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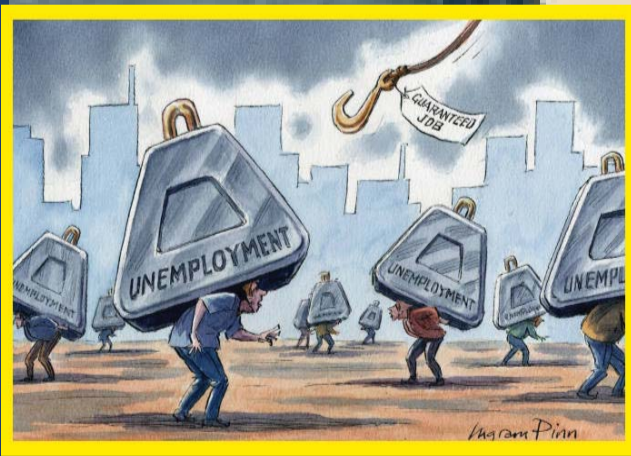
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'A Very Dangerous Game'

US Congress set for brawl as unemployment cliff looms

Next week, Millions of Americans who are out of work due to COVID- 19 will see a drastic reduction in their unemployment benefits despite this pandemic being far from over.



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FRONT PAGE FEATURE

A Very Dangerous Game

US Congress - Act now. Extend unemployment benefits for struggling workers

The week is drawing to a close without a new coronavirus relief package from Washington. The CARES Act sailed through Congress in March with bipartisan support for an extra \$600 per week for anyone collecting unemployment. But those payments are about to stop, and Republicans, who control the Senate and White House, are balking at an extension. That's bad news for laid-off workers in Massachusetts, which has the nation's highest unemployment rate. The state's congressional delegation is worried about benefits expiring, unless there's a deal soon.

Republicans are playing a very dangerous game with Americans' lives," said Rep. Katherine Clark, vice chair of the House Democratic Caucus. "Twenty million Americans will see their weekly income fall by half if the Republicans allow these unemployment benefits to expire." No state would be hit harder than Massachusetts, with its 17.4% unemployment rate — more than 6 points higher than the national average. Republicans correctly



point out that the extra \$600 per week allows some people to collect more than they made when working. Rep. Lori Trahan, a Lowell Democrat, said her party may be open to a compromise that lowers the payment. "Absolutely we should be having that discussion," she said. "I'm open to tweaks, but letting the benefit expire or dwindling it down to a place where it's no benefit at all will have long-lasting and devastating

effects." Trahan said she's concerned about effects on the Massachusetts economy and public health. Laid-off workers won't be left with nothing if the extra payments run out. They'd still get the state's standard unemployment benefit, which amounts to about half of their regular earnings. Rep. Stephen Lynch, a South Boston Democrat, said they shouldn't have to settle for that. "I'm optimistic" about a deal with

Republicans, Lynch said. "I think that because of the way some of these Southern states are now lit up with coronavirus, they realize that their constituents are in a difficult position. So, I think that's helping the argument over in the Senate." Lynch is betting lawmakers from red states will want to send extra help to their own communities, especially with fall elections approaching. And a new federal relief package would also benefit unemployed workers in Massachusetts. Rep. Joe Kennedy, the Newton Democrat challenging Sen. Ed Markey, said in a statement that "the Senate must take up the HEROES Act," referring to a bill House Democrats passed two months ago that would have paid the extra \$600 unemployment benefit through the end of January. The bill "not only provides the much-needed cash assistance to help hardworking American families get through these times," Kennedy added, "but it also brings in the money states need for testing, tracing and more to ensure we can fight off this pandemic."

Delegation Worries Unemployment Benefits May Expire

Next week, thousands of North Carolinians who are out of work due to COVID-19 will see a drastic reduction in their unemployment benefits despite this pandemic being far from over.

The additional \$600 a week unemployed workers have received from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program has been a lifeline for struggling families and communities over these past few months.

But unless the federal government acts quickly, these benefits will expire this weekend and many people will be without money they need to pay bills and provide for their families. I am urging Congress to do the right thing for the health of our families and the health of our economy by extending this critical program.

The people who rely on these benefits are out of work through no fault of their own. We've seen COVID-19 create the highest unemployment since World War II and completely change our way of life. But it hasn't changed the fact that people still need to pay their rent, put food on the table and make ends meet.

The federal government agreed to



send an additional \$600 to unemployed workers back in March. It's irresponsible for Congress and the president to stop providing this critical support now when the virus still is spreading rapidly and states, especially in the South, are seeing record high case counts. Hospitals and ICU beds are full in Florida and Texas, and the virus is worse than it was in March and April. North Carolina still has hospital capacity, but we know how quickly that could change. It's not safe for some people to go back to work and many don't have jobs to return to yet. Benefits from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation

program have not only helped people pay their bills — they've been critical to the health of our local businesses when unemployed people use their benefits to put money into the economy by purchasing food, paying rent and buying other necessities. So far, between the state and federal benefits, North Carolina has paid over 815,000 people more than \$6.2 billion dollars here in our state. And this spring, my administration took executive action to make sure these benefits were accessible to more furloughed North Carolinians. This funding has a multiplier effect

on our communities, going from families' pockets back into local small businesses, which helps keep our economy afloat. If these benefits are cut off, it will hurt the unemployed as well as our local economies. This extra \$600 has been particularly important in North Carolina. Several years ago, our state legislature slashed unemployment insurance benefits to one of the lowest in the nation and made them available for only 12 weeks. By comparison, a South Carolinian can receive benefits for up to 20 weeks and a Virginian for up to 26 weeks. Legislators had the opportunity to change this during their last session but did not. I urge our legislature to re-evaluate our state's own unemployment compensation when they return. But, right now, North Carolinians need immediate action from Congress and the president. For months, we have asked people to do their part to fight this virus — wear masks, set aside family traditions, become homeschool teachers overnight. Now it's time for Washington to do its part and support the people and families who have made these sacrifices.

FRONT PAGE FEATURE

GOP struggles with overhaul of unemployment system, complicating negotiations over \$1 trillion stimulus

The temporary \$600 weekly benefit expires next week, and Republicans are seeking a way to scale it back

By Jeff Stein and Erica Werner, Courtesy The Washington Post

With days to go before enhanced jobless benefits expire, the White House and Senate Republicans are struggling to design a way to scale back the program without overwhelming state unemployment agencies and imperiling aid to more than 20 million Americans. The hangup has led to the surprising delay in the introduction of the GOP's \$1 trillion stimulus package. Administration officials and GOP lawmakers have said they want to cut but not outright eliminate enhanced federal unemployment benefits, but the final shape of the plan remains in flux. The White House and Senate Republicans are now racing to find a solution, hoping to unveil their joint plan early next week, just a few days before the \$600 weekly federal payment runs out. "We realize there are a lot of hard-working Americans because of covid [who] still won't have jobs," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told reporters on Thursday. Typically, state unemployment pays about 45 percent of a worker's prior wages. In March, Congress approved a \$600-per-week emergency bonus for every unemployed worker on top of that traditional payment, funneling hundreds of billions of dollars to newly jobless Americans as the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the country.

That federal benefit, currently being received by more than 20 million people, is set to expire at the end of this month. And it comes at a time when a



federal eviction moratorium is also ending, a dynamic that could put enormous pressure on cash-strapped families.

In practice, the jobless benefit lapse means that millions of workers are seeing their last enhanced benefit payment this week. In recent days, senior congressional Republicans and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin have discussed replacing this universal federal bonus with one tied to workers' income before their job was lost. Instead of sending a \$600-per-week bonus to every unemployed person, under this plan the federal government would provide a bonus amounting to about half of the existing state bonus, according to three senior GOP officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe fast-moving and internal deliberations. Mnuchin and President Trump have said publicly that they want to have the new payments replace

roughly "70 percent" of a worker's prior income. This would represent a combination of the nearly 50 percent state contribution of a worker's prior income plus an additional 25 percent kicked in by the federal government. Republican lawmakers have discussed extending the flat payment at about \$200-per-week instead of \$600 to give the states time to adjust to the new formula and system.

"We are going to extend it on the basis of wage replacement — it's approximately at 70 percent of wage replacement," Mnuchin told reporters on Thursday about the GOP's proposed plan. Other leading Republican lawmakers have argued for cutting the \$600-per-week bonus down to \$200-per-week, these people said, with one possibility being that this amount slowly phases out over time. These GOP officials have insisted that targeted wage replacement could prove too difficult for the states to implement.

One Senate Republican aide close to the negotiations, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal matters, said that a \$200 flat payment represented the party's "default" position, with additional funding included to help states upgrade their unemployment systems. The aide downplayed the odds of the GOP approving the more complicated replacement instead of the \$200-per-week extension. The issue has helped delay the introduction of the \$1 trillion stimulus package Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) had planned to release on Thursday. Republicans debated last-minute changes to the unemployment insurance section of the proposal, according to the three people aware of the deliberations.

