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BJP steps up nationwide campaign to counter Opposition protests against SIR



NEW DELHI: The BJP has stepped up its nationwide campaign to counter Opposition protests against the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, deploying party workers, senior leaders and Union ministers to mobilise public support.Under the slogan 'Save Democracy, Remove Anarchy', the party is conducting public outreach and digital campaigns across the country, from villages and district headquarters to state capitals. The campaign is focused particularly on poll-bound Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, where the BJP sees the SIR controversy as a major political issue.The party aims to challenge the Opposition's objections to the Election Commission of India's voter-list revision exercise and question why the Congress and other parties are opposing the process. BJP leaders have also taken out padyatras across the country, with Union Home Minister Amit Shah among those leading the campaign.The intensified campaign follows Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's street-level protests against SIR and his efforts to build an anti-government narrative through social media posts and reels.In response, the BJP has decided to take the political contest to Opposition strongholds, asking its leaders and workers to highlight what it describes as inconsistencies in the Opposition's position on electoral reforms.The BJP maintains that a transparent revision of electoral rolls is essential to safeguarding democracy. It has accused the Opposition of trying to protect questionable entries and prevent the removal of alleged fake voters. The Opposition, however, has raised concerns about the exercise and its implications for voters' rights.A senior BJP functionary told this newspaper on Friday that the campaign had gained further momentum following recent personal attacks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi by Congress leaders, including remarks by party president Mallikarjun Kharge about the Prime Minister's father.According to a senior party functionary, the remarks have given the BJP another opportunity to question the Opposition's approach and accuse it of resorting to personal attacks instead of focusing on substantive issues.The party's latest stance signals a more aggressive political strategy, with the BJP indicating that it would respond more forcefully to Rahul Gandhi's attacks on the Prime Minister.Union Home Minister Amit Shah reinforced this message during his recent visit to Karnal in Haryana. Warning the Opposition against what he described as declining standards of political discourse in the Congress, Shah reportedly said that if Rahul Gandhi continued with his 'sadak-chhaap' style of politics, the BJP would respond in the same language.The campaign reflects the BJP's effort to turn the SIR controversy from an Opposition-led protest into a nationwide political debate through grassroots mobilisation and digital outreach ahead of crucial electoral contests.

Amit Shah accuses Rahul of spreading false narrative on SIR, vows to expel infiltrators



DEHRADUN: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of spreading a "false narrative" about the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and vowed to expel infiltrators from the country.Addressing a public meeting at Parade Ground in Dehradun, Shah launched an attack on the Congress, Rahul Gandhi and former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat.Taking a swipe at Rawat, Shah said Congress leaders were responsible for making Friday a school holiday. Referring to a sting operation involving Rawat, he said people had seen "what used to happen in the secretariat". He ended his speech with the slogan, "This time, 65-plus."Shah praised Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and cited the state's investment plans as evidence of his administrative capabilities. He said he was initially sceptical when Dhami set a target of attracting Rs 1 lakh crore in investments. However, after speaking to the chief secretary, who explained the plan and confirmed the target, his doubts were cleared.Shah said Uttarakhand had long been associated with the saying that the mountain's water and youth do not serve the hills. He accused the Congress of failing to address the issue and take effective steps to check migration. "Young people want industrial development," he said, adding that the state was moving towards attracting investments and creating jobs.Dhami said the government had taken strong action in the Ankita Bhandari case and secured life sentences for those convicted. He accused the Congress of selective outrage and questioned its silence on the "Jeni" case and the Delhi tandoor murder case.After the rally, Shah and Dhami visited the Reserve Police Lines, where the Home Minister inspected a police parade. He presented the President's Police Colour to the Uttarakhand Police, making it the 16th state police force in the country to receive the honour. He also presented President's Police Medals to awardees and congratulated the force, saying he had never heard anything negative about it.Shah also praised the Dhami government for its action against paper leaks and examination malpractice, and said it had provided jobs to more than 35,000 young people. He stressed that investment and industrial growth were essential to creating employment opportunities in the hill state.

'Come to Haryana, face our questions': CM Saini's counter to Rahul Gandhi over debate challenge

CHANDIGARH: Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Friday took a swipe at senior Congress leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, over his debate challenge, inviting him to Haryana to face questions from the BJP Yuva Morcha president.Offering to arrange the venue himself, Saini said Gandhi could not expect to make what he described as false allegations without facing questions in return. "It cannot be a one-sided affair where someone makes false claims and then walks away," he remarked.Saini said that if the Congress had any grievances regarding the electoral process, it should present its case before the Chief Election Commissioner. He said the Election Commission was an independent institution and that the courts were also open to the party.Questioning why the Congress was unwilling to approach these forums, he said merely making allegations from home for public consumption would serve no purpose.Saini was speaking to the media after transferring funds under various government welfare schemes. He responded to questions on government initiatives, crop procurement, allegations levelled by the Congress and several other issues.Launching a sharp attack on the Congress, Saini said the party had no substantive issue to take to the people and was therefore attempting to mislead the country in the name of "vote theft" while casting doubts on the credibility of democracy and the Election Commission.He said that if the Congress had complaints about voters' names being deleted or incorrectly recorded, the Election Commission had already prescribed a procedure for raising objections. Electoral rolls had been made available in the public domain, and a month's time had been provided to file objections through the prescribed forms.Despite these provisions, he said, the Congress continued to mislead the public. People were watching these developments closely and would no longer be swayed by such claims."There has been no vote theft. What the Congress is facing today is the consequence of its own actions. People are now even saying that the Congress should shut down the party," he remarked.Saini said that during Congress rule, elderly people often went without pensions for as long as six months and were forced to make repeated visits to government offices and political leaders to secure their dues. Many, he said, had to wait outside offices in the scorching sun, with no one willing to listen to their grievances.He said Congress leaders were now raising allegations of vote theft but should first answer for the treatment meted out to the poor, elderly and needy during their tenure.Under the earlier system, when benefits worth Rs 200 were meant for a poor person, only Rs 50 would reach the intended recipient, with no accountability for the remaining Rs 150, he said. Today, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the full amount of welfare benefits is being transferred directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts, he added.Saini said the Congress had governed the country for decades and had been given opportunities by successive generations of voters. "People had hoped that the next generation of Congress leadership would bring change, but the situation remained the same," he remarked.He further said that the Congress lacked a concrete vision for national development even when it was in power and that its politics remained confined to allegations and counter-allegations. At times, its leaders staged protests wearing black clothes; at others, they sat on dharnas, and now they had begun turning to village chaupals, he said.Taking a dig at the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress, Saini said women in Punjab had been promised Rs 1,000 per month during the elections. Over five years, this would amount to Rs 50,000 per woman. However, with elections approaching, there was now talk of depositing Rs 1,000 into women's accounts, he said.Questioning why the promised amount had not been provided over the preceding five years, Saini said making promises to women to secure their votes and subsequently failing to fulfil them amounted to betrayal.Referring to the Congress promise of providing 100-square-yard residential plots to poor families in Haryana, Saini said the party had made the announcement in the final days of the election campaign without providing either ownership documents or actual possession.In contrast, he said, the present government had provided eligible beneficiaries with plot documents as well as possession. While the Congress had confined its politics to securing votes, his government was working to ensure that the poor received their rightful entitlements, he added.



