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Biden orders government to study digital dollar, other cryptocurrency risks



(News Agencies) US President Joe Biden has asked the government to assess the risks and benefits of creating a central bank digital dollar, as well as other cryptocurrency issues. US President Joe Biden will sign an executive order on Wednesday requiring the government to assess the risks and benefits of creating a central bank digital dollar, (Contd. on page 33)

Assembly election 2022 Result



**Full Story
on Page
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Russia-Ukraine war

India may rank among worst hit emerging economies, say analysts

The oil price spike is also expected to pressure the government to lower fuel levies and reduce the burden on consumers. That in turn would dent revenues, narrowing the room for capital spending needed to boost growth.



Gulf Medical University to provide free seats, scholarships to Indian students returning from Ukraine

Gulf Medical University in UAE has decided to provide free seats and scholarships to displaced Indian students returning from war-hit Ukraine amid the Russian invasion



(News Agencies) Offering major relief to Indian medical students returning from war-ravaged Ukraine amid the Russian invasion, the Gulf Medical University (GMU) in UAE has stepped forward to provide the

displaced students with free seats and scholarships based on the merit criteria and admission policy of the university. Dedicated admission counsellors from the university will help students make

well-informed decisions regarding their remainder course, assistance in paperwork and smooth transfer, providing visa and accommodation facilities.

(Contd on page 35)



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Jill Biden Praises Indian-American Entrepreneur On Silicon Valley Visit

The First Lady, during a closed-door meeting with some of the top Democratic Party leaders in Silicon Valley, mentioned the name of Indian-American entrepreneur from Silicon Valley, Ajay Jain Bhutoria, and his contributions



contributions. During the meeting in Silicon Valley last week, she recollected her visit to Mr Bhutoria's house during the presidential election campaign. According to those present at the meeting, Dr Biden praised Mr Bhutoria for his strong support for President Biden and the Democratic Party. Mr Bhutoria, a finance committee member of the Democratic Party, said that President Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken and their team are doing great work in leading and keeping the NATO allies together in support of Ukraine. President Biden has united the world, he said. "Russia is quite literally shut off from the global economy now. Major credit

cards, including Visa and Mastercard, transactions suspended, flights soon to be grounded, most Western airspace restricted, Western businesses pulled out, domestic businesses sanctioned. Russian banks are banned from SWIFT.

"The Russian Ruble and the Stock market continue to crash. Germany halted certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, Russian athletes cannot compete in several sports activities," he said. "Swiss Bank putting sanctions and asset freeze applying to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov...are definitely putting immense

pressure on the Russian economy in both immediate short term and long term," he added. Mr Bhutoria said the Ukrainian people are showing the world what it means to fight for freedom. "Their bravery and heroism are inspiring. Moscow has to pay the price for its unconscionable actions. The attack on Kharkiv is a war crime and now is the time for NATO allies to list Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. This will further shutdown the Russian economy and punish Putin and his team for war on Ukraine," he said. Dr Biden is a community college educator, a military mother, a grandmother, and bestselling author. She has also served as Second Lady of the United States from 2009–2017.

(News Agencies) public. The First Lady, during a Washington: US First Lady Dr Jill Biden has praised the role of an eminent Indian-American tech entrepreneur and community leader in taking the message of the Biden administration to the

"Be Ready To Leave," Indian Students In Ukraine's Sumy Told By Embassy

As evacuation from the shelling-battered city remains a challenge for Indian authorities, the students said they could no longer cope with the nail-biting cold, depleting food supplies and having to melt snow to get drinking water

(SAI Bureau) New Delhi: Indian students, who have been stranded at a medical college hostel in embattled northeastern Ukrainian city of Sumy, have been told to "be ready to leave on short notice" by the Indian Embassy. A team is stationed in Poltava - nearly a three-hour drive from Sumy - to coordinate the safe passage of the students, it said on Sunday. As evacuation from the shelling-battered city remains a challenge for the authorities, the students said they could no longer cope with the nail-biting cold, depleting food supplies and having to melt snow to get drinking water.

"The main challenges in evacuation of Indians from Sumy are ongoing shelling, violence and the lack of transportation," the foreign ministry said on Saturday. Earlier on Saturday, the stranded students shared videos saying they have decided to take a risky journey to the Russian border that's 50 kilometres away. They, however, decided to stay put after the

government contacted them and advised to "avoid unnecessary risks". India has been urging Ukraine and Russia to impose a ceasefire in the northeastern Ukrainian city to



evacuate around 700 students, trapped after Russian troops invaded Ukraine in late February, with their evacuation hampered because of fighting in the area, foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi told reporters. India has brought back over 15,920 of its nationals in 76 flights under mission "Operation Ganga" which was launched on February 26.

PM Committed To Bringing Back Every Indian From War-Hit Ukraine: Union Minister

The Union housing and urban affairs minister reached Delhi with the last batch of Indian students from Hungarian capital Budapest

(SAI Bureau) New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to bringing back every Indian stranded in war-hit Ukraine, said Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, who returned to Delhi on Monday after completing the evacuation process of 6,177 Indian students through Hungary. Mr Puri was one of the four Union ministers sent to countries bordering Ukraine to coordinate evacuation of Indians. "With the last flight yesterday, we completed evacuation of 6,177 students from Hungary. Five flights yesterday were almost full. A big thank you for all assistance we received from the government of Hungary, specially Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Interior and other agencies," he tweeted. The Union housing and urban affairs minister reached Delhi with the

last batch of Indian students from Hungarian capital Budapest.

"Delighted to reach Delhi with the last batch of our 6,177 students from Budapest. There is joy, enthusiasm and relief as youngsters reach home and will soon be with their parents and families. Deeply privileged to be of help," he said in another tweet. Interacting with students on board the plane, Mr Puri said, "I want to assure you that the few are remaining there. We are in touch with them and the control room. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is personally committed to bringing each one of you back home." Prime Minister Modi on Monday spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and sought his "support" in evacuation of Indian students stuck in northeastern Ukraine's Sumy city.

Indian-Origin Shop Manager Jailed For 28 Months For Cheating On Lottery Win In UK

Narendra Gill checked the numbers of a lucky dip lottery ticket for 81-year-old Frank Gowland at the shop she managed at a shopping centre in the northern England city of Leeds



she lied to him and kept the ticket stub for herself, 'The Sun' newspaper reports.

Gill, a mother of two, admitted in court to theft and fraud and was jailed on Friday at Leeds Crown Court for 28 months, where the judge told her she had been "unbelievably cruel".

"People who work in these places need to hear the message that you cannot abuse your position when it comes to dealing with millions of pounds. Trust is so important," the judge said. Camelot, the company which runs the EuroMillions lottery in the UK, became suspicious when Gill called them and they heard her serving customers. The 51-year-old admitted she worked at GT

News at the White Rose Shopping Centre in Leeds but said she was gifted the ticket and did not know where it was bought. Camelot alerted police, who identified Gowland via CCTV footage, spotting him and his wife Sue, 77, getting into their car. "The whole thing has been quite a shock," Gowland, a retired delivery man, was quoted by the newspaper as saying. "I had no clue I'd won until I got this phone call. I couldn't hear what the PC (police constable) was saying so I asked my stepson to deal with it. He said to the officer, 'You must be joking, this is a scam'. Anyway, it wasn't and I had won," he said. Gowland, who wears a hearing aid, remembers giving

Gill eight tickets to check.

