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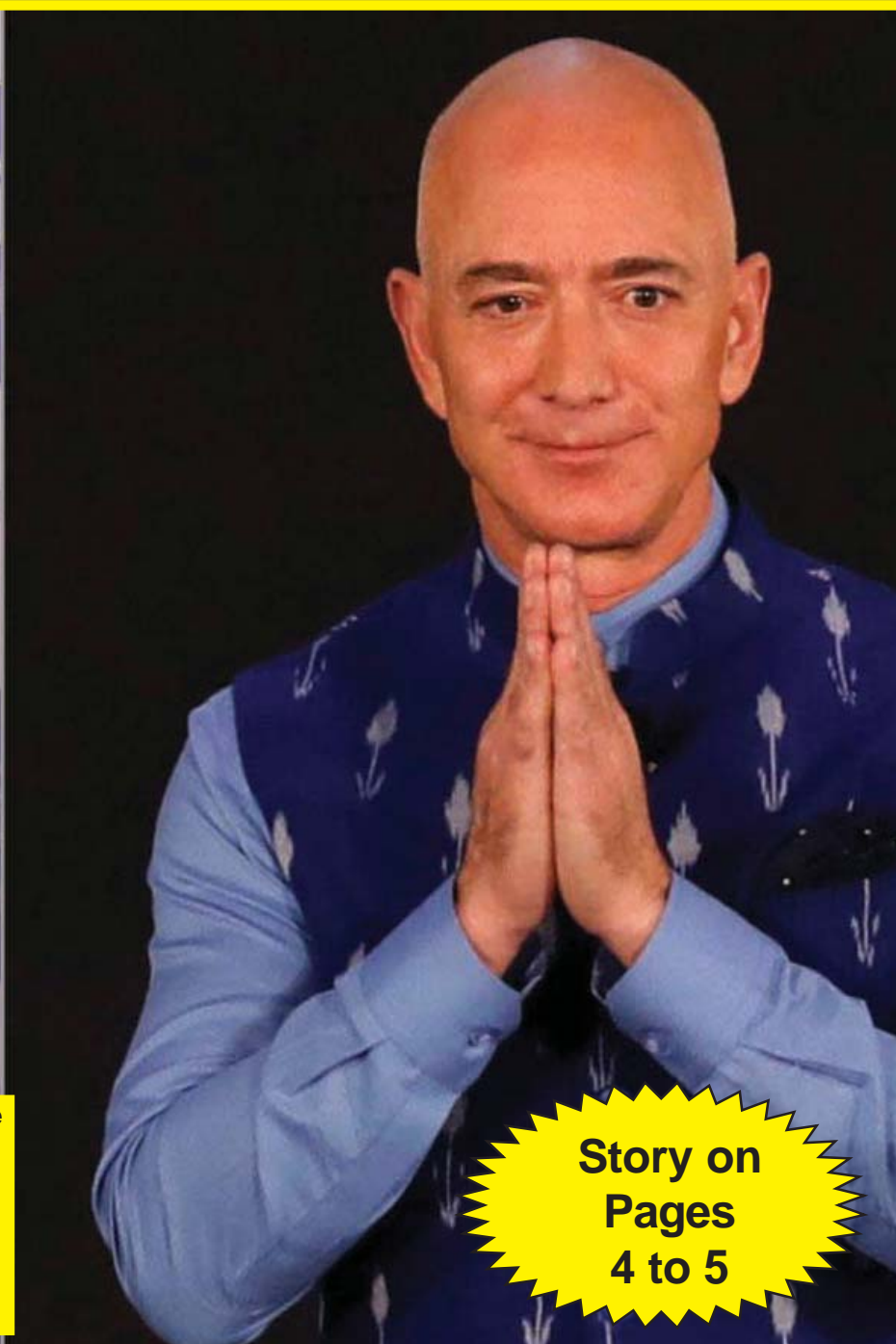
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Ambani Vs Amazon India's raging retail war



Amazon, Reliance and Walmart Inc's Flipkart are in a battle to gain market share in India, as millions of middle class customers are trying to adapt to the new culture of buying food and groceries online amid coronavirus pandemic. Amazon has sent a legal notice to Future Group, alleging the Indian retailer breached the terms of its contract by signing a deal with Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries.

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FRONT PAGE FEATURE

Is it going to be Ambani vs Amazon?



If it were a ticketed event, they would bill it as Asia's richest man facing off against the world's richest man in a battle of supremacy in one of the toughest markets in the world — India.

Essentially, that is what it is coming down to as the Mukesh Ambani-helmed Reliance Industries is set to cross swords with Jeff Bezos-run Amazon, with the Kishore Biyani-held Future Group of Companies being the battle arena, as it were.

In a season when plenty of things have happened for Reliance Industries and Jio Platforms, it has emerged that the Ambani firm is in advanced stages of talks to buy into units of Future Group, which as it happens, is already in a tie-up with Amazon.

If this is not taking the fight to the enemy camp, then what is?

As per multiple media reports, Reliance Industries, in a bid to further its e-commerce ambitions, is planning to buy stakes in Future Group's Future Retail and perhaps another unit, too. As a twist in the tale, the Future Group is also in talks with Amazon, which wants to increase its existing stake. The Future Group, which is in some financial strife, wants to close the deal early so that it is rid of its troubles.

Why Future Retail?

Future Retail operates some of India's most popular retail chains and is in more than 400 cities in every state of the country through digital platforms and over 1500 stores that cover over 16 million square feet of retail space. It has large format stores, Big Bazaar, its flagship chain, besides small store neighbourhood retail chains, EasyDay Club and Heritage Fresh. Though a group with enormous potential, it is now under severe financial strain. The debt book of Future Group's six listed firms increased to Rs 12,778 crore as of September 2019 from Rs 11,463 crore in March 2019. Market news says that the Future Group needs Rs. 6,000-8,000 crore to stay afloat. And earlier, the

better.

Hence the company is holding talks with various players, but the spotlight is understandably on Reliance and Amazon.

Amazon's gameplan

Amazon is betting big on India. It has been considerably increasing its Indian presence slowly. Recently it rolled out Amazon Food Delivery in Bengaluru. And of course, its key business is Amazon online platform, on which it wants to retail every product possible.

Amazon already holds an indirect stake of 1.3% in Future Retail. (In August last year, Amazon agreed to purchase 49% of one of Future Group's unlisted firms, allowing it to buy into Future Retail after a period of between three and 10 years.)

The ties between the two companies further strengthened after Amazon became the authorized online sales channel for Future Retail's stores that sell everything from groceries to cosmetics and apparel.

Now, Amazon wants to add its investment in Future Retail for a holding of as much as 49%.

If the deal actually happens, Amazon can consolidate its position in the Indian market, as it has already pledged to invest \$5.5 billion in the country. Amazon, which got bested in China by Alibaba, wants to have better results in India. Hence, it has been pretty aggressive in its approach in India so far. Reliance not ready to roll over

It is no secret that Mukesh Ambani wants to build an Indian Alibaba that will let offline merchants and kirana stores sell their goods online to Indian consumers. Reliance is hoping to tap into its 10,415 retail stores across 6,600 cities and leverage its Jio subscriber base of 380 million to reach the masses. The company built out the connection layer first, providing affordable data and even selling phones for consumers to go online, and is now developing the marketplace by providing hardware (point of sale machines).

Having put in all the hard yards over the last 3-4 years, Reliance now wants to move in for the kill. It has gone for some over-the-top, aggressive investment soliciting, and sold close to quarter of its stake in Jio Platforms and raised a whopping \$15.2 billion in just over two months time. Reliance Retail, as of now, operates a network of 11,784 stores covering 28.7 million square feet and reported a revenue of Rs 38,211 crore in the January-March quarter. Thanks to its sustained efforts, Reliance Industries has become debt free much ahead of its schedule.

Reliance Industries has raised over Rs 168,818 crore in just 58 days through:

1. Global tech investors - Rs 115,693.95 crore
2. Rights issue - Rs. 53,124.20 crore.

The combined capital raised has no precedence globally in such a short time. Both of these are also unprecedented in Indian corporate history and have set new benchmarks.

Along with the stake sale to BP in the petro-retail JV, the total fund raise is in excess of Rs 1.75 lakh crore.

Reliance's net-debt was Rs 161,035 crore, as on 31 March 2020. With these investments, RIL has now become net debt-free.

Mukesh Ambani, in a press

release said, "Today I am both delighted and humbled to announce that we have fulfilled our promise to the shareholders by making Reliance net debt-free much before our original schedule of 31 March 2021."

He added: "Over the past few weeks, we have been overwhelmed by the phenomenal interest of the global financial investor community in partnering with Jio."

Ambani is now ready for the next haul for Jio and Reliance Retail, which he said at the company's AGM early this year, "will induct leading global partners in the next few quarters, and move towards listing of both these companies within the next five years." Battle royal The e-commerce space in India is very attractive for all big players. With 500 million internet users and e-commerce growing 30% a year, experts expect online retail in India to become a \$200 billion opportunity by 2027. Basically, there should be enough space for multiple players. But both Amazon and Reliance have shown that they don't like competition in the spheres they operate.

As personalities Bezos and Ambani are different, but both are no-nonsense guys and don't brook any threat to their market suzerainty.

In India, Amazon has also got to

be wary of government rules. Being a local player, Reliance gets to enjoy more benefits than Amazon, which is why Amazon wants to ride piggyback on Future Group and reap the benefits of being an Indian competitor.

