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## US Election 2020



### Who is ahead - Trump or Biden?



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## FRONT PAGE FEATURE

# US election 2020 polls

## Who is ahead - Trump or Biden?



Voters in America will decide on 3 November whether Donald Trump remains in the White House for another four years.

The Republican president is being challenged by Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden, who is best known as Barack Obama's vice-president but has been in US politics since the 1970s.

As election day approaches, polling companies will be trying to gauge the mood of the nation by asking voters which candidate they prefer.

We'll be keeping track of those polls here and trying to work out what they can and can't tell us about who will win the election.

How are the presidential candidates doing nationally?

National polls are a good guide as to how popular a candidate is across the country as a whole, but they're not necessarily a good way to predict the result of the election.

In 2016, for example, Hillary Clinton led in the polls and won nearly three million more votes than Donald Trump, but she still lost - that's because the US uses an electoral college system, so winning the most votes doesn't always win you the election.

With that caveat aside, Joe Biden has been ahead of Donald Trump in national polls for most of the year. He has hovered around 50% in recent weeks and has had a 10-point lead on occasions but Mr Trump has recovered somewhat in the last few days.

By contrast, in 2016 the polls were far less clear and just a couple of

percentage points separated Mr Trump and his then-rival Hillary Clinton at several points as election day neared.

Which states will decide this election?

As Mrs Clinton discovered in 2016, the number of votes you win is less important than where you win them.

Most states nearly always vote the same way, meaning that in reality there are just a handful of states where both candidates stand a chance of winning. These are the places where the election will be won and lost and are known as battleground states.

In the electoral college system the US uses to elect its president, each state is given a number of votes based on its population. A total of 538 electoral college votes are up for grabs, so a candidate needs to hit 270 to win.

As the map above shows, some battleground states have a lot more electoral college votes on offer than others so candidates often spend a lot more time campaigning in them.

Who's leading in the battleground states?

At the moment, polls in the battleground states look good for Joe Biden, but there's a long way to go and things can change very quickly, especially when Donald Trump's involved.

The polls suggest Mr Biden has big leads in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin - three industrial states his Republican rival won by margins of less than 1% to clinch victory in 2016.

But it's the battleground states where Mr Trump won big in 2016 that his campaign team will be most worried about. His winning margin in Iowa, Ohio and Texas was between 8-10% back then but he's neck-and-neck with Mr Biden in all three at the moment.

Those poll numbers may help explain his decision to replace his re-election campaign manager in July and his regular references to "fake polls".

Betting markets, however, are certainly not writing Mr Trump off just yet. The latest odds still give him about a one in three chance of winning on 3 November.

Has coronavirus affected Trump's numbers?

The coronavirus pandemic has dominated headlines in the US since the start of the year and the response to President Trump's actions has been split predictably along party lines.

Support for his approach peaked in mid-March after he declared a national emergency and made \$50 billion available to states to stop the spread of the virus. At this point, 55% of Americans approved of his actions, according to data from Ipsos, a leading polling company.

But any support he had from Democrats disappeared after that, while Republicans continued to back their president.

The most recent data, however, suggests even his own supporters have begun to question his response as states in the south and the west of the country have dealt with renewed outbreaks of the virus. Republican support had fallen to 78% by early

July.

This may explain why he has been less optimistic about coronavirus recently, warning that the situation will "get worse before it gets better"

He also donned a face mask for the first time recently and called on Americans to wear them, saying "they'll have an effect" and show "patriotism".

One leading model produced by experts at the University of Washington predicts the death toll will have passed 230,000 by 1 November - just two days before the election.

Can we trust the polls?

It's easy to dismiss the polls by saying they got it wrong in 2016 and President Trump frequently does exactly that. But it's not entirely true.

Most national polls did have Hillary Clinton ahead by a few percentage points, but that doesn't mean they were wrong, since she won three million more votes than her rival.

Pollsters did have some problems in 2016 - notably a failure to properly represent voters without a college degree - meaning Mr Trump's advantage in some key battleground states wasn't spotted until late in the race, if at all. Most polling companies have corrected this now.

But this year there's even more uncertainty than normal due to the coronavirus pandemic and the effect it's having on both the economy and how people will vote in November, so all polls should be read with some scepticism, especially this far out from election day.

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# What is the significance of Independence day in India

The republic of India gained its independence from the rule of the British on 15 August 1947. Since then every year, 15th August is celebrated as the Independence Day in India to commemorate its freedom from the 200-year-old British government. For India, 15th August is a day of her re-birth, a new start. At the midnight of 15 August 1947, the British rulers handed the country back to its Indian leaders, ending a remarkable struggle that lasted years. It was 15 August 1947, the historic date, on which sovereign India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru unfolded the tricolour flag of the nation on the glorious Red Fort. The day is significant in the history of India as bringing an end to the British colonial rule in India.

## History of 15th August

In 1757, after the British victory in the Battle of Plassey, the rule of East India Company started in India. By 1858, the British Crown had assumed control over India. The situation after World War I was marked with suppressive and exploitative laws by the British. This led to revolutionary calls for independence, and sparked the phase of non-violent and non-cooperation movements followed by the civil disobedience movement.

The enduring leader and a national symbol for all these movements was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi- the Father of the Nation. The next decades were marked with constant struggles between the Indians and the British for freedom. Many movements and acts were carried out by the Indian National Congress, freedom fighters and the people of India.

In the year 1946, the Labour government, the exchequer of Britain thought of ending their rule over India because of their exhaustion of capital post the World War II. The British

## g o v e r n m e n t

announced, during the early 1947, that they intend to transfer power to the Indians by the month of June 1948. This approaching independence could not decrease the Hindu-Muslim violence in Bengal and Punjab. This led to Louis Mountbatten, the then Viceroy of India to propose the power hand-over date, owing to the fact that the unprepared British army could not cope with the increased violence in the country. In the month of June in 1947, the prominent Indian leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Abul Kalam Azad, Master Tara Singh and B. R. Ambedkar agreed for a partition of India along religious outline.

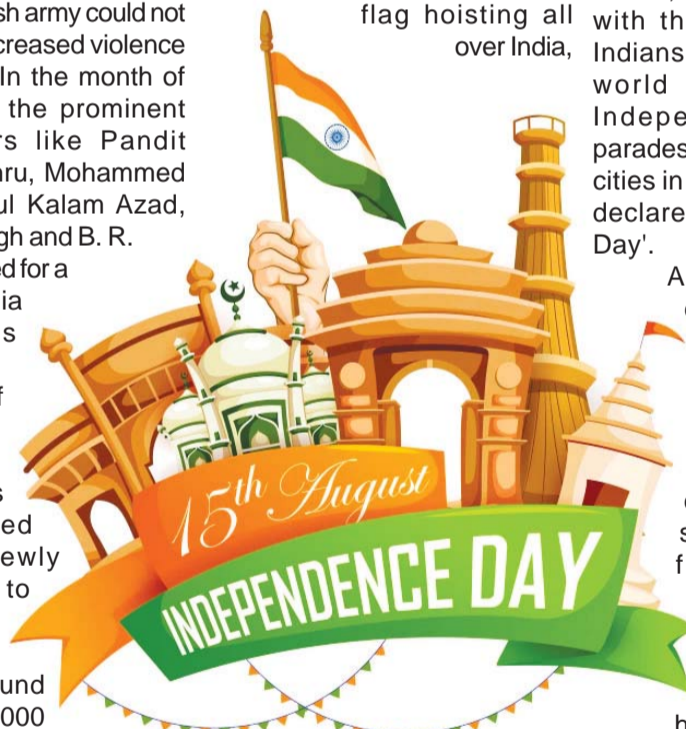
Millions of people belonging to different religious groups tramped across the newly drawn border to find places to reside. This took away around 250,000 to 500,000

lives. Finally, at midnight of 15 August 1947, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru proclaimed India's independence by reading out his famous speech known as "Tryst with destiny". During this speech, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we will redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes, but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. We end today a period of ill fortune,

and India discovers herself again."

Independence day Celebrations in India

Every year, India's Independence Day is celebrated on this day by all the proud Indians. 15th August is observed as a national holiday throughout the country. Though, local governments conduct the ceremony of flag hoisting all over India,



the venue of main celebration is the Red Fort in the capital city New Delhi in India. The celebration starts every year with the unfurling of the tricoloured national flag by the Prime Minister of the nation, followed by a televised speech. The speech generally reflects the present condition of the nation along with the achievements in the previous year and the future development plans. A tribute is even paid by the Prime Minister to freedom fighters of India by declaring the day as a national holiday. Post the flag-hoisting ceremony, patriotic programs by children from schools based in different states is one of the main attractions. In northern and

central cities of India, kite flying is celebrated as an event associated with the Independence Day. People symbolise their patriotism towards the country with the use of national flags of different sizes. They decorate their cloths, cars, household, etc. with the tricolour flag. The Indians in various parts of the world also celebrate the Independence Day with parades and pageants. Several cities in the United States have declared 15 August as 'India Day'.

