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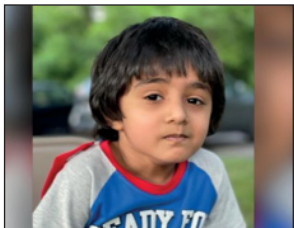
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Boy dies after being hit by 2 cars



A 5-year-old boy has died after being struck by two cars in Chicago. **Page 4**

A Kashmir village after partition



'Line through our hearts': A Kashmir village, 75 years after partition. **Page 6**

Salman responds to allegations



Salman Khan files restraining order against his Panvel neighbor for derogatory posts. **Page 12**

ICC plans 777 cricket matches



The IPL showed its growing influence as the ICC announced its men's Future Tour Program (FTP) on Wednesday. **Page 20**

INDEX	Entertainment.....	Page 12
	Business.....	Page 14
	Astrology.....	Page 16
	Health.....	Page 17
	Sports.....	Page 20

Indian woman condemns release of her convicted rapists

NEW DELHI - A Muslim woman who was gang raped while pregnant during India's devastating 2002 religious riots has appealed to the government to rescind its decision to free the 11 men who had been jailed for life for committing the crime, after they were released on suspended sentences.

The victim, who is now in her 40s, was pregnant when she was brutally gang raped in communal violence in 2002 in the western state of Gujarat, which saw over 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, killed in some of the worst religious riots India has experienced since its independence from Britain in 1947. Seven members of the woman's family, including her three-year-old daughter, were also killed in the violence.

The 11 men, released on Monday when India celebrated 75 years of independence, were convicted in 2008 of rape, murder and unlawful assembly.

The victim said the decision by the Gujarat state government has left her numb and shaken her faith in justice.

"How can justice for a woman end like this? I trusted the highest courts in our land," she said in a statement late Wednesday, adding that no authorities reached out to her before making the decision.



Activists shout slogans against the remission of sentence by the government to convicts of a gang rape, in New Delhi, India on Thursday, August 18, 2022.

"Please undo this harm. Give me back my right to live without fear and in peace."

Last Thursday, dozens of women protested against the release of the men in the capital, New Delhi. Maimoona Mollah of the All India Democratic Women's Association said they are demanding the state to roll back its decision.

"(The victim) and other survivors should be allowed to live in peace and dignity," Mollah said.

Raj Kumar, additional chief

secretary in Gujarat, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party holds power, told the Indian Express newspaper that the convicts' application for remission was granted because they had completed over 14 years in jail. A state government panel made the decision after considering other factors like their age and behavior in prison.

Kumar said the men were eligible under a 1992 remission policy

that was in effect at the time of their conviction. A newer version adopted in 2014 by the federal government prohibits remission release for those convicted of certain crimes, including rape and murder.

Videos on social media showing the men being welcomed with sweets and garlands after their release from prison went viral, triggering outrage and anger from women, rights activists and opposition politicians.

U.S. lowers expectations on India cutting ties with Russia

WASHINGTON - It is going to be a long-term proposition for India - which has a decades-old relationship with Moscow - to reorient its foreign policy away from Russia, the United States has said.

It said it was working "very closely" with India through the Quad as well as other forums.

"It is not for me to speak about another country's foreign policy. But what I can do is point out what we have heard from India.

We have seen countries around the world speak clearly, including with their votes in the UN General Assembly against Russia's aggression in Ukraine. But we also recognise, as I was saying just a moment ago, that this is not flipping a light switch," US State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters.

"This is something that, especially for countries that have historical relationships with Russia. Relationships that, as is the case

with India, extend back decades, it is going to be a long-term proposition to re-orient foreign policy away from Russia," he said in response to a question.

The United States, he said, has worked very closely with India bilaterally and through the Quad "to signal, and the Indians have done so very clearly what should be the inviolable principle of state sovereignty".

Price was responding to a series of questions on a multilat-

eral joint military exercise that involves Russia and China and several other countries, including India.

"Countries routinely make their own sovereign decisions. It is absolutely their right to do so regarding what, if any, military exercises to take part in. I'll also note that most of the participating countries also routinely participate in a wide array of military exercises and exchanges with the United States as well," he said.

Thought of the Week: "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant." - Robert Louis Stevenson

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Modi says India aims to become developed nation in 25 years



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets the crowd after addressing the nation during Independence Day celebrations at the historic Red Fort in Delhi, India, August 15, 2022.

By Manoj Kumar

NEW DELHI - India will aim to become a developed nation within 25 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a national day address on Monday, with policies to support domestic production in power, defence and digital technology.

Speaking from the 17th century Red Fort in Delhi as India celebrates its 75th year of independence from British colonial rule, Modi exhorted youth to "aim big" and give their best years for the cause of the country.

"We must turn India into a developed country in the next 25 years, in our lifetime," said the 71-year-old Modi, wearing a turban in the colours of the Indian flag, in his 75-minute-speech in Hindi.

"It's a big resolution, and we should work towards it with all our might."

The World Bank currently categorises India as a lower-middle income economy - meant for countries with a gross national income per capita of between \$1,086 and \$4,255. High income countries, like

the United States, have a per capita income of \$13,205 or more.

India is the world's sixth-largest economy and is expected to grow at over 7% in the current fiscal year ending in March 2023 - the fastest among major economies.

Many experts say India's economy could expand to become the world's third-largest by 2050 after the United States and

China, although per capita income, currently around \$2,100, may remain low compared to many countries.

With about 1.4 billion people, India is expected to surpass China as the world's most populous country next year.

Countries like the United States already see India as a future challenger to China's dominating influence in Asia and beyond. U.S. President Joe Biden

on Sunday congratulated India for its national day and said the United States and India were "indispensable partners" that would continue to work together to address global challenges in the years ahead.

India's neighbour Pakistan, which was part of British India and became independent at the same time, celebrated its independence day on Sunday.

India dismisses four employees in Kashmir for anti-national activities

By Fayaz Bukhari

SRINAGAR - Indian administered Kashmir last Saturday sacked four government employees, citing their involvement in activities "prejudicial to the interests of the security of the state".

One of those dismissed is the son of the leader of a militant group fighting against India in the disputed Himalayan territory.

India and Pakistan each rule part of Kashmir and claim it in full.

Also dismissed were two

professors at Kashmir University that the administration claims were radicalising students to advance Pakistan's agenda, and a woman working in rural development that the administration says was funding anti-India activities.

"They have been found involved in activities prejudicial to the interests of the security of the state," senior government officials said, adding that all four employees were dismissed immediately.

India blames Pakistan for stoking unrest in Muslim-majority Kashmir and has stepped up

pressure on Pakistan in recent years.

Pakistan has denied giving material help to Kashmiri separatists but has pledged to provide continued diplomatic and moral support.

In the past year, Indian administered Kashmir has terminated the contracts of at least 30 government employees for alleged militancy links under a law which enables it to sack employees without an inquiry.

Reuters was not able to reach any of the dismissed employees for comment.

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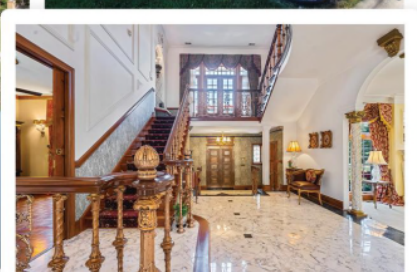
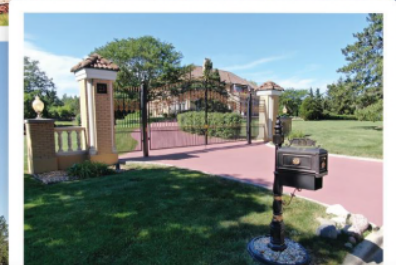
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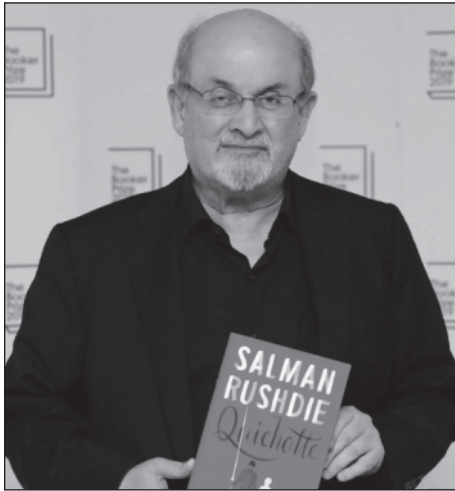
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Salman Rushdie is awake and 'articulate' after stabbing attack in New York, official says



Salman Rushdie

By Aya Elamroussi
and Mark Morales

NEW YORK - Award-winning author Salman Rushdie is awake and "articulate" in his conversations with investigators as he remains hospitalized for severe injuries following a stabbing attack in western New York, a law enforcement official with direct knowledge of the investigation told CNN on Monday.

Rushdie, 75, underwent emergency surgery after a man allegedly stabbed him several times before his scheduled lecture at the Chautauqua Institution, officials have said.

The writer -- whose books have garnered him awards -- was conscious on Monday and able to respond to questions

from investigators, according to the law enforcement official.

It's unclear what Rushdie told investigators following the attack that shook the literary world and prompted immediate condemnation from around the globe.

The author suffered three stab wounds to his neck, four stab wounds to his stomach, puncture wounds to his right eye and chest, and a laceration on his right thigh, Chautauqua County District Attorney Jason Schmidt said during the suspect's arraignment over the weekend. Rushdie may lose sight in his right eye, he noted, adding that the attack was targeted and preplanned.

The suspect in the attack, identified as 24-year-old Hadi Matar, allegedly jumped onto the stage at the Chautauqua Institution, about 70 miles southwest of Buffalo, New York, and lunged toward Rushdie, repeatedly stabbing him, according to New York State Police. The suspect was held down by audience members and staff who forced him to the ground until he was arrested by a state trooper.

Matar's mother, Silvana Fardos, told the Daily Mail in an interview that her son, who was raised in the US and was outgoing, took a month-long trip to the Middle East in 2018 and returned as a "moody introvert." She said she didn't find out about the stabbing attack until the FBI raided her Fairview, New Jersey, home.

Officials believe Matar, who lived in

Fairview, traveled to Buffalo via bus and used a ridesharing app to reach Chautauqua the day before the attack, according to the law enforcement official who spoke to CNN.

Investigators do not know where Matar spent the night and they are working with the institution to comb through surveillance footage to determine whether he was near the area during overnight hours, the official added.

Upon his arrest, Matar had a fake driver's license, some cash, two Visa prepaid gift cards and no wallet, the official told CNN. Matar refused to answer questions from authorities when he was taken into custody and asked for an attorney, the law enforcement official said.

Public defender Nathaniel Barone, who represents Matar, told CNN his client has been "very cooperative" and communicating openly.

Matar pleaded not guilty to charges of second-degree attempted murder and second-degree assault with intent to cause physical injury with a deadly weapon, Barone said.

Rushdie lived in hiding after his novel "The Satanic Verses" was published in 1988, drawing criticism from some Muslims who considered it sacrilegious. The late Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who described the book as an insult to Islam and the faith's Prophet Mohammed, issued a religious decree, or fatwa, calling for Rushdie's death in 1989.

A motive for the attack remains unclear and authorities are sifting through items they took from Matar's New Jersey home, according to the law enforcement source.

Fardos told the Daily Mail that FBI agents seized several things, including a computer, books and knives from her son's basement apartment. She said she didn't know whether her son had read Rushdie's book.

Fardos, who is Lebanese and was born Muslim, told the news outlet she believed Matar became more religious since his trip to Lebanon roughly four years ago, and he had criticized her for not raising him in a more strict Muslim way.

Sauganash crash: Boy, 5, dies after being hit by 2 cars on Chicago Far NW Side

CHICAGO - A 5-year-old boy has died after being struck by two cars on the Far Northwest Side last Wednesday night, according to police.

Chicago fire officials said the incident happened just after 9 p.m. on Cicero Avenue near Devon in the Sauganash neighborhood.

The boy's family identified him as Taha Khan. His parents were home at the time. His father was talking to a neighbor.

"Looking out the windows and seeing my son dying in front of my house," recalled his mother, Misbah Khan.

It's unclear why the boy was in the street. Chicago police said Khan was struck by a red SUV Jeep that was driving north on Cicero. He was then struck a second time by the driver of a 2013 Volvo also driving north on Cicero, CPD said.

The Jeep drove away, but the driver of the Volvo stopped and stayed at the scene after the incident, even performing CPR until an ambulance arrived.



Taha Khan

Within seconds Taha's parents were at his side; they had heard the unmistakable sound of the impact.

"He's not responding when we touch him. We call his name. Other people give him CPR. I'm just panicking, praying that, please ambulance, please come," said Misbah Khan, mother.