She told him they were all losers and handed him back crumpled tickets, not realising she had switched them. The thrilled father of two eventually received his rightful winnings in November last year. It has certainly helped to make life a bit more comfortable. I bought a new car, cleared all my debts and gave quite a bit of money to my family. We've had new carpets and we're getting a walk-in shower for my wife, who has health problems," he said. When approached by 'The Sun' before her sentencing, Gill said: "Obviously, I wish I had not done it. It was stupid." The shop branch where she worked has since closed.

(News Agencies) London: An Indian-origin shop manager who tried to cheat an elderly man out of his lottery winnings of 1,30,000 pounds has been sentenced by a UK court to 28 months in prison. Narendra Gill checked the

numbers of a lucky dip lottery ticket for 81-year-old Frank Gowland at the shop she managed at a shopping centre in the northern England city of Leeds. Gowland's ticket had the requisite winning numbers but

Indian-American Among 2 Charged In US For Crypto Laundering

According to the indictment, Boyd and Mehtani are alleged to have conspired with others to receive victim money derived from a variety of fraud schemes and launder the proceeds through cryptocurrency

(News Agencies) Washington: Two persons, including an Indian-American, have been indicted by a US court for their roles in a cryptocurrency money laundering scheme, the Department of Justice said. Lois Boyd, and Manik Mehtani -- both from Virginia -- face up to 20



years in federal prison. According to the indictment, Boyd and Mehtani are alleged to have conspired with others to receive victim money derived from a variety of fraud schemes and launder the proceeds through cryptocurrency.

They allegedly have routinely structured deposits to avoid transaction reporting requirements and to conceal

the nature and source of the criminal proceeds, the Department of Justice said. They allegedly exchanged the criminal proceeds for cryptocurrency and directed the cryptocurrency to wallets under the control of their foreign co-conspirators, it said. In August 2020, Boyd and Mehtani travelled to Longview, Texas, where they attempted to exchange more than USD 4,50,000 for Bitcoin. They were temporarily detained and the money was seized. In the course of their operation, Boyd, Mehtani, and their co-conspirators allegedly laundered more than USD 7,50,000, the federal prosecutors alleged.

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Kashmiri girls breaking barriers and shining at international sports arena



(News Agencies) The Kashmiri girls in sports are breaking the barriers and making a mark in the international sports arena. From winning gold medals to securing a position of judge at the Asian games, Kashmiri sportswomen are at the forefront. Just a few years ago, there were hardly any women in sports in the valley but now the whole scenario has changed. Girls are picking up sports as their careers and excelling in the field.

Recently, Sadia Tariq from Srinagar became the first

Indian girl to get a Wushu World Gold Medal at the Moscow Wushu Stars event. At 15, Sadia is a two-time Junior National Wushu Championship gold medalist as well. Sadia has been lauded by everyone across the country. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted about her win. Hundreds of students are inspired by Sadia and her win. "My parents are my inspiration. I think other girls will take up sports after my win. My father has been continuously getting calls from so many people that they want their girls to participate

and take up sports. It's such a great thing that girls are wanting to take up wushu as their careers. There is so much change and I don't want to take credit for it but it's all because of my parents who stood by me through my journey." said Sadia Tariq, World Gold Medallist in Wushu.

Another such story is of Olympic-level women's kayaking-canoeing player Bilquis Mir, she is the first Kashmiri woman to be chosen as a judge at the upcoming Asian Games in China. Bilquis Mir, 33 is the first water sports coach from Srinagar and was the first Olympic-level women's kayaking-canoeing player from the Kashmir region.

When Bilquis started her sports career, there were very few women from Jammu and Kashmir who were playing for the state. She paved a way for many girls across the Union territory to take up sports as their careers. Bilquis appreciates the increasing number of girls joining

different sports in the valley. "It's sending a positive message as when I started there were very few girls in the sports and now, I see that changing, Girls should trust and have faith in themselves, Girls always face more hurdles in their careers, but my message would be that talent will never die. Keep working hard, where there is a will there's a way. I had a dream of becoming a judge at an international sports event as I saw a very small number of girls in decision-making teams at these events. I always say men in those teams, and I promised myself that I would be in the decision-making team of these events. After the Olympics, if there is any big event, it's the Asian games. I am extremely happy about this." said Bilquis Mir, Director Water Sports, Jammu Kashmir.

The Sports council department in the valley has seen a sharp rise in female registrations in various sports.

From water sports to winter sports to other games, women are proving to be better at every sports activity.

"It's changing a lot. There were few girls in sports in Kashmir a few years back but now there are so many. 50 percent of the total at sports facilities is now girls. The girls do it better than boys. Sadia won a gold medal; she is a golden girl for us. She is an inspiration for other girls in the UT. I am sure we will have many girls like Sadia in the future." said Mushtaq Zargar, Coach, Sports Council.

The young girls in the Kashmir valley are so inspired by these sportswomen that they are taking up sports and are also winning medals for the state. One such girl is Nabeela Khan, who recently won a silver medal in water sports. She has drawn her inspiration from Bilquis Mir. "I won a silver medal at Himachal in a tournament.



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Committed to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, says India at UN

India said on Monday that it will continue to coordinate with "stakeholders" towards enabling expeditious provision of much needed humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people

(News Agencies) India said on Monday that it will continue to coordinate with "stakeholders" towards enabling expeditious provision of much needed humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, days after New Delhi sent shipments of wheat to Afghanistan. "India's approach to Afghanistan has always been guided by its historical friendship with its people. We remain steadfast in our commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan," India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Geneva Ambassador Indramani Pandey said.

Pandey was speaking at the interactive dialogue with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on her report on strengthening promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan during the 49th Session of the Human Rights Council.

He said that in this endeavour, India has already supplied 4000MT of wheat, half a million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin, 13 tonnes of essential lifesaving medicines and winter clothing for the Afghan people. These consignments were handed over to the UN specialised agencies the World Health Organisation and the World Food Programme.

"As Afghanistan's largest regional development partner, India would continue to coordinate with other stakeholders to work towards enabling expeditious provision of much needed humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people," he said.

Last week, India had sent the second shipment of 2,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan via Pakistani land route as part of its humanitarian aid to Afghan people who have been reeling under food shortage.

India despatched the first consignment of 2,500 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan through the Pakistani land route on February 22 and it reached the Afghan city of Jalalabad on February 26. Fifty trucks carried



the consignment.

India had sent a proposal to Pakistan on October 7 seeking the transit facility to send 50,000 tonnes of wheat to the people of Afghanistan via Pakistan and it received a positive response from Islamabad on November 24. Following the Pakistani response, both sides were in touch to finalise the modalities

for the transportation of the shipments.

Pandey said that as a contiguous neighbour and a long-standing partner of Afghanistan, recent developments in the war-torn country, particularly the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation continues to be a matter of concern.

"India also shares concerns

of the international community on issues related to providing immediate humanitarian assistance; ensuring formation of a truly inclusive and representative government; combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities," Pandey said.