Almost every school, college, university and organization hoist the national flag on 15 August. Nowadays, many housing complexes, clubs, societies, group of friends, etc. even observe the flag-hoisting ceremony within their premises with ease, joy and honesty. This just shows the togetherness of Indians, who never forget to pay a tribute to their ancestors who sacrificed their life for the betterment of the country.

## Nehru's Speech on Independence Day

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, was a man, who could influence the masses with his oration. He was an immensely learned man and could feel the pulse of the masses. Nehru's Message to the Nation on the Independence Day was delivered on the brink of midnight of the 14th of August, 1947 Independence Day Speech by Jawahar Lal Nehru Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, was a man,

who could influence the masses with his oration. He was an immensely learned man and could feel the pulse of the masses. Nehru's message to the nation on the Independence Day was delivered on the brink of midnight of the 14 August 1947. The speech focussed on various topics related to India and the freedom that she had achieved from the shackles of British colonial rule. The speech also encouraged and inspired the countrymen to wake from the long slumber and take steps for the upliftment and development of India. Jawaharlal Nehru's independence speech aimed at motivating the general masses at building a new India. The speech aimed at boosting the people for working harder and with real zeal and enthusiasm to make India the numero uno nation in the world. There were certain social evils that were dominant in the Indian society in the form of illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, poor health conditions and many more in pre-independent India. The message propagated for the eradication of these social evils and to make India a prospering nation. The message of the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, also requested the people of the country to actively participate in the process of nation-building. He also urged the people to have and show confidence in the national leaders of the country, who were bestowed with the duty of carrying the nation forward. The concept of equality was also emphasized in the independence speech made by Jawaharlal Nehru. The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, also finds reference in the speech made by Nehru.

## OPINION

# UNSC: A diplomatic 'two-front' war

## India warded off the China-Pakistan game on Kashmir. But don't let the guard down



Stoking diplomatic deadwood in the hope that the embers may catch fire is a parlour game at the United Nations. One of our neighbours - Pakistan - has indulged in this for years. "The India-Pakistan Question", inscribed on the United Nations Security Council (SC)'s agenda on January 6, 1948, was last considered by SC on November 5, 1965. Yet, on the annual requests of Pakistan, the item has remained an inert part of the Council's formal agenda. These requests are followed by sundry communications, in a bid to stir

the pot. They are circulated and filed. No one is bothered. Then, in August 2019, following changes to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)'s special status provided in the Indian Constitution, China weighed in favour of its "iron brother" and initiated what was akin to a diplomatic "two-front war".

Using its perch on the Council, China took over the driver's seat of this venture. Since China did not have the requisite majority to call for a formal meeting, it requested an informal consultation. China proposed a draft outcome statement and

lobbied for support. The tussle was transformed into one between a Permanent Member of the Council - China; and a non-member of the Council - India. Pakistan was the cat's paw in the equation.

The duo threw everything into the fray. They argued along the following three axes. Contrary to previous Council decisions, India changed the status quo, violating international law. The change resulted in large-scale human rights violations, leading to a serious humanitarian situation. This, along with India's military assertiveness along the Line of

Control constituted a threat to international peace and security. The Council, which is responsible for maintenance of international peace and security, needed to respond.

The same talk that we hear now on India-China issues was voiced then. Can India take on an economy five times its size? Can actions evoking criticism domestically be shielded from global scrutiny? Will a global power, which had sewn up vast swathes with its Belt and Road Initiative, not get broad support against a mid-sized delegation with limited resources?

A blow-by-blow account is left for another time. Suffice it to say that then, as now, hubris of global overreach was on display. Then, as now, quiet diplomacy was in play. Then, as now, despite the disparity in the power equation, some stay silent. Then, as now, key partners weigh in our favour. The closed-door outcome was better than expected. The public diplomacy victory was the icing on the cake.

More efforts - including one earlier this week - have been made. These follow a slightly different tack. Pakistan writes a letter to the president of the Council. China follows up to raise the

matter during closed, informal consultations under "Any Other Business". The "pinprick" doesn't yield anything, as overwhelmingly, others aren't interested. The rubric "Any Other Business" can be used by anyone, to raise anything. Some have used it to prick China about Hong Kong, and in course of discussions also referred to the treatment of Uighurs. Others target Russia by raising matters not on the active agenda. In short, failed "pinpricks" are par for the course. Our overcoming such efforts provides useful "lessons learnt".

First, in August 2019, the People's Republic of China took the unprecedented step of trying to extricate an agenda item that it had historically never engaged with. When the item was last considered in 1965, it was the Republic of China whose representative sat on the Council. China invalidated the oft-repeated shibboleth that it will handle "differences through peaceful discussion" bearing in mind "sensitivities and concerns". Despite not succeeding, China keeps trying in other ways. Try, try and try again seems their theme song; never letting our guard down needs to be ours.

# The Mandal moment

## It empowered. But it also opened a Pandora's box

Thirty years ago, on August 7, Indian politics and society changed. In a historic move, the VP Singh government decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, and open up reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs. This came in the wake of the gradual political rise of the backward communities, which was due to a set of complex factors. The first was the demographic weight of the backward communities. The second was the fact that OBCs were not a natural constituency of the Congress and preferred peasant-based formations, socialist parties and regional

parties - all of which were on the ascendant then. And the third was the impact of the Green Revolution which led to their economic empowerment and desire for upward professional mobility. The immediate political trigger for Mr Singh's decision was an effort to counter the Mandir politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which sought to prioritise religion over caste, but its impact went way beyond that. The Mandal moment saw ferocious backlash by sections of upper castes. This opposition was articulated on two axes - the fact that reservations compromised merit, and if at all reservations should open up beyond what was offered to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, it

should be on economic lines. These arguments hid beneath it a real fear of losing power and opportunities. And it launched an era of open hostility between upper castes and backward communities, particularly in the Hindi heartland. OBCs became a force to contend with, and it is no surprise that no government in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar can now be formed without their active support. But it also opened up a Pandora's Box. For one, the resentment of those communities which did not have a share in the reservation pie increased. And political parties, in order to appease them, continued to expand reservation - to the extent that now economically weaker sections of dominant



communities avail quotas, and in many states, there is over 70% reservation in key spheres. This has undermined the entire purpose of reservation, envisaged as a tool to address historic injustice, and made it an exercise in power distribution

and employment generation. Second, within OBCs, some communities benefited more than others, which led to a political divide and demands for sub-categorisation, a process currently underway. Mandal empowered communities.

## OP-ED

# Ayodhya marks the twilight of the first Republic

*Hindu nationalism has been the bedrock of the Indian State and polity. Nehruvian secularism was the fringe*

The last time a temple existed in Ayodhya, Krishnadevaraya was emperor in the South ruling over the Vijayanagara empire, Nuno da Cunha was governor of Portuguese India, Spanish conquistadors were setting foot in Texas, and Suleiman the Magnificent was inaugurating the era of Ottoman supremacy in West Asia. With the bhoomi puja on August 5, the long saga of struggle of a people has come to an end. This day falls on the first anniversary of the full constitutional integration of Jammu and Kashmir to India, making it a symbolic date in post-colonial India. This is the twilight of the first Republic.

The first Republic was founded on the myth of a secular-socialist India supposedly born out of the anti-colonial struggle. However, the Indian freedom movement was always a Hindu movement. From its origin, symbolism, language, and support base, it was the continuation of a Hindu resurgence already underway, but which was disrupted by the British conquest. The coming together of various pagan traditions in the Indian subcontinent under the umbrella of Hinduism is a long-drawn-out process. But it began to consolidate as a unified political entity in the colonial era in the form of Hindutva. The Hindutva concept is driven by an attempt by the older pagan traditions, united by a dharmic framework and intertwined by puranas, myths and folklore, to navigate the modern political and intellectual landscape dominated by nations and nation-states. Hindutva is not Hinduism. Hindutva is a Hindu political response to political Islam and Western imperialism. It seeks to forge Hindus into a modern nation and create a powerful industrial State that can put an end to centuries of persecution that accelerated sharply over the past 100 years when the Hindu-Sikh presence was expunged in large swaths of the Indian subcontinent.

India's freedom struggle was guided by the vision of Hindu nationalism and not by constitutional patriotism. The Congress brand of nationalism was but a subset of this broader Hindu nationalism with the

Congress itself as the pre-eminent Hindu party. The Muslim question forced the Congress to adopt a more tempered language and symbolism later and to weave the myth of Hindu-Muslim unity. But it failed to prevent the Partition of India. The Congress was taken over by Left-leaning secular denialists under Jawaharlal Nehru who, instead of confronting reality, pretended it did not exist.

