

## Seasons First Snowfall Cuts Off Kashmir From Outside World Highways Blocked, All Flights Cancelled; Dry Weather Predicted For Next 4 Days

Auqib Javeed

Kashmir Valley on Friday was cut-off from the rest of the world due to heavy snowfall leading to the closure of strategic Srinagar- Jammu highway, besides grounding all the flights at the Srinagar International Airport.

While the higher reaches of Jammu and Kashmir experienced moderate to heavy

snowfall, many areas in the plains including Srinagar received light to moderate snowfall, officials said.

The fresh snowfall started early in the morning and continued till the last reports came in, they said.

The officials said the famous ski-resort of Gulmarg recorded about eight inches of snowfall, followed by 14 inches in Pahalgam and about 2.5-3 feet in



### Avalanche Warning Issued In 10 Districts

Jammu and Kashmir State Disaster Management Authority on Friday issued avalanche warning in several districts of Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of heavy snowfall since morning. According to a | [More on P6](#)

Sonamarg (in the last 24 hours). Many other areas in the higher reaches experienced very heavy snowfall, they added.

The plains in Jammu were lashed by rain.

The inclement weather resulted in the closure of the Srinagar-Jammu national highway -- the only all-weather road connecting the Valley with the rest of the country, the officials said. [More on P6](#)

## LG, Ex- Cms Condole Sharad Yadav's Demise

Press Trust Of India

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and other leaders of the Union Territory on Friday paid tributes to late socialist leader Sharad Yadav, saying he did not compromise with his values of secularism and diversity and always stood with the weakest.

The 75-year-old Yadav died on Thursday at a private hospital in Gurugram. He is survived by his wife, daughter and son.

The veteran socialist leader had been suffering from kidney-related issues for a long time and regularly underwent dialysis.

The LG said he was deeply saddened at the demise of Yadav.

"His long public career is an inspiring example of selfless service to the people. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti", Sinha tweeted.

In a tweet, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said, "Saddened by the sudden demise of Sharad Yadav ji. He belonged to a generation of politicians who fought tooth & nail for the idea of India & didn't compromise on his values of secularism & diversity. Condolences to the family especially his wife Rekha ji & daughter Subhashini."

National Conference leaders Omar Abdullah and his father, Farooq Abdullah also condoled Yadav's death.

"I join my father & my colleagues in sending our condolences to the family of Sh [#SharadYadav ji. More on P6](#)

## 'Impenetrable' Security Grid Across Jammu In 3 Months: HM

Says NIA, Police To Jointly Probe Rajouri Attack; Vows Severe Punishment To Culprits

Observer News Service

New Delhi: Amid a sudden spurt in militant activities in the winter capital, the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah said on Friday that all security agencies are fighting a decisive battle against terrorism and within three months the security grid in every area of Jammu would be made impenetrable by further strengthening it.

Shah made these remarks while addressing a news conference after chairing a high-level review meeting in Jammu on the overall security situation in the Union Territory. The Home Minister was on a day-long visit to the winter capital to meet the families of the six civilians killed in twin attacks in Rajouri earlier this month.

J&K Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, Union Home



**WITH FULL EMPATHY, THE AFFECTED FAMILIES WOULD BE GIVEN BENEFITS** through various schemes of the government, along with this all possible help will be provided by the LG with relief measures under his authority."

Secretary, Chief Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir, Financial Commissioner (ACS) Home, DGP, Jammu and Kashmir, Commander,

Northern Command, Army and Intelligence, and other senior officers of BSF and CRPF among others attended the meeting.

"My desire was to share the grief of victims' families of the Rajouri terror attacks, but I could not go there due to bad weather. [More on P6](#)

## VDG Opens Fire After Noticing Suspects In Rajouri

A village defence guard (VDG) opened fire after allegedly noticing a suspicious movement in a village in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district Thursday night, sources said. Village defence guards (VDGs) have been activated and given weapons in the Jammu region, especially in border district of Rajouri, after twin terror attacks in Dhangr village that left seven people dead. A VDG, Yashpal, fired a few rounds in the air from his gun after two suspicious persons came to his house in Androla village at around 8.30 pm, the sources said. [More on P6](#)

## Double Whammy For Kulgam Family House Goes Up In Flames Hours After Man's Death

Agencies

Kulgam: Back to back tragedies struck a family in south Kashmir's Kulgam district after an elderly man died on Friday morning while his house went up in flames hours later.

Tehsildar Damhal Hanjipora, Rouf Ahmad Lone said that an elderly man (house owner) died early morning on Friday after a few hours his house caught fire.

The deceased has been identified as Mohammad Ashraf Khatana son of Ali Mohd Khatana, a resident of Gujjar Basti Avil Manzgam.