Bachelet said that the

Afghan people face a "devastating humanitarian and economic crisis" that severely impacts their enjoyment of the full range of economic, social and cultural rights. More than half the population now suffer extreme levels of hunger. An increase in child labour, child marriage and the sale of children has been observed.

"Following the Taliban's takeover, international sanctions that previously applied to the Taliban effectively became sanctions on the country's de facto governing authorities. The resulting liquidity crisis contributed to a full-scale economic crash. "In addition, non-humanitarian aid to the country on which almost every essential state function had been dependent prior to the Taliban take-over was suspended. The Security Council's adoption in December of Resolution 2615, to exempt humanitarian transactions is a welcome first step to enable work that could save millions of lives," she said.

International Women's Day: PM Modi interacts with winners of Nari Shakti Puraskar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday interacted with the winners of Nari Shakti Puraskar on the eve of International Women's Day

(News Agencies) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday interacted with the winners of Nari Shakti Puraskar on the eve of International Women's Day. Twenty-eight awards, 14 each for 2020 and 2021, will be given to 29 women in recognition of their exceptional work towards the empowerment of women, especially the vulnerable and marginalised. The awards will be given by President Ram Nath Kovind on International Women's Day which is on March 8. During the interaction, the prime minister praised the awardees for their work, adding they are contributing to society as well as the country.

He said while their work has a spirit of service, what is also clearly visible in their work is innovation. There is no sector now where women have not made their mark and made the country proud, Modi remarked. The prime minister said the government is

committed to working towards realizing the potential of women and is framing policies through which such potential can be identified. It is important to ensure that all women become part of decision making at a family level which will follow as a result of their economic empowerment, he mentioned. Modi talked about his government's focus on 'sabka prayas' during the celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. He also said that the success of the efforts of the government, like vocal for local, is dependent on the contribution of women. The awardees thanked the prime minister for giving them such a platform where they are being heard by the top leadership of the country. They added that getting an opportunity to meet the prime minister and to interact with him was a dream come true for them and also praised the initiatives of the government. The awardees include

Merchant Navy captain Radhika Menon, social entrepreneur Anita Gupta, organic farmer and tribal activist Ushaben Dineshbhai Vasava, innovator Nasira Akhter, Intel-India head Nivruti Rai, down syndrome affected Kathak Dancer Saylee Nandkishor Agavane, first woman snake rescuer Vanita Jagdeo Borade and mathematician Neena Gupta. The Nari Shakti Puraskar is an initiative of the Women and Child Development Ministry to acknowledge the exceptional contribution made by individuals and institutions and to celebrate women as game-changers and catalysts of positive change in society. The recipients are from fields such as entrepreneurship, agriculture, innovation, social work, education and literature, linguistics, arts and crafts, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), disability rights, merchant navy and wildlife conservation.

SEC issues Model Code of Conduct for MCD election

The Delhi State Election Commission, on Tuesday, issued a Model Code of Conduct for the upcoming municipal corporation elections in the state

(SAI Bureau) The Delhi State Election Commission (SEC) on Tuesday issued a Model Code of Conduct for the municipal corporation elections in the state slated to be held in April. The dates for the MCD polls are expected to be formally announced soon.

The basic guidelines to be followed by the candidates include allowing rallies and meetings only in earmarked places and with prior permission from district administration.

No rallies and public meetings should be held between 8 pm and 8 am, similar to a campaign curfew on campaign days. Additionally, Nukkad Sabhas (meetings) will not be allowed on public roads, round



abouts or public streets or corners. Political parties and candidates have been advised to conduct their campaign through

digital/virtual/ media platforms / mobile-based mode as much as possible. A maximum of five persons including the candidate,

excluding security personnel, if any, shall be allowed to do door to door campaigning. Delhi has three municipal corporations --

North, South and East Delhi municipal corporations and the last civic polls were held in April 2017. The State Election Commission (SEC) in Delhi had recently announced de-reservation of existing wards and reservation of new wards on rotation for specified categories. While the North Delhi Municipal Corporation and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation have 104 wards each, the East Delhi Municipal Corporation has 64 wards. All three corporations are currently ruled by the BJP, the party which has also been controlling all the civic bodies since the trifurcation of the erstwhile unified Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) in 2012.

PM Modi asks Putin to hold direct talks with Ukraine President Zelensky

(SAI Bureau) Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi has called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold direct talks with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky in a phone conversation on Monday.

The proposal for direct talks is in "addition to the ongoing

negotiations between their teams", according to Indian government sources. During the talks that lasted for 50 minutes, Russian President Putin briefed Prime Minister Modi on the status of negotiations between the Ukrainian and Russian teams. This is the third



Tamil Nadu student joins Ukraine forces to fight Russian invasion

A 21-year-old student from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu has joined the Ukrainian paramilitary forces to fight Russia. He had applied to join the Indian Army



(SAI Bureau) Sainikesh Ravichandran, a 21-year-old student from Coimbatore district

in Tamil Nadu has joined the paramilitary forces in Ukraine to fight against Russia. Officials visited his residence and inquired his parents about it. They discovered that he had applied to join the Indian Army but was rejected. In 2018, Sainikesh went to Ukraine to study at the National Aerospace University in Kharkiv. He was to complete the course by July 2022. In the midst of the ongoing war in Ukraine, his family had lost communication with Sainikesh. After seeking the embassy's help, they were able to contact Sainikesh. He informed his family that he had joined the Ukrainian paramilitary forces to fight against Russia.

telephonic call between the two leaders in the last two weeks. Both had held the first telephonic chat on 24th February, the day Russia began its invasion of Ukraine. According to Indian govt sources, PM welcomed the Russian announcement of a ceasefire and the establishment of humanitarian corridors in parts of Ukraine, including Sumy. Russia had announced a ceasefire for a humanitarian purpose that comes into effect at 12.30 PM IST.

The announcement came

after President Putin's talks with French President Macron and has been announced for four places: Kyiv, Mariupol, Sumy, and Kharkiv. The key focus during the talks was on the safe evacuation of Indian nationals as PM stressed "the importance of safe evacuation of Indian citizens from Sumy at the earliest".

Around 500 Indian students are stranded in Sumy. President Putin had assured Prime Minister Modi of all possible cooperation in their safe evacuation. India has launched

'Operation Ganga' to evacuate its nationals from the war-torn country that have crossed over to neighboring countries like Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova. Under 'Operation Ganga', so far 76 Flights have brought over 15920 Indians back to India. Out of these 76 flights, 13 flights landed in the last 24 hours. In all, over 21000 Indians came out of Ukraine since the issuance of the advisory in January 2022. Out of these, 19920 Indians have already reached India.

Delhi-born Nishant Batra is helping NASA set up cellular network on Moon

(SAI Bureau) Cellular network and wifi is something we take for granted these days. Entire repository of humankind's knowledge or that one TikTok video is literally at our fingertips. Things have gone ahead so quickly that sometimes it makes us wonder whether there is any new frontier left. But there are plenty. NASA is setting up cellular network on Moon and Indian-origin Nishant Batra is spearheading the effort. Batra is working as Chief Strategy and Technology Officer (CSTO) at smartphone maker Nokia. He holds an MBA from INSEAD, a master's degree in telecommunications and a master's degree in computer science from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, and a bachelor's degree in computer applications from Devi Ahilya University in India.