Khan's father said Taha was shy but starting to come out of his shell. He would have turned 6 next month, and was looking forward to starting kindergarten.

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Original Fox News Channel anchor Uma Pemmaraju dies at 64

NEW YORK - Founding Fox News Channel anchor Uma Pemmaraju has died at age 64.

Pemmaraju was on the air when Fox News launched on Oct. 7, 1996. At the time, Pemmaraju was one of the only Indian-American anchors to reach national prominence, and she was beloved by viewers and Fox News colleagues alike.

“We are deeply saddened by the death of Uma Pemmaraju, who was one of FOX News Channel’s founding anchors and was on the air the day we launched. Uma was an incredibly talented journalist as well as a warm and lovely person, best known for her kindness to everyone she worked with. We extend our heartfelt condolences to her entire family,” FOX News

Media CEO Suzanne Scott said.

Pemmaraju’s daughter Kirina released a statement, telling Fox News, “The sudden death of my mother, Uma Pemmaraju, has been deeply devastating and incredibly shocking and unexpected. She was a light who brought so much compassion and inspiration to those around her. Journalism truly defined who my mother was.

We thank you for your continued kindness, support, and privacy during this unimaginable time.”

A cause of death was not immediately made public.

Pemmaraju first anchored “Fox News Now” and “Fox On Trends.” She left the network but rejoined in 2003 as an anchor and substitute host across the network. She also hosted the Sunday edition of “FOX News Live,” anchored “The Fox Report” and interviewed newsmakers, celebrities and political figures from all walks of life, including a memorable sit-down with the Dalai Lama.

Pemmaraju also hosted a variety of specials for Fox News, such as “A Special for Young People,” which features top newsmakers offering advice on life challenges to young adults. In 2012, Pemmaraju was surprised on Mother’s Day when her daughter appeared live on-air during a Fox News segment.

The award-winning anchor was born in India, raised in Texas and honed her craft at local stations in Dallas, Baltimore and WBZ-TV in Boston, before relocating to New York to help launch Fox



Uma Pemmaraju

News Channel. Her family told WBZ-TV’s David Wade she was a “noble soul and pioneer.”

Pemmaraju was named “Boston’s Best Anchor” in 1996 and 1997 by Boston Magazine and received several Emmy awards throughout her career for reporting and investigative journalism. She was named one of Spotlight Magazine’s “20 Intriguing Women of 1998.” Pemmaraju also won the Texas AP award for reporting in 2002, the Woman of Achievement award from the Big Sisters Organization of America and the Matrix Award from Women in Communications.

Pakistani doctor pleads guilty to terror charge in Minnesota

ST. PAUL, MN - A Pakistani doctor and former Mayo Clinic research coordinator pleaded guilty on Tuesday to a terrorism charge, more than two years after he was arrested for telling paid FBI informants that he pledged his allegiance to the Islamic State group and that he wanted to carry out lone wolf attacks in the U.S.



Muhammad Masood

According to online court records, Muhammad Masood pleaded guilty to one count of attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. A sentencing date has not been set.

Prosecutors say Masood was in the U.S. on a work visa. They alleged that starting in January of 2020, Masood made several

statements to paid informants — whom he believed were members of the Islamic State group — pledging his allegiance to the group and its leader.

Prosecutors said Masood expressed his desire to travel to Syria to fight for ISIS and a desire to carry out lone wolf attacks in the U.S.

The Mayo Clinic has previously confirmed that Masood was a former employee at the medical center in Rochester, Minnesota, but was not employed by the clinic at the time of his arrest.



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'Line through our hearts': A Kashmir village, 75 years after partition



A general view of a bridge between Pakistan and India, closed since 2018, with an Indian flag in the background, in Chilehana, Pakistan-India crossing point in Kashmir, Pakistan August 11, 2022.

By Fayaz Bukhari
and Gibran Naiyyar Peshimam

TEETWAL - A roaring Himalayan river and one of the world's most militarised borders separate the Khokhar family in Kashmir, a mountainous region divided between India and Pakistan - arch rivals that gained independence from Britain 75 years ago.

Abdul Rashid Khokhar lives on the Indian side, in the village of Teetwal.

Across the fast-flowing waters of the Neelum River, also known as the Kishanganga, his nephews - Javed Iqbal Khokhar

and Muneer Hussain Khokhar - run small stores in the hamlet of Chilehana in Pakistan.

Above them, on both sides, loom tall, green mountains from where the militaries of the nuclear-armed neighbours have intermittently rained mortars, shells and small arm fire on each other through the decades.

Since early 2021, the Line of Control (LOC), a 740-km (460-mile) de facto border that cuts Kashmir into two, has been mostly quiet, following the renewal of a ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan.

After years of bombardment and destruction in this part of

Kashmir, farmers have returned to abandoned fields and orchards, markets are bustling, small businesses are expanding and schools are back to normal routines, residents on both sides said.

But the broken diplomatic ties between India and Pakistan, who fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, continue to cast a dark shadow over the region. Kashmir, claimed by both nations, remains the biggest unresolved issue between the two, much the same as it was in 1947.

India and Pakistan have no viable trade links and their diplomatic missions are downgraded. Visas to visit from either side are extremely limited.

The picture-postcard valleys and mountains of Kashmir are divided into Pakistani and Indian sectors, while China controls a slice of the region in the north.

The narrow rope bridge that connects Teetwal to Chilehana is blocked on both sides by barbed wire, and no crossings have been allowed since 2018.

Sentry posts remain on both sides of the bridge, which straddles the LOC.

"The line runs through our hearts," said Khokhar, a 73-year-old who is the village council

head of Teetwal, referring to the LOC.

"It is very traumatic that you can see your relatives across but can't talk to them, meet them."

The Khokhars are among the millions of families that found themselves divided following the partition of colonial India into the independent nations, Hindu-majority India and Islamic Pakistan, at midnight on August 14/15 in 1947.

MORE THAN A MILLION KILLED

The hasty splitting of the sub-continent by Britain triggered a mass migration, marred by bloodshed and violence, as about 15 million people sought to swap countries mainly based on their religion.

More than a million people were killed in religious riots, according to many independent estimates.

Carnage swept through Teetwal during partition but more destruction followed during the 1971 India-Pakistan war that eventually led to the establishment of the LOC, said Khokhar.

By the 1990s, parts of Jammu and Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in the mainly

Hindu nation, were in the grip of a full-blown insurgency that New Delhi accused Pakistan of fomenting.

Islamabad has denied the allegation, saying it only provides diplomatic and moral support for Kashmiris seeking self-determination.

Pakistan also accuses India of human rights violations in the parts of Kashmir under its control, a charge that New Delhi rejects.

In 2019, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reorganised Jammu and Kashmir state into two federally-controlled territories, drawing Pakistan's ire and renewing tensions.

On the Pakistan side of the Neelum River, Khokhar's nephew, Javed Iqbal Khokhar, said he remembers a time they couldn't switch on the dimmest of lights in their home in Chilehana because of the risk that they could be hit by shelling.

The never-ending shelling and mortar fire at the time forced the family to move their elders and most of their children away from the border to the relative safety of Muzaffarabad, a city 40 km (25 miles) away in Pakistan, he said.

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India to register up to 2.5 million voters in contested Kashmir

By Fayaz Bukhari

SRINAGAR - India is expected to register as many as 2.5 million new voters in the contested Jammu and Kashmir region, a top official said late on Wednesday, in a move local political parties said was an attempt to influence upcoming elections.

The Muslim-majority region is claimed in full but ruled in part by nuclear arch-rivals India and Pakistan, who have fought

two wars over control of the territory.

India stripped semi-autonomy from its portion of the region in 2019, changing the Indian constitution to allow non-Kashmiris to vote and own land there.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Electoral Officer Hirdesh Kumar told reporters on Wednesday that more than 2 million new voters are expected to be enrolled in the region ahead of local polls due in November. The new reg-

istrants could increase the voter count by more than a third, adding to the existing 7.6 million voters in the region.

“We are expecting an addition of (2 to 2.5 million) new voters in the final list,” Kumar said, including non-Kashmiris living in the region.

Kashmiris fear the rule changes will allow the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi



An aerial view shows residential houses in Srinagar.

India backtracks on support for Rohingya refugees, will deport them

By Krishna N. Das

NEW DELHI - India's home ministry said on Wednesday that Rohingya refugees in the capital New Delhi would be held at a detention centre and then deported, contradicting a minister's earlier statement promising flats and security to members of the Muslim minority.

Hardeep Singh Puri, federal minister for housing and urban affairs, had earlier on Wednesday outlined new provisions for the Rohingya, signalling a potential change in the govern-

ment's critical stance towards the refugee group from Myanmar. Rohingya refugees would be allotted flats in western Delhi's Bakkarwala area, provided basic amenities and round-the-clock police protection, Puri had said on Twitter.

But, just hours after Puri's tweets, the federal home ministry said in a statement that "Rohingya illegal foreigners" would remain at a locality in the city's southern reaches as authorities worked to deport them.

"Illegal foreigners are to be kept in the detention centre till their

deportation as per law," the home ministry said in a statement.

"The Government of Delhi has not declared the present location as a detention centre. They have been directed to do the same immediately."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has previously tried to repatriate members of the Rohingya, who are a minority community in Buddhist-majority Myanmar. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled from persecution and waves of violence in their homeland over the years, mainly to Bangladesh.

to alter the demographics of the region, quelling a decades-long independence movement.

The BJP says its policies in the region are for the benefit of ordinary Kashmiris.

There has been sharp criticism from the main political parties in Kashmir over the move.

Former chief minister and J&K Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti said it is aimed at influencing the election results.

"Allowing non-locals to vote

is obviously to influence election results. Real aim is to continue ruling J&K with an iron fist to disempower locals," she said in a tweet.

A second former chief minister Omar Abdullah, from the rival Jammu & Kashmir National Conference, was also critical of the decision.

"Is the BJP so insecure about support from genuine voters of J&K that it needs to import temporary voters to win seats?" he tweeted.

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Chinese navy ship docks in Sri Lanka, stokes worry in India



A Sri Lankan traditional dancer carries a decorative umbrella as the crew of Chinese scientific research ship Yuan Wang 5 waves Chinese flags after arriving at Hambantota International Port in Hambantota, Sri Lanka.

By Eranga Jayawardena

HAMBANTOTA - A Chinese navy vessel arrived at a Beijing-built port in southern Sri Lanka on Tuesday, after its port call was earlier delayed due to apparent security concerns raised by India.

The Yuan Wang 5 sailed into the Hambantota port and was welcomed by Sri Lankan and Chinese officials. The development could spark worry in India, which views China's rising influence in the Indian Ocean with suspicion.

Sri Lanka has referred to the Yuan Wang 5 as a "scientific research ship," but there are fears in India that the vessel could be used to surveil the region, with multiple media reports calling it a "dual-use spy ship."

"The Yuan Wang 5 is a powerful tracking vessel whose significant aerial reach — reportedly around 750 km — means

that several ports in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh could be on China's radar," the Indian Express newspaper wrote.

The closely watched developments surrounding the vessel underscore the competing interests of regional giants India and China in the small island nation. For more than a decade, Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and along one of the busiest shipping routes has seen both countries vie for influence.

Over the years, Beijing was widely seen as having an upper hand with its free-flowing loans and infrastructure investments. But Sri Lanka's economic collapse proved an opportunity for India to gain greater sway, as New Delhi stepped in with massive financial and material assistance to its neighbor.

The ship has permission to dock in Hambantota until Aug.

Indian firm to develop Nepal hydropower plant left by China

By Gopal Sharma

KATHMANDU - Nepal has signed a pact with an Indian company NHPC to develop a hydroelectric plant in the west of the nation years after a Chinese firm backed out, officials said on Thursday.

Nepal has opened its rivers, which it sees as having a combined potential to generate more than 42,000 megawatts of hydroelectric power, to foreign players to develop its economy and export electricity to narrow the trade deficit of more than \$13 billion.

Officials said India's NHPC Ltd signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Thursday allowing it to study details like

feasibility, environmental impact, inundation of land and construction costs for two projects - West Seti (750 megawatts) and SR 6 (450 megawatts).

Both plants are to be located on the West Seti River in Nepal's least developed far western region.

China's biggest hydropower developer, Three Gorges International Corp, was previously lined up to develop the West Seti plant, but Nepal scrapped the deal in 2017 amid haggling over the terms, officials said.

"After decades of delays we would not have plunged into another uncertainty," chief executive officer Sushil Bhatta of the state-run Investment Board Nepal told Reuters.

22, Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry said last weekend. It added that China had agreed the ship would keep its identification systems on and would not carry out any research activities while in Sri Lankan waters.

