



India-Russia summit

28 agreements inked; Afghanistan, Chinese incursions discussed



(SAI Bureau)-PM Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin met during the 21st India-Russia Annual Summit on Monday to discuss the entire gamut of bilateral relations, including regional and

global issues.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin held the 21st India-Russia Annual Summit on Monday to discuss the entire gamut of relations, including regional and global issues.

Putin's short visit to New Delhi was owing to Covid-19 which is why he came straight to Hyderabad House from the airport and went back to the airport after the talks and dinner. The visit lasted less than five hours. His ministers, however, had arrived a day earlier to participate in the inaugural 2+2 ministerial meeting and hold bilateral talks, including the meeting (Contd on page 35)

India's top military chief among 13 killed in air force helicopter crash



(SAI Bureau)-India's top military official was killed Wednesday when an Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter carrying 14 people crashed in southern India, the IAF confirmed, with only one survivor. Chief of Defense Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat died along with his wife, Madhulika Rawat, the IAF said via Twitter. He had been in the post for almost two years. The helicopter, which had a crew of four, crashed near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu state while (Contd on page 35)

Biden warns Putin of sanctions, military support for Ukraine if Russia invades



(SAI Bureau)-US President Joe Biden warned Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday the West would impose "strong economic and other measures" on Russia if it invades Ukraine, while Putin demanded guarantees Nato would not expand further eastward. The two leaders held two hours of virtual talks on Ukraine and other disputes in a video (Contd on page 33)

Farmers' stir nearing end? SKM to take final call on ending year-long agitation



(SAI Bureau)- Three hundred and sixty-five days and counting - that's how long farmers from Punjab, Haryana and western UP have been camping at Delhi's borders. However, it now seems that the year-long agitation is nearing its end.

The tug of war between the central government and the protesting farmers continues, with the Samyukt Kisan Morcha yet to take a call on the future course of action for the agitation.

(Contd on page 33)

Ready for use in Switzerland, the science behind Sacro machine that assists in suicide

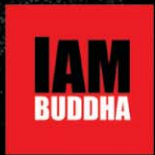


(SAI Bureau)- Makers of Sacro suicide capsule, a machine that is designed to assist a willing individual to end one's life, has claimed to have passed legal review in Switzerland. Developed by Exit International, a non-profit organisation, Sacro pod could be used in assisted suicide, which is not illegal in Switzerland under certain circumstances. (Contd on page 35)



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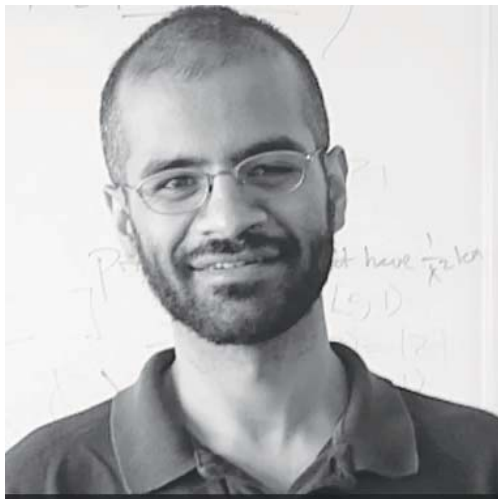
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Indian-American Math Genius Nikhil Srivastava Helps Solve Famous 1959 Problem

(News Agencies) - Eminent Indian-American mathematician Nikhil Srivastava, who teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, has been jointly selected for the inaugural Ciprian Foias Prize in Operator Theory by American Mathematical Society (AMS).

Along with Nikhil Srivastava, the two other awardees are Adam Marcus and Daniel Spielman. Adam Marcus holds the Chair of Combinatorial Analysis at the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland. Daniel

sparification method (also in collaboration with Batson) and the method of interlacing polynomials, a media release



In a joint statement, the three awardees said they wish to accept it on behalf of the many people whose work contributed to the resolution of the Kadison-Singer problem.

"Our involvement was the final chapter of an amazing story we hope will inspire similar solutions to difficult problems in the future," they said.

The prize will be presented to Professor

Nikhil Srivastava and his colleagues on January 5 next year at the 2022 Joint Mathematics Meeting in Seattle, described as "the largest mathematics gathering in the world."

The Ciprian Foias Prize is the third major prize won by Nikhil Srivastava, who earlier jointly won the George Polya Prize in 2014, and the Held prize in 2021.

said. "Together, these ideas provided a powerful toolkit with many applications, notably in the trio's breakthrough paper "Interlacing families II: mixed characteristic polynomials and the Kadison-Singer problem" (Annals of Mathematics, 2015), which solves the famous "paving problem" in operator theory, formulated by Richard Kadison

Kashmiri Pandits Among Most Successful Groups In US: Indian-American Leader

The challenges that Kashmiri Pandits overcame in the past make all other challenges pale in comparison, Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said.

(News Agencies) : Kashmiri Pandits are one of the most successful Indian-American communities, a top US lawmaker has said, praising the community members for their contributions in America and the world. "When you are running for your life, when you are dispossessed of possessions you know the real meaning of life. You know how to appreciate it, cultivate it and nurture it wherever you are and make sure everybody remembers their heritage and roots," Indian-American Congressman Raja



Krishnamoorthi said at a reception and private screening of the movie 'The Kashmir Files' at the US Capitol last week. "The Kashmiri Pandit community is one of the most successful Indian American communities. The challenges that you have faced in the past and overcoming those challenges make all other challenges pale in comparison," he said at the event organised by Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora. Directed and written by award-winning director Vivek Agnihotri and produced by award-winning actress Pallavi

Joshi, the movie is based on the Kashmiri Pandit genocide and ethnic cleansing.

The movie depicts the humanitarian angle of the challenges that global terrorism brings and disrupts communities and make them rootless. It also highlights human pain and sufferings. The movie is being screened in 16 US cities. Congressman Andy Barr emphasised on the India-US relationship and contributions of Indian-Americans. In a message, Senator Mark Warner extended his warm greetings to all the guests at the reception. "Our aim is deepening the US-India partnership. I remain optimistic about the United States and India relationship, and I continue to believe we can make great strides together. "As two of the world's largest democracies and with the incredible Indian American population that contributes so much to our culture, commerce and community in this country it is critical for us to deepen and broaden the existing partnership and friendship," Warner said.

Indian-origin Anil Menon named in NASA's newest astronaut class

(News Agencies) -NASA announced its fresh class of trainee astronauts on Tuesday. Anil Menon, a US fighter pilot born to parents from India and Ukraine has been named in the newest list.

Anil Menon (45), a lieutenant colonel in US Air Force was first direct responder during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, 2015 earthquake in Nepal and 2011 Reno Air Show accident.

Menon was previously a first flight surgeon with SpaceX. He had a stint with NASA before that.

There are 10 astronaut trainees including Menon in NASA's newest list. The list includes a firefighter turned Harvard professor, a former member of the national cycle team and a pilot who led the first-ever all-woman F-22 formation in combat. NASA's latest list

includes 10 names including that of Menon. The list includes a firefighter turned Harvard professor, a former member of the national cycle team and others.



"We're going back to the Moon, and we're continuing on to Mars - and so today we welcome 10 new explorers," NASA administrator Bill Nelson said at an event

to welcome the recruits.

"Alone, each candidate has 'the right stuff,' but together they represent the creed of our country: E pluribus unum - out of many, one," he added.

The 10 candidates have been shortlisted from 12,000 applicants. Inclusion in this list however, does not guarantee that each of them would get to become an astronaut. All of them will now undergo a rigorous training program that will go on for two years.

Indian-Origin Professor First Woman To Be President Of US' Penn State University

New York: Indian-origin professor Neeli Bendapudi has created history as the first woman and person of colour to be named as the president of America's prestigious Pennsylvania State University, the educational institution announced on Thursday. Ms Bendapudi, who was born in Visakhapatnam and came to the US in 1986 for higher studies, is currently serving as the president and professor of marketing at the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

She has been unanimously named Penn State's next president by the Penn State Board of Trustees on December 9, the Pennsylvania State University said in a statement on its website. When she begins her appointment as Penn State's 19th president in spring 2022, she will make history as the first woman and person of colour to serve as the University's president, it said. Ms Bendapudi, currently the 18th president of the University of Louisville, is a recognised leader in higher education who specialises in marketing and consumer behaviour.

With a nearly 30-year career in academia, she has taught marketing and served in



a variety of administrative roles over the years, including as provost and executive vice chancellor at the University of Kansas, dean of the School of Business at the University of Kansas, and founding director of the Initiative for Managing Services at Ohio State University. With a focus on collaboration and development, Ms Bendapudi has dedicated her career to student success, fostering inclusivity, and creating opportunities for students, faculty and staff to thrive. "Penn State is a world-class university, and I couldn't be prouder and more excited to join this vibrant community of outstanding students, faculty, staff and alumni throughout the commonwealth and beyond," Ms Bendapudi said.

Bengal government doesn't want peace talks to start with Centre: Insurgent group KLO

(News Agencies) - peace talks but the West Bengal government has not agreed to discuss our 29-year-old pending issues," said Fidel Koch. "Our long-pending demands are not newly created, it is our historical right as per the 1949 Merger Agreement. Our organization was established based on that. We warn West Bengal government that if it is not ready to discuss our demands, then we will come to the road from jungle to fight. We request the West Bengal government to discuss our demands," said Fidel Koch. KLO's spokesperson, Devraj Singha, alias Yunel Koch, who is the son of KLO chairman Jibon Singha, said the process to start peace talks between the Centre and KLO is going on and KLO has also agreed to solve its long-pending issues through dialogues under

Banned insurgent outfit Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) accused that Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government does not want the organisation to take part in peace talks with Centre. The banned outfit has desired to take part in talks with the Union government to resolve its 29-year-old pending issues through dialogues.

In an exclusive interview with India Today TV, KLO's Operation Commander Fidel Koch said: "The West Bengal government doesn't want KLO to take part in talks with the Union government and their long pending issues to be addressed."

"We are ready to take part in peace talks with the government. The Central and Assam governments have taken up initiatives to hold the

the ambit of the Constitution of India.

"Yesterday, I received a call from the West Bengal government and they are trying to blackmail us emotionally. They (West Bengal government) said that they have given money to the daughter of KLO chairman for her education and have also given home guard jobs to our cadres. Are we fighting only for a home guard job? We are fighting for our rights. We respect the Constitution of India, we are also Indian. We are not anti-national. We have raised our voices for our rights and demands. We want to discuss our demands and issues through dialogue," Devraj Singha said.

The KLO spokesperson also asked the Bengal chief minister to create an atmosphere to hold talks.



Objective of KLO

The main objective of the Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) is to carve out a separate Kamtapur state comprising six districts -- Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North and South Dinajpur and Malda of West Bengal, and four contiguous districts of Assam -- Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and

Goalpara. The organization was established in 1993.

The KLO is a part of the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFW) a united front of armed separatist groups in North-East India led by the United Liberation Front of Asom Independent (ULFA-I), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K).





Civil Aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia checks Covid preparedness in airports, issues action plan

Aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia lays down a new action plan after taking stock of Covid preparedness at airports.

After images of crowding at airports went viral in view of the government laying out new norms for international arrivals and testing to counter the Omicron threat, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has sprung into action.

Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia held a meeting on Tuesday with secretary Aviation, Rajiv Bansal, CEO, Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) Videh Kumar Jaipuriar, chairman, Airports Authority of India, Sanjeev Kumar and a representative from Adani Group that manages Mumbai international airport.

After the meeting, Scindia tweeted, "Took stock of the preparedness, testing capacities, and the situation on the ground with regard to crowd management at both private and

@AAI_Official airports." He added: "Have put an action plan with eight compliance on immigration queues, expanding RT-PCR service providers, ramping up help desks and forex counters, along with seamless floor management."

Scindia assured that the Ministry of Civil Aviation is monitoring the situation on a daily basis & passengers shall not face any inconvenience at airports.

On Monday, the minister, in his daily review meeting, expressed concern over long queues and crowds at airports, after the Centre mandated testing on arrival for passengers coming from 'at risk' countries, and randomised testing for 2% of passengers coming on flights from other international destinations. In response, DIAL said more passengers

are now pre-booking their tests before arrival in India and also opting for the quicker rapid RT-PCR.

In a statement, CEO Videh Kumar Jaipuriar noted: "Keeping this in mind, we have installed 120 Rapid PCR test machines and provided for 20 dedicated counters for passengers, who have pre-booked their tests. The tests are being completed quickly to minimise waiting time."

DIAL claimed the current time taken from sample collection to providing reports stands at 60 minutes for Rapid PCR test and five hours for RT-PCR tests. DIAL is also working closely with immigration authorities to facilitate swift movement of passengers.

In another statement, Chetan Kohli, COO Genestrings Diagnostics, the lab conducting tests at Delhi international

airport said: "We currently have 120 machines for Rapid PCR, taking our hourly capacity to 500-600 per hour with a turnaround times of 60 minutes. In addition to this, we have four sets of fully automated RT-PCR setup with a capacity of conducting approximately 450 tests per hour with a turnaround time of 4 hours."

He added, "Additionally, out of 120 Rapid PCR machines, we're planning to place 50 machines inside the terminal, thereby saving an additional time of 30 minutes spent on moving samples to the main laboratory in T3 multi-level parking." Genestrings also said that it is in the process of hiring additional staff to have 60 registration desks, as against 40 right now to speed up the process of testing.

Drugs worth Rs 500 crore seized in Manipur's Moreh

(News Agencies) -A team of Assam Rifles and Manipur Police seized a large consignment of contraband drugs worth around Rs 500 crore in Manipur's Moreh area along the Indo-Myanmar border.

Based on a tip off, a joint team of 43 Assam Rifles and Manipur Police launched an operation at Moreh area and recovered a consignment of contraband

drugs from a house located at Sunrise ground, Moreh on December 6. The area is close to the Indo-Myanmar border.

A 19-year-old person, identified as Monkhai, was nabbed by the security forces.

The security forces seized 3,936 soap cases, suspected to be heroin powder, weighing 54.141kg (Rs 108 crore, 152 packets of suspected

methamphetamine (crystal meth) weighing 154.314kg (Rs 500 crore).

Tengnoupal district Superintendent of Police (SP) Th. Vikrajit Singh told India Toda TV that the operation was launched along the international border based on an intelligence input.

The arrested person and the seized drugs were handed over



to Moreh police station and a Tengnoupal district police had case was registered. seized drugs worth Rs 165 Crore Last year, 43 Assam Rifles and from Moreh area.



Investigators on Thursday recovered the black box from the crashed Indian Air Force Mi-17V5 helicopter that killed Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, his wife



CDS Bipin Rawat's chopper crash black box recovered: What is a black box?

Madhulika Rawat and 11 others in Tamil Nadu's Coonoor. The black box also known as a flight recorder will provide crucial details of the final minutes before the tragic accident. Official sources said the black box was retrieved after authorities expanded the search area from 300 metres to one km of the accident spot.

India's top-most defence officer, General Rawat, was on board the helicopter that took off from the Sulur IAF Station in

Coimbatore for the Defence Staff College in Wellington when it crashed midway.

WHAT IS A BLACK BOX?

A black box is a device that is installed in aircraft to help investigators in case of unfortunate accidents. Similar to a hard disk, the black box is a highly protective machine that records all flight data and conversations in the cockpit. Apart from recording cockpit conversations, the recorder also holds information on automatic

computer announcements, radio traffic, discussions with the crew and announcements to the passengers.

According to experts, the flight recorder also stores private conversations between the pilots, making it crucial in case of a crash as it could provide key details about the developments leading up to an accident.

There are two types of flight recording devices: the Flight Data Recorder (FDR) that stores all the recent history of the flight

through the recording of dozens of parameters collected multiple times per second and the Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) that records cockpit sound including pilot conversations. The black box these days is in bright orange colour, which makes it easier to spot amid the wrangled mess of the crash. However, when these recorders were first introduced, their black colour stuck with the name. Double wrapped in a corrosion-resistant stainless-

steel container with high-temperature insulation, the black box is designed to withstand the harshest crashes -- on the land and over seas. CAN BE RECOVERED FROM SEAS While crashes can happen anywhere both on land and over seas, the flight recorder is designed in a way that it can be recovered from underwater locations as well. The device sends out a signal on contact with saltwater that can be picked up within a radius of about two kilometres. The device can withstand water pressure found in depths of up to 6,000 meters.

Comedian Munawar Faruqui dropped from Gurugram show after BJP leader files complaint

(News Agencies) -Stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui has been dropped from an upcoming three-day comedy show later this month after a complaint was filed against him by the Haryana BJP's IT department head.

In his complaint to the Gurugram police, BJP's Arun Yadav objected to the show saying Munawar Faruqui insulted Hindu deities and that the stand-up comedian was "continuously doing so on open platforms such as live performances and shows".

"His activities have offended my Hindu faith. This is intentionally done to incite communal disharmony," said the complaint by Yadav citing video clips of the stand-up comedian allegedly mocking Hindu deities.

Yadav also put out a copy of the complaint on Twitter.

SHOW CANCELLED

Munawar Faruqui was to perform at Gurgaon Comedy Festival to

Stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui was dropped from an upcoming comedy show later this month after the Haryana BJP's IT department head filed a complaint against him.



be held at Gurugram's Airia Mall from December 17-19. Now, his name has been removed by the organisers, The Entertainment Factory, from the promotional posters.

This is the second event involving Faruqui that has been cancelled in the last 10 days. His last show

in Bengaluru that was scheduled for November 28 at Good Shepherd Auditorium, did not take place over "threats of vandalism" to the venue.

Over the past few months, Faruqui's shows have been cancelled in Raipur, Surat, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Goa, and

Mumbai after being targeted by Hindutva groups.

MUNAWAR FARUQUI QUILTS COMEDY

Munawar Faruqui in a tweet hinted that he might not do public shows anymore, a day after his scheduled event in Bengaluru was cancelled.

"Nafrat jeeta hai, artists haar gaya [hate has triumphed, the artist has lost]. I'm done! Goodbye! Injustice," wrote Faruqui.

On the other hand, Bengaluru police had "advised" the organisers to call it off citing possible law and order problems.

"This is credible information that several organisations are opposing this stand-up comedy show and it could create chaos and disturb the public peace and harmony, which may lead to law-and-order problems," police said in the letter to organisers. **ARRESTED BEFORE PERFORMANCE**

Munawar Faruqui was arrested on January 1 in Madhya Pradesh's Indore ahead of his show in the city after some Hindutva groups complained to police that he was going to make offensive jokes about Hindu deities.

Decision on ending farmers' protest to be taken, SKM's call will be final: Rakesh Tikait



(News Agencies) -The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of over 40 farmer unions, could take a final call to withdraw the ongoing farmers' agitation against the government's three farm laws. Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said that the final decision about the farmers' protest will be taken at the meeting on Wednesday. The farm leaders are set to hold a meeting at 2 pm on December 8, where some key decision regarding the future course of action about the protest are likely to be taken.

The farmers' union had called a meeting of its top leaders at the Singhu border on Tuesday to deliberate on the Centre's draft proposal. However, Rakesh Tikait, who was attending an event in Uttarakhand, did not participate in Tuesday's meeting.

When asked about the farm leaders saying that they had a positive talk with the government and are hopeful of a positive result, Rakesh Tikait refused to comment and said that whatever needs to be decided, will be decided on Wednesday.



Padma Shri Nanda Prusty of Odisha dies, PM Modi tweets condolences

(News Agencies) -According to a doctor at the district hospital, Prusty had been ill for the past month and was suffering from fever, cough and other old-age ailments.

Nanda Prusty, popularly known as 'Nanda Master', was honoured with the Padma Shri on November 9 for his long contribution in the field of education and social service.

Nanda Prusty spent several decades of his life providing free education to children and adults in Jajpur district in Odisha. Prusty, who had to discontinue his studies after

Class 7 owing to his family's financial condition, had been teaching children free of cost since Independence with the goal of eradicating illiteracy in his village.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the death of the Padma Shri awardee and said that he will be remembered for generations.

PM Modi tweeted, "Pained by the demise of Shri Nanda Prusty Ji. The much respected 'Nanda Sir' will be remembered for generations due to his

efforts to spread the joys of education in Odisha. He drew the nation's attention and affection a few weeks ago at the Padma Awards ceremony. Om Shanti."

Pained by the demise of Shri Nanda Prusty Ji. The much respected "Nanda Sir" will be remembered for generations due to his efforts to spread the joys of education in Odisha. He drew the nation's attention and affection a few weeks ago at the Padma Awards ceremony. Om Shanti. pic.twitter.com/VUyPWP9FP

Threat of drones: Govt tells Parliament why it increased jurisdiction of BSF

(News Agencies) -Jurisdiction of the Border Security Force (BSF) was increased due to the emerging threat of drones and other unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) among other reasons, the Union home ministry informed Parliament on Tuesday. In a written reply,

-Jurisdiction of the Border Security Force (BSF) was increased due to the emerging threat of drones and other unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) among other reasons, the Union home ministry informed Parliament on Tuesday. In a written reply, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said



this in response to a question asked by Pilibhit MP Varun Gandhi of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in its written response, said, "The

extension in territorial jurisdiction of BSF in some states is aimed at empowering BSF to discharge its border guarding duties more effectively in the wake of use of technology

like Dynamic Remotely Operated Navigation Equipment (Drones), Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAVs), etc generally having long range, by anti-national forces for surveillance as well as for smuggling of arms, narcotics and fake Indian currency notes (FICN)."

