tiffany had earlier said its sales were improving, citing demand recovery in the United States ahead of the holiday season and China, one of its biggest markets. LVMH then renegotiated the deal price, lowering it by \$425 million. The deal, now cleared by regulators, is expected to close in early 2021. As agreed in October, LVMH will pay \$131.5 per share, down from \$135 in the original deal signed late last year.



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What if the Universe has no end?



To mark the end of a turbulent year, we are bringing back some of our favourite stories for BBC Future's "Best of 2020" collection. Discover more of our picks here. The usual story of the Universe has a beginning, middle, and an end. It began with the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago when the Universe was tiny, hot, and dense. In less than a billionth of a billionth of a second, that pinpoint of a universe expanded to more than a billion, billion times its original size through a process called "cosmological inflation". Next came "the graceful exit", when inflation stopped. The universe carried on expanding and cooling, but at a fraction of the initial rate. For the next 380,000

years, the Universe was so dense that not even light could move through it – the cosmos was an opaque, superhot plasma of scattered particles. When things finally cooled enough for the first hydrogen atoms to form, the Universe swiftly became transparent. Radiation burst out in every direction, and the Universe was on its way to becoming the lumpy entity we see today, with vast swaths of empty space punctuated by clumps of particles, dust, stars, black holes, galaxies, radiation, and other forms of matter and energy. Eventually these lumps of matter will drift so far apart that they will slowly disappear, according to some models. The Universe will become a cold, uniform soup of isolated photons.

It's not a particularly dramatic ending, although it does have a satisfying finality. But what if the Big Bang wasn't actually the start of it all? Perhaps the Big Bang was more of a "Big Bounce", a turning point in an ongoing cycle of contraction and expansion. Or, it could be more like a point of reflection, with a mirror image of our universe expanding out the "other side", where antimatter replaces matter, and time itself flows backwards. (There might even be a "mirror you" pondering what life looks like on this side.) Or, the Big Bang might be a transition point in a universe that has always been – and always will be – expanding. All of these theories sit outside mainstream cosmology, but all are supported by influential scientists. The growing number of these competing theories suggests that it might now be time to let go of the idea that the Big Bang marked the beginning of space and time. And, indeed, that it may even have an end. Many competing Big Bang alternatives stem from deep dissatisfaction with the idea of cosmological inflation. "I have to confess, I never liked inflation from

the beginning," says Neil Turok, the former director of the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo, Canada. "The inflationary paradigm has failed," adds Paul Steinhardt, Albert Einstein professor in science at Princeton University, and proponent of a "Big Bounce" model. "I always regarded inflation as a very artificial theory," says Roger Penrose, emeritus Rouse Ball professor of mathematics at Oxford University. "The main reason that it didn't die at birth is that it was the only thing people could think of to explain what they call the 'scale invariance of the Cosmic Microwave Background temperature fluctuations'." The Cosmic Microwave Background (or "CMB") has been a fundamental factor in every model of the Universe since it was first observed in 1965. It's a faint, ambient radiation found everywhere in the observable Universe that dates back to that moment when the Universe first became transparent to radiation. The CMB is a major source of information about what the early Universe looked like. It is also a tantalising mystery for physicists. In every direction scientists point a radio telescope, the CMB looks the same,

even in regions that seemingly could never have interacted with one another at any point in the history of a 13.8 billion-year-old universe. "The CMB temperature is the same on opposite sides of the sky and those parts of the sky would never have been in causal contact," says Katie Mack, a cosmologist at North Carolina State University. "Something had to connect those two regions of the Universe in the past. Something had to tell that part of the sky to be the same temperature as that part of the sky." Without some mechanism to even out the temperature across the observable Universe, scientists would expect to see much larger variations in different regions. Inflation offers a way to solve this so-called "homogeneity problem". With a period of insane expansion stretching out the Universe so rapidly that almost the entire thing ended up far beyond the region we can observe and interact with. Our observable universe expanded from one tiny homogenous region within that primordial hot mess, producing the uniform CMB. Other regions beyond what we can observe might look very different.