Last year, the Indian government issued new e-commerce guidelines that directly affect foreign players like Amazon and Walmart (which acquired Flipkart for about \$16 billion two years back). The main focus may be on warehouses. Foreign-funded firms aren't allowed to hold e-commerce inventory in India. That's a disadvantage for Amazon, since it prevents the firm from fully capitalizing on the strengths of its vaunted logistics operation, seen as one of its most decisive edges in the US. And this is a good moment to point out that Amazon is also in discussion for taking a controlling stake in Kishore Biyani-promoted Future Supply Chain Solutions (FSC), which is a third-party supply chain and logistics service provider that offers warehousing facilities also. So there are many layers in this Ambani vs Amazon battle for stakes in the Future Group. Reliance, needless to say, is aiming for a controlling stake in the Group, so that it can call the shots from all corners.

Amazon sends legal notice to India's Future Group over deal with Ambani's Reliance Retail

Amazon has sent a legal notice to Future Group, India's second largest retail chain, for breaching the terms of its contract by selling a significant portion of the business to Ambani's Reliance Retail.

Future Group announced in late August that it was selling its retail and wholesale business, as well as its logistics and warehousing business, to Reliance Retail for \$3.4 billion. But before Reliance Retail came into the picture, Future Group and Amazon also had a deal. Last year, Amazon acquired a 49% stake in Future Coupons, a group entity owned by Future Group's retail business. The deal gave Amazon a 3.58% stake in Future Retail, and the right of first refusal to purchase more stake in Future Retail both directly as well as via entities, Future Group said in a filing at the time. According to TV network ET Now, which first reported about the legal notice, the deal between Amazon and Future Retail also restricted the Indian firm from entering into a deal with certain firms. Future Group, which kickstarted its journey as a stonewashed-fabric seller in the 1980s, served millions of customers through more than 1,500 stores in more than 400 cities as of earlier this year.

The legal notice has puzzled many in India, as Amazon is reportedly preparing to acquire a multi-billion-dollar stake in Reliance Retail, India's

largest retail chain, according to earlier reports by ET Now and Bloomberg. With e-commerce commanding only between 3-7% of all retail sales in India — and Reliance Retail launching its own e-commerce business to fight Amazon and Flipkart — Amazon's deal with Reliance Retail is seen by many industry analysts as crucial for the American e-commerce firm's future in India. Amazon, which kickstarted its journey in India seven years ago, has invested more than \$6.5 billion in its local business in the country.

Amazon confirmed that it had filed a legal notice but did not elaborate as the matter is "sub judice." Reliance Retail and Future Group did not comment. As of Wednesday midnight (local time), Future Group had not disclosed the notice on the stock exchange. Founded in 2006, Reliance Retail serves more than 3.5 million customers each week (as of early this year) through its nearly 12,000 physical stores in more than 6,500 cities and towns in the country.

The retail chain, run by India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, has raised about \$5.14 billion by selling about an 8.5% stake in its business to Silver Lake, Singapore's GIC, General Atlantic and others in the past four weeks. Ambani's other venture, Jio Platforms, this year raised over \$20 billion from more than a dozen marquee investors, including Google and Facebook.

FRONT PAGE FEATURE

Ambani versus Bezos: Who's winning the battle for India's \$700 billion retail industry

India's retail industry has become a racetrack for two of the world's wealthiest men—and one might well be close to the finish line. On Aug. 29, Reliance Retail Ventures, owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, said it will acquire the retail, wholesale, logistics, and warehousing operations of India's leading brick-and-mortar retailer Future Group for Rs24,713 crore (\$3.4 billion). The deal gives Reliance Retail access to around 1,800 stores of Future Group's popular brands Big Bazaar, FBB, EasyDay, Central, and Foodhall. With this deal, Ambani has taken a giant leap in the retail sector, leaving behind all domestic and international rivals, including Amazon, led by the world's richest man Jeff Bezos. "Reliance was already much ahead of the competition. This deal has just further strengthened its position in the industry," said Arvind Singhal, chairman at retail management consultancy firm Technopak Advisors.

Reliance's retail universe

Reliance Retail, which started operations in 2006, was the country's largest retailer

by number of stores even before the recent deal with Future Group. The company operates more than 10,000 stores across categories like standalone stores, supermarkets, wholesale cash-and-carry outlets, and speciality stores, across various segments. It also has several e-commerce portals. In the year ended March 2019, Reliance Retail reported a turnover of Rs1.3 lakh crore. In recent months, the Reliance group has been actively working to increase its presence in the e-commerce space, too. In November 2019, the group launched JioMart, an online selling channel for Reliance Retail's grocery outlets. JioMart was launched with a WhatsApp order-booking service where customers could place orders via the instant messaging app. This gave JioMart the potential to tap into WhatsApp's massive user base of over 400 million Indians. More recently, Reliance Industries bought a 15% stake in online lingerie retailer Zivame and paid Rs620 crore for a majority stake in online pharmacy Netmeds. The company is

reportedly also in talks to buy stakes in other online retailers such as furniture seller Urban Ladder and grocery delivery app MilkBasket. While Ambani has been trying to go online, Bezos' Amazon has been trying to tap offline opportunities.

Amazon in India

India's retail market is estimated to touch \$1.3 trillion by 2025 from \$700 billion in 2019. This massive potential has drawn global retailers to the country.

Since its entry into India in 2013, Amazon has invested over \$5 billion in its business here. Earlier this year it committed another \$1 billion investment over the next five years. Despite stiff competition from homegrown unicorn Flipkart (now owned by Walmart) and a host of vertical-focused e-commerce firms, Amazon has managed to establish itself as one of the largest players in the segment in India. However, e-commerce is still a sliver of India's overall retail. In 2019, online sales accounted for just 1.6% of India's retail sector. So, Amazon has been trying to tap

into brick-and-mortar retail in India. In 2017, Amazon bought 5% of ownership in department store chain Shoppers Stop for Rs179.25 crore. And in 2018, Amazon invested in Aditya Birla Group's food and grocery retail chain More. In January, the Jeff Bezos-led company acquired a 49% stake in Future Coupons, the promoter entity of Future Retail. While Future Coupons' business is limited to value-added payment solutions such as corporate gift cards, loyalty cards, and reward cards for corporate customers, the deal gave Amazon around a 3.6% share in Future Group. These acquisitions have benefitted Amazon, but they aren't enough. Ambani's retail focus. Some industry experts have already declared Ambani a winner. "We cannot say the competition has intensified because for that we need players with similar strength or capability. Foreign retailers such as Amazon and Walmart have a limited reach due to the existing policy restrictions," said Singhal. "Currently, it's nothing but an open playing field for Reliance from which it'll reap benefits."

Ambani's \$2 Chutzpah Unlocks Another Fortune

It's not chump change if you're getting multibillion-dollar deals with Facebook, Google and possibly Amazon.

Mukesh Ambani has joined the league of world's richest with the help of a simple formula: assembling admirers for \$2 businesses. First he got Facebook Inc. and Google to back his fledgling digital ambitions, and now he may be trying to entice Amazon.com Inc. into his retail venture, already India's largest.

In four years, the Indian billionaire has amassed roughly 400 million customers for his mobile data business. What does Ambani eke out from each of them? Less than \$2 a month. The chump change didn't deter Facebook and Google's parent, Alphabet Inc. Together with marquee private equity investors and sovereign wealth funds, Silicon Valley tech titans made a beeline recently to invest in Ambani's Jio Platforms Ltd., valuing it at about \$65 billion.

That \$20 billion fund-raising spree has already met the refining and petrochemicals czar's goal of making his flagship Reliance Industries Ltd. net-debt-free, giving it enviable financial strength just as the coronavirus pandemic is taking a toll on most other balance sheets. The tycoon wants a repeat performance for another \$2 business in his stable: retail.

He has offered a 40% stake in Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd. to Amazon, Bloomberg News reported Thursday. It's unclear if Jeff Bezos will bite. But others have. Menlo Park, California-based Silver Lake Partners, which bought a stake in



Jio, has written a \$1 billion check for 1.75%. Another Jio investor, KKR & Co., is also probably coming on board.

To see how the excitement is rising once again over a princely \$2, consider Reliance's 30 million square feet of retail space. Each square foot, analysts expect, will garner \$2 a day by 2022. On an operating margin of 7%, that translates to \$1.5 billion in earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization. All Ambani had to do was to convince Silver Lake that this Ebitda is worth 38 times today. And with that, he unlocked the gates to a \$57 billion enterprise.

If the Facebook deal for Jio is any guide, Amazon as a strategic partner might get its 40% for a small discount to what Silver Lake paid, though the reported \$20 billion price tag is still formidable. Excluding his \$38 billion divorce settlement, Bezos

hasn't done a transaction as large as this. There's another wrinkle. Amazon India, in which he has already committed billions of dollars, competes with Reliance Retail's physical stores — as well as with Ambani's version of "phy-gital" retail.

But on his own, Bezos must fight with one hand tied behind his back. Foreign-owned e-commerce sites, such as his or Walmart Inc.'s Flipkart, must operate as pure marketplaces for third-party sellers. The law against owning inventory has become stricter, with discounts triggering allegations of favoring connected parties. India's competition commission received a fresh such complaint from a group of Amazon vendors recently. Being an Indian company, no such restrictions apply to Reliance's grocery stores, supermarkets, or JioMart, Ambani's vision of virtually connecting 30 million neighborhood

shops with his telecom customers.

Although still untested, the latter is his edge. The bulk of the 20-fold growth that India's online grocery sales might witness over the next five years may go to the Jio-Facebook partnership, Goldman Sachs Group Inc. estimates. The advantage for Ambani could also carry over to higher-margin items, the same way as Costco Wholesale Corp.'s popular \$4.99 rotisserie chicken helps the American retailer sell a little more of everything from apparel to flat-screen TVs. Covid-19 has been a shot in the arm for Reliance, despite retail Ebitda of only \$145 million in the June quarter, a 47% drop from last year. The carnage from a nationwide lockdown allowed it to swoop on debt-strapped rival Future Group's retail, wholesale, logistics and warehousing units, acquiring the lot for just \$3.4 billion. More importantly, the prospect of getting stuck with sub-5% growth in the post-pandemic economy is making Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government reliant on an increasingly small number of domestic groups to pull India out of its tight spot.