Rouf said immediate relief was given to the family and he

himself visited the spot along with other officials.

"As per SDRF norms we will forward the case within the shortest period of time so that family get compensation", he said.

He said locals played an important role in the dousing of flames and controlling fire, he said.

Asked about the cause of the fire, he said it happened probably due to a short circuit.

Meanwhile, Kulgam police in a tweet said: "Kulgam police received an information that fire broken out in the residential house at Manzgam, it was tough to reach there due to snowfall. SHO Manzgam under the close supervision of [More on P6](#)

## Electric Shocks Killed 35 People In Last Two Years



Agencies

Srinagar: At least 35 people including ten civilians have lost their lives due to electrocution in the Valley in the last two years, an official document reveals.

"A total of 18 persons including four regular employees, five civilians and nine Permanent Daily Labourer (PDL), Temporary Daily Labourer (TDL), Casual Labourers and Daily Rated Workers have lost their lives in 2021 across Kashmir due to electrocution," the document revealed. It said that three [More on P6](#)

## Tricolor In Every Street Of Kashmir After 2019: Thakur

Observer News Service

New Delhi: Describing the Modi government's policies on terrorism as decisive, the Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting, Anurag Thakur said on Friday that since the abrogation of Article-370, tricolor is hoisted in every street of Kashmir.

Thakur, who is also Union Minister for Youth and Sports, made these remarks in the "Youth Dialogue, India @ 2047 Program" organized at Agartala, Tripura on Friday, an official spokesperson said.

The Union Minister said that in the last eight years, the government took clear action by adopting a decisive policy against terrorism. He said that separatism has also been defeated.

"There has been a reduction of 89% in insurgency in the North East. Today AFSPA has been withdrawn from most



of the areas. Record peace agreements have been made," Thakur said.

"Similarly, Article 370 was abolished in Jammu and Kashmir where at one time terrorists did not allow the tricolor to be hoisted. Today the tricolor is hoisted in every street of Kashmir. The dream of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat is coming true now," he added.

Giving information about the Youth-20 being organized [More on P6](#)

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- Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

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## SHORT TAKES

### 6 Men Charged In Drone Dropping Case

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against six accused persons in a case related to drone recovery and other ammunition in Kathua district. According to a statement, NIA filed the chargesheet in NIA Special Court, Jammu in case pertaining to interception of drone (Hexacopter), recovery of drone (Hexacopter) and rounds of UBGL and Magnetic Bombs from near Dhalla area under of Kathua. The statement reads the case was initially registered as FIR No. 114/2022 dated 29.05.2022 at PS Rajbagh, Kathua and re-registered by NIA on 30.07.2022. "Investigations revealed that on directions of accused, [More on P6](#)

### Child Injured In Accidental Fire Dies

A minor boy, who was injured in accidental firing in Surankote area of Poonch district on Thursday, died at the Government Medical College (GMC) Jammu on Friday. Nine-year-old Afran Ahmed was playing near forest area of Sangla in Surankote tehsil when he was hit by an accidental fire from the rifle of a hunter Mohammad Sharief on Thursday. He was removed to the GMC Jammu from GMC Rajouri for advanced treatment of gunshot injuries. However he succumbed to the grievous wounds. SHO Surankote Rajveer Singh confirmed the death of the minor. He said police have already registered a case [More on P6](#)

### Train Derails On Budgam Section

A train on the Baramulla-Banihal section derailed from the railway track in Mazhama area of central Kashmir's Budgam district on Friday, however, no casualties were reported in the incident. Reports said the derailment took place at Mazhama after the train left the railway station Friday morning. He said all the passengers were safe, while railway officials reached the spot. The official said the derailment was accidental and further details were being ascertained. He further said that the train services between Budgam and Baramulla stretch have been stopped and efforts are on to restore them.ess.

**14<sup>th</sup> January, 2023**

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# Money and Media

Somdeep Sen

“  
**Some countries have regulatory measures in place to curb media monopolisation. In Germany, for instance, no single company can control “more than 30 percent of all TV audiences”. But the landscape varies across Europe: In Italy, the holding company Fininvest, which is controlled by the family of former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, owns all three of the country’s main TV channels as well as the nation’s largest publisher for newspapers and books**

When popular Indian television journalist Ravish Kumar announced his resignation from New Delhi Television Ltd (NDTV) — the country’s oldest private broadcaster — at the end of November, it was a grim reminder of the vanishing independent news media landscape in the world’s largest democracy.

It was no ordinary departure. Kumar had been a popular voice on NDTV for a quarter of a century and is known for his fearless, hard-hitting reporting and willingness to take on those in power. Of late he has criticised other news outlets for taking a stance explicitly in favour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government and for stoking communal discord between Hindus and Muslims.