After centuries, Hindus were the dominant power. Despite self-denial, the post-colonial State



was essentially a Hindu State. The misleading secular-communal debate blinded us to the obvious; the Republic of India is a Hindu reformist State. It abolished the caste system, integrated and Sanskritised the Dalits and large sections of tribals, codified Hindu social laws, revived classical and folk art forms and replaced Urdu-Persian with Hindi and native languages, controlled Hindu temples, introduced an element of uniformity in temple laws and even harmonised rituals and continues to intervene in Hindu social and religious matters with popular legitimacy. At the same time, it has left Islam outside its ambit in the guise of minority rights and freedom of religion. The Indian state intensified the historical process of Hindu consolidation even as Nehruvian elites denied that India is a Hindu polity above all. Hindu nationalism has never been fringe; it is Nehruvian secularism that was the fringe. And with the fall of the old English-speaking elites, the system they created is also collapsing along with accompanying myths like

Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb and Hindu-Muslim unity. The fact is that Hindus and Muslims lived together, but separately. And they share a violent and cataclysmic past with each other, which has never been put to rest. Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb was an urban-feudal construct with no serious takers outside a limited circle. In villages, whatever unity existed was because the caste identities of both Hindu and Muslims dominated instead of religious identities or because Hindu

converts to Islam maintained earlier customs and old social links with Hindus like common gotra and caste. But all that evaporated quickly



with the Islamic revivalist movements such as the Tabligh and pan-Islamism from 19th century onwards. It never takes much for Hindu-Muslim riots to erupt. There was nothing surprising about the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA)? protests and widespread riots. As political communities, Hindus and Muslims have hardly ever agreed on the big questions of the day. What we are witnessing today is twilight of the first Republic. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is but a modern vehicle of the historical process of the rise of the Hindu rashtra. In the north, Jammu and Kashmir is fully integrated. In the south, Dravidianism is melting away. In the east, Bengal is turning saffron. In the west, secular parties must ally with a local Hindutva party to survive. The political debate has

decisively shifted from the pseudo-secular paradigm to the Hindu-pseudo Hindu one. The Ram mandir is reborn. The CAA is the law. The National Population Register is underway. And the National Register of Citizens will happen sooner or later. Although history is never linear, it is time to face the truth: Hindu nationalism has always been the bedrock of the Indian State and polity. However, as we witness the rise of a new republic, the question which we must ask is what its shape will be? Is becoming a Hindu State India's destiny? There are no clear answers given the lack of precedent, barring a few instances such as the Vijayanagara empire. Even the Hindutva movement has concerned itself with the Hindu rashtra and not Hindu rajya.

## Pakistan's cartographic absurdity

**The new map shows shallowness and weakness. It has no legitimacy**

The Imran Khan government has issued a map that shows the entirety of Jammu and Kashmir and the former Gujarati princely state of Junagadh as Pakistani territory. Such maps were common in the 1950s. Over time, Junagadh was largely dropped, but Survey of Pakistan maps have shown the border running south of Jammu. The map has kept the self-determination flag flying by printing across Kashmir that its future will be "decided" under the relevant United Nations resolutions. Curiously, the border between this fictional Greater Pakistan and China is a "frontier undefined" - something not reflected in Beijing's maps.

Ancient maps have some use in territorial disputes, overnight ones produced by a weak government have none. Mr Khan issued the map one year after the



amendment of Article 370. One of the policy shifts explicit in India's decision was that the future of this part of Kashmir would no longer be negotiated with Islamabad. Pakistan has spent the past year trying to argue it is essential to the issue. Initially, it turned to the international community to get some support. When that failed, it resumed shelling across the Line of Control and supporting terrorism. That Mr Khan's

government has now been reduced to printing pieces of coloured paper should be seen as further evidence that Pakistan has been reduced to a cipher as far as Kashmir is concerned. Nepal, Pakistan and others have recently turned to cartography to provoke the Indian government. But drawn ink lines are not even credible statements. They show shallowness of thought and, most crucially, weakness at home.

## INDIAN-CURRENT AFFAIRS

## 70% Covid-19 related deaths in Bengal due to delayed admission in hospitals

**Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said most of those who died of Covid-19 had delayed getting admitted to hospitals.**

Nearly 70% of the Covid-19 related deaths in West Bengal happened due to delayed hospital admissions, the state's top bureaucrat said on Thursday.

"We are analysing each and every Covid-19 related death on a daily basis. Nearly 70% of the deaths took place because people delayed in reaching the hospital," said Rajiva Sinha, chief secretary of West Bengal.

Over the past few months multiple allegations have

surfaced against both state-run and private hospitals that they have refused to admit patients because of various reasons including shortage of beds, resulting in the death of some patients.

Sinha, however, said that there is no shortage of hospital beds. At present there are 11,560 beds in 83 Covid-19 designated hospitals out of which 60% are still vacant. In all there are 23,500 beds in hospitals and safe homes. "There is demand

for a particular category of hospital which can't be guaranteed in a pandemic situation. What we can guarantee is a kind of hospital where patients would be provided with adequate treatment by the best experts," he said.

The state government said that the case fatality rate has dropped to around 2.2% in West Bengal. The National CFR stands at 2.7%. At present only 1,144 patients in the state are in critical condition while 1,043 and 1,946 are

with moderate and mild symptoms.

"This means only two out of 100 Covid-19 patients have died. Out of this, 87% of the deaths were because of comorbidity," he added. The chief secretary was addressing media persons at the state secretariat. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee was also present.

The Covid-19 pandemic has claimed 1,846 lives in Bengal till Wednesday which also saw the highest single-day



casualties at 61. On Thursday West Bengal crossed the 25,000-mark of daily swab tests. The state has already done more than one million tests. Veteran CPI (M) leader Chakraborty, who had tested positive for Covid-19, died in Kolkata on Thursday. Banerjee and West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar expressed their condolences.

## 700 tonnes of Chemical stored in Chennai safe, to be e-auctioned: Customs



The storage of the chemical here became a cause for serious concern in the backdrop of the explosion of the chemical in the Lebanese capital city of Beirut on Tuesday, which killed 135 people and injured around 4,000.

The chemical worth Rs 1.80 crore was seized from a Tamil Nadu-based importer in 2015 who had allegedly declared it as fertiliser

grade although it was an explosive grade, a Customs official said.

However, the consignment, imported from South Korea, was safe and an e-auction process was on to clear it, he said.

The Customs' clarification comes in the wake of reports in a section of media that huge quantities of the chemical substance being stored here

**Customs authorities on Thursday sought to allay fears over safety regarding the storage of nearly 700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate at a container freight station near here.**

could be a risk, even as political party Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) sought the government to ensure its safe disposal.

"The goods are safe and pose no danger" a senior Customs department official told PTI when asked about the fears of safety in the backdrop of the devastating Beirut explosion.

Elaborating, the official, on condition of anonymity, said the sleuths had in November 2015 seized 697 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in 37 containers valued at Rs 1.80 crore from the importer.

"The importer had misdeclared the goods as ammonium nitrate of fertiliser grade whereas on examination it was found to be

of explosive grade and that (the importer) had not followed the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012," he said.

The containers were seized then and were since lying at a container freight station in the city while the licence of the importer had been cancelled.

While seven tonnes of the chemical got spoilt during the deluge in December 2015, the remaining 690 tonnes were under process of e-auctioning, he said.

Earlier during the day, PMK founder S Ramadoss urged the government to take immediate steps to safely dispose of the ammonium nitrate, saying a possible Beirut-like incident

should be avoided. Expressing concern over the reported huge quantity of the seized chemical kept at the freight station here since 2015, he said the uncleared substance could be a risk and that it should be safely disposed of and utilised for purposes like composting.

Tuesday's explosion in Lebanon's port city of Beirut killed 135 people and injured about 4,000.

Buildings were damaged for miles around the city after 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive chemical used in fertilisers, stored at the facility for six years, reportedly caused the explosion.