HEALTH & SCIENCE

Here's what we know about the new coronavirus variant found in US



The United States' first known case of the new coronavirus variant was discovered in Colorado on Tuesday, according to state health officials.

The variant, called B.1.1.7, has been linked to the United Kingdom. The man who was infected is in his 20s, is isolating and appears to have no travel history, according to Gov. Jared Polis.

That man had been working at an assisted living facility in Elbert County. Health officials suspect, but have yet to confirm, that another man who worked there also came down with the variant,

the county's public health director said Wednesday.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Wednesday that the new variant has been found in the southern part of his state.

Here's what we know about the variant:

The new variant came from the UK

The new variant is believed to have originated in southeast England, according to the World Health Organization.

Public Health England says backward tracing, using genetic evidence, suggests the variant emerged in September. It then

circulated in very low levels until mid-November. But scientists did not know whether the mutation originated in southeast England or was introduced there from elsewhere, said Sharon Peacock, professor of public health and microbiology at the University of Cambridge.

Some experts have suggested the new variant could have been amplified because of a superspreader event, meaning the current spike in cases could also have been caused by human behavior.

The new variant spreads more quickly

Health authorities from around the world have said the variant does not appear to be more deadly than previously identified coronavirus strains.

Initial analysis showed that while the variant appears to be more transmissible, there is no evidence it is linked to a higher risk of hospital admission or death, according to Public Health England.

Scientists advising the UK

government have estimated the variant could be up to 70% more effective at spreading than others. Peter Horby, chair of the UK's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG), said last week that scientists were "confident" the new variant is "spreading faster than other virus variants."

Speaking at an emergency meeting of the UK Parliament Science and Technology Committee, Horby explained that the new variant has "some kind of biological advantage to make it spread faster."

Scientists still don't have a complete picture as to why, he said, but they are investigating several scenarios.

There is preliminary evidence to suggest the new strain results in a person holding a higher viral load, which means the virus is easier to pass on, Horby said.

Scientist Neil Ferguson, a member of NERVTAG, said the variant may be more infectious for children.

"There is a hint is that (the variant) ... has a higher propensity to infect children," he said at a news briefing last week organized by the Science Media Centre, though he cautioned that more data was needed. Severe illness due to Covid-19 is still relatively rare for children.

The new variant raises questions about vaccines

There are no signs yet that the current vaccine front-runners won't work against this new variant, experts and drugmakers have said.

The companies behind the first two vaccines to gain authorization in the United States -- Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna -- are testing their shots to double-check that they're effective against the variant.

The coronavirus has mutated before, and both firms say their vaccines worked against other variations of the virus.

Some US-based scientists have said it's possible the new variant might, to a small extent, undermine the vaccines.

How to harness brain science for a better life, explained by a neuroscientist

Many of the ideas and metaphors in popular culture about how the human brain works don't stand up to scrutiny.

That's a prevailing theme in Lisa Feldman Barrett's new book "Seven and a Half Lessons About the Brain," released in November. Barrett is a university distinguished professor of psychology at Northeastern University in Boston, where she directs the school's Interdisciplinary Affective Science Laboratory. She also holds appointments at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital.

She has made significant contributions in helping to understand the fundamental nature of emotion. Her pioneering research in neuroscience has landed her among the top 1% of most cited scientists in the world, and a 2019 Guggenheim Fellowship in neuroscience.