"It [the increase in territorial jurisdiction] would also help in curbing the menace of cattle smuggling as smugglers take refuge in the interior areas outside the jurisdiction of BSF," the government told Parliament. Varun Gandhi, disgruntled BJP leader from Uttar Pradesh, had sought a response from MHA

seeking the rationale for extending the jurisdiction of the Border Security Force (BSF) from 15 km to 50 km inside the international borders in Punjab, West Bengal and Assam by a Government Notification dated 11 October, 2021. States ruled by the non-BJP parties such as West Bengal and Punjab have opposed the move calling it an infringement of federal rights of the states. Recently, BSF DGP Pankaj Singh described "demographic changes in border states" especially West Bengal and Assam as one of the key reasons for extension of Jurisdiction for the BSF.



Tamil Nadu man dies while being questioned by cops, family alleges police brutality



(News Agencies) - A 67-year-old man in Tamil Nadu's Viluppuram district died while being questioned by the police for running a petty shop without permission. However, the man's family members alleged that he was killed due to police brutality. The man, Ulaganathan, ran a petty shop selling snacks and water bottles near a TASMAL liquor shop. The AK Nallur Police told him to stop selling snacks in the area as it was turning into a menace with drunk men using the area like a makeshift bar.

According to the complaint filed by Ulaganathan's wife Rani, the policemen were talking rudely with Ulaganathan as he was attending to people on Sunday, December 5. She claimed that the policemen pushed down the eateries and raised their lathis to attack her. Rani claimed that when Ulaganathan tried to stop the police, one policeman hit him on the chest due to which he fainted. She further claimed when her son tried to give Ulaganathan water, he didn't drink it. Ulaganathan was taken to the hospital where he was declared brought dead. Viluppuram Police, however, stated that Ulaganathan had several charges against him, including an assault case. He fainted while being questioned, the police claimed. The police also claimed that Ulaganathan had a previous heart condition and preliminary enquiry revealed that there was no police assault. However, based on Ulaganathan's son Dhanapal's complaint, a case has been registered. In the meantime, state Opposition leader Edappadi K Palaniswami issued a statement highlighting the case, claiming that the public is unable to live peacefully in the DMK regime and that the state government should take action against the perpetrators.

Madras High Court orders winding up of SpiceJet over unpaid dues

The Madras High Court has directed the official liquidator to take over the assets of SpiceJet and start the process of winding up for its inability to pay outstanding dues to a Switzerland-based firm.

(News Agencies) - Airline SpiceJet is set to be liquidated to pay more than \$21 million owed in debt to Switzerland-based firm Credit Suisse AG. The Madras High Court on Monday directed the official liquidator to take over SpiceJet assets and start the process of winding up. SpiceJet had entered into a contract for maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft with SR Technics Ltd in 2011. In 2012, the financial company Credit Suisse AG had signed a financing agreement with SR Technics, under which Credit Suisse was assigned the rights to receive payments. The banking institution had issued multiple

notices over time to SpiceJet asking for payment.

The bench of Justice R Subramanian held that Class (e) of Section 433 of the Companies Act provides for winding up a company, if the company is unable to pay its debts.

"Section 434 of the Companies Act states as to when a company can be deemed to be unable to pay its debts," the bench said. The bench also noted that there was "categorical admission of debt" by the airline, even though it opposed the plea for winding up by claiming that the documents were not "stamped documents" under the Indian Stamp Act.

"Even ignoring the agreements and the bills of exchange, the certificates of acceptance that had been issued by the respondent would show that there is a categorical admission of liability. Each of the bills of exchange is supported by a certificate of acceptance," the bench noted.

"Therefore, it is clear that the respondent company had obtained an advantage of a deferred payment by execution of these documents and the denial thereof, in my considered opinion, cannot be said to be bona fide. Having obtained an advantage under the supplementary agreement and

having executed the documents as required, the respondent cannot now seek to evade liability raising technical objections relating to stamping of the instruments," it added.

The bench also dismissed the objection raised by SpiceJet that Credit Suisse does not have approval of the DGCA to enter into agreement with airlines. The bench has held that the airline was aware of the status at the time of signing the agreement, but chose not to terminate the contract. "The termination of the contract by itself would not relieve SpiceJet of its liability" even if the contract had actually been terminated, the bench held.

Indore bangle-seller who was beaten by mob gets bail after 107 days

(News Agencies) - After being thrashed by a mob in Indore and then spending 107 days in jail, bangle-seller Tasleem Ali was granted bail by the Indore bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Tuesday. He was arrested in an alleged Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act case in August this year.

WHAT HAPPENED?

In August, 25-year-old Tasleem

Ali was thrashed by a mob of locals for allegedly having concealed his Muslim identity in order to sell bangles to Hindu women. A video of the attack went viral on social media.

In the video, several men can be seen beating the bangle-seller, throwing his wares on the ground and hurling expletives at him. Some of the attackers also snatched money from the victim. Following outrage over the

incident, the police registered a case against four individuals who could be seen beating him up in the video. All four of them are out on bail at present.

Shortly after the case was filed, a complaint of sexual harassment was lodged against Tasleem Ali on behalf of the minor daughter of one of the four accused of thrashing him. It was alleged that Tasleem Ali had inappropriately touched the

young girl. He was then arrested. The police also filed a case of forgery against him, on the complaint that he used a forged document to conceal his identity.

COURT GRANTS BAIL

He was granted bail in the case on Tuesday. His advocate, Ehtesham Hashmi, was quoted in The Indian Express as saying it was a "a victory of the constitution."

Spilled blood will be avenged'

Naga insurgent group condemns civilian killings, promises reaction



Reacting to the civilian killings in Mon district of Nagaland on December 4, an insurgent group in the state issued a statement promising that "the blood of the innocent spilled will be avenged sooner or later".

(News Agencies) - Reacting to the civilian killings in Mon district of Nagaland on December 4, an insurgent group in the state issued a statement promising that "the blood of the innocent spilled will be avenged sooner or later". "We hope that our people will understand when we initiate such measures," it says.

Fifteen people - fourteen civilians and a soldier - died in a firing incident in Nagaland's Mon

district on Saturday evening. A group of daily-wage labourers from Oting village were returning home from a coal mine in a pick-up van when they were allegedly shot at by security forces, who claimed they had planned a counter-insurgency operation "based on credible intelligence".

In its statement, insurgent group National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) said that it had, so far, restrained itself

from conducting operations against "the sadistic occupiers in the Indian Military, keeping in mind the wishes of our people who are in the quest for peaceful atmosphere."

"But what have our people received from the shameless occupiers for trying to achieve our goal peacefully? Nothing. Only tortured rapes, manslaughter and untold miseries unleashed from time to time," the statement says.

It condemns the incident and expresses condolences to the bereaved families of the deceased civilians.

The statement has been issued by the Naga Army of the Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) which is a government-in-exile established by separatist group NSCN.

The Ministry of Information and Publicity, GPRN also issued a separate statement on the

civilian killings. It said, "The fact that the ubiquitous Indian security forces has brought about toxic storm of bloody dust in Nagalim is not a new thing but a repeat of the past to suppress the legitimate Naga political movement."

The National Socialist Women's Organisation of Nagalim released a statement saying, "It appears to be a pre-determined massacre carried away by anti-Naga hostility."

Agri minister didn't have data: Rahul Gandhi tables list of deceased farmers in Lok Sabha

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi tabled in Lok Sabha a list of farmers who allegedly died during the farm laws agitation in the country.

(News Agencies) - Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday tabled in Lok Sabha a list of farmers who allegedly died during the farm laws agitation in the country. The former Congress president also demanded compensation and jobs for the next of kin of the deceased farmers.

Speaking during the Question Hour of Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi claimed around 700 farmers died in the farmers' agitation.

"PM apologised to the nation

and farmers, accepting that he made a mistake. On November 30, the Agriculture Minister was asked about how many farmers died in the agitation. He said he doesn't have any data," Rahul Gandhi said.

Rahul Gandhi showed a list of 400 farmers from Punjab who died during the agitation. The families of these farmers, Rahul Gandhi said, were given Rs 5 Lakh compensation by the Punjab government and jobs were also given to 152 of them.

"We have made another list of

70 farmers from Haryana," Rahul Gandhi said. "I want the farmers be given their rights, compensation as well as jobs." On December 4, Rahul Gandhi had accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being "insensitive" for not paying compensation to families of the farmers who died during the protest against the Centre's three farm laws.

"These people have died as a result of the agitation. We are not talking about billions of Dollars, thousands of crores of



rupees. We are talking about sacrifice they have made," minimum compensation for the Rahul Gandhi had said.



Farmers' protest likely to be called off, final decision soon

The year-long farmers' agitation could be called off. A final decision in this regard will be taken by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha soon.

(News Agencies) -Samyukt Kisan Morcha could take a final call to withdraw the agitation against the central government's three farm laws. A final decision in this regard is likely to be taken on Wednesday.

The central government has sent a written draft regarding issues raised by protesting farmers to the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's five-member committee, sources told India Today. The farmers' union had called a meeting of its top leaders at the Singhu border on Tuesday to deliberate on the Centre's draft proposal.

Sources also told India Today that a major section of the SKM is in favour of calling off the agitation.

A final decision on the government's draft proposal, however, will be

taken on Wednesday.

On December 4, SKM, the umbrella body of farmers' unions leading the protest, selected five people to be part of a committee empowered to hold talks with the government on behalf of all the protesting farmers.

This committee was formed to conduct discussions with the Centre on farmers' issues that still need to be addressed after the major demand to repeal the three contentious farm laws was accepted by the Union government. The farmers have decided not to call off their protest till these issues have been addressed.

WHAT ARE THE REMAINING ISSUES?

1. Surety on Minimum Support Price: MSP based on the

comprehensive cost of production (C2+50 per cent) should be made a legal entitlement of all farmers for all agricultural produce so that every farmer in the country can be guaranteed at least the MSP announced by the government for their entire crop.

2. Withdrawal of draft "Electricity Amendments Bill, 2020/2021" proposed by Centre: SKM stated that during the talks, the government had promised that it would be withdrawn, but it was included in Parliament's agenda and is still pending.

3. Removal of penal provisions on farmers in the "Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act 2021": SKM has demanded that the

government should remove section 15 of the act which allows a possibility for penal action against farmers in case of stubble burning. 4. Withdrawal of criminal cases against farmers: Thousands of farmers have been implicated in hundreds of cases during the movement (June 2020 till date) in Delhi, Haryana, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh and several other states. They now demand that these cases should be withdrawn immediately.

5. Sacking and arrest of Union MoS Ajay Misra from his post over the Lakhimpur incident.

6. Land for the construction of a martyr's memorial at Singhu for the alleged 700 farmers who died during the protest, along with compensation to families.

Supreme Court rejects NIA's plea against bail for Sudha Bharadwaj in Bhima Koregaon case



After the Bombay High Court granted default bail to lawyer and activist Sudha Bharadwaj in the 2018 Elgar Parishad case on December 1, the National Investigation Agency moved the Supreme Court against her bail.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court rejected the NIA's plea and upheld bail for Sudha Bharadwaj. The court said, "There is no reason to intervene in this matter. There are no grounds to interfere in Bombay High Court's verdict. The petition is dismissed."

The Supreme Court said procedural lapses and delays were considered by the high court while granting bail to Sudha Bharadwaj. An accused is entitled to default bail, which the Bombay High Court granted to Bharadwaj, after the statutory custodial period is over.

Sudha Bharadwaj will now be produced before a special NIA court on December 8 to fix the bail conditions before she is released. The bail applications of others accused in the case were, however, rejected by the Bombay High Court. This includes Varavara Rao, Rona Wilson, Surendra Gadling, Shoma Sen, Mahesh Raut, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira.

WHAT IS BHIMA KOREGAON ELGAR PARISHAD CASE?

On December 31, 2017, an event was held in Pune's Shaniwarwada Fort to mark the 200th anniversary of the Bhima Koregaon battle. Speeches, plays and music performances with an anti-caste and anti-communal theme were staged. The next day, violence broke out at the war memorial in Bhima Koregaon village in Maharashtra between right-wing groups armed with saffron flags and those who had come to mark the anniversary of the battle.

PIL filed in Madras HC to restrain EC from recognising election of EPS, OPS to top AIADMK posts

Awrit petition has been filed in the Madras High Court to restrain the Election Commission (EC) from recognising the election process in AIADMK, in which O Panneerselvam and Edappadi K Palaniswami were elected as party coordinator and joint coordinator unopposed. The petition, moved by AIADMK party member J Jayachandran, sought an interim injunction from the EC

recognising the election, claiming that bylaws were changed



recently to make sure that the two former chief ministers of Tamil Nadu stick to their position in

AIADMK. Panneerselvam and Palaniswami were on Monday elected unopposed as party coordinator and joint coordinator respectively. The top two posts together constitute the party's top leadership. On December 1, the AIADMK amended its bylaws at its general council meeting. The move was seen as to retain and strengthen the present leadership structure of top

two positions held by Panneerselvam and Palaniswami. According to the changes, the coordinator and joint coordinator would be elected by the party's primary members as against the general council choosing them. While the posts are two, there cannot be separate votes, as the twin positions together constitute the party top leadership, effectively a single entity.

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Politics of cutouts:

Jayant stands taller than Akhilesh at Meerut rally

(News Agencies) -In politics, optics is everything. At the joint rally in Meerut, cutouts of RLD chief Jayant Chowdhury and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav stand tall. But look closer. Chowdhury is standing taller than Tipu aka Akhilesh.

At a joint rally in western Uttar Pradesh's Meerut on Tuesday, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Jayant Chaudhary

are likely to formally announce their alliance for the upcoming state election in 2022.

Ahead of the rally, cutouts of Jayant Chaudhary and Akhilesh Yadav stand tall at the venue. But look closer. Jayant Chaudhary is standing taller than Akhilesh Yadav. Is this indicative of a shift in power relations in the politics of western Uttar Pradesh?

The Samajwadi Party is the

main Opposition party in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly with 47 seats, RLD on the other hand has just one. The two parties have not yet announced a seat-sharing arrangement for the upcoming election and are expected to do so in the next few days.

SYMBOLS AT THE RALLY

The cutouts at the venue are not the only images with symbolic value. At the rally ground in

Meerut, sugarcane has been tied to the stage, suggesting that the problems of sugarcane farmers in western Uttar Pradesh will be addressed.

These farmers have consistently been demanding an increase in the minimum support price of sugarcane.

Additionally, cutouts of LPG cylinders are also visible at the venue as inflation is another issue that will be taken up.

Supporters at the rally will also don caps with the slogan 'Bhaichara Zindabad'. With a big Muslim population in the region, the RLD-SP alliance is also hoping to win the community's support.

In an attempt to show the strength of the RLD-SP alliance, some supporters have brought models of bicycles (SP's symbol) and hand pumps (RLD'S symbol) made of brass.

Students wear 'I am Babri' badges in Kerala, 3 booked

Students of a school in Kerala were allegedly made to wear 'I am Babri' badges. The police have booked three SDPI leaders in the matter



(News Agencies) -The Kerala police have booked three leaders of the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) an offshoot of the Popular Front of India (PFI) -- for allegedly forcing students to wear 'I am Babri' badges in school on Monday the 19th anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

The incident happened in a school in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district. A case has been registered against local SDPI leader Muneer Ibnu Nazeer and two others for trying to create communal disharmony and riots in the area. The parent teacher association of the school also lodged a police complaint alleging that some unidentified persons stopped students

in front of the school and made them wear badges which read 'I am Babri'.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alleged that workers of SDPI were behind the incident. BJP Pathanamthitta district president VA Sooraj also lodged a complaint with the police over the issue and held the PFI responsible. BJP state president K Surendran also lashed out, saying that the CPM still rules with the help of SDPI and that the police have taken no steps to arrest the perpetrators. "We want strong action to be taken against PFI for their involvement. The link between Communists and PFI is evident. Kerala is close to becoming another Syria. The rights of children are being hindered. The government is aiding others to make

Kerala a hub of terrorism," said K Surendran.

The Perumpetty police have launched an investigation into the incident. Some organisations observe December 6 as Babri Day to protest the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992.

NCPCR TAKES NOTE, DEMANDS FIR- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) also took cognizance of the case.

In its letter, the child rights Panel has written to District Police Chief of Pathanamthitta, Kerala asking for an investigation in the matter, and demanded an FIR to be registered under relevant sections of the IPC and Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 against those responsible for harassing students.

Biden warns Putin of sanctions, military support for Ukraine if Russia invades

US President Joe Biden warned Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday the West would impose "strong economic and other measures" on Russia if it invades Ukraine, while Putin demanded guarantees Nato would not expand further eastward.

The two leaders held two hours of virtual talks on Ukraine and other disputes in a video call about US-Russian relations, which have sunk to their lowest point since the end of the Cold War more than three decades ago.

The Kremlin, which said before Tuesday's meeting that it did not expect any breakthrough, has denied harbouring any intention to attack Ukraine and has said its troop posture is defensive.

US officials said before the video conference that Biden would tell Putin that Russia and its banks could be hit with the toughest sanctions yet if it attacks Ukraine.

Sanctions, which one source said could target Russia's biggest banks and Moscow's ability to convert roubles into dollars and other currencies, are designed to dissuade Putin from using tens of thousands of troops massed near the Ukrainian border to attack its southern neighbour.

"Things we did not do in 2014 we are prepared to do now," US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters after the call, referring to Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. "There was a lot of give and take, there was no finger-wagging, but the president was crystal clear where the United States stands on all of these issues," Sullivan said.

The Kremlin said Putin told Biden it was wrong to put all the responsibility on Russia's shoulders for current tensions.

Moscow has voiced rising irritation over Western military aid to Ukraine, a fellow former Soviet republic that has tilted towards the West since a popular revolt toppled a pro-Russian president in 2014, and what it calls creeping Nato expansion.

The Kremlin said Putin told Biden he wanted reliable, legally binding guarantees against Nato expansion further eastward and complained about Nato attempts to "develop" Ukrainian territory.

Putin also called for guarantees that offensive strike systems would not be deployed in countries close to Russia, according to the Kremlin.

Both sides agreed to continue contacts and directed their teams to consult on questions about Ukraine.

Biden reiterated US support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the White House said, and called for de-escalation and diplomacy.

Russian TV footage showed Biden and Putin greeting each other in a friendly manner at the start of the virtual summit.

Both sides say they hope the two leaders can hold an in-person summit to discuss ties between the two nations, which have long-standing differences over Syria, US economic sanctions and alleged Russian cyber attacks on US companies.

A Ukraine official said after the

talks Kyiv was grateful to Biden for his "unwavering support". A US Congress defense bill released after the talks included \$300 million for Ukraine's military. Washington has accused Russia of massing troops near the border with Ukraine to intimidate an aspiring Nato member, suggesting it could be a repeat of Moscow's 2014 playbook, when it seized the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea from Ukraine.

Moscow has questioned Ukrainian intentions and said it wants guarantees that Kyiv will not use force to try to retake territory lost in 2014 to Russia-backed separatists, a scenario Ukraine has ruled out. For the Kremlin, the growing Nato embrace of neighbouring Ukraine - and what it sees as the nightmare possibility of alliance missiles in Ukraine targeted against Russia - is a "red line" it will not allow to be crossed.

Leaders from Britain, the United States, France, Germany and Italy spoke on Monday and "agreed to stay in close touch on a coordinated and comprehensive approach in response to Russia's military build-up on Ukraine's borders", the White House said. The Russian rouble weakened slightly on Tuesday, with some market analysts predicting the talks would de-escalate tensions and others saying that the US sanctions threat eroded hopes of finding common ground. Should Russia invade Ukraine, the Biden administration has discussed targeting Putin's inner circle but no decision has been made, a US source said.

Sanctions against the biggest Russian banks, and curbing the conversion of roubles into dollars and other currencies, were also being considered, another source said. US officials have told members of Congress they have an understanding with Germany about shutting down the Nord Stream 2 pipeline if Russia invades Ukraine, a senior congressional aide said. The United States has evaluated the possibility of curbing investors' ability to buy Russian debt on the secondary market, a measure that even if taken only by Washington was seen as having a severe impact on Russia's government, according to a person with direct knowledge of the matter.

Media reported that sanctions could include disconnecting Russia from the SWIFT international payment system used by banks around the world, an extreme step that would likely require coordination with allies.

German Gref, the chief executive of Russia's top bank Sberbank, on Tuesday called that idea "nonsense" and "impossible to execute". The White House declined to comment. Ukraine and Nato powers accuse Russia of building up troops near the border, sparking fears of a possible attack. Moscow denies any such plan and accuses Kyiv of massing its own forces in its east, where Russian-backed separatists control a large swathe of Ukrainian territory.

Omicron drives world to restriction with high infection rate

By Susmita Ghosh

The Omicron variant of the Covid-19 is a major worldwide headache now. With high infectibility, it is present in around forty countries now and spreading rapidly. Under the WHO guidelines, the authorities across the nations are trying to contain the outbreak of the new variant. In absence of rapid counter-measures, the new variant can potentially put brakes on the recovering economy trends worldwide.

The seemingly never-ending mutation on the SARS-CoV-2 virus has given rise to several variants. The structural change of the spike proteins on the virus body results in different levels of functionality and viral infection levels. The Omicron variant is just the latest in the route, difficult to detect with the conventional tests.

As per the researchers, the Omicron variant has genetic materials from the Common Cold or the RhinoVirus. The genetic sequence helps it to dupe the human immune system easily. Consequently, the virus can infect more people quite easily. Simultaneously, the disease is mild or asymptomatic in most of the cases. However, it also results in a decreased fatality rate with the infected population.

The steps taken by WHO regarding the Omicron variant management is under question with no fatality reported cases till now. However, the Delta-variant management from WHO steps drew enough criticism. WHO was

quite late to brand it as a major threat. Hence, it spreads like wildfire across worldwide, resulted in heavy mortality.