Prior to joining the telecommunications major, Batra worked at Veoneer in Sweden, as Executive Vice President and Chief Technology Officer. He had also spent 12 years at Ericsson holding several positions. Batra is based in Espoo, Finland, and has lived and worked in Asia, Europe and the US.

At Nokia, Batra's responsibilities include managing technology architecture and pioneering research at Nokia Bell Labs whose innovations will be used to build and deploy the first ultra-compact, low-power, space-hardened, end-to-end LTE solution on the lunar surface in late 2022. NASA is looking to regain its presence on the lunar surface with its uncrewed Artemis mission slated for launch in May this year and crewed mission in 2026.

In October last year, the US

space agency selected Nokia as a partner to advance "Tipping Point" technologies for the Moon, deploying the first LTE/4G communications system in space and helping pave the way towards sustainable human presence on the lunar surface. For the mission, Nokia has also partnered with Intuitive Machines to integrate the groundbreaking network into their lunar lander and deliver it to the lunar surface. The network will provide critical communication capabilities for many different data transmission applications, including vital command and control functions, remote control of lunar rovers, real-time navigation and streaming of high definition video - while containing power, size and cost.

These communication applications are all vital to long-term human presence on the

lunar surface. The network will self-configure upon deployment and establish the first LTE communications system on the Moon. Nokia's lunar network has been specially designed to withstand the harsh conditions of the launch and lunar landing, and to operate in the extreme conditions of space. This is not the first space collaboration for Nokia's Bell Labs. In 1962, Bell Labs and NASA launched into orbit Telstar 1, the first communications satellite capable of relaying TV signals between Europe and North America. In 1964, Bell Labs researchers and future Nobel laureates, Arno Penzias and Bob Wilson, discovered the cosmic microwave background radiation left over from the Big Bang, confirming the now predominant theory on the origins of the universe. Indian-origin Nishant



Batra working as Chief Strategy and Technology Officer (CSTO) at smartphone maker Nokia is helping NASA to build the first ever cellular network on the Moon. Batra joined Nokia as CSTO and a member of the Nokia Group Leadership Team in January 2021. He holds an MBA from INSEAD, a master's degree in telecommunications and a master's degree in computer science from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, and a bachelor's degree in computer applications from Devi Ahilya University in India.

NSE ex-CEO Chitra Ramkrishna sent to 7-day CBI custody



(SAI Bureau) A court in Delhi on Monday (March 7) sent former managing director and chief executive officer of National Stock Exchange (NSE) Chitra Ramkrishna, to 7-day CBI custody. Ramkrishna has been arrested in India's National Stock Exchange co-location case.

After hearing arguments from Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), special judge Sanjeev Aggarwal passed the order. The probe agency had sought her 14-day custodial interrogation.

The CBI arrested the accused on Sunday after her anticipatory bail application was dismissed by the court on Saturday. In its application before the court, the CBI alleged that the electronic devices recovered are being analyzed and would be used for conducting further examination of Ramkrishna. It alleged that she was evasive and has continuously misgued the Investigation Officer and gave

wrong statements.

The CBI alleged that her custodial interrogation was needed to unearth the criminal conspiracy and the role of other NSE officials and brokers in the company. "She is also required to be confronted with co-accused

Anand Subramanian, who is already in police custody of CBI, to understand the magnitude and scope of the criminal conspiracy. She is also required to be confronted with digital evidence available on record," the agency told the court. The CBI further submitted that the material already collected in the present case show that Ramkrishna in conspiracy with Subramanian had improperly hired him by coercing the HR department of NSE.

"Thereafter, she in conspiracy with Subramanian influenced the officials of NSE to facilitate him in having access to important decision making processes of the

NSE. During the same period M/s OPG Securities was gaining undue advantages in NSE by logging into secondary server," it said. The CBI said that during Ramkrishna's tenure as Joint MD, NSE, the co-location was conceptualized and implemented. Ramkrishna was appointed as MD and CEO of NSE on April 1, 2013. "Investigation has revealed that during the period 2013-16 after accused Chitra Ramkrishna took over as MD & CEO of NSE, OPG Securities Pvt Ltd was allowed to connect to secondary server of the COLO-TBT Dissemination server for over 300 trading days causing it undue

gain," it said.

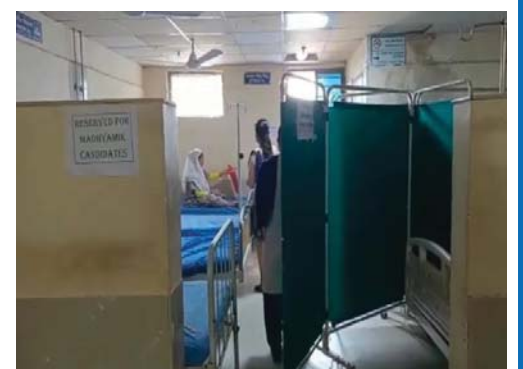
It is further submitted that OPG Securities Pvt Ltd was warned repeatedly in 2012 that accessing the secondary server is a violation of the rules/guidelines of the NSE, it said. "NSE however stopped issuing such warnings to OPG Securities without any justifiable reasons during 2013 when Ramkrishna was MD & CEO of NSE. Investigation has also revealed that Muralidharan Natarajan, the CTO of NSETECH (a subsidiary of NSE), was responsible for putting in place the co-location architecture at NSE. He was reporting to Ramkrishna," the agency told the court.

Woman goes into labor during board exams in Bengal, completes paper from hospital

A woman in West Bengal's Malda goes into labor during board exams, writes the remainder of the paper from the hospital bed

(SAI Bureau) A woman in West Bengal's Malda district gave her class 10 board exams from the hospital bed after delivering a child. The woman, identified as Hazra Khatoon, went into labor during her Class 10 board exams at Goalpara High School in Chanchal on Monday. She was rushed to Chanchal Super Specialty Hospital where she delivered a child. After that, Hazra wrote the remainder of her exam from the hospital bed. Hazra Khatoon got married two years ago. Her husband is a

farmer. Despite being pregnant, Hazra continued with her studies and today she went to school to take her exams. However, after the labor pains, arrangements were made by the school administration to take her to the hospital. The school's promptness has been praised by the Chanchal district officer. The class 10 board examination commenced in West Bengal today. Nearly lakhs of students appeared to sit for the offline exam after almost two years.



Apply for licence under Centre's 2020 guidelines by March 16: Bombay HC to aggregator cabs

The HC bench has given seven days to the aggregators to apply for a licence to the Regional Transport Authorities and another 10 days for the state to consider

(SAI Bureau) The Bombay High Court on Monday directed Ola, Uber and all similar aggregators to apply for valid licences by March 16 if they wish to continue operations.

"We are conscious that restraining aggregators, who have not yet obtained licences, will operate to prejudice and detriment of passengers who avail the services," Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Vinay Joshi of the Bombay HC said.