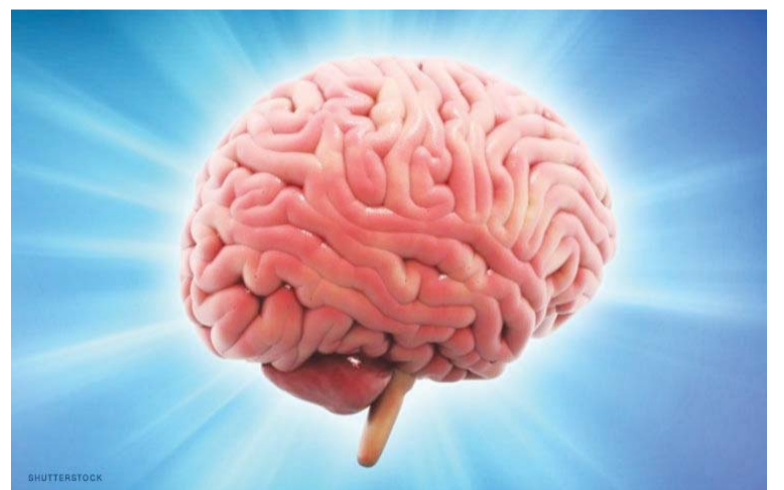
Here Barrett answers seven and a half questions about how brain science can help you have a more productive and prosperous life. Barrett: Actually, in the first draft of the book, it had seven lessons. But an early reader suggested splitting the first lesson into two parts, which is the lesson on brain evolution. The first half lesson is really just a short peek into a much

larger story on brain evolution so I thought calling it "a half" sounded reasonable. Having a science book called "Seven and a Half Lessons" does indicate that I hope this is supposed to be fun and entertaining.

CNN: Something else that stuck with me is how you wrote that the human brain is constantly making predictions about what it expects to see, and you talked about it as a "carefully controlled hallucination." How do our brains give us information about the world that isn't exactly true?

Barrett: Think about the last time you were drinking a glass of water. Within a couple of seconds you feel less thirsty. And that's actually a remarkable thing, because the water that you drink doesn't reach your bloodstream for about 20 minutes. How is that water quenching your thirst so quickly? And the answer is because your brain has learned from past experience that drinking water makes you less thirsty, so your brain is making a prediction. It predicts that you'll feel less thirsty, and that prediction becomes your experience, and so your thirst diminishes quickly. And so really what your brain is doing is predicting -- the brain actually operates by

prediction all the time. The process is largely invisible to you. But it's happening under the hood and everything you've experienced is some combination of what's in your head. So our brains predict what will happen before it happens. Are we slaves to our own brains, or can we consciously get around this to retain our free will? Barrett: The question is really whether a brain is a slave to itself, or is there an opportunity for free will?



Coronavirus has been with us for a year. Here's what we still don't know

When China first reported cases of coronavirus to the World Health Organization on December 31, 2019, it was described as a mysterious new strain of pneumonia. It didn't even have a name.

Within two weeks, Chinese scientists had identified the virus' genome sequence, the genetic code that makes up the virus. Within three weeks, the first test kits had been created and then shared by the WHO. And just over 11 months since the virus

was reported to the WHO, the first people were vaccinated, making the shots the fastest vaccines ever developed.

The speed at which we've learned about coronavirus is unprecedented and scientists say we already know a remarkable amount.

But one year on, with more than 81 million reported infections and 1.7 million deaths around the world, there's still a lot we don't know about Covid-19.

Those unknowns range from the

basics -- such as how the virus started -- to the more complicated questions, including how will this pandemic end?

"We have learned a tremendous amount, but in terms of understanding anything in any real detail, we've got miles and miles to go," said Maureen Ferran, an associate professor of biology at Rochester Institute of Technology. "This is going to keep virologists and public health officials busy for decades."

ENTERTAINMENT

Kiara Advani posts pic in backless dress from Maldives. Fans ask where is Sidharth Malhotra

Kiara Advani has shared a picture of herself in a backless dress from the Maldives. The actress is holidaying in the island country with Sidharth Malhotra.

Kiara Advani is all set to welcome 2021 in the Maldives. The actress jetted off to the island country with rumoured boyfriend Sidharth Malhotra. Today, she shared a picture of herself enjoying a beautiful view of the ocean.

WHAT DID KIARA SHARE?