In the third-world countries, which are more populated, the Covid management measures should be taken cautiously. While more sanctions can cripple the country, a lacklustre approach may result in an uncontrollable disaster. India is taking a praiseworthy course of action around this time. There is a rising rate of vaccination around the country and a stringent checking policy along with mandatory submission of RT-PCR test reports for the international travellers.

There are 23 reported Omicron cases in India now, with more tests pending. They have also added the UK, South Africa, Brazil, China, Ghana, Israel and so on in the list of at-risk countries. Travellers from these countries are to be screened with proper care.

South Africa is the country where the first reported case of the Omicron variant came to light. The common cold virus is prevalent in this region and can prove life-threatening in some cases. Accordingly, the Covid virus went through the mutation, picking up the common cold genetic traits.

Most of the countries immediately started to cut off flight connectivity with countries with reported Omicron cases. However, one of the exceptions to this trend was Thailand, where travel is a major source of revenue. Thailand travel minister, Phiphat Prakarn commented that they will be able to keep the Omicron cases under control from the

(Contd on page 32)



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Nagaland shooting

Latest violence and its links with demand for Nagalim

Union Home Minister Amit Shah issued a statement in Parliament, giving details of what happened in the Mon district of Nagaland, and how. Amit Shah identified the shooting down of civilians as a case of misidentification where intelligence input had gone awry. Fifteen people including a soldier died in Nagaland's Mon district on Saturday and Sunday. Thirteen coal mine workers died in shooting by the Indian Army's special forces on a vehicle carrying coal miners on Saturday. The botched up operation triggered retaliation from angry civilians targeting the forces leading to the death of one soldier and injuries to others. Response from the armed forces caused the death of one more civilian on Sunday. The incident has given a boost to separatist Naga outfits, which have been looking for fresh oxygen to revitalise their campaign. It has also brought focus on the logic of continuance of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). But why?

To understand why the Mon incident is not only a case of misidentified shooting for which justice will be served in due course, it is important to understand the trigger working for Naga groups.

The Trigger

A framework agreement was signed between the central government and the Naga groups

in 2015. But it could not take off. The government followed the framework agreement with measures to stop illegal tax collection by prominent Naga group NSCN and its factions. The group has denounced the central government's move.

The NSCN has been collecting 'taxes' from traders and government officials since its establishment. The government's decision to stop illegal levy collection worked, in a way, to weaken the framework agreement.

Socio-economic Strain

Development in certain areas of Nagaland has different meanings for the government and the Naga groups. The government thinks it could bring people living in remote areas and the hills into a greater integration process. The Naga groups describe this as an initiative to erode their cultural identity. Economic disparity is another factor arising out of development measures. Like the rest of the country, the gap between the poor and the rich has widened in Nagaland. This is seen in greater migration of people from rural areas in Nagaland. Village population density is said to be growing thinner with younger people moving out to bigger cities.

Climate change too has contributed to the problem. The hilly areas are facing water shortage, and cropping is no longer as remunerative. As a

consequence, more people have moved out in search of work. All this has increased socio-economic strain in Nagaland society in rural and smaller urban

Fifteen people - fourteen civilians and a soldier - died in a firing incident in Nagaland's Mon district on Saturday evening. The incident has given a boost to separatist Naga outfits.

centres.

Lack of Transparency

The Centre signed the framework agreement with NSCN-Issac-Muivah group on August 3, 2015. But its provisions were not made public.

A couple of years later, when provisions were made public, the NSCN faction accused mediator RN Ravi, who is Nagaland governor, of altering the terms of agreement.

Roots Are Deeper

NSCN is insisting on having a separate constitution and a flag for Nagaland. This is what the true bone of contention is. The Modi government is not ready to agree to any such demand, especially after having ended a similar

provision in Jammu and Kashmir. **Who Is Naga?**

Naga is not the name of one tribe. It is a group of several tribal communities living not only in Nagaland but also in neighbouring states and bordering areas of Myanmar. They speak different languages and follow different religions.

The British

For centuries, Nagas had a cultural linkage with other Indian communities in the Northeast and beyond. The advent of the British brought a change. The Christian missionaries contributed hugely in shaping the present identity of the Nagas, including adoption of Christianity and the English language. English is the official as well as the link language of Nagaland.

The expansion of the British led to the establishment of a military camp in Nagaland. It developed into the city of Kohima and the capital of Nagaland. The Naga hills, whose natural reserves drew the British to the state, became part of British India in 1881.

Resistance

Nagaland saw similar agitations against British rule as other parts of India. By 1918, the Naga Club had come into existence to offer organised resistance to British rule.

When the Simon Commission visited India in 1920, the Naga leaders told it to leave them to manage their own affairs. As the

struggle against the British continued, Angami Zapu Phizo inspired the foundation of Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 and led the outfit.

To the British, Phizo announced, "I am a Naga first, a Naga second, and a Naga last." He supported Myanmar (known then as Burma) when Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA).

As India moved towards Independence, the NNC said it would be part of the Indian federation but enjoy autonomy to manage their affairs. An agreement was signed between the Naga group and the government -- called the Akbar Hydari pact in June 1947. Hydari was then the governor of Assam. But the pact collapsed just before Independence.

Separatism

At Independence, Phizo's group declared Nagaland a separate state just as Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared the formation of Pakistan on August 14, 1947. But it had no backing in the Indian Independence Act that recognised India and Pakistan.

Phizo continued his campaign after making an about turn on his earlier stand of staying within the Indian federation. In 1951, Phizo even claimed to have conducted a referendum in which the participants supported a sovereign Nagaland by a majority of 99 per cent. The referendum was not recognised by the government.

Birth of AFSPA

In 1952, Phizo formed two underground groups, the Naga Federal Government and the Naga Federal Army. Simply put, Phizo announced a Naga government and an army to fight the Indian government and forces. To tackle this challenge, the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru government re-introduced the 1942 British law as AFSPA in the hills of Assam. Nagaland was then part of Assam. The hills were declared 'disturbed areas' giving special power to armed forces.

Guarantee under Constitution but...

Nagaland became a separate state in 1963, and curiously placed under the external affairs ministry in its early days. Nagaland got its Vidhan Sabha in 1964. In the Constitution, Nagas were given guarantee of protection of their cultural identity by inserting Article 371A. However, that did not end the campaign for a sovereign Nagaland by Phizo.



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**Collective relief,
road ahead requires
pragmatism**

The decision to call off the farmers' agitation at the Delhi borders is an occasion for celebration and collective relief. As a symbol of social cohesiveness and equanimity, the year-long peaceful yet dogged protests have few parallels. Time and again, those at the forefront were tested, and they not only remained committed to their cause, but more importantly, ensured discipline and order despite incidents that threatened to derail the movement. As the protesters prepare to return home, flush with success and a sense of victory, a bigger task lies ahead for the farmers' unions. One that sends out a message of carrying forward the spirit of harmony and restraint that marked the protests, and not indulging in any action that has the potential to undermine the victory.

Economic activity across the region has taken a huge hit owing to the protests, the toll

plazas have been lying shut, frequent roadblocks and 'rail roko' calls have disrupted life in towns and cities. Yet, despite the prolonged inconveniences, the support for the farmers' cause has been overwhelming. It's a triumph of the people, by the people. Their

voice has been heard. Victory celebrations are but expected, but it falls upon those at the helm to make sure that the decorum and composure seen at Singhu and Tikri through the year are reflected here too. Over-zealous or rowdy behaviour

should have no place.

Now that the laws have been repealed, the momentum that the protest generated provides a unique opportunity for a pragmatic approach on the urgent issues that confront the crisis-ridden agriculture sector. Change is difficult, but cannot be ignored

any longer, Reform is required, in what form or shape is the question. Projecting MSP as the sole saviour is unrealistic. Tough challenges such as moving away from paddy crop, considering the huge ecological costs that accrue for water-starved Punjab, need to be tackled head-on.

Bole So Nihal, Sat Shri Akal

End of farm protests



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Tale of two Covid variants

What makes Omicron more infectious than Delta

Scientists warn that high mutations in Omicron variant may lead to re-infection and breakthrough infections. The variant could spark explosive increase in Covid cases in other countries as well

Omicron, the new variant of coronavirus, is said to be more infectious than others, including the feared Delta strain. Unusual patterns of mutations appeared to be accountable for the speed of the spread of this new variant.

Omicron replaced the Delta strain in a relatively short time in South Africa.

Scientists warn that high mutations may lead to re-infection and breakthrough infections. The variant could spark explosive increases in Covid cases in other countries as well, early data shows. However, its severity seems to be comparatively low.

Whatever is known so far about this new variant's transmissibility, ability to evade immunity, and the severity of its symptoms is from preliminary research in South Africa. Many questions, therefore, continue to remain unanswered at this stage.

"This wave seems much faster than the Delta wave. And we thought the Delta wave was really fast. It's unbelievable," Juliet Pulliam, director and professor of applied mathematics at the South African Centre for Epidemiological Modelling and Analysis (SACEMA), said.

Pulliam and her colleagues in their study showed that re-infections in South Africa are more likely with Omicron than with Delta or Beta variants. "Population-level evidence suggests that the Omicron variant is associated with substantial ability to evade

immunity from prior infection. In contrast, there is no population-wide epidemiological evidence of immune escape associated with the Beta or Delta variants," the study said.

The Omicron has 60 mutations not seen in combination earlier, compared to other coronavirus variants. Of these, around 30 mutations are to the spike protein that the virus uses to link to human cells, genome sequence data shows. Scientists said large mutations might reduce the immunity of already infected or even vaccinated people.

High mutation means a virus can bind to a human cell, and the immune system is not able to eject it. Even target vaccines may be less effective.

On December 5, South Africa recorded 10,041 new cases, up from 3,459 reported on November 26. Genome sequencing data shows more than 70 per cent of these cases are due to the Omicron variant.

Higher number of mutations in spike proteins makes Omicron scarier for other

countries too. Therefore, the genetic difference from other variants is a big concern for scientists.

Dr Christopher JL Murray, director and lead modeler of the Institute for Health Metrics

and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, said, "This is going to be very important in places with high levels of past infection India, for example, with the Delta variant, or parts of Latin America with high levels of Gamma variant they're a susceptible population that can now be infected with

Omicron. We would expect some cross-variant protection, but given all the mutations in the spike protein, it's likely greatly reduced but it'll take quite some time until we'll be sure." However, some experts said that existing data and studies are not sufficient to declare that the newest coronavirus variant appeared to spread more than twice as quickly as Delta. "Data emerging from South Africa suggest increased transmissibility, but whether it is more or less transmissible than Delta remains to be answered. A new study by SACEMA suggests that Omicron

can re-infect people who already had Covid, but it remains to be determined whether it can escape vaccine-induced immunity. In the coming weeks, we will have answers to these questions," Dr Priya Luthra, principal investigator at viral disease and translational science program at Trudeau Institute in New York, told India Today.

Doctors cautioned that the rapid rise of Omicron variant in South Africa could reach many nations, including India. More than 45 countries have reported the presence of the Omicron variant as of December 6.

"In South Africa, 40 per cent of the population is already infected with Covid, and 36 per cent are vaccinated. Despite that, Omicron is spreading at great speed. This is not a good sign for India as India's sero survey showing a high rate of antibodies (about 75 per cent in many states) seemed to be a big weapon against corona infection, and we thought that we were inching towards herd immunity," GC Khilnani, former professor and head of pulmonary department at AIIMS, told India Today.

Scientists and health officials are still struggling to analyse data to predict Omicron's impact and the multiple mutations. Many countries have upped border restrictions, and whether more measures will be introduced in the coming days remains to be seen.

Omicron can re-infect people who already had Covid, but it remains to be determined whether it can escape vaccine induced immunity



Assam-Meghalaya border dispute:

Two Meghalaya regional committees submit reports

Two out of three regional committees formed by the Meghalaya government to settle inter-state border disputes with Assam submitted its report

Two out of three regional committees formed by the Meghalaya government to settle inter-state border disputes with Assam submitted their reports to Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma.

The regional committees - one headed by Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong and another by Public Health Engineering Minister Renikton Lyngdoh Tongkhar, submitted their reports on Wednesday.

Both Assam and Meghalaya

governments formed three regional committees each in August this year to resolve differences in at least six of the 12 disputed areas between the two North Eastern states.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said the reports related to the joint inspection conducted in the areas of difference in Ri Bhoi district and West Khasi Hills district were submitted.

"The Committees submitted their report after completing exhaustive inspections to the

disputed areas along the Meghalaya-Assam border," Conrad Sangma said.

Conrad Sangma tweeted "The Regional Committee, Ri Bhoi District headed by Hon'ble Deputy CM, Sh. Prestone Tynsong submitted their report today as part of the joint exercise with our Assam counterpart to resolve the Meghalaya-Assam border dispute."

Earlier, the Meghalaya Chief Minister told India Today TV that, once the report is submitted, the

respective government will then discuss with the stakeholders in the respective states about the suggestions or different kinds of concerns and engage with different stakeholders.

"Once engagement and discussions done with the stakeholders then the Chief Minister of both states will meet again in Shillong or Guwahati. We hopeful that we should able to meet and come to at least some kind of first level consensus before Christmas,"

Conrad Sangma said.

Out of 12 disputes the government of both neighbouring states have taken six disputes as resolution at the beginning and these disputes are mainly Tarabari, Gizang, Fahala, Baklapara, Khanapara (Pilingkata) and Ratacherra and these areas fall under Cachar, Kamrup and Kamrup Metropolitan districts of Assam and West Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi and East Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya.

IAF chopper crash: Sole survivor Group Captain Varun Singh suffered 45% burn injuries, vitals stable

Group Captain Varun Singh, the sole survivor of the IAF chopper crash on Wednesday, has suffered 45 per cent burn injuries and is under treatment, as per sources. His condition is critical but his vitals are stable, they said.

A call to shift him from the Military Hospital in Wellington to the Air Force Command Hospital in Bengaluru is being assessed.

Speaking in Parliament, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said, "Group Captain Varun Singh is on life support in the Military Hospital at Wellington and all efforts are being made to save his life."

In a helicopter crash in Tamil

Nadu's Coonoor on Wednesday, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat and 12 others -- including his wife Madhulika and 11 armed forces personnel -- lost their lives. There were fourteen people on board. Group Captain Varun Singh was the only one who survived.

SHAURYA CHAKRA AWARDEE On August 15 this year, then Wing Commander Varun Singh, a pilot in a Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Squadron, was conferred with the Shaurya Chakra, India's third highest peacetime gallantry award, for his act of exceptional gallantry.

According to a statement issued by the Defence Ministry, Wing



Commander Varun Singh, was on October 12, 2020, flying a system check sortie in LCA, away from the parent base, after major rectification of the Flight Control System (FCS) and pressurisation system (life support environment control system). During the sortie, the

cockpit pressurisation failed at high altitude.

"He correctly identified the failure and initiated a descent to lower altitude for landing. While descending, the Flight Control System failed and led to total loss of control of the aircraft. This was an unprecedented catastrophic failure that had never occurred," the Defence Ministry statement had said. There was a rapid loss of altitude while in usual attitude, with the aircraft pitching up and down viciously going to the extremities of G limits. Despite being in extreme physical and mental stress in an extreme life-threatening situation, Wing

Commander Varun Singh maintained exemplary composure and regained control of the aircraft, thereby exhibiting exceptional flying skill.

Soon thereafter, at about 10,000 feet, the aircraft again experienced total loss of control with vicious manoeuvring and uncontrollable pitching. Under such a scenario, the pilot was at liberty to abandon the aircraft. Faced with a potential hazard to his own life, he displayed extraordinary courage and skill to safely land the fighter aircraft, the statement noted.

The pilot went beyond the call of duty and landed the aircraft taking calculated risks.



WILLY KURNIAWAN/REUTERS

Volcano rescue workers dig through thick layers of hot ash in Indonesia after Mount Semeru erupts

Rescue workers in Indonesia continued to dig through thick layers of hot ash and debris Tuesday to find survivors of a volcanic eruption that left dozens of people dead and thousands displaced in the country's East Java province, even as the volcano continued to erupt ash. Mount Semeru, one of Indonesia's most active volcanoes, erupted Saturday, shooting smoldering hot ash and volcanic gas into the air that turned the sky dark over villages in East Java's Lumajang district. The death toll increased to 34 on Tuesday, the head of the task force for the management of the eruption of Mount Semeru, Infantry Col. Irwan Surbekti, said at a news conference. On Monday, Indonesia's National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB), said about 2,000 people had been evacuated across 19 makeshift centers. Nearly 3,000 houses and 38 schools have been damaged by the debris, according to a statement from the Command Post for Emergency Response of Mount Semeru. The eruption also destroyed a bridge that connects Lumajang with the neighboring Malang district, blocking access from the main road and hampering rescue efforts, it added.

Maulana Ardiansyah, a volunteer from Baznas Search and Rescue team told CNN the group found three bodies -- one man, one woman, and one child -- submerged in cold lava in Kampung Renteng village Monday morning. The evacuees included hundreds of villagers who lived near a dam that burst Monday due to cold lava and heavy rain, Operational Chief of Search and Rescue I Wayan Suyatna told CNN. He added that Monday's search operation was forced to stop twice due to pyroclastic clouds -- a mix of ash, rock and volcanic gases that can be much more dangerous than lava. "Hot volcanic cloud is dangerous for the team safety," Suyatna said. "The weather here is also really bad. (It is) dark and rainy." Video shared Monday by BNPB shows debris-filled mud stretching for miles around the volcano. Villages are completely abandoned and vehicles remain submerged under the sludge, while thousands of trees are covered in a sheet of ashy dust. Local resident, Hosniya, 31, told Reuters the eruption caught her by surprise. "At first, I thought it was a bomb explosion ... suddenly it was all dark, like it was going to destroy the earth," she said.

Hosniya was evacuated with her family, but they were unable to take anything with them but their official papers, Reuters reported. In the village of Sumberwuluh, where 16 houses were buried under ash, residents raced to evacuate their livestock on trucks Sunday. Roofs of several of the village's houses had caved in, leaving bricks and metal rods exposed. Aftershocks from the eruption

were also felt among some residents of Kobokan and Kanjar villages late Sunday. They were later evacuated to a shelter in a nearby district. The Indonesian government said it was preparing a relocation process for villagers who lost their home in the eruption. BNPB said it will provide them with financial aid before the government can relocate them. Indonesia sits between two

continental plates on what is known as the Ring of Fire, a band around the basin of the Pacific Ocean that leads to high levels of tectonic and volcanic activity. In January, Mount Merapi on Java island erupted, shooting up a cloud of ash that led authorities to warn of the risk of lava reaching roads. The volcano violently erupted in 2010, killing more than 350 people.



ADEK BERRY/AFPG/GETTY IMAGES



Kids in 5-14 age group now account for highest rates of Covid infection in Europe: WHO

WHO Europe regional director Dr Hans Kluge said the incidence of COVID-19 was two to three times higher among young children than the average population in some places.

The World Health Organization's office for Europe said Tuesday that children in the 5 to 14 age group now account for the highest rates of reported COVID-19 infection in the region. WHO Europe regional director Dr Hans Kluge also argued that vaccine mandates should be "an absolute last resort," and said that COVID-19 deaths remain "significantly below previous peaks." But he said that coronavirus cases and deaths have more than doubled in the last two months in the 53-country region stretching to central Asia. He stressed the continued threat from the widespread delta variant, and noted the new omicron variant has so far accounted for 432 confirmed cases in 21 countries in the region. "The delta variant remains dominant across Europe and Central Asia, and we know that the COVID-19 vaccines remain effective in reducing severe disease and deaths from it," he

told reporters from WHO Europe headquarters in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"It is yet to be seen how and whether the latest COVID-19

variant of concern, omicron, will be more transmissible, or more or less severe."

Kluge urged countries to "protect children and the schools" amid

the rapid increase in cases among the young in the region, and said the incidence of COVID-19 was two to three times higher among young

children than the average population in some places.

Children have tended to face less severe cases than more vulnerable populations like older people, health care workers and people with weaker immune systems. "As school holidays approach, we must also acknowledge that children contaminate their parents and grandparents at home, with a 10 times increased risk for these adults to develop severe disease, be hospitalized or die when non-vaccinated," he said. "The health risks extend beyond the children themselves." Kluge also spoke out against vaccination mandates, saying they should be an "absolute last resort" and have efficacy only in some contexts. WHO's European region has the global epicenter of the pandemic for weeks, accounting for 70% of cases and 61 percent of deaths worldwide according to the U.N. health agency's weekly epidemiological report issued last week.





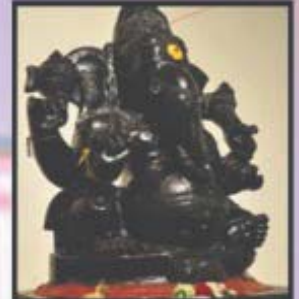
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Boosters can wait, focus on vaccinating everyone first: WHO India chief

In an exclusive conversation with India Today, Dr Roderico Ofri, WHO India representative, spoke on the importance of getting the entire eligible population under the vaccine coverage to battle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dr Roderico Ofri, the World Health Organisation (WHO) representative to India, said that it is not advisable to rush with booster doses due to concerns surrounding the Omicron variant of coronavirus. He added that it is more important to get the entire population under vaccination coverage first.

In an exclusive conversation with India Today, Dr Roderico Ofri said that India's approach on aiming to cut down transmission of infection by vaccinating the entire population is the right thing to do. Dr Ofri was responding to a question on whether the country should start administering booster doses to the immunocompromised population, more so in the light of the new variant of coronavirus. Dr Ofri added that it is still unclear what sort of response vaccines have in neutralising the new Omicron variant, designated as 'variant of concern' by the WHO.

According to Dr Ofri, rushing with booster jabs instead of inoculating the unvaccinated population first due to concerns about the new variant is not advisable.