"Given the geopolitical dynamics in the region and Sri Lanka's heavy vulnerability on the economic front, Sri Lanka is playing with two fires at a diplomatic level," said international affairs analyst Ranga Kalansooriya.

The Yuan Wang family of naval vessels serve both the Chinese missile force and its space program, which is run by the People's Liberation Army, the military wing of the ruling Communist Party.

Previous official Chinese media reports have described PLA officers serving in command

positions aboard the vessels in the Yuan Wang class, which may also have civilians in their crews.

China Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin dismissed concerns about the ship in a briefing Tuesday.

"I would like to reiterate that the marine scientific research conducted by the research ship Yuan Wang 5 conforms to international law and international common practice, and will not affect the security and economic interests of any country," he said.

On Monday, India gifted a maritime reconnaissance aircraft to Sri Lanka to strengthen its maritime security. The Indian Embassy said the aircraft would help Sri Lanka tackle multiple security challenges such as human and drug trafficking as well

as other crimes in its coastal waters more effectively.

Indian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said last week that India was aware of the planned visit by the vessel and that it carefully monitors any development that affects its security and economic interests and would take all measures to safeguard them. He also dismissed claims last week that India put pressure on Sri Lanka to delay the ship.

As Sri Lanka endures its worst economic crisis, India in recent months has provided crucial assistance including food, fuel, medicines and cooking gas. At the same time, China's agreement to restructure its infrastructure loans to Sri Lanka is vital for the country to reach a bailout program with the International Monetary Fund.

Modi's party loses crucial Indian state after ally switches sides

LUCKNOW - Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party lost power in Bihar, the third most populous state in India, after its regional ally broke ranks to join an opposition alliance that now has the majority to form the next government.

Bihar sends the fourth most number of elected lawmakers to parliament and the fall in government there is a rare setback for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which dominates politics in the country.

Bihar's coalition collapsed ahead of the 2024 general election, which the BJP is still expected to win for a third straight term unless disparate opposition parties are able to come together to overcome Modi's popularity.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, from the regional Janata Dal (United) party, told reporters he resigned after his party colleagues recommended exiting the BJP coalition. He accused the BJP of trying to undermine his party, a charge the BJP denied.

Kumar said his new alliance, with the regional Rashtriya Janata Dal as its biggest constituent, had a comfortable majority and that a new government would be formed soon.

The BJP said Kumar had betrayed it and the people of Bihar, after having together won the last state election in 2020.

The BJP coalition won 39 out of the 40 parliamentary seats in Bihar in the 2019 general election, helping Modi win one of the biggest mandates in India in decades.

Police suspect militants fatally shot local Hindu in Kashmir

SRINAGAR - Assailants killed a Kashmiri Hindu man and wounded his brother in a shooting Tuesday that police blamed on militants fighting Indian rule in the disputed region.

Police said suspected militants fired at two Kashmiri Hindu brothers inside an apple orchard in the Shopian district in the south of Indian-controlled Kashmir. Both were taken to a hospital with critical gunshot wounds where one died, police said in a statement.

Soldiers and police cordoned off the area and began searching for the attackers.

Kashmir has witnessed a spate of targeted killings in recent months. Several Hindus, including immigrant workers from Indian states, have been killed. Police say the killings - including that of Muslim village councilors, police

officers and civilians - have been carried out by anti-India rebels.

The spate of killings this year come as Indian troops have continued counterinsurgency operations across the region amid a clampdown on dissent and press freedom, which critics have likened to a militaristic policy.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed by both in its entirety.

Rebels in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir have been fighting New Delhi's rule since 1989. Most Muslim Kashmiris support the rebel goal of uniting the territory, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country.

India insists the Kashmir militancy is Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Pakistan denies the charge, and most Kashmiris consider it a

legitimate freedom struggle. Tens of thousands of civilians, rebels and government forces have been killed in the conflict.

Kashmir's minority Hindus have long fretted over their place in the disputed region. Most of an estimated 200,000 of them fled Kashmir in the 1990s when an armed rebellion against Indian rule began. Some 4,000 of them later returned after 2010 as part of a government resettlement plan that provided them with jobs and housing.

The recent killings, however, have heightened their fears.

In May, after the killing of a Hindu revenue clerk, hundreds of them organized for the first time simultaneous street protests in the region and demanded the government relocate them to safer areas.

At 75, India's democracy is under pressure like never before

By Sheikh Saaliq

NEW DELHI - The August 5th demonstrations by India's main opposition Congress party against soaring food prices and unemployment began like any other recent protest - an electorally weak opposition taking to the New Delhi streets against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's massively popular government.

The protests, however, quickly took a turn when key Congress lawmakers led by Rahul Gandhi - Modi's main opponent in the last two general elections - trooped to the Parliament, leading to fierce standoffs with police.

"Democracy is a memory (in India)," Gandhi later tweeted, describing the dramatic photographs that showed him and his party leaders being briefly detained by police.

Gandhi's statement was largely seen as yet another frantic effort by a crisis-ridden opposition party to shore up its relevance and was dismissed by the government. But it resonated amid growing sentiment that India's democracy — the world's largest with nearly 1.4 billion people — is in retreat and its democratic foundations are floundering.

Experts and critics say trust in the judiciary as a check on executive power is eroding. Assaults on the press and free speech have grown brazen. Religious minorities are facing increasing attacks by Hindu nationalists. And largely peaceful protests, sometimes against provocative policies, have been stamped out by internet clampdowns and the jailing of activists.

"Most former colonies have struggled to put a lasting demo-

cratic process in place. India was more successful than most in doing that," said Booker Prize-winning novelist and activist Arundhati Roy. "And now, 75 years on, to witness it being dismantled systematically and in shockingly violent ways is traumatic."

Modi's ministers say India's democratic principles are robust, even thriving.

"If today there is a sense in the world that democracy is, in some form, the future, then a large part of it is due to India," External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said in April. "There was a time when, in this part of the world, we were the only democracy."

History is on Jaishankar's side.

At midnight on August 15, 1947, the red sandstone parliamentary building in the heart of India's capital echoed with the high-pitched voice of Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first prime minister.

"At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom," Nehru famously spoke, words that were heard over live radio by millions of Indians. Then he promised: "To the nations and peoples of the world, we send greetings and pledge ourselves to cooperate with them in furthering peace, freedom and democracy."

It marked India's transition from a British colony to a democracy — the first in South Asia — that has since transformed from a poverty-stricken nation into one of the world's fastest-growing economies, earning itself a seat at the global high table and becoming a democratic counterweight to its authoritarian neighbor, China.

Apart from a brief interruption in 1975 when a formal emergency was declared under the Congress party rule that saw outright censorship, India clung doggedly to its democratic convictions — largely due to free elections, an independent judiciary that confronted the executive, a thriving media, strong opposition and peaceful transitions of power.

But experts and critics say the country has been gradually departing from some commitments and argue the backsliding has accelerated since Modi came to power in 2014. They accuse his populist government of using unbridled political power to undermine democratic freedoms and preoccupying itself with pursuing a Hindu nationalist agenda.

"The decline seems to continue across several core formal democratic institutions... such as the freedom of expression and alternative sources of information, and freedom of association," said Staffan I. Lindberg, political scientist and director of the V-Dem Institute, a Sweden-based research center that rates the health of democracies.

Modi's party denies this. A spokesperson, Shehzad Poonawalla, said India has been a "thriving democracy" under Modi's rule and has witnessed "reclamation of the republic."

Most democracies are hardly immune to strains.

The number of countries experiencing democratic backsliding "has never been as high" as in the past decade, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance said last year, adding the U.S. to the list along with India and Brazil.



FILE - An Indian paramilitary soldier orders a Kashmiri to open his jacket before frisking him during curfew, days after New Delhi revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, in Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir.

Still, the descent appears to be striking in India.

Earlier this year, the U.S.-based non-profit Freedom House downgraded India from a free democracy to "partially free." The V-Dem Institute classified it as an "electoral autocracy" on par with Russia. And the Democracy Index published by The Economist Intelligence Unit called India a "flawed democracy."

India's Foreign Ministry has called the downgrades "inaccurate" and "distorted." Many Indian leaders have said such reports are an intrusion in "internal matters," with India's Parliament disallowing debates on them.

Globally, India strongly advocates democracy. During the inaugural Summit for Democracy organized by the U.S. in December, Modi asserted the "democratic spirit" is integral to India's "civilization ethos."

At home, however, his government is seen bucking that very spirit, with independent institutions coming under increasing scrutiny.

Experts point to long pending

cases with India's Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of key decisions taken by Modi's government as major concerns.

They include cases related to a controversial citizenship review process that has already left nearly 2 million people in Assam state potentially stateless, the now revoked semi-autonomous powers pertaining to disputed Kashmir, the opaque campaign finance laws that are seen disproportionately favoring Modi's party, and its alleged use of military-grade spyware to monitor political opponents and journalists.

India's judiciary, which is independent of the executive, has faced criticism in the past but the intensity has increased, said Deepak Gupta, a former Supreme Court judge.

Gupta said India's democracy appears to be "on the downswing" due to the court's inability to uphold civil liberties in some cases by denying people bail and the misuse of sedition and anti-terror laws by police, tactics that were also used by earlier governments.

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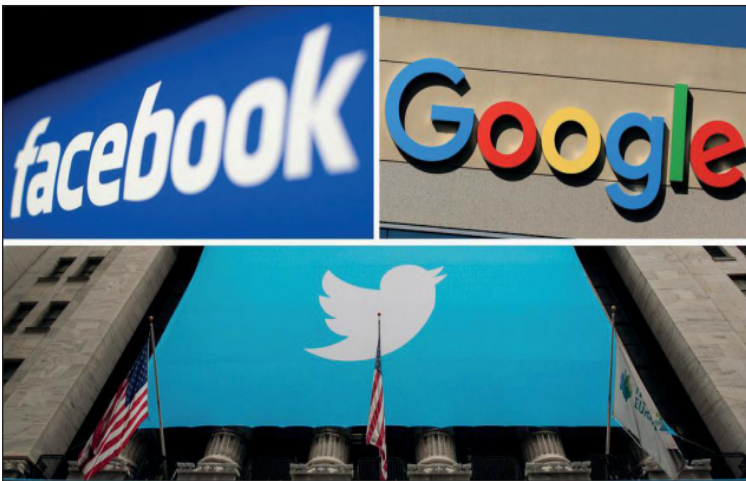
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Google opposes Facebook-backed proposal for self-regulatory body in India



Facebook, Google and Twitter logos are seen in this combination photo.

By Aditya Kalra

NEW DELHI - Google has grave reservations about developing a self-regulatory body for the social media sector in India to hear user complaints, though the proposal has support from Facebook and Twitter, sources with knowledge of the discussions told Reuters.

India in June proposed appointing a government panel to hear complaints from users about content moderation decisions, but has also said it is open to the idea of a self-regulatory body if the industry is willing.

The lack of consensus among the tech giants, however, increases the likelihood of a government panel being formed - a prospect that Meta Platforms Inc's Facebook and Twitter are keen to avoid as they fear government and regulatory overreach in India, the sources said.

At a closed-door meeting this week, an executive from Alphabet Inc's Google told other attendees the company was unconvinced about the merits of a self-regulatory body. The body would mean external reviews of decisions that could force Google to reinstate content,

even if it violated Google's internal policies, the executive was quoted as saying.

Such directives from a self-regulatory body could set a dangerous precedent, the sources also quoted the Google executive as saying.

The sources declined to be identified as the discussions were private.

In addition to Facebook, Twitter and Google, representatives from Snap Inc and popular Indian social media platform ShareChat also attended the meeting. Together, the companies have hundreds of millions of users in India.

Snap and ShareChat also voiced concern about a self-regulatory system, saying the matter requires much more consultation including with civil society, the sources said.

Google said in a statement it had attended a preliminary meeting and is engaging with the industry and the government, adding that it was "exploring all options" for a "best possible solution."

ShareChat and Facebook declined to comment. The other companies did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

Self-regulatory bodies to police content in the social media sector are rare, though there have been instances of cooperation. In New Zealand, big tech companies have signed a code of practice aimed at reducing harmful content online.

Tension over social media content decisions has been a particularly thorny issue in India. Social media companies often receive takedown requests from the government or remove content proactively. Google's YouTube, for example, removed 1.2 million videos in the first quarter of this year that were in violation of its guidelines, the highest in any country in the world.

India's government is concerned that users upset with decisions to have their content taken down do not have a proper system to appeal those decisions and that their only legal recourse is to go to court.

Twitter has faced backlash after it blocked accounts of influential Indians, including politicians, citing violation of its policies. Twitter also locked horns with the Indian government last year when it declined to comply fully with orders to

take down accounts the government said spread misinformation.