The legislation is now expected to be released on Monday, a delay that has prompted scorching criticism from

congressional Democrats who have been demanding action for months. Congress has not passed any coronavirus relief legislation since approving four bipartisan bills in March and April that pumped around \$3 trillion into the economy. McConnell wanted to wait and see how the unemployment benefits and other programs approved in that unprecedented stimulus effort played out before taking additional action. "This weekend, millions of Americans will lose their unemployment insurance, will be at risk of being evicted from their homes, and could be laid off by state and local government, and there is only one reason: Republicans have been dithering for months while America's crisis deepens," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a joint statement Friday.

'A very dark feeling': Hundreds camp out in Oklahoma unemployment lines Workers are pushed to the brink as they continue to wait for delayed unemployment payments

If adopted, the new unemployment plan could complicate negotiations with congressional Democrats, who favor extending the \$600 weekly payment through January. And it's unclear if balky state processing systems would have the bandwidth to implement a complicated new formula on such short notice. "We're dealing with the mechanical issues associated with that," Mnuchin told reporters about the wage replacement plan.

Congress set for brawl as unemployment cliff looms

Congress is barreling toward a showdown over federal unemployment benefits, with millions of Americans hanging in the balance. As part of the March \$2.2 trillion coronavirus bill, Congress agreed to a \$600-per-week boost of unemployment benefits, but those are set to start expiring in a matter of days. What to replace it with is shaping up to be a clash as lawmakers and the White House prepare to negotiate the fifth coronavirus bill. "What's going to happen on Saturday, all the pain, all the suffering ... did not have to happen," Sen. Ron Wyden (Ore.), the top Democrat on the Finance Committee, said of the looming deadline. The statistics are stark: 1.4 million Americans applied for unemployment insurance last

week, according to Department of Labor data released Thursday, the first increase since March. Roughly 32 million Americans are unemployed and the national jobless rate is just above 11 percent. But a lapse of the current federal benefit appears unavoidable. Both the White House and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) say they want a deal by the end of next week, when the benefits drafted as part of the March bill will expire. But Congress is all but guaranteed to not meet that deadline; Republicans won't unveil their coronavirus proposal until early next week and bipartisan negotiations on the next package are largely nonexistent. Even if Congress somehow managed

that herculean task they are likely already out of time to prevent a lapse: Because the end of the month falls on a Friday, states would need an extension before July 25 or July 26 to fully cover the last week of July, which spills into August. And the two sides remain far apart about what to replace the \$600 per week measure with, underscoring the difficulty in getting a quick agreement. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told reporters that the forthcoming Republican proposal — which was expected to be released Thursday but slipped to Monday — will provide a roughly 70 percent wage replacement compared to what an individual was making before they were laid off through the end of the year.

FRONT PAGE FEATURE

Here's what we know is in the Republican coronavirus relief bill

Republicans do not plan to release a coronavirus relief bill until next week, but their proposal has mostly taken shape as Senate GOP leaders and the White House say they have reached a tentative deal.

Congress faces pressure to pass more legislation in the coming days to combat the damage from a raging outbreak. States will stop paying out the \$600 per week enhanced federal unemployment benefit at the end of the week as the U.S. reports more than 4 million Covid-19 cases and at least 144,000 deaths from the disease.

As Senate Republicans and the Trump administration hammer out final details of a bill they previously hoped to release this week, provisions in the plan could change. Democrats, who passed their own relief package in the House in May, will look to reshape major parts of the GOP legislation.

Senate Republican leaders and White House negotiators outlined much, but not all, of what the proposal would include this week.

It would extend enhanced federal unemployment insurance but "based on approximately 70% wage replacement," according to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has described a continuation as "temporary." As of earlier this week, Republicans were considering paying out the supplemental aid through December, sources told CNBC.

The plan would send another round of direct payments to Americans. It is unclear now if the bill would keep the same terms of eligibility as the stimulus checks approved in March (\$1,200 to individuals and \$2,400 to couples, which started to phase out at an average income of \$75,000 per person and ended completely



at an average income of \$99,000). On Friday, McConnell said "we do envision another round of direct cash payments particularly those making \$40,000 a year and less in the hospitality industry."

It would protect businesses, doctors and universities from coronavirus-related lawsuits except for cases of "gross negligence and intentional misconduct," according to McConnell. He has described the provision as a "red line" in talks with Democrats.

The legislation would include \$105 billion to help schools restart, with at least part of the funding contingent on them opening their doors in the fall.

The bill would authorize what Republicans have called a targeted second round of Paycheck Protection Program loans for small businesses hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Mnuchin said the aid could go to companies whose revenues have fallen more than 50%.

In addition to those pieces of the plan, Republicans have said their bill will include \$16 billion in new funds for coronavirus testing and tax incentives to encourage

companies to rehire workers and adopt safety measures.

GOP officials still need to come to a consensus among themselves even before Democrats join the discussions. On Thursday, McConnell said the Trump administration "has requested additional time to review the fine details."

Then on Friday, he said Republicans were developing a proposal they plan to release on Monday. After its release, "we'll be sitting down with the Democrats to see what we can agree to do going forward," he added.

Letting the extra unemployment benefit lapse even for a few weeks could have major ripple effects. The payments will end around the same time a federal moratorium on evictions does. The additional funds have not only helped the roughly 30 million people still getting some form of unemployment insurance cover food and housing costs, but also have boosted consumer spending at a time when many businesses are still closed.

Democrats have blamed Republicans throughout the week for the delays in passing

new relief. In a joint statement Friday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said "we had expected to be working throughout this weekend to find common ground on the next COVID response package."

"It is simply unacceptable that Republicans have had this entire time to reach consensus among themselves and continue to flail," they said. "Time is of the essence and lives are being lost."

McConnell said Thursday that when the GOP releases a bill, he hopes Democrats "meet our serious, fact-based proposal with the productive and bipartisan spirit that got us the CARES Act, rather than the cynical partisanship that led them to block" a Republican-written police reform proposal last month.

Democrats have signaled they will push Republicans to make changes on several major pieces of the plan. On Thursday, Pelosi said she will continue to call for extension of the \$600 per week unemployment benefit at its current level.

She reiterated Friday that she would not agree to a short-

term extension of the unemployment benefit while Congress negotiates a broader bill, saying she wants to pass a full relief package.

The bill that passed the House in May would extend it into January. Schumer previously signed on to a proposal that would automatically reduce the benefit as state unemployment rates fall below certain thresholds.

Pelosi and Schumer have also insisted on nearly \$1 trillion in aid for states and municipalities as governments facing lost revenue and increased expenses during the pandemic consider laying off workers. National Governors Association Chair Larry Hogan, a Republican from Maryland, and Vice Chair Andrew Cuomo, a New York Democrat, have repeatedly

called on Congress to approve at least \$500 billion more in relief for states. The GOP proposal would give states and municipalities more flexibility in how they spend aid approved earlier this year but would not authorize new money.

Democrats also want to include rent and mortgage assistance in the developing bill.

INDIAN-CURRENT AFFAIRS

India to boost Rafale capabilities with HAMMER missiles under emergency order: Report



HAMMER (Highly Agile Modular Mmunition Extended Range) is a medium-range air-to-ground weapon designed and manufactured for the French Air Force and Navy initially.

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The HAMMERs would give India the capability to take out any bunkers or hardened shelters in any type of terrain including the mountainous locations such as Eastern Ladakh, the sources said.

When asked to comment, an IAF spokesperson refused to confirm or deny the developments related to the new acquisition.

Five Rafale would be arriving in India from France on July 29 and their advanced weaponry including the long-range SCALP and Meteor missiles would have reached India before their touchdown.

The first five Rafale fighter aircraft would start arriving in India by July 29 flown by pilots of the 17 Golden Arrows commanding officer.

The delivery of the aircraft was earlier supposed to have been done by May end but this was postponed by two months in view of the Covid-19 situation in both India and France.

The trainers will have the tail numbers of the RB series in honour of the Air Force Chief RKS Bhadauria who played a pivotal role in finalising India's largest-ever defence deal for 36 Rafale combat aircraft.

The aircraft on their way from France to India would be refuelled by a French Air Force tanker aircraft in the air around Israel or Greece before they make a stopover in the Middle East. India

had signed a deal worth over Rs 60,000 crore with France in September 2016 for 36 Rafales to meet the emergency requirements of the Indian Air Force.

Air Chief Marshal Bhadauria was the Deputy Chief of Air Staff at that time and headed the Indian negotiation team for the deal which is the biggest ever in monetary terms in India. Armed with the long-range Meteor air to air missiles and SCALP, the Rafales would give India an edge over both Pakistan and China in terms of air strike capability.

Sources said the air to air and the air to ground strike capabilities of the Rafale cannot be matched by both China and Pakistan and the aircraft would give India an edge over both the rivals.

With the Rafales arriving in the country in the middle of a dispute with China, the Indian Air Force is further boosting the capabilities of the combat aircraft by equipping it with the HAMMER missiles from France. The order for the HAMMER standoff missiles with the capability to take out any type of targets at the range of around 60-70 kms is being processed under the emergency powers for acquisition given to the armed forces by the Narendra Modi

government.

"The order for the HAMMER missiles is being processed and the French authorities have agreed to supply them to us at a short notice for our Rafale combat aircraft," government sources told ANI.

In view of the urgent requirement for these missiles by the Air Force, the French authorities would be delivering the systems to India from the existing stock meant for some other customer, they said.