Unlike China, India's billion-plus consumer market has been open to U.S. tech firms. But when Ambani requested Modi last year to end "data colonization" by global corporations, it became clear that a shift was coming. Any remaining doubts have been removed by the post-Covid surge of economic nationalism.

OP-ED

Where reforms and federalism clash

The Centre's attempt to bulldoze the states on agriculture weakens the entire reform process

Yamini Aiyar and Mekhala Krishnamurthy

Days after Parliament passed the controversial agriculture bills, several state governments have begun crafting strategies to avoid its implementation. This is a predictable consequence of a process of law-making that undermines India's federal consensus. Agriculture is a state subject. The passage of national laws, on a state subject, marks a rupture in India's federal trajectory.

There is no argument that India's agriculture markets, mandis in particular, have been stuck in a low-level equilibrium and need reform. Greater accessibility, transparency and competition are necessary goals. But even the most ardent supporters of the new laws recognise that liberalising agriculture markets requires negotiating knotty implementation issues. The Constitution assigned jurisdiction over agriculture markets to states due to the very localised nature of farm production. The first sale

between the farmer and the trader is linked with the production process. This is location specific and it is states who are best placed to determine the contours of production and sale including, taxation, credit, building farmer producer organisations and physical markets.

The current laws upend this. They bypass states by drawing on the Centre's constitutional powers to regulate inter-state and intra-state trade - note that the Act dealing with Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) reform is titled The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020. But they leave a critical institutional vacuum about how state-specific implementation investments, crucial for running efficient markets, will be negotiated and managed, when states are bypassed. Moreover, they create an artificial distinction between "markets areas" (regulated by the mandi system under state governments) and "trade areas"

(now under the central Acts), thus risking a regulatory maze. Beyond implementation, the choice of bypassing states in the quest to reform raises questions fundamental to the federal bargain. Our national debates on agriculture, and indeed other factor markets, have been framed by a deep disenchantment with state governments. This is not unjustified. States have routinely failed to challenge political interests. Agriculture subsidies and minimum support price (MSP) systems are intertwined with vested interests in states. Punjab, for instance, has failed to challenge this regime despite significant fiscal and environmental damage. On markets, states have done more. Karnataka experimented with electronic market integration, Madhya Pradesh with private single-licence yards, Maharashtra built infrastructure for private markets. However, the pace was uneven. State "failure" raises an important federal



conundrum. What is the Centre's role when state political economy is the binding constraint for reform? As the economy becomes more complex, there is a sound economic rationale for pursuing the goal of a common national market across factor markets. This requires consensus-building, a task that rests squarely with the Centre. But when states allow political concerns to override, should the Centre bypass states by bulldozing reforms?

Our disenchantment with states has legitimised the bulldozing approach. But this undermines reforms. For instance, the artificial distinction between "markets areas" and "trade areas" in these laws, has

resulted in a new battleground as states are now expanding their market territory. Punjab has declared its intent to declare the entire state a market area. Haryana stopped trade from Uttar Pradesh.

Further bulldozing breaks trust. There is much more to agriculture reforms than mandis. Several elements of the production process including subsidy reforms and the vexed MSP question need untangling. As agricultural economist, Sudha Narayan, has noted, the Punjab farmers' concerns with MSP are different from those of the Bihar farmers. Arriving at an appropriate pathway of subsidy, price support and procurement reforms will require extensive consultations.

Where India stands on peace in Afghanistan



Jayant Prasad

A significant minority in India's policy circles questions what India has gained from its reconstruction activities in Afghanistan. India has earned (back) goodwill and traction with Afghans from all parts of the country. Before Taliban rule in Afghanistan, India had an exiguous presence in the minds of Afghans, who felt that India had turned away from them. They now know that India wants Afghans to stand on their own feet and make their own decisions. They know India is

working for a sovereign, united, and peaceful Afghanistan. They believe in the commonalities between Indian and Afghan objectives, and that India will celebrate Afghan successes.

India's effort to rebuild Afghanistan goes beyond financial support or constructing the Afghan parliament, a dam on the Hari Rud River, transmission lines and a power station to bring electricity to Kabul, and Small Development Projects for education and health. India has contributed to building

Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation will be in Delhi from Tuesday to consult with India's top leadership, seeking a reiteration of India's support for the peace process.

institutions, developing human resources, training Afghan public officials and providing the country with a new generation of educated and skilled workers. The Taliban gained ground in parts of Afghanistan not because they are "smart" and "tough" as Donald Trump believes, but because of American mismanagement, Afghan incapacity, and support to the Taliban from the Pakistan army. Afghanistan's defence minister, Asadullah Khalid, told me several years ago, when he was Kandahar's governor: "It is not that the Taliban are strong, it is that we are weak." The Taliban profile is disproportionate to its gains on the ground.

Many in Pakistan insinuate that India is sabotaging the Doha negotiations because India would

not like Afghanistan and Pakistan to have good relations. Far from it. Unlike Pakistan, which fears harmonious ties between India and Afghanistan, India would be quite content with friendship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. After all, the same families, clans and tribes straddle the two sides of their long and porous frontiers. That said, India would be content if, irrespective of relations between Islamabad and Kabul, the Afghan people and government were free to decide the kind of relationships they should have with other countries, including India.

Does India have reasons to worry about the peace deal concluded between the United States (US) and the Taliban and a future peace deal between the Taliban

and the Afghan government? Not if all Afghans agree that the peace deal safeguards their interests. Not if they can preserve the gains made in Afghanistan since 2001. All parties, including the Taliban, should feel assured that they will have India's support if they acted independently.

India is, therefore, just right in lining up behind Afghanistan, with the external affairs minister participating in the September 12 inaugural of the Doha inter-Afghan negotiations. It is not to suggest that India has now warmed to the Taliban but to underline that India has no reservations in interacting with the Taliban if the Afghan government has none. With Doha, India has ended the erstwhile ambiguity in its policy.

OPINION

Hathras horror: India must wake up, repair its justice system

It is imperative for state governments and the Opposition to come together now to restore our institutions, committed to women's security and empowerment.

Yashovardhan Azad

As the pyre was lit for the Dalit victim a little after midnight on September 30, just outside her village Boolgadhi in Hathras district, under the watchful eye of 300 policemen, her family lay grieving at home. The police claim that the law and order situation warranted the cremation at night. With its unprofessional conduct and apathy in the last two weeks on brazen display, the police could not muster enough courage to face the law and order situation and give the victim her right to dignity even in death, by letting the family perform the last rites as per custom in daylight. Her right to dignity was denied even when she was brought to the police station on September 14, barely alive. Instead of rushing her to the hospital to save her life, the police left the family to take the victim on their own. Such insensitivity and crass behaviour in a case of Dalit atrocity went unheeded in the village and higher echelons of the police and bureaucracy.

This, despite several standing orders and guidelines by the state government and laws for stringent action to be taken in such cases. The FIR was registered five days later, and her statement recorded by the magistrate only on the 22nd. The callousness was compounded when a senior police official held a press conference ruling out rape, knowing fully well that semen does not survive beyond 90 hours and that the dying declaration is sacrosanct. The assertion spoke volumes of police credibility and its investigation. What was more important was, instead, an inquiry into police inaction, availability of investigative officers at that time, forensic back up and also the effectiveness of the UP 100 line, launched by the police with great fanfare for responding to distress calls and monitoring them. The collector of Hathras escaped suspension while the district police chief and two others did not. As the law and order head, the collector should have been

the first to go. Why was the cremation done at night? Why was the family quarantined earlier? Did he check whether ambulance on call was available that day? Did he ever enquire about the status of the victim from the hospital? The investigation by the local police was handed over to the Special Investigation Team and is now recommended for takeover by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The family wants an investigation monitored by a retired judge of the Supreme Court. Such drastic erosion of faith in institutions is a serious issue, and it will take elaborate corrective efforts to restore their lost credibility. The Hathras incident reveals a broken system in our countryside - a rural police station lacking basic amenities, human resources and sensitivity; a health care system with glaring gaps; a rudderless panchayat; and social fault lines running deep in a caste-ridden patriarchal



society, corroding every institution. The opposition leaders are baying for the blood of the UP chief minister (CM). Several leaders have visited the family of the victim, under the glare of the media, and hurled accusations against the state government, exhorting the CM to resign - knowing fully well that things do not change at the grassroots with change of CMs. These speeches did not ask for reforming the broken rural administration. No one cared to look at police infrastructure and functioning even as a Bureau of Police Research and Development report on the issue gathers dust. No one spoke about improving the ambulance scheme or

inadequate hospitals routinely transferring cases to Delhi. No one referred to the mere 35% utilisation of the fund, set up in the wake of the December 2012 Delhi gang rape incident, by various states so far. The Hathras shame is a gaping wound in the conscience of a nation aspiring to be a major global power. Even as women scale tremendous heights, much to our pride, other women from remote corners are still subjected to medieval depravity. When will our conscience stir? It is imperative for state governments and the Opposition to come together now to restore our institutions, committed to women's security and empowerment.