The central government had issued the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, meant to regulate such cabs. However, the state government in Maharashtra was yet to

formulate these rules. The court observed that those in the state are operating on the basis of permits issued to them under Maharashtra City Taxi Rules 2017. "What are you (aggregators) doing? This is complete lawlessness. You are not following the law. The law is very clear that as long as the state government does not have rules, you will have to follow the central government guidelines. We will stop you from plying," the bench said during the hearing.

The bench ordered that the Centre's rules will be applicable till the Maharashtra Regulation of Aggregator Rules, 2021, which is pending

approval, comes into effect. While dictating the order, the bench said, "We are pained to observe that despite the Central guidelines having been in place since 2020, the state government has permitted aggregators to function in Maharashtra without following the guidelines."

The bench has given seven days to the aggregators to apply for a licence to the Regional Transport Authorities (RTA) and another 10 days for the state to consider. The aggregators have been asked to approach the State Transport Appellate Tribunal if the RTAs reject their application. The court will further hear the case on March



28. During the hearing, Chief Justice Datta also recounted a personal experience. "I have been told by my son that Ola and Uber drivers drive for long hours. My son took a picture and sent it to me. He had taken over the wheel of the cab along the

Noida Expressway because the driver was dozing off after having been behind the wheel for 24 hours straight," Chief Justice Datta said while pointing out the working conditions of drivers with the aggregators.

Days after evacuation from Ukraine, student casts her vote in UP polls

Kritika, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Cantt Vidhan Sabha constituency, today cast her vote in the seventh and the last phase of UP polls



(SAI Bureau) It has been only a few days since Kritika returned home after escaping a full-blown war in Ukraine where she was studying at a university in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city. A resident of Uttar Pradesh's Cantt Vidhan Sabha constituency, she today cast her vote in the seventh and the last phase of the state polls.

Speaking to India Today about her harrowing experience in Ukraine, she said, "I was in Kharkiv. We were being bombed every 30 minutes to an hour. I was stuck in my hostel's bunker for five days. We had no food to eat, no water to drink."

As the ground troops began moving in and Russian airstrikes devastated city after

city, she made her way to Poland on her own along with a group of stranded students, Kritika said, after exercising her franchise at a booth in Varanasi. Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh, Mau, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Chandauli, Mirzapur, Bhadohi and Sonbhadra also voted in this phase. "Students who have returned from Ukraine should

be allowed to finish their education in India. The fees charged by private medical colleges should be reduced," she added. Her father, relieved after his daughter's return, said, "I am very happy she is back. For a while, we had thought she would not be able to return." Thanking the government for bringing back Indians from the bordering countries, he said, "The situation showed the real value of the Indian flag. Students of other countries also carried India's flag to escape from there. The governments - both at the Centre and the states - have done an incredible job."

"Students and other nationals stood in the snow for 10-12 hours at the border to enter Poland. The Ukrainians were given priority to cross," her mother told India Today. "The private colleges have such inflated fees that we are forced to send our children abroad. So, I would like to urge the government to increase the number of seats

at private institutes and reduce the fees. I would also like to request that students who have come back from Ukraine are given an opportunity to finish their studies in India so that they don't have to go out again," she added. Since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 in a pre-dawn attack, India has flown back over 18,000 citizens from the war-ravaged country under Operation Ganga. Union ministers have been deployed to Romania, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia - the countries sharing borders with Ukraine - to assist with the evacuation of Indians who have managed to escape from Ukraine. Almost all Indians have been brought back, except for students who remain cooped up in shelters and underground bunkers in Kharkiv and Sumy. The last phase of the UP polls today brought the curtain down on the marathon five-state elections, spanning almost a month. Votes will be counted on March 10.

After folded-hands meeting with Mamata, Bengal Guv Dhankhar reads speech in assembly

Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and CM Mamata Banerjee held a folded-hands meeting to reach an agreement to avert "a constitutional crisis" in the state assembly

(SAI Bureau) Unlike acrimonious comments made on one another in recent times, West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee held a folded-hands meeting on Monday to reach an agreement to avert "a constitutional crisis" in the state legislative assembly.

Governor Dhankhar was leaving the house without reading his address to West Bengal Legislative Assembly amid ruckus as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members shouted slogans in the house.

The state assembly witnessed chaotic scenes with the MLAs belonging to the BJP raising slogans during Governor Dhankhar's address and the ruling Trinamool Congress members blocking his way to exit.

The BJP members alleged rigging and violence in the recently concluded civic polls in West Bengal. The TMC countered the BJP's allegations.

Amid pandemonium, Governor Dhankhar decided to leave the house without delivering his speech. CM Mamata Banerjee, who is also the chairperson of the TMC, reached out to Governor Dhankhar requesting him to deliver his



speech.

Mamata Banerjee and Jagdeep Dhankhar were photographed greeting each other with folded hands.

TMC BLOCKS DHANKHAR'S WAY

Earlier, Governor Dhankhar had refused to begin his address to the house as the BJP members shouted slogans, displayed placards and posters as they alleged violence in Bengal civic polls, which they claimed was rigged by the TMC workers.

When Governor Dhankhar tried to leave the house without delivering his address, Trinamool

Congress members attempted to prevent him from leaving the house. They surrounded his seat obstructing his way to exit. A number of women MLAs belonging to the TMC were part of the legislators who attempted to block his way to exit.

The impasse continued for about an hour before Mamata Banerjee and Jagdeep Dhankhar met with their hands folded. Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee too urged Governor Dhankhar to address the house.

The deadlock was resolved and Governor Dhankhar read the first and last sentences of his

speech. Then he left the house.

MAMATA BANERJEE TARGETS BJP

Mamata Banerjee called the ruckus in the assembly "unprecedented" that was a "planned attempt" aimed at creating a constitutional crisis. "Since the governor was leaving the house without reading the address, it would have created a constitutional crisis," said Mamata Banerjee.

Our boys and girls [MLAs] requested him again and again to read it. Then he [Governor Dhankhar] urged me to persuade everyone to take their seats, which I did and he

read his speech," Mamata Banerjee was quoted as saying.

Later, Mamata Banerjee visited the Raj Bhawan to meet Jagdeep Dhankhar and thanked him for averting a constitutional crisis. "What the BJP has done today in the Assembly was a shame on democracy," she said.

BJP REJECTS MAMATA'S CHARGE

On the other hand, Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari dismissed Mamata Banerjee's charge at the BJP of disrespecting the office of governor and "insulting democracy". He said the BJP respected the office of the governor but the address was written by CM Mamata Banerjee.

The BJP members were protesting against the chief minister and her government, said Adhikari, who was a minister in the previous Mamata Banerjee government before switching over the BJP ahead of West Bengal Assembly election in 2021. In the polls, Adhikari defeated Banerjee on Nandigram seat. Adhikari alleged that the TMC members heckled Governor Dhankhar on multiple occasions during the proceedings in the assembly when he tried to leave the house.

Care Today Fund with VGSSP project provide help to fishermen in Visakhapatnam

On Monday, 400 Kondakarla lake dependent families received grants worth Rs 18,42,000 from Care Today Fund

(SAI Bureau) Care Today Fund - TV Today Network, a CSR Initiative of India Today Media Group, with the help of NGO Visishta Gramodaya Swayam Sadhana Parishad (SADHANA) provided assistance worth Rs 18 lakh to the fishermen in Visakhapatnam. Four inland Kondakarla Lake dependent Villages, namely Kondakarla, Vadrapalli, Mallavaram and Thotada, were chosen for the program.