India, Israel developing Covid rapid testing kit for results in less than 30 seconds



The Israeli embassy acknowledged India's help when the pandemic hit that country and said Israel now wants to reciprocate.

help to Israel when the pandemic hit that country and now wants to reciprocate. "In the first outbreak of Covid-19 in Israel, India gave Israel special authorization to acquire medicine, masks & protective gear. Now, Israel is proud to reciprocate this significant gesture & grant authorization for purchasing of respirators to its great friend in the east," the embassy said in another tweet. Israel's Covid-19 tally

stands at over 56,000 out of which more than 23,000 have recovered and 433 have died. Israeli ambassador to India, Ron Malka said, "I am proud to lead this Israeli delegation to India. It is at times like this that our friendship is tested, and the State of Israel is happy to lend a helping hand to India in this complicated and difficult time." During a phone conversation in June, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart

Benjamin Netanyahu "agreed the post-Covid world would create further avenues for mutually beneficial partnerships in many areas", according to a readout from the external affairs ministry. They discussed potential areas in which India and Israel could expand cooperation in the context of the pandemic, including research and development in vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.

An unprecedented anti-Covid-19 cooperation operation between India and Israel is on the anvil as the two countries are racing to develop rapid testing for the virus that could give results in under 30 seconds, the embassy of Israel in India said Thursday. "In the coming weeks, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Israel Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Health will lead an unprecedented anti-Covid 19 cooperation n between India and Israel," the embassy tweeted. "A special planned flight from Tel Aviv to New Delhi is set to carry a high ranking Ministry of Defence, R&D team which has been working with India's chief scientist K. Vijay Raghavan and DRDO to develop rapid testing for #Covid_19 in under 30 seconds," it said in another tweet.

Professor Krishnaswamy Vijay Raghavan is thr government's principal scientific adviser . The embassy acknowledged India's

General households to cut and store waste masks, gloves for 72 hours before disposing of: CPCB

In its latest guidelines on disposal of Covid-19 waste, pollution watchdog CPCB has directed that masks and gloves used by everyone, whether infected or not, should be cut and kept in paper bags for minimum 72 hours before disposing of them.

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) also directed commercial establishments like malls and offices to follow the same procedure with discarded protective personal equipment (PPE) from general public.

"Discarded PPEs from general public at commercial establishments, shopping malls, institutions, offices, etc. should

be stored in separate bin for 3 days, thereafter, disposed of as dry general solid waste after cutting/shredding.

"Waste masks and gloves in general households should be kept in paper bag for a minimum of 72 hours prior to disposal of the same as dry general solid waste after cutting the same to prevent reuse," the CPCB said. This is the fourth time the CPCB has issued guidelines on management of bio-medical waste generated from coronavirus. It, however, said that leftover food and empty water bottles handled by infected patients should not be collected along with bio-medical waste but with other general

solid waste. "Leftover food, empty juice bottles or tetra packs, empty water bottles, packaging material, and any other items, generated or handled by Covid-19 patient should be collected along with other general solid waste in bags securely tied for handing over to waste collectors. "Yellow coloured bag should not be used for general solid waste," it said. Yellow bags are dedicated for bio-medical waste from Covid-19, as per the guidelines issued time and again. The CPCB also recommended use of bio-degradable or non-disposable cutlery to minimize waste generation.

INDIAN-CURRENT AFFAIRS



Ashok Gehlot asks for testing 'horse trading' audio clips in US, escalates attack on BJP minister

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot has thrown a challenge to get the audio clips, purportedly carrying evidence of Union minister Gajendra Shekhawat's involvement in alleged attempts to dislodge Rajasthan government, tested in a forensic lab in the United States to prove its veracity. Gehlot also said that those, whose voices are alleged to be on the audio clips, should get their voice tested to clear their names in the MLA horse-trading case being investigated by the state police. "If they think they don't trust the Rajasthan government, then they can send the audio-tapes to the FSL agency in the US for a voice test. They should step forward and undergo a voice test," Gehlot was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

In an indirect reference to Shekhawat, Gehlot added that Union ministers, MLAs or MPs give speeches and

therefore their voice is easily recognizable. Shekhawat, a senior BJP leader from Rajasthan, has denied his involvement in the case and rejected claims that one of the voices on the three audio clips being probed by the police is his. Gehlot dismissed Shekhawat's defence and said that the truth will win in the end.

"Still, the first reaction always is 'it wasn't my voice'. They are also threatening people. Nothing is going to work. Satyamev Jayate," the news agency quoted him as saying. Gehlot has

upped the ante against Shekhawat and demanded that he subjects himself to the investigation in the case of alleged horse trading of MLAs aimed to overthrow his government. He and his party has accused BJP leaders of hatching the alleged plot in connivance with Congress rebels led by Sachin Pilot, the former deputy chief minister and head of the party's state unit. Gehlot even wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi last Sunday naming Shekhawat as one of the BJP leaders allegedly involved in the act. He also referred to Sachin Pilot and

MLAs supporting him as "over ambitious leaders" in his own party, who were purportedly hand in glove with the BJP to bring down his government. Sachin Pilot has denied involvement with the BJP and rejected conjectures that he may join the party soon.

The BJP leaders in Rajasthan have, however, rejected Gehlot's accusations and said his government was in trouble due to internal differences with his own party and alleged failure in governance. Gehlot's government is also locked in a legal battle with Sachin Pilot and his

followers over a disqualification notice served to 19 party rebels by the assembly speaker. The Rajasthan High Court is expected to announce its verdict on a petition filed by Pilot, challenging the disqualification notices. Congress has also petitioned the Supreme Court in the same case asking it to prevent any interference in the proceedings before the speaker takes a decision on the matter. The SC, however, refused to stop the high court from announcing its verdict in the case.

India's second national-level plasma bank opened in Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu health minister also said that the state has conducted 2 million tests for Covid-19 so far and has the highest number in terms of testing compared to other states.

After national capital, India's second national-level plasma bank was opened in Tamil Nadu at a cost of Rs 2.34 crore, C Vijaybhaskar, health minister, Tamil Nadu said here on Thursday.

"We were earlier conducting the plasma method on a trial basis.

Four people in Madurai successfully underwent the process in the early stages and a few more banks will be set up in nearby districts. We now have the approval of the Indian Council of Medical Research and have opened the second plasma bank at the national level with a

total budget of Rs 2.34 crore," said Vijaybhaskar. He added, "After a Covid-19 patient is discharged, the patient has to wait for 14 days before they can donate their plasma. Plasma will be separated from the blood, which can be stored and used for up to one year."

Vijaybhaskar also mentioned that a committee was constituted to discuss the death count and it was recommended that 444 deaths be added to the Covid-19 deaths toll in the state. "We have conducted 2 million tests so far and have the highest number in terms of testing



compared to other states," reported a total of 186,492 Covid-19 cases, including 51,765 active cases, 131,583 recoveries and 3,144 deaths.

EC defers bypolls for one LS, 7 assembly seats due to 'extraordinary circumstances'

The Election Commission has deferred by-elections for one Lok Sabha and seven assembly seats due to "some extraordinary circumstances peculiar to these constituencies" and the poll panel will meet on Friday to discuss scheduling of these bypolls. The states where the bypolls have been deferred are --Valmiki Nagar Lok Sabha seat in Bihar, two assembly seats each in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, and one each in Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. Most of these seats fell vacant due to the death of sitting members. A senior EC official said the Covid-19 pandemic and the flood situation were two reasons behind the decision. As per the electoral law, EC has to hold bye-elections within 180 days (six months) of a seat falling vacant, another official pointed out. The six-month deadline to hold by-elections in these eight seats was ending on different dates in July, August and

September respectively. When the EC assessed the situation, it found that it is difficult to adhere to the six-month deadline in these seats, and approached the Union law ministry to defer the polls, the official said. Under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, in certain cases, the EC, in consultation with the Central government (the Union law ministry), certifies that it is difficult to hold the by-election within the six-month period. Using this provision, the poll panel issued a certificate on July 22 to defer the elections in these eight seats. In a statement, the Commission said on Thursday that "this matter of timing etc of by-elections is also slotted for discussion in the Election Commission meeting to be held tomorrow" (Friday). The statement said the total number of by-elections due is 56 assembly constituencies and one Lok Sabha seat (including the eight deferred)."