India has so far reported 21 cases of Omicron variant of coronavirus.

Meanwhile, the WHO Technical group on

immunisation called SAGE (Strategic Advisory Group on Immunisation) is all set to meet on December 7 to lay out the recommendations for booster doses.

On Monday, India's National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation held a meeting to discuss boosters or additional doses. However, no recommendations have been made yet to the health ministry, according to sources.

INDIA'S VACCINATION CAMPAIGN

India has its thrust on ensuring the second dose coverage of its entire population. The Government of India's 'Har Ghar Dastak' campaign has helped India cross the 50 per cent-mark when it comes to the second dose. Of the eligible population, 85 per cent have received the first jab of Covid-19 vaccine.

"One billion doses in 10 months is remarkable," Dr Roderico Ofri said, responding to a question on the slow pace of vaccinations.

"The future is uncertain because of the new variants," he said, adding that we already have the tools to handle the possible increase in coronavirus cases.

Reduce the spread, suppress transmission, and vaccinate so that the chain of transmission can be broken, Dr Ofri added.

A divine force made the Ayodhya case conclusion possible: Former CJI Ranjan Gogoi



Former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi has discussed in detail the controversial, long-standing Ayodhya dispute which was concluded during his tenure and the surcharge of emotions that he went through during the hearings and the writing of the judgment.

"The Ayodhya case was an occasion for India's judiciary to make an invaluable contribution to the odyssey of mankind as, through its verdict, it was expected to lay out a vision and inspire the will in communities across the world to seek closure of such inter-faith conflicts through peaceful and judicial ways. It would also guide the faithful to discover the ability to accept and co-exist with what may be different or diverse or perceived to be so." Justice Gogoi says in his book.

The matter was heard at length with 40-days of continuous arguments from all sides before a five-judge bench headed by Justice Gogoi as the Chief Justice. During this time, multiple attempts were also made to delay the hearing for as long as possible.

Justice Gogoi recalls, "The hearing dragged on until fireworks emanated from Dhavan who, during Jain's arguments, looked at me and said that these cases could not be heard in the manner that I would 'normally' hear cases coming before me. This was without any provocation, and only because we had urged Jain to step up the pace of his arguments. Everything will have to be considered and everybody will have to be given a full hearing, Dhavan said. All documents would have to be scrutinised. Dhavan indicated that he may himself take about six weeks to complete his arguments. At one point, he also mentioned that none of the judges except Justice Chandrachud had either read the papers or understood the case.

I requested all my brother judges to remain silent and not to respond as it could have resulted in scuttling of the hearing. Such incidents kept occurring in court frequently and increased with time. But the hearing continued."

Justice Gogoi mentions an interesting incident that occurred on the last day of the hearing. At around noon during the hearing, Justice Gogoi received a slip of paper from the Secretary General of the Supreme Court stating that a representative of one of the parties to the Ayodhya matter was seeking permission to enter the Supreme Court. "Justice Bobde, who was to my right, and Justice Chandrachud, on my left, asked about the note as receipt of notes from registrars in the midst of hearing by a five-judge Bench is somewhat unusual. Since it pertained to an administrative matter, I told them accordingly." Justice Gogoi writes. Justice Gogoi says he sent a handwritten reply back to the Secretary General saying that "under no circumstances was the person to be allowed entry" into the Court. "A bona fide visitor to the Supreme Court in connection with his case is always entitled to a visitor's pass through his Advocate-on-Record. Since this person was approaching the Registry or the Secretary General for entry, I sensed that his objective was not well-intended but aimed at disrupting the hearing. Had he been able to do that, the court proceedings would have been affected and the case may have had to be adjourned." Justice Gogoi apprehended. The former CJI has also spoken at length about the toll that the long and tedious Ayodhya hearings took on him.



Nepal reports first cases of Omicron variant in two foreign nationals

Nepal reported the first two cases of Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, the health ministry confirmed on Monday.

"It is for the first time that the presence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus has been

confirmed in Nepal," the country's Ministry of Health and Population said in a statement.

A 66-year-old foreign national who arrived in Nepal on November 19 and a 71-year-old person having close contact with him have

tested positive for the new variant. The swab samples of the two persons were tested Sunday night through gene sequencing at the National Public Health Laboratory in Kathmandu.

Both the passengers were fully

vaccinated against Covid-19, the health minister said.

The duo tested negative for coronavirus on November 19, when they arrived in Nepal. Later on November 23, they were detected with mild Covid-

A 66-year-old foreign national who arrived in Nepal on November 19 and a 71-year-old person having close contact with him have tested positive for the new variant

19 symptoms and tested positive for the Omicron variant. The two foreigners have been sent to an isolation centre.

66 CONTACTS TEST NEGATIVE

Sixty-six people who came in contact with the two passengers tested negative for Covid-19.

Nepal had banned flights from nine African countries to curb the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant after the new mutation was discovered.

The Nepali government has imposed travel restrictions on arrivals from South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and Malawi.

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It's youthful exuberance, happens all the time, says Pak defence minister on lynching of Sri Lankan man

Speaking on the lynching of a Sri Lankan man in Sialkot, Pakistan defence minister Pervez Khattak reportedly said it was "youthful exuberance" and "happens all the time"

(News Agencies) - Speaking on the lynching of a Sri Lankan factory worker in Sialkot, Pakistan's Minister of Defence Pervez Khattak reportedly said that it was the "youthful exuberance of Muslim youngsters" and "happens all the time". He reportedly added, "When the youth feel Islam has been attacked, they react to defend it."

On Friday, a Sri Lankan factory manager in Pakistan was beaten to death and set ablaze by a mob, in an incident linked to alleged blasphemy.

#Pakistan's Defence Minister @PervezKhattakPK dismisses seriousness of the killing of a Sri Lankan by an Islamic lynch mob. He said it was "youthful exuberance" of Muslim youth. It happens all the time; when youth feel Islam is attacked; they



react to defend it, he added pic.twitter.com/fagkVemsaj

- Tarek Fatah (@TarekFatah) December 6, 2021

Pakistan's defence minister Pervez Khattak also took to Twitter to issue a statement on the incident on Monday. He wrote, "I strongly condemn the brutal victimisation of the Sri

Lankan who has been killed. The incident is not a reflection of Pakistan. Pakistan denounces extremism in all its forms and manifestation. Those responsible shall be brought to justice."

I strongly condemn the brutal victimisation of the Sri Lankan who has been killed. The incident is not a reflection of Pakistan.

Pakistan denounces extremism in all its forms and manifestation. Those responsible shall be brought to justice.

LYNCHING OF SRI LANKAN MAN

A mob of over 800 men, including supporters of hardline Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik

Pakistan (TLP), allegedly attacked a garment factory and lynched its general manager Priyantha Kumara Diyawadanage and set him on fire over allegations of blasphemy on Friday in Sialkot district.

The body of the victim was flown to Colombo on Monday. Meanwhile, the Punjab Police tweeted, "A total 131 suspects, including 26 main ones, have been arrested so far. The 26 prime suspects have played a key role in inciting the people, lynching Kumara and setting his body ablaze."

The lynching was condemned by the Sri Lankan Parliament. On Saturday, Pakistan PM Imran Khan said, "Let there be no mistake all those responsible will be punished with full severity of the law."

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Myanmar's Suu Kyi jailed for four years for inciting dissent against Junta govt

Myanmar's deposed leader Suu Kyi has been jailed for four years, a Junta govt spokesperson said

(News Agencies) -A special court in Myanmar's capital sentenced the country's ousted leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, to four years in prison on Monday after finding her guilty of incitement and violating coronavirus restrictions, a legal official said. The sentencing was the first in a series of cases in which the 76-year-old Nobel laureate is being prosecuted since the army seized power on Feb 1, preventing her National League for Democracy party from starting a second five-year term in office. The incitement case involved statements posted on her party's Facebook page after she and other party leaders had already been detained by the military, while the coronavirus charge involved a campaign appearance ahead of elections in November last year which her party overwhelmingly won.

The army, whose allied party lost many seats in the election, claimed massive voting fraud, but independent election observers did not detect any major irregularities.

The court's ruling was conveyed by a legal official who insisted on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities. Suu Kyi's trials are closed to the media and spectators, and her lawyers, who had been the sole source of information on the proceedings, were served with gag orders in October forbidding them from releasing information.

The cases against Suu Kyi are widely seen as

contrived to discredit her and keep her from running in the next election. The constitution bars anyone sent to prison after being convicted of a crime from holding high office or becoming a lawmaker. Opposition to military rule remains strong 10 months after the army's takeover, and the verdict may inflame tensions even further.

There were protest marches on Sunday against the military government and calling for the release of Suu Kyi and other detained members of her government. An army truck deliberately sped into a march by about 30 young people in Yangon, the country's biggest city, and at least three of the protesters may have been killed, according to unconfirmed reports.

The verdicts in Suu Kyi's first two cases, on incitement - for allegedly spreading false or inflammatory information that could disturb public order - and violating the Natural Disaster Management Law for allegedly breaching coronavirus restrictions, were supposed to be delivered last Tuesday.

However, the court postponed its ruling with no explanation. At the same time, it agreed to allow testimony this week on a separate coronavirus charge from an additional defense witness who had previously been unable to attend court because of ill health.

Suu Kyi's lawyers sought vigorously to have the incitement charge dismissed. The prosecution's evidence consisted of statements posted on a

Facebook page of Suu Kyi's party.

Defence lawyers argued that Suu Kyi and a co-defendant, former President Win Myint, could not be held responsible for the statements - which criticised the takeover and suggested in broad terms that it be resisted - because they were already in detention.

The former mayor of Naypyitaw, Myo Aung, was another defendant in the charge, which carries a maximum penalty of two years in prison and a fine. Win Myint was sentenced to a total of four years and Myo Aung to two years.

February's seizure of power was met by nationwide nonviolent demonstrations, which security forces quashed with deadly force. They have killed about 1,300 civilians, according to a detailed tally compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. With severe restrictions on nonviolent protest, armed resistance has grown in the cities and countryside, to the point that UN experts have warned the country is sliding into civil war.

The military took Suu Kyi into custody on the day of its takeover, and she has not been seen in public since then, though she has appeared in court in several of her trials.

Judgment on Suu Kyi's second count of violating coronavirus restrictions is scheduled for Dec 14. The maximum penalty for each count is three years' imprisonment and a fine.

US announces diplomatic boycott of Beijing Winter Olympics due to human rights abuses in China

(News Agencies) -The United States on Monday (December 6) announced a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. During a press briefing, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki informed that US government officials will not attend the upcoming Winter Games which are all set to take place in the Chinese capital next year. Although the athletes from the United States will still be

allowed to compete as the Biden administration has decided not to send any diplomats or officials to the Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games. The United States was mulling the decision for a while now to protest against reported instances of human rights abuses in China.

Psaki announced the decision while citing human rights

abuses as the reason behind the strong move. She said,

"The Biden administration will not send any diplomatic or official representation to the

100 per cent as we cheer them on from home," she added. The West has repeatedly slammed

Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games given the PRC's (People's Republic of China) ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses." "The athletes on Team USA have our full support. We will be behind them

China, accusing it of perpetrating "genocide" against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, northwest China.

Psaki said that sending official representation to the Winter Olympics, scheduled to be held between February 4 to February 20 in 2022, would signal that, despite China's "egregious human rights abuses and atrocities in Xinjiang," the Games were "business as usual".



Myanmar



3 feared dead as military truck rams into group of protesters

A witness told the protesters had been on his street for just two minutes when the military truck hit them, leaving three people lying motionless on the road

An army vehicle barreled into a peaceful march of anti-government protesters in military-ruled Myanmar's biggest city on Sunday, reportedly killing at least three people, witnesses and a protest organizer said. Sunday's march was one of at least three held in Yangon, and similar rallies were reported in other parts of the country a day ahead of an expected verdict in the first of about a dozen criminal cases against Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was toppled in a military takeover Feb. 1.

A video posted on social media showed a speeding small army truck heading into the marchers from behind. Voices can be heard, saying: "The car is coming ... Please help! It hit the children ... Oh! ... Dead! ... Run, ... run!" The video shows about a dozen people running from the spot. A witness told The Associated Press that the protesters had been on his street for just two minutes when the military truck hit them, leaving three people lying motionless on the road.

"About five armed soldiers got out of the vehicle and chased after the protesters," said the witness, who insisted on anonymity for fear of arrest. "They opened fire and also arrested young people who had been hit by the car. At least 10 people were arrested."

A worker for a local emergency rescue team, who also insisted on anonymity, said it brought two men and a woman, all in their early 20s and seriously injured, to a military hospital for treatment.

11 PROTESTERS ARRESTED

State television reported that 11 protesters had been

arrested, including three injured people.

Security forces have previously used cars to attack protesters since the army took power. They have also freely used live ammunition, killing about 1,300 civilians, according to a detailed list compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

The use of lethal force by the army and police has led to less large-scale street protests, which have been replaced by small, quickly organized marches that usually break up at the first sight of the authorities. Sunday's deaths in Yangon's Kyeemyindaing neighborhood could not be immediately confirmed.

Another witness said that when several people came to gather their items, three more military vehicles arrived and arrested several of them.

"At least four people, including two young girls who were crying near the shoes, were arrested," he said. "The soldiers told us to go inside or they would shoot us." A statement issued by the National Unity Government, an underground opposition group that has set itself up as the country's parallel administration, decried the incident, in which it said five people had been killed and more seriously injured.

"The randomized nature of the attacks - killing and maiming indiscriminately, is no accident. The intention of the junta is clear: create as much fear and panic as possible. Inflict as much pain, trauma, and suffering as they can, without a care as to who their victims are. Reinforce the message that anyone at any time can be killed, arrested, beaten, or wounded, simply

for being in the wrong place," said the statement, signed by the group's spokesman and minister of international cooperation, Dr. Sasa.

GROWING CALLS TO OUST MILITARY GOV'T

The statement reiterated the group's call for international action to help oust the military government.

About 30 people took part in the march, according to a member of Yangon People's Strike, the local resistance group that organized it. Media posted online showed the protesters carrying placards with Suu Kyi's image, and calling for the immediate release of the country's detained civilian leaders.

The organizer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the threat of arrest, said the group held such protests to keep the residents involved in the struggle against the military-installed government.

At the same time, militant urban guerrilla groups have attacked officials and planted bombs, while open armed conflict had engulfed rural areas, leading to a warning the country may slide into civil war.

Since she was detained by the military, Suu Kyi has faced charges from breaching coronavirus regulations to corruption. They're seen as contrived in order to discredit her and justify the military takeover.

The army claims it acted because last November's election was marked by widespread electoral fraud. Independent observers of the polls, won by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, say have seen no evidence justifying the army's claim.

US national park to cull around 900 bison to check spread of bacterial disease brucellosis



(News Agencies) -In the coming months, around 900 bison in Yellowstone National Park in the United States will be allowed to get hunted, quarantined or slaughtered, revealed the authorities.

According to a report, the order seems to have come to check the spread of a bacterial disease brucellosis from bison to cattle during winter.

If the right number of bison is

not achieved later in the winter months, another 200 may be captured or shot, the tribal, state and federal officials added. The Yellowstone National Park houses around 5,000 bison within its premises.

In the winters, Bison tend to leave Yellowstone and travel to Montana. Here, they risk spreading brucellosis to cattle.

Although brucellosis is rare in humans, it can be a big

problem for cattle. This disease can cause cows to abort their calves.

The park officials are looking to cull the bison as their population is higher according to the recent counts. It could stabilise after spring calving.

Native American tribes and the state of Montana will conduct bison hunts beyond the perimeter of the Yellowstone National Park.

US citizens continuously losing confidence in military, says new survey



The citizens of the United States seem to have been continuously losing confidence in the military, a new survey published recently said.

There is a need to conduct more research to understand the reasons for the development.

Since its launch in 2018, the Reagan Institute's national defence survey, for a third year in a row, found the confidence in the military to be declining regularly. Around 2,500 respondents belonging to different gender, age, political and other demographics were

included in the survey.

In it, there were questions about confidence in Supreme Court, law enforcement, media, Congress, presidency and other institutions as well.

From 2019, the confidence began to fell in the military. It fell from 70% to 63% in 2019 and then down to 56% earlier this year. In nine months, it dropped to 45%.

Rachel Hoff, the Reagan Institute's policy director, said, "... we've tested over the last three years a number of public institutions and institutional trust is declining overall in American society."

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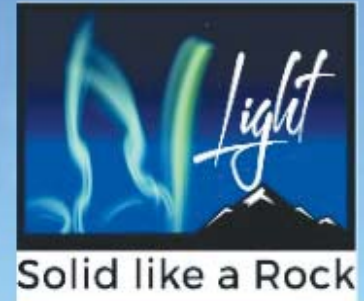
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US: Norwegian cruise ship with Covid-19 outbreak docks in New Orleans

A Norwegian Cruise Line ship with at least 10 passengers and crew members infected with Covid-19 docked in New Orleans

(News Agencies) -A Norwegian Cruise Line ship with at least 10 passengers and crew members infected with Covid-19 docked Sunday in New Orleans, where health officials said they were trying to disembark people without worsening the spread of the coronavirus illness. Local news outlets in New Orleans confirmed the Norwegian Breakaway had arrived in the city. The ship departed New Orleans on Nov. 28. The Louisiana Department of Health said in a late Saturday news release that over the past week, the ship made stops in Belize, Honduras and Mexico. Norwegian Cruise Line issued a statement that confirmed a "handful of Covid-19 cases among guests and crew." The company said all of the identified cases involved people without symptoms of the illness. "We are testing all individuals on Norwegian Breakaway prior to disembarkation, as well as providing post-exposure and quarantine public health guidance by the (US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention)," the company's statement said. "Any guests who have

tested positive for Covid-19 will travel by personal vehicle to their personal residence or self-isolate in accommodations provided by the company." The state health department - which is working with the

A Norwegian Cruise Line ship with at least 10 passengers and crew members infected with Covid-19 docked in New Orleans – Remove 'US on Sunday'

cruise line and state and local officials to contain the outbreak - said at least 10 people on the ship tested positive for Covid-19.

More than 3,200 people were on board the ship, officials said. Some disembarking passengers told WVUE-TV in New Orleans that they were notified about the positive cases on the ship, while others said they had no idea about the outbreak until being asked about it by a reporter. "We didn't hear of this until we kind of heard you talking a second ago," said Don Canole, a passenger from North Carolina.

"It would have been nice to have known. We would have taken maybe a few more precautions."

Passengers said they were tested for Covid-19 exposure on Saturday before disembarking Sunday.

The cruise line also gave passengers take-home rapid tests as they left the ship, according to WVUE.

Norwegian said it requires all passengers and crew members to have been vaccinated against the coronavirus prior to departure. The company said no changes to scheduled future sailings on the Norwegian Breakaway are currently planned, and the ship was scheduled to depart again Sunday evening.

Cruise ships were an early source of outbreaks last year at the start of the coronavirus pandemic as some ships were rejected at ports and passengers were forced into quarantine.

The CDC issued a no-sail order in March 2020, prompting a standstill that ended last June as cruise ships began to leave US ports with new health and safety requirements.

Bitcoin 'inventor' told to pay USD 100 million by US court

(News Agencies) -A computer scientist claiming to be inventor of Bitcoin has been told by a US court to pay USD 100 million. He was sued by his former partner, who is now dead. The partner had claimed half of the bitcoin cache with Wright. It is now worth about USD 4 billion. The estate of the departed partner has not been awarded half of the Bitcoin

cache worth billions but will now get USD 100 million in intellectual property rights. The Miami jury cleared Craig Wright on nearly all issues in the dispute, including the transfer of half of the 1.1 million Bitcoin in dispute. Jurors concluded that Wright was not liable for fraud. Wright and Dave Kleiman were formerly partners in W&K

Information Defense Research LLC.

"This has been a remarkable good outcome and I feel completely vindicated," Wright said in a video message, as quoted by Reuters.

"There are still more fights. We are going to make everything change: cryptocurrency to digital cash the way it's meant to be."

According to court papers, the 1.1 million Bitcoin had been mined by Satoshi Nakamoto, whose October 2008 white paper "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System" described a framework for what would become bitcoin.

Wright claimed in 2016 that he was Nakamoto, which was a pseudonym. The claim has been disputed. Kleiman's family

contended that he and Wright had been friends and business partners, but that Wright stole the bitcoin stemming from their relationship. In a statement, lawyers for W&K and Kleiman's estate said they were "immensely gratified" that the jury awarded the \$100 million in intellectual property rights, and help give the Kleimans "their fair share of what Dave helped create."



Witty and to the point, Dole embodied 'shared values' in Washington

When Bob Dole was the Senate majority leader, in the days when Republicans and Democrats at least tried to work together, he routinely walked across the second floor of the Capitol to meet the minority leader, Tom Daschle, in Daschle's office.

The reversal of protocol struck Daschle, who was new in the job, as gracious.

"I said, 'Bob, I'm really humbled that you insist on coming to my office; I'm the junior guy, so I should come to your office,' " Daschle, D-S.D., recalled Sunday after learning that Dole, 98, had died. "And he said, 'No, when I come to your office, I can always decide when the meeting is over.' "

The remark was classic Bob Dole - witty and straight to the point. And the story is a reminder of Bob Dole's Washington.

Dole, a Kansas Republican who overcame the poverty of the Great Depression and grievous injuries suffered during World War II, brought his prairie values and no-nonsense manner when he arrived in Washington in 1961. Over the next 35 years - through eight years in the House, 27 in the Senate and three failed attempts to win the presidency -

he operated in a city that was conducive to his instincts as a deal maker.