Border Security Force (BSF) personnel keep vigil along the Tripura-Bangladesh Border.

Another day, another U-turn: Cong says EC's chance to voters excluded during SIR admits 'wrongful deletions'

The Congress on Friday termed the Election Commission's decision to give voters left out of the draft electoral rolls in seven states another chance to enrol as a "U-turn", saying it was a "belated admission that wrongful deletion and exclusion" has taken place during the SIR process.The opposition party also reiterated its demand that Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar must go and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls must be suspended.Facing allegations of disenfranchising crores of voters, the Election Commission on Friday gave a fresh chance to electors of seven states who were marked as Absent, Shifted, Dead and Duplicate (ASDD), and whose names could not be included in the draft rolls during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise.In a letter, the EC directed the chief electoral officers of Delhi, Maharashtra, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Telangana and Nagaland to facilitate the inclusion of such electors in the final electoral rolls.Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "Another day, yet another U-turn. The Election Commission of India has just issued instructions to include left-out voters in the on-going SIR in seven states/UTs.""This is a belated admission that wrongful deletion and exclusion has indeed taken place under the ASDD (Absent, Shifted, Dead, Duplicate) category," Ramesh said on X.The ECI is carrying out corrective-after-corrective following the nationwide outrage and anger over SIR which has robbed over 13 crore Indians of their constitutional right to vote, he said."Every new set of orders begs the question: what was the point of this bureaucratic mess that every Indian has been put through? These repeated clarifications and amendments actually expose the true intent of the diabolical PM-HM (Narendra Modi-Amit Shah). They have been caught out," Ramesh said."SIR is the latest form of Vote Chori. And now that the Chori has been caught, the ECI and the PM-HM duo are doing everything to cover their tracks," he alleged.Every corrective also reinforces what has become abundantly clear -- Gyanesh Kumar must go and SIR must be suspended, Ramesh added.The EC has also asked officials to establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure that no eligible elector is deprived of the opportunity to be included in the Final Electoral Roll, while preventing duplicate enrolments.The EC's decision covers electors who were issued enumeration forms but whose forms were not received back, resulting in their exclusion from the draft rolls.The opposition has accused the EC of deleting the names of crores of eligible citizens

India on the path to make affordable care available to all



With Indian doctors' prowess giving foreigners a confidence to seek treatment here, India has come a long way since independence in healthcare. The country has a booming medial tourism industry, coupled with improved score in health indicators like life expectancy, infant mortality and fertility rate. India now has a strengthened network of primary health centres, community health centres and tertiary care super specialty hospitals along with an army of trained medical personnel to provide health care to its people. Simultaneously, more hospitals are being opened, drug prices being regulated, technology being made affordable for masses, network on communicable diseases being strengthened and efforts being made to invest more in the healthcare.

The Gross Domestic Product per capita, which indicates a country's standard of living, has increased 21 times from the 1960 level when it was $81.3 to $1709.4 in 2016, according to World Bank estimates. The life expectancy at birth, the average number of years a person is expected to survive if existing patterns of mortality stayed the same throughout their life has increased by 65.8 percent or 27 years between 1960 when it was 41 years and 2015 at 68 years. Crude birth rate has also reduced from 37 in 1970 to 22.2 in 2012 (per 1000 population). Population stabilisation efforts have paid off with total fertility rate for the country going down to 2.3 while some states like Delhi at 1.7, Kerala at 1.8, Tamil Nadu at 1.7, Maharashtra at 1.8, West Bengal at 1.6 and Himachal Pradesh at 1.7 attaining fertility rates even lower than the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman.

The country has shown impressive progress in bringing down the infant mortality rate - the number of babies per 1000 who die before their first birthday. From 165 deaths per 1000 children in 1960, the IMR has come down to 38 deaths in 2015. A major reason for this is the country's vaccination program. After launching its first vaccine – BCG - in 1962 as part of the national tuberculosis control program, India now has come a long way. An expanded program on immunization as part of the World Health Organisation's initiative was launched in India in 1978 which included BCG, DPT and typhoid vaccine. Oral Polio vaccine was included in the program in 1979. In 1985, the program was converted into Universal Immunization Program (UIP) with a goal to cover all the children.

Over the years new vaccines like those against hepatitis B and Japanese encephalitis have been added. The thrust on vaccination has made India polio free. The country was removed from the endemic countries' list on February 25, 2012 by the WHO. Vaccination has also contributed to the decline in under-five mortality rate from around 233 to around 47.7 per 1,000 live births in 2015 in last five decades, though in numbers this is huge burden - an estimated 5.9 million children died under the age of five in 2015, 45 percent of them being newborns.

Despite the progress, health sector in India still faces some challenges. For example, a large proportion of population - two-thirds of children and more than half of the women – suffer from anemia and malnutrition. High cost of care is a cause of concern which makes accessing care difficult for the poor and the weaker sections. Statistics show that even the well-to-do families reach the brink of poverty if faced with a serious illness. This is because of low government investment in health and private sector becoming the main source of healthcare.