## No communication from Pakistan on Kulbhushan Jadhav case, says India

**The Islamabad high court on Monday had directed the government to inform India to appoint a lawyer for Kulbhushan Jadhav in order to file a review petition against his conviction. He is facing a death sentence for alleged spying.**

Islamabad has not reached out to New Delhi after the Islamabad high court's order on Monday to the Pakistani government to give another chance to India to appoint a counsel for former Indian navy commander Kulbhushan Jadhav who is on death row. "We haven't received any communication from Pakistan on Kulbhushan Jadhav case. Pakistan needs to provide

unhindered, unimpeded consular access to him," external affairs ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said on Thursday. The Islamabad high court on Monday had directed the government to inform India to appoint a lawyer for Jadhav in order to file a review petition against his conviction. He is facing a death sentence for

alleged spying. A two-judge bench of the Islamabad high court headed by chief justice Athar Minallah also directed the Pakistan government to again inform Jadhav, 50, of his rights under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) order of 2019 staying his execution and calling for a review of his



conviction. India had recently said Pakistan had blocked all its efforts to seek remedies in the case of Jadhav, who was arrested by Pakistani security agencies in Balochistan in

March 2016 and charged with spying. India maintains Jadhav is not a spy was kidnapped by Pakistani operatives from the Iranian port of Chabahar, where he was running a business.



## INDIAN-CURRENT AFFAIRS

# Day after bhoomi puja, curious devotees throng Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya

*The foundation stone laying ceremony at Ayodhya at the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was broadcast live on Wednesday.*



deity's aarti on Doordarshan (national broadcaster)," said Kureel. Next to Hanuman Garhi temple, a group of devotees from adjoining Gonda district were spotted. After paying obeisance to Lord Hanuman, they also planned to visit Ram Janmabhoomi.

"Yesterday we watched Modiji on Doordarshan performing bhoomi puja. My family and relatives wanted to visit Ram Janmabhoomi today (Thursday) itself," said Radhey Shyam Varma, in his 50s. The festivities and celebrations

at Ayodhya post bhoomi puja were also the talking point among people.

However, in Faizabad, (locals differentiate between old Ayodhya and Faizabad for their convenience), there was business as usual and life was back to normal.

A day after the bhoomi puja, curious devotees turned up in large numbers at Ram Janmabhoomi site on Thursday to worship Ram Lalla at the pre-fabricated temple.

The people who queued up outside Ram Janmabhoomi, waiting for their turn to enter, were mostly from neighbouring areas, though some locals were also present.

Devotees also visited Hanuman Garhi temple, a few metres from Ram Janmabhoomi.

The grand bhoomi puja and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation were the talk of the town on Thursday. With pictures of PM Modi performing bhoomi puja still fresh in their minds, some of the devotees were expecting major changes at the Ram Janmabhoomi.

Diwakar Maurya, 51, who came from adjoining Gonda district, could not wait for his turn to enter

the Ram Janmabhoomi.

"I saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi performing bhoomi puja on television (on Wednesday). It was a grand ceremony. Some changes might have been made at Ram Janmabhoomi. Out of curiosity I am here today (Thursday) to see those changes," he said.

There were many others like Maurya in the queue who expected something grand at Ram Janmabhoomi.

However, Saket Kureel, 55, from neighbouring Basti district, wanted to pay obeisance to Ram Lalla at the pre-fabricated temple in which PM Modi had performed 'aarti' before bhoomi puja.

When he last visited Ram Janmabhoomi, Ram Lalla was residing inside the makeshift temple inside a tent.

"I want to see the temple where Ram Lalla is residing at present. I saw PM Modi performing the

## Rajasthan HC orders notices to be served to 6 BSP MLAs who merged with Congress

A division bench of Rajasthan high court on Thursday disposed of the petition seeking an immediate stay on the merger of six Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) lawmakers with the Congress in 2019 with a direction to a lower court to serve the notices to six MLAs issued earlier by a single bench last week. A single bench of the high court had earlier sought replies from Speaker C P Joshi and the six lawmakers by August 11 after the BSP and BJP lawmaker Madan Dilawar moved the court against the Speaker's order upholding the merger. On Tuesday, the BSP and Dilawar filed review petitions

seeking a stay on the merger. Prateek Kasliwal, counsel for speaker CP Joshi said that the special appeal filed by the petitioner



Madan Dilawar and BSP is not maintainable. "The HC has disposed of the appeal filed by the BSP and

BP MLA Dilawar. The court directed the district judge to get the notices served the BSP MLAs as well as if required to take assistance of the Jaisalmer superintendent of police to serve the notices. The court had also directed to publish the notice in a local newspaper and at the same

time it is redirected to the single bench that it should give its decision on August 11 on the petition filed earlier," Kasliwal said.

On August 4, the BSP and BJP MLA Madan Dilawar filed a petition in the division bench of the High Court seeking immediate stay on the merger of six BSP MLAs with Congress last year. The BSP had prayed to the division bench to accept the special appeal and to suspend the effect of the order of assembly Speaker dated September 18, 2019 whereby he declared that six elected representatives of the BSP have merged with Indian National Congress.

## Six days after 1st rejection, Kejriwal govt resends LG proposal to reopen weekly markets and hotels in Delhi

Delhi government led by Aam Aadmi Party's Arvind Kejriwal has sent a fresh proposal to lieutenant governor Anil Baijal recommending reopening of hotels, gyms and weekly markets, citing the decline in the number of Covid 19 cases in the national capital. The new proposal has been sent almost a week after the rejection of a similar proposal by the government bringing the differences between the government and the LG's office into sharp focus.

Delhi has witnessed a steady decline in the number of active coronavirus cases and the sharp rise in new cases, which was a cause of worry back in June, has stabilized, easing the pressure on medical facilities and giving the government confidence to

seek wider relaxations for further resumption of economic activities. However, the LG's office has indicated that relaxations such as allowing local weekly markets and gymnasiums to operate may lead to a resurgence in the number of cases and has therefore spurned Kejriwal government's insistence on that count.

The issue has become the latest point of stand-off between the two power centres in the city-state that have often been at loggerheads over various issues. Kejriwal's deputy Manish Sisodia, had last Saturday, sought home minister Amit Shah's intervention to force LG Anil Baijal's hand to allow reopening of weekly markets and hotels citing a need to give

economic activities in the capital another shot in the arm. In his letter to Shah, Sisodia had cited statistics to claim eight per cent of Delhi's business and employment was suffering due to the coronavirus disease outbreak.

"Due to the closure of weekly markets, five lakh families are sitting at home. Now when they are hopeful that with control over coronavirus in Delhi they will get an opportunity to restart their business, binding them under the decision of closure is unfair to Delhi's economic situation and hopes of lakhs of people," Sisodia had written. He had indicated that the Delhi government will resend the proposal to Baijal on Tuesday. "If traders start their business, jobs will be generated, and that



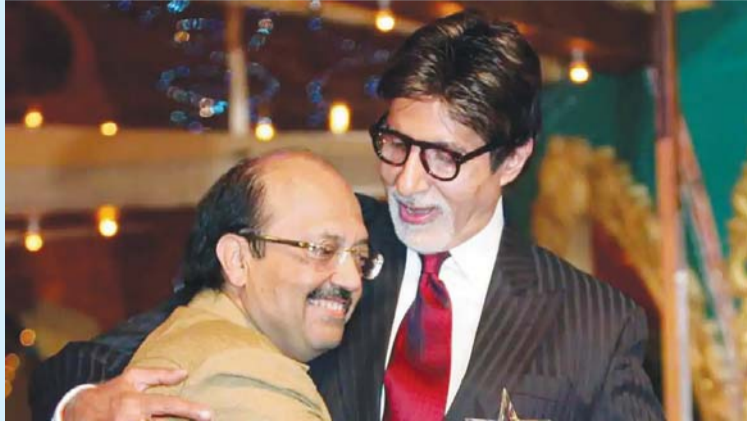
the condition of the economy will improve," the deputy chief minister wrote in his letter. Baijal had rejected the first proposal a day earlier on Friday describing capital's Covid 19 situation as "fragile" and stating that the threat was still "far from over". Baijal's office had claimed that CM Kejriwal had agreed with the

LG's assessment advocating adoption of "a cautious and conservative approach". The AAP government has been looking to give further impetus to economic activities in the Unlock 3 phase and has accused LG's office and the Centre of adopting two yardsticks for Delhi and the rest of the country.

## SPECIAL REPORT

# The Rise And Fall Of Amar Singh

He came from nowhere and rose so high. But, in the end, he flew away with the wind.



Congress support and Bachchan was Rajiv Gandhi's close friend. To Bachchan, Singh said that Chandra Shekhar was like a brother to him and he, Amar Singh, would personally ensure that any problems that had been created for the Bachchans by the predecessor VP Singh- government would disappear. For years afterwards, Amar Singh would tell the story of how he personally carried the government file relating to a case against the Bachchans around till Chandra Shekhar agreed to sign it and close the case.

"Amitji may have been a friend of Rajiv Gandhi's but it was Amar Singh who got the files signed and the case disposed off," Amar Singh



In the 1983 film Zelig, Woody Allen (who also wrote and directed the movie) plays the eponymous hero; a man who manages somehow to know everyone (from F Scott Fitzgerald to Adolf Hitler) and who turns up at every important event. The film is a mockumentary, which is to say that it is made to look like a documentary with shots of the fictional Zelig inserted into actual footage of real events.