Protect Indian crafts; ban Chinese imports

China is flooding Indian markets with cheap craft replicas, destroying jobs, local traditions, culture

Ritu Kumar

On a cold February morning in 2017, I was in Paris, on my bi-annual reconnaissance of European fashion. We were striding down Avenue Montaigne, a street that connects the Eiffel Tower with the famous Champs-Élysées, the most glamorous street in the fashion world, which houses the haute couture designers of Europe. To my surprise, there was a queue, around the block, of Chinese customers waiting to enter the LVMH store. As I was about to enter the store, I was approached by two Chinese women. They requested me to buy two handbags from the Louis Vuitton range at any price and had the money in hand. There was a quota system of sales in the store, and since they had exhausted their quota, they needed help. In February, I was visiting the same avenue. The economy was undergoing great pain, and it was apparent with the absence of well-heeled customers. The Chinese were the only buyers around who were wooed by the French. Gone were the days of quotas on purchases. But it is not just in terms of

consumption patterns. The Chinese have become a force to reckon with in the fashion world, as they manufacture and supply almost all of the luxury clothing and goods to the world. But Covid-19 has dramatically altered the situation, with the market for Chinese goods shrinking. China, however,



remains focused on flooding the India market, by supplying copies of indigenously popular crafts, at a fraction of the cost. The Chinese do not work with a costing policy on their goods when they enter a market. It is, at best, a political policy which decides the price of their products. This means they can

undercut anything, at any price, to get into India's fashion and wedding business. They have been quick to create a collection, based on deep research of the values and habits of the Indian consumer. Unfortunately for Indian handmade crafts, China is focused on the production of machine-made alternatives, copying designs from India's vast resources of craft skills, practised even today by 16 million Indians. This cannot be allowed to continue, especially in a context where Indian craftsmen and women are already confronting rising unemployment due to the Covid-19 crisis. One really must look very carefully at why India is today being inundated with Chinese copies made on cheap fabrics, which is now taking on a vast repertoire - Benarsi and Chanderi saris; Rajasthani crafts of bandani, printed on synthetics; copies of mirror work embroideries of Gujarat and Kutch; a whole repertoire of

kantha, suzani, phulkari and Lucknow embroideries, recreated on synthetics by digitised machinery in China; Banjara bags and Kolhapuri chappals, mostly imported from Xinjiang; fake cashmere from Mongolian wool, labelled as pashmina. Not one of these products, imported from China, now rapidly available in most markets, in big or small-town bazaars, helps generate local employment. Instead, they take away work from established craft sectors. India is the only country which has preserved its fashion identity, and given indigenous fashion a young, modern interpretation based on traditional silhouettes, crafts and textile processes organic to the country - a truly Make in India product. It is a miracle, and an enigma, especially if one compares it with countries as disparate as Japan and Mexico where organic clothing is now in museums and the countries follow diktats of the ramps in Paris, with little relevance to their traditional culture and climate.

POINT OF VIEW

The political aftermath of December 6, 1992

With the rise of Hindu nationalism, the beginning of the alienation of Muslims, and the erosion of the rule of law, India changed fundamentally

On December 6, 1992, India changed. Irrespective of one's views on the issue of the Ram Temple, the act of demolishing the Babri Masjid was criminal. It was a blot on the rule of law. It undermined India's secular credentials deeply. It damaged Hindu-Muslim relations like no other act since Partition. It led to riots, killings, breakdown of social trust, and grief for families and individuals caught in the violence that rocked the country. And while a range of political leaders may have been acquitted last week for their alleged role in the demolition of the mosque, there is little doubt that the criminal act was preceded by identity-based political mobilisation which created the environment for the actual demolition.

A lot has happened since then. Last year, the Supreme Court enabled the construction of the Ram Temple at the disputed site, and in August, with a brick-laying ceremony, the process to build a grand temple commenced. In what appeared to be a move to compensate them for the loss of

the mosque, as well as the loss of the land, the court ordered that Muslim parties were to be offered five acres separately to construct a new mosque. Key political actors who were at the forefront in 1992 in different capacities have either died (the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Ashok Singhal, for instance) or become marginalised (LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharti, Vinay Katiyar on one side, and Mulayam Singh on the other). Many observers have declared that the issue is now closed, and it is time to move on.

But this closure cannot really happen, for a lot of the current trends in Indian politics can be traced back to that fateful day in Ayodhya. The demolition changed Indian politics in four distinct ways, the impact of which can still be felt.

One, it marked the arrival of Hindu nationalism as a force to be reckoned with. Advani's Rath Yatra galvanised hundreds of thousands of people directly, but it had an even greater indirect

impact. A sense of Hindu political consciousness deepened; a narrative that Hindus had been under subjugation - first from Muslims, then from the British and finally from "pseudo secularists" in Independent India - gained ground. The narrative of Indian pluralism, diversity and its rich - admittedly complex and even occasionally conflictual - tradition of Hindu-Muslim relations gave way to the thirst for correcting historical injustices usually blamed on minority citizens. Suddenly, it was common to hear Hindu professionals and middle-class citizens speak disparagingly of Muslims, perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices about India's principal minority. The temple movement also helped the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expand their social base - for this was an emotive issue that Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Dalits could relate to as well. The construction of the "other" - Muslims in this case - proceeded apace. This may not



have yielded immediate electoral dividends for the BJP (it lost state elections after the demolition), primarily because the mandir card (the politics of religion) was neutralised by the Mandal card (the politics of caste). But this process eventually saw the decline of Mandal parties which failed to deliver the justice and progress they had promised to their marginalised social base; simultaneously, the BJP began co-opting backward classes. Smarter Mandir politics eventually defeated Mandal.

Second, while the older leaders associated with the temple movement may have faded away, a new generation of leaders in the BJP emerged for whom the late 1980s and early 1990s served as crucial

years of political socialisation. The most prominent example is, of course, Narendra Modi. Involved in organising a part of Advani's Rath Yatra, Modi's political life was to have a close overlap with the aftermath of the demolition, although it was only in the early 2000s that he took the first tangible step towards where he is now, when he was named chief minister of Gujarat. The fact that the temple construction was allowed when he was PM, and he did the bhoomi puja for the temple, is also in sync with his older association with the movement. Arguably, if there was no Ram Janmabhoomi temple agitation, the BJP is unlikely to have become the force it has, and Modi may not be where he is today.

Broaden the idea of a smart city in India



KumKum Dasgupta

On September 20, New York City (NYC)'s "iconic" buildings were lit up in green for the launch of the week-long global Climate Week NYC, which coincided with the United Nations General Assembly session. The summit was the first big one (virtual) in this Covid-19 year, and was held in the backdrop of an ongoing global conversation on the need for the world to chart a new green development path. While

globally, cities are struggling to tackle the impact of the climate crisis (with heat waves, cold waves, flash floods and cyclones among others issues), many have also become hubs of climate action. They are thinking of innovative ways to reduce temperatures and make their urban environments sustainable and liveable for their residents by designing and constructing buildings that need less energy to run and employ

passive means of climate control. For example, Chicago and Toronto are building rooftop gardens; Milan is building vertical forests; and Madsar City in Abu Dhabi is building houses close to each other so that they can provide shading to public walkways, and also prioritising walking and cycling over polluting cars. Unfortunately, the responses of India's cities to the climate crisis are still at a nascent stage. In fact, they have "little incentive to act", writes Radhika Khosla and Ankit Bharadwaj in India in a Warming World. Therefore, most cities do not mention, let alone adequately address the climate challenge in their development plans. Recently, however, there has been a policy nudge from the Centre: It unveiled the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework 2.0 that provides a road map and technical expertise to cities to combat the crisis. It will make eminent sense

for India to invest in climate-resilient planning now as the country is still urbanising. How cities are built over the next decade will, as Khosla and Bharadwaj argue, condition how most Indians live until the end of the century: In the choice of building types; in how they expend energy; in the amount of distance travelled; and the way in which distances are covered. These choices will have material consequences for air, water, congestion, energy, and the climate crisis. India's cities, however, must look for their own solutions, starting with meeting the basic requirement in a warmer world: Make housing climate-friendly so that they don't need excessive energy for air-conditioning, and also are good enough to protect those who cannot afford artificial cooling from heat waves. To do this, first, buildings must stick to the basic principles: Shade, insulate, use reflective roofing,

ventilate. Second, planners, developers and buyers must stop aspiring for glass-and-steel monoliths (such as the "iconic" buildings of NYC). While huge glass facades may work well in colder climates because they lock-in heat, in India, these constructions become "solar cooker" buildings, guzzling huge amounts of energy for air-conditioning, which, in turn, heat up the atmosphere. In addition, taller buildings need more steel, cement, aluminium and glass which have deep carbon footprints. Third, at a policy level, the Centre must push the states to weave the Bureau of Energy Efficiency's energy conservation code into their building-by-laws. Fourth, cities must invest to improve microclimate by investing in green roofs, parks, gardens, green facades and water bodies.

OPINION

This Is Rahul Gandhi's "Atal-Advani" Moment

Ashutosh

"Rahul has re-invented himself!" "Has he really?" a close friend of mine disbelievingly asked me. His question was in the context of the Hathras incident and Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi going there to meet the victim's family. A few others asked rather sarcastically, "How many times he will reinvent himself?" None of them are sympathetic to Hindutva or the Sangh Parivar or the ruling regime. They can all be called liberal, who have an ideological leaning towards the Congress, but skepticism was writ large on their faces. All of them have one question in common - will he continue like this or he will again disappear? I have not seen any other politician under such public scrutiny. And within the Nehru-Gandhi Family, no other member has had to face so much ridicule and scorn. In this regard, Rahul has not been fortunate like his parents and grandparents. Motilal Nehru, when he entered politics, was already a famous lawyer with inordinate national standing. His lateral entry was applauded

immediately. His son Jawaharlal also did not have to struggle. In no time, he was adopted by Mahatma Gandhi and by the mainstream leadership of the freedom movement. In fact, when the presidentship of the Congress passed on from father to son in 1929, nobody called it dynastic politics. By then, Jawaharlal Nehru was recognised among the frontline leaders of the movement. Even Bhagat Singh was so enamoured of his magnetism that while comparing Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Bose, he advised the youth to follow Jawaharlal and not Bose as he found him more revolutionary than Bose.

Indira lived under the shadow of her father for long. Though she became the Congress president in the late 50s, when she became Prime Minister, she was dubbed by opposition stalwart Ram Manohar Lohia as 'Goongi Gudiya' (a mute doll). Within her own party, Morarji Desai and a few others used to call her 'Chhokri' (chit of a girl) but within two years, she proved herself and became the empress of the Congress Party

and forced all the big leaders to either retire from politics or cross over to the opposition camp.

Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi did not have to prove themselves to anyone. Sanjay Gandhi became a parallel power centre during Indira Gandhi's time and after his death, Indira Gandhi took Rajiv under her wing. Rajiv Gandhi's transition to the top job in the country was the smoothest in the Nehru Family. After his demise, Sonia Gandhi avoided being in politics but to save the Congress from disintegration, she had to take over the reins of the party. She did face a small rebellion but after that, she has remained the unchallenged leader of the party. Ever since Rahul Gandhi has joined politics, he has been struggling. The aura that has been the hallmark of the Nehru-Gandhi family is missing in him. But Rahul Gandhi changed the rules and maybe he is paying the price for that. Despite a smooth entry into the party, he decided to take the vertical route. He contested elections, became an ordinary MP. Before becoming Congress President, he served as General Secretary and Vice President of the party. Let us not



forget that from 2004 to 2014, there was a Congress-led government at the centre and it was not a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family but Dr. Manmohan Singh who was Prime Minister. Even after 2009, when it was expected that Rahul might ascend to the top job, he did not. Who knows if history would have been different had he decided to avoid the roundabout route and become Prime Minister directly on joining politics? The office of Prime Minister transformed the public persona of Dr. Manmohan Singh. Today, he is one of the most respected persons in the country and every word of his is taken seriously. This was the same Dr. Manmohan Singh who was a low-profile bureaucrat who

wasn't noticed even in his own peer group. Secondly, Rahul Gandhi decided to lead the party in the 2014 parliamentary elections which in my view was a strategic mistake. He had to answer for mistakes which he had not committed or was responsible for; the onus of these should have been on the Manmohan government. The Congress was in disarray due to corruption charges, the cadre was demoralized. The Anna Movement had put a serious blot on the credibility of the Congress. Instead of Dr Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi became the symbol of whatever was wrong with the Congress and its government. It was a monumental handicap.

The Real Whodunit In SSR Case Is Obvious, Isn't It - by Vir Sanghvi 35

If you have been following the Sushant Singh Rajput case - and these days, who can avoid hearing about it? - then you will know that there have been several important developments in the last few days. First of all, Rhea Chakraborty has not only got bail but the Bombay High Court has poured scorn on the Narcotics Bureau's case. "There is nothing at this stage to show that Rhea had committed any offence involving a commercial quantity of contraband," the judge said.

This criticism of a case that has already been widely criticized outside the court comes as the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) has confirmed that there is no evidence that Sushant Singh Rajput was murdered. Suicide is still the most likely explanation.

The CBI, which is investigating the case, has said that it has found no suspicious circumstances and there is no evidence that Rhea Chakraborty stole money from Sushant Singh's account.

The Union Health Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan who, it was reported, would

disregard the verdict of the AIIMS doctors and conduct an investigation himself, has issued a strong denial, calling the reports "fake news".

The Mumbai police, who have always maintained that Sushant's death was a suicide, are treating these developments as a vindication. But they have also made a more serious charge. They claim that their cyber cell has found that 80,000 fake social media accounts were set up to spread misinformation about the Sushant Singh Rajput case. These accounts were outsourced to professional troll factories in such countries as Romania, Poland, Turkey, Indonesia, etc. It was this manipulation of social media that created the uproar over Sushant's death and led to the dissemination of fake news.

No doubt there will be questions about the Mumbai police's claim but nobody who has been following this controversy can seriously dispute that it has been fuelled by fake news, fed by social media and

amplified by TV channels. All this leads to several questions. First of all, who did it? Who manipulated social media and TV to manufacture this controversy? It is hard to be sure, but we know that whoever did it had access to vast sums of money, to a domestic core of social media trolls and bots, and has influence over our TV channels.

Your guess as to who this could be is as good as mine.

Secondly, what purpose did the controversy serve? Why was it worth it for somebody to spend several crores on a controversy that has not only ruined the lives of innocent people but may have actually besmirched Sushant's memory? The explanation most often offered is that the uproar was engineered with an eye on the forthcoming Bihar assembly election. The idea was to portray Sushant as the innocent Bihari murdered by the big city, big shots of Bollywood after being seduced into a drug-fuelled lifestyle by a Bengali vishkanya. If this was really the motive, then it has worked.



Nitish Kumar's party has raised the issue and feelings run so high in Bihar that every political party has refused to challenge this narrative. Even in neighbouring Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, who counts on Bihari voters, has not spoken up against the slur on Bengali womanhood.

The Mumbai police say that there was another motive: to smear them. As they are not, in themselves, important enough to warrant such an elaborate and expensive attack, what seems more likely is that the idea was to

destabilise the Shiv Sena-led ruling alliance. Throughout the campaign, it has been suggested that Shiv Sena leaders prevented the police from investigating the case and many attempts were made by TV channels and social media trolls to try and drag Aaditya Thackeray into the case.

Both these reasons seem to me to be indisputable. But I think there was also a third motive: to teach Bollywood a lesson. Never before have politicians been so obsessed with Bollywood.

SCIENCE & TECH

Space is becoming too crowded, Rocket Lab CEO warns



of 55 satellites to space for a variety of research and commercial purposes. Beck said the in-orbit traffic issues took a turn for the worst over the past 12 months. It was over that time that SpaceX has rapidly built up its Starlink constellation, growing it to include more than 700 internet-beaming satellites. It's already the largest satellite constellation by far, and the company plans to grow it to include between 12,000 and 40,000 total satellites. That's five times the total number of satellites humans have launched since the dawn of spaceflight in the late 1950s. It's not clear if traffic from its own satellites has also caused frustrations for SpaceX. The company did not respond to a request for comment.

Orbital junkyards

Researchers have warned for decades that congestion in outer space could have devastating consequences. Kessler's warning said that if space traffic becomes too dense, a single collision between two objects could set off a disastrous chain reaction that effectively turns the space around Earth into an extraterrestrial wasteland. One piece of debris would hit a satellite, and that impact —

much like a car crash, except at orbital speeds upwards of 17,000 miles an hour — could generate hundreds, if not thousands, of new pieces of debris in its own right. Those new pieces could hit other objects in orbit, which would hit other objects, and on and on, until low Earth orbit would be saturated with an increasing amount of uncontrollable projectiles. And any one of them could knock out a satellite, a launching rocket, or even an orbiting space station with humans inside. Kessler Syndrome was central to the plot of 2013's "Gravity," in which satellite shrapnel caused a cascade of disastrous satellite collisions. The question is whether it will remain fiction. Some experts warn areas of low-Earth orbit have already reached a critical mass of congestion. SpaceX has said that it is determined to be a responsible steward of outer space. The company says it has equipped its Starlink satellites with the ability to automatically maneuver out of the way of other objects in orbit. SpaceX's constellation also orbits at lower altitudes than the most crowded areas, which NASA and international partners estimate is about 400 to 650 miles high. That's an

ideal area for observation satellites that monitor the environment and is also home to swarms of debris.

But Moriba Jah, an astrodynamics expert at the University of Texas at Austin and a leading expert in space traffic, said most of Earth's orbit below about 750 miles is becoming a danger zone.

Jah created a database to help track potential collisions in space, and an online chart uses dots to show how many objects are expected to pass within six miles of each other every 20 minutes. Over the past year, the dots have grown too dense to count. Jah hopes that more satellite operators and rocket companies, including SpaceX and Rocket Lab, will share real-time location data of their rockets and satellites to make the predictions more precise. Neither company has done so. Though there haven't been any collisions this year, Jah warns, it could be only a matter of time. Even if SpaceX can manage to keep its area in space clean, there's a line of other companies waiting to build their own giant constellations. Amazon and UK-based OneWeb plan to build their own telecom ventures also using hundreds of their own satellites.

In 1978, NASA scientist Donald Kessler warned of a potential catastrophic, cascading chain reaction in outer space. Today known as "Kessler Syndrome," the theory posited that space above Earth could one day become so crowded, so polluted with both active satellites and the detritus of space explorations past, that it could render future space endeavors more difficult, if not impossible. Last week, the CEO of Rocket Lab, a launch startup, said the company is already beginning to experience the effect of growing congestion in outer space.

Rocket Lab CEO Peter Beck said that the sheer number of objects in space right now — a number that is growing quickly thanks in part to SpaceX's satellite internet constellation, Starlink — is making it more

difficult to find a clear path for rockets to launch new satellites. "This has a massive impact on the launch side," he told CNN Business. Rockets "have to try and weave their way up in between these [satellite] constellations."

Part of the problem is that outer space remains largely unregulated. The last widely agreed upon international treaty hasn't been updated in five decades, and that's mostly left the commercial space industry to police itself.

Rocket Lab set out to create lightweight rockets — far smaller than SpaceX's 230-foot-tall Falcon rockets — that can deliver batches of small satellites to space on a monthly or even weekly basis. Since 2018, Rocket Lab has launched 12 successful missions and a total

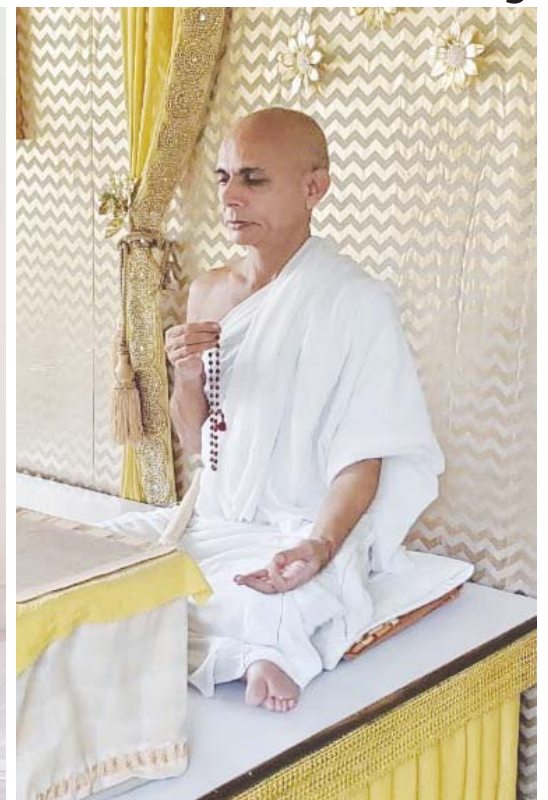
FASTING JAIN SAINT Acharya HansRatna Maharaj

From Jyoti Dharod

Chicago It will not be an exaggeration to say that Acharya HansRatna Maharaj Saheb is wedded to rigorous fasting. In Jainism fasting is the spiritual discipline that involves renunciation of food to maintain self-control and self-discipline to reach self-realization and the ultimate goal of Moksha or spiritual liberation.