An initial draft of the proposal for the self-regulatory body said the panel would have a retired judge or an experienced person from the field of technology as chairperson, as well as six other individuals, including some senior executives at social media companies.

The panel's decisions would be "binding in nature", stated the draft, which was seen by Reuters.

Western tech giants have for years been at odds with the Indian government, arguing that strict regulations are hurting their business and investment plans. The disagreements have also strained trade ties between New Delhi and Washington.

U.S. industry lobby groups representing the tech giants believe a government-appointed review panel raises concern about how it could act independently if New Delhi controls who sits on it.

The proposal for a government panel was open to public consultation until early July. No fixed date for implementation has been set.

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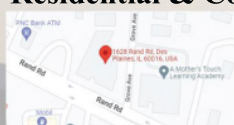


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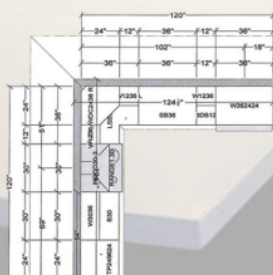


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Caste in California: Tech giants confront ancient Indian hierarchy

By Paresh Dave

OAKLAND - America's tech giants are taking a modern-day crash course in India's ancient caste system, with Apple emerging as an early leader in policies to rid Silicon Valley of a rigid hierarchy that's segregated Indians for generations.

Apple, the world's biggest listed company, updated its general employee conduct policy about two years ago to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of caste, which it added alongside existing categories such as race, religion, gender, age and ancestry.

The inclusion of the new category, which hasn't been previously reported, goes beyond U.S. discrimination laws, which do not explicitly ban casteism.

The update came after the tech sector - which counts India as its top source of skilled foreign workers - received a wake-up call in June 2020 when California's employment regulator sued Cisco Systems on behalf of a low-caste engineer who accused two higher-caste bosses of blocking his career.

Cisco, which denies wrongdoing, says an internal probe found no evidence of discrimination and

that some of the allegations are baseless because caste is not a legally "protected class" in California. This month an appeals panel rejected the networking company's bid to push the case to private arbitration, meaning a public court case could come as early as next year.

The dispute - the first U.S. employment lawsuit about alleged casteism - has forced Big Tech to confront a millennia-old hierarchy where Indians' social position has been based on family lineage, from the top Brahmin "priestly" class to the Dalits, shunned as "untouchables" and consigned to menial labor.

Since the suit was filed, several activist and employee groups have begun seeking updated U.S. discrimination legislation - and have also called on tech companies to change their own policies to help fill the void and deter casteism.

Their efforts have produced patchy results, according to a Reuters review of policy across the U.S. industry, which employs hundreds of thousands of workers from India.

"I am not surprised that the policies would be inconsistent because that's almost what you would expect when the law is

not clear," said Kevin Brown, a University of South Carolina law professor studying caste issues, citing uncertainty among executives over whether caste would ultimately make it into U.S. statutes.

"I could imagine that parts of ... (an) organization are saying this makes sense, and other parts are saying we don't think taking a stance makes sense."

Apple's main internal policy on workplace conduct, which was seen by Reuters, added reference to caste in the equal employment opportunity and anti-harassment sections after September 2020.

Apple confirmed that it "updated language a couple of years ago to reinforce that we prohibit discrimination or harassment based on caste." It added that training provided to staff also explicitly mentions caste.

"Our teams assess our policies, training, processes and resources on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are comprehensive," it said. "We have a diverse and global team, and are proud that our policies and actions reflect that."

Elsewhere in tech, IBM told Reuters that it added caste, which was already in India-specific policies, to its global discrimination rules after the Cisco lawsuit was



FILE PHOTO: Guests arrive at the Steve Jobs Theater for an Apple event at their headquarters in Cupertino, California.

filed, though it declined to give a specific date or a rationale.

IBM's only training that mentions caste is for managers in India, the company added.

Several companies do not specifically reference caste in their main global policy, including Amazon, Dell, Facebook owner Meta, Microsoft and Google. Reuters reviewed each of the policies, some of which are only published internally to employees.

The companies all told Reuters that they have zero tolerance for caste prejudice and, apart from Meta which did not

elaborate, said such bias would fall under existing bans on discrimination by categories such as ancestry and national origin policy.

Caste discrimination was outlawed in India over 70 years ago, yet bias persists, according to several studies in recent years, including one that found Dalit people were underrepresented in higher-paying jobs. Debate over the hierarchy is contentious in India and abroad, with the issue intertwined with religion, and some people saying discrimination is now rare.

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Salman responds to neighbor's allegations



Salman Khan approached the High Court last Friday after his Panvel farmhouse neighbor, Ketan Kakkad accused the superstar of being engaged in several nefarious activities. The superstar has now filed a case accusing Ketan of not only making defamatory but also communally provocative comments. This comes after NRI resident Ketan Kakkad allegedly posted videos accusing Salman Khan of several things including drug and human trafficking.

As per these videos shared by Ketan, he alleged that Salman Khan wants to shut down a Ganesha temple and compared him to Mughal Emperors, Babar and Aurangzeb. The actor's lawyer Mr. Kadam was quoted in these reports saying, "In the video, the defendant (Kakkad) compares Salman Khan to Babar and Aurangzeb. He (Kakkad) says it had taken 500 years for the Ayodhya Mandir (temple) to come up and here Salman Khan is trying to shut down a Ganesha temple."

According to reports, Salman Khan had approached his neighbor to sort the matter amicably. However, when it didn't work, the star sought the help of the civil court where he requested them to pass an order to take down the videos and also help stop Kakkad from making any more comments. But, the single bench of Justice C V Bhadrang did not grant the star any relief in terms of the defamation suit, after which, the superstar decided to approach the High Court.

Indian Film Festival of Melbourne: Abhishek Bachchan, Vaani Kapoor receive awards; films like 83 and Jalsa win big

The Indian Film Festival of Melbourne 2022 (IFFM) after much fanfare has announced the winners for the coveted awards of its 13th edition. The festival was attended by various dignitaries of the Victorian government in Melbourne at the iconic Palais theatre. A plethora of Indian actors and artists were also part of the celebration like Abhishek Bachchan, Taapsee Pannu, Tamannaah Bhatia, Vaani Kapoor, Kabir Khan, Shefali Shah, Shoojit Sircar, Anurag Kashyap, Nikkhil Advani etc. The awards night was hosted by Rithvik Dhanjani also saw Mohit Raina, Sona Mohapatra, Mini Mathur, Suresh Triveni, former cricketer and ex-captain of Indian cricket team, Kapil Dev, Vikram Malhotra, Shibashish Sarkar, Sunir Khetarpal in attendance.

This year IFFM 2022 also had an impressive lineup of films, short films, documentaries representing Indian cinema and from the neighbouring countries. In case of

awards, the Leadership in Cinema Award was given to Abhishek Bachchan. Vaani Kapoor was awarded with Disruptor in Cinema award for her path breaking performance in *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*.

After her winning Vaani Kapoor said, "It's so special and kind of Indian Film Festival of Melbourne and Mitu to recognise such a film and giving so much dignity, respect and love and accepted it and to have a great inclusion of *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* in a film festival. It feels so special and surreal."

On the other hand, Abhishek Bachchan expressed his gratitude adding, "I thank IFFM for giving me Leadership in Cinema award, I am extremely ecstatic being considered for this prestigious award by the Victorian Government and the film festival. Even though this award is not for the best actor, I am very much certain to come back to the festival soon enough for the best actor award too as I am certain I'll soon get it."



Mona Singh on calls to boycott *Laal Singh Chaddha*: 'What has Aamir Khan done to deserve this?'



Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor Khan starrer *Laal Singh Chaddha* is currently in cinemas. The film is Indian adaptation of *Forrest Gump*. While the film has opened to mixed reviews from critics and audience, the box office collections are not up to the expectations. But, there's also call for boycott from certain sections. The hashtags began trending on social media even before the film's release. Actress

Mona Singh, who stars in the film, recently reacted to the boycott issue.

Speaking to India Today, Singh said, "I was very sad. I mean, what has Aamir Khan done to deserve this? He is a guy who has always entertained us for the last 30 years. But I was very confident that the boycotters would come around once they started seeing that the film is resonating with every Indian."

The *Dirty Picture* sequel is in the pipeline but it will not feature

Vidya Balan



Amidst many sequels, Kanika Dhillon and Ekta Kapoor are planning to bring back one of the biggest hits, *The Dirty Picture*. The film, which is considered to be one of the boldest commercial Bollywood film, is all set to have a sequel. However, while that was based on the

life of Silk Smitha, *The Dirty Picture 2* one is expected to feature a completely different plot-line and a different set of actors. If reports are to be believed, Kriti Sanon and Taapsee Pannu are currently being considered for the role, originally played by Vidya Balan in the sequel.

UNKNOWN FACTS ABOUT BOLLYWOOD CELEBRITIES



You'll be shocked to know that Farhan is a college dropout and was also threatened by his mother that he'll be thrown out of the house for doing nothing with his life.

Shilpa Shetty debuted at a young age with the movie *Baazigar* in 1993 alongside Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol. She was just 18 years old when she came in a banger performance.



Bollywood Trivia

This actor started his acting career unexpectedly with the 1936 movie 'Jeevan Naiyya'. He went on to become one of the most celebrated actors of Indian Cinema giving hits like 'Kismet', 'Achhyut Kanya' and 'Mahal'. He is also fondly called "Dada Moni." Who is he?

- 1) Ashok Kumar
- 2) Kishore Kumar
- 3) Mehmood
- 4) Dilip Kumar

BOLLYWOOD Insider™

MOVIE REVIEW

Laal Singh Chaddha

Banner:
Aamir Khan Productions
Viacom18 Studios

Producer:
Aamir Khan
Kiran Rao
Jyoti Deshpande
Ajit Andhare

Director:
Advait Chandan

Starring:
Aamir Khan
Kareena Kapoor
Naga Chaitanya
Mona Singh

Music By:
Pritam

Release Date:
August 11, 2022

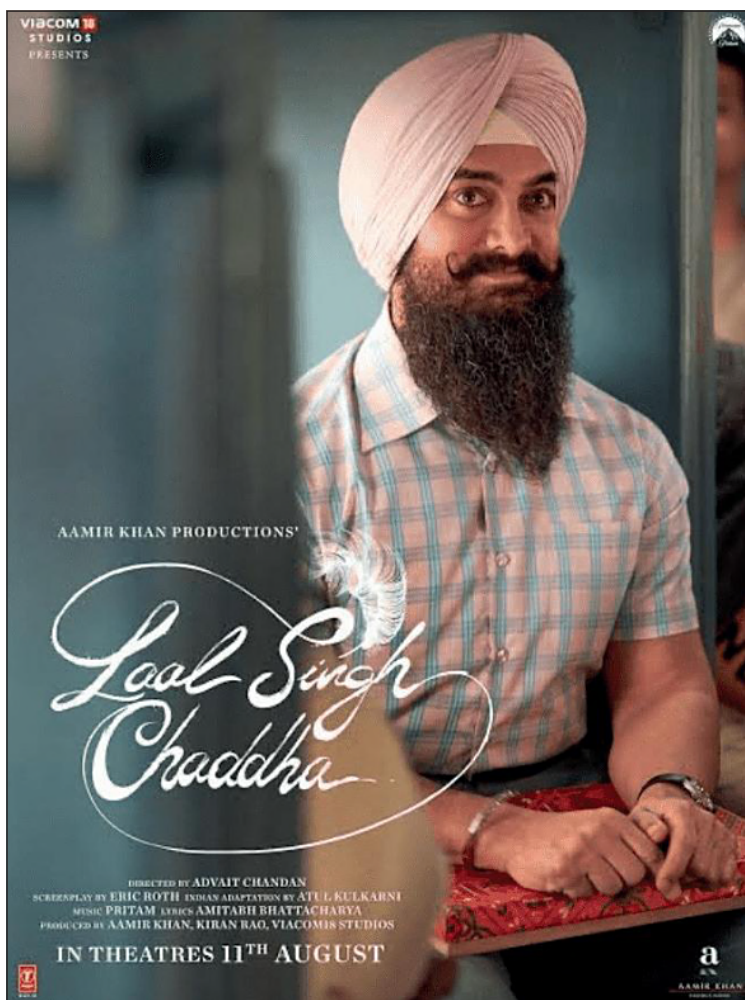
Laal Singh Chaddha is the story of man's extraordinary journey. Laal Singh Chaddha (Aamir Khan) is born in 1971 to Gurpreet (Mona Singh). She is separated from her husband and raises Laal alone in the village of Karoli near Pathankot, Punjab. As a young boy (Ahmad bin Umer), he is fitted with leg braces as he finds it difficult to walk. On top of that, he has a low IQ and hence, he becomes an object of ridicule in school. But Rupa Dsouza (Hafsa Ashraf), his classmate, becomes his close friend. Laal falls in love with her instantly. Both study in the same college in Delhi too. One day, while Laal is being chased by some bullies, he accidentally enters his college ground and the sports coach (Shrikanth Verma) enlists him after he sees him running at lightning speed. Laal participates in running tournaments for his college and becomes a champion. He continues to love Rupa. But Rupa likes him as a friend and is in love with Harry (Guneet Singh Sodhi). She wants to be a model and actress and

shifts to Mumbai. Laal meanwhile enlists in the army, like his forefathers did. During training, he becomes friends with Bala (Chaitanya Akkineni). His ancestors used to design innerwear for men and it's his dream to start an undergarment business. They become so close that he offers Laal a partnership in his future business. Laal accepts it. Sadly, the Kargil War breaks out in 1999 and Bala dies. What happens next forms the rest of the film.