Kerala gold smuggling case

After outrage, transfer of customs officials deferred for now

Following the outrage over the transfer of key customs officials who are investigating the Kerala gold smuggling case, the order was withdrawn on Thursday. The Union Home Ministry has expressed serious reservations over the issue saying such a controversy should have been avoided when the investigation was continuing on the right track, a senior official familiar with the development said. The sudden transfer order of six superintendents and two inspectors attached with the Kochi unit of the Customs who are part of the ongoing investigation was issued by Mohammad Yousaf, Commissioner of Customs, late on Wednesday. After the issue triggered a controversy, the Customs department made it clear that it was a routine transfer and it was deferred for the time being. "There are

enough pressures as the investigation is progressing. The transfer drama can be part of it. It seems many who are part of the syndicate are rattled," said a senior official, who did not want to be identified. He said the multi-agency probe is moving in the right direction. The gold smuggling case came to light on July 5, when P S Sarith, a former employee of the UAE consulate in the state capital, was arrested when he came to receive a consignment in the name of an official of the consulate. Later, 30 kg gold was retrieved from the consignment. Five days later, Swapna Suresh, a senior IT official and her friend Sandip Nair were arrested from their hideout in Bengaluru. The Enforcement Directorate has formally arrested three key accused, Sarith, Suresh and K T Ramees, another accomplice.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Overcome the malaise of defection

Create a new framework to govern actions of legislators, election of speaker, role of governor



This is not about Rajasthan (full disclosure; I am arguing for the speaker in the high court) nor Madhya Pradesh or Karnataka, though paradigms can be extrapolated from these. This is state-neutral, party-neutral, and politics-neutral. It is about an institutional malaise called defection and party-hopping. It is about every major stakeholder — governor, speaker, defecting Members of Parliament (MPs)/ Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), ruling party defenders and Opposition opportunists — having mud on their face. It is about the need to root out this “constitutional sin” by root surgery.

The body politic needs to decide whether acting like Brutus or changing parties midstream for the loaves and fishes of office is sinful. Innumerable Supreme Court (SC) judgments say it is, as do the elaborate parliamentary debates preceding the anti-defection law enacted in 1985. But the “true” Indian politician has circumvented the best-drafted laws through inimitable and unsurpassable jugaad. Here is how.

First, if the ruling party wants to prolong itself in office with support from other parties’ legislators acting against their own parties, individual pliant speakers are available to never decide disqualification petitions against them for years. The SC’s lament in the Manipur case (2020) is an example. Worse was Tamil Nadu, which footballed the issue between the high court and a non-deciding speaker for years, while a minority government continued. The SC decided the issue by not

deciding in time.

The second jugaad is the engineered resignations of legislators in a ruling dispensation by a desperate Opposition promising them lucrative ministerships if they ensure that the Opposition comes to power. It helps that these “toppling” agents are entitled to at least six months of ministerial portfolios in the new government, even if they fail to get re-elected.

Third, there is always the office

of governor readily available for misuse. The governor seems to be at his master’s bidding, wrongly ready to interfere by giving unsustainable directions to Speakers to have floor tests within 48/72 hours, only to assist the defectors to topple the government and preclude the speaker from discharging his 10th Schedule duties.

Fourth, clear defectors, even after being subjected to ongoing disqualification hearings before the speaker, are advised by

lawyers to file no-confidence motions against the speaker under a misconception of law that the SC, in the Nabam Rebia case, rendered a speaker lame-duck and paralysed him the moment a no-confidence was filed against him. Rebia only cautioned against speakers already facing prior and serious pending no-confidence motions from deciding disqualification issues against their accusers. Otherwise, every pending and prior disqualification proceeding

could be rendered infructuous by the simple expedient of defectors filing subsequent no-confidence motions against the speaker, rendering the 10th Schedule a dead letter.

While individual speakers can certainly be aberrant, generalisations are dangerous. It is forgotten that the speaker is the sole persona designata who can decide disqualification petitions under the 10th Schedule. His job is non-transferable and non-delegable.

The power gap with China

Economic growth is key to foreign policy. Fix it

In a conversation on Monday, external affairs minister S Jaishankar laid out the big picture about how the world has changed and how India sees the world, four decades after he first entered South Block as a junior diplomat. He made a series of significant points. The old bipolar politics of the Cold War between the United States (US) and Soviet Union, with elements of a multipolar system, has given way to a multipolar system with elements of bipolarity between the US and China. The world is more globalised, but it is also, now, witnessing an era of protectionism. Non-alignment was a strategy adopted at a particular time, and while India would not be a part of any alliance system, it could not stay out on critical global issues and once it was in the game, it had to play the game. These



interventions give a glimpse into the Indian worldview. But Mr Jaishankar’s most important point was about the power differential between India and China. He suggested that while the two countries had similar economic trajectories and growth rates in 1988, when Rajiv Gandhi made his historic visit to

Beijing, China has leapfrogged since then — by focusing on economic growth and embracing the world and opportunities therein. India, by contrast, grew too, but as Mr Jaishankar acknowledged, it wasn’t able to industrialise to the extent it should have; manufacturing remained a

weak spot; embrace of the world was somewhat limited; and free trade agreements did not yield the dividends India had hoped for. This power differential — and India’s recognition of the power differential — is significant. It shows a realistic appraisal of the challenge at hand, and underlines what India has to do to compete more effectively. For India, the best foreign policy is a high growth rate. Unless India is able to get its economy right — and what is visible is a slump — its global ambitions will never be met. It will continue to pale in front of China. It will find managing the neighbourhood more difficult. It will become less attractive to its western partners and global businesses. It will not be able to modernise its military. It will not be able to provide global common goods which earns both soft and hard power.

OPINION

Let's talk about Kanye West's damaging and inaccurate claims about Harriet Tubman

By Richard Reddick

Kanye West's campaign rally in South Carolina on Sunday drew our attention with his appalling misinterpretation of Harriet Tubman's legacy when he said Tubman "never actually freed the slaves." Although his comments received much backlash, followed by an intense tweetstorm about his personal life and family, it was too easy for people to dismiss the comments as just a trivial viral sensation.

But it's imperative that we pause and think about how his commentary on Black History gives us a great deal to process about celebrity culture and social media, especially during a time of heightened awareness to systemic racism.

Some are probably wondering, "Why should we listen to Kanye to begin with?" The short answer is that it's less about "why we should" and more about "who will listen." Most have some familiarity with West's creative work. As a talented producer, musician and designer, he has a social media platform that rivals other entertainers and world leaders, so he naturally draws eyes and ears. It is not inconceivable to think that people, who are unaware of African American history and seeking answers, may take what West said as a fact or, at the very least, that his

rhetoric planted a seed of doubt about Tubman's legacy.

In the past, West has recounted his battle with bipolar disorder, so many of us felt we were witnessing a mental health crisis, with someone who needed the intervention and support of loved ones.

It seems that the right reaction was the one captured on social media, when Toni Fulton, who attended and filmed the rally said, "Yo, we leavin' right now," in response to West's false claim about Tubman.

Maybe as a viewing public, we too should leave right now and hope that West gets the support he needs.

On Wednesday, Kim Kardashian West issued a statement on Instagram about her husband. She wrote, "As many of you know, Kanye has bi-polar disorder. Anyone who has this or has a loved one in their life who does, knows how incredibly complicated and painful it is to understand. ... Those who are close with Kanye know his heart and understand his words sometimes do not align with his intentions." She didn't mention any of his comments specifically.

While I and many others hope that West gets the help he needs during this time, it's important that we don't overlook his damaging and inaccurate claims about

Harriet Tubman. His words have power during a time when many people are trying to learn more about Black history while the discussion of systemic racism is at the forefront of international discussion. Accuracy, truth, and humility will bring us all to a common understanding of Tubman's -- and other historical contributors -- work toward social justice and racial equality.

West's mash up of celebrity culture, politics and popular music seems far afield from the zeitgeist 30 years ago. In 1990, hip-hop pioneers Boogie Down Productions released the album *Edutainment*. The group posited that hip-hop can merge education and entertainment to inform listeners of issues impacting the Black community -- paralleling the hip-hop group Public Enemy's Chuck D, who said, "Rap music is the invisible TV station that Black America never had." Implicit in these ideas and comments are the responsibilities inherent in that role.

I would categorize the responsibilities of the socially and politically engaged edutainer/artist/celebrity into three categories: amplification, clarification and magnification. Amplification of the voices of knowledge producers -- academics, scholars, journalists and

artists -- who do not have access to the same platform as celebrities. Clarification works in concert with humility -- the ability to acknowledge new information and note when you're wrong (and bring voices with knowledge to prominence). Magnification is bringing attention to issues overlooked by media, such as the focus on Breonna Taylor's death at the hands of police in Louisville, Kentucky.

In many ways social media has significantly bridged the gap between celebrities and the public; information can be shared in an instant with millions of followers. However, no Instagram post or Twitter thread can substitute for the in-depth analysis and research that comes from engaging with texts and other media -- especially considering the limited average attention span of human beings.

A more hopeful view would be that celebrities leverage social media as a starting point for followers to learn more about a topic. Indeed, social media can elevate traditionally marginalized scholarly voices. For example, movements like #CiteASista are providing ways to ensure that the scholarly contributions of Black women are not on the periphery but are instead centered. **(Contd on page 32)**

India's "Vaccine Games" On Covid-19 Come At Great Risk

Our penchant for somehow "topping the class" is deeply embedded in our cultural psyche. Now, we want to be the first in the world to develop and produce a Covid-19 vaccine, even though many other potential vaccines in the fray are far ahead on the developmental trajectory. One way to win this race is to just declare that we will get there first - and even announce a deadline for the exact date on which this will happen. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - the nodal public agency that leads the official fight against the Covid-19 pandemic - did just that in its letter of July 2, 2020. It stated that "it is envisaged to launch the vaccine for public health use latest by the 15th August 2020 after completion of all clinical trials"! The reference was to Covaxin, a vaccine being developed by Bharat Biotech, a company in Hyderabad, in collaboration with ICMR. The unprecedented fiat that such a short deadline must be met, and the tone of the letter, was met with huge backlash. The main issue is that the numbers relating to the timeline just do not add up, apart from numerous other problems.