Tapasya is thus the voluntary acceptance of austerities of the body, mind and verbal to achieve a higher end of life. To win one's soul one has to win his own physical mind and body.

Acharya Hans Ratna Maharaj Saheb, now 54 was born on April 15, 1966 and named Hari Bhai to Raji Ben and Devji Bhai Satra in Mumbai. At the young age of 13 he renounced the world and entered the life of Monkhood. Under the guidance of his Guru Acharya Shri



Bhuvanbhanu Suriswarji. he observed his third time 180-day continual fasting which culminated in Parna-breaking of

the Fasting on November 3rd 2019.

(1) 180 fasting was - Marine drive Mumbai, - 28 February 2014

(2) 180 fasting was - Andheri, Mumbai - 6 July 2018

(3) 180 fasting was - Sangli Maharashtra 03 November 2019

This year On 12 oct 2020 , Acharyaji has fasted for 112 days and this Tapasya continues even now

SPECIAL REPORT

Over 30 models accuse TFM talent agency of non-payment of dues racking up to almost Rs 1 crore. Here's the whole story

From unpaid dues from 2018, to threats of 'gundas', models who have worked with Ashish Soni-owned TFM/360 India have several sorry tales. Here is everything from the allegations made by the models, to the response given by TFM and designer-owner Ashish N Soni.



The Indian film and modelling industry has quite a reputation, both good and bad, with people sharing experiences of lifelong friendships and burnt bridges that made, or ended their careers. However, over the past few months, over thirty models who worked with Mumbai-based talent agency TFM/360 India, owned by designer Ashish N Soni, have alleged that the company owes them lakhs of rupees (more than Rs 70 lakhs) in unpaid dues for shows, events and shoots that in some cases took place years ago and that the company has no intention to pay.

The incident was first brought to light when several models took to their social media handles and shared their experiences working with TFM, sharing how they hadn't been paid for months on end, some have even claimed they were threatened with 'gundas' by upper management when they said they'd make the issue public. The incident was picked up by self-appointed Instagram-based fashion industry watchdog, Diet Sabya, which shared a post which revealed another side of the glamorous modelling industry. The post elaborated how TFM had deprived its talent of their rightful payment since 2018, often discrediting the

model by claiming breach of contract, misbehaviour as a cause of non-payment. The post read, "Over the last couple of months, we've gone back-and-forth between 20+ creatives (models, make-up artists etc) and their talent agency, TFM. Mumbai-based agency, TFM allegedly owes them lakhs of rupees in unpaid dues. Multiple rounds of clarifications later the fact remains unchanged: Money is still owed! The bitter industry truth is that modelling/talent agencies are notorious for withholding money and TFM has been pulling this stunt since 2018 (shocking!). The models have finally had it and are no longer willing to wait for their own money. TFM agents did give us multiple reasons/explanations for the delay citing Covid economy, breach of contract, models misbehaving etc etc. Most of these explanations seem to be just excuses to buy time. Moral of the story? It's a messy, and incredibly heartbreaking situation for these creatives, who are dependent on agencies for their livelihood. Discuss!!" Since then, several models came forward with similar stories, and Diet Sabya has also shared videos of models that have worked with TFM and are still awaiting payment. While

Diet Sabya has always been a page that calls out copycats and 'gandi' copies, over the past few months the page has racked up a new reputation for calling out companies, brands and employers for the mistreatment of employees, as well other social issues like colourism. Several models, in their testimonies, shared that given that they had



their own bills and weren't getting paid, they had to end their contract with the agency, which states that they cannot work with another agency during the three months after their contract with TFM is terminated, however, the contract allows them to work independently. Diet Sabya, models get blocked by Ashish Soni, TFM on Instagram

In an interview with MidDay, model Arlette Grao, who was at TFM from 2016 to 2018, claimed that the company owes over Rs 70 lakh to the models, and that she didn't

receive any payment for all the assignments she did during her time there, which racks up to Rs 8 lakhs. "I have bank statements to support this." She went on to add that she ended up quitting the agency and after the contractual cooling-off period (three months) was complete, she began to freelance, "Once I started freelancing, I realised there are multiple models whose payments are stuck with the company." Arlette mentioned that make-up artist Donald Simrock who worked for Lakme Fashion Week two years ago is waiting on a payment, which according to Diet Sabya's post comes up to Rs 9 lakhs. The model also added that in her case TFM cited breach of contract as the reason for non-payment of dues, "When I haven't breached any clause. They are putting similar false allegations on my other colleagues."

Another model, Shivani Bafna, who also worked with TFM, took to her YouTube channel and shared her experience working with TFM. She spoke of her time at the agency in 2018, and having to wait on payments for months in 2018, she added that she clarified with her manager as well as one of the 'owners' Rishy Bartariya, that she needed to be paid. After months of polite following up and not getting anything except

excuses, Shivani got exasperated and decided to share her experience with other models via a group text on WhatsApp. This however, did not sit well with Rishu, who allegedly threatened Shivani saying that if she puts anything on social media, or speaks up she would send 'gundas' after her. They even discredited everything Shivani said by saying she had breached her contract which is why she wasn't paid. However, after filing a lawsuit, and a lot more persistence, Shivani got

her payment of Rs 5 lakhs. Ashish Soni and TFM's side of the story - There are several such instances, and many models have already filed police complaints and sent legal notices to the agency, or are planning to. A written statement mailed to LiveWire by TFM stated, "Ashish Soni, on behalf of TFM/360 India, reassures everyone that TFM/360 India shall clear its dues as soon as possible as has also been done in the past." MidDay reached out to Soni, who said that the firm has been running in losses since it was set up five years ago, on account of which the foreign partner, who was the parent company, decided to pull out leaving Soni, a 40% investor in TFM, struggling to keep the company afloat. He added, "They wanted to shut it down. I took on their debt and ensured that the models' income stays afloat. It was a liability and I have been running it for two years. Company records that are public will tell you that I haven't drawn a single salary from the company. I hope to find an investor with deeper pockets for this agency. Till March, we had a regular cash flow but the business has been affected due to COVID. People are not in a position to pay up. To malign someone (for that), is out of line. I am willing to open this up for audit and if to prove my integrity, if I have to take a loan, I will do so." According to the written statement by TFM to Livewire, TFM/360 India has paid Rs 2.65 crore to several models in payments. The statement added that when the foreign partner pulled out TFM tried to recover as much as it could, but "due to the fact that TFM/360 India was owed a great deal of money and such money was not recovered within a considerable amount of time, the financial and economic health of the company worsened." The statement also added that TFM's management was never in Ashish Soni's purview and that there were other people running the show, and in some instances clients also failed to pay the company on time. The statement also went on to say that now Soni is "taking steps to mitigate the damage caused by earlier mismanagement".

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SOUTH ASIA



Andrew Small on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's Return to the Shadows

"CPEC has been a chastening experience for China in the context of the BRI."

In the five years since the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was launched, it's been beset by the winds of local politics and the waves of geopolitics alike. In a new report, titled "Returning to the Shadows: China, Pakistan, and the Fate of CPEC," Andrew Small catalogues the grand promises and countless pitfalls of CPEC. In an interview with The Diplomat, Small, a senior transatlantic fellow with the German Marshall Fund's Asia Program, explains the significance of CPEC to the China-Pakistan relationship, the contours of its highs and lows, and what the fate of the grand scheme means for China's broader Belt and Road Initiative. What's the significance of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to the China and Pakistan bilateral relationship? CPEC was supposed to act as a vehicle to upgrade the China-Pakistan partnership. Some Chinese analysts used to describe the relationship as a "stool with two legs": While security and political ties have been strong for decades, economic ties had always been extremely weak. Even this characterization somewhat overstates the breadth of the relationship - it was almost entirely confined to military and intelligence matters, and managed by a very small cast of individuals on the two sides. China was never a factor in day-to-day economic or political life in Pakistan, and its strong

approval ratings in opinion polls reflected its unimpeachable reputation as the "all-weather friend" rather than any deeper affinity among the Pakistani public.

That narrowness of relations also made it difficult for China to embrace Pakistan too openly - despite being arguably Beijing's closest partner, virtually anything the two sides did together was always viewed through a security prism, and China had to tread carefully to avoid eliciting alarmed reactions in New Delhi or further

wanted its relationship with Pakistan to be a "model to follow": Close, trusted military ties that nonetheless fell short of the commitments of a formal alliance, underpinned by a comprehensive Chinese immersion in the country's economic life. If CPEC succeeded, other countries would look to replicate it.