Laal Singh Chaddha is an Indian adaptation of *Forrest Gump* [1994]. The story is one-of-its-kind, Atul Kulkarni's adapted screenplay (original screenplay by Eric Roth) has its share of pluses. The biggest achievement of the writer is that the story has been Indianized beautifully. Also, he made the film a lot less dark than the original, especially with regard to Rupa's character. But the writing is stretched and could have been shortened. Atul Kulkarni's dialogues (additional Punjabi dialogues by Rana Ranbir) are sweet and simple.

Advait Chandan's direction is neat. The way he connects one track of the film to another is seamless. A few scenes stand out as they are well executed. On the flipside, the film's biggest culprit is the second half. While the first half is nearly 1 hour 15 minutes long, the second half's runtime is more than 1 hour 25 minutes. The remake is longer than *Forrest Gump* by nearly 22 minutes and one can feel that in the second half. Several scenes test the patience of the viewers and the makers should have trimmed the length for a better impact. The romantic track is cute in a few places but overall, it's not entirely convincing. A few plot points are interesting like the track of Mohammed bhai (Manav Vij) but it will be difficult for the viewers to digest. Lastly, the treatment is such that it's not for mass audiences.

Speaking of performances,



Aamir Khan is in great form and owns the character. In a few scenes, he merely communicates through his eyes, especially in the running episode, and shows yet again that he's one of the finest actors today. He does go a bit overboard with his acting in the racing scenes in the beginning. But he compensates for it in the rest of the film. Kareena Kapoor Khan looks like a million bucks and delivers a bravura performance. Mona Singh is adorable. Chaitanya Akkineni leaves a huge mark despite having a small role. Manav Vij is a surprise and does well. Ahmad bin Umer and Hafsa Ashraf are cute. Shrikanth Verma, Guneet Singh Sodhi and Harry Parmar (Abbas Haji) are okay. Kamini Kaushal (Aged lady in the train), Arun Bali (Sardarji in train) and Arya Sharma (lady in train) are fine. Vijay Maurya (Dawood) is there for just one scene. Sowmyashree

Belur (Bala's wife) gets no scope. Shah Rukh Khan is superb.

Pritam's music is soothing to the ears but none of the songs will have a long shelf life. 'Kahani' is the best song of the lot. 'Tur Kalleyan' works as it comes at an important juncture. 'Main Ki Karaan', 'Phir Na Aisi Raat Aayegi' and 'Tere Hawaale' fail to leave a huge mark.

On the whole, *Laal Singh Chaddha* is embellished with fine performances and lovely moments. However, the excessive length and slow pacing in the second half goes against the film. At the box office, it will get the benefit of Raksha Bandhan from evening and also of the long, extended weekend [Thu - Mon]. However its business would be restricted only to the audience in metros and that too premium multiplexes.

Rating: ★★

Bollywood Beat

Ranveer Singh wins Best Actor of the Year award



Ranveer Singh, who was hailed by many for his performance in '83, has won the Best Actor of the Year award at the prestigious Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM). The film featured him in the role of the Indian cricket team captain Kapil Dev and was directed by Kabir Khan.

Needless to say, Ranveer Singh expressed his happiness and gratitude for this win adding that '83 will always be one of the most cherished films in his filmography. Speaking about it, Ranveer said, "I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the jury members at IFFM for bestowing me with the Best Actor of the Year Award for my role as Kapil Dev. '83 is one of the most loved films of my career! It'll always be one of the most cherished films in my filmography."

He went on to share, "But more than the accolades, it's the process of making this film that I will cherish the most. I'm grateful to Kabir Sir for giving me this opportunity, for guiding me and for inspiring me with his leadership. I share this honour with the cast and crew of '83 who are so dear to me, and with whom I share a very, very warm bond."

Ranveer also dedicated this honour to every member of Kapil Dev's World Cup winning squad. "I dedicate this honour to Kapil's Devils, a fine bunch of gentlemen who dared to dream, who through their efforts and achievements showed us that we Indians can be the best in the world," he concluded.

Celebrity Birthdays

August 22nd Devoleena Bhattacharjee (1985)	August 28th Deepak Tijori (1961) Karanvir Bohra (1982)	September 2nd Sudeep (1973)
August 23rd Gauhar Khan (1983) Vani Kapoor (1988)	August 29th Richa Sharma (1974)	September 3rd Vivek Oberoi (1976)
August 26th Madhur Bhandarkar (1968)	August 31st Rajkummar Rao (1984)	
August 27th Neha Dhupia (1980)	September 1st Deepak Dobriyal (1975) Ram Kapoor (1973)	

Upcoming Films

Jewel Of India Amitabh Bachchan and Katrina Kaif	Vikram Vedha Saif Ali Khan and Hrithik Roshan	Thank God Ajay Devgn and Rakul Preet Singh
Ram Setu Akshay Kumar, Jacqueline Fernandez and Nushratt Bharuccha	Dobaaraa Taapsee Pannu and Pavail Gulati	Ganapath Tiger Shroff and Kriti Sanon
Brahmāstra Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt	Thai Massage Divyennud Sharma, Gajraj Rao and Rajpal Yadav	Bhediya Varun Dhawa, Kriti Sanon and Deepak Dobriyal

BUSINESS

BIZ BRIEFS

Rupee falls as Fed minutes prop dollar

The Indian rupee slipped on Thursday against a steady greenback that found support from minutes of the U.S. Federal Reserve's last meeting that hinted higher interest rates could stick for longer.

The partially convertible rupee ended at 79.6725, having flirted with the key 79.70 level occasionally during the session. The local unit had closed at 79.4450 on Wednesday.

Traders widely expect the rupee to tread the 79-80 range for at least another week, with no major events around the corner.

"Within that broad range, there is choppiness depending on sentiment. A 25-30 paise broad move one day gets covered the next day, so within this range there's volatility," Gaurang Somaiya, an analyst at Motilal Oswal said.

India's SpiceJet settles with lessors

Indian low-cost carrier SpiceJet Ltd said on Tuesday it has entered into a settlement agreement with aircraft lessor Goshawk Aviation Ltd and its affiliates related to three Boeing aircraft.

The airline said that the agreement - the terms of which are confidential - ends all litigation proceedings between the parties, adding that this will allow SpiceJet to add two more fuel-efficient Boeing 737 MAX aircraft and one Boeing 737-800 NG aircraft to its fleet.

Recently, SpiceJet has been in trouble with its lessors, Ireland-based Alterna Aircraft Ltd and United Arab Emirates aeronautics firm AWAS, who asked the Indian aviation regulator to de-register their planes.

Indian companies swapping dollar for Asian currencies to buy Russian coal

By Sudarshan Varadhan

NEW DELHI - Indian companies are using Asian currencies more often to pay for Russian coal imports, according to customs documents and industry sources, avoiding the U.S. dollar and cutting the risk of breaching Western sanctions against Moscow.

Reuters previously reported on a large Indian coal deal involving the Chinese yuan, but the customs data underline how non-dollar settlements are becoming commonplace.

India has aggressively stepped up purchases of Russian oil and coal since the war in Ukraine began, helping to cushion Moscow from the effects of sanctions and allowing New Delhi to secure raw materials at discounts compared to supplies from other countries.

Russia became India's third-largest coal supplier in July, with imports rising by over a fifth

compared with June to a record 2.06 million tonnes.

In June, Indian buyers paid for at least 742,000 tonnes of Russian coal using currencies other than the U.S. dollar, according to a summary of deals compiled by a trade source based in India using customs documents and shared with Reuters, equal to 44% of the 1.7 million of tonnes of Russian imports that month.

Indian steelmakers and cement manufacturers have bought Russian coal using the United Arab Emirates dirham, Hong Kong dollar, yuan and euro in recent weeks, according to customs documents separately reviewed by Reuters.

The yuan accounted for 31% of the non-U.S. dollar payments for Russian coal in June and the Hong Kong dollar for 28%. The euro made up under a quarter and the Emirati dirham around one-sixth, the data from the trade source showed.

India's Ministry of Finance,



U.S. Dollar and Chinese Yuan banknotes are seen in this illustration picture taken on June 14, 2022.

which administers the customs board, did not respond to emails seeking comment confirming the documents. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry declined to comment.

The Reserve Bank of India

also did not respond to requests for comment.

The RBI has approved payments for commodities in the Indian rupee, a move it expects to boost bilateral trade with Russia in its own currency.

Indian inflation still elevated, may warrant policy response says RBI

By Swati Bhat

MUMBAI - Inflation in India may still require a monetary policy response going forward as it remains above the target range even though it has eased in recent months, the Reserve Bank of India said on Thursday.

"In India, supply conditions are improving, with the recent monsoon pick-up, strong momentum in manufacturing and a rebound in services," the central bank said in an article on the state of the economy, published in its monthly bulletin.

"Inflation has edged down,

but its persistence at elevated levels warrants appropriate policy responses to anchor expectations going forward," RBI added.

India's consumer inflation dipped to 6.71% in July, easing for the third month in a row and helped by a slower increase in food and fuel prices but it remained above the RBI's 2% to 6% tolerance band for a seventh straight month.

"Imported inflation pressure points remain the overarching risk, followed by pending pass-through of input costs if producers regain

pricing power, and wages," RBI wrote.

"Yet, some risks have turned down - commodity prices, especially of crude; supply chain pressures; revving up of monsoon activity due to the depression in the Bay of Bengal," it added.

The RBI's monetary policy committee raised the bank's key lending rate by 50 bps earlier in the month, its third increase in four months to curb rising price pressures.

RBI also highlighted that portfolio inflows had turned positive for India in August so far after a

long hiatus, but it sounded cautious on the outlook of these "fickle flows".

"Tightening of global funding conditions as monetary policy is front loaded is hence expected to worsen the outlook for portfolio flows," it wrote.

The central bank said the onset of the festival season should boost consumer demand, including in rural areas as sowing activity picks pace, while the robust central government capital outlays are seen supporting investment activity.



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Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, 'India's Warren Buffett', dies at 62

By Rupam Jain and M. Sriram

MUMBAI - India's best-known stock investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, dubbed the country's Warren Buffett, died on Sunday, prompting an outpouring of tributes for a self-made billionaire whose fortunes rose with the country's economy.

Jhunjhunwala died at the age of 62, a week after the launch of his budget airline, Akasa Air. He had looked and sounded frail promoting the carrier. The cause of his death was not immediately known.

He is survived by his wife, whom he used to call his only client, and three children. He leaves stakes in around three dozen Indian companies and a legacy of

quoting one-liners like "the trend is your friend" and "the only rule I have is there are no rules".

"All I've known is trading and investing. I don't want to do anything else in life," Jhunjhunwala told Reuters 10 years ago. "I'll call it quits the day I die."

On Monday, he told CNBC-TV18 that India's economy, Asia's third-biggest, was "entering a golden age," expressing hope that "my fellow Indians are as optimistic as I am."

Jhunjhunwala was a big public supporter of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who lauded him on Sunday as "indomitable, full of life, witty and insightful".

Jhunjhunwala's communication skills helped small investors understand the stock market, said businessmen and bankers based

in India's financial capital, Mumbai, who had interacted with him for over 30 years. His insights on the economy and companies made him a TV celebrity.

Born in the state of Rajasthan and trained in chartered accountancy, Jhunjhunwala started dabbling in stocks as a teenager and went on to manage a stock trading firm, RARE Enterprises. His net worth was about \$6 billion, according to Forbes.

He made his first big profit by buying 5,000 shares in Tata Tea with borrowed money, confident the markets had under-estimated the potential of a company looking to grow at a time of rising yield production. He trebled his money within months.