I first met Amar Singh around four years after I saw the movie and in my mind, Amar Singh was always the Indian Zelig: a man who managed to work his way into any situation of consequence and to stand shoulder to shoulder with any important person he saw.

I first met Amar Singh after I moved to Calcutta in 1986. He was no big deal then. Though he was a Rajput, his twin claims to fame were his association with the city's prosperous Marwari community and his friendship with Bengal Congress leaders.

As he was neither much of a businessman nor a politician of any great consequence, he was already punching much above his weight. He could get the city's richest men --- the Birlas, the Goenkas, and others --- on the phone and became involved, at a high level, in the feuds that characterized the Bengal Congress of that era. (He was pro-Subrata Mukherjee, anti-Mamata Banerjee and so on.)

He also understood the media. He would turn up at the ABP office, where I then worked, escorting visiting notables. He brought Dr. Karan Singh to see us. He came again with Veer Bahadur Singh who was then (if I remember correctly) Telecom Minister. Amar Singh was hardly the only local politician to accompany national

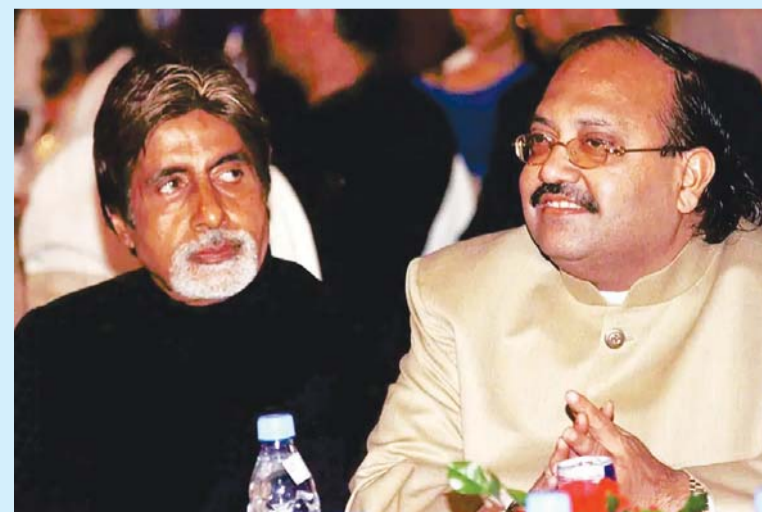
biggies on their visits to Calcutta. But what made him different was that he demanded almost as much attention as the visitor he was escorting, inserting himself into every conversation and holding forth at length. Interrupt him and you risked offending the important visitor



so most of us heard him out politely. In a few years, Amar Singh had established a presence in Delhi as well. When Jaya and Amitabh Bachchan came to Calcutta for the premiere of Agneepath in 1990, Amar Singh attached himself to Jaya Bachchan whom he had helped with a Children's Film Festival in Delhi. (At the time Jaya was Chairperson of the Children's Film Society.) He was not yet a friend of Amitabh's but because he popped up, Zelig-like, in all the photos, he came off to the general public as a close friend of all the Bachchans. The following year, when Chandra Shekhar was Prime Minister, Amar Singh who knew the PM a little, performed what would become a classic Amar Singh maneuver. He told Chandra Shekhar that he would introduce him to Amitabh Bachchan, who was not only a legend but was also of immediate consequence to Chandra Shekhar because his government was dependent on

would boost.

This got him nowhere with Rajiv who turned down Amar Singh's request for a Congress ticket for the 1991 election and refused to even meet him despite Amitabh's urging. But it certainly endeared him to Amitabh and by 1992, the two men were extremely close and spoke



to each other on the phone every single day.

But equally, there is no doubt that

Amar Singh gained much more from the association than he admitted. His career advanced within the Samajwadi Party because he was able to deliver the Bachchans whenever Mulayam Singh Yadav needed them. He gained entry to political circles that would never have allowed him in by promising to bring Amitabh along. And though the Bachchans treated him with extraordinary respect and deference, Amar Singh made it a point to gratuitously inform people that Amitabh would come to the airport to receive him when he visited Mumbai and that he had organized the weddings of both the Bachchan children, exercising total control over the guest list.

Nobody really knows what went wrong with that relationship --- I only have Amar Singh's version which was so poisonously anti-Bachchan as to lack all credibility --- but while it lasted, there is no doubt that Singh became the closest friend Amitabh had ever had, especially after the split between the

various times so it is hard to be certain. But there is no doubt that nearly everywhere Singh went, there were family issues. He was central to the split between Mulayam and his son Akhilesh. He was openly hostile to Mukesh Ambani and an active warrior for the Anil Ambani camp when the brothers fought. And when the Bajajs had a problem, he turned up there as well, Zelig-like. By the end of his time in the limelight, Amar Singh had either fallen out with or moved away from every powerful person he was once close too. The parting with the Bachchans was bitter. He ceased to be a figure of any consequence in UP politics after Akhilesh kicked him out of the SP, though he tried very hard but fruitlessly to get somewhere with the BJP. He was openly attacking Anil Ambani in interviews which meant that the parting could not have been cordial. His attempts to suck up to Mukesh Ambani ("I made a mistake by behaving badly with Mukeshbhai" etc.) were rebuffed. Subroto Roy of Sahara whose planes and helicopters Amar Singh flew around in during the glory days told a TV interviewer that he thought Amar Singh had now become so arrogant that his feet hardly touched the ground. The story of his fall may not be surprising: any moth that flies too close to the flame always risks going up in smoke. But the more remarkable story is the one of his rise. I saw him at fairly close quarters for over 30 years and I still can't figure out how he managed to fly so high and get so far.

Bachchan brothers.

Did Amar Singh precipitate the split? He said various things at

## PERSPECTIVE

# The economic situation is grim

## The financial sector, in particular, is vulnerable

On Saturday, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the government was extending its credit facility, originally announced for medium and small enterprises to private professionals such as doctors and chartered accountants. This, the minister said, was being done after stakeholder consultations. The decision is an indicator of the stress faced by professionals such as doctors and accountants, as economic activity is far from normal and new Covid-19 cases continue to rise in most parts of the country. But this is not the only indicator of a troubled economy. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection in the month of July dropped to Rs 87,422 crore from Rs 90,917 crore in June. In July 2019, this number was Rs 1.02 lakh crore. Most analysts have been warning that economic revival has started plateauing in July after showing a brief spike due to lockdown induced pent-up demand in June. Ms Sitharaman herself said that the “government is cautious about overstating the green shoots of a recovery visible in the economy”. As Covid-19 cases continue to climb and large parts of the country experience intermittent

lockdowns, the pandemic’s economic challenge will only get more difficult. Supply chains remain disrupted; demand continues to be low; unemployment is still high; and the Centre’s budgetary numbers may not quite hold because of both revenue shortages and new expenditure commitments. Among the most complex challenges will be loan-default related difficulties in the financial sector, especially once the ongoing moratorium comes to an end. Any large crisis on this front will necessitate a bailout and impose an additional strain on the government’s already



stretched fiscal resources. A sudden withdrawal of credit relief can make firms unviable, and trigger an inflationary shock as productive capacity suffers. These questions will hopefully be discussed at the Reserve Bank of India’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting this week. Signalling on this front will matter more than any decision on policy rates, which many private forecasters believe will see a pause. It will also be interesting to see whether the MPC makes a GDP forecast for this year and whether there has been any revival in consumer confidence after lockdown restrictions have been eased.