However, the government has initiated landmark measures in the past three years to overcome these problems. It has brought out of a new national health policy which aims to provide universal access to good quality services at affordable cost. There is an emphasis on strengthening of the public health system by increasing public expenditure on health to 2.5 per cent of the GDP in a time bound manner. The policy also proposes free drugs, free diagnostics and free emergency care services in all public hospitals to reduce financial burden of health care on people. The policy envisages giving choice of treatment to patients by co-location of AYUSH remedies in public facilities. Yoga should be introduced in schools and work places as part of promotion of good health, it says. The policy advocates strengthening of district level services so that people get secondary care there itself rather than in medical college hospitals, and recommends proactive engagement with the private sector.

In line with the intention of health policy, government has already initiated measures to reduce cost of medicines and medical equipment while bringing more people under the health insurance net. There are plans to provide about 500 medicines free of cost in government district hospitals across the country. Fifty basic medicines will be provided free in primary health centres and 300 medicines in community health centers. The government has opened 83 outlets under the Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) program. It also intends to empower citizens to access quality healthcare services using better mobile and internet connectivity. Aiming for equitable care, the government has been opening new AIIMS, including the latest approved for Assam.

Affordable medical care is the focus of this government. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority has added 30 more essential drugs in the price control list taking the total medicines under price control to about 760. A draft national medical device policy aimed at bringing most medical devices within the ambit of price regulation and boosting their local manufacturing has also been prepared. Currently, only a few critical medical devices are under indirect price control and 80 per cent of all devices are imported products.

Far from keeping the world safe

The 23rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change concluded on November 17 in Bonn, Germany. The two-week meeting was regarded by many as primarily intended to clarify processes for the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through the creation of a rule book, with technical guidelines and processes. This would explain what compliance with the Paris Agreement means and how it would be monitored.

The key topics of contention were related to financial support, mitigation action, differentiation, and loss and damage — the same knots of disagreements that came up at COP-21 in Paris. The questions raised in Bonn were: Are developed countries going to do their fair share to support poor and emerging countries, having occupied the bulk of the planet's available carbon space? What actions have thus far been taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by rich countries? Shouldn't there be greater emphasis to phase out coal? There was also some apprehension about the role of the U.S. in the discussions since President Donald Trump had earlier declared that it would leave the Paris Agreement.

Actions related to the Paris Agreement are intended for 2020-2030. However, the pre-2020 period is part of the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol. Both the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol (2005-2012) and the second (2013-2020) principally laid out the responsibilities for reducing emissions by rich countries. However, there has been little progress and the 2012 Doha Amendment, the agreement concerning the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol, has not been ratified by a sufficient number of countries to enter into force.

Under pressure from poor and emerging economies, actions on the pre-2020 Kyoto period were added to the agenda in the first week of the Bonn meeting. As a result, in 2018 and 2019 there will be additional stocktaking on progress made on the Kyoto Protocol. There will also be climate finance assessments and all of these will be part of the overall process undertaken before 2020. It is reported that several countries have since expressed interest in ratifying the Doha Amendment and all these changes indicate some advancement.

Another aspect of the obligations that need to be fulfilled by big emitters is related to economic and non-economic losses under the work programme on loss and damage. In Warsaw, Poland, COP-19 established the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage to address the destruction likely from climate change, including extreme events (such as severe storms) and slow-onset events (such as sea-level rise). This track of negotiations recognised that even if the world were to drastically reduce its emissions, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere would cause warming. This would severely affect the poorest countries that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

It is important that such countries have access to economic and non-economic support, especially since their actions have not led to these increased concentrations of harmful greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement recognises loss and damage and calls for enhanced action and support from the parties. However, loss and damage was not included in the agenda for the Paris rule book, and this was rightly a big bone of contention with poor and developing economies. There are no funds currently available for this stream and the discussion on this has been postponed to 2018. This is alarming given that the world has already faced the wrath of numerous extreme events just in the last couple of years.

A third aspect of the support from rich countries is about providing finance, technology, and building capacity for poorer countries, both to protect themselves from the effects of climate change and to help them move along a low-carbon pathway. There were conflicts on financial support at various points, and on this topic, COP-23 was a failure. Without the means of implementation, the targets set by each country in Paris will not be achieved. There is also the promise of $100 billion each year by 2020 into the Green Climate Fund, which has not seen much inflow to meet the goal. There was therefore little progress on the key issue of finance and several important decisions were moved forward to be discussed at the next meeting to be held in Katowice, Poland in 2018.

There have been a number of advances in renewable energy over the last several years. These were highlighted at various side events at COP-23. There were also several state and substate actors from the U.S. at Bonn, some of whom tried to distance themselves from the actions and statements of the Trump administration, along with a series of colourful protests and interactions.

On the plus side, negotiators did move forward on developing other details for the Paris Agreement implementation, a process that is carried out under the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement and a policy should be ready in 2018. There was also a draft of a document integrating positions from parties on information needed to communicate the Nationally Determined Contributions. Steps were also taken to spell out the details of the global stock-taking that will occur every five years starting in 2023 and on transparency measures that are part of the overall process.

Nevertheless, the science on climate change has been grim this year. Greenhouse gas emissions which appeared to have stabilised for a few years, probably for economic reasons, rose by 2% in 2017, perhaps due to additional electricity drawn from coal power plants in China. When coal will be phased out globally was a major question. In fact, there were protests organised by activists at Europe's largest open pit coal mine near the Hambach Forest in Germany, not far from the COP-23. Clearly, greater ambition on clamping down on fossil fuels is needed for the Paris Agreement to be successful. The Bonn meeting saw the launch of the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which was led by Canada and the U.K. and joined by numerous countries and substate actors.

There was small but significant headway made regarding agriculture where a work plan was proposed by Parties on items related to climate change and agriculture, including improvements in soil fertility and carbon, management of land use and livestock maintenance. For India, these developments could be an excellent opportunity for learning from others and sharing local knowledge. Much more needs to be done for the international community to truly grapple with climate change — we are still far from keeping the world safe from its harmful consequences. And for India, there is unfortunately no time left for delaying action on multiple fronts on the landscape of sustainable development, which itself will be derailed by a warming world.