On Monday, 400 Kondakarla lake dependent families received grants worth Rs 18,42,000 from Care Today Fund.

It included support for the purchase of 10 fishing boats, four tourist boats, 30 safety jackets, 50 nylon fishing nets, 100 plastic baskets/cages, two lakh fingerlings, two units of seed culture on 1.5 hectares of land.

Besides, the Care Today Fund also provided kitchen garden support to 100 women for food security, 50 units of fish vending accessory kits for women, including ice boxes, weighing machines, torch lights, umbrellas, tarpaulin sheets and cutting instruments were also distributed.



MP: Kamal Nath condemns Congress MLA's decision to boycott governor's address

Leader of Opposition and Congress leader Kamal Nath condemned one of his party's MLAs for boycotting the governor's address

(News Agencies) Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Jitu Patwari came under attack from all sides on Monday after he decided to boycott Governor Mangubhai Patel's inaugural address on the first day of the state assembly's budget session. While the government benches condemned the act, Congress also distanced itself from the move and termed it an individual decision. A little while before the Assembly session was set to begin, Jitu Patwari released a video on social media in which he declared that he will boycott the governor's speech. After this video surfaced, BJP leader and state minister Narottam Mishra questioned Kamal Nath on the floor of the House. As the Leader of Opposition in the House, Kamal Nath condemned the boycott. "It [attending the governor's address] has been the tradition, be it Assembly or Lok Sabha, or any House of the country. Tradition should be maintained. All I want to say is that it [the boycott] was not our party's decision. I came to know about this tweet only an hour ago. I do not agree with the tweet as it affects the dignity of the House," Kamal Nath said. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan thanked Kamal Nath for his statement. "Leader of Opposition Kamal Nath has agreed to oppose a wrong tradition. I thank him from the bottom of my heart. Following parliamentary traditions has been a proud tradition of Madhya Pradesh and he has ensured that it will be carried forward," the chief minister said on the floor of the House.

BHC directs contractors to appear before court over delay in installation of CCTVs in police stations

The installation work should have been completed within 22 weeks from the date of their contract last year. The two pvt contractors have now sought 16 weeks to complete the work



installed in 547 police stations. Of these 6,092 cameras, 5,639 were functional, and 453 were non-functional. On Monday, Rohan Cama, the amicus curiae appointed by the court to assist in the matter, informed the bench that since February 16, more CCTVs had stopped functioning and the total number of non-functional cameras now stood at 711. The court asked why the repairs hadn't been carried out yet. "Contractors are from Pune and Bangalore. Let them come to court on the next date. Ask both of them to come. Let us interact with them directly," the bench said. "They can afford to come to Bombay. They have received 23 crores out of the total 60 crores. One trip to Bombay is not difficult for them," said Justice Kathawalla. The state has allocated Rs 60 crore to install CCTV cameras in police stations across the state and of this amount, the two contractors had already received Rs 23 crore. The state government tried to explain the delay by saying the contractors were "importing high-quality cameras." To which the bench replied, "Imported? What are they... Chinese? Doesn't India have high-quality CCTV cameras?" The bench will hear the case further on March 11.

(News Agencies) Bombay high court has directed two private contractors selected by the Maharashtra government for installing CCTV cameras in police stations to appear before them on Friday to explain the delay in completing the work. This came after the court was informed that only half the installation work has been done so far while the time granted to do the job is over.

The bench of Justices SJ Kathawalla and Milind Jadhav has been hearing a petition that challenged an arbitrary notice issued by the Sinnar Police Station in Maharashtra.

The notice was issued under Section 149 (prevention of cognisable offence) of the Code of Criminal Procedure to maintain law and order following threats that were issued to the complainants by

the petitioners. The bench had been handed out a report on the progress of the installation work, which was being done by two contractors, Sujata Computers Pvt Ltd, Pune and Javi Systems India Pvt Ltd, Bengaluru. The two contractors had to execute the installation project and look after the maintenance of all CCTVs and instruments for five years, with effect from August 6, 2021. The bench noted that while the installation of CCTV cameras should have been completed within 22 weeks from the date of their contract finalised in August last year, the two private contractors have now sought an additional 16 weeks to complete the work. There are 1,089 police stations in Maharashtra, and so far, 6,092 CCTV cameras have been

Gujarat: Hindu outfits removes Lord Ganesha painting from toilet wall in Surat

Workers of two Hindu outfits painted over Lord Ganesha's painting on a toilet wall in Surat, Gujarat and warned authorities against hurting religious sentiments.

(News Agencies) Hindu outfits, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, on Monday, protested against a painting of Lord Ganesha in Gujarat. The painting was made on the wall of a pay-and-use public toilet in Surat's Kapodra crossing. The activists of the two organisations painted over the portrait and warned the authorities against hurting religious sentiments. They also raised slogans against the Surat Municipal Corporation as it had commissioned the painting work on the toilet. The activists warned the authorities against such paintings of deities on public toilets as they hurt religious sentiments. Kamlesh Kayada, the city general secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, said, "Surat Municipal Corporation should know that making a picture of any deity on this kind of building is tantamount to hurting religious sentiments. They should be careful while assigning contract work." The activists painted over the portrait with white paint.



Adityanath Emerges As BJP's Second True Mass Leader

Two months before the elections, when Navjot Sidhu resigned from the post of the party president in Punjab, I had said in a column for NDTV that it was a blunder to appoint him to that post in the first place - and not accepting his resignation would be a bigger blunder. But the Congress was oblivious to reality. And it is now paying the price.

The Congress should have won at least two of the five states in these elections. Six months ago, the general view was that the Congress could retain Punjab and Uttarakhand. In Goa, despite being decimated by defections, coming to power was

not an impossibility because of the anti-incumbency against the BJP government. In Punjab,

the Congress leadership decided to remove Captain Amarinder Singh as Chief Minister; it replaced him with CS Channi and named Navjot Sidhu the party president. Sidhu has established himself as anything but a team player. On the other hand, making a Dalit the Chief Minister was a good move. For unknown reasons, the Congress had neither the courage nor the conviction to shut down Sidhu as he did his best to wreck Channi's chances.

Similarly, in Uttarakhand, the party was not willing to give Harish Rawat a free hand and on the eve of the elections, he was forced to "crocodiles" were out to get him. Like in Punjab, Congress leaders in Uttarakhand were also gunning for each other, rather than fighting the BJP. The state was waiting to embrace the Congress. The BJP had changed two Chief Ministers in three months and the party looked demoralised. The consensus was that it would be difficult for the BJP to return to power. But the Congress worked hard to let the BJP win.

In Goa, the Congress was undoubtedly on a weak wicket, but it still stood a chance, provided it had the strategy to turn the anger against the BJP government to its benefit. The result shows that it had none. Let's not forget that the BJP had lost its top and charismatic leader, Manohar Parrikar. The party looked lackluster and colourless throughout the campaign. But the Congress didn't have the energy or appetite to look at new initiatives and be innovative.