## 2 Chinese generals dissect Xi Jinping’s US policy, push for a relook



**General Dai said that traditionally, China and the US had a very close trade relationship, but the Trump administration has now branded the country a trade terrorist and a global economic aggressor.**

Dai Xu, a top general of the People’s Liberation Army has advocated that China should take stock of its relative weaknesses compared to the US and behave accordingly, according to a report in Nikkei Asian Review that cited a recent article authored by the officer who has been described as one of China’s most prominent hawks. In his article, Dai underscored how no country had come forward to establish an alliance against

the United States through the ongoing China vs US episode that has been playing out. “China has provided assistance to so many countries, benefiting them in so many ways, but at this critical moment, none of them has taken any unified action with China,” Dai wrote. The top general, the analysis in Nikkei Asian Review said, appeared to suggest that China had gotten ahead of itself.. He warned that China should never

“knock on (America’s) door and make a loud announcement that ‘I shall surpass you, replace you and be the world’s number one’.” The Nikkei Asian Review analysis authored by a senior fellow at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, Richard McGregor, interpreted multiple voices from China to signal the view that Beijing’s interests would have been far better served by sticking with the low-profile policy counseled by Deng Xiaoping. The reference the doctrine of a revered political leader like Deng, was seen as an effort to criticise Xi Jinping without mentioning him by name. In the article (Here is the link to the article published in a mainstream Chinese publication), General Dai said that traditionally, China and the

US had a very close trade relationship, but the Trump administration has now branded the country a trade terrorist and a global economic aggressor. He also listed 10 understanding about the Sino-US relationship. Among them is the United States’ ruthless push towards portraying China in a negative light which is beyond the expectations of most Chinese officials. He also said that China has not received support from any country. General Dai then went on to say that the US has been united at the domestic front. He also said that China needs to understand that China is not a paper tiger, but a real tiger that kills people. Suggesting the way forward, the

military general said that China doesn’t need to make a loud announcement to be number 1. General Dai said that even if China knows it can beat the US, it needs to keep a low profile. He also said that China should consider the US as world’s number 1. Another retired army officer, Major General Qiao Liang had told South China Morning Post in May this year that Beijing “should not consider the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to take back Taiwan by force”. The military strategist said Taiwan can be used by the US and its western allies to impose sanctions on China that would stop Beijing from importing resources needed for its industry.

## Can nuclear war be morally justified?

In the early 1980s, the Harvard law professor Robert Fisher proposed a new, gruesome way that nations might deal with the decision to launch nuclear attacks. It involved a butcher’s knife and the president of the United States. Writing in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Fisher suggested that instead of a briefcase containing the nuclear launch codes, the means to launch a bomb should instead be carried in a capsule embedded near the heart of a volunteer. That person would carry a heavy blade with them everywhere the president went. Before authorising a missile

launch, the commander-in-chief would first have to personally kill that one person, gouging out their heart to retrieve the codes. When Fisher made this proposal to friends at the Pentagon, they were aghast, arguing out that this act would distort the president’s judgement. But to Fisher, that was the point. Before killing thousands, the leader must first “look at someone and realise what death is – what an innocent death is. Blood on the White House carpet”. Killing a person with a butcher’s knife may be a morally repugnant act, yet in the realm of geopolitics, past leaders have justified their

atomic acts as a political or military necessity. Following the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – 75 years ago this month – the decision was justified only in terms of its outcome, not its morality. The bombing ended World War Two, preventing further deaths from a protracted conflict, and arguably discouraged the descent into nuclear war for the rest of the 20th Century. Yet those positive consequences cannot obscure the fact that on 6 and 9 August 1945, two of humanity’s most destructive objects brought the horrifying power of the atom onto two civilian cities. We can attempt to describe

the events through numbers: at least 200,000 people killed by the flashes, firestorms and radiation; tens of thousands more injured; an unquantifiable inter-generational legacy of radiation, cancer and trauma. We can remember the individual stories – of mothers and children, of priests and doctors, of ordinary lives transformed in a moment. Or we can memorialise the relics left behind, as described in the poem No More Hiroshimas: “The ones that made me weep... The bits of burnt clothing. The stopped watches. The torn shirts. The twisted buttons”.

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US & THE WORLD

REVEALED: Deutsche Bank hands over Donald Trump's financial records to NYC prosecutors as state attorney general says she will make a 'major national announcement' today



(News Agencies) - New York prosecutors were able to obtain Donald Trump's financial records from Deutsche Bank last year, it has been revealed, as the state's attorney general plans a mysterious major announcement on Thursday. The office of Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, a Democrat, sent a subpoena last year to Deutsche Bank as part of its investigation into Trump's business dealings, the New York Times reported Wednesday, citing four people familiar with the inquiry. The bank complied with the subpoena, turning over records including financial statements Trump gave the bank when he was borrowing money, two of those people told the Times. New York Attorney General Letitia James, also a Democrat, also subpoenaed the bank for records related to Trump last year following Michael Cohen's testimony. The subject of the announcement was not immediately clear, and it may be unrelated to the widening criminal probe into

Thursday at 11.30am. Vance, a Democrat, this week suggested a grand jury subpoena for Trump's tax returns was part of an investigation of 'possibly extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization,' including alleged insurance and bank fraud. Vance's investigation into Trump and the Trump Organization was spurred by disclosures of hush payments to two women who said they had had sexual relationships with Trump before he became president. Trump has denied the claims. Vance's office declined to comment on the New York Times report. Attorneys for Trump and for Deutsche Bank didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. The Manhattan prosecutor, who is a Democrat, was among several authorities in New York who launched investigations last year after Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, told congress that the president had a practice of misleading business associates and tax

told a federal judge this week that it was a 'complex financial investigation' that followed public reports of 'extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization.' As part of the investigation, Vance asked Trump's accountants to turn over eight

'They failed at every stage of the game,' Trump said. 'Even before I got in this was starting with the Mueller deal. Mueller started a little bit after,' Trump corrected himself. Mueller was appointed after former Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from overseeing the Russia

scrutiny from lawmakers. The House Financial Services Committee has examined possible money laundering in US property deals involving Trump. The House Intelligence Committee has investigated whether Trump's dealings left him vulnerable to the influence of foreign individuals or governments.



Trump's business practices. On Wednesday night, James' office said she will deliver a 'major national announcement' on

officials about the value of his assets. Vance hasn't disclosed details about his probe, but his lawyers

years of his personal and corporate tax records. The accounting firm has yet to comply as Trump and Vance have battled in court over the validity of the subpoena. Other investigators have requested records from Deutsche Bank, which was one of the few banks willing to lend to Trump after a series of corporate bankruptcies starting in the early 1990s. Trump addressed the case at a White House press briefing on Monday, saying 'This is just a continuation of the witch hunt.' It's Democrat stuff they failed with Mueller they failed with everything,' Trump said, referencing Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, which generally confined itself to allegations of a conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russians. The report preceded a failed Democratic impeachment effort.

investigation in 2017. Trump also said he was barely familiar with the matter, which was reported in the New York Times and a variety of outlets as a court filing was made public. 'There's nothing that I know even about it,' Trump said. 'I said what's this all about? I know nothing about it.' 'It's a terrible thing that they do. It's really a terrible thing. The witch hunt has gone on long enough,' he said. Two congressional committees, both controlled by Democrats, subpoenaed the bank for documents related to Trump, who sued to block their release. Trump has said the investigations are all politically motivated. Earlier this week, he called Vance's investigation 'a continuation of the witch hunt.' After Trump's shock election victory in 2016, his relationship with Deutsche Bank has attracted

The two committees issued subpoenas in April 2019 requiring Deutsche Bank to hand over the banking records of Trump, his children and his businesses. Last month, the Supreme Court ruled that prosecutors in New York could seek Trump's financial records from lenders including Deutsche Bank. It is part of a criminal investigation that began in 2018 into Trump and the Trump Organization, the president's family real estate business, spurred by disclosures of hush payments made to two women who said they had past sexual relationships with him - pornographic film actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal. Trump and his aides have denied the relationships. Investigators hope the records will reveal whether there are any financial links between Trump and Russia's government, sources familiar with the probe have said. Sources within Deutsche Bank have denied any Russian connections to Trump loans. At the time he became president in January 2017, Trump owed the bank around \$350 million, according to sources. The Financial Services Committee also issued a subpoena to Capital One, which had maintained a long-term relationship with Trump and has been scrutinized for some of its business practices.

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## TRAVEL



# One pilot brings the world to Iceland

Ancient tales of trolls and magic live on in Iceland, an island nation of volcanoes, lava fields, glaciers and ice caves. To fully explore every corner of the dynamic landscape, unravel local folklore and battle the natural elements, one must take to the skies.

Enter Jón Kjartan Björnsson, the pilot with a mission to show the real Iceland.

Björnsson, a helicopter pilot for 35 years, has taken camera crews, directors and actors to some of the most stunning spots in the country.

The thundering waterfalls and deep valley gorges seen in TV's "Game of Thrones" and the movies "Oblivion" and "Flags of Our Fathers" are thanks to Björnsson's expert navigation skills.

Björnsson explains that since you cannot use a zoom on the wide-angle camera, the trick to getting that intimate feel is moving the actual helicopter close to the shot: "If it feels like you're close, you are close," he

says.

Iceland, the alien planet Although Björnsson loves to showcase his strikingly dramatic country, many of the shots he enables filmmakers to create are not presented as Iceland at all. In fact, Björnsson says, "Whenever directors want to show somewhere on another planet, they shoot in Iceland!"

The aerial filming world is small, explains Björnsson, who describes it as a big family.