It is perhaps trite to reminisce about and romanticize a "bygone era" in Washington, when politicians of opposing parties fought by day and socialized with one another at night. There was plenty of partisanship - some of it every bit as bitter as what exists today - during Dole's time in the Capitol. But there also is no denying that the climate was

different, and the facts speak for themselves: Both as a senator and as the Republican leader, a job he held from 1985 until 1996, Dole reached across the aisle to help push through a string of bipartisan legislation, such as a bill to rescue Social Security, the Americans with Disabilities Act and a measure to overhaul the welfare system. Among his proudest accomplishments was teaming up with George McGovern, the liberal Democrat from South Dakota, to revamp the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly called food stamps. They continued to work together on

nutrition issues after they both left the Senate. "People believed in working with each other, and they kept their word," Sen. Patrick J. Leahy, D-Vt., who counted Dole as a friend, said Sunday. He recalled the close

Dole, a Kansas Republican who overcame the poverty of the Great Depression and grievous injuries suffered during World War II, brought his prairie values and no-nonsense manner when he arrived in Washington in 1961.

ties between George J. Mitchell Jr., the Maine senator who preceded Daschle as the Democratic leader, and Dole.

"When George Mitchell was leader, he'd go down to Dole's office two and three times a day and vice versa," Leahy said. "And I recall they both said the same thing about the other: 'He never surprised me.' You don't see that happen today."

Not only that, Mitchell and Dole had dedicated phone lines on their desks that let them communicate directly with the touch of a button, one aide recalled. The button came in handy in November 1994, when

Republicans won back the majority. Mitchell, who had not sought reelection, asked that Dole be alerted that he was coming to his office to congratulate him. Dole sent a quick message back that he

didn't want Mitchell to make the humbling trek and that Dole would instead go to his office, a gesture that Mitchell and his team regarded as decent and thoughtful. "He operated in a different era, when the idea of bipartisanship was very

much in vogue and politicians understood that in a democracy you simply have to work, not just with your fellow party members, but with people from the opposite side or the other side of the aisle," said Robert Dallek, the presidential historian. "He was masterful at that." That is not to say that Dole lacked sharp elbows or conservative ideology. Newt Gingrich, the former Republican speaker of the House who is widely credited with ushering in Washington's era of partisan warfare, said he worked closely with Dole to push through tax cuts and to defeat President Bill Clinton's plan for

universal health care. In an interview Sunday, Gingrich likened Dole to the current Republican leader, Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, an object of loathing for Democrats. "I think there's a lot of parallels between Dole and McConnell," Gingrich said. "They're both creatures of the Senate; they're both very, very good tactically. They both understand how to stop things, and they understand how to get things done."

Despite their partnership, Dole could not embrace Gingrich's bomb-throwing style. When Gingrich and House Republicans refused to pass federal spending bills, forcing the government to shut down in 1995, Dole took to the Senate floor to declare that he had had enough. "We ought to end this," Dole said at the time. "I mean, it's gotten to the point where it's a little ridiculous as far as this senator is concerned." In Washington, Dole and his wife, Elizabeth Dole - who later became a senator and ran for president herself - were seen as a power couple, the embodiment of the city's institutions. Robert Dole came to stand for World War II and the Greatest Generation, and an earlier era of dignity and honor.

Biden warns Putin of sanctions, military support for Ukraine if Russia invades

US officials said before the video conference that Biden would tell Putin that Russia and its banks could be hit with the toughest sanctions yet if it attacks Ukraine.

Sanctions, which one source said could target Russia's biggest banks and Moscow's ability to convert roubles into dollars and other currencies, are designed to dissuade Putin from using tens of thousands of troops massed near the Ukrainian border to attack its southern neighbour.

"Things we did not do in 2014 we are prepared to do now," US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters after the call, referring to Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

Biden was "direct and straightforward" with Putin, Sullivan said, telling the Russian leader that the United States and European allies would provide additional defensive capabilities to Ukraine, as well as beef up Nato allies in the region.

"There was a lot of give and take, there was no finger-wagging, but the president was crystal clear where the United States stands on all of these issues," Sullivan said.

The Kremlin said Putin told Biden it was wrong to put all the responsibility on Russia's shoulders for current tensions. Moscow has voiced rising irritation over Western military aid to Ukraine, a fellow former Soviet republic that has tilted towards the West since a popular revolt toppled a pro-Russian president in 2014, and what it calls creeping Nato expansion.

RUSSIA WANTS GUARANTEES

The Kremlin said Putin told Biden he wanted reliable, legally binding guarantees against Nato expansion further eastward and complained about Nato attempts to "develop" Ukrainian territory. Putin also called for guarantees that offensive strike systems would not be deployed in countries close to Russia, according to the Kremlin.

Both sides agreed to continue contacts and directed their teams to consult on questions about Ukraine.



Biden reiterated US support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the White House said, and called for de-escalation and diplomacy.

Russian TV footage showed Biden and Putin greeting each other in a friendly manner at the start of the virtual summit.

Both sides say they hope the two leaders can hold an in-person summit to discuss ties between the two nations, which have long-standing differences over Syria, US economic sanctions and alleged Russian cyber attacks on US companies.

A Ukraine official said after the talks Kyiv was grateful to Biden for his "unwavering support".

A US Congress defense bill released after the talks included \$300 million for Ukraine's military. Washington has accused Russia of massing troops near the border with Ukraine to intimidate an aspiring Nato member, suggesting it could be a repeat of Moscow's 2014 playbook, when it seized the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea from Ukraine. Moscow has questioned Ukrainian intentions and said it wants guarantees that Kyiv will not use force to try to retake territory lost in 2014 to Russia-backed separatists, a scenario Ukraine has ruled out.

For the Kremlin, the growing Nato embrace of neighbouring Ukraine - and what it sees as the nightmare possibility of alliance missiles in Ukraine targeted against Russia - is a "red line" it will not allow to be crossed.

WESTERN ALLIES ENGAGED
Leaders from Britain, the United States, France, Germany and Italy spoke on Monday and "agreed to stay in close touch on a coordinated and comprehensive approach in response to Russia's military build-up on Ukraine's

borders", the White House said. The Russian rouble weakened slightly on Tuesday, with some market analysts predicting the talks would de-escalate tensions and others saying that the US sanctions threat eroded hopes of finding common ground.

Should Russia invade Ukraine,

the Biden administration has discussed targeting Putin's inner circle but no decision has been made, a US source said.

Sanctions against the biggest Russian banks, and curbing the conversion of roubles into dollars and other currencies, were also being considered, another source said.

US officials have told members of Congress they have an understanding with Germany about shutting down the Nord Stream 2 pipeline if Russia invades Ukraine, a senior congressional aide said.

The United States has evaluated the possibility of curbing investors' ability to buy Russian debt on the secondary market, a measure that even if taken only

by Washington was seen as having a severe impact on Russia's government, according to a person with direct knowledge of the matter.

Washington could target the Russian Direct Investment Fund as well.

CNN reported that sanctions could include disconnecting Russia from the SWIFT international payment system used by banks around the world, an extreme step that would likely require coordination with allies. German Gref, the chief executive of Russia's top bank Sberbank, on Tuesday called that idea "nonsense" and "impossible to execute".

The White House declined to comment.

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India-Russia summit: 28 agreements inked; Afghanistan, Chinese incursions discussed

call about US-Russian relations, which have sunk to their lowest point since the end of the Cold War more than three decades ago. The Kremlin, which said before Tuesday's meeting that it did not expect any breakthrough, has denied harbouring any intention to attack Ukraine and has said its troop posture is defensive. of the intergovernmental commission on military and technical cooperation.

"2021 is also special for our Strategic Partnership. Today was the inaugural meeting of the 2+2 dialogue between our Foreign and Defence Ministers. This has started a new mechanism to enhance our practical cooperation," PM Modi said in his opening remarks ahead of the bilateral meeting.

He welcomed President Putin with a warm handshake and hug despite Covid restrictions. The Russian side was very particular about ensuring negative tests for all those present in the compound.

The India-Russia Joint Statement called 'Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity' said, "The completion of 5 decades of the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation and 2 decades of Declaration on Strategic Partnership is symbolic of the long standing and time-tested India-Russia relations characterized by mutual trust, respect for each other's core national interests and similarity of positions on various

international and regional issues."

While the meeting saw the signing of 28 agreements across sectors from defence to energy to space exploration, science and technology, heavy engineering, to trade and investment; but could not conclude the much anticipated 'Reciprocal Exchange of Logistical Support' (RELOS).

"Reciprocal Mutual Logistics Support Agreement has been put off this time. Did not conclude it during this visit but will conclude at the earliest," Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla said during the briefing that was held after the talks.

MILITARY PACTS

Among other deals, the two sides signed the 'Agreement on Program of the Military-Technical Cooperation from 2021-2031'. This 10 year Defence Cooperation Program outlines the ongoing defence cooperation and future possible cooperation between the two countries. Such agreements are being signed since 1994. The long awaited 'A-203 assault rifles deal' was inked at the end of bilateral talks between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart Sergey Shoigu, paving the way for the production of over six lakh rifles in Amethi.

"Agreements signed between India and Russia include the contract for procurement of 6,01,427 7.63x39 mm assault rifles AK-203 through Indo-Russia

Rifles Pvt Ltd and extension of the programme for military-technical cooperation from 2021-2031," government officials said. This visit had layers of political messaging as much as it did substance in terms of deliverables. The Indian and Russian side made their stance very clear on issues of convergences and divergences as also their shared views on certain global issues.

S-400 MISSILES DEAL

Regarding the threats of US sanctions on procurement of S-400 missiles, the Indian foreign secretary said, "S-400 is a legacy contract going back to 2018. Supplies have begun and will continue to happen. We follow an independent foreign policy and decisions are not taken in light of others."

Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov also said in his press briefing after the conclusion of the 2+2 dialogue, "S-400 does not just have symbolic meaning. It has important practical meaning for Indian defence capability. The situation is basically underway. The deal is being implemented."

He added, "We witness attempts on the part of the US to undermine this cooperation and to follow the American vision of how this region should be developed. Our Indian friends clearly and firmly explained that they are a sovereign country and they will decide whose weapons to buy and who will be their partner in various areas."

ON AUKUS AND INDO-PACIFIC On the issue of AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific, the Russian minister debunked these new formats calling them "non-inclusive" and violative of international norms.

"We expressed our concern about the activities taking place in this region under the slogan of Indo-Pacific strategy where we see non-inclusive blocs, the latest being AUKUS, a military-technical alliance between the United States, the UK and Australia and there are a lot of questions on their plans to supply or make in Australia nuclear-powered submarines. There are questions whether if they comply with IAEA norms and non-proliferation rules," he said.

ON REGIONAL SECURITY

India confirmed that issues such as Chinese incursions in Ladakh and the situation in Ukraine did come up during the conversations between India and Russia.

The leadership also discussed the evolving situation in Afghanistan, especially the security situation and its implications in the region, the current political situation, issues related to terrorism, radicalisation and drug trafficking etc.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has raised questions about the current model of global affairs, but the long-standing challenges remain even as new ones emerge, prominent among them are terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation. The situation in Afghanistan has wider repercussions, including for Central Asia. West Asia or the Middle-East continues to present hot spots," said External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar.

"The leaders reiterated strong support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan while emphasising respect for sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and non-interference in its internal affairs. They also discussed the current humanitarian situation and decided to provide immediate humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people," said the joint statement.

ON TERRORISM

The joint statement mentioned India's concerns of terror networks like Pak-based terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) finding space in Afghanistan. "The leaders emphasised that Afghanistan's territory should not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing any terrorist groups including ISIS, Al Qaeda, LeT etc. They reaffirmed their firm commitment to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including its financing, the dismantling of terrorist infrastructure and countering radicalization, to ensure that Afghanistan would never become a safe haven for global terrorism," the statement read.

Omicron drives world to restriction with high infection rate

international travellers. His sentiments were echoed by Supant Mongkolsuthree, the chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries. He said that the government and the public should not panic and move to a lockdown.

With 2022 looming in the corner, the Covid condition seems to improve around the world. As the experts expect, there should

come milder versions like Omicron with less infection rate. It can adjust the general population against the Covid spread. There are reported Covid pills from Pfizer and Glaxo in development. If the trends continue, 2022 will be the year when Covid may turn into common cold completely - less of a disease, more of a nuisance.

By Susmita Ghosh

Ready for use in Switzerland, the science behind Sarco machine that assists in suicide

The law in Switzerland does not specifically legalise assisted suicide, but it makes assisted suicide punishable only if "selfish motives" are proven in the act. Assisted suicide is not uncommon in Switzerland. According to Exit International, around 1,300 people died by assisted suicide in Switzerland in 2020 using the services of the country's two largest assisted suicide organisations Exit (separate from Exit International) and Dignitas.

Dr Philip Nitschke, the director of Exit International, is the brain behind the suicide pod.

WHAT IS SARCO SUICIDE CAPSULE?

The coffin-shaped machine is a 3D-printed capsule, which is activated from inside once the person gets into the capsule and lies down. The organisation said that once the person lies down they will be asked a number of questions and when they have answered, they may press the button inside the capsule, activating the mechanism in their own time.

Philip Nitschke said that they have developed two Sarco prototypes and the third is now being printed in the Netherlands. "If all goes well, the third machine should be ready for operation in Switzerland in 2022," he added.

HOW DOES SARCO SUICIDE CAPSULE WORK?

Exit International said that the capsule is sitting on a piece of equipment that will flood the interior with nitrogen, rapidly reducing the oxygen level to one per cent from 21 per cent. The person will feel a little disoriented and may feel slightly euphoric before they lose consciousness.

The entire process will take about 30 seconds and death will take place through hypoxia and hypocapnia, oxygen and carbon dioxide deprivation, respectively. "There is no panic, no choking, no feeling," Philip Nitschke said. The organisation is also developing a machine which will be equipped with a camera "that allows the person to communicate with the people outside. There needs to be a recording of the person's informed consent. This has been commissioned and the next step is to get it manufactured."

'DE-MEDICALISE THE DYING



PROCESS'

The organisation aims to de-medicalise the dying process,

which has largely been used in assisted suicide. The medical process includes ingestion of

liquid sodium pentobarbital. After taking the drug, the person falls asleep within two to five minutes before slipping into a deep coma, followed soon afterwards by death. "Currently, a doctor or doctors need to be involved to prescribe sodium pentobarbital and to confirm the person's mental capacity. We want to remove any kind of psychiatric review from the process and allow the individual to control the method themselves," Philip

Nitschke said in a statement, adding that his aim is to develop an artificial intelligence screening system to establish the person's mental capacity.

IS ASSISTED SUICIDE SAME AS EUTHANASIA?

No, both euthanasia and assisted suicide are two different things. According to UK's National Health Services (NHS) euthanasia is the act of deliberately ending a person's life to relieve suffering.

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Farmers' stir nearing end? SKM to take final call on ending year-long agitation

A union of nearly 40 farmers' outfits, SKM has been spearheading the agitation against the Centre's farm laws since November of last year. Reacting to PM Modi's decision to repeal the three farm laws, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha had written to the Prime Minister on November 21 with a list of six demands.

The central government (Home Ministry) on Tuesday sent a detailed proposal to the farmers' union days after the three farm laws were repealed through a Bill passed in both houses of Parliament.

Sources told India Today that the latest proposal by the central government was debated among farmer leaders at the Singhu border for nearly five hours on Tuesday. A number of SKM leaders expressed satisfaction over the Centre's call to take initiative to resolve the standoff. A majority of the farmers are willing to end the agitation, given the fact that their main demand - repeal of farm laws - has been met.

However, some factions, including the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) led by Rakesh Tikait are against the idea of

ending the agitation before a law guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) is put in place.

What is Govt's 5-point proposal
1. Both PM Modi and Agriculture minister Tomar have announced the formation of a committee for the regulation of MSP. The panel will comprise representatives of the central and state governments, farmers' outfits and agricultural scientists in addition to leaders of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha.

2. Governments in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana have agreed to immediately withdraw all cases against protesting

farmers once the agitation is brought to an end.

3. Both Haryana and UP governments have agreed in principle to provide compensation for the next of kin of farmers who reportedly died during the agitation. An announcement in this regard has also been made by the Punjab government.

4. Views of all stakeholders will be taken into consideration before the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 is tabled in Parliament.

5. The Government of India has passed a Bill to exempt farmers

from criminal liability in cases of stubble burning.

Farmers' 3-point counter to Govt proposal

1. Officials involved in drafting the three farm laws must be excluded from the committee on MSP. The panel must include only farmer leaders affiliated with the Samyukt Kisan Morcha.

2. Cases against protesting farmers must be withdrawn before a final decision is taken to end the agitation.

3. Government has agreed in principle but should first compensate the families of those farmers who lost their lives during the year-long stir.

Moving in right direction: Yogendra Yadav

Farmer leader Dr Darshan Pal told India Today, "The draft proposal has come from the Home Ministry and Home Minister Amit Shah. This is the beginning of dialogue between Centre and SKM."

"The central government has put up conditions before withdrawing cases against farmers, that is the main bone of contention," he added.

Swaraj India leader Yogendra Yadav, who has been at the centre of the stir, told India Today, "Things are moving in the right direction. We want to bring this agitation to a conclusion and we are approaching the issue with an open mind." "The final call on the future of the protest will be taken tomorrow, representatives of farmers' unions will meet tomorrow," he said on Tuesday.

India's top military chief among 13 killed in air force helicopter crash

en route from Sullur to the town of Wellington in Tamil Nadu, the IAF said.

The survivor, Group Capt. Varun Singh, is being treated for his injuries at the Military Hospital in Wellington, the IAF said.

The cause of the crash is not yet known. The IAF said "an inquiry has been ordered to ascertain the cause of the accident."

Rawat was appointed India's first Chief of Defense Staff in December 2019. Prior to that, he served as the Chief of Army Staff for close to three years. During a career spanning more than 40 years, Rawat commanded several battalions for the Indian army. He had received several awards for his service. He was first

commissioned into the Indian Army in December 1978.

A statement released by the Indian Army described Gen. Rawat as "a visionary who initiated far reaching reforms in the Indian military's higher defense organization" and his wife as "an epitome of grace whose presence will be missed by everyone."

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted of his deep anguish at the news of the 13 deaths.

"They served India with utmost diligence. My thoughts are with the bereaved families," he said. "Gen Bipin Rawat was an outstanding soldier. A true patriot, he greatly contributed to modernising our armed forces and security apparatus.



His insights and perspectives on strategic matters were exceptional. His passing away has saddened me deeply."

Indian President Ram Nath Kovind also offered his condolences to all the bereaved families and paid tribute to Gen. Rawat's service. "The nation has lost one of its

bravest sons. His four decades of selfless service to the motherland was marked by exceptional gallantry and heroism," he tweeted.

India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and Chief of Army Staff Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane visited Rawat's residence in New Delhi before his death was confirmed.

Singh later tweeted to express his condolences, saying his heart went out to the families of those killed.

"Deeply anguished by the sudden demise of Chief of Defense Staff Gen Bipin Rawat, his wife and 11 other Armed Forces personnel in an extremely unfortunate helicopter accident today in

Tamil Nadu. His untimely death is an irreparable loss to our Armed Forces and the country," he wrote.

"General Rawat had served the country with exceptional courage and diligence. As the first Chief of Defence Staff he had prepared plans for jointness of our Armed Forces."

Singh said he was praying for a speedy recovery for the officer who survived the crash. The Indian Army said the 11 military personnel who had died alongside Gen. Rawat and his wife would "also be equally missed by everyone."

CORRECTION: This story has been updated to correct the Indian President's name.



Republicans slam lame duck NYC mayor Bill de Blasio for 'devaluing citizenship' with his plan to give 800K non-citizens the right to vote in city elections from 2023

Critics are slamming the New York City Council and Mayor Bill de Blasio for committing to pass a law that will give about 800,000 non-citizens the right to vote in local elections starting in 2023.

Some state Republicans have vowed to 'use every legal method' to block the proposal, which they say 'devalues citizenship' by allowing non-citizens to vote in city races after just 30 days of living in the Big Apple.

The City Council is scheduled to vote on the plan, dubbed 'Our City, Our Vote,' this Thursday and Mayor Bill de Blasio said he is concerned about the legality of the plan, but won't veto it.

Nearly one in nine of the city's 7 million voting-age residents are considered among the non-citizens that will be granted voting rights under the law. This includes those authorized to work in the U.S. through programs such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or Temporary Protected Status.

The law does not include undocumented immigrants or people with temporary visas, however.

Qualifying noncitizens would be allowed to cast ballots in elections to pick the mayor, City Council members, borough presidents, comptroller and public advocates. They would still be barred from voting for U.S. president, members of federal Congress, state judges and state legislators.

The law would direct the Board of Elections to draft an

implementation plan by July, which includes voter registration rules and guidance for how noncitizens could register. It would also mandate that the Board of Elections create separate ballots for municipal races that prevent noncitizens from casting ballots in federal and state contests.

City Council Minority Leader Joseph Borelli, a Republican from Staten Island, and State Republican Committee Chairman Nick Langworthy vowed to fight the law's passage.

'It devalues citizenship, and citizenship is the standard by which the state constitution issues or allows for suffrage in New York state elections at all levels,' Borelli said. 'If they want to vote here, they should go through the process of becoming citizens, because that is how you show a real commitment to being a part of this city and this country,' he added at a news conference held last week outside of City Hall alongside Langworthy and a number of other critics of the plan. 'The stakes are too high, the problems we face in this city are too big, for us to give away the most quintessential right of American citizenship to someone who has only lived here for 30 days.'

Langworthy called the proposal 'perhaps the worst idea out of New York City Democrats ever' and

declared it 'unconstitutional, un-American and downright dangerous.'