Carbohydrates may help to design better malaria vaccine

Good news! Carbohydrates are not our enemy, especially when it comes to stopping the spread of malaria, suggests a study. According to researchers, carbohydrates on the surface of malaria parasites play a critical role in malaria's ability to infect mosquito and human hosts. The discovery also suggests steps that may improve the only malaria vaccine approved to protect people against Plasmodium falciparum malaria - the most deadly form of the disease. Justin Boddey led the research from the Univeristy of Alberta, Canada.

Dr Justin Boddey said the team had shown that the malaria parasite 'tag' its proteins with carbohydrates in order to stabilise and transport them and that this process was crucial to completing the parasite's lifecycle. "Malaria parasites have a complex lifecycle that involves constant shape shifting to evade detection and infect humans and subsequently mosquitoes," Dr Boddey said. They found that the parasite's ability to 'tag' key proteins with carbohydrates is important for two stages of the malaria lifecycle.

It is critical for the earliest stages of human infection, when the parasite migrates through the body and invades in the liver and later when it is transmitted back to the mosquito from an infected human, enabling the parasite to be spread between people. Dr Goddard-Borger said the research had attracted a lot of interest because of the implications it has for improving malaria vaccine design. "It was hoped that the vaccine would generate a good antibody response that protected against the parasite, however it has unfortunately not been as effective at evoking protective immunity as hoped," Dr Goddard-Borger said.

"Now that we know how important these carbohydrates are to the parasite, we can be confident that the malaria parasite cannot 'escape' vaccination pressure by doing away with its carbohydrates," he added. This discovery reveals that carbohydrates are very important, and in two completely different lifecycle stages. This is exciting because to ultimately eradicate malaria the researchers need combined approaches that attack different stages of the parasite at once, Dr Boddey noted.

App to treat substance abuse gets FDA nod

In a first, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved marketing of a novel mobile medical application designed to help treat people with substance use disorders such as addiction to alcohol, cocaine and marijuana. The "Reset" app developed by Pear Therapeutics – a US-based Prescription Digital Therapeutics firm -- delivers cognitive behavioural therapy to teach users the skills that aid in the treatment of substance use disorders.

The app, which is also a web interface for clinicians, is also intended to increase abstinence from substance abuse and increase retention in treatment compared to other therapies, the agency said in a statement on Thursday. "This is an example of how innovative digital technologies can help provide patients access to additional tools during their treatment," said Carlos Pena, Director at FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health. "More therapy tools means a greater potential to help improve outcomes, including abstinence, for patients with substance use disorder," Pena added.

As part of the approval process, the FDA reviewed data from a multi-site, in a 12-week clinical trial of 399 patients who received either standard treatment or standard treatment with the addition of a desktop-based version of Reset which could be accessed at the clinic or home. The data showed a statistically significant increase in adherence to abstinence for the patients with alcohol, cocaine, marijuana and stimulant substance use disorders in those who used Reset, 40.3 per cent, compared to the patients who did not, 17.8 per cent. The clinical trial did not demonstrate the effectiveness of using the Reset device in patients reporting opioids as their substance of abuse. Data from the clinical studies also did not indicate any side effects associated with the device, the statement said.

E-cigs may double risk of tobacco smoking in teenagers

Teenagers who try vape may be at double the risk for developing addiction to smoking tobacco cigarettes, according to a new study. The findings showed that students in grades 7 to 12 who had tried an e-cigarette are 2.16 times more likely to be susceptible to cigarette smoking. "Since e-cigarettes came on the market, there has been a debate about whether their use may lead to cigarette smoking. The answer among adolescents is yes," said Bruce Baskerville, a researcher at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada.

E-cigarettes can contain nicotine but not many of the harmful substances produced by smoking tobacco such as tar or carbon monoxide. These products work through an inhalation-activated system that heats a solution to create an inhalable aerosol often known as vapour. "While preliminary evidence suggests that e-cigarettes contain fewer toxic chemicals than traditional cigarettes, our findings suggest that a potential increase in harmful cigarette use may follow as e-cigarette use continues to rise among adolescent populations," Baskerville added.

The study was published in the journal Preventive Medicine. "This study supports the restricting of e-cigarette access to minors, which have been shown to have heightened risk to initiate smoking," Baskerville said. However, more research is needed on additional contributing risk factors as well as longitudinal data to evaluate the complex relationship between e-cigarette use and tobacco cigarette use in adolescence.

High BP can cause organ damage in teenagers too

Is your teenage son or daughter suffering from high blood pressure? Beware, if left uncontrolled the condition can lead to organ damage as in adults, according to a research. The findings showed that organ damage -- damage to the heart and blood vessels -- from high blood pressure does not only occur in adults, but also in teenagers. Importantly, the damage in teenagers occurs at blood pressure levels that are below the clinical definition of hypertension in the age group, the researchers said.

"Some adolescents may have organ damage related to blood pressure and are not targeted for therapy," said Elaine M. Urbina, Director at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital in Ohio. "Imaging of the heart may be useful in youth in the high-normal range of blood pressure to determine how aggressive therapy should be." High blood pressure in teenagers is defined on the basis of percentiles, rather than blood pressure level as in adults.