But rather than the colossal collapse of the Congress, the bigger story of the elections undoubtedly is the massive mandate for the BJP and its taking of four of five states. People were upset due to price rise, unemployment, mismanagement during the pandemic

and the farmers' movement. But the BJP dramatically improved its vote percentage in UP (though the number of seats will be lower than in 2017). So, should it be called the pro-incumbency vote? In my opinion, three things worked for the BJP, particularly in UP.

One, the Yogi factor worked well and now the BJP has a leader other than Modi who can be called a mass leader despite being a divisive leader like Modi. His tenure has been very controversial. The way he dealt with the anti-CAA movement and other voices of dissent was very ruthless and underlines his personality trait. He has brought in a new model of governance which was replicated by other BJP Ministers.

Other than hardcore Hindutva, over-centralisation of power, massive use of police apparatus, no regard for the Opposition and ignoring one's own party leaders are the hallmarks of this model. Secondly, the BJP has increased its vote share. The argument during the elections was that the BJP was losing Mandal votes (other than Yadavs), which it had in 2014, 2017 and 2019. That seems to have not happened and the BJP managed to retain its OBC social base and in fact added some more. That shows that Hindutva vote today in UP is more consolidated than ever. Let's not forget that this is the fourth time in the last eight years that the BJP has touched 40% votes. Which is quite astonishing. No other party since 1989 has managed to get this kind of vote. Even when the BSP and the SP formed majority governments, their vote share did not cross 30%. It appears that this is possible due to Hindu-Muslim polarisation.

Thirdly, welfare measures and distribution of rations up to a large extent neutralised the despair on the ground due to price rise, unemployment, and pandemic. Today it can be said that the BJP is no longer a "Brahmin-Bania" party, having made serious inroads amongst the OBC and Dalit voters and welfare schemes have played significant role in this. In the end, AAP's victory is spectacular. In fact, its return is five years late. In 2017, it was predicted that it would form the government in Punjab, but the results were most disappointing, and it had to be satisfied only with 20 seats and 22% vote share. AAP today is a new party with two governments at its disposal. But to say that it has become the major Opposition party and is going to replace the Congress will be too much too soon. AAP did not do well in the other two states - Goa and Uttarakhand - where their performance has been much below expectation.

Global political scenario of late

By Susmita Ghosh

The global political scenario is standing at a tumultuous time right now. The world is reeling from back-to-back effects of the Covid pandemic, followed by the highly volatile European war scenario. In a post-cold-war world, such a charged situation in almost every continent, is quite unprecedented.

The focus of the world is now on Europe, where the unruly situation has consequences in every sector, starting from geopolitical to socioeconomic. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has rattled the whole world. While most democratic countries in the world are supporting Ukraine in the present scenario, it is

not enough to stop the Russian aggression without an active intervention. The nations like France, Germany and the United Kingdom are doing a commendable job where they are trying to find a solution to the war situation, even though the Russian atrocities continue in Ukraine, where they are bombing and moving towards the nation's capital, Kiev.

Across the pond, the USA is trying their level best to diffuse the Ukraine situation with all the available arsenal. The USA President, Joe Biden, is in constant touch with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. Besides that, the USA has started placing economic sanctions in place of against Russia. This step is replicated by the USA allies too, as they are not engaging with military might, but attacking the economy instead. The USA, like a world leader is showing a path, while they also continue to supply Ukraine with much-needed ammunition. In the southern part, however, the situation is not so bright. Brazil president Jair Bolsonaro visited Russia at this time to show solidarity and this move was sternly rebuked by the White House. There are several Russia sympathizers on the Asian subcontinent too, with superpowers like China and the eccentric North Korea rallying in support of Russia.

Pakistan, China's closest ally has also been vocal in the support of Russia, as the Pakistan PM, Imran Khan, who went for a two-day Russia visit during the war time, expressed that it was an exciting time to be in Russia. While his statement shows clear solidarity with Russia, in his administration, his country has gone to the dogs. With an increased militant action that is often supported by the top brass, basic human needs and progress in Pakistan is mostly ignored, as the country drowned in Chinese debt trap. A more dreadful decline is seen in

neighbouring country Afghanistan, where the democratic government is propped as the result of a civil war. Years of progress and social equality as gone down the

The focus of the world is now on Europe, where the unruly situation has consequences in every sector, starting from geopolitical to socioeconomic

drain, with the Taliban insurgency. Civil rights and freedom of speech is a joke now in a progressive country, which is now on the brink of being a Neo-ISIS state.

For the first time ever, the effect of global politics has reached space too, on a large scale. In response to the economic sanctions imposed on them, Russia has decided to stop supplying rocket engines to the USA. Russia is also considering revoking their support from the International Space Station, which is a global collaboration, with Russia and the USA as major partners. The Russian space agency, Roscosmos and its chief has taken a stance on Twitter, which is the cause enough to worry.

Russia supplies the propulsion system as well, which helps the ISS to stay afloat. Without their help, it may destabilize the operations of the space module. As ISS is on its last legs of operation, it is to be seen if SpaceX can join as a private partner, even though that would not be much beneficial for either party.

Undoubtedly we are going through the trying times. We can only hope that best will prevail eventually, and the war efforts will come to an end. Under the leadership of the global powerhouses, a solution must come soon, else only the world will be inferior for it.

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Learning from forest-dwelling, tribal communities to fight forest fires

There is much to learn from how their relationship with natural resources is regulated by natural rhythms and cycles

India's varied forest habitat is a giant tinderbox that can release vast amounts of carbon dioxide, imperilling lives and livelihoods. But, if safeguarded and thoughtfully expanded, these very forests could be vital in slowing down the world's warming by drawing down greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. In combating wildfires, we can no longer continue to ignore the critical role of our allies — the forest dwellers and tribal communities.

Inaction on forest fires would have grave consequences for the country. In 2021 alone, large blazes in Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha and Uttarakhand destroyed ecosystems of species from the microscopic to the magnificent, releasing thousands of tonnes of carbon. This trend is increasing across our planet — a new UN report describes a "global wildfire crisis" primarily because of climate change. In India, data on this issue — and forest cover more broadly — are either scarce or sketchy and will be critical to guiding decision-making. India's ecosystems are closely intertwined with several state and



societal goals. As part of the Paris Climate Accord, the Indian government committed to adding forests and tree cover as "carbon sinks" to absorb 2.5-3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalents by 2030. On the livelihoods front, 300 million Indians depend on forests for their subsistence and jobs, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Given that these tribal and local communities live in forests or on their fringes, in the blame that follows the blaze, those who have the least power and voice are often cast as the villains. However, an emerging understanding from ecologists and grassroots organisations indicates how communities can be allies in arresting and preventing fires. In

Simlipal, for instance, tribal people were on the frontline of battling fires last year and as this summer looms, women's self-help groups have been clearing the brush and creating fire lines. For centuries, forest-dependent communities across the world have fine-tuned a balance between their needs and the natural world's regeneration. Their thoughtful practices are the principal reasons for the health of large parts of our planet's ecosystems, research has found. However, in India, longstanding mindsets from a colonial forestry model have transitioned into a fortress-style conservation model that keeps communities out. This marginalisation manifests itself

in an energy poverty that leaves many tribal communities dependent on firewood for basic needs like cooking in the 21st century.

