

India Hosts G20 Despite Modi's Authoritarian Hold

Quick note: We have a guest writer for this week's Headline, Pushkar Sharma, Founder and Executive Director at [SACRED](#) (South Asian American Coalition to Renew Democracy). You can follow him on Twitter [here](#) and LinkedIn [here](#). We also interviewed him for the Spotlight below. -Shahed

The Headline

This week, President Biden visits India to attend the Group of 20 (G20) summit. Presiding over the G20 this year, India will host leaders of the world's largest economies in Delhi for the summit with the notable exceptions of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, who will not attend the summit. While in Delhi, President Biden is expected to meet bilaterally with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a meeting that follows Modi's visit to Washington for a state dinner and joint address to Congress in June.

The visit is President Biden's first trip to India, but Biden's embrace of the far-right extremist Modi represents continuity with the last administration. The last time a U.S. President met Modi in India was in February 2020, when then-President Trump commented that India was "[working very hard on religious freedom](#)" at nearly the same time as armed Hindu supremacist mobs orchestrated what has been described as state-sponsored [pogroms against the Muslim community](#), with scores being killed and hundreds injured. The violent targeting of marginalized communities in India has escalated since, with [Hindu supremacists burning hundreds of churches](#) in the Indian state of Manipur this summer and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommending India to be designated a country of particular concern this year.

Biden's focus seems not to be on the democratic backsliding in India, but instead on how to better arm India (and increase profits for the military-industrial complex – through an estimated \$3 billion dollar drone deal) in the emerging, new cold war with China. The administration also does not appear to be concerned that its actions are escalating the threat of nuclear war across Asia including, of course, with India's nuclear rival, Pakistan.

What's next: Biden's embrace of Modi has not yet changed India's position of neutrality in the war in Ukraine. With the leaders of China and Russia not attending the G20 in Delhi, the chances of Modi breaking the stalemate and negotiating a joint communique from the G20 on the war seems unlikely. Meanwhile, though the G20 is intended to be an external-facing, global summit, Prime Minister Modi appears to be prioritizing using the summit as an opportunity to [amplify his image to voters in India](#) in advance of the nation's 2024 parliamentary elections. The trajectory of the U.S.-India relationship – and the future of global democracy – appears to be murky heading into a massively consequential 2024.

The Happenings

September 11th, 12:00-1:30pm ET: "Iran One Year After the Death of Mahsa Amini," [Stimson Center](#)

September 18th, 1:00pm ET: "Unraveling the GWOT in Africa," [Defense Priorities](#)

The Spotlight

In today's spotlight, we interview Pushkar Sharma, your Headline author!

1): What is something you wish people in the United States better understood about India and South Asia?

The Hindu supremacist ideology that assassinated Gandhi is now in power in India.

This ideology is uniting with other anti-rights, anti-democracy, and anti-minority movements to build a world where democracy, equality, and human rights are no longer the guiding principles of global systems. To give you a clear, local example: a Chicago-area organization, the “Republican Hindu Coalition,” named Steve Bannon as an Honorary Chairman a few years back and [boasted that “Modi was a Trump before Trump.”](#) The White Supremacist and Hindu Supremacist alliance is an enduring one – built around the concept of racial superiority and the “Aryan Race” myth. It’s the reason Hitler appropriated the Hindu symbol of the Swastika. It’s the reason why founding members of the [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh \(RSS\)](#) (the militant Hindu supremacist organization) *admired Nazi Germany’s* treatment of Jews. India’s Prime Minister has been an RSS member for a half-century, longer than he has been a political figure.

But the more powerful force that unites the U.S. and South Asia is the historic relationship of American civil rights leaders (including Sue Bailey and Howard Thurman, Rev. James Lawson, Bayard Rustin, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Coretta Scott King) visiting South Asia in solidarity with the struggle to end British rule. The central tenets of this progressive vision – democracy, nonviolence, civil/human rights, collective liberation, and anti-imperialism – are the tenets we need to recommit to if we are to overcome the hate of the supremacist forces.

2): What’s the story behind the creation of SACRED? Can you tell us more about it and what your priorities are as an organization right now?