Yet Kumar felt compelled to quit after the world’s third-richest man, Gautam Adani, became the majority shareholder of NDTV. Adani is considered close to Modi, who used the tycoon’s aircraft for campaigning ahead of the 2014 national election. Since 2014, when Modi came to power, Adani’s wealth has jumped from \$7bn to \$110bn.

Adani has insisted that NDTV under his ownership will retain its independence to call out the government when it has “done something wrong”. But the worries about his takeover of one of the few Indian TV channels seen as brave enough to challenge the Modi government reflect broader fears centred on a question that journalism around the world has been grappling with: what happens when the ownership of platforms meant to protect free speech is concentrated in the hands of a few elite businesspeople?

Or as Kumar said: “How can a channel, bought by a corporat[ion] whose success is seen to be linked to contracts granted by the government, now criticise the government? It was clear to me I had to quit.”

#### A global problem

To be sure, this isn’t a problem unique to India.

Corporate monopolisation of media has increasingly been under scrutiny in the United States. In 2017, Bernie Sanders wrote of how Comcast, News Corp, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner and CBS — just six companies — owned 90 percent of the media in the country. Forbes wrote in 2016 that 15 billionaires owned all major national newspapers, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post.

In the United Kingdom, the Media Reform Coalition has described “concentrated ownership” in the sector as a “significant problem for any modern democracy”. In 2015, 71 percent of the UK national newspaper market was dominated by three companies — News UK, Daily Mail Group and Reach. By 2019, their market share had grown to 83 percent, and by 2021, to 90 percent.

Some countries have regulatory measures in place to curb me-

dia monopolisation. In Germany, for instance, no single company can control “more than 30 percent of all TV audiences”.

But the landscape varies across Europe: In Italy, the holding company Fininvest, which is controlled by the family of former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, owns all three of the country’s main TV channels as well as the nation’s largest publish-

centrated corporate control of media since “the largest cable service providers [were] already owned by broadcasting companies”.

In January 2012, Reliance — headed by Mukesh Ambani, the world’s eighth-richest man — invested in the heavily debt-ridden Network18 media group. The result was the creation of India’s largest media conglomerate which in-

Panda, who is the BJP’s national vice president and spokesperson. News Live, one of the most popular TV channels in India’s northeast, is owned by Riniki Bhuyan Sarma, wife of the BJP chief minister of the northeastern state of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma.

‘Godi media’



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er for newspapers and books.

#### Canary in the Indian media mine

India’s economic boom since the 1990s has spawned a fast-growing media industry, with a market size expected to grow from \$21.5bn in 2021 to \$54bn in 2026. This has resulted in a news media landscape that now boasts more than 100,000 newspapers and 380 news channels. Add the rapid growth of internet and social media usage, and a wide variety of news platforms ought to be available to the Indian consumer.

But like in the West, Indian media too is increasingly owned by a select few corporations. The first warning bells were sounded a decade ago when Reliance Industries — India’s largest company in terms of revenue — entered the media sector.

In 2011, the Indian parliament passed the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Bill that made “digitisation of cable television across the country mandatory in three years”. But as Arvind Rajagopal, professor of media studies at New York University pointed out at the time, the bill also effectively paved the way for con-

cluded a bouquet of general news and business channels in English, Hindi and several regional languages. Journalists and analysts raised concerns over how this would impact the media coverage of a company, Reliance, whose decisions influence the nation’s economy. In 2014 Reliance took complete control of Network18 in a hostile takeover. Rajdeep Sardesai, the editor-in-chief of the company’s flagship channel CNN-IBN, resigned. In his farewell email, he wrote: “Editorial independence and integrity have been articles of faith in 26 years in journalism and maybe I am too old now to change!”.

Today, the ties between big business, politics and Indian media extend beyond any one company. Zee Media Corporation, another influential TV network, is part of the conglomerate Essel Group, which is led by Subhash Chandra, a former member of the upper house of the Indian parliament. His candidature was supported by Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

A 2019 report by Reporters Without Borders found many other similar examples. Odisha TV is owned by the family of Baijayant

Ravish Kumar coined a term that captures this unholy mix of news, money and politics: Godi media. “Godi” means lap. Godi media refers to the lapdog nature of the many pro-establishment mouthpieces that the Modi years have birthed. And looking at how the mainstream Indian media has celebrated events like the BJP-led demolitions of the homes of Muslim activists or criticised farmer protests in 2021, it’s hard to get away from a sense that Kumar is spot on.

Meanwhile, amid a spate of attacks on journalists and government critics, India is slipping in the World Press Freedom Index, where it is now ranked 150 among 180 nations.