The clinical trial of a vaccine, involving

humans, begins after a pre-clinical phase. In this phase, the vaccine is tested on animals and human trials are proposed only if the results look promising.

Phase I of human trials involve only a few candidates, a few tens. The objective is to test safety and dosage levels. Because this is the very first injection of the vaccine into humans, it is often started with just a few individuals in the first few days, who are observed 24x7 for any adverse reactions and tested for their immune system response. This phase can last up to a few months.

Phase II expands the trials to a larger group of people, ranging up to several hundreds. The groups are diverse - for instance, in terms of age and gender - so that different responses can be captured. The aim here is also to assess safety, and the kind and level of antibodies that get generated. Only if the right type of antibodies develop and persist in significant concentrations, does the trial proceed to Phase III.

Phase III is to check if the vaccine is really effective in very large groups of people (efficacy), as large as tens of

thousands. The objective is to assess the prevalence, or lack of, the disease in a "real life" scenario. Placebo testing also happens in this phase. This trial can take years because it is across a large group of people.

Finally, time is also taken for manufacturing large numbers of doses for public consumption.

As of today, there are around 135 vaccines in the pre-clinical stage, and around 30 in human trials.

Where does Covaxin stand in this whole scenario? It has been approved for Phase I and II trials; volunteer recruitment was to end on July 7 but even now safety screenings of volunteers - to check for existing infections, health checks - are being conducted.

Many other vaccines are already in Phases I, II and even III. Oxford COVID-19 vaccine began Phase III trials on July 1, 2020 and exciting results are expected anyday; Moderna vaccine development group published their interim results from Phase I trials this week. For Covaxin, even the data from the pre-clinical phase, which apparently lasted around 50 days, is not available in the public domain - something which

is unacceptable for a scientific endeavour. The period seems to be too short by comparison with other vaccines under trial. Phase I is proposed to last for 28 days and involve 375 subjects; phase II for about 14 months involving 750 volunteers. The submissions from Bharat Biotech themselves state a total period of 15 months for these two phases. So even these two phases will not be completed till August 15, 2020. ICMR issued a "clarification" that the letter of July 2 was only "meant to cut unnecessary red tape, without bypassing any necessary process"; The Health Ministry too "clarified" that trials would be done "without compromising on safety and security concerns". These clarifications are peculiar "official-speak" in that they do not actually clarify the main contention - of the deadline - but instead dwell on generic assurances which are not compatible with the announced date for public use. In a somewhat aggressive swipe, the ICMR statement also said, "The best of India's medical professionals and research scientists should not be second guessed for their professionalism or adherence to the highest scientific rigour."

PERSPECTIVE

How the UP government is demolishing the mafia

Earlier, criminals had political protection. Now, with a fierce crackdown, they are being punished and eliminated

The dacoit gangs in the ravines of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP), especially the Banda and Patha area of Chitrakoot of the latter, were always a serious challenge for successive state governments. But these dacoit gangs were successfully wiped out, largely in the 1980s. It was then that the terror of the urban mafia surged in UP.

The inception and subsequent rise of the urban mafia did not come out of the blue. It flourished thanks to open political patronage. The Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) are mainly responsible for its rise. Members of the mafia were not only given political protection, but, in many cases, tickets to facilitate their entry into the state legislature and Parliament.

Let us look at a few such entrants — Hari Shankar Tiwari, Virendra Paratp Shahi, Atiq Ahmad, Mukhtar Ansari, Vijay Mishra, Uday Bhan Singh, DP Yadav, Madan Bhaiyya, Umakant Yadav, Sonu, Monu Singh, Pawan Pandey, Aruna Shankar Shukla "Anna".

This trend has continued until now with criminals such as Vikas Dubey emerging from the protective shadow of politicians. While not enough attention is being paid to the massacre of policemen at Bikru in Kanpur, an outrageous and horrific incident, people are comparing the encounter of the main accused Vikas Dubey with the incident of Telangana where four criminals, accused of a rape/murder, were killed by the police while on an evidence-gathering mission at night. It is fallacious to compare these two incidents. The Telangana killing was clearly a criminal act by the police.

Dubey was a criminal who had a history of challenging the sanctity of constitutional institutions and the judiciary. In early 2000s, he killed the then minister of state Santosh Shukla inside the premises of a court and was then absolved. It turned him into a vicious and unrestrained criminal, as was evident in the manner he killed eight policemen. He seemed to believe he could not be touched. But he did not factor in the resolve of the Yogi Adityanath government in UP.

Unlike in the encounter in Telangana, Dubey was killed after he tried to escape taking



advantage of the situation as the police van carrying him overturned. Dubey had, in fact, snatched the rifle of a policeman accompanying him and opened fire at the police party. Two constables sustained injuries because of this. The police returned fire to minimise further casualties and, in this fracas, Dubey was killed on July 10.

The police were prepared to produce him in the court to undergo the legal process. They took him from Ujjain but the unforeseen accident of the police van, and reckless and indiscreet

action on the part of the criminal as the party neared Kanpur, prompted the police to act in self-defence. Don't forget that it was just a few days earlier that he had murdered eight uniformed personnel.

In the Telangana incident, all of four accused had no case against them in any police station. In contrast, Dubey had 64 criminal cases pending against him and he was a notorious historysheeter, carrying a reward of ~5 lakh on his head.

The UP government has appointed a probe commission to

enquire into this encounter. It has also set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to take an in-depth look into his crimes, his political connections and other activities. The district magistrate of Kanpur has also requested the district judge to institute an inquiry under the supervision of a judicial magistrate. No such action was taken by the Telangana government.

The policy of "zero tolerance" towards organised crime and criminals adopted by the Yogi Adityanath-led government has resulted in the

elimination of over 100 criminals in the approximately 4,000 encounters that have taken place in his term. Such has been the effectiveness of the UP police's effectiveness that criminals with rewards on their heads started surrendering in police stations holding up placards. Members of mafia groups such as those run by Mukhtar Ansari and Atiq Ahmad, who controlled their empires from jail, are languishing in penal facilities in Punjab and Ahmedabad. Any mafia can be demolished if its economic backbone is broken. The Yogi government did it with precision and attacked the illegal financial network of the mafias and gangsters. In a planned manner in western UP, the properties of gangsters such as Badan Singh Baddo, Anil Dujana, Sunder Bhati, Udhan Singh Karnawal, Manish Chauhan, Yogesh Bhadoura, and Amit Kasana were attached or demolished. This dealt them a crushing blow. It is now only a matter of time before the UP government destroys the entire mafia network in the state and makes it safer for people, especially the most vulnerable.

Stop the culture of resort politics It undermines democracy and popular mandates

The sight of legislators being packed off in buses, and lodged in comfortable, even luxurious, hotels and resorts, has become a common feature of Indian politics. It usually happens when a state government is in crisis, when a crucial election for a Rajya Sabha seat is underway and numbers are fluid, or when a rebellion is underway to change the regime in a state. A political party — or the rebel faction — then rushes to consolidate the legislators who are in its favour. The objective is to ensure that these legislators don't succumb to temptations and inducements

offered by the other side; and instead remain under constant surveillance. The method then adopted is to lock them in, till the crisis is resolved one way or the other. While Rajasthan is only the most recent example — members loyal to Ashok Gehlot were sent off to a hotel on the outskirts of Jaipur and members loyal to Sachin

Pilot were brought to a resort in Haryana — this is neither unique to one party nor to one state. Similar examples of



resort politics were witnessed in Madhya Pradesh (rebel legislators went to Karnataka), Karnataka (legislators were brought to Maharashtra), Gujarat (to preserve numbers for a Rajya Sabha poll, legislators were taken to Karnataka), among others. It is important to go back to first principles here, to understand how this growing

pattern makes a mockery of Indian democracy, speaks poorly of elected representatives, is a reflection of the distortions in political party structures, and is an insult to the voter. Voters elect representatives, who belong to a political party or who may be an independent, for their ideas, agenda and ideology. These representatives are, within the framework of party discipline, understood to be autonomous leaders who act in public interest. But, instead, what resort politics shows is that these legislators can shift allegiances based on

whoever can offer a better prize (either price or position); even parties have little faith in their integrity and so they are locked up; public interest is far-removed in these calculations; and money is an active determinant in how legislators make their choices. Resort politics is, in many ways, a symbol all that is wrong with Indian democratic politics.

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SOUTH ASIA

2019 Easter Blasts: Wife of a suicide bomber escaped to India, says Sri Lanka police

Probed by the Colombo Crime Division, Criminal Investigation Department and the Terrorism Investigation Department, the probe into the Easter Sunday blasts has result in the arrest of around 200 suspects, and the investigation is in its final stages.



The wife of one of the suicide bombers who struck churches across Sri Lanka on Easter in April 2019, resulting in the death of 260 people, has fled to India fearing arrest, the police of the island nation has said. Testifying before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry, which is probing the blasts, Chief Inspector of Police Arjuna Maheenkanda said Pulasthini Rajendran alias Sarah — the wife of Atchchi Muhammadu Hastun, who

detonated his bomb at the St Sebastian's Church in Negombo — may have fled to India via sea in September 2019.