'This not only will undermine the credibility of local city elections but will undoubtedly interfere with the integrity of state and national elections across New York State,' he added at the

Nearly one in nine of the city's 7 million voting-age residents are considered among the non-citizens that will be granted voting rights under the law. This includes those authorized to work in the U.S. through programs such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or Temporary Protected Status.

news conference.

'Democrats do not get to create their own brand of citizenship to manipulate elections. This is unconditionally unconstitutional and we will use every legal method to make sure it's stopped.'

Republican lawmakers from other states decried the plan and stressed that they would fight to prevent similar laws from occurring in their jurisdictions. Ohio Republican Representative Jim Jordan tweeted, 'First, Democrats let illegal immigrants in the country. Then, they don't subject them to #COVID19 mandates. Now, they're going to let them vote. Such a deal.'

Other Twitter users showed skepticism toward the plan with Twitter user the Quirky Pastor

writing, 'Ummm. I'm all for making voting easier but I'm not sure allowing non-citizens to vote in local elections is a good plan. We have enough problems with foreign entities meddling in elections.'

User Ty Harper-Freedmen was more outraged and wrote on

Twitter, 'This is the so-called voting rights the Dems were trying to trick us into fighting for! Non-citizens cannot vote in the US. It's a violation of federal law which is why the CBC has been pushing this on us and ignoring our demands!!'

While De Blasio said he would pass the bill,

he also questioned the constitutionality of it. Federal law says state and local governments can decide who can vote in their elections.

But the mayor also raised concerns about whether state lawmakers must first act to grant the city the authority to extend voting rights to noncitizens.

'Look, there's obviously an argument: We want people involved, we want to hear people's voices ... I still have a concern about it. Citizenship has an extraordinary value. People work so hard for it. We need people in every good way to want to be citizens,' de Blasio recently said in an interview with the television news program 'Inside City Hall.'

Eric Adams, alternatively,

repeatedly expressed support the move and tweeted late last month, 'I've long advocated for the rights of documented noncitizens to vote in New York's municipal elections. Immigrants make NYC stronger -- they should have a say in their government.'

Meanwhile, states like Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Arizona and North Dakota have all moved measures stating that only U.S. citizens can vote, which would pre-emptively block a plan like the one in New York City.

However, more than a dozen communities across the United States already allow noncitizens to vote, including 11 towns in Maryland and two in Vermont.

'I think that there's people in our society that go to sleep with so much fear of immigrants that they try to make an argument to disqualify their right to elect their local leaders,' said New York City Democratic Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez, who is originally from the Dominican Republic and was unable to vote until he gained citizenship.

'This is about whether we are living in New York City, we are contributing to New York City and paying taxes in New York City,' he added.

Anu Joshi, the vice president of policy of the New York Immigration Coalition, argued that giving non-citizens the right to vote could empower them to become more engaged in politics.

Such was the case for Eva Santos, 32, a DACA-recipient, was brought to the U.S. by her parents at age 11 as an unauthorized immigrant, but wasn't able to vote like her friends or go to college when she turned 18.

'It was really hard for me to see how my other friends were able to make decisions for their future, and I couldn't,' said Santos, who now a community organizer.

New York City, with more than 3 million foreign-born residents, would be a fitting place to anchor a national movement to expand immigrant voting rights, said Ron Hayduk, a professor of political science at San Francisco State University who spent years in New York advocating for noncitizen voting rights.

'New York, the home of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, prides itself on being the place of immigration,' he noted.

'So there's this question of what's the place of immigrants in our city - are they really New Yorkers, are they full New Yorkers in the sense of qualifying and deserving the power of the vote and to shape its political future?'

Hayduk argued that the answer should be a 'resounding yes.'



New York City expected to give some voting rights to noncitizens

Noncitizens would be able to vote in local elections, but not for president, members of Congress or in the state elections

New York City, long a beacon for immigrants, is on the cusp of becoming the largest places in the country to give noncitizens the right to vote in local elections.

Legally documented, voting-age noncitizens comprise nearly one in nine of the city's 7 million voting-age inhabitants. Under a bill nearing approval, some 800,000 noncitizens would be allowed to cast ballots in elections to pick the mayor, City Council members and other municipal officeholders.

Noncitizens still wouldn't be able to vote for president or members of Congress in federal races, or in the state elections that pick the governor, judges and legislators.

Little stands in the way of the effort becoming law. The measure has broad support within the City Council, which is expected to ratify the proposal Thursday. Mayor Bill de Blasio has raised concerns about the wisdom and legality of the legislation, but said he won't veto it.

The law would give an electoral voice to the many New Yorkers who love the city and have made it their permanent home, but can't easily become U.S. citizens or would rather remain citizens of their home nations for various reasons.

It would also cover "Dreamers" like Eva Santos, 32, who was brought to the U.S. by her parents at age 11 as an unauthorized immigrant, but wasn't able to vote like her friends or go to college when she turned

18.

"It was really hard for me to see how my other friends were able to make decisions for their future, and I couldn't," said Santos, now a community organizer.

More than a dozen communities across the United States currently allow noncitizens to vote, including 11 towns in Maryland and two in Vermont.

San Francisco, through a ballot initiative ratified by voters in 2016, began allowing noncitizens to vote in school board elections - which was also true in New York City until it abolished its boards in 2002 and gave control of schools to the mayor.

The move in Democrat-controlled New York City is a counterpoint to restrictions being enacted in some states, where Republicans have espoused unsupported claims of rampant fraud by noncitizens in federal elections. Last year, voters in Alabama, Colorado and Florida ratified measures specifying that only U.S. citizens can vote, joining Arizona and North Dakota in adopting rules that would preempt any attempts to pass laws like the one being considered in New York City.

"I think that there's people in our society that go to sleep with so much fear of immigrants that they try to make an argument to disqualify their right to elect their local leaders," said New York City Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez, who is originally from the Dominican Republic and was unable to vote until he became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

"This is about whether we are living in New York City, we are contributing to New York City and paying taxes in New York City," said Rodriguez, a Democrat.

De Blasio, though, has questioned whether the measure would survive a legal challenge. Federal law allows states and local governments to decide who can vote in their elections, but some, including the mayor, have raised concerns about whether state lawmakers must first act to grant the city the authority to extend voting rights to noncitizens.

"Look, there's obviously an argument: We want people involved, we want to hear people's voices," de Blasio recently said on the television news program "Inside City Hall." "I still have a concern about it. Citizenship has an extraordinary value. People work so hard for it," he said. "We need people in every good way to want to be citizens."

The minority leader of the City Council, Joseph Borelli, a Republican from Staten Island, said the measure will undoubtedly end up in court.

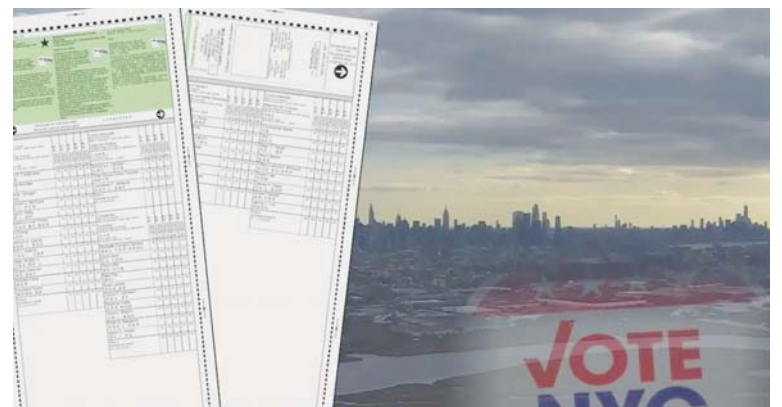
"It devalues citizenship, and citizenship is the standard by which the state constitution issues or allows for suffrage in New York state elections at all levels," Borelli said.

The proposal would allow noncitizens who have been lawful permanent residents of the city for at least 30 days, as well as those authorized to work in the U.S., including so-called "Dreamers," to help select the

city's mayor, city council members, borough presidents, comptroller and public advocate. The law would direct the Board of Elections to draw up an implementation plan by July, including voter registration rules

and provisions that would create separate ballots for municipal races to prevent noncitizens from casting ballots in federal and state contests. Noncitizens wouldn't be allowed to vote until elections in 2023.

800,000 non-citizens could vote under NYC proposal



Immigrants who have not become U.S. citizens would be allowed to vote for mayor, city council, and other New York City public offices in a bill that is sponsored by Democratic City Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez. "I feel that 2021 that New York City can be a role model," Rodriguez says.

City Council is scheduled to vote on the measure on Thursday. It would cover about 800,000 New Yorkers who have green cards and working papers. Councilman Rodriguez says, "This is a great opportunity that we have to give the dignity and respect to those hard-working individuals that have green cards, that have working papers who contribute to our city." But Republican State Senator Robert Ort, the Minority Leader,

is among those who oppose the bill.

"It shows a disdain for the constitution," Ort says. "It's going to incentivize people to know, hey you can show up in America, you can show up in New York City, you can vote. You can get a driver's license. You can get all the benefits of citizenship without having to go through the process of becoming a citizen."

Ort believes that allowing non-citizens to vote is a slap in the face to all immigrants who have become U.S. citizens.

"I firmly believe this will be struck down at some point in a court of law," Ort says.

Rodriguez responded by saying, "We welcome any lawsuit. We have the law on our side."



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GOP vows fight against 'dangerous' legislation that would let NYC non-citizens vote

Top New York Republicans pledged Thursday to thwart a City Council proposal that would allow non-citizens to vote in municipal elections, declaring they would take the legislation to court if signed.

"We are here today pledging action against perhaps the worst idea out of New York City Democrats ever - that's giving non-citizens the right to vote in local

expanding eligibility to vote for elected posts in the five boroughs to green card holders and recipients of deferred action.

The measure - supported by a veto-proof majority of the Council and set for a vote on Dec. 9 - would not allow non-citizens to head to the polls in federal or state elections.

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs has said that nearly

On Thursday, Councilman Joe Borrelli (R-Staten Island), who was recently selected to be the heavily Democratic body's minority leader, fumed that the measure violates the Empire State's constitution.

"The people in this building are doing something against the state constitution," he said.

"The truth is, this will influence our elections, and the people who are registered to vote, the 5.6 million registered voters, ought to have a say in this."

"If they want to vote here," he said of non-citizen New York City residents, "they should go through the process of becoming citizens because that is how you show a real commitment to being a part of this city and this country."

Republican state Attorney General candidate Michael Henry told The Post he would



file a lawsuit "immediately" against the law following de Blasio giving it a green light.

"I'm going to do it immediately after the mayor signs the bill," he said. "We've already been preparing a legal strategy. I'm going to sue, in my personal capacity."

"There will probably be other plaintiffs involved," he explained.

"I'm going to sue based on the constitutionality, and it's going to be done very quickly after the ink is dry on that bill."

During a subsequent press

conference, Rodríguez defended the legislation he's been spearheading.

"I feel that it is time, in 2021, that we as a city move forward being a role model to the whole nation. People pay taxes, people should have the right to decide who are the mayor, comptroller, public advocate, borough president, council member," he said. "This bill will give the dignity and respect to those individuals ... that we have a voice, to ask for more attention to improve safety in their community."



elections," state GOP Chairman Nick Langworthy said during a press conference outside City Hall.

"We are here to say we pledge action, any means necessary ... to stop this dangerous legislation undermining our elections," he vowed. "We will pursue every legal action to see that this dangerous law is struck down. "Besides being bad policy, it's unconstitutional, it's dangerous and un-American."

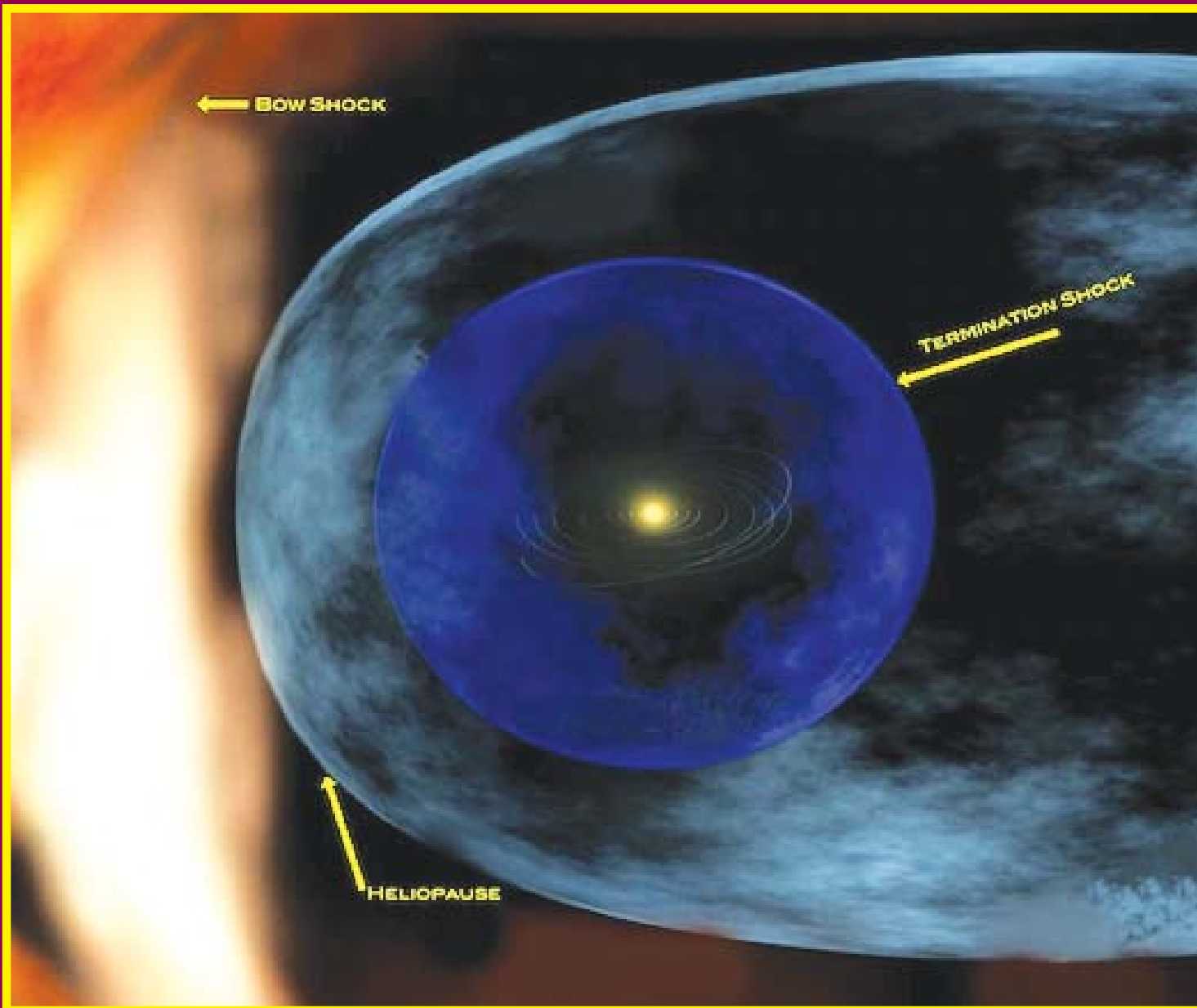
The bill, sponsored by Councilman Ydanis Rodríguez, would allow hundreds of thousands of non-citizens to participate in local elections by

800,000 New Yorkers would be covered under the legislation, including 622,000 green card holders.

Mayor Bill de Blasio has repeatedly expressed reservations about the bill, in part because of his stated belief that only state lawmakers have the authority to pass it. But importantly, he has vowed not to veto the policy should the Council approve it.

"To me, this is something that, again, I'm not sure is legally what a city can do," he said Nov. 23 during a virtual press briefing. "I think it's something the state government needs to do."





How does life exist on Earth? Thanks to a croissant shaped bubble protecting solar system

The protective bubble is known as the heliosphere and scientists have long been trying to understand this blanket covering the solar system.

Humans have discovered over 4,000 exoplanets across the vast reaches of the galaxy, but life exists on just one. It is not just a cosmic fluke, but an interplay of scientific phenomena that come together for our existence on Earth. Among them is a protective bubble covering the length and breadth of the solar system that saves Earth from dangerous cosmic radiations emerging from supernovas, the explosion of stars in the universe.

This protective bubble is known as the heliosphere and scientists have long been trying to understand this blanket covering the solar system. Astronomers believe the heliosphere extends far beyond our solar system, but despite the massive buffer against cosmic radiation that the

heliosphere provides Earth's life forms, no one knows the shape of the heliosphere-or, for that matter, the size of it.

"There are lots of theories, but of course, the way that galactic cosmic rays can get in can be impacted by the structure of the heliosphere-does it have wrinkles and folds and that sort of thing?" Merav Opher, an astrophysicist at Boston University says. Leading an international team of astronomers, Opher has constructed some of the most compelling computer simulations of the heliosphere, based on models built on observable data and theoretical astrophysics.

WHAT IS HELIOSPHERE?

According to Nasa, the sun sends out a constant flow of charged particles called the solar wind, which ultimately

travels past all the planets to some three times the distance to Pluto before being impeded by the interstellar medium. This forms a giant bubble around the sun and its planets, known as the heliosphere.

In a paper published in the *Astrophysical Journal*, the team reveals that neutral hydrogen particles streaming from outside our solar system most likely play a crucial role in the way our heliosphere takes shape.

The researchers found that the heliosphere is shaped more like a croissant or even a doughnut. They explain that neutral hydrogen particles come streaming through the solar system, which would make it impossible for the heliosphere to flow uniformly like a shooting comet.

"The model offers the first clear explanation for why the shape of

the heliosphere breaks up in the northern and southern areas, which could impact our understanding of how galactic cosmic rays come into Earth and the near-Earth environment," James Drake, an astrophysicist at the University of Maryland who is co-author of the study said.

The heliosphere is the edge of the solar system, where the impact of the sun's rays ends. So far only two man-made probes, Voyager 1, 2 have been able to cross that boundary and are currently travelling in interstellar space.

"This finding is a major breakthrough, it sets us in a direction of discovering why our model gets its distinct croissant-shaped heliosphere and why other models don't," Opher says.

A special chewing gum to reduce Covid transmission? Scientists say yes



A major reason behind coronavirus spreading rapidly across the world is its high transmissibility. The virus can easily be spread from one person to another. Strict measures like lockdown and social distancing had to be introduced because of this. The world waited with bated breath as vaccines were being developed. Time before introduction of the vaccines was tough indeed.

But a team of researchers including those from University of Pennsylvania has developed a chewing gum that they say decreases transmission of coronavirus from a patient to other people.

Coronavirus gains access to bodily cells by attaching to a protein called ACE2. The chewing gum has a copy of ACE2 protein in it. So in a way, it mimics bodily cells. This tricks coronavirus into attaching with chewing gum chemicals thereby sparing body cells.

A Covid patient has high concentration of coronavirus in his saliva.

The researchers took saliva samples from Covid patients and mixed them with powdered form of the gum. It was found that the virus attached to the ACE2 receptors present in the gum. The researchers say that 50 mg of the chewing gum reduced viral entry by 95 per cent.

Result of the study has been published in scientific journal 'Molecular Therapy'.

OMICRON

SARS-CoV-2

Omicron may have spread between 2 rooms at Hong Kong quarantine hotel: Study

The Omicron variant was first detected in Botswana on November 11 and three days later in South Africa, which has since then reported an increasing number of cases.

With the world yet to come to grips with the Omicron variant of the deadly SARS-CoV-2, a new study has raised concerns over the spread of the virus despite quarantine in a Hong Kong hotel. Two people staying across each other at a quarantine hotel have been confirmed to be infected by the Omicron variant.

According to a study published in the journal Emerging Infectious Diseases, both were fully vaccinated travellers and the transmission of the variant between the two rooms confirmed the concerns raised by healthcare experts over the fast transmission of the virus.

"We report detection of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 Omicron variant (B.1.1.529) in an asymptomatic, fully vaccinated traveller in a quarantined hotel in Hong Kong, China. The Omicron variant was also detected in a fully vaccinated traveller staying in a room across the corridor from the index

patient, suggesting transmission despite strict quarantine precautions," the study said.

According to the study, patient A showed a positive result for SARS-CoV-2 without symptoms on November 13, 2021 after which he was hospitalised and isolated, while patient B had mild symptoms develop on November 17, 2021. He showed a positive result for SARS-CoV-2.

Close-circuit television footage showed that both the infected persons never left their rooms nor

had any contact. This raises concerns that the virus could have reached from one to another through the airborne medium -- when the doors were opened for food collection or Covid testing, for example. "However, because these 2 cases-patients arrived 1 day apart, it is unlikely that they would be tested on the same day. Airborne transmission across the corridor is the most probable mode of transmission," the study added.

The Omicron variant was first

detected in Botswana on November 11 and three days later in South Africa, which has since then reported an increasing number of cases. The variant has since travelled to most of the countries in the world including India, where over 20 cases have been reported. South African scientists are warning that reinfections among people who've already battled Covid-19 appear to be more likely with the new Omicron variant than with earlier coronavirus mutants. Much

remains unknown about the new variant, including whether it is more contagious (as some health authorities suspect), whether it makes people more seriously ill, and whether it can thwart vaccines. Meanwhile, US health officials said Sunday that while the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is rapidly spreading throughout the country, early indications suggest it may be less dangerous than the delta variant, which continues to drive a surge of hospitalisations.





5 job portals to help you find the right job in 2022

Here are 5 job portals that will help you find the right job in 2022.

More than 22.7 million jobs losses were reported in April and May 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). However, as businesses are getting back to normal and hiring activity in India has been on an upswing, with August seeing an 89% year-on-year growth, hiring for certain roles too have picked up with increased movement across the market.