It’s important to cling to the hope that the tide will turn. Yes, good journalism needs money. But it also needs freedom. If media monopolisation cuts out critical voices like Kumar’s, it can never be healthy for Indian democracy.

*Views expressed in the article are the author’s own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The article was originally published by Al Jazeera*

In many aspects, spectacle is a key part of human existence. We all enjoy a good show, whether or not it is at someone else’s expense. Tragedy unimaginable in one’s own life is a source of entertainment and release if it is happening at a distance from us. People have collectively found catharsis in watching films such as Titanic, a fictional re-telling of the very real and unbelievably horrific incident that took hundreds of lives. There are countless other examples such as this, of books and TV shows and songs that allow people to experience emotions they might not be willing to bring to the surface in their own contexts while allowing them to distance themselves from what they are feeling. In a way, all art is capable of this and of bringing people together through a shared appreciation or evaluation of it. However, it is not just fictional narratives that inspire such collective assessment and attachment. What happens when the same phenomenon is applied to actual people and their lives? When an individual or a group becomes the vessel for collective release — of anger, joy, or mourning — what happens to them and to the people invested in them?

## The Spectacle of Bodies

Muskan Chaudhary

In an essay written in 2013 titled Royal Bodies, author and historian Hilary Mantel considers this very question in the context of Britain as a modern nation that persists in its relentless obsession with the archaic nature of its monarchy. She weaves together a history of women as they have existed in the structures of confined royal positions, from Marie Antoinette and Queen Elizabeth to Diana and Kate Middleton. She speaks of them with varying measures of sympathy, pity, curiosity, and a sharp condemnation. They are bodies, she claims. Bodies that glide and smile, bodies that exist less for what they are and more for what they signify. These bodies are brides and mothers, queens and consorts. They exist to preserve or provide, depending on the role their birth accords them. And people stare at these bodies and their actions, unabashedly. It is almost taken as a right. It’s nothing

**I want to look and not forget, to remember with unerring clarity the grief that I have felt over the fate of bodies like mine. I want to live everyday with the certain knowledge of the fact that everywhere there are people who read and write over the bodies of women with their own ideas and beliefs**

personal, writes Hilary Mantel. It is the monarchy I’m staring at. When these bodies are alive, people consume and critique each action as if it was served up to them on a platter. When they die, the attachment that they had accrued while living grows into a fervour that then allows people to mourn. Not the individual who has departed, no. That is just symbolic. It allows people to mourn that which they haven’t even acknowledged.

Grief is part and parcel of the modern condition. Everywhere one turns, there is something to be grieved. We are just bad at releasing it. Who has the time or the energy to sit and grieve when there is a life to be lived, when reality and a need to survive tugs us away from our individual sadness. But the death of a body that was symbolic to the nation can become a catalyst that draws that grief out into the open, that blurs the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable in favour

of a fervour of feelings released. The death of young Diana Spencer was one such catalyst. It took the private grief of her family and turned it into a public spectacle. Even today, her children still suffer from the consequences of it. ‘History makes fools of us, makes puppets of us, often enough’ says Hilary Mantel at the end of her piece as she asks her readers to change the narrative by turning away from the spectacle. But as someone who lives in a nation where the bodies of women are constantly symbolised, used, and discarded as spectacles — I want to look. I want to look and not forget, to remember with unerring clarity the grief that I have felt over the fate of bodies like mine. I want to live everyday with the certain knowledge of the fact that everywhere there are people who read and write over the bodies of women with their own ideas and beliefs. And remember too, that we have always fought to write our own selves into existence.

*Views expressed in the article are the author’s own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer*

# Navigating the Path to Studying Abroad - Part II

Muhammad Tahir

## HOW TO WRITE A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Now let us talk about Statement of Purpose (SOP), also called Personal Statement or Letter of Motivation. It is one of the most important documents in your whole application package. It is perhaps the first thing that admission committee members grab when they assess your application, and it is crucial that SOP is attractive enough to hook them. Remember admission committee typically gets hundreds of SOPs of prospective students and each SOP has just 10 seconds to create an impression. So, write your SOP with utmost care and diligence.

Different universities have different word limits for an SOP but in most cases it shall be an under 1500-word document. Sometimes there is variation within the same institution. For example, Harvard University's Graduate School of Education asks: "It should be typed, double-spaced, and no more than 1,500 words" and the same university's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences says: "Unless otherwise noted, your statement should not exceed 1,000 words." So, it is better to double-check, always visit the website of the department where you are applying for requirement check-list. Sticking to word limit is very important because not adhering to the guidelines can make your application ineligible. The University of Oxford is categorical about this: "If your statement of purpose or research proposal significantly exceeds the permitted length stated on the relevant course page, it will be removed from your application and your application will be considered incomplete and is unlikely to be assessed by the academic department."