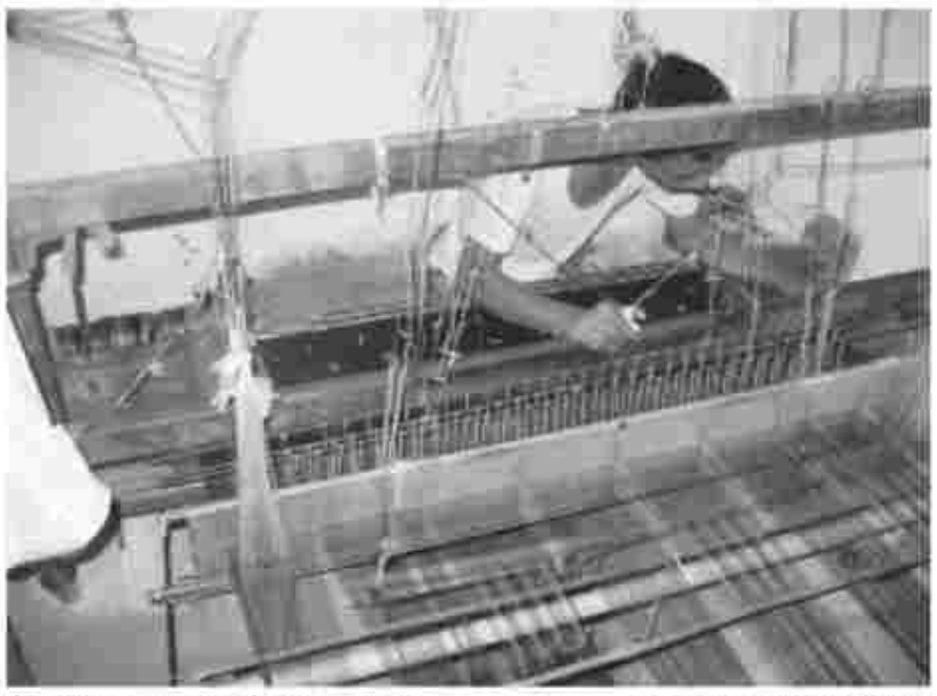
In the study, presented at the 2017 American Heart Association (AHA) Council on Hypertension in San Francisco, the team looked at whether organ damage in teens develops below the 95th percentile -- the clinical definition of high blood pressure in teenagers. The researchers examined blood pressure and measured organ damage in 180 teenagers (14-17 years old, 64 per cent white, 57 per cent males). The results showed evidence of organ damage even among the youth categorised as "normal" with blood pressure less than in the 80th percentile.

Even teens can suffer organ damage from high blood pressure

Turns out, organ damage from high blood pressure occurs not only in adults, but also in teens. A recent study also found that the damage to the heart and blood vessels can occur in youth at blood pressure levels that are below the clinical definition of hypertension in youth. High blood pressure in youth is defined differently than it is in adults. In childhood, high blood pressure is based on percentiles, rather than blood pressure level. Researchers looked at whether organ damage in teens develops below the 95th percentile, which is the clinical definition of high blood pressure in youth.

Researchers studied blood pressure and measured organ damage in 180 teenagers (14-17 years old, 64 percent white, 57 percent males). They found evidence of organ damage even among the youth categorized as "normal" with blood pressure less than in the 80th percentile. They also found heart and vessel damage in the mid-risk group, which had blood pressures in the 80th to 90th percentiles and the high-risk group, with blood pressures above the 90th percentile.

Hope looms large for the handloom sector



A riot of colours, eye-riveting designs, scintillating hues and entrancing interlacing of warps and wefts give these fabrics a distinctive appeal. From the northeast and Kashmir to the southern tip, these fabrics have distinguishing features that impart a unique exotic appeal. Through centuries, handlooms have been associated with excellence in India's artistry in fabrics and providing a source of livelihood to millions of crafts persons in almost every state.

Despite sweeping changes, the art and craft traditions have been kept alive due to continuous efforts of generations of artists and craftsmen who weaved their dreams and visions into exquisite handloom products and transferred their skills to their progenies. From ancient times, Indian handloom products have been identified by their impeccable quality. These include muslin of Chanderi, silk brocades of Varanasi, the tie and dye products of Rajasthan and Orissa, the Chintas of Machhilpatnam, the Himroos of Hyderabad, the Khes of Punjab, the prints of Farrukhabad, the Phenek and Tongam and bottle designs of Assam and Manipur, the Maheshwari sarees of Madhya Pradesh and the Patola sarees of Vadodara.

Furthermore, the skill involved in producing these special handloom products, such as the Kancheepuram and Benaras silks, the Kosa and Moga silk from Chhattisgarh and Assam respectively, or the Jamdhani from Bengal, the Bhagalpur silk, the Chanderi from Madhya Pradesh and the Tussar and Ikat of Orissa, is part of a special cultural capital. Though lighter, western clothing is preferred today, most of us still do not miss the most intricately woven traditional clothing on special occasions like weddings and festivals.

After Independence, the government introduced many safeguards to preserve the Gandhian legacy of valuing Khadi to protect handloom weavers and the cultural heritage of this industry from encroachment by the powerloom and mill sectors. The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985, set aside 22 traditional cloth items such as sarees with borders, dhoti, lungi, among others, for exclusive handloom production and put them outside the purview of the powerloom sector. But, when this Act took effect after eight years in 1993, after a protracted litigation by the powerloom sector, the reserved list had only 11 items.

In the late nineties, production suffered due to a combination of factors such as customer's changing tastes, trade practices, and duty-free imports of Chinese crepe yarn. Weavers became labourers. Slowly, trends changed and traditional crafts persons found it difficult to sustain their livelihood. However, since 2015, the saree has revived people's interest in handlooms like never before.

The second biggest source of employment in rural India; next only to agriculture, the handloom sector provides employment to 4.33 million from diverse communities engaged in 2.38 million looms across the country. It contributes nearly 15 percent of the cloth production in the country and also to export earnings. About 95 percent of the world's handwoven fabric is from India.

Recognising the glorious history of the industry and its relevance to present times, the government is committed to resurgence of hand-woven textiles and also weavers. In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared August 7 as the National Handloom Day to mark the day the Swadeshi Movement was launched in 1905 and dedicated the day to the weavers of the country, making good on his poll promise of the 5Fs: farm to fibre, fibre to fabric, fabric to fashion and fashion to foreign.

The prime minister also launched the "India Handloom" Brand (IHB) the same day, to endorse the quality of the products in terms of raw material, processing, weaving and other parameters besides social and environmental compliances for earning customers' trust. The IHB soon made its presence on social media to connect with customers, especially youth, to promote high quality handloom products and help build customer awareness and carve a distinct identity for it. Since assuming charge of the textiles ministry in July 2016, Union Minister Smriti Irani has led by example with her "I Wear Handloom" campaign on social media started last August.