In the picture, Kiara is seen wearing a backless dress with her back towards the camera. She captioned the post as, "Lookin at you 2021."

FANS SAY WHERE IS SIDHARTH?

Many fans commented on Kiara's post with heart and fire emojis. Some, however, asked her about Sidharth's absence from the picture. One fan even asked Kiara to give photo credit to Sidharth.

Take a look at some of the comments by fans:

KIARA AND SIDHARTH SNAPPED AT AIRPORT

Kiara Advani and Sidharth Malhotra were spotted at the



married."

Akshay, however, revealed Kiara's secret and said, "Ye badi Siddhanto wali ladki hai (She is a girl of principles)." Hinting that she is dating Sidharth Malhotra.

Kangana Ranaut back in Mumbai, Congress tweets reminder for anti-drugs agency

The Maharashtra Congress on Wednesday reminded the Narcotics Control Bureau, probing the alleged Bollywood-drugs nexus, that actor Kanagana Ranaut, who claims to have information on the drugs links in the film industry, is back in Mumbai. The party sought to know when the actor would be summoned by the anti-drugs agency.

On September 9, the NCB arrested actor Rhea Chakraborty over drugs-related allegations following actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death. The agency had also summoned actors Deepika Padukone, Sara Ali Khan, Shraddha Kapoor, among others, for questioning.

The Congress put out an old video of Kangana Ranaut



Wednesday morning.

where she is heard saying that she was a "drug addict".

"Dear NCB, She is bk! When will you call @Kangan Team for this video? Also Modi govt gave Y category security to her (she is still enjoying at the cost of exchequer) as she wanted to give info abt drug racket in bollywood. She is still hiding info abt crime which is an offense.(sic)," Maharashtra Congress general secretary and spokesperson Sachin Sawant tweeted the 14-second video clip on



Kiara Advani

Durgamati on Amazon Prime feels like Laxmii 2.0. Why did Akshay Kumar do it to us?

At a time when movie buffs had their eyes and heart set on Christopher Nolan giving them an IMAX experience with Tenet, thereby rescuing them from their forced abstinence from truly experiencing cinema, Akshay Kumar was giving us his version of Inception. For he gave us two movies back to back - Laxmii and Durgamati, both remakes of South Indian films, and both pretty much a copy of each other too. A remake and sequel of a remake which is also a remake. Confused? We were too after we streamed the Bhumi Pednekar-starrer Durgamati on Amazon Prime Video.

LAXMII AND DURGAMATI, TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

On November 9, 2020, Akshay's Laxmii dropped on Disney+Hotstar, a remake of 2011-released Tamil film



Kanchana, both helmed by Raghava Lawrence. A little over a month later, on December 11, he, as a presenter, gave us Durgamati, a remake of the Telugu film Bhaagamathie, both directed by Ashok G.

The biggest difference in these two is that while Akshay headlines the

cast in the first, he is simply providing behind-the-camera support as a producer on the latter. The story, the premise, even the fact that both films belong to the horror genre, anyone who has watched both will tell you, make them uncannily similar. Why would he choose to do that, is one of

those mysteries that always remain unsolved at the end of a horror film.

NAME CHANGE, POSTER, HUMANS POSSESSED BY DEMONS

Okay, so a human being haunted and ultimately possessed by a spirit is common in horror films. So in that, Durgamati and Laxmii are similar. But what would you say about the colour-scheme of the posters of the two films? The look on both Akshay and Bhumi are similar, the poster heavily relies on blue and red to create a mystery about the character, and both have blood-shot eyes. Why?

Stretching it a bit further, Laxmii, originally Laxmii Bomb, had to change its title because a certain section of the audience wasn't happy about it. No such

explanation was given about Durgavati when it changed from Durgavati overnight. Like we said, certain mysteries are forever left unresolved.