As the business continues to grow in the coming year, there will always be a requirement for talented experts to work for the companies. With this, there has been a growth in many job portals. It is estimated that the top job portals fill up more than 80% of the job vacancies filled. Thus, we collated the list of top Job Portals list to solve your work queries.

Here is a list of 5 job portals to help you in finding the right job 2022:

1. Indeed

Indeed is one of India's leading job portals which is used to search for jobs from across the world.

Indeed, through its Coronavirus Work Tools, it is also playing its part in providing employment during this pandemic.

Through the India Yes online work portal, you can check for

millions of jobs and upgrade your career.

2. Shine.com

Shine.com was established in 2008, at the very beginning of India's digital transformation, when the need for a transparent and effective online portal connecting jobseekers with recruiters was at its strongest. But while other job portals rushed in to address the apparent need-gap, the founding team at Shine.com conducted an in-depth study about the prevailing market challenges and the various ways that technology could be used to solve them.

This research-oriented, tech-driven approach has paid off handsomely; the portal is today offering more than 3 lakh+ jobs to its large pool of over 4.1 crore registered jobseekers and has 8,000+ employers associated with its platform, including leading companies such as SBI Life Insurance, Deloitte, Infosys, ICICI, Amazon etc.

3. Jobs for her

A platform that enables women to accelerate their careers by connecting them to jobs, community, mentoring, reskilling, inspiration and networking opportunities.

Incepted in 2015, it connects over 2.2 million job aspirants registered on the platform to 7500+ companies across the country.

The platform also offers mentorship for women looking to start/restart their careers.

The brand also has over 500+ reskilling partners to assist women in reskilling/upskilling themselves before they join/rejoin the workforce

4. Monster

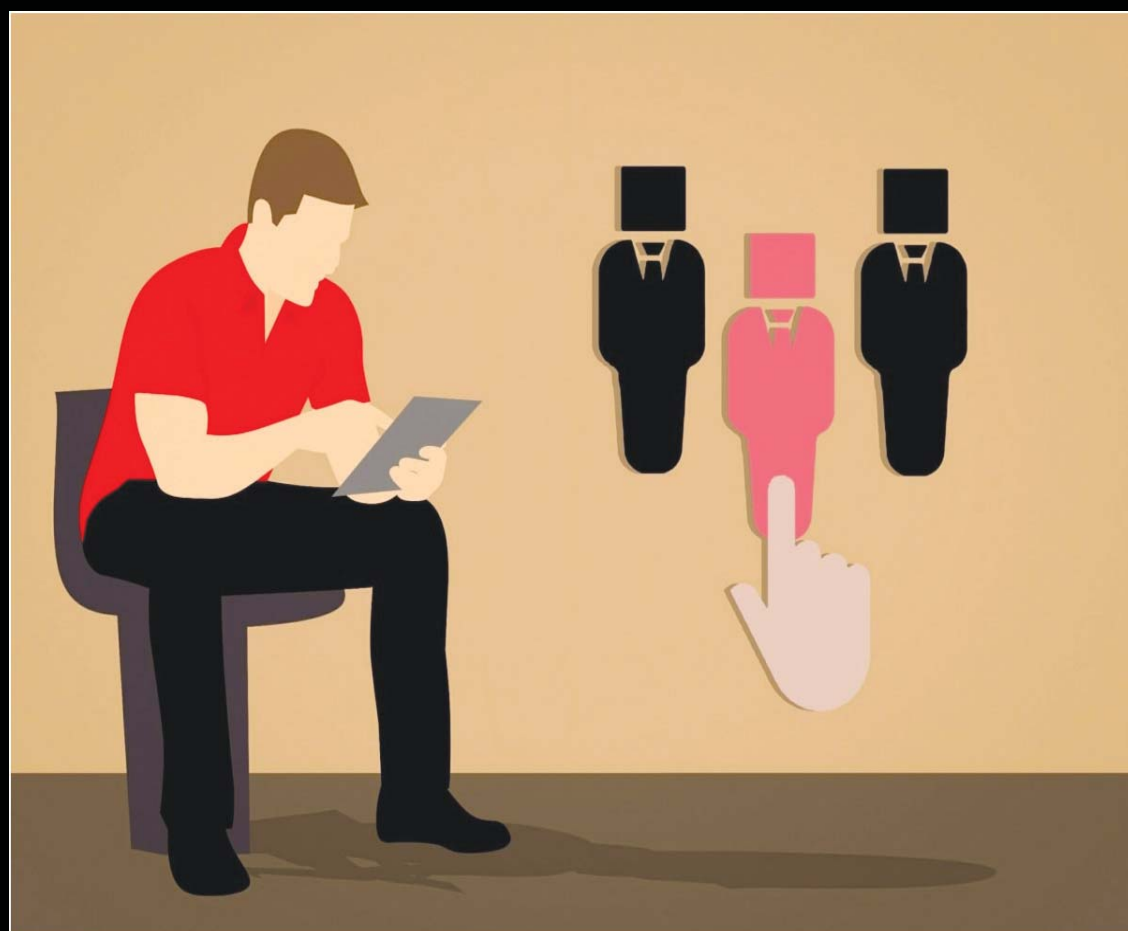
For jobseekers around the world, including Indian people, Monster is a well-known website. It has a well-developed and expanded

network of jobseekers and Indian recruiters.

There is a wide choice of options for both employers and future workers. It was created in 1999 through the merger of The Monster Board and Online Career Center. It is a subsidiary of Randstad Holding, a Dutch multinational human resource consulting firm, and is headquartered in Weston, Massachusetts.

5. Naukri.com

The platform offers multiple products like Resume Database Access, listings and Response Management Tools. With more than 4,75,000 jobs live at any point and over 60 million CVs, Naukri.com serviced over 76,000 corporate clients in 2017-2018. The company operates 56 offices in 42 cities in India and overseas offices in Dubai, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain.





Chinese boats spotted illegally hauling tuna in Indian Ocean

Chinese boats were spotted illegally catching tuna in the Indian Ocean, according to a new report by a Norway-based watchdog group.

Chinese squid vessels were documented using wide nets to illegally catch already overfished tuna as part of a surge in unregulated activity in the Indian Ocean, according to a new report by Norway-based watchdog group that highlights growing concerns about the lack of international cooperation to protect marine species on the high seas.

The report, published Wednesday by Trygg Mat Tracking, found that the number of squid vessels in the high seas of the Indian Ocean - where fishing of the species is not regulated - has exploded six-fold

since 2016.

The vast majority of the vessels sailing in the high seas off the coast of Oman and Yemen were flagged to China, whose overseas fleet, the world's largest, has been dogged by accusations of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing around the world.

Behind the surge is a lack of oversight and decades of overfishing that has pushed China's overseas fleet - officially capped at 3,000 vessels but possibly consisting of thousands more - ever farther from home. Unlike in other parts of the high seas, where countries come

together to jointly manage fishing grounds beyond any country's territorial waters, there's no such organization regulating the squid caught in the Indian Ocean.

TMT, relying on ship tracking data and an at-sea survey by Greenpeace International, found that all of the squid vessels were fishing with large nets - a practice considered far more harmful than using lures known as jigs because it generates bycatch of non-targeted species.

Among the other fish tangled in the vessels' nets and spotted on board by drones were large species of tuna - a slow-maturing, top predator whose

disappearance can indicate a dying ocean. None of the 341 vessels detected operating in the area this season was authorised to fish for tuna by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, or IOTC, which regulates the catch on the international waters.

Adding to the concerns, TMT said five vessels active in the area later called into a port in Pakistan with 30 metric tons of skipjack and yellowfin tuna, whose population the IOTC is trying to rebuild after years of overfishing.

Another indication of illegal fishing: a significant number of vessels were sailing dark,' with

their mandatory tracking device that gives a ship's position either switched off, transmitting intermittently, or providing false identifiers.

Some of the same Chinese vessels highlighted by TMT had a history of illegal activity in other parts of the world and were spotted on satellite drifting close to the boundaries of Oman and Yemen, where they did not have permission to fish.

They are also known to fish for squid in the Pacific Ocean off the west coast of South America, where The Associated Press this summer observed similar tracking device discrepancies.

Who after Gen Bipin Rawat as CDS? What are the criteria?

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat, his wife Madhulika Rawat, and 11 other persons who were on board IAF's Mi-17V5 chopper died after it crashed near Tamil Nadu's Coonoor.

The death of General Bipin Rawat in a chopper crash in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday throws up multiple challenges for the Narendra Modi government.

The government, particularly, the defence establishment has the immediate task of choosing the next Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

After a revamp of the military structure by the Modi government, the post of CDS is of pivotal importance. Being the first CDS, General Bipin Rawat was instrumental in bringing reforms in the armed forces.

That he was on the same page as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval was evident from the government's decision first to

elevate him to the position of the Chief of Army Staff in 2016, and then as the CDS just a day before his retirement as the Indian Army chief.

General Bipin Rawat had superseded two army officers when he was appointed the Indian Army chief.

His appointment as the CDS by December-end 2019 came naturally given his experience in handling tough situations in both the eastern and western sectors.

The government is likely to make the appointment of the next CDS in a week's time, according to reports. There are no fixed

rules for the selection of the CDS. It is principally a decision that the government takes keeping in mind the border security challenges.

The basic criteria for appointment of the CDS are simple. Any commanding officer of the three services - Indian Army, Indian Air Force (IAF) and Indian Navy - is eligible for the post of the CDS. The government has to take a

decision on the basis of merit-cum-seniority of the military officer. The person holding the post of CDS should not be older than 65. Of the three serving chiefs of the armed forces, Indian Army chief General MM Naravane is the senior-most officer in the military after General Bipin Rawat. General Naravane has a tenure till April 2022 as the Indian Army

chief. General Naravane took over as the Indian Army chief from General Bipin Rawat on December 2019. This also places him top on the list of seniority compared to two other chiefs of

the armed forces.

The two other service chiefs are relatively new in their positions. Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhary took over as the IAF chief on September 30 this year while Admiral R Hari Kumar became the Chief of Naval Staff on November 30.

Besides seniority, what also favours General Naravane for elevation to the post of the CDS is the border situation with China. From Ladakh in the western sector to Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern sector, China has been aggressively attempting to change the status quo unilaterally. This situation calls for a greater role of the Indian Army. The government may find itself tilting towards the army chief for the next CDS.





Mumbai Entrepreneurs Award 2021: True Gallants to build up healthy Business Ecosystem

Mumbai, popularly known as 'The Commercial Capital of India,' helps nurture the objectives of the entrepreneurs willing to establish themselves in their respective varieties of work.

A lot of Entrepreneurs harnessed organizations that have contributed to the economic growth of the region, moreso the entire country, in multiple ways. Hence it builds up a robust Business Ecosystem that keeps evolving every passing moment. This Entrepreneurs are the true Gallants, as they take up all the risks to create development and growth.

A Selective list of the Gallants, were honored at 'Mumbai Entrepreneurs Award 2021' ceremony held on Dec. 4, 2021 at a renowned hospitality venue. The activity being curated by Nova Realtime Solutions LLP, was presented by Insurance4life and Rotary Mumbai, District 3141 being the supporting partner.

A jury committee comprising of the leading luminaries in their fields. Ashith Kampani, Chairman-CosmicMandala15 Group, Daara Patel, Secretary

General - IDMA, Romit Barat, Co-Founder, - Akta Connect, Dinesh Chindarkar, Co-Founder - MediaMedic Communications, Manish K, Angel Investor and Kisalay P Vora, Artist-Visualiser-Painter, undertook an exercise to select the awardees from the nominations submitted. The process was based on the guidelines framed for the selection. It was criteria based and the awardees selected, represent multiple work categories.

The awardees have been chosen purely on the basis of merit, assessed on their current professional activities and contributions.

The award Recipients are -

Supriya and Sulekha Kamath of Anuradha Creations, Nikhil Singhi of Flin Technologies Pvt Ltd, Sameer Tejuja of Vunya Infotech Pvt Ltd, Gautam Harshadrai Desai of Akta Connect, Pradeep Rathi of 3i, Saugata Goswami of InvestArc Fintech Solutions Pvt Ltd, Satanik Roy of HyperXchange, Kapil Bhatia of Unirec, Rohit Chabria of Cebex Solutions Pvt Ltd, Sanjita Prasad of Amaltas Apparel

and Accessories Pvt Ltd, Prasad Bhide of Aaji Care Home Health Services, Rajiv Mistry of Ascent Meditech Pvt. Ltd, Mohit Solanki of Bloomgreen, R.B .Mohile of CLAIMS Pvt Ltd, Vanmala Jain of Kuprkabi, Quentin Desouza of QDnet Technologies Pvt Ltd, Hemant Jhaveri of Badshah Masala Pvt Ltd, Abhishek Agarwal of Rockstud Capital, Divya Advani of Sew You and Dr Rishi Dixit of Navigene Genetics Special achievement award for remarkable contribution is given to Ashok Mohnani of Ekta World Group and Rajendra Agarwal of Donear Industries Ltd.

Sanjay Kumar Garg, Co-Founder of Nova Realtime Solutions LLP, Rajendra Agarwal, D.G. Rotary Mumbai District 3141, Deepak Choudhary CEO, Insurance4life and Alope Sasmal, India Sales Head, FinIQ Consulting Pvt Ltd spearheaded the award activity as part of the organizing team. Udayan Basu, Reputed Investment Consultant was the advisor. Sunil Goenka CoFounder of Nova Realtime Solutions LLP conceptualized and executed the activity.

Six asteroids to zoom past Earth, fastest one to fly at a speed of 44,388 kmph

Weeks after Nasa launched the first mission to hit an asteroid, six Near Earth Objects (NEO) will fly past Earth on Monday as Nasa observes their movement and tracks their orbit. Asteroids 2021 VX7, 2021 WE1, 2021 WM2, 2021 XT1, 2021 WL2, 2021 XE will make a close approach to the planet on their way to the Sun.

While it is a significant event in the celestial world, Nasa has been tracking their trajectory and their orbit as they race towards Earth. The agency has not issued any advisories on the asteroids and are set to move past the planet without any harm. WHAT ARE THE SIX ASTEROIDS?

The biggest among the six asteroids is 2021 VX7 which is between 31-70 meters in diameter, followed by 2021 WM2 that is between 18-39 meters in size along with the 2021 WE1 that is 15-33 meters wide. 2021 XT1 is between 5.2- 12 meter, while asteroid 2021 XE is 4.7-11 meters in diameter.

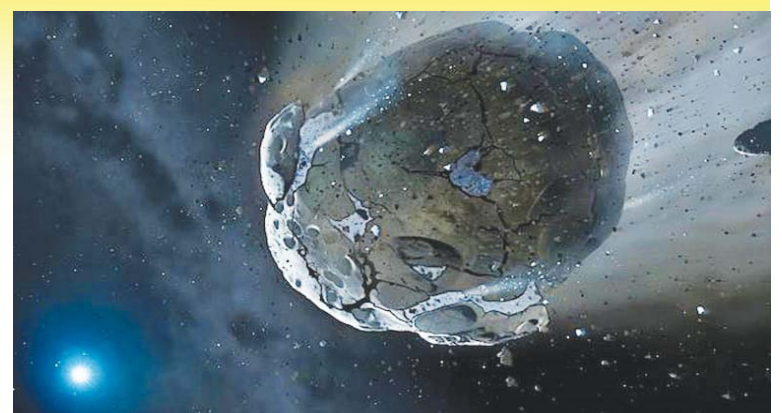
Asteroid 2021 WM2 will be the fastest among the six to make the close approach at a staggering speed of 44,388 kilometers per hour. The asteroid will fly past Earth from a distance of 31,50,531 kilometers.

POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS ASTEROID TO SWING PAST EARTH ON DEC 12

While the six asteroids zoom

past Earth today, a potentially hazardous asteroid will fly past the planet on December 11. Dubbed 4660 Nereus, the asteroid was first discovered in 1982 by FE Helin at the Palomar Observatory. The asteroid, which is 330 meters wide, will swing past Earth at a distance of 39,34,424 kilometers.

Nereus has been one of the most closely watched asteroids to fly past Earth for several missions, but was never selected. According to a 2008 study published by Nasa, "Nereus was an early target for the Nasa Near-Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) mission that visited asteroid Eros instead. It was also the original target for Japan's



Hayabusa spacecraft, which ultimately visited Asteroid Itokawa. Nereus was considered as a potential candidate for several other missions that never advanced beyond the planning stages." While the origin of the asteroid is not clear, it is speculated to

be from the main belt. In the 2008 study, scientists said that the orbit of Nereus is chaotic, heavily influenced by its frequent interaction with the Earth's gravitational field. Nasa has predicted its next rendezvous with Earth to be on March 2, 2031.

Petrol, diesel prices : Fuel rates remain unchanged



Across the country, petrol and diesel prices remained stable on Monday, December 6, 2021. Fuel rates have been stable for over a month after the central government decided to cut down petrol and diesel prices by Rs 5 and Rs 10 respectively by slashing the excise duty on the fuels.

However, last week, the Delhi government reduced value-added tax (VAT) on petrol from 30 per cent to 19.40 per cent. As a result, the petrol price in Delhi was reduced by Rs 8.56 per litre. A litre of petrol now costs Rs 95.41 in Delhi, while diesel rates - which were kept unchanged - stood at Rs 86.67.

Fuel rates in other cities:

In Mumbai, the prices of petrol and diesel stood at Rs 109.98 and Rs 94.14 per litre, respectively. The fuel rates are the highest in Mumbai, among all the four metro cities.

In Chennai, petrol costs Rs 101.40 per litre and diesel is available at Rs 91.43 per litre. On the other hand, petrol can be bought at Rs 104.67 per litre in Kolkata and diesel costs Rs 101.56 per litre. Rajasthan levies the highest VAT in the country, followed by Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar, petrol is retailing at Rs 112 per litre and diesel costs Rs 95.26 per litre.



Precious metals record dip on MCX| Check latest rates here

On Tuesday, both gold and silver were trading on the lower side of the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). Check the latest city-wise rates here.

The prices of gold and silver are trading on the lower side of the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. Witnessing a downfall of Rs 100 or 0.21 per cent, prices of gold futures maturing on February 4, 2022, stand at Rs 47,907 per 10 grams on the MCX.

Similarly, the market rates for silver stand at Rs 61,236 per kg after recording a marginal dip of Rs 68 or 0.11 per cent.

Gold and Silver prices on international market

As per Reuters, gold prices were flat on Tuesday, as a firmer dollar and U.S. Treasury yields weighed on its appeal and confined the metal to a tight \$4 range.

Meanwhile, spot gold was little changed at \$1,778.79 per ounce by 0130 GMT. U.S. gold futures were flat at \$1,780.00. The dollar index steadied, hanging on to an overnight jump made with U.S. yields as investors hoped early signs the Omicron variant may be mild will be proved correct.

As per the metal report, a stronger dollar raises gold's costs to buyers holding other currencies, while higher yields increase bullion's opportunity cost.

The SPDR Gold Trust, the world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund, said its holdings fell about 0.2 per cent to 982.64 tonnes on Monday from

984.38 tonnes on Friday.

Meanwhile, spot silver fell 0.2 per cent to \$22.31 an ounce. Platinum was steady at \$938.00 and palladium dropped 0.3 per cent to \$1,849.19.

Gold and Silver prices in major Indian cities:

CITY	GOLD (per 10 grams, 22 carats)	SILVER (per kg)
NEW DELHI	Rs 46,910	R s
61,200		
MUMBAI	Rs 46,510	R s
61,200		
KOLKATA	Rs 47,100	R s
61,200		
CHENNAI	Rs 45,000	R s
65,000		

Indian shares end up 1.5% higher as banking, metal stocks bounce back amid Omicron scare

Indian shares ended more than 1.5% higher on Tuesday, with banking and metal stocks bouncing back from the previous session after fears about the potential severity of the Omicron coronavirus variant eased.

At the closing bell, the blue-chip NSE Nifty 50 index (.NSEI) and the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex (.BSESN) were both up 1.56% at 17,176.60 and 57,633.65, respectively. Nifty 50 and Sensex witnessed their best day since Sept. 23.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease official, told CNN on Monday that it does



not look like Omicron has a "great degree of severity."

The Nifty bank index (.NSEBANK) inched up to close 2.47% higher, its best day since May 21. Shares of Kotak

Mahindra Bank (KTKM.NS) were up 2.8% and Axis Bank (AXBK.NS) up 3.6% after a report said the two private-sector lenders had emerged as top contenders to acquire Citi

India's retail assets.

"The rise in U.S. markets after Fauci's comments have been one of the major factors driving Indian stocks higher today... We expect the Omicron variant will help in keeping the interest rates low", said Siddhartha Khemka, head of retail research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

"The valuations for Indian equities have come down from their recent peaks and are no longer in the expensive zone and this is giving some comfort to investor sentiment".

The Nifty metal index (.NIFTYMET) closed 3.13% higher with shares of state-

owned miners Hindustan Copper Ltd (HCPR.NS) and National Aluminium Co Ltd (NALU.NS) rising 10.1% and 7.1%, respectively. As per a media report, India's disinvestment department will soon seek cabinet clearance on the sale of both companies. Heavyweights Tata Steel (TISC.NS) and state-run Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL.NS) were up 3.61% and 4.7%, respectively.

Investors are eyeing the Reserve Bank of India's policy decision due on Wednesday, where it is expected to hold interest rates.

Nasa to reveal who will fly to space next. Will there be an Indian in the mix?



Nasa has reviewed over 12,000 applications and will announce the selected candidates

Nasa is all set to announce the names of the newly selected candidates to train as astronauts for future missions ranging from venturing to the Moon and onwards to Mars. The American space agency has reviewed over 12,000 applications and will announce the selected candidates at 11:00 pm IST today.