The government has also initiated several steps to revive handlooms. It has laid stress on increasing weavers' earnings, which would in turn attract the younger generation to this profession. These include: Organising weavers in clusters and providing basic infrastructure by setting up Common Facility Centres. To boost handlooms, the textiles minister recently brought together leading designers in a unique public-private partnership. More than a dozen of them were assigned handloom clusters for product development and training weavers to upgrade their skills.

The other measures include—encouraging weavers to sell products through e-commerce; promoting educated youth from weavers' families as weaver entrepreneurs, who will get market information, produce and market cloth directly; linking handloom with fashion and tourism, to expand the market and increase earnings; and involving the private sector in design development and marketing. The textiles ministry is making concerted efforts to pitch India as a global sourcing centre for all fabric, making handloom India's niche contribution to the international fashion industry.

Efforts are on to upgrade hand weaving technology in terms of weavers' comfort, productivity and quality. To ensure continuity of the hand weaving heritage,

Structural differences in brain linked to epilepsy: Study

Thickness and volume differences in the grey matter of several brain regions could predict an increased risk of developing epilepsy a neurological disorder characterised by seizures, finds a research led by a professor of Indian-origin. Epilepsy affects 0.6-1.5 per cent of the global population, comprising many different syndromes and conditions, and defined by a tendency for seizures. The findings showed reduced grey matter thickness in parts of the brain's outer layer (cortex) and reduced volume in subcortical brain regions in all epilepsy groups when compared to the control group.

Reduced volume and thickness were associated with longer duration of epilepsy. Adults with epilepsy exhibited lower volume in the right thalamus a region which relays sensory and motor signals --and reduced thickness in the motor cortex, which controls the body's movement. These patterns were even present among people with idiopathic generalised epilepsies -- a type of the disorder that are typically considered to be more benign if seizures are under control. "We found differences in brain matter even in common epilepsies that are often considered to be comparatively benign," said lead author, Sanjay Sisodiya, Professor at the University College London.

"We have identified a common neuroanatomical signature of epilepsy, across multiple epilepsy types. We found that structural changes are present in multiple brain regions, which informs our understanding of epilepsy as a network disorder," added Christopher Whelan from the University of Southern California. For the study, published in the journal Brain, the team conducted MRI brain scans of 2,149 people with epilepsy, and compared with 1,727 healthy controls from across Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia. "Our findings suggest there's more to epilepsy than we realise, and now we need to do more research to understand the causes of these differences," Sisodiya said.

Depression may reduce survival rates in cancer patients

Even mild depression among patients with head and neck cancer are associated with poorer overall survival, a new study has said. The findings of the study indicated that patients should be screened and treated for depressive symptoms at the time of diagnosis. "We observed that patients with depressive symptoms suffered greater two-year overall mortality rates and this was especially true for those who did not achieve optimal response to medical treatment," said study co-author Elizabeth Cash from the University of Louisville School of Medicine.

According to the researchers, many patients diagnosed with head and neck cancer experience symptoms of depression, which can make it difficult for them to manage treatment side effects, quit smoking, or maintain adequate nutrition or sleep habits. To see if depressive symptoms might affect patients' health outcomes, researchers studied 134 patients with head and neck cancers who reported depressive symptoms during the planning of their treatment.

When they examined the patients' clinical data over the following two years, they found that patients with greater depressive symptoms had shorter survival, higher rates of chemoradiation interruption and poorer treatment response. Poorer treatment response partially explained the depression-survival relationship; however, there were no significant effects from factors commonly used to determine cancer prognosis -- such as the patient's age, the stage of tumour advancement or extent of smoking history.

"This suggests that depressive symptoms may be as powerful as the clinical features that physicians typically use to determine the prognosis of patients with head and neck cancer," Cash added. The researchers noted that most patients in the study, published in the jornal CANCER, did not meet criteria for diagnosis of major depressive disorder, suggesting that even mild symptoms of depression may interfere with head and neck cancer treatment outcomes.

The problematics of genetics and the Aryan issue

Tony Joseph's article ("How genetics is settling the Aryan migration debate, June 16) on how recent genetic studies of Indian populations might be "settling the Aryan migration debate" attempts to summarise polemical as well as technical aspects of the contribution of genetics to the debate in question. I will focus here mostly on methodological issues to argue that the conclusions of two recent studies Mr. Joseph's article heavily leans on are much shakier than conveyed. (Those are "A genetic chronology for the Indian Subcontinent", published earlier this year in BMC Evolutionary Biology, which I will refer to as "Silva et al," after its first author, and "Reconstructing Indian population history" by David Reich and four co-authors, published in Nature in 2009, henceforth "Reich et al.")

To begin with, most studies of population genetics suffer from shortcomings and flaws, some of which are currently unavoidable, while others are the result of subjective, personal choices. The larger public interested in the field of population genetics should be all the more aware of this problematics as genetic studies come to us in a scientific garb; in actual fact, they are scientific only in part; there is still much room for human prejudice and error.

The first limitation is one of numbers. Silva et al.'s study sequenced very few new genomes of the Subcontinent's populations; rather, it revisited older samples with new techniques (about 1,500 for their mtDNA study and 850 for their genome-wide study, if I have correctly read the paper's Additional file 1). That is, of course, a valid exercise, but such a small data set remains inadequate to represent the diversity of Indian populations, which the paper itself often stresses ("a remarkable genetic diversity", "a very complex history", etc.), and may easily lead to over-interpretation of the limited data. It is the case with all genetic studies to date understandably so, DNA sequencing being a time-consuming and costly affair. Moreover, the paper (see its Fig. 2) inherits from earlier studies serious inconsistencies in categorising the samples, grouped sometimes regionally ("Sindhi", "Bengali from Bangladesh", "Gujarati from Houston", "Indian Telugu from UK", with no further details), sometimes caste-wise ("Kshatriya", "Low-caste South" and "Central", "Brahmin South" and "Central", again without further details), and sometimes religion-wise ("Muslim", with no geographical precision). A look at Table S3 in Additional file 1 makes it clear that thousands of communities from all over the Subcontinent are left out of the picture. Bias is built into the data set.