## STRUCTURE OF THE SOP

Divide your SOP into 4 or 5 paragraphs with first paragraph being more personal, where you mention what prompted you to pursue a particular course or program. You can say, for example, that you attended a seminar somewhere or a particular professor taught you a course or an event ignited your interest in the subject. Let me give examples of attention grabbing first paragraphs: "During my undergrad studies, I got a chance to demonstrate my

heat-trapping model at National Science Exhibition..."

"In 2008, I was pursuing Masters in Political Science at University of Kashmir. In International Law class, our professor once said, 'Peace processes are ploys to further entrench the occupations'"

"As a teenager I was sent to study in North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, because political turmoil in Kashmir was claiming many lives. I enrolled for B.A in English literature..."

An account of personal experience in the opening sentence must connect logically with your proposed research. Example 1 above suits a person who is applying for MSc or PhD in Physics. It demonstrates consistency of interest in the subject. Example 2 gives indication that the applicant's interest stems from a particular International Law class which she attended in Kashmir University, and is logically connected to her proposal if it would be a critical appraisal of a peace process. Similarly, example 3 can be used to pitch a research proposal on literature of exile. You can work it many ways. But do not make up. Just be creative. Write your story in your own unique voice.

**In terms of a framework, I can suggest the following:**

- My context: which experiences have generated my interest in this field of study?
- My aims and objectives: what are my career goals, what knowledge and skills I



pire to reach in your career. Write about your relevant experiences, any internships and volunteer work you have done which complements your academic profile. In brief and crisp lines show your progression over the years, highlighting your achievements, such as high grades, gold medal, award/s, etc. Mention any course, conference, publication related to your proposed research project. Also, you can tell them what you can bring to the class based on

from one field to another took place and how you are prepared enough or possess requisite skills to pursue the program. It is always better if your master's thesis or your work experience (or something you have done previously) and the proposed research for PhD are similar, because it is a good way to show the consistency of your academic interest.

To write why you have chosen the school or department you are applying to go through the department's

this research, write something along these lines: 'I chose this department because it has strong expertise on [your chosen field] and, particularly, [your proposed supervisor] has done a considerable work on [your proposed research theme] and can provide me better guidance.' You can then highlight the proposed supervisor's achievements, by saying, for example: "Professor Suzanne is an experienced mentor who has brought 12 students to successful PhD completion, including on [mention research areas]. She has mentored students from different backgrounds and her mentees have found employment in various organisations, such as [mention if available]. Her knowledge of [mention the areas of study] and her quantitative approach or comparative method [mention what applies in your case] make her an ideal mentor for my proposed project. She has received [mention the funding body] funding for her project [mention the project], and she has also been a visiting professor at [mention the name of the universities]. Her extensive network, include [mention the organisations or entities]. These contacts will be very helpful to my career development and are available only in very few places in [mention the country where you are applying]."

In this part of SOP, you will ad-

dress why this department is the right place for you to study and why this professor is the right person to work with. Overall, you should be able to convince the admission committee why you are the most suitable candidate out of hundreds of other applicants. Portray yourself as a capable candidate who has real passion in the chosen subject, has shown consistency and can undertake a rigorous academic program or research.

## LANGUAGE AND FORMAT OF THE SOP

Don't try to impress by inserting complex sentence structures and difficult vocabulary. Write in simple English with sentences of reasonable length. Revise your draft many times for a coherent and persuasive narrative. Send it to the people who can provide an informed feedback. Incorporate useful suggestions, leave out what might seem like a tangential comment. Once you have a polished draft, go to the mirror and read it to yourself as you read a story to an audience. If you can find a friend who can listen, read it out to him or her. Ask for their feedback on language of the document, whether it tells a good story or not. Revise further based on this feedback. Repeat this process till you are satisfied.

Understand the document by reading SOPs of successful candidates. You can imitate them, but don't copy verbatim. Learn how to draft the whole thing and weave together different elements of your CV to create an interesting story. Preferably use Times New Roman, font size 12, and 1.5-line space. In no way should the document exceed more than two pages. Always remain within the word limit. Here are some useful resources to write a persuasive SOP:

<https://study.soas.ac.uk/personal-statement-ten-tips/>.

[https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/yuhuaawang/files/writing\\_statement\\_of\\_purpose\\_for\\_graduate\\_school\\_application\\_2021\\_yuhuaawang\\_0.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/yuhuaawang/files/writing_statement_of_purpose_for_graduate_school_application_2021_yuhuaawang_0.pdf).

(to be continued...)