For Pakistan, the logic was even more compelling. CPEC was an opportunity to draw China into a deeper level of political, security, commercial, and financial

practice. The Khan administration's interest in modifying CPEC made headlines back in 2018. Since then, as you note in the report, CPEC first slowed then gradually sped up again. But in the interim, did the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government have any success in pushing for its desired changes? CPEC was already slowing down even before the PTI took power - by late 2017 Pakistan's economic situation was weakening and political uncertainties were growing as Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)'s struggles with the army intensified. Imran Khan was known to be skeptical about CPEC - seeing it as too closely tied to the PML-N's agenda, a poor fit for his own priorities, and almost certainly corrupt too. Prominent figures in the PTI, such as the commerce minister and leading industrialist, Abdul Razak Dawood, were also public critics of CPEC, representing sections of the Pakistani business community that saw the benefits as too tilted to Chinese firms, and had themselves missed out on the explosion of CPEC contracts.

Beijing was ready to be accommodating to the new government's priorities. Its position had always been that the PTI just didn't understand that they could be beneficiaries too if they spelled

out clearly enough what they wanted. In practice though, the model that Imran Khan was proposing was precisely the kind of economic relationship that China had always sought to avoid with Pakistan: In his first trip to Beijing after taking office, he asked for a bailout to address the country's weak financial position, and support for socio-economic projects, in other words, aid.

Initially, China tried to figure out some way to rebalance CPEC around the PTI's priorities. As one Chinese official put it to me in the early months after the elections: "We can do peanut projects instead of mega projects, if that's what they want." They looked at making Pakistan a test country for China's new aid agency, as well as some agriculture and green energy projects, and they talked about renegotiating the terms of existing investments. But Beijing quickly grew fed up with the new government - particularly after the open criticism that CPEC received early in its tenure - and decided that they needed to go straight to the army instead, which they increasingly believed was running the show anyway. The result of that has been a slowed down and slimmed down CPEC but not necessarily a CPEC that bears the imprimatur of the PTI the way that its conception reflected the PML-N's infrastructure and energy-centered agenda.



afield. CPEC was a way of changing that narrative. China could make a big public push to enhance the relationship while selling it as an economic and development matter. There was also a gamble involved: CPEC was dubbed the "flagship" of the BRI, which tied its fate closely to the reputation of the entire initiative, and even to Xi Jinping himself. This was a risk that Beijing was willing to take. China

commitment to the country, in a highly visible way, at a juncture where U.S. support was being tapered back on all fronts, and international investors were very wary of the security situation. For both sides, the optics are therefore almost as important as the substance. China and Pakistan have a strong incentive to put a good face on CPEC whatever is actually happening in

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Hathras: Making a mockery of the idea of justice

There is so much noise over the horror of what has happened in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh (UP), that it is difficult to believe that a week ago, the family of the 19-year-old Dalit victim was running from town to town, hospital to hospital, police station to police station, ignored, overlooked, forgotten. I first met her family when they arrived in Delhi to seek medical help at Safdarjung hospital. Her father and brother were hapless and broken. "Take me home," the woman had said to her brother Sandeep, younger by just a year. Those were her last words. By the morning, she was dead. Sandeep, employed at a pathology laboratory and thus, a frontline worker in these coronavirus pandemic times, said many things to me, some from rage, some from sorrow. But what really stays with me is his response to my question on how they coped over the last fortnight. "My sister was raped on September 14," he said softly, "but it's only after her death that anyone has bothered to give us attention. Till now, for politicians and for the media, we were invisible." The Hathras rape - and despite the sudden counter-claim by the UP police, I will call it exactly that because it was in the dying

testimony of the victim - has represented the failure of every institution in India. Whether it is the police, the bureaucracy, the politicians - we have all failed. As I spoke to Sandeep, there was a sudden swarm of politicians eager to get onto the camera, jostling for their five minutes of fame. These were the same people who had not bothered to give this family - the father is a daily wager and the mother works at home - an iota of their attention all these days. From being on the margins of public attention, Hathras is now in danger of being reduced to a noisy, unfeeling spectacle. The egregious behaviour of the UP police has been the most brazen. The undercover cremation of this young woman, forcibly executed by the police by keeping her parents out, was just the first illustration of callous unprofessionalism. Lawyers and senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officers say that for a senior police officer to give a statement that "no rape took place" and make a forensics report public goes against all tenets of a rape investigation. For a moment, think of this young woman strapped to a hospital bed, strangled with her own dupatta, her limbs paralysed, her tongue cut, fighting valiantly to live. The gang

rape charge was her testimony in her dying hours. She named the four men who she said did this to her. Her brother told me they found her lying "in a pool of blood with no clothes on". If indeed, there are gaps, a complete investigation, done quietly and with dignity, could have established that. Now, it will be very difficult for anyone to believe anything the state police says about this case. Meanwhile, rape has become the predictable political pawn. In the competitive finger-pointing between states, no one actually cares even a tiny bit about women, about Dalits or, indeed, about justice. The government's own data points underscore the inanity of this whataboutery. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics released just a few days ago tell us that 87 rapes are reported every day in India and that crimes against women are up by 7.3%. Remember, this is only counting the women who actually decide to speak out. For anyone who thinks that sexual violence is not compounded by class and caste, here is a fact; 10 Dalit women are raped every day, making up 11% of the reported cases.

UP tops the list of crimes against women and the girl child. Rajasthan tops the list of states with the most number of rapes; 18% of all rape cases in UP are that of Dalit women, compared to 9% in Rajasthan. A third of all rapes of Dalit women have been reported from Rajasthan and UP. So, everyone should spare us the political slugfest because it is just a convenient and noisy excuse to not do anything to make India safer for women. The institutional response to sexual violence is critical. On this score, the UP police has covered itself in shame. At every turn, they have robbed the family of its agency to make key decisions. I am not a big fan of politicians turning tragedy into opportunity, but I believe that which politician a victim's family wants to meet is entirely their decision. Blocking Opposition politicians such as Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi from making a trip to Hathras and shoving them around on the expressway is just wrong. It's for the family, not the police, to turn the Gandhis away, should they so wish. So far, we are making a mockery of the idea of justice. Soon, this headline will fade and we will all move on. Till the next horror strikes us. And it will.

BUSINESS

The SSR Mega Serial



One of the most hilarious memes last week showed actor Ajit (that famous villain of the past) saying: "Mona Darling chalo News dekthey hain. Arnab Rhea ko jeeneey nahi dega aur Rajdeep Rhea ko marney nahi dega." Ajit's words summed up the gnawing hilarity we are witnessing now-mega serials with unfolding family dramas have now shifted from entertainment to news channels thanks to Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide and Rhea Chakraborty's alleged hand in it. It's a whole new twist with the evolving conspiracy theories and inside stories of the police interrogation that news channels have been churning out. Even the wildest script writer will struggle to come up with such a racy storyline. And if you thought your Whatsapp chats were secure because they are encrypted, sorry to disappoint. All the channels had "exclusive" screenshots of juicy chats between Rhea and Mahesh Bhatt, and the pros and

Mega serials with unfolding family dramas have now shifted from entertainment to news channels thanks to Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide and Rhea Chakraborty's alleged hand in it

cons of party drugs, and where one can find the best weed. It appeared no secrets were sacred-everyone had an inkling. Friends, cooks and house help of the deceased star became important characters and soon became household names-just as the key players of a mega serial. The ultimate barometer of TV channels-TRP ratings-further justified the hype and drama surrounding a routine probe into the death of a film star. News channels peddling the SSR mega serial notched the highest numbers even as other important issues like COVID-19, the border standoff with the Chinese and even IPL got pushed to the backburner. Only briefly did the death of former President Pranab Mukherjee take precedence over the obsession with SSR. While most channels continued to paint Rhea Chakraborty and her gang as the villain, one English news channel finally decided to get her side of the story. Soon others joined the 'interview Rhea' bandwagon. Left behind in the race were the bunch of entertainment channels-most of them were replaying old episodes as shooting of new episodes had come to a standstill. No wonder the SSR mega serial, with one new angle by the hour and a new villain every day, was putting the original family dramas to shame.

In surge, Pakistan sees 12 new deaths from coronavirus

Figure is 2nd highest single-day tally in several months, after lockdowns lifted



Twelve people died from coronavirus in Pakistan over the past 24 hours, the second-highest single-day tally in the last several months, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday. The fresh casualties raised the total number of deaths from the novel virus to 6,535 since March. Another 625 people were tested positive for coronavirus during the last 24 hours, bringing the total

recent months, prompting the government to completely lift a longstanding lockdown.

The number of cases dropped from nearly 7,000 per day to about 400, with daily fatalities hovering in the single digits.

However, additional cases doubled over the past two weeks after schools reopened last month, forcing the government to reimpose the lockdown in several parts of the commercial capital Karachi, and Lahore, the country's second-largest city. Pakistani-administered Kashmir also reimposed lockdown measures on Sunday to help curb surging infections, as well as violations of health guidelines. A study by Pakistan's leading blood

disease institute suggested last month that there was a slim chance of a second wave in the country of the virus, further backing the government's policy of reopening businesses.

The cross-sectional study done at the National Institute of Blood Diseases (NIBD) in Karachi was published by Oxford University Press' Journal of Public Health. The study by a team of microbiologists, hematologists and pathologists led by Dr. Samreen Zaidi included nearly 1,700 people from healthcare, community, and industrial workers. According to Zaidi, Pakistan has "almost" achieved herd immunity, indicating that there are low chances of a second wave of the pandemic.

ENTERTAINMENT

Warner Bros shares new release dates: Dune arrives October 2021, The Batman in May 2022

Warner Bros said late Monday it is delaying the release of Dune and The Batman movies, another setback for the entertainment industry hit by Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and social distancing measures that have closed theaters worldwide.

Dune, a sci-fi movie directed by Canadian director Denis Villeneuve, is now scheduled to open in October 2021, instead of December. The release of The Batman, starring Robert Pattinson, has been moved to the spring of 2022 from October next year.

Movie releases have been getting delayed even after restrictions were eased, with people still wary of stepping into cinema halls, and many theaters still not operational. On Monday, the world's second-



biggest cinema chain, Cineworld, decided to temporarily close its UK and U.S. movie theaters in an attempt to survive a collapse in film-making and cinema-going. Credit rating agency Fitch promptly downgraded the company. "Our base-case forecasts indicate that, the company's current liquidity levels may only be sufficient until November to

December 2020, assuming no revolving credit facility (RCF) extensions," Fitch said in a statement.