His submission was based on an input he received on July 6 this year through an informant. The information was that a woman, believed to be Sarah, who was initially believed to have been killed in the explosion at a house in Sainthamaruthu on April 26, 2019, had actually fled the scene and was in hiding before escaping to India from Sri Lanka's Mannar coast. Probed by the Colombo Crime Division, Criminal Investigation Department and the Terrorism Investigation Department, the probe into the

Easter Sunday blasts has result in the arrest of around 200 suspects, and the investigation is in its final stages. According to the Colombo Crime Division, Sarah was hiding in a village called Mankadu in the Kalawanchikudy area.

Jaliya Senaratne, director of the Police Media Division, told The Indian Express, "We do not have any concrete information about her whereabouts in India except a report that she managed to escape to India. We arrested two persons on July 13 — her relative and a senior police officer — from Ampara (an eastern province of Sri Lanka) for harbouring that lady before her

escape. They are in custody." An estimated 15 people, including four women and six children, were killed in the Sainthamaruthu blast. The explosion, which killed the families of at least four of the suicide bombers, had occurred when security forces launched an operation to capture them, a week after the Easter blasts. When The Indian Express visited Sainthamaruthu blast site two days later, the two known survivors from the explosion were the wife and daughter of Zahran Hashim, the main suicide bomber. A senior officer said Hashim's wife, who sustained serious injuries in the blast, is currently under detention.

Bangladesh regulator orders telcos to stop providing free access to social media



Bangladesh's regulator has ordered telecom operators and other internet providers in the nation to stop providing free access to social media services, becoming the latest market in Asia to take a partial stand against zero-rating deals. Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, the local regulator, said late last week that it had moved to take this decision because free usage of social media services had spurred their misuse by some people to commit crimes. Local outlet Business Standard first reported about the development. Bangladesh is one of the largest internet markets in Asia with more than 100 million online users. Technology companies such as Facebook and Twitter have struck

partnerships, more popularly known as zero-rating deals, with telecom operators and other internet providers in several markets in the past decade to make their services free to users to accelerate growth. Typically, tech companies bankroll the cost of data consumption of users as part of these deals. In Bangladesh, such zero-rating deals have been popular for several years, said Ahad Mohammad, chief executive of Bongo, an on-demand streaming service (Extra Crunch membership required), in an interview with TechCrunch.

Grameenphone and Robi Axiata, two of the largest telecom operators in Bangladesh, enable their mobile subscribers to access a handful

of services of their partners even when their phones have run out of credit. Both telecom firms have said they are in the process to comply with Dhaka's order. Other zero rating deals remain in effect, a person familiar with the matter said. It remains unclear whether Free Basics, a program run by Facebook in dozens of markets through which it offers unlimited access to select services at no cost, will continue its presence in Bangladesh after the nation's order. Facebook relies on telecom networks to offer data access for its Free Basics program.

In Bangladesh, Facebook struck deals with Grameenphone and Robi Axiata, according to its official website, where Facebook continues to identify Bangladesh among dozens of markets where Free Basics is operational.

Several nations in recent years have balked at zero-rating arrangements — though they have often cited different reasons. India banned Free Basics in early 2016 on the grounds that Facebook's initiative was violating the principles of net neutrality.

Free Basics also ended its program in Myanmar and several other markets in 2017 and 2018. Facebook did not respond to requests for comment.

Pakistan, Bangladesh premiers hold rare telephonic talk



The prime ministers of Pakistan and Bangladesh held a telephonic conversation on Wednesday in a rare occurrence of diplomacy as the two estranged countries seek rapprochement. "Pakistan is committed to deepening fraternal relations with Bangladesh on the basis of mutual trust, mutual respect and sovereign equality," said PM Imran Khan, according to a statement issued by his office. The premier reiterated his invitation to Sheikh Hasina to visit Pakistan. He extended condolences for the lives lost during the pandemic, and offered his commiserations on the material and human losses due to the recent flooding in Bangladesh and prayed for early recovery of the people affected by this natural calamity. The two leaders exchanged views on their respective steps to deal with the myriad of challenges posed by Covid-19. Imran apprised of his

government's efforts and commended his Bangladesh counterpart on the measures taken by her leadership to contain the virus. He also apprised her of his 'Global Initiative on Debt Relief' for developing countries. In the bilateral context, Imran underscored the importance Pakistan attaches to closer ties with fraternal Bangladesh and highlighted the significance of regular bilateral contacts and people-to-people exchanges. Reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to SAARC, Imran underlined the importance of both countries working for enhanced regional cooperation for sustainable peace and prosperity. He shared Pakistan's perspective on the grave situation in the Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K) and stressed on the importance of a peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute for a safe and prosperous region.

US & THE WORLD

Chinese actions are a challenge for the world community: British envoy

Following its exit from the European Union (EU), the UK will focus on healthcare, a long-term agenda for green growth and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and trade and investment while strengthening its ties with India, Barton said during his first news briefing after presenting his credentials.

China's actions around the globe, including imposing a national security law in Hong Kong and the border standoff with India, are a challenge for the world community and Britain will work with partners to call out violations of international law, UK high commissioner Philip Barton said on Thursday. Following its exit from the European Union (EU), the UK will focus on healthcare, a long-term agenda for green growth and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and trade and investment while strengthening its ties with India, Barton said during his first news briefing after presenting his credentials. "There are challenges around the world on all sorts of Chinese actions, for us Hong Kong particularly is a focus, clearly for India the LAC (Line of Actual Control) is a particular focus," he said. "These are concerning things and our hope would be that there can be de-escalation, and tensions do seem to have eased over the last week or two after the tragic loss of

lives," he said, referring to the death of 20 Indian soldiers in a clash with Chinese forces along the LAC on June 15. Barton welcomed progress by India and China in managing tensions and the commitment by the two Special Representatives on the

border issue to disengage and de-escalate. "I hope we're not about to see a change in that," he said. Britain, he said, has its own concerns about a range of Chinese actions and has decided to remove Chinese technology giant Huawei's equipment from all its

telecommunications networks by 2027 because of concerns highlighted by the UK National Cyber Security Centre. "We don't have a border with China but we have particular responsibilities for Hong Kong and the new national security law which China has imposed

there, we see this as a very clear and serious violation of the UK-China joint declaration," he said, referring to the agreement that laid out the administrative arrangement for Hong Kong when the former British colony was handed over to China in 1997.

Portland mayor tear gassed after speaking with protesters on presence of federal agents

Mayor Ted Wheeler was tear gassed in downtown Portland early Thursday morning, according to video and posts on Twitter from a New York Times journalist. The video shows Wheeler, wearing goggles and a face mask amid a crowd of people, hold his nose and close his eyes in distress as a cloud of tear gas drifts by him. "It stings. It's hard to breathe. I can tell you with 100% honesty I saw nothing that provoked this response," Wheeler said to the Times camera. "I'm not afraid but I am pissed off." It's unknown at this time who is responsible for deploying the tear gas and there is nothing to indicate the mayor was targeted. Portland Police said they did not deploy any CS gas, a commonly

used type of tear gas. CNN has reached out to the mayor's office for additional comment. The video appeared to come after Wheeler joined crowds to listen to protesters and answer their questions in response to violent clashes between demonstrators and federal forces, whose camouflage, troop-like uniforms and aggressive tactics have exacerbated the protests. It is an unconstitutional occupation," Wheeler told the crowd. "The tactics that have been used by our federal officers are abhorrent. They did not act with probable cause, people are not being told who they are being arrested by, and you're being denied basic constitutional rights." "It is an unconstitutional occupation," Wheeler told

the crowd. "The tactics that have been used by our federal officers are abhorrent. They did not act with probable cause, people are not being told who they are being arrested by, and you're being denied basic constitutional rights." President Donald Trump said federal officers were sent to the city to protect federal property, but protesters and local leaders have strongly opposed their presence. Demonstrations, many of which have been peaceful, have been ongoing for more than 50 days. "This is clearly a waste of federal resources and it's getting increasingly dangerous," Wheeler told CNN. "We did not ask the feds to be here. We do not want them here. They're not helping the situation. They're not appropriately trained, and we're demanding that they leave."

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SPECIAL REPORT

The differing digital journeys of India, China

There is resistance against Chinese dominance. India needs to fix its domestic landscape to take advantage

Over the last two decades, India and China have become significant players in the digital ecospace with profiles that are different but convergent. India may be the world's back office, but its presence in products — software and hardware — is relatively small. China, on the other hand, is big in both domains. On the basis of a back-of-the-envelope calculation, the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of their digital sectors over the past two decades appear roughly comparable: India's digital sector has grown, on average, annually by around 35%, while China has recorded 50%+ growth. However, thanks to compounding of the difference in growth rates over 20 years, the final picture today is different. In 2019, China's digital economy claimed to have crossed \$5 trillion or over a third of the country's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In comparison, India's current digital economy is estimated around \$300 billion, or nearly 12% of the GDP.