Muhammad Tahir is an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at Dublin City University, Ireland



**UNDERSTAND THE DOCUMENT BY READING SOPs OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES.** You can imitate them, but don't copy verbatim. Learn how to draft the whole thing and weave together different elements of your CV to create an interesting story

expect to gain through enrolment in this program?

- Rationale for choosing this institution: why this specific course or program? Why studying at this university or department, and this master's program, is crucial in helping me achieve my career goals?

In short: tell your story in terms of who you are, what academic and professional experiences you have obtained so far, and where you as-

your background and unique life experiences.

In case your academic progress has suffered (for example, receiving lower grade in some course/s) due to some event, like natural calamity, political turmoil etc., do mention it. If you have done your previous study in one field (for example, BSc Botany, MSc Environmental Studies) and you are applying for MA or PhD in another field (say International Relations or Journalism), you should tell your reader why and how this transition

website and read about it carefully. Scan through the courses it offers, its publications, your proposed supervisor's profile and research interests. Write down what specific qualities this department has in terms of resources and staff. What kind of students they wish to enrol in the course and what they expect them to leave with after they have finished the program?

Process this whole information and write in bullet points your key observations. After you have done

# The Thrill of Conspiracy Theories

Daniel Jolley

Anthony Lantian

From vaccine uptake to violent extremism, conspiracy beliefs are linked to distrust in major institutions or powerful figures.

Research developed in the last decade shows how conspiracy beliefs can be linked to people's lack of control in their lives, feeling threatened or even workplace bullying.

Conspiracy theories are defined by psychologists as "explanations for important events that involve secret plots by powerful and malevolent groups" without any basis in fact. Followers point a finger at groups they think of as powerful, from scientists and doctors to minority groups such as Jewish people, and blame them for events or societal change.

Conspiracies, where powerful figures secretly plot to undermine something or someone, do exist. The Watergate scandal involved a break in at the US Democratic National Committee headquarters by burglars connected to President Richard Nixon's reelection campaign.

The burglars were caught wiretapping phones. Nixon tried to cover up the crimes but journalists uncovered his role in the conspiracy. But the difference here is that there is evidence to back up what happened.

However, conspiracists insist their theories are true even when there is no evidence that holds up to scrutiny. Still, conspiracy theories can be persuasive. Millions of British people believe in at least one. It's a worldwide phenomenon.

## PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Studies in the early 2010s showed how non-pathological factors, such as uncertainty, are linked to why people turn to conspiracy beliefs. In 2017 psychologist Karen Douglas and colleagues argued the wide ap-



peal of conspiracy theories is their promise to satisfy psychological needs. These include desire for certainty, control and meaning, and to maintain a positive image of yourself and the groups you identify with.

Feelings of anxiety and threat increase during a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. People want to make sense of turbulent societies.

But conspiracy theories do not satisfy the psychological needs that make us reach for them. A 2021 study found conspiracy beliefs don't

lessen anxiety or uncertainty. If anything, there is some evidence people's sense of existential threat and anxiety increases when they engage with conspiracy theories.

A less well understood factor is collective discrimination, where a

group experiences being harmed by another group.

But researchers are getting closer to finding out why conspiracy theories are adopted by a group of people. It can be linked to lack of trust in institutions or society. Work in 2002

showed discrimination experienced by African Americans was associated with their heightened beliefs that HIV is made by humans deliberately. This idea still circulates today.

Research in 2020 found discrimination experienced by gay men in the UK was connected to their conspiracy beliefs about HIV being human-made. Such research underscores the links between conspiracy beliefs and distrust in powerful figures found in minority communities.

In a study into how conspiracy beliefs develop, Greek participants who thought their country historically suffered more than other nations were more likely to be conspiracy theorists. Research with similar study designs have found the same results in French and Polish participants.

## LINKED TO BULLYING

Our recent research was inspired by previous work linking conspiracy theorising and people's sense they are being victimised. We focused on workplace bullying. Unlike collective discrimination, bullying is personal, with a power imbalance between the bully and the victim.

Bullied victims report increased feelings of anxiety and paranoia. Being bullied seems to increase the risk of believing in a conspiracy theory.

We carried out two studies. The first study recruited 273 British participants online. We measured participants' past experiences of workplace bullying by asking them report whether they experienced a range of incidents, such as a colleague withholding information which affects a co-workers' performance. The more negative acts a participant has suffered, the stronger their tendency to engage in conspiracy theorising.

Participants who experienced workplace bullying were more likely to report increased paranoia – to wonder what hidden reason another person may have for doing some-

thing nice for them.

In the second study, 206 British participants were asked to imagine they had joined a new work place in the last six months. Half were asked to imagine being bullied in the new workplace (for example being shouted at) or being welcomed. Those who were asked to imagine about being bullied reported an increased general belief in conspiracy theories.