Let us turn to another example of this limitation: I refer to the construct of Ancestral North Indians (ANI) and Ancestral South Indians (ASI) promoted by Reich et al., Middle Easterners, Central Asians, and Europeans", making it "tempting to assume that the population ancestral to ANI and CEU [Europeans] spoke "Proto-Indo-European"". In reality, as I showed in a paper published last year ("Aryans and the Indus Civilization: Archaeological, Skeletal, and Molecular Evidence"), the study had no samples whatsoever from several major Indian States (Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and a few Northeastern States), while other States (Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Kerala) were represented by a single population. With such a heavily skewed distribution, the constructs of ANI and ASI clearly lacked any scientific validity and, moreover, were never defined genetically in the said paper. This prompted in 2014 the biologist B.M. Reddy to call them "ill-conceived and untenable as units of study". ANI and ASI were advanced simply because they were expected to conform to predetermined results, such as ANI entering as Indo-Aryan speakers. When Mr. Joseph asserts that Reich et al.'s study "proved that most groups in India today can be approximated as a mixture of these two populations, with the ANI ancestry higher in traditionally upper caste and Indo-European speakers", he merely resorts to the classic "argument from authority" except that there is no authority at all in this case. That particular study only "proved" how good scientists are apt to bungle when their theoretical framework remains amateurish. We might as well put forth constructs of "Ancestral Eastern Indians" and "Ancestral Western Indians" and demonstrate that most Indian populations "can be approximated as a mixture of these two" the approach would be just as valid, or invalid, as that of Reich et al.

In fact, Reich et al. were themselves careful to "warn that 'models' in population genetics... although they provide an important framework for testing historical hypotheses, are oversimplifications. For example, the true ancestral populations of India were probably not homogeneous as we assume in our model, but instead were probably formed by clusters of related groups that mixed at different times". Clearly, the same complex processes of intermixing continued through most of Indian prehistory and history, which means that there are no "true ancestral populations of India", barring the original immigration from Africa some 60 or 70,000 years ago. The concept of Adivasi has no genetic legitimacy, unless we are ready to restrict it to the Andamanese.

The second flaw, hinted at above, is that of circularity. Mr. Joseph also quotes Reich et al.'s above words of caution, and adds, "In other words, ANI is likely to have resulted from multiple migrations, possibly including the migration of Indo-European language speakers" (note the use of the definite article "the" before "migration"). Silva et al.'s paper also refers to "multiple dispersals into the Subcontinent." If, then, we have "multiple migrations" or "dispersals" at different periods, what are the criteria that allow us to associate a particular migration with "the" presumed migration of Indo-Aryan speakers? There are no criteria at all only a predetermined dogma that Indo-Aryans speakers did enter India in the early or mid-second millennium B.C.E. Silva et al.'s study suffers from this argument from circularity by constantly assuming that any populations migrating in or about central Asia during the Bronze Age must have been "speaking a proto-Indo-Iranian language"; the genetic data are not allowed to gradually build up a picture of possible population movements but immediately squeezed into the mainstream linguistic model.

In a perceptive paper of 2007 entitled "Anthropological, historical, archaeological and genetic perspectives on the origins of caste in South Asia", Nicole Boivin, an archaeologist at Oxford University's School of Archaeology with wide experience of the Subcontinent, offered this critique of genetic studies: "In reading the genetics literature on South Asia, it is very clear that many of the studies actually start out with some assumptions that are clearly problematic, if not in some cases completely untenable. Perhaps the single most serious problem concerns the assumption, which many studies actually start with as a basic premise... that the Indo-Aryan invasions are a well-established (pre)historical reality."

Test vaccine for malaria appears promising

A new, experimental vaccine for malaria has shown fast and effective results against acute infection, protection against relapse, as well as, delay in resistance formation, researchers say. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), nearly half of the world's population is at risk of malaria. In 2015, there were roughly 212 million malaria cases and an estimated 429,000 malaria deaths. Researchers from the University of Tubingen in Germany, tested the efficacy, tolerability and safety of a combination of the drugs Fosmidomycin and Piperaquine on 83 patients in the phase II clinical trials.

The two-fold medication was administered for three days to patients aged one to 30, who were infected with malaria via the Plasmodium falciparum pathogen. In the 83 cases, there was a 100 per cent cure rate, said Peter Kremsner, Professor at the varsity. Patients tolerated the treatment well, and it led to a swift reduction of clinical symptoms. "This study represents a milestone in the clinical research into Fosmidomycin," Kremsner said.

The antibiotic Fosmidomycin, is originally isolated from Streptomyces lavendulae a species of bacteria from the genus Streptomyces. Streptomyces lavendulae blocks a metabolic pathway for the production of Isoprenoid – naturally occurring organic chemicals in the malaria pathogen. This makes the malaria pathogen unable to metabolise or reproduce. As Isoprenoids are formed via a different synthesis path in the human body, humans have no target structures for Fosmidomycin.

As a result, humans tolerate the drug well and suffer barely any side effects, the researchers said, in a paper published in Clinical Infectious Diseases. In addition, this unique mechanism excludes the possibility of cross-resistance to the drugs used in earlier malaria treatments. The new combination also meets WHO guidelines for combination therapies. The two drugs mechanisms against differing target structures means that they attack the parasite in the bloodstream independently of one another. This meets WHO requirements for a fast and effective treatment of the acute phase of infection, and for protection against relapse due to reappearance of the infection. Furthermore, the effective mechanism helps to delay the formation of a possible resistance, the researchers noted.

Cervical cancer's signs every woman should know

The symptoms of cervical cancer, a condition that develops in the cervix, don't surface during its early stages, but there are some crucial signs of the disease that women should know. According to the Daily Express, one of the pivotal signs can be bleeding from the vagina at any time, other than during monthly period. National Health Service also shared that the bleeding can usually occur after having sex.

The organisation added, "Other symptoms of cervical cancer may include pain and discomfort during sex and an unpleasant smelling vaginal discharge. If cancer spreads out of your cervix and into surrounding tissue and organs, it can trigger a range of other symptoms". Bone pain, loss of appetite and finding blood in the urine are also considered to be the signs of the condition. Though there is no single way to prevent cervical cancer, the people can lower your risk by using a condom when having sex.