Last summer, the Illinois General Assembly [passed legislation](#) establishing an “Indian American Advisory Council” that advanced an Islamophobic agenda and sowed enmity within the South Asian-American community. The legislation codified principles of the increasingly influential Hindu supremacist hate ideology, violated church-state separation by valuing certain faiths at the expense of others, and promoted the domination of India over other countries in South Asia.

We at SACRED came together to build a multi-racial, multi-faith, pro-democracy coalition to educate legislators about the Hindu supremacist falsehoods in the text, and in February, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a [follow-up bill](#) that addressed nearly all of our key concerns. Despite this win, we are deeply concerned about the Hindu supremacist movement’s ability to co-opt representation and progressive leaders across the U.S.

Hindu supremacists have been in power in India since 2014 and are increasingly powerful in the U.S., where they are funding political candidates (including Republican Presidential nominees); attacking campaigns to ban caste discrimination; co-opting “multi-cultural” spaces; and codifying their far-right agenda into law (particularly at the state and municipal level). At SACRED we work to counter this through four areas of work: movement building, action research, developing community power, and narrative change.

Buried Ledes

Austria is offering an [odd deal](#): one free year of public transportation for those willing to get the name of its travel pass “KlimaTicket” — worth roughly \$1,080 and usable on almost all forms of Austrian public transportation — tattooed on their body. This comes as Austria aims to reduce private car use by 16% by 2024. It may shock you that six people have gotten the tattoos so far. In support of the campaign at a recent festival, climate minister Leonore Gewessler wore a [temporary tattoo](#) that read “Gewessler takes the lead.” Not all are as enthusiastic, however, as some, such as lawmaker for the liberal NEOS party Henrike Brandstötter, criticize the campaign as inappropriate.

A 38-year-old man and 55-year-old woman [have been detained](#) in northern China for causing “irreversible damage” to the Great Wall of China. The pair used an excavator to plow through and widen an existing gap in the wall to, apparently, create a shortcut for the construction work they were doing in nearby towns. The case is now under [further investigation](#). Notably, the area targeted by the pair was a [broken-down section](#) far from the restored segments that are the most visited and photographed parts of the Great Wall.

Following the release of treated radioactive wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the ocean a couple of weeks ago, Japanese authorities have made significant efforts to assure people that fish in the area are still safe to eat. This has included having high-level authorities, including [Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and three Cabinet ministers](#) eating sashimi of flounder, octopus, and sea bass caught off the Fukushima coast after the water release. Even [US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel](#), in his visit to Fukushima, shared a seafood lunch with the local mayor to prove it is safe. The Fukushima wastewater will continue to be discharged for decades, which has been met with strong resistance from fishing groups and neighboring countries.

The Cuban government said it has [begun criminal proceedings against a “human trafficking network”](#) recruiting Cuban nationals to fight in Russia’s war on Ukraine. Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the network was targeting Cubans living in Russia as well as some living in Cuba. The announcement came shortly after [local media in Miami](#) featured Cubans being tricked into signing contracts to go to Russia — being told they would do construction work, not fight in the war.

This week, abortion was decriminalized across Mexico’s 32 states. The Mexican Supreme Court ruled that a federal ban on abortion is [unconstitutional and violates women’s rights](#). Though this ruling does not affect local state laws (abortion remains illegal in 20 of the 32 states), the ruling does require that federal hospitals and clinics in those states [provide abortion access to those seeking it](#).

This month marks two years since El Salvador made history by [introducing the cryptocurrency Bitcoin](#) as a legal tender alongside the U.S. dollar, but its adoption hasn’t

yet produced the massive changes it promised. For instance, though the integration of Bitcoin was believed to help Salvadorans receive remittances digitally, less than 2% of remittances have gone through cryptocurrency and digital wallets this year according to El Salvador's Central Bank. Neither [Bitcoin City](#) nor [Bitcoin Bonds](#) have actually transpired. But President Nayib Bukele [continues to champion](#) the use of Bitcoin and disputes the IMF's claims that his efforts have negatively impacted the Salvadoran economy.