Better, bigger investments followed, including a leveraged bet



Rakesh Jhunjhunwala

in the late 1980s on iron ore exporter Sesa Goa. Jhunjhunwala bought the stock at 60-65 rupees and sold at 2,200 rupees.

His firm's investments include many Tata Group companies, such as Tata Motors, watchmaker Titan, Tata Communications and Indian Hotels Co, which runs the Taj hotels.

Other investments include Indiabulls Housing Finance, Star Health Insurance, Federal Bank and vocational training company Aptech Ltd.

Jhunjhunwala had told Reuters the growth of the Indian stock market since the country's economy was liberalised in 1991 - a period in which the main Sensex

index has risen about 40-fold - was a big factor in his success.

"Investor, bold risk taker, masterly understanding of the stock market, clear in communication - a leader in his own right," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman wrote in a tribute on Twitter. "Had strong belief in India's strength and capabilities."

Uday Kotak, chief executive of Kotak Mahindra Bank, and school and college mate, said Jhunjhunwala "believed stock-India was undervalued. He is right."

Kotak said on Twitter: "Amazingly sharp in understanding financial markets. We spoke regularly, more so during COVID. Will miss you Rakesh!"

U.S. says India hid Russian origin of fuel shipped to U.S., India central banker says

NEW DELHI - The United States has expressed concern to India that it was being used to export fuel made from Russian crude, through high-seas transfers to hide its origin, to New York in violation of U.S. sanctions, a top Indian central banker said.

The U.S. Treasury Department told India that an Indian ship picked up oil from a Russian tanker on the high seas and brought it to a port in Gujarat on the west coast, where it was refined and shipped on, said Reserve Bank of India Deputy Governor

Michael Patra.

U.S. sanctions on Moscow for its February invasion of Ukraine prohibit the import to the United States of Russian-origin energy products including crude oil, refined fuels, distillates, coal and gas.




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WEEKLY HOROSCOPE

(August 28 - September 3, 2022)

Aries (March 21 to April 20)

There are two types of people who will tell you that you cannot make a difference in this world: those who are afraid to try and those who are afraid you will succeed. You have been hearing a lot of these pessimistic noises from people around you and this is the right time to insulate yourself from them.

Taurus (April 21 to May 21)

As a general rule, the freedom of any people can be judged by the volume of their laughter. You have been so busy in this hectic schedule that you have forgotten how a carefree lifestyle is. This week you should focus on your inner happiness.

Gemini (May 22 to June 21)

The high cost of living hasn't affected its popularity. You have been splurging a lot on things you do not really need. This is resulting in an imbalance in your financial life. You should ensure that you initiate a humbler lifestyle by not investing too much in luxury.

Cancer (June 22 to July 22)

Hindsight is an exact science. You have been wasting too much of your energy on regretting things that were never in your control. You should imbibe more practicality this week and stop this overthinking which is leading to mental fatigue.

Leo (July 23 to August 22)

If the odds are a million to one against something occurring, chances are it will. You are encountering unnecessary delays and hurdles in your life right now. You have been thinking too much about your goals without putting in the requisite efforts.

Virgo (August 23 to September 23)

Never say, 'oops'. Always say, 'Ah, interesting'. This week will provide you with ample opportunities to say 'Ah, interesting'. Rather than overthinking the current issues, just focus on solutions with a smile on your face.

Libra (September 24 to October 23)

A mistake should be your teacher, not your attacker. A mistake is a lesson, not a loss. It is a temporary, necessary detour, not a dead end. You have become too pessimistic due to the mistakes and negative circumstances that you are currently surrounded with.

Scorpio (October 24 to November 22)

All the talent in the world won't take you anywhere without your teammates. You have been facing a lot of challenges in your professional life due to some people around you and this is the time for you to reduce your rigidity and accept others' viewpoints too.

Sagittarius (November 23 to December 21)

Ambition is putting a ladder against the sky. This is a high octane week wherein you will set very high goals and will also be able to attain those goals. Keep a good work-life balance. Advice: Keep a good work-life balance.

Capricorn (December 22 to January 20)

Time is like a handful of sand — the tighter you grasp it, the faster it runs through your fingers. You have been trying to control your environment a lot and are unable to do so.

Aquarius (January 21 to February 19)

Better late than never, but never late is better. You have been wasting your time in this unending phase of laziness. You need to understand that this laziness will not help you realize your ambitions and will only create problems in life.

Pisces (February 20 to March 20)

A bad day sailing is 100 times better than a good day at work. The materialistic race that you are now so much accustomed to in life has taken a toll on your inner happiness. A good phase to take some time off and do things which you really love.

India could emerge as Asia's strongest economy in 2022-23, says Morgan Stanley

India could emerge as Asia's strongest economy in 2022-2023 as it is best-positioned to generate robust domestic demand, helped by economic policy reforms, a young workforce and business investments, Morgan Stanley economists said.

The brokerage expects India's growth to average 7% for 2022-2023 and contribute 28% and 22% to Asian and global growth, respectively.

Morgan Stanley's projection comes as Asia's third-largest economy grew 9.2% in the fiscal year 2022, a sharp recovery from a 6.6% contraction in the previous year as COVID-19 lockdowns took a severe toll on its economy. The country now expects GDP growth for 2022-2023 at 8%-8.5%.

"Lower corporate taxes, the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme and India as a potential beneficiary of supply chain diversification will catalyse and sustain domestic demand, especially in investment," the economists said in a note dated.

In 2019, India had cut corporate tax rates to woo manufacturers and revive private investment, and launched the PLI scheme in 2020 to aid domestic



People walk at a crowded market in the old quarters of Delhi, India.

manufacturing.

The brokerage sees risks related to higher energy prices, spurred by the Ukraine war and supply constraints, to remain, but added that they have begun to recede.

Morgan Stanley's outlook also comes as developed economies paint a glum picture, with business activity in the United States and eurozone contracting in July, as per their PMI data.

"The economy is set for its best run in over a decade as pent-up demand is being unleashed," the brokerage said, adding that

"healthy" corporate balance sheets and business confidence bodes well for India's investment outlook.

While India, like other economies, raised interest rates to battle inflation, Morgan Stanley said the country's 39.45 trillion rupee (\$529.7 billion) budget for the current fiscal year has continued to tilt towards lifting public investment.

It expects domestic consumption to pick up and services exports to hold up better than goods exports.

India's domestic airlines get a boost as cap on ticket prices lifts

BENGALURU - Shares of Indian domestic airlines rose last Thursday, a day after the civil aviation ministry said it will remove the restrictions on ticket prices it had imposed two years ago due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Domestic airlines IndiGo, SpiceJet Ltd, Air India, Go First and Vistara - a joint venture between the Tata Group and

Singapore Airlines - can now price tickets freely.

Shares of top airline IndiGo's parent InterGlobe Aviation Ltd rose as much as 2.3% to 2084.6 rupees while smaller rival SpiceJet Ltd jumped as much as 7% to 47.9 rupees.

The government had imposed a minimum and maximum band based on the flight's duration to prevent ticket prices from spik-

ing once restrictions on air travel eased.

Competition in the Indian aviation space is expected to heat up with the launch of Akasa Air and revival of Jet Airways.

The upcoming festival season is expected to boost demand for air travel, with passenger numbers already touching pre-COVID levels. But high fuel costs continue to be a dampener.

India's Digit Insurance eyes \$440 million in IPO

By M. Sriram and Chris Thomas

MUMBAI - India's Digit Insurance, backed by Canadian billionaire Prem Watsa's Fairfax Group, aims to raise around \$440 million through an initial public offering (IPO), according to a source with direct knowledge and regulatory documents filed.

Founded in 2017, Digit is trying to expand its presence in general insurance by offering a better customer experience including easier claim settlements.

The company's prospectus filed

on Tuesday showed the IPO will consist of a fresh issue of shares worth 12.5 billion Indian rupees (\$158 million).

Large existing shareholders will also sell up to 109.4 million shares, it said, without specifying the funds that would raise.

The source directly aware of the matter, however, said that sale will raise roughly \$282 million, bringing the total IPO size to around \$440 million.

Digit declined to comment on the total IPO size.

Reuters first reported Digit Insurance's plans to raise funds via

an IPO on May 25.

Morgan Stanley and local investment banks ICICI Securities, Axis Capital, Edelweiss Financial Services, HDFC Bank and IIFL Securities are managing the IPO.

Digit reported total income of \$571.70 million for the fiscal year ended in March, up from \$362.23 million a year earlier, filings showed. Its losses grew to \$37.29 million from \$15.47 million.

Digit plans to use the IPO proceeds to shore up its balance sheet and maintain cash reserves which the regulator requires of insurance companies, it said.

U.S. move to negotiate drug prices a rare defeat for Big Pharma

By Ahmed Aboulenein

WASHINGTON - Big Pharma spent more than any other industry to lobby Congress and federal agencies this year, a Reuters analysis shows, but still suffered a major defeat after failing to stop a bill that allows the

government to negotiate prices on select drugs.

Despite the pharmaceutical industry's spending at least \$142 million on lobbying efforts, the \$430 billion Inflation Reduction Act to change climate, health and tax policies will become law. It cleared its largest hurdle last

week with passage in the Senate, without any Republicans joining Democrats in voting for the bill, followed by passage by the U.S. House of Representatives last Friday.

President Joe Biden will sign it into law next week.

The bill's imminent enactment



Bottles of medications line the shelves at a pharmacy in Portsmouth, Ohio.

represents a rare legislative defeat for the pharmaceutical industry and sets a precedent for curbing drug prices in the world's most lucrative market for medicines, according to congressional and industry officials.

"This is a major first step forward," Democratic Senator Patty Murray, chair of the Senate's health committee, told Reuters. "It is the first time we've been able to make this kind of step to lower prices on pharmaceuticals ... which will set the stage for us to do more."

Health policy experts say the bill reflects the pharma industry's weakening influence on the Democratic Party and that its main argument against price negotiation -- that it stifles innovation -- is no longer persuasive for the public.

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll in October found that 83% of Americans, including 95% of Democrats and 71% of Republicans, want the federal Medicare health plan for seniors to negotiate prices, a provision of the bill.

"The pharma guys upped the ante in throwing everything but the kitchen sink against this," said Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat who chairs the finance committee.

The industry's powerful trade association, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), urged sena-

tors in a public letter to reject the bill. Its president, Stephen Ubl, told Politico that lawmakers who vote for it would not "get a free pass."

"Few associations have all the tools of modern political advocacy at their disposal in the way that PhRMA does," he said.

A PhRMA spokesperson said the group would continue to work with all lawmakers. He did not address Ubl's comments about holding lawmakers accountable.

"We may not agree on every issue, but we believe engagement and dialogue is important to promoting a policy environment that supports innovation, a highly-skilled workforce and access to life-saving medicines for patients," said spokesperson Brian Newell in an email.

PHARMA'S PLAN

A Reuters analysis of lobbying and campaign contribution data from OpenSecrets shows that the pharmaceutical industry spent at least \$142.6 million on lobbying Congress and federal agencies in the first half of 2022, more than any industry, and at least \$16.1 million on campaign contributions during the current mid-term election cycle that started in January 2021.

Almost two-thirds of the money spent on lobbying, around \$93 million, came from PhRMA and its member companies.

AstraZeneca says data confirms Enhertu benefit in breast cancer patients

By Natalie Grover and Pushkala Aripaka

AstraZeneca said a late-stage trial had confirmed the benefit of breast cancer drug Enhertu in patients with an advanced form of the disease who had been previously treated with another therapy.

In a 600-patient trial called DESTINY-Breast02, Enhertu - developed with Japan's Daiichi Sankyo - was compared against a treatment pre-determined by physicians in people with HER2-positive metastatic breast cancer.

The trial evaluated a similar breast cancer patient population as the DESTINY-Breast01 mid-stage trial, which was the basis for initial approvals in Europe and several other countries, AstraZeneca said.

In the DESTINY-Breast02 study, Enhertu met the main goal of statistically significant and clinically meaningful improvement in progression-free survival, a measure of how long a person can live without their disease worsening. The drug also improved overall survival, a key secondary goal.

Detailed results will be presented at an upcoming scientific conference.

The HER2 protein contributes to the growth and spread of breast cancer. About one in five patients with breast cancer are considered HER2-positive, according to AstraZeneca.

AstraZeneca's shares were up about 2% on Monday morning, while Daiichi's shares jumped about 15%.

Earlier this month, AstraZeneca and Daiichi secured U.S.

approval specifically targeting patients with so-called HER2-low breast cancer, paving the way for billions in sales.

Enhertu's first approval came in late 2019, as a third-line treatment for breast cancer patients with HER2-positive disease, in the United States.