Most cases of the cancer are linked to an infection from the human papillomavirus (HPV), and using a condom could lower the risk of the infection. Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women and the seventh most common cancer overall. In 2012, worldwide, there were estimated to have been around 528,000 new cases. India alone accounts for one-fourth of the global burden of cervical cancers.

In a recent study, it was estimated that cervical cancer will occur in approximately one in 53 Indian women during their lifetime compared with one in 100 women in more developed regions of the world. The data also showed that cervical cancer contributes to approximately 6-29 percent of all cancer in females at different locations within the country.



Billie Eilish poses in the press room with the award for new artist of the year and favourite alternative rock artist at the American Music Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles.

Pooja Hegde crosses 4 million followers on Instagram!



Pooja Hegde who has an exciting line up of films in her kitty has resulted in the surge of her popularity amongst the millenials.

The gorgeous and talented actress who made heads turn in her stint in Saakshayam and eagerly awaiting the release of her next big film, Aravindha Sametha is on a roll these days. Pooja has become the current social media sensation as the Housefull 4 actress has crossed 4 million followers on her Instagram account. The actress's Instagram handle not just gives us sneak peek into the work-out routines and behind the scenes footages of the films she works on but also shares with us the stunning magazine cover looks that the actress is a part of. Pooja says, "The love keeps growing and I am honoured and humbled. I'm still so new to this industry and the fact that 4 million people are showering their love in me through social media is touching and encouraging.

I think my fun, goofy and forever excited self seems to connect with them somehow. Sending my love back to them."

Sherlyn Chopra does the new film Tunu Tunu



The bold and beautiful actress, Sherlyn Chopra is all set to grace the spotlight for her brand new single, Tunu Tunu which is a Hindi pop song with a Punjabi touch. The song has been composed by music composer duo, Vicky & Hardik and has been sung by Sukriti Kakar.

The lyrics are by Hardik Acharya. The audio-video of Tunu Tunu boasts of impeccable production values and features Sherlyn Chopra, Vicky & Hardik.

When asked about her upcoming single, the Chopra girl said, "I had too much fun being both a visionary producer and a performing artist for Tunu Tunu! As a hands-on producer, I intend to produce excellent singles featuring immensely talented new age musicians & singers.

I enjoy producing high quality content for entertainment.

Today, music (regardless of whether it is a film song or a non-film song) has become a means of instant relaxation, mood enhancement, enjoyment, expression of oneself & celebration of life. There are so many new talented singers and musicians who are willing to step out of the box so as to create new age, contemporary music and I'm keen on collaborating with them to produce excellent, high quality music as I believe in the power and reach of music which is beyond phenomenal!"

The producer-actor has a series of back to back high quality music videos lined up for release in 2019, the first of which is Tunu Tunu.

The teaser of Tunu Tunu will be released by T-Series on 16th Jan followed by the full audio-video release.

'Hum Chaar brought some nostalgic memories' say Tushar Pandey



The recently released trailer of Sonchiriya has been generating immense buzz for the raw and rustic looks set in the rooted villages of central India. In order to make every look of the character realistic, the entire starcast of the film has completed the shoot with only one outfit respectively. On top of that, all the outfits were not sent to the laundry to keep the continuity and authenticity intact.

As the film progressed, the outfit kept getting dirtier and dirtier but the Sonchiriya team was very keen on using the same outfit, giving it a realistic feel. In the film it will give you the realistic feel and all the actors of Sonchiriya left no stones unturned to ace their characters. The story of Sonchiriya is set in the 1970s showcasing a small town ruled and dominated by dacoits. Multiple gangs fight over the struggle to attain power. The cast dons fierce avatars in sync with the theme of the film.

Starring Sushant Singh Rajput, Bhumi Pednekar, Manoj Bajpayee, Ranvir Shorey, and Ashutosh Rana in lead rotes, Sonchiriya presents tale set in the era of dacoits. Sonchiriya promises to be a power packed action film giving a glimpse of the glorious years if dacoits in central India. Shot in the valleys of Madhya Pradesh, Sonchiriya presents an ensemble cast with an intriguing storyline. Directed by Abhishek Chaubey who has earlier presented 'Udta Punjab' and 'Ishiqiya', 'Sonchiriya' presents a rooted tale set in Chambal.

Zoya Akhtar: I love films populated with people



Zoya Akhtar who has been ahead of her times with films Luck By Chance, Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara and Dil Dhadakne Do is now all ruling the box office with Gully Boy. The Zoya Akhtar directorial is indomitable a testimony of which is seen at the Box Office along with immense appreciation from Audiences and critics alike.

During a live Instagram interview, Zoya Akhtar shares, "I am really happy at the response we have got and I am really happy everybody that's worked on it everybody that's involved in it beside me all the rappers, they all getting texts, they all are calls and they are getting validated. In a way that you want to putting your heart and soul into any project, but having said that I am also having a bit of emptiness because its kind of out there and it's gone and now what like you spent soo much time on something and its done"

Expressing her gratitude towards the exceptional response to her film, the director said, "I am overwhelmed with the kind message I have gotten on Instagram and Facebook, and thank you so much for everybody, they went in for the opening weekend as the opening week's business makes a huge difference in terms of the business of the trade and you make that effort to go in there and thanks you soo much for that".

Zoya Akhtar who has earlier presented multi starrer films like Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara, Dil Dhadakne Do and now Gully Boy, expressed her fondness for an ensemble cast saying, "I love ensemble cast I love lots of actors and lots of characters, interactions, relations and I love films populated with people" Sunday night, the filmmaker visited the famous gaiety galaxy in mumbai sharing her experience she posted the picture quoting: "Nostalgia #gaiety #cinema #childhood #popcorn #soft drinks #intermission #gully boy #theatrevisit"

The woman with the Midas Touch, Zoya Akhtar has wowed critics with Gully Boy with raving reviews making news across all quarters already.

Over the years, Zoya Akhtar is known to treat the audience with a strong male character driven film which has slayed at the box office along with critical acclaims. With a journey of four feature films, two short films, and one web series, Zoya Akhtar is one of the leading filmmakers who has carved her niche into the entertainment industry.



Litzy arrives at the 47th International Emmy Awards gala at the Hilton Hotel in New York.

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