BOLLYWOOD AND HORROR

Bollywood's tryst with horror hasn't been a particularly memorable one. There have been a few standout ones - Tummbad, Stree, Pari perhaps - but for each of these, there's a Bhoot Part 1: The Haunted Ship or the Raaz or the Haunted series. Sheesh! So why would Akshay decide to give us two films in the same genre, back to back?

The optimists in us were still hopeful, pinning our hopes on his 2007-released Bhool Bhulaiyaa, not entirely horror, but a psychological film with a ton of comedy, nonetheless.

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Coronavirus Pandemic World On Edge

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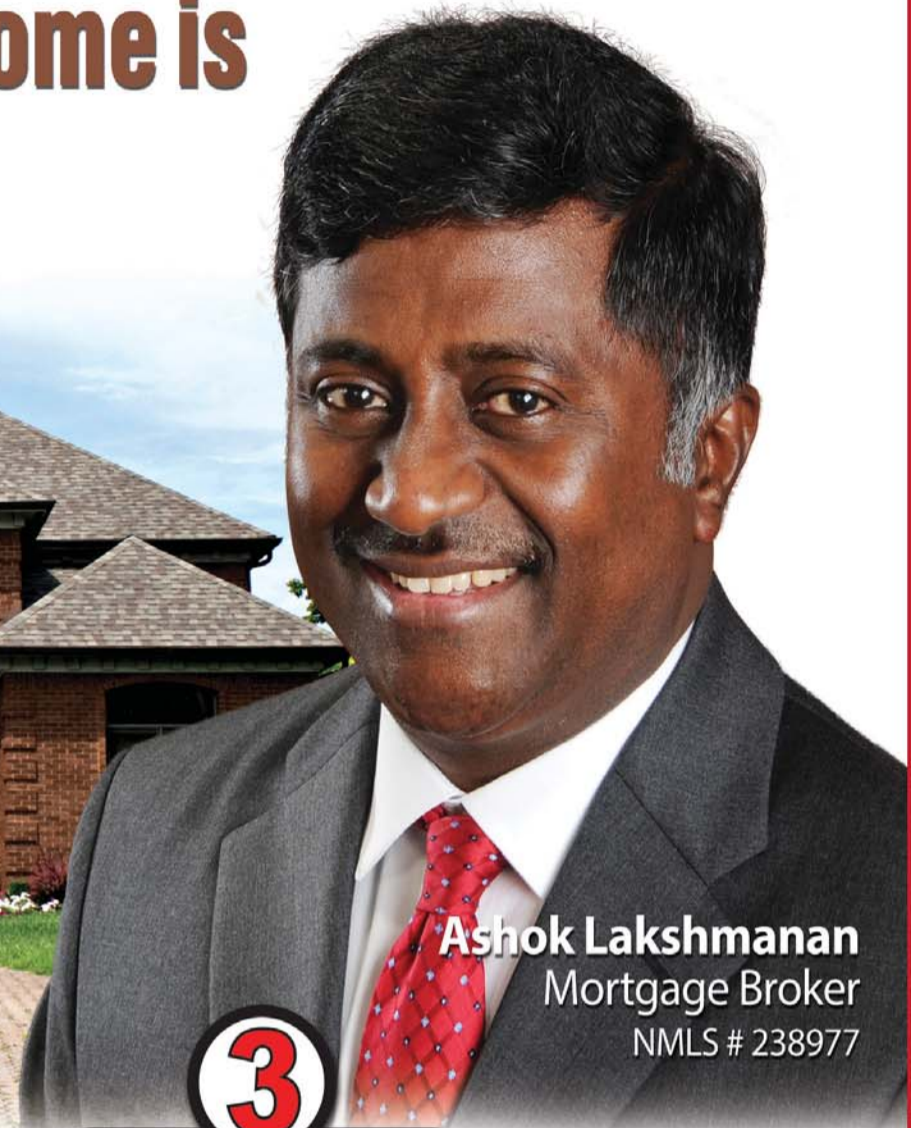
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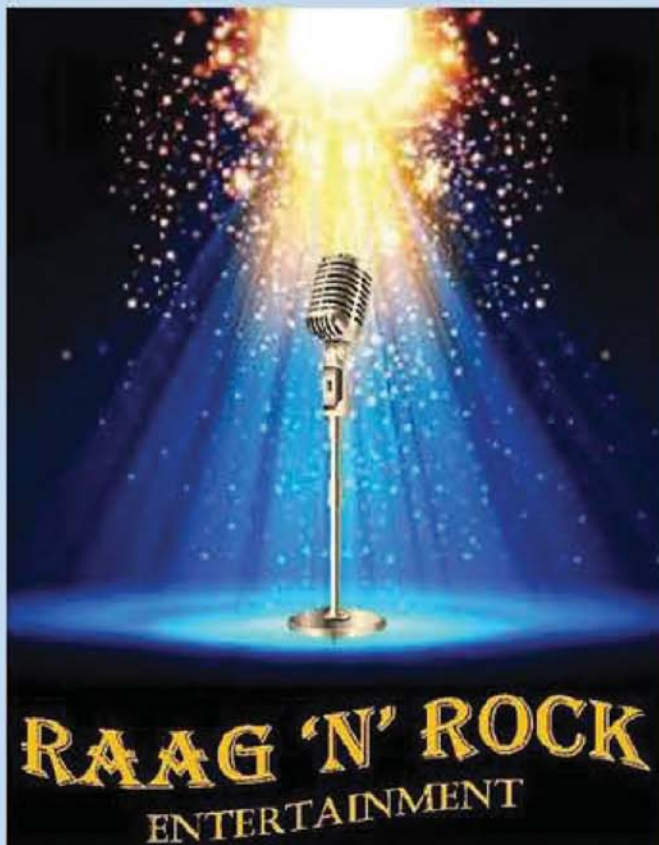
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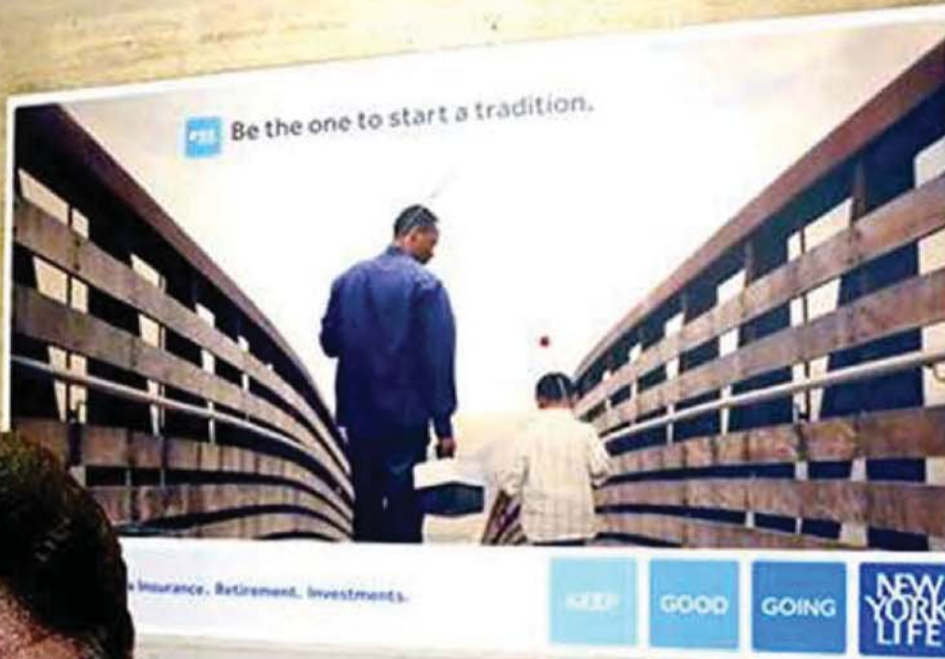
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