Earlier, the filming of The Batman was also shut down for two weeks after a member of the production - widely reported to be Pattinson - tested positive for the new coronavirus. Filming resumed in Britain last month and Warner Bros never confirmed or denied

reports about Pattinson's old diagnosis. Timothee Chalamet, who was nominated for an Academy Award

Dune has gained a lot of traction for his role in the 2017 film Call Me by Your Name.



Taapsee Pannu is a strident voice in turbulent times, says Anupama Chopra

At the end of the trailer of Aaron Sorkin's upcoming Netflix period drama, The Trial of the Chicago 7, activist Abbie Hoffman (played by Sacha Baron Cohen) hesitates before answering a question in court. He says to the lawyer examining him, "Give me a moment would you, friend? I've never been on trial for my thoughts before." This scenario, where you are on trial for your thoughts, plays out daily on social media, except that you can't ask trolls for a moment. The hate is vicious, furious and relentless. Which is why I admire artists who speak their minds, among them Taapsee Pannu. Taapsee is very much a mainstream Bollywood

actress. In the last five years, she has deftly carved out a niche in Hindi cinema. Starting with Pink in 2016, she has become a propeller for films with limited budgets, driven by strong messaging - think Naam Shabana (2017), Mulk (2018), Saand ki Aankh (2019) and, most recently, Thappad. She has endorsement contracts and millions of followers on social media platforms. But like Ayushmann Khurrana, her brand is unique. Taapsee is an actor on the rise. In the current cultural climate, it would be more prudent for her to express as few opinions as possible.

Neha Kakkar's picture with Rohanpreet Singh surfaces online, is it from their roka ceremony?



The clues pointing towards Neha Kakkar's purported October 24 wedding to Rohanpreet Singh keep coming in. A new unseen picture has surfaced online and shows the two with his parents. The photo, shared by an

Instagram fan account, shows Neha and Rohanpreet sitting on a sofa with their hands entwined, joined by a man and a woman on either side. One look at Rohanpreet's Instagram profile shows that they are his parents. Neha, though dressed in casuals, is seen sitting with a large, decorated gift bag in her lap. Neha and Rohanpreet sparked relationship rumours when they shared a video of themselves lip-synching to the song Challa. In the video, Rohanpreet puts a ring on Neha's finger.



Taapsee Pannu

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Coronavirus Pandemic World On Edge

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Trump declares national emergency in latest bid to combat coronavirus P: 13

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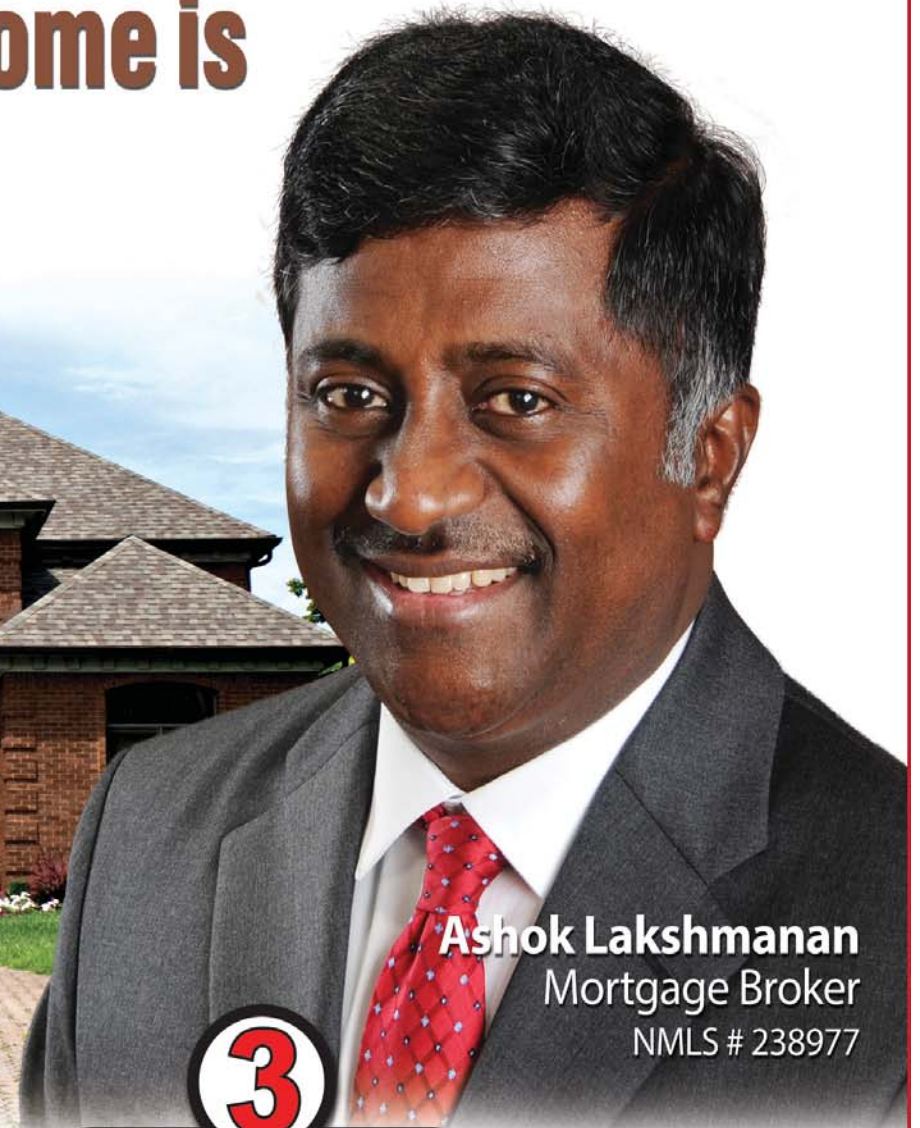
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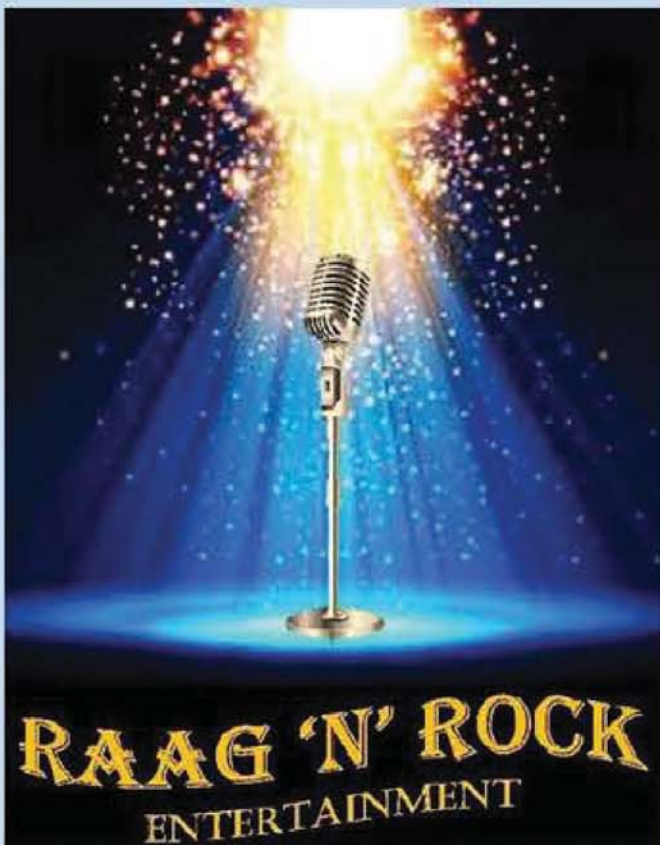
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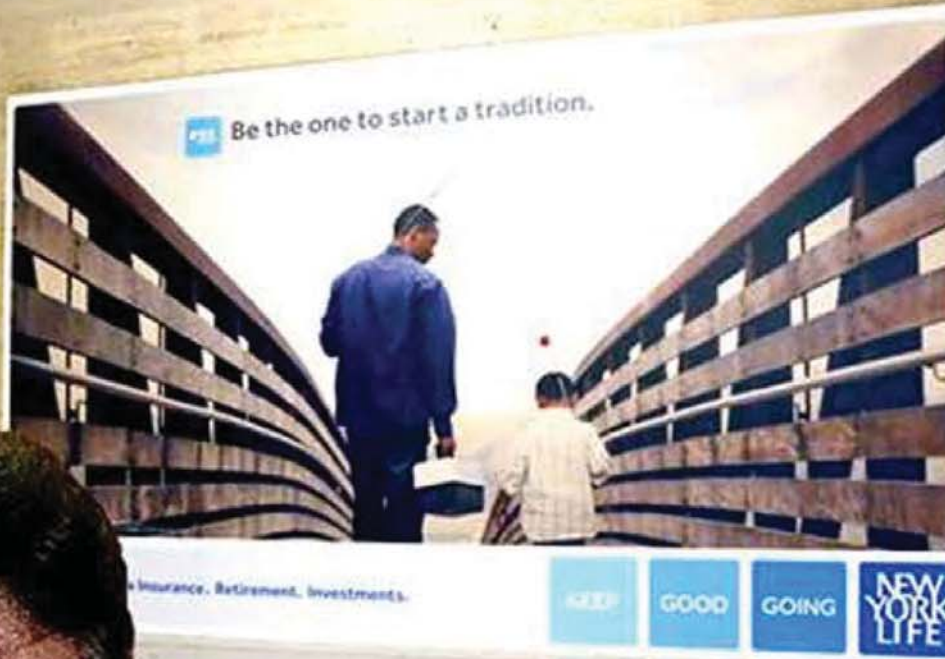
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