China's digital surge has not only reinvented the economy, but has also bolstered the nation's growth rate. In 2019, for instance, its digital sector's 15.5% growth was the biggest

contributor to the national GDP growth of 6.1%. Globally, China's digital economy is second only to the United States (US). Although the US still dominates with 18 companies in top-30 digital companies by market capitalisation (2019), China has seven companies in the list, including Alibaba (\$402 billion), and Tencent (\$398 billion).

Recently, however, there are signs that this lopsided China-India's digital paradigm might be correcting. China's domestic digital economy is getting saturated and its attempt to expand globally is encountering increased resistance. Last month, India banned 59 Chinese apps. The United Kingdom (UK) reversed its decision to allow Huawei to operate 5G telecom system, and, in this, joined a number of western countries uneasy about Chinese digital exports.

In contrast, India's digital economy seems to be getting a tailwind. Over the past three months, Jio, the largest Indian telecom operator, has managed to get Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of over \$20 billion from 13 global investors

for its platforms. Google has announced its intention to invest \$10 billion in India's digital economy over the next five to seven years. Foxconn, which assembles Apple phones here, intends to ramp up mobile production by investing \$1 billion in India, already the world's second-largest mobile manufacturer. Despite the enormous global economic challenges, the four Indian technology majors have had healthy growth in their turnover during Q2/2020. While these may be early hopeful signs of gains in India's digital journey, we need to acknowledge its strategic importance.

At this juncture, we need to study the Chinese strategy over the last two decades to become a digital superpower. In the late 1990s, China realised the potential of these emerging technologies and leveraged them. Foreign digital companies received permissions to ply their wares in China's huge market, but these were withdrawn soon in a seemingly systematic manner, and the entire domestic digital ecospace reserved for its home-grown entities. Thus, China is the only major economy where Facebook, Amazon, Apple,

Microsoft and Google (FAAMG) are either absent or remain marginal players. Their Chinese clones took full advantage of a near-monopoly to grow exponentially. Meanwhile, China invested heavily in digital hardware technologies from chip-making to telecom systems and acquired companies and start-ups abroad. Thousands of Chinese students and researchers went to western technical institutions to specialise in these domains. While many of the pathways China took to become a digital superpower are relevant to us, replicating them has since become more difficult. Having lost China, FAAMG are determined not let go of India. They have also become more possessive about their technologies. On our side, too, the ecosystem has often rendered only tepid support to the home-grown digital companies. Indian IT companies grow despite the government. There is little point in rediscovering the wheel — we should try and leap-frog into the future. To this end, a strategy leveraging our market size and competence to foster alliances between domestic and foreign digital companies will serve us best. The government can and

should make this possible by creating a positive and forward-looking framework and adopt best global practices, particularly on Intellectual Property Rights, data security, taxation, land acquisition and employment. A high-powered inter-ministerial entity could be created to supervise the digital sector and accelerate decision-making. Non-resident Indian (NRI) techno-entrepreneurs should be encouraged to lead this synergy, particularly in creating research and development capacity in emerging technologies, clubbed as the Industrial Revolution 4.0. We also need to develop human resources through better academia-industry interface, adopt employment-friendly syllabi and train our workforce. We also need to appreciate that unlike the brick and mortar economy, digital technologies are less beholden to lure of either geo-economics or size. If the country's digital economy soars, it will have comprehensive spin-offs for the Indian economy and society — from faster growth to higher employment generation to greater self-reliance in an area, both critical at present and strategic in the future. These are reasons enough for us to act — particularly in the current challenging economic times.

Undermining Sushant Rajput's tragic death

Interrogate power structures, but don't launch a witch-hunt

Sushant Singh Rajput died by suicide last month. This was tragic. Rajput — a young man from outside the world of cinema — had truly come into his own in the Mumbai film industry, with a range of critically-acclaimed and commercially-successful films. His death sparked an outpouring of grief in the film industry, in his home state of Bihar, and across urban and semi-urban India.

But the tragedy has now taken a somewhat bizarre turn. His death should have triggered a conversation about mental health, and the insecurities that are driving young people to take extreme steps. It should have triggered a conversation

about the structure of the film industry, and the pressures even stars — and Rajput was a star — work under. And yes, it should have triggered a debate about the power matrix in the industry. But what has happened is that, driven by social media, an entire narrative has been constructed about how Rajput was a victim of a nepotistic industry, which only favours its own. Nepotism is a real problem in Bollywood. And that debate must take place. But this narrative, and all kinds of conspiracy theories, have now found their way into the police investigation into Rajput's case. A suicide merits an investigation. But in this case, film reviewers who may have rated Rajput's

films poorly are being called for questioning; producers who may not have done a project with Rajput are being held accountable; talk show hosts who may have joked about Rajput are being blamed; actors who had little to do with Rajput are using it as an opportunity to project themselves as the subaltern battling an entrenched elite. This is not the way structures of power can be interrogated. Instead, it smacks of mob justice. It ignores the complex factors that drive a person to the end. It appears driven by political motivations. And it undermines Rajput's life, legacy, and tragic death.



ENTERTAINMENT

The Missed Opportunities Of Netflix's New Hit "Indian Matchmaking"



It's common to see Indian weddings portrayed as Technicolor fantasies - in Bollywood films, in the images of Priyanka Chopra's wedding to Nick Jonas in 2018 and in stories about the extravagant wedding of Isha Ambani, the daughter of one of Asia's richest men, with a bill that ran into the millions.

But "Indian Matchmaking," the Netflix reality show released last week, makes clear the Indian wedding industrial complex is no fantasy, and not just because none of the show's couples actually make it to the altar. Instead, it highlights how the marriage market is uniquely besieged by the same divides and prejudices that run through large portions of Indian society.

The show, directed by Smriti Mundhra, follows "Mumbai's top matchmaker," Sima Taparia. Armed with stacks of "biodata" - carefully vetted profiles that list a person's qualifications and background - Taparia attempts to pair up not just compatible

couples but also compatible families.

Though Taparia is shown repeating chants to ensure "good vibes" and visiting astrologers for horoscope readings, the show doesn't just present archaic caricatures of arranged marriage. It carefully explains to non-Indian audiences that arranged marriages are actually considered the default for much of India - the most common way couples get together.

"In India ... there is marriage and then love marriage," Taparia says early on. Many of her clients have deeply relatable reasons for turning to her for help: wanting to find someone "serious," looking for a partner who understands their culture, trying out alternatives to dating apps. There are also clips of successful couples who met through matchmakers and have been happily married for decades.

But the show also depicts people who unthinkingly

normalize some of the most pernicious biases that plague South Asian communities. At no point does it make any effort to interrogate or dive deeper into these attitudes.

Arranged marriage is one of the ways Indian families self-isolate within their own social classes and groups, entrenching age-old divisions. While there are laws prohibiting different forms of discrimination in India, matchmakers and matrimonial advertisements - which are still carried in newspapers across the country - continue to draw on biases.

Numerous studies over the past decade have found evidence of caste discrimination among marriage-seekers in India. Other research has documented how women face pressure to be "fair," while dark-skinned women experience significant colorism. Only an estimated 2 percent of marriages are between different religions, while wealth, class and language also play a role in arranged marriage. Many of these prejudices are brought up by clients and families in the show - caste and skin tone most frequently - but little is said to condemn or address these discriminatory criteria.

What about people who don't want to get married or have children but are pushed to find matches because of parental or societal expectations? It was clear that many of those featured

weren't actually ready to get married, including Pradhyan from Mumbai, who apparently rejected 150 potential brides. And what about the millions of LGBT+ Indians, including those who may be in the closet, who are often pressured into heteronormative relationships in a country where bigotry and stigma are common? The show doesn't feature anyone looking for a same-sex partner.

Then there's the question of what happens to people who find partners outside of the narrow criteria set by families and society. In India, couples can be excluded from households, families and communities, and can even face violence, for their choices. Families may also demand exorbitant dowries (which are illegal but still prevalent in India) for marriages between social groups. The clients on the show - all of whom were from wealthy families in India or had comfortable livelihoods here in the United States - probably wouldn't experience this. Yet

these patterns continue to affect many young Indians, and not just those from low-income or marginalized backgrounds.

Of course, it would be unrealistic to expect Taparia, the matchmaker, to address these issues directly. Mundhra, meanwhile, tackled some of these questions head-on in her 2017 documentary "A Suitable Girl." But "Indian Matchmaking" had ample opportunity to offer more context and repeatedly passed up the chance. What we see is an incomplete picture of marriage and matchmaking in India.

The highlight of the show is the plot line surrounding Ankita, an independent business owner who overcame her insecurities and decided that she found her career more fulfilling than a relationship. Her entire arc was a breath of fresh air that left me craving more, precisely because it confronted the ramifications of societal pressure. But her story is the exception within the show - just as it is in Indian society more generally.