It has since also secured multiple approvals in other breast cancer settings, as well as forms of lung and gastric cancer.

The drug, which generated sales of \$214 million in 2021, belongs to a class of therapies called antibody drug conjugates. It comprises a monoclonal antibody chemically linked to a cell-killing chemotherapy drug.

AstraZeneca secured partial rights to the Daiichi Sankyo compound three years ago in a deal worth up to \$6.9 billion.

J&J to end global sales of talc-based baby powder

Johnson & Johnson will stop selling talc-based baby powder globally in 2023, the drug-maker said on Thursday, more than two years after it ended U.S. sales of a product that drew thousands of consumer safety lawsuits.

"As part of a worldwide portfolio assessment, we have made the commercial decision to transition to an all cornstarch-based baby powder portfolio," it said, adding that cornstarch-based baby powder is already

sold in countries around the world.

In 2020, J&J announced that it would stop selling its talc Baby Powder in the United States and Canada because demand had fallen in the wake of what it called "misinformation" about the product's safety amid a barrage of legal challenges.

The company faces about 38,000 lawsuits from consumers and their survivors claiming its talc products caused

cancer due to contamination with asbestos, a known carcinogen.

J&J spun off subsidiary LTL Management in October, assigned its talc claims to it and immediately placed it into bankruptcy, pausing the pending lawsuits. Those suing have said Johnson & Johnson should have to defend itself against the lawsuits, while defendants of J&J and the bankrupt subsidiary process say it is an equitable way to compensate claimants.

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Long COVID risk up for unvaccinated children; at-home antibody test shows promise



A girl receives a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pediatric vaccine during a mass vaccination program for children ages 6 to 7 in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico on August 9, 2022.

By Nancy Lapid

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review.

Unvaccinated children have higher long COVID risk.

A small study is adding to evidence that children can develop long COVID-19 even if the virus did not make them seriously ill. Researchers in Texas who tracked 1,813 children infected with the virus between October 2020 and May 2022 - during the waves of the Delta and Omicron coronavirus variants - found that 4.5% had symptoms for up to 12 weeks and 3.3% had symptoms for longer than 12 weeks. The risk for persistent symptoms - loss of taste and smell, cough and difficulty breathing - was highest in children sick enough from COVID-19 to be hospitalized. But

93% of those with long COVID had reported only mild to moderate illness when initially infected, according to the study published in *The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*. The risk was highest for children infected earlier in the pandemic, before vaccines were available, the researchers said. Most of the children with long COVID had not been vaccinated, they found. "There may be a perception that one needs to be hospitalized to have long COVID, and that is not what we found. I encourage parents to still take caution and get their child vaccinated against COVID-19, because we now know that it will decrease the risk of infection and long COVID," study leader Sarah Messiah of the University of Texas said in a news release.

Experimental at-home test measures COVID antibody levels.

An experimental test for at-home use that measures a person's antibody levels to the

virus that causes COVID-19 could someday help people know how protected they are against infection and what kinds of precautions they need to take, according to researchers. Their device - now in the prototype stage - employs the same technology as most rapid antigen tests for COVID-19, except it uses a drop of blood rather than nasal swabs. As reported in the journal *Cell Reports Methods*, the test measures the amount of antibodies that are capable of blocking the virus from attaching itself to cells and infecting them. A smartphone app would then interpret the findings and quantify the person's antibody level. The test is designed so that the manufacturer could adjust it to account for future variants of the virus, the researchers said. "Many people probably want to know how well protected they are," study leader

Dr. Hojun Li of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said in a news release. "But I think where this test might make the biggest difference is for anybody ... who doesn't mount good immune responses," such as cancer patients or people taking immunosuppressive medications. Li's team has filed for a patent but said more research is needed to demonstrate that the test is safe and accurate.

COVID-19 vaccination rates may be lagging among adults with vision or hearing disabilities, U.S. Census Bureau survey data indicated. Between April 2021 and March 2022, the bureau surveyed 916,085 people about their receipt of COVID-19 vaccines and other healthcare factors. Overall, 3.8% reported vision difficulties and 2.5% reported hearing impairment. Researchers

found that 83% of people without hearing or vision problems reported receiving at least one dose of a vaccine, compared to 80.7% of those with any hearing impairment and 76.7% of those reporting any vision difficulties, according to a study in the journal *JAMA Ophthalmology*. The disparities were more pronounced with more severe impairment, with vaccination rates of 62.9% among those who said they are completely blind and 65.2% in those who are deaf. "Few state vaccination plans have prioritized adults with vision or hearing disabilities," the authors said. They called for research on factors that may be contributing to vaccination difficulties for these groups, such as lack of accessible vaccine registration sites and broadcast information for those with vision or hearing disabilities.

Baby formula supplies improving, say U.S. retailers Walmart and Target

Two big U.S. retailers Walmart Inc and Target Corp said on Tuesday that supplies of baby formula were improving, months after the country faced acute shortages that had caused a panic among parents.

Considering the still-existing supply constraints, Target said it will continue with the purchase restrictions both at its stores and online.

The shortage that began due to pandemic-induced supply chain issues worsened in February when Abbott Laboratories, the biggest U.S. supplier, re-

called some products and closed a manufacturing plant after reports of bacterial infections.

In response, U.S. health regulators relaxed import policies and shipped in millions of cans of emergency supplies from companies such as Nestle SA and Reckitt Benckiser.

Abbott in early July partly restarted production of certain specialty and metabolic formulas at its Sturgis facility while also importing baby formula products from its international plants.

Walmart Chief Financial Of-

ficer John David Rainey said on an earnings call on Tuesday the shortage the company experienced in a "big way" in the second quarter was easing.

Data from market research firm IRI also showed stock levels for baby formula in U.S. stores have improved in the recent weeks.

In its quarterly report, Walmart said it now expects a smaller drop in its annual profit as discounts to clear excess merchandise and lower fuel prices helped it beat quarterly sales expectations.

Former asthma sufferer Biden has cough, but not COVID, White House says

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Joe Biden continues to test negative for COVID-19 but is suffering its lingering effects, the White House press office said on Tuesday, after he coughed repeatedly through a speech on the South Lawn.

Biden spoke to dozens of Congress members, including Republicans, as well as business executives and members of his Cabinet, in sweltering midday heat before signing the a \$53 billion bill aimed at boosting the U.S. semiconductor industry.

His persistent congestion forced him to stop the speech at several points to turn aside and cough into his hand or sip water, drawing the attention of supporters and detractors alike

on social media. The 79-year-old president recently suffered his second bout of COVID-19, and was isolated for over two weeks in the White House until Sunday.

"The President tested negative for COVID yesterday and this morning," the press office told the White House pool, soon after the speech ended.

Biden used to have asthma, Ashish Jha, the COVID-19 coordinator, told reporters in July, and has "reactive airway disease," which means he is prone to getting "a little bit of bronchospasm," or cough. He relied on an albuterol inhaler to alleviate his cough during his illness, and has previously used an inhaler while he had a cold, he said.

Polio virus found in New York City wastewater, suggesting local transmission

By Kanishka Singh

Health officials identified the virus that causes polio in New York City's wastewater, suggesting local transmission of the virus, state authorities said last Friday, urging unvaccinated New Yorkers to get vaccinated.

"The NYC Health Department and the New York State Department of Health have identified poliovirus in sewage in NYC, suggesting local transmission of the virus," the city's health department said in a statement last Friday.

"Polio can lead to paralysis and even death. We urge unvaccinated New Yorkers to get vaccinated now."

The identification comes weeks after a case of polio in an adult was made public on July 21 in Rockland County, marking the nation's first confirmed case in nearly 10 years. read more

Earlier this month, health officials said the virus was found in wastewater in the New York City suburb a month before health officials there announced the Rockland County case.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said at the time it was not yet clear whether the virus was actively spreading in New York or elsewhere in the United States.

There is no cure for polio, which can cause irreversible paralysis in some cases, but it can be prevented by a vaccine made

available in 1955.

New York officials have said they are opening vaccine clinics to help unvaccinated residents get their shots. Inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) is the only polio vaccine that has been given in the United States since 2000, according to the CDC. It is given by shot in the leg or arm, depending on the patient's age.

Polio is often asymptomatic and people can transmit the virus even when they do not appear sick. But it can produce mild, flu-like symptoms that can take as long as 30 days to appear, officials said.

It can strike at any age but the majority of those affected are children aged three and younger.

Newly launched U.S. drugs head toward record-high prices in 2022

By Deena Beasley

Drugmakers are launching new medicines at record-high prices this year, a Reuters analysis has found, highlighting their pricing power even as Congress moves to cut the \$500 billion-plus annual bill for prescription drugs in the United States.

At the same time, some pharmaceutical manufacturers are disclosing less information about the pricing of those treatments, which have come under greater scrutiny in recent years, Reuters found.

"In the U.S. we allow drug manufacturers to freely set prices for all brand-name drugs," Dr. Aaron Kesselheim, professor

of medicine at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital, told Reuters.

The median annual price of 13 novel drugs approved for chronic conditions by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration so far this year is \$257,000, Reuters found.

They were in good company: seven other newly-launched drugs were priced above \$200,000. Three other drugs launched in 2022 are used only intermittently and were not included in the calculation.

Last year, the median annual price rose to \$180,000 for the 30 drugs first marketed through mid-July 2021, according to a study published recently in JAMA.

While the Reuters tally does

not completely replicate the work of that study, it shows that the direction of new drug prices continues to be on the rise.

The JAMA study also excluded drugs that are used intermittently. It included an adjustment for the fact that drugs for very rare diseases have higher prices, which Reuters did not.

The pharmaceutical industry says that prices for new drugs, many of which now treat rare diseases for which there are no therapies, reflect their value to patients, including the ability to prevent costly emergency room visits and hospital stays.

Drugmakers also stress that they do not determine what U.S. patients end up paying for the



Pharmaceutical tablets and capsules are arranged in the shape of a U.S. dollar sign on a table in this picture.

medicines.

"Each person's individual (health) insurer and plan will determine the out-of-pocket costs," Eli Lilly & Co said in response to a question about the \$12,700 annual price of its new diabetes drug Mounjaro, adding that the company offers savings cards to reduce those costs to as little as \$25 a month.

'AN ATTEMPT TO DISTRACT'

At the same time, drug price information has become harder to confirm. Reuters requested price data from all 15 of the companies that launched new drugs this year.

Six of the manufacturers either did not respond to a request for price details or initially provided only partial information, such as a "per vial" cost, rather than an annual cost based on average patient use, as they had in the past.

Sanofi said its new drug Enjaymo, used to treat a rare type of anemia, was priced at \$1,800 per vial. When pressed further, the French healthcare group clarified that the typical annual price is \$280,800.

Immunocore initially disclosed only a "per vial" price for melanoma drug Kimmtrak, and Dermavant Sciences gave only a "per tube" price for its new psoriasis cream. Bristol Myers Squibb quoted a "per infusion" price for cancer treatment Opdualag. All three eventually provided annual prices.

CTI BioPharma referred Reuters to a third-party database, but later gave a monthly price for its rare anemia treatment Vonjo. Mycovia Pharmaceuticals said that "as a private company" it would not provide information on the price of its antifungal drug Vivjoa.

Dr. Ameet Sarpatwari, a Harvard University professor who specializes in healthcare law, said such incomplete disclosure could be "an attempt to distract" from high annual costs.

Some drugmakers, in response, say treatment costs can vary

depending on patient weight and other factors, complicating the estimation of prices for an average patient.

Congress last week passed the landmark \$430 billion Inflation Reduction Act that includes a cap on annual drug price increases and allows the Medicare health program for seniors to negotiate prices for up to 20 of the drugs on which it spends the most.

The bill, however, does not limit what drugmakers can charge for new drugs. Some industry experts say that could leave manufacturers even more reliant on higher launch prices.

"The industry will turn to new drugs to try to use the lever that remains uncontrolled," said Daniel Ollendorf, of the Center for the Evaluation of Value and Risk in Health at Tufts Medical Center.

The JAMA-published study on drug prices showed that between 2008 and 2021, U.S. drug launch prices grew 20% annually.

On a net basis, which accounts for volume-based rebates and other discounts that health insurers negotiate with drugmakers, prices for new drugs rose by 11% a year, according to the study led by researchers from the Boston-based Program on Regulation, Therapeutics, and Law and from Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Reuters did not calculate a comparable rise for 2022 as such discounts are not made public.

Discounts and rebates are often demanded by payers for new drugs once competing treatments become available. As patents expire, lower-cost generics also mitigate prescription drug price inflation, which in the 12 months through July has grown by 2.8%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"The vast majority of drugs that Americans use are generics," said Rena Conti, associate professor at Boston University's business school. Drugs for diseases with few treatment options command the highest prices, she said.