Nasa said that the selected astronaut candidates will join Administrator Bill Nelson, Nasa Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy, Johnson Center Director Vanessa Wyche, and Flight Operations Director Norm Knight on the stage during the announcement.

The selected candidates will go through a rigorous two years of training with Nasa before graduating as astronauts. Following graduation, they will be assigned missions that include research aboard the International Space Station, launching from American soil on spacecraft built by commercial companies, and launching on deep space missions on Nasa's Orion spacecraft and Space Launch System rocket.

"The astronaut candidates will report to Nasa Johnson

in January to begin their training in spacecraft systems, spacewalking skills, teamwork, and other necessary skills," the agency said in a statement ahead of the announcement, adding that these women and men were selected after completing their applications in March 2020 for a chance to join Nasa's astronaut corps and take part in America's human spaceflight program. The requirement to apply for an astronaut position in the US space agency included US citizenship, a master's degree from an accredited institution in a STEM field that emphasised science, technology, engineering, or math, and at least three years of related experience, or at least 1,000 hours of pilot-in-command time in jet aircraft. The candidates also had to pass the Nasa long-duration flight astronaut physical. WILL THERE BE AN INDIA IN THE MIX?

While Nasa is quiet about the profiles of the selected astronauts, it remains to be seen if they have selected an American of Indian descent to be the next astronaut. Nasa has in the past selected US citizens

from Indian descent as astronauts, which include Kalpana Chawla, Sunita Williams and the latest being Commander Raja Chari, who was recently launched to the International Space Station.

Raja Chari was selected by Nasa to join the 2017 Astronaut Candidate Class, when he was Colonel select in the US Air Force, serving as the Commander of the 461st Flight Test Squadron and the Director of the F-35 Integrated Test Force. Chari has 2,500 hours of flight time in the F-35, F-15, F-16, and F-18, including F-15E combat missions in Operation Iraqi Freedom and deployments in support of the Korean peninsula.

Meanwhile, astronaut Sunita Williams was selected for the job in 1998 and is a veteran of two space expeditions. She is currently training for the first post-certification mission of Boeing's Starliner spacecraft the second crewed flight for that vehicle and her third long-duration mission aboard the International Space Station.

Did something crash on the Moon? China's Yutu-2 rover spots 'mystery hut' on lunar surface

China's Yutu 2 rover trundling on the Moon has spotted a mysterious outcrop on the far side of the lunar surface. The Chinese rover is in the Von Kármán crater on the lunar surface and spotted the cube-shaped object about 80 metres away from its location.

According to a diary of the mission published by Our Space, a Chinese language science outreach channel with the China National Space Administration (CNSA), the

rover had made the discovery in November this year when it was on the 37th day on the lunar surface. Dubbed "mystery hut" by Chinese scientists, the Yutu-2 team has expressed interest in visiting it and exploring the structure. According to reports, the rover is likely to spend the next two to three months in the region exploring the outcrop, which involves a treacherous journey to reach it in the first place. "This object pierced through the winding of the

skyline, like a "mysterious hut" that appeared out of thin air. There was a large "baby" impact crater beside it. Was it a home built by aliens after the crash landing? Or is it the pioneer spacecraft of the predecessors to explore the moon?" a loose translation of the diary published in Chinese read. "This thing is interesting! Let's go check it out!" scientists told pilots, who first reported the mysterious finding. China's Chang'e-5 mission had recently revealed

that the remnants of solidified lava brought back by the mission were a billion years younger than material acquired by other missions decades ago. Last December, the uncrewed Chinese probe touched down on a previously unvisited part of a massive lava plain, the Oceanus Procellarum or "Oceans of Storms". About 1,731 grammes of lunar samples were later retrieved and brought back to Earth. One of the main objectives of Chang'e-5, named

after the mythical Chinese goddess of the moon, was to find out how long the moon remained volcanically active.

WHAT IS YUTU-2 ROVER?

Yutu-2 was delivered on the far side of the Moon's surface by the Chang'e-4 mission to within the Moon's South Pole-Aitken basin in 2019. The rover is exploring the surface, which has never seen the Sun's light and scientists speculate it could have information about the early solar system and Earth.



Smallest planet outside our solar system detected where one year is just eight-hour-long

A quarter century after the first exoplanet discoveries, scientists have turned toward characterizing them more precisely to gain a deeper understanding of their variety.

Scientists have spotted one of the smallest planets ever discovered outside our solar system, a scorching-hot world a bit larger than Mars and just about as dense as pure iron zooming around its home star every eight hours.

The researchers said on Thursday they managed to detect the planet, located a relatively close 31 light years from Earth, and discern some of its important traits, illustrating the improvements in recent years in the ability to characterize smaller-sized planets beyond our solar system.

Scientists are eager to find exoplanets, as these alien worlds are known, that might harbor life. The newly discovered one, called GJ 367b, certainly could not, possessing ferocious surface temperatures and perhaps a molten lava surface on the side facing its star, they said. But other small exoplanets found and studied using the same methods might emerge as good candidates for nurturing extraterrestrial life.

A quarter century after the first exoplanet discoveries, scientists have turned toward characterizing them more precisely to gain a deeper understanding of their variety, from large gas giants akin to Jupiter to smaller rocky Earth-like planets where life might thrive. "Gas giants such as Jupiter, as we

know it, are not habitable because they have more extreme temperatures, weather, pressures and a lack of essential building blocks to support life," said astronomer Kristine Lam of the Institute of Planetary Research at the German Aerospace Center (DLR), lead author of the study published in the journal Science.

"Unlike gas giants, small terrestrial worlds like Earth are more temperate and consist of important ingredients, such as liquid water and oxygen, to harbor life forms. Although not all terrestrial exoplanets are habitable, searching for smaller worlds and identifying the type of planets they are can help us understand how planets were formed, what makes a planet habitable and if our solar system is unique," Lam added.

GJ 367b is the smallest exoplanet to be so precisely characterized. It has a diameter of about 5,600 miles (9,000 km) - compared to Earth's 7,900 miles (12,700 km) and the 4,200 miles (6,800 km) of Mars. Its mass is 55% that of Earth and it is more dense - near that of pure iron.

The researchers calculated that 86% of GJ 367b is composed of iron, with an interior structure resembling Mercury, the closest planet to our sun. They are wondering whether the planet lost

an outer mantle that once encased its core.

"Perhaps like Mercury, GJ 367b could have experienced an episode of giant impact which stripped away the mantle, leaving behind a large iron core. Or maybe the exoplanet is a remnant of a Neptune or super-Earth sized gaseous planet, where the atmosphere of the planet has completely blown away as the planet is blasted by a large amount of radiation from the star," Lam said.

It orbits very close to a red dwarf star that is smaller, cooler and less luminous than our sun - more than 99% closer than Earth's distance to the sun, according to astronomer and study co-author Szilard Csizmadia, also of the DLR's Institute of Planetary Research.

GJ 367b orbits its star once every 7.7 hours, placing it in a category of "ultra-short period" exoplanets that travel around their home stars in less than 24 hours. One side of GJ 367b probably faces its star at all times, with surface temperatures up to about 2,700 degrees Fahrenheit (1,500 degrees Celsius).

"This temperature is high enough to evaporate any atmosphere that GJ 367b might have had in the past, as well as melting any silicate rocks and metallic iron on the planet," Lam said.

Pakistani wildlife team cradles green turtles babies from beach to sea



A female turtle lumbers across the beach in Pakistan's bustling port city of Karachi late at night, looking for a place to lay her eggs. Waiting for her, staff from Sindh Wildlife watch quietly as the green turtle buries a hundred or more eggs in the sand before heading back out into the Arabian Sea.

Because of Covid-19 and movement restrictions, beaches around the world have been more sparsely inhabited by humans since last year. Sea turtles have taken the opportunity to return to their birthplaces in large numbers, reclaiming the now less-polluted, serene beaches to lay their eggs during the main September-November breeding season.

Green turtles seen on Karachi beaches jumped to 15,000 last year from 8,000-8,500 in 2019, Sindh Wildlife says. Lockdowns ended by the start of this year's season, but conservation experts still expect a large number of the endangered animals to visit.

Among the largest sea turtles and the only herbivores, adult green turtles can weigh more than 90 kg (200 pounds).

They nest in more than 80 countries and live in tropical and subtropical coastal areas of more than 140. Conservation group Sea Turtle Conservancy says there are 85,000 to 90,000 nesting females worldwide. The weather in Karachi can be conducive to egg-laying as late as January, and wildlife officials will keep up their vigil until then.

"The turtles have still had an ample egg-laying opportunity during this period. In this season, too, we have had a large number of turtles coming here. The result is that within a period of three months, we have nested around 6,000 eggs so far," said Ashfaq Ali Memon, who is in charge of Sindh Wildlife's Marine Turtle Unit.

As soon as the mother turtle leaves, staff hurry to dig out the eggs and move them to a three-foot (1-metre) deep pit in a hatchery until the babies hatch, 40-45 days later. The hatchlings are taken to the beach immediately and released into the sea.

The Sindh turtle unit has released 860,000 turtle babies into the Arabian Sea since being set up in 1970. Memon said 900 have been released so far this season.

Conservationists say that in the past, sea turtle populations were threatened by demand for their fat, meat and eggs, but in recent years loss of habitat due to pollution and land reclamation have also taken their toll.

How an Ayurveda-based lifestyle can keep the sniffles away

As the mercury drops and pollution levels rise, the cold winter breeze often brings with it sniffles and sneezes. Following an Ayurveda-prescribed lifestyle can help combat the seasonal flu and colds. Dr Nutan Pakhare, Ayurveda and Yoga consultant and founder of the AYG Academy in Mumbai shares tips on how to stay healthy as the season changes.

As a result of the pandemic, people have realized that immunity plays an important role in our wellbeing and in preventing serious disease. Ayurveda is extremely relevant today because it is not merely a science of medicine-it is a lifelong practice that combines mental and physical health to keep a person disease-free and healthy. Dinacharya (daily routine) and ritucharya (seasonal lifestyle) are the cornerstones of leading a life based on the



principles of Ayurveda. These again are based on three pillars-diet, discipline and lifestyle. Ayurveda offers a manual on how to live life.

Eat seasonal fruits and vegetables which are rich in 'prana' or life force because that energises the body and is

recommended as part of the diet. Avoid stale, processed or preserved foods which do not have prana. In several Indian cultures, eating stale or leftover food is prohibited in order to prevent digestive disorders that may arise from consuming food that's devoid of prana. Even as

a seasonal diet offers nutrition, Ayurveda has a treasure trove of rasayanas or rejuvenating herbs such as ashwagandha, amla and shatawari and formulations like chyawanprash and ginger tea that can boost immunity.

During the winters, the digestive

power is strong. As the external atmosphere is cold, the body retains heat inside and attempts to preserve it. Therefore, the internal digestive fire becomes stronger and can metabolise oils, fats and dairy products. Therefore, these should be included in the diet. A daily regimen plays an equally important role in boosting and maintaining good health and immunity in Ayurveda principles. It should not be sedentary or excessively strenuous. Ayurveda recommends plans that often include a mix of diet, yoga, meditation, massages and fasting for optimum health. A lot of bodily ailments arise from a weak digestive system which leads to a build-up of toxins. Regular fasting restarts the digestive system, cleanses the colon and promotes health.

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'Nice of Salman Khan to give us Atrangi Re': Aanand L Rai reveals story behind Akshay Kumar, Sara Ali Khan's film title



On Monday, Atrangi re cast and crew launched the music album of the film in Mumbai. During the conversation director, Aanand L Rai made a revelation about the title of the film. When host Mandira Bedi asked what was the inspiration behind the name.

Aanand replied, "The title was with us for a long time but jab hum register karne gaye toh pata chala ki woh Salman (Khan) bhai ke pass hai (The title of the film was with us for a long time but when we went to get it registered, we got to know that it was already registered by Salman Khan). But so nice of him he gave us the title."

Talking about working with Aanand on

the project at the music launch, Akshay Kumar said, "Aanand ji ko dekh ke mujhe apne bachpan ki yaad aati hai. Ek dum bachhe jaise hain. Rote hain, ladte hain, jhagadte hain, kuch smaay

sunte huye (Aanand Ji reminds me of my childhood. He is just like a kid, he cries, fights and gets angry and then he goes and eats food. He also spills food on himself while eating. I enjoy

watching him, listening to his stories)." The launch was attended by actors Sara Ali Khan, Akshay Kumar, along with director Aanand L Rai, composer AR Rahman, lyricist Irshad Kamil, scriptwriter Himanshu Sharma and T-Series' Bhushan Kumar.

The film was announced last year but the shooting was delayed due to Covid-19 pandemic. The shooting of the film was eventually completed on March 27, 2021. The movie will release on Disney+ Hotstar on 24 December 2021



ke liye gussa ho jaate hain baat nahi karte hain phir khaate hain peete hain. Khaate time khana shirt pe gira dete hain. Bilkul bachhe jaise hain. Maza aata hai inko dekh ke inki kahaniyan

Ahan Shetty and KL Rahul twin in white at event, actor's girlfriend Tania Shroff joins them



Actor Ahan Shetty was joined by his girlfriend Tania Shroff and cricketer KL Rahul at the launch of a cafe in Mumbai. Rahul is in a relationship with Ahan's elder sister Athiya Shetty. The event was also attended by cricketer Robin Uthappa and his wife Sheethal Goutham. While Ahan wore a white jacket over a white T-shirt and jeans, Rahul was dressed in a white T-shirt, black joggers and a baseball cap. They both wore white sneakers and posed together for the paparazzi. Tania, meanwhile, wore a black crop top with beige pants and canvas shoes.

Her hair was tied up in a bun. Earlier this month, Ahan saw the release of his debut film, Tadap. The film is a remake of the Telugu hit RX 100 and also stars Tara Sutaria. It has taken off to a good start at the box office and earned ₹15.77 crore in four days. As Tadap released, Rahul shared a photo of him and Ahan in a park and wrote, "No more looking back, my brother @ahan.shetty. So proud, only bigger things ahead for you. Tadap out now."

Incidentally, Athiya and Rahul made their red carpet debut as a couple at

the premiere of Tadap on December 1. Later, a picture from the event surfaced online, in which she could be seen resting her head on his shoulder.

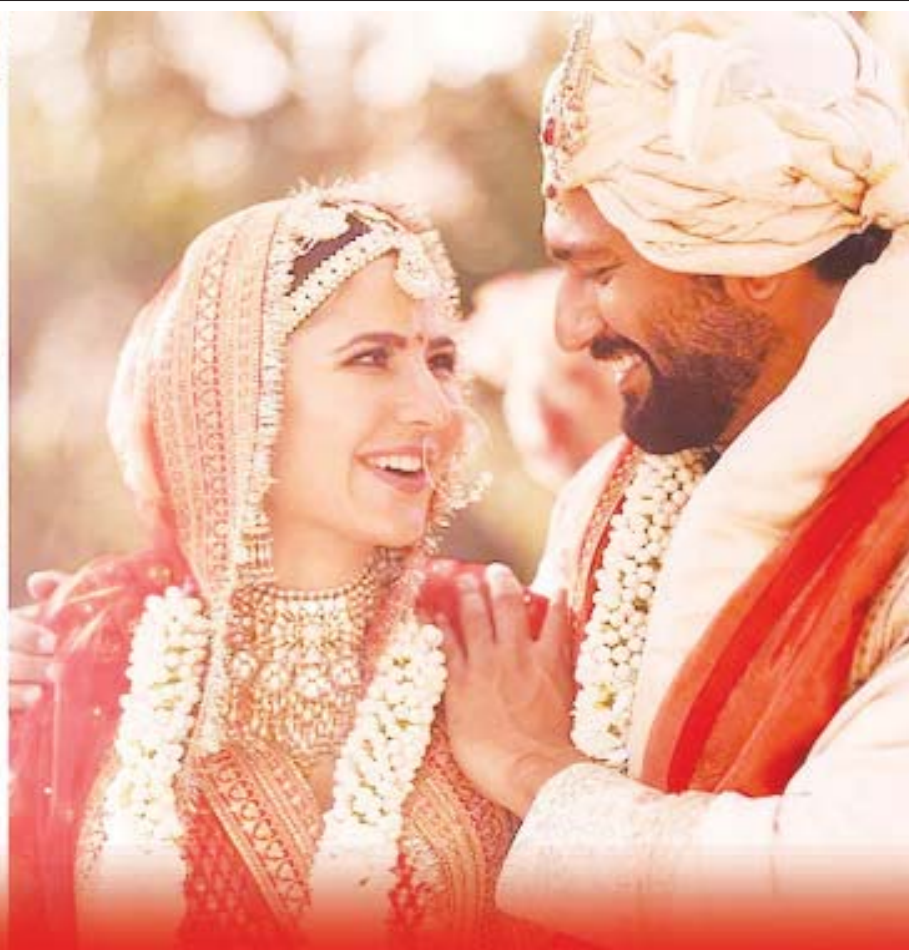
Talking to ANI, Ahan said that he was scared before he met Tadap director Milan Luthria for the first time. "I thought he is such a big director. He will be very controlling, very demanding and would have that sort of ego but he didn't have that at all. He was so open and friendly and even on the sets... throughout the whole process, he let Tara and I take control of our characters," he said.

Still figuring my way out in this glamour world: Rohit Saraf



Five years, ago, Rohit Saraf made his film debut with Alia Bhatt starrer Dear Zindagi. But the actor admits he hasn't been able to completely understand the workings of the film industry yet. He tells us,

"I'm still figuring my way out in this glamour world. I still have a lot to learn. Honestly, I've been lucky to have had a chance of working with some impeccable and renowned artists early in my career. So, I would like to believe that filmmakers have always taken me seriously as an actor and graced me with great opportunities." He believes that 2021 got him a lot of exposure due to his body of work. "While I'm getting used to the nature of work here, I think the recent year introduced me to a new world, and I'm glad to have gained more recognition," Saraf shares.



Katrina Kaif's custom-made veil is a tribute to Vicky Kaushal's Punjabi roots

Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal finally released pictures of their wedding on Instagram. The couple's wedding was held at the Six Senses Fort Barwara in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, on Thursday.

The wait is over as Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal finally released pictures of their wedding on Instagram, much to the delight of their fans and followers. The couple's wedding was held at the Six Senses Fort Barwara in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, on Thursday.

For her wedding, Katrina stunned in an elaborate red lehenga choli from the shelves

of ace fashion designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee. The lehenga featured heavy gold embroidery. The dupatta also had zari work all along the border. The embroidered choli featured a plunging V-neckline. Katrina's veil was a tribute to Vicky's Punjabi roots. Her veil was custom-trimmed with handmade kiran in hand-beaten silver electroplated in gold.

The actress accessorised her

look with heavy kundan jewellery - a necklace, earrings, matha patti and nath. Katrina's makeup was subtle with a dewy base, jet black kohl and nude lipstick, all rounded off with a red bindi.

Vicky Kaushal was handsome as ever in a white sherwani. The actor's wedding outfit was also designed by Sabyasachi. His sherwani featured floral motifs all over. He also wore matching

headgear that featured a stone-studded brooch. Vicky also wore a layered green haar to complete his wedding look.

We loved the red choora that Katrina wore - a set of bangles traditionally worn by a bride on her wedding day.

"Only love and gratitude in our hearts for everything that brought us to this moment. Seeking all your love and blessings as we begin this new journey together,"

Vicky said in the caption of his post as he shared the set of images on Instagram.

Katrina also posted a set of pictures from her wedding: Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal got married in the presence of close friends and family. Their pre-wedding festivities commenced on December 7 at Six Senses Fort Barwara resort in Rajasthan.

Abhishek Bachchan says he left Boston as Amitabh Bachchan was in financial crisis: 'Didn't know how he'd get dinner'

Abhishek Bachchan, who studied acting in Boston, recalled that he flew back to India to morally support his family during a financial crisis. Abhishek said he wanted to be with his father Amitabh Bachchan during the difficult time. Amitabh, while speaking to Abhishek over phone when he was in Boston, had asked him to sharpen his Hindi once he was back. The actor entered Bollywood in 2000 with JP Dutta's film *Refugee* after he returned to India. Speaking on *The Ranveer Show* podcast, Abhishek opened up about the time when he was in university in Boston and Amitabh had to



be worried about providing dinner for the family back home in Mumbai. "I spoke to my father from college. My family was going through a difficult financial time. And I just felt as a son, although I might not have been qualified at

that point of time, that I needed to be with my father. Even for moral support. He's a big guy on moral support. He likes to know his family's around." "I said I can't be here sitting in Boston when my father doesn't know how he's going

to get dinner. And that's how bad it was. And he said it publicly. He had to borrow money from his staff to put food on the table. I just felt morally obliged to be with him. I called him and I said 'You know dad, I think I want to leave college half-way and comeback and just be with you, try and help you in whatever way. At least you'll know that your boy is next to you and he's there for you'," added Abhishek. Revealing Amitabh's response, the Bob Biswas actor said: "So he was very emotional, he was very touched, he was very moved but he ended the rest of the conversation, which obviously I won't dive up, but he said: 'I'm glad.' Because I mean we'd already

discussed that I would like to be an actor. He said, 'I'm glad, come back. Bhasha sikho (learn the language). Because Shakespeare doesn't work over here. And I realise that today, that I was very out of context.' In a recent episode of *Kaun Banega Crorepati* 13, Amitabh said that he decided to start hosting the quiz show two decades ago as he was out of work: "My circumstances were such that I wasn't getting any work in films at that time, but after the show premiered, the kind of reactions I received made me believe that the world changed for me," he had said on the 1,000th episode of the show.



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Story on
Pages
37-40

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