## TACKLING CONSPIRACY BELIEFS

Our work highlights how conspiracy beliefs can form in response to circumstances that could happen to anyone. When a hostile environment primes us to search for meaning, we may find a conspiracy explanation appealing.

Research has also started to find solutions to the problem. In 2018 one study found giving people a greater feeling of power reduced the intensity of conspiracy beliefs. Encouraging people to think analytically, which prompts deliberate processing of information, also helps curb the emergence of conspiracy beliefs. Developing these skills in adolescents and conspiracy believers is essential.

Challenging people's misconceptions about how popular conspiracies are could be effective. For example, one study found giving information to UK parents with anti-vaccine beliefs about other UK parents who did vaccinate their children reduced conspiracy beliefs.

We do not know what tools will work outside of the lab. Mentorship for bullying victims, which has been shown to help people feel more secure, could be a promising place to start. And considering the devastation conspiracy theories can wreak, we can't afford not to try.

By arrangements with The Conversation



**The more negative acts a participant has suffered, the stronger their tendency to engage in conspiracy theorising.**





## J&K Lose To Punjab In Ranji Trophy



Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** The J&K men's cricket team lost to Punjab by 4 wickets in the ongoing Senior National Championship, the 73rd Edition Ranji Trophy, on Friday. J&K's batting performances in the tournament continued to disappoint as the team lost 5 batters for barely 22 runs on the last day of the four-day test at Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali. Riding on Musaf Aijaz's valiant 89 (122), J&K managed to make 260 runs in their second innings, posting a target of 205 for Punjab to chase down. Wicketkeeper Fazil Rashid 46 (65) and Vivrant Sharma 26 (46) were the next two top scorers for J&K.

as soon as possible, the Punjab batters pounded J&K bowlers all over the park to reach the target in just 24.5 overs, losing 6 wickets in the process. Abhishek Sharma 83 (47) and skipper Mandeep Singh 45\* (39) top scored to help Punjab secure the win.

J&K leg spinner Abid Mushtaq showcased yet another brilliant display with the ball as he took 4 wickets in Punjab's second innings to give the cricketing powerhouse a minor scare. But captain Manodeep ensured the team crossed the finish line.

The domestic test match saw only 44 overs of cricket over the first two days due to bad weather. Scores: J&K: 212 & 260 Punjab: 268 & 210/6

## Incomplete Playground Irks People Of Pulwama's Urwan



Agencies

**PULWAMA:** Work on a sports ground situated in Urwan area of Pulwama district has been left incomplete, angering local sportsmen. Athletes from several villages in the area said that they expected that the government will prioritize upgrading facilities at the sports ground so that they can get engaged in sports activities. Irshad Ahmad a local said development of playing facilities is vital in the face of rising drug addiction in the Valley. He said that around 10 lakh

rupees were spent on the ground by the government in 2020 but they were insufficient to complete all the works.

Since then, funds were released but they relapsed after no works were taken up. Many a time officials of the administration visited the ground and assured that work will start soon but nothing on ground, he said.

They urged the authorities to develop this ground at the earliest so that the local youth can invest their free time in sports and the professional sportsmen can continue training. (KNO)

## India Beat Spain 2-0 In Hockey World Cup Opener



Press Trust of India

**ROURKELA:** Hosts India defeated Spain 2-0 in their opening match of the FIH men's hockey World Cup here on Friday. Vice-captain Amit Rohidas (12th) and Hardik Singh (26th) scored for India in the second Pool D match. While Rohidas scored from a rebound following a penalty-corner situation, Hardik sound-

ed the board with a field effort. India were by far the better side as they dominated the possession besides earning as many as five penalty corners, out of which Rohidas converted one.

Spain, on the other hand, secured three penalty corners but wasted all. India will next play England, who had thrashed Wales 5-0 in another Pool D match earlier in the day.

## Odisha Woman Cricketer Found Dead In Forest Near Cuttack

Press Trust of India

**BHUBANESWAR:** Rajashree Swain, a woman cricketer of Odisha, was found dead in a dense forest near Cuttack city on Friday, police said. She was missing since January 11. The body was found hanging from a tree in Gurudijhatia forest in Athagarh area, Cuttack Deputy Commissioner of Police Pinak Mishra said. Her coach had filed a missing complaint with Mangalabag police station in Cuttack on Thursday. A case of unnatural death will be registered with Gurudijhatia police station, he said. Police were yet to ascertain the cause of her death. Her family, however, alleged that she was murdered "as the body bore injury marks and her eyes were damaged".

Her scooter was found abandoned near the forest and her mobile phone was switched off. Police said the matter will be probed from all angles.