Abortion bans limit training options for some future U.S. physicians

By Rose Horowitch

University of Oklahoma medical student Ian Peake spent four years shadowing doctors at a Tulsa abortion clinic because his school didn't offer courses on abortion or provide any training.

But the Tulsa Women's Clinic stopped abortion services in May when Oklahoma enacted a near-total ban, and the provider closed for good after the U.S. Supreme Court ended constitutional abortion protections in June. Peake, 33, now had no local options to learn about abortion.

"It's basically impossible to get abortion education in the state," said Peake, who is now applying to residency programs outside of Oklahoma. "We're going to have whole swaths of the country where medical students aren't going to really know how these procedures work."

In interviews, a dozen doctors, activists and medical students said they worried that the next generation of physicians trained in states with severe abortion restrictions would lack crucial skills to treat women.

Even before the Supreme Court overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nationwide, some conservative states restricted institutions from teaching how to provide abortions. The June ruling, which allowed states to decide the legality of abortion, has left more medical schools and residency programs unable to offer comprehensive obstetrics and gynecology training.

Ninety-two percent of obstetrics and gynecology residents reported having access to some level of abortion training in 2020, according to a study published in

April by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' journal. The researchers predicted that number would drop to 56% at best following Roe's overturn.

Already, seven states, including Texas and Alabama, no longer have any clinics providing abortion services, according to the Guttmacher Institute, an abortion rights research group.

The procedure used to perform elective abortions, known as dilation and curettage, is needed for emergencies such as if a pregnant woman has a heart attack, stroke or begins hemorrhaging. It is also necessary to clear tissue from the uterus after an incomplete miscarriage to prevent infection and sepsis.

"It goes beyond just what people refer to as abortion," said Maya Hammoud, an obstetrics and gynecology professor at the University of Michigan Medical School. "It's how it's going to affect everything else in women's healthcare."

Medical schools are not required to provide abortion training. But the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), which assesses and certifies residency programs, requires that all residents learn how to perform abortion procedures before graduating.

The council has proposed revisions to its obstetrics and gynecology guidelines after Roe's overturn, saying programs in states that restrict abortion access must help budding doctors travel to another state to receive training. If a resident is unable to travel, programs must still train the resident using classroom lessons and simulation.

Several doctors and an activist raised concerns about whether

simulation - which is often performed on a dragonfruit or papaya - could adequately prepare residents for real-world treatment.

"I'm very concerned that at some point very well-respected med schools are going to graduate students who have not received a modern medical education," said Pamela Merritt, executive director of Medical Students for Choice, an abortion rights advocacy group. "Even if they get the green light to intervene to save the life of a pregnant person, they won't actually be able to do it."

Anti-abortion advocates say medical schools and residency programs will continue to teach emergency procedures to save a woman's life even if they do not teach how to perform voluntary abortions.

"We have seen abortion activists employing misinformation and scare tactics aimed at women who do not deserve that stress," said Kristi Hamrick, spokesperson for Students for Life of America, an anti-abortion group.

Louito Edje, associate dean of graduate medical education at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and an ACGME member, said she expects most institutions will help their residents travel to receive real-world training.

But training could still suffer, she said, if more students are crowded into fewer institutions and there isn't enough patient flow to provide everyone with hands-on practice.

The University of Michigan has established a task force to prepare for an influx of residents coming to Ann Arbor for training, said Lisa Harris, an obstetrics and gynecology professor who is co-chair of the task force.

ICC plans 777 cricket matches for 2023-27; more time for IPL



India's Rishabh Pant (P) and Pakistan's Babar Azam (R) in action during a match between India and Pakistan.

DUBAI - The Indian Premier League showed its growing influence as the International Cricket Council announced its men's Future Tour Program (FTP) on Wednesday.

Twelve full ICC members will play a total of 777 matches in all formats during the 2023-27 FTP cycle.

The independently run IPL, which is the world's biggest and richest Twenty20 league, gets an extended window in April and May every year in the new FTP cycle with little international cricket scheduled during this period.

Despite an increase of T20 leagues around the world, the ICC

has 323 T20 internationals lined up in the next cycle, along with 173 test matches and 281 ODIs.

"The landscape around the game is continuing to evolve and we will work closely with members as we collectively adapt to that," ICC general manager of cricket Wasim Khan said. "We are committed to growing the game and giving more fans more opportunities to enjoy cricket, but are very mindful of the need to balance that ambition with the welfare of players."

Triangular ODI series also return in the next cycle with Pakistan hosting New Zealand and South Africa in February 2025 in the buildup to the ICC Champions Trophy and then hosting England and Sri Lanka for another ODI tri series in 2026.

Zimbabwe is scheduled to host

New Zealand and South Africa in a T20 tri-series in 2025.

Pakistan's premier domestic T20 league, the PSL, will clash with the IPL in 2025. That's due to Pakistan's extremely busy international commitments that begin late 2024 with tours of Australia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and then New Zealand in January before it hosts tri series in February. Pakistan also hosts the Champions Trophy which is set to end in March 2025.

India will play four five-test series in the new cycle — two each against Australia and England, which will be part of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC).

Afghanistan, which made its test debut against India in 2018, is also set to play a test match in India in 2026.

India will play home series

against Bangladesh, England and New Zealand in the 2023-25 WTC while playing Australia, South Africa and the West Indies in the away series. In the 2025-27 WTC, India will play Australia, South Africa and the West Indies at home while its away series are against England, New Zealand and Sri Lanka.

Pakistan will play 27 WTC matches in the next FTP cycle which is loaded with white-ball cricket as it will play 47 ODIs and 56 T20s. It will also host 10 test-playing nations during this period.

"While finalizing our Future Tours Programme 2023-2027 in a tight and densely packed cricket calendar, we have given priority to context, quality and player workload," PCB chief executive Faisal Hasnain said in a statement.

India trying to resolve FIFA ban on its soccer association



NEW DELHI - India's government is holding discussions with FIFA to settle issues that led to the suspension of the country's national soccer federation and the possible loss of its hosting rights for the Under-17 Women's World Cup in October, a government law officer said Wednesday.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the country's highest court that the government and a committee of administrators running the soccer federation have held two meetings with FIFA to "break some ice" on the issue, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

The Supreme Court asked the government to take proactive steps to hold the Under-17 Women's World Cup in India and scheduled Monday for further hearing in the case.

The FIFA suspension follows the Supreme Court's appointment of a three-member Committee

of Administrators to manage the affairs of the All India Football Federation and to conduct elections for new office bearers by the end of August under a new constitution.

The court in May ousted Praful Patel as president of the AIFF for not holding elections that were due by December 2020 and for continuing in the position following that date.

FIFA suspended the AIFF on Monday because of "undue influence from third parties."

It said the suspension was effective immediately and that the transgression "constitutes a serious violation of the FIFA statutes."

"The suspension will be lifted once an order to set up a committee of administrators to assume the powers of the AIFF executive committee has been repealed and the AIFF administration regains full control of the AIFF's daily affairs," FIFA said.

Indian court appoints committee to run national Olympic body

NEW DELHI - A court in India has appointed a committee to take over the running of the national Olympic committee and hold fresh elections within four months in a move that could have further implications for the country in international sport.

The Delhi High Court asked Olympians Abhinav Bindra, Anju Bobby George and Bombayla Devi Laishram to assist the three-person administration committee that includes a former Supreme Court judge, an election commissioner and a government bureau-

crat, the Press Trust of India reported.

The International Olympic Committee had earlier advised the IOA to fast track its elections, which were scheduled for last December, or risk facing suspension.

The Delhi High Court's orders Tuesday followed the decision by FIFA, soccer's world governing body, to suspend the All India Football Federation because of "undue influence from third parties" — India's Supreme Court. The suspension threatens India's hosting of the Under-17 Women's World Cup in October.

The Delhi High Court issued the orders against the Indian Olympic Association because of "persistent recalcitrance" to comply with the National Sports Code.

It said posts such as lifetime president in the IOA were against the national code, and it wanted senior officials to be limited to three terms in office.

The court also wanted to see women appointed to senior positions and more equality across the board, adding: "Sports administration is not a male preserve."

India gives Zimbabwe reality check with 10-wicket win

By Enock Muchinjo

HARARE - India gave Zimbabwe a reality check to win the first one-day international by 10 wickets on Thursday as seam bowler Deepak Chahar returned from a long injury layoff with a fine performance.

Chahar took 3-27 after six months out to help bowl Zimbabwe out for 189 in 40.3 overs at Harare Sports Club.

India openers Shubman Gill (82 not out) and Shikhar Dhawan (81 not out) powered India to 192-0 with nearly 20 overs to spare.

Prasidh Krishna and spinner Axa Patel also took three wickets each for India.

But it was the 30-year-old Cha-

har's return to action that caught the eye.

"Every time you come back it's always important to score runs and take wickets if you can," Chahar said. "I'm so glad that I made a good contribution today."

Zimbabwe was 66-5 as Chahar claimed three of the first four wickets to fall. Some fight from the tail helped the home team to 189 all out, with Brad Evans (33 not out) and Richard Ngarava (34) putting on 70 runs for the ninth wicket, a record for Zimbabwe against India.

Dhawan and Gill both cracked half-centuries as a polished India side chased down its target with ease.

Dhawan became the 10th India batter to score more than 6,500

ODI runs.

The 36-year-old left-hander faced 113 balls and smashed nine fours, running well between the wickets and rotating the strike brilliantly.

"Obviously Shikhar and Gill at the crease, we are talking of world-class batters here," said Zimbabwe bowler Richard Ngarava. "You have to be spot on, and they really batted well today. You need to be on top of your game to get them out."

Zimbabwe had recently qualified for this year's Twenty20 World Cup and won T20 and ODI series against Bangladesh but its revival was halted by India.

The second game of the three-match ODI series is on Saturday.

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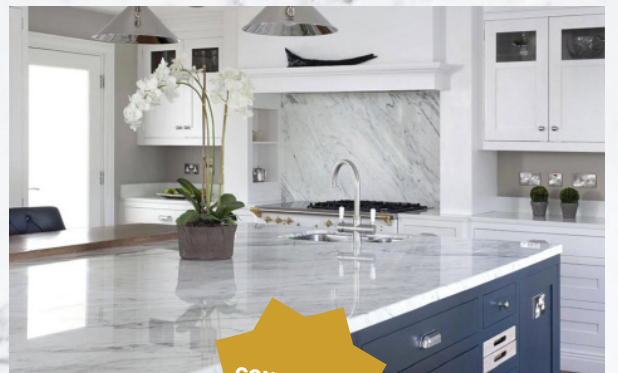
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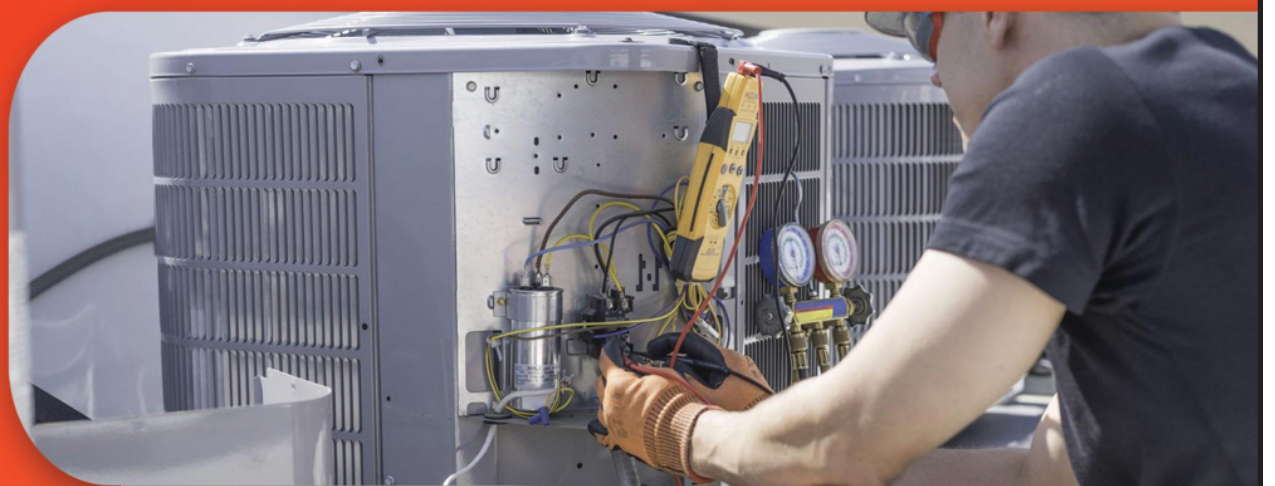
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