IFC Films will release A CALL TO SPY starring RADHIKA APTE in theaters & VOD on October 2



Directed by | Lydia Dean Pilcher
Produced by | Sarah Megan Thomas

Written by | Sarah Megan Thomas

Edited by | Paul Tothill

Cast | Sarah Megan Thomas,

Stana Katic, Radhika Apte, Linus Roache, and Rossif Sutherland

Acclaimed Bollywood star Radhika Apte makes her American film debut in A CALL TO SPY as Noor Inayat Khan, the real-life British spy of Indian descent who became the first female wireless operator sent by the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to aid in the French Resistance. Throughout her career, Radhika has been praised by the South Asian community, receiving recognition from The Vijay Awards, GQ India Awards, Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles and the International Indian Film Academy among many others. In the beginning of WWII, with Britain becoming desperate, Churchill orders his new spy

agency--SOE-- to recruit and train women as spies. Their daunting mission: conduct sabotage and build a resistance. SOE's "spymistress," Vera Atkins (Stana Katic of CASTLE), recruits two unusual candidates: Virginia Hall (Sarah Megan Thomas of EQUITY), an ambitious American with a wooden leg, and Noor Inayat Khan (Radhika Apte of SACRED GAMES), a Muslim pacifist. Together, these women help to undermine the Nazi regime in France, leaving an unmistakable legacy in their wake. Inspired by true stories, this original screenplay draws on SOE, OSS, and CIA files. This is the untold story about the personal sacrifice of courageous individuals who put their lives on the line to fight for freedom.

Teenage fan of Sushant Singh allegedly dies by suicide in Chhattisgarh's Durg



A 13-year-old girl who is said to have been depressed over the death of actor Sushant Singh allegedly died by suicide in Chhattisgarh's Durg district on Wednesday night, police said Thursday. The family said the girl was a seventh standard student and was a big fan of Sushant Singh who dies last month.

Trinath Tripathi, Station House Officer (SHO), Bhalai Nagar police station said the girl's parents were not at home when the incident took place. "When her parents returned, they found the door was locked from inside. The father entered the house from the backyard and found his daughter hanging from the ceiling," Tiwari said. Durg's Superintendent of Police, Prashant Thakur said police have found a suicide note. "We have recovered a suicide note purportedly written by her that said that she was ending her life because she did that actor Sushant has left the world. We are investigating the case from all angles and matching the handwriting of the girl." The teenager's father told local media that she was a fan of Sushant Singh and was depressed after his death and was continuously watching his videos and songs of his movies.

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Coronavirus Pandemic World On Edge

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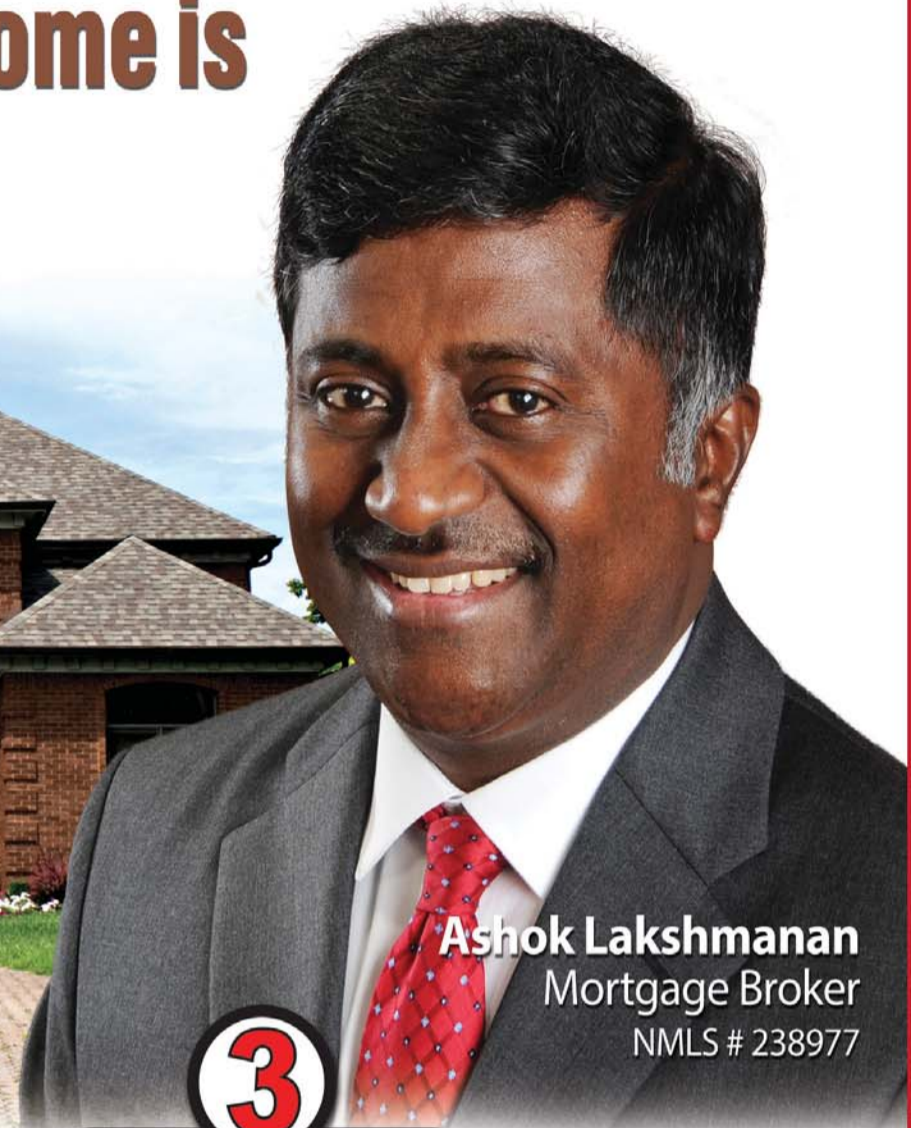
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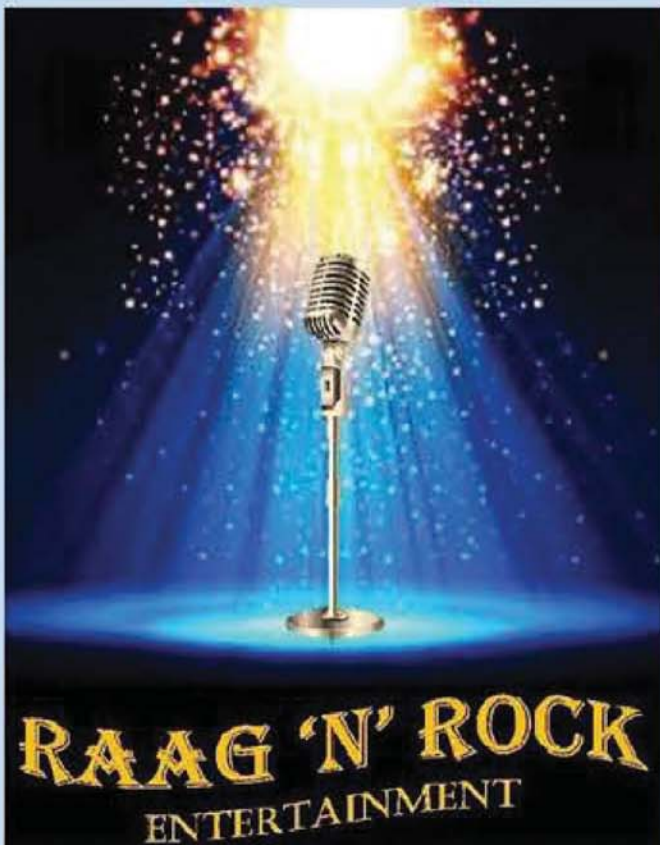
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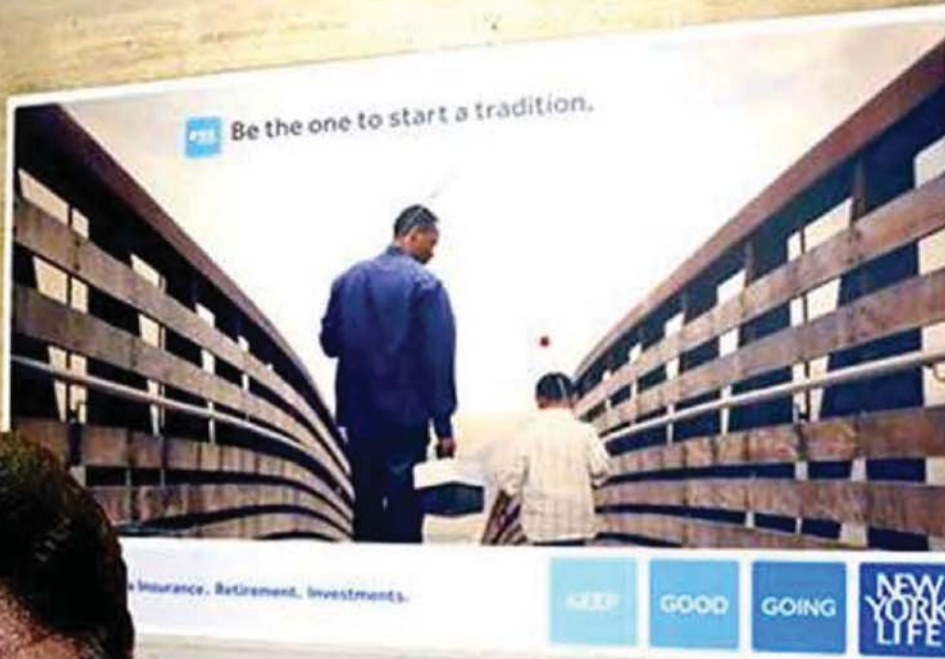
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