The desolate volcanic deserts, glaciers and lush mossy valleys seen on the planets of Eadu and Hoth in "Star Wars," in "Game of Thrones" Land Beyond the Wall, and in Thor's home of Asgard were all filmed in Iceland. Iceland also stands in for an alien planet in the movie "Interstellar," where astronauts travel through a wormhole to find another home after Earth becomes uninhabitable.

And in the post-apocalyptic film "Oblivion," Iceland features as both a war-torn and ravaged Earth as well as its potential

replacement, the planet of Titan. Iceland immersion

In addition to work on feature films and television series, Björnsson is also responsible for getting the director and filming crew in the right spot for the FlyOver Iceland video used in the exhilarating experience based in Reykjavik.

The FlyOver exhibit, currently in Vancouver and Iceland and soon in Las Vegas and Toronto, takes visitors on a sensory ride suspended over a 20-meter (65.6-foot) screen. The experience blends some of those amazing sights depicted on film with the physical sensation of flying, including an actual mist falling on your face from a waterfall.

You might even get a whiff of fresh mountain flowers as you glide over a meadow.

In one stunning sequence in the Iceland film, Björnsson flies right through an impossibly narrow arch that has the whole audience gasping and holding their breath as they feel themselves trying to

make it through the arch.

In fact, he tells CNN Travel the width was very comfortable at about 50 meters, but it sure looks and feels narrow as you embody the role of the silent passenger, sitting beside Björnsson, trusting Björnsson.

The finished footage from FlyOver and Björnsson's other projects - full films and shows -- creates the impression that the audience is right there with him. It's as close as most people can hope to get to many of Iceland's otherwise inaccessible territory. Remarkably for a man who has been flying professionally for over three decades, Björnsson says he is actually scared of heights and prefers low-level flying.

One scene in the eight-and-a-half-minute minimovie takes place at Iceland's highest peak, at 7,000 plus feet (2,134 meters) above sea level. "I almost had to close my eyes sometimes!" Björnsson quips.

Björnsson routinely has the opportunity to fly over places most Icelanders will never visit.

"Most of those sites in FlyOver are pretty difficult to get to unless you have a helicopter. The little lighthouse just south of Iceland is probably the most difficult one. But when you have the helicopter, you can go wherever you like to go!"

That remote and lonely little lighthouse is known as The Þrídrangaviti lighthouse and is located on the Westman Islands, about five miles off the coast of mainland Iceland.

The making of the movie Some parts of the island do not feature in the final cut of director Dave Mossop's 2019 FlyOver Iceland video because weather conditions posed insurmountable obstacles.

Filming took place over a year and a half in all seasons. Mossop says that they were stranded for days in the northern part of the island when bad weather, including sideways snowstorms and zero light, made it impossible to film or to leave. This part of the country seldom sees tourists and locals had warned Mossop that flying and filming would be difficult. The challenging shoots, nonetheless, reaped great rewards: The helicopter's positioning gives viewers a grasp of the sheer scale of Iceland's glaciers, not visible in this way by land -- or even accessible.

Black sands, lava fields and deep green valleys look like a series of dramatic canvas landscapes stitched together into one true masterpiece. "One of the most remote places that we got to visit and one that you would never be able to experience in its full effect from the ground is called the Tungnaa river, and I think it's one of the seven wonders of the world."

## Microsoft Flight Simulator's 2020 reboot may be the safest way to fly this year

Avgeek desktop gamers and wannabe airline captains can finally get the high-altitude fix they've been craving. Following a prolonged period of hibernation, the rebooted Microsoft Flight Simulator, officially available on August 18, could be the perfect antidote to pandemic-induced cabin fever - or to airplane cabin withdrawal symptoms, for those who've been bumped off their real-world flight plans due to Covid-19.

Getting misty-eyed over the imminent demise of the "Queen of the Skies"? Flight Simulator will let you fly your very own Boeing 747 on that round-the-world trip you had to cancel this year.

Or if looping the loop over the

snow-capped Pyrenees is your thing, the new flightsim helps users master the controls of a Pitts aerobatic plane as it slices through snow and wind effects that mirror real-world weather, derived in real time from climatic data sources. Alternatively, if you didn't manage to get your skiing holiday in this spring break, you could go off-piste and get some digital solace by landing your Cessna Citation executive jet at Courchevel Altiport.

Reality? Check. Photo-realistic graphics are a given in the world of online gaming, but what separates this sim from its rivals is the facility to fly anywhere in a world reconstructed from high-definition satellite-generated

Microsoft Bing mapping imagery.

Bing data is siphoned through Microsoft's machine-learning technology which then builds 1.5 billion houses and 2 trillion trees -- not to mention 37,000 airports, all hand-touched to ensure that each runway has the right length and that taxiways and parking stands are marked correctly.

The colossal quantity of data required to simulate this realistic world in real time is managed using Microsoft's Azure cloud-based platform. Azure does the heavy lifting, so your home computer doesn't need to be of the super-duper variety to deliver a convincing experience.

Take off from London City Airport



on a frosty morning, and as you pass the Shard you can even peer through the glinting glazed superstructure into the highly detailed interior of the building - just one of many architectural icons that have been modeled in geek-satisfying ultra-high-resolution to bring a sense of realism that transcends the

norm for digital games. That's quite a feat for a sim that many fans had assumed, just a few years ago, would never be resurrected, or supported by Microsoft -- given that the last revision was with the release of Microsoft Flight Simulator X (FSX), its 10th version, in 2006.



## ENTERTAINMENT

## Cameron Diaz reveals why she quit acting in interview with Gwyneth Paltrow

Former Hollywood star Cameron Diaz has revealed her reasons for retiring from the movie business, saying she found "peace" when she quit acting. Diaz appeared on Gwyneth Paltrow's "In Good Health: The Sessions" series Wednesday, discussing her wine business, how her mentality changed as she got older and the impact her career had on her well-being and relationships.

"I just decided that I wanted different things out of my life. I had gone so hard for so long, working, making films and it's such a grind," said Diaz. "I didn't really make any space for my personal life."

Diaz, 47, was nominated for four

Golden Globes over the course of a 20-year career that ran from 1994-2014. She is best known for her roles in "The Mask" (1994), "There's Something About Mary" (1998) and "Vanilla Sky" (2001).

When asked what it felt like to walk away from a successful movie career, she replied: "A peace. I got a peace in my soul." She added: "I finally was taking care of myself."

The former actor said she decided to really focus on her relationships with family and friends after handing over control of certain aspects of her life to other people for many years.

"When you're making a movie, it's a perfect excuse -- they own you. You're

there for 12 hours a day for months on end and you have no time for anything else," she said.

"Actors are infantilized. We're put in a position where everything is taken care of for us."

Diaz said she never really felt comfortable with that sort of life, and had to take back responsibility after retiring. She decided to become "self-sufficient" and prove she could take care of herself as an adult, "putting all the pieces of my life together the way that I wanted it to be put together, not how other people thought it should go."

Diaz also said it's "intense" being in the public eye.

"There's a lot of energy coming at you at all times when you're really visible as an actor and doing press and putting yourself out there," she said.

Diaz has released two books -- "The Body Book" and "The Longevity Book" -- and married Good Charlotte singer Benji Madden in 2015. The couple announced earlier this year the birth of their daughter Raddix Madden.



## August 5: A tribute to the values of the Republic



**Mughal-e-Azam, exactly 60 years ago, displayed a bold imagination of the nation, law, governance and dissent**

As the triumphant narratives of August 5, celebrating the bhoomi puja that marks the beginning of the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya get recorded in history, they will inaugurate a new majoritarian identity for a Republic that was hitherto proudly upheld as a secular, democratic polity where all religions of the nation and their followers had equal rights. Some of us, however, would like to remember this date for a different reason that is cause for celebration as well. August 5, also marked the 60th anniversary of K Asif's dream project, the magnificent Mughal-e-Azam, that released on this date at Maratha Mandir in Bombay to massive crowds, eagerly awaiting a film that had been 15 years in the making. The difference between the two events - equally popular - could not be starker. The Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP) leaders who were present at the bhoomi puja, and others who were not in attendance, were instrumental in initiating and encouraging imaginaries of a majoritarian Hindu India. For them, the

destruction of a monument such as the Babri masjid, which they claim was built on a site that was the exact birthplace of lord Ram, was crucial to overcome centuries of humiliation at the hands of "foreign rule". This dream project is now set to be realised, and with it, we will see the birth of a new Republic that goes against the founding principles of this nation. So how does Mughal-e-Azam represent a different imaginary of the Republic? Can a film that has its roots in a play that was written in 1922 in Lahore - Anarkali by Iqbal; that was read and appreciated by several luminaries all over north India, including Rabindranath Tagore; that was realised on screen several times; and that colonised the imagination of K Asif when he first encountered it in 1944 as a 20-year-old, embody different imaginaries of nationhood, law,