Her family members said around 25 women cricketers, including Swain, were part of a training camp organised by the Odisha Cricket Association (OCA) in Bajrakabati area for an upcoming national-level cricket tournament scheduled to be held in Puducherry. All of them were staying in a hotel in the locality.

The Odisha state women's cricket team was announced on January 10, but Swain couldn't make it to the final list.

The next day, the players went to a cricket field in Tangi area for practice but Rajashree informed her coach that she was going to Puri to meet her father, police said.

## 'Human Rights Are Not Politics': CA Chief On Australia's Withdrawal From Afghanistan Series

- ▶ ACB call decision 'unfair' and 'pathetic'
- ▶ Rashid Khan wants politics out of cricket
- ▶ Naveen-ul-Haq refuses to play in BBL



Agencies

**MELBOURNE:** Cricket Australia chief executive Nick Hockley defended the decision to withdraw its men's team from a one-day international series against Afghanistan over women's rights after criticism from the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) and their players.

Australia opted out of the three-match series, scheduled for March in the United Arab Emirates, citing further restrictions by the Taliban on women's and girls' education and employment opportunities.

The ACB described the decision as "unfair" and "pathetic" in a furious response, while spinner Rashid Khan said he was considering his future in Australia's Big Bash league (BBL) and wrote on Twitter:

"Cricket! The only hope for the country. Keep politics out of it." Afghanistan's Taliban-led administration last month imposed a ban on women attending universities. Girls have since been banned from high school since March. They have also been excluded from parks and gyms.

"Basic human rights is not politics," Hockley said on Friday. "It is clearly a very challenging and sad situation. We did not take this decision lightly and consulted widely including with our government."

"We were hopeful of playing the series and have been in regular dialogue with the Afghanistan Cricket Board, however announcements by the Taliban in late November and late December led to our decision to withdraw from these games."

Rashid, who plays for the Ad-

elaide Strikers, has previously voiced support for women in Afghanistan since the Taliban seized control. His international team mate Naveen-ul-Haq said he will not play in the BBL "until they stop these childish decisions".

"We acknowledge and applaud Rashid Khan's and other Afghanistan cricketers' comments at the time condemning the Taliban's decision to ban women from universities," Hockley added.

"Rashid will always be welcome in the BBL."

"We remain committed to supporting growing the game for women and men around the world and hope that improved conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan means that we can resume bilateral cricket in the not too distant future."



## Barça Set Up Super Cup Final Against Madrid In Riyadh

Agencies

**RIYADH:** Marc-André ter Stegen saved two penalties and Pedri converted the deciding spot kick as Barcelona defeated Real Betis 4-2 in a shootout to set up a Spanish Super Cup final against rival Real Madrid this weekend in Saudi Arabia.

Madrid defeated Valencia on penalties in the other semifinal on Wednesday, when Thibaut Courtois made the decisive save. The decisive match will be on Sunday at the King Fahd Stadium in Riyadh.

Barcelona converted all four of its penalties in the shootout and Ter Stegen stopped the efforts by Juanmi and Willian Carvalho to give the Catalan club the victory. The teams drew 1-1 in regula-

tion after Robert Lewandowski scored for Barcelona in the first half and Nabil Fekir equalized for Betis near the end. The score was 2-2 after extra time as Ansu Fati gave Barcelona an early lead and Loren Morón equalized again for Betis.

In the shootout, Fati, Lewandowski and Franck Kessie also scored for Barcelona. Morón and Willian José converted for Betis.

It will be the first time Spanish powerhouses Barcelona and Madrid meet in the Super Cup final since the competition was revamped and taken to Saudi Arabia in 2020. Madrid will try to equal Barcelona with 13 Spanish Super Cup trophies, the most among all clubs. Barcelona will be trying to win its first Super Cup trophy since 2018. (AP)

## Djokovic 'Emotional' After Warm Welcome At Melbourne Park

Agencies

**MELBOURNE:** Novak Djokovic said he felt "emotional" following a warm reception from fans upon his return to Melbourne Park for a practice match against Nick Kyrgios on Friday.

Djokovic was deported on the eve of the 2022 Australian Open in January for not being vaccinated against COVID-19 and received a three-year travel ban for the country. However, the former world num-

ber one's visa ban was waived in November, opening up a path for

Djokovic to target a 10th Australian Open crown and giving him a chance to equal Rafa Nadal's mark of 22 Grand Slam titles. "I'm very happy, thank you so much," Djokovic said before the match, to loud cheers from the crowd.

"I feel a bit emotional right now, to be honest. I was really looking forward to coming back to this court, so thank you all, guys, for coming out tonight for a great cause."

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