## CBI files FIR over Sushant Singh's death, names Rhea Chakraborty as accused



The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday registered an FIR in Sushant Singh Rajput death case, after a Central notification on Wednesday handed over the case to the agency on the recommendation of the Bihar government, said agency officials. The FIR filed by the agency is based on the one registered by Bihar police in Patna and names Rhea Chakraborty, her parents, her brother Showik apart from two others for suspected offences of criminal conspiracy, abetment of suicide, wrongful restraint, wrongful

confinement, theft, criminal breach of trust, cheating and criminal intimidation. "The investigation of FIR No. 241/2020 dated 25.07.2020 registered u/s 341, 342, 380, 406, 420, 306, 506, 120B IPC, PS- Rajiv Nagar, District-Patna, related to death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput has been transferred to Central Bureau of Investigation for investigation," the CBI FIR says. The agency had earlier said that it was in touch with Bihar police, which had

first registered the FIR against Sushant's former live in partner Rhea Chakraborty and his family members on his father's complaint. "A regular case is therefore registered u/s 341, 342, 380, 406, 420, 306, 506, 120B IPC against (1) Rhea Chakraborty and her family members (2) Shri Indarjit Chakraborty, (3) Smt. Sandhya Chakraborty, (4) Sh. Showik Chakraborty, (5) Sh Samuel Miranda, and (6) Mrs Shruti Modi and others," the CBI FIR states further.

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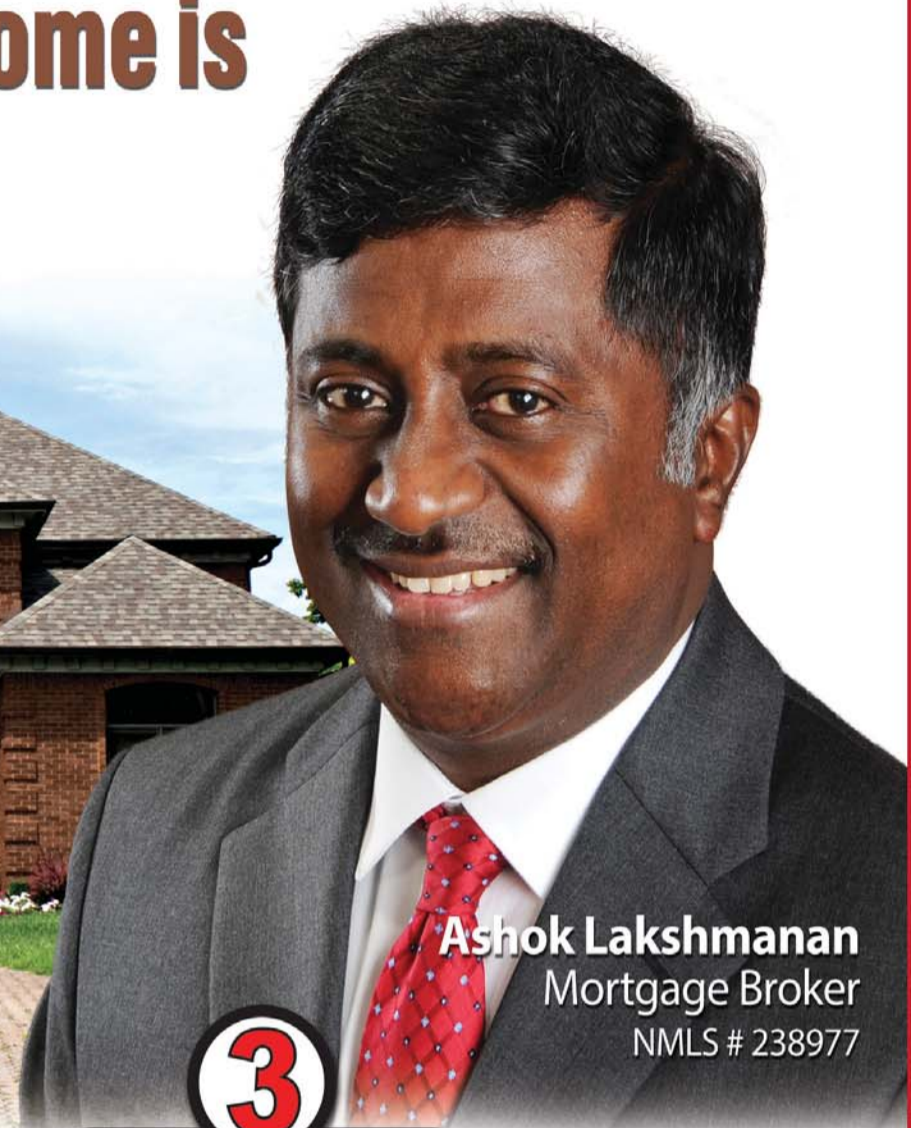
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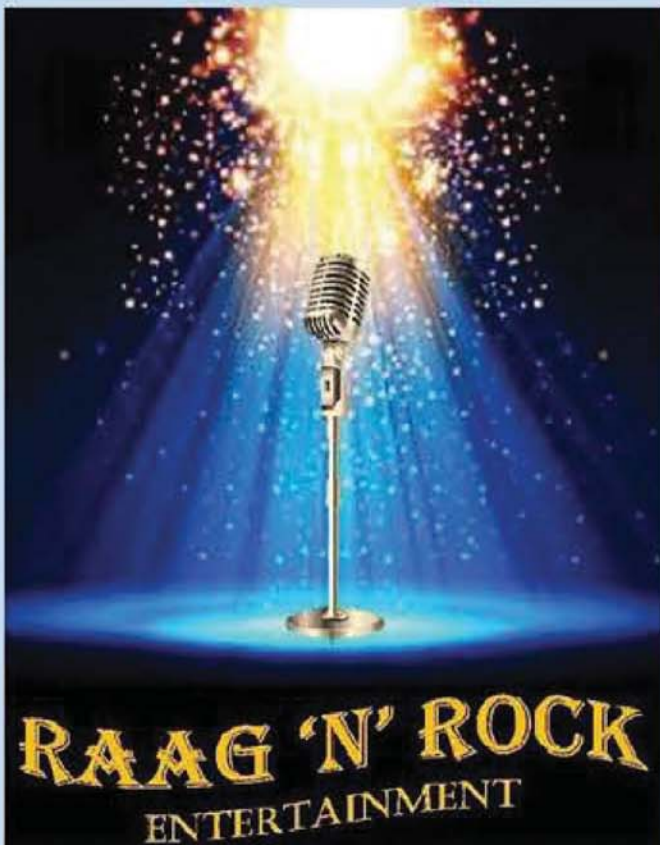
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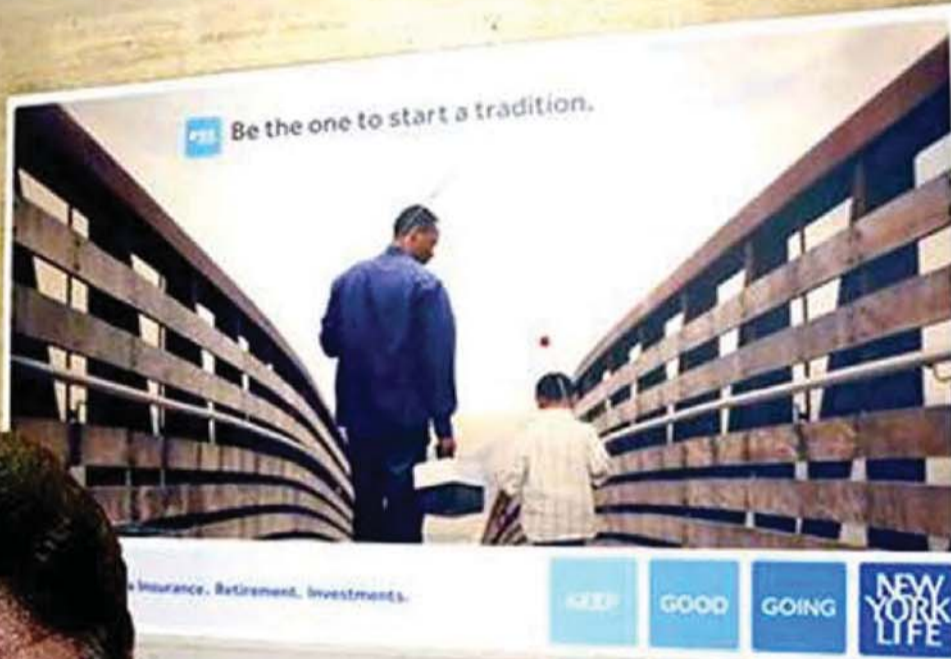
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