At the same time, fire is central to communities' culture and socio-economic cycles. On cool late spring mornings in the sal forests of central India, Baiga and Gond communities light fires under mahua trees while they wait to gather the pale yellow flowers that fall on the ashen earth. These small blazes keep them warm and keep potential rivals like bears away from the mahua harvest.

As conservation science fuses with social disciplines like anthropology, these traditional practices, which may have once

been derided as primitive, could be seen as prescient. After ignoring Native Americans' knowledge about periodic controlled burns, the US is experiencing the consequences of allowing a massive build-up of flammable stock that combusts in mega blazes like in California in 2021. "Good fire" of low to moderate intensity may reduce the fuel for larger blazes and aid germination of plants whose seeds need fire to crack open.

These complexities require fusing contemporary knowledge with contextual needs. For instance, researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology Mandi have tested an intervention that makes the alpine forests of the Himalayan foothills less susceptible to forest fires and provides local livelihoods. Based on these studies, communities in Himachal Pradesh have set up businesses that gather and process highly flammable dry chir pine needles into bio-pellets that can be fired with or instead of coal in industrial processes.

To combat forest fires, India will also need to improve

(Contd. on page 30)

What the BJP hopes to gain by merging Delhi's three MCD

The MCD polls are likely to be pushed beyond April as the Centre has communicated to the State Election Commission that it is working to unify the three municipal corporations

To understand a push to unify Delhi's three municipal corporations — South, North and East — one needs to look back to a time when the Aam Aadmi Party was yet to emerge as a major force.

The trifurcation

The carving of the erstwhile Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) into three, in 2012 by the Congress party and then Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, was done to "decentralise" the large local body. However, it was also an attempt to fix political boundaries in such a way that the then Congress government in Delhi would be able to make inroads into the civic body, which had become a BJP bastion. The BJP continues to rule the three MCDs, but the AAP hopes to change that this time.

The trifurcation, which divided resources



unequally, is at the heart of the financial crisis in the civic bodies. While the move was aimed at decentralising municipal governance in Delhi, officials said it only "tripled the number of officers, increased costs and resulted

in unequal distribution of assets and liabilities". The North, being the owner of the biggest civic body, also became the most top-heavy. The North Corporation is struggling with a deficit of over Rs 1,300 crore and East of

around Rs 800 crore.

What came next

After the trifurcation, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation and South MCD were given 104 wards each, while East MCD had 64 in mostly the trans-Yamuna area.

Due to the demography of Delhi, the South body ended up with the most "posh" colonies — A and B category taxation zones that paid higher property taxes. The North body, on the other hand, got more unauthorised and lower taxation category colonies, which pay less tax, or not at all. This led to a financial crisis for the North and East. The split created a structure in which the South ended up earning around 30% of its internal revenue through property tax.

(Contd on page 30)

The impact of Biden's ban on Russian oil - in Moscow, Washington, Caracas, and Tehran

President Joe Biden has announced a total ban on American imports of Russian oil and gas. The immediate impact will be seen in the higher price of auto fuels for Americans. Biden was upfront about this in his address: "Defending freedom is going to cost", he said



might have to offer significant discounts.

In fact, even before the announcement of sanctions, some American refiners had started to cut off Russian supplies. An Associated Press (AP) report said imports of Russian crude had dropped to zero in the last week of February, quoting preliminary data from the US Department of Energy.

Russia does not sell any natural gas to the US. Overall, the impact of the ban on Russia would be "minimal", the AP said.

And how will the United States and Americans be impacted?

The immediate impact will be seen in the higher price of auto fuels for Americans. Biden was upfront about this in his address: "Defending freedom is going to cost", he said.

The national average price for a gallon (about 3.8 litres) of regular gasoline (petrol), was \$4.173 on March 8, up from \$4.06 on March

7, according to the American Automobile Association (AAA) which tracks prices daily.

The March 7 price was itself 45 cents more than the price a week ago, 62 cents more than a month ago, and \$1.30 more than a year ago, the AAA said in a release. The US national average has not been this high since July 2008, the AAA said. The New York Times quoted Omair Sharif, founder of Inflation Insights, as saying the national average gas price could touch nearly \$4.50 this month, "assuming we don't move any more". The AP report said the price could go past \$5 per gallon, should international crude prices touch \$160 a barrel or go even higher up to \$200.

(For a rough comparison with India, the price per gallon is now about Rs 362, or Rs 95 for a litre of petrol as per the exchange rate on Wednesday, which is about the same as what Indians are

paying at pumps.)

Not only have Russian oil, LNG, and coal imports been stopped, all new American investments in Russia's energy sector are also banned. Nor can Americans put money in any foreign companies that make investments in Russian energy production.

The ban, and higher pump prices, are widely expected to increase overall inflation in the US. According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, inflation in January was at a 40-year high, and prices were up 7.5 per cent from a year ago.

How will the global shortfall in production arising out of this situation be addressed?

Biden said that "If we do not respond to Putin's assault on global peace and stability today, the cost of freedom and to the American people will be even greater tomorrow", and promised to "do

(Contd. on page 30)

President Joe Biden has announced a total ban on American imports of Russian oil and gas. How will his decision, taken with apparently bipartisan support in the United States, impact Russia and the ordinary American? And how can it change the US relationship with other oil-producing regimes that it has demonised for years?

How will the US ban on Russian oil imports impact Russia?

No significant impact is likely, at

least directly and in the short term.

In 2021, America got only about 8% of its oil and petroleum products imports from Russia. That worked out to about 245 million barrels for the year, or around 672,000 barrels a day. This is a fairly modest amount, and Moscow can conceivably make up the loss of American business by selling to China or even India. Because of the smaller pool of potential customers though, it

The post-ideology politician and erosion of the party system

Cross-party defections have created such a crisis of confidence that parties are resorting to loyalty pledges

This year's assembly elections have signalled two significant political undercurrents. The first has been the ugly display of post-ideology politics marked by endless cross-party defections. What has happened during the election season has been an extension of the massive exodus of fortune seekers whose only concern is the host party's ability to provide "ticket" and "tekka" or election ticket and position.

As per an Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report, 443 MLAs and MPs had quit their parties and re-contested on their host party's ticket between 2016 and 2020. If one includes those who did not re-contest, the figure will be higher. In Goa, 60 per cent of the MLAs changed parties. Punjab MLA Balvinder Singh Laddi switched parties four times in two months. Within



days after joining TMC, Sushmita Dev was made a Rajya Sabha member. The BJP rewarded 10 of 16 Congress defectors in Karnataka with ministerships. A dozen Congress-NCP defectors were in the first list of BJP candidates in Maharashtra polls — another sign of the bargain for

power and quid pro quo. In Maharashtra, where hopes are fading for a BJP return, many BJP leaders have joined the Shiv Sena. Hours after Amit Shah's visit in February last year, seven BJP councillors joined the Sena and six others later. West Bengal had a spate of defections from

the Trinamool Congress to the BJP, including four ministers and 13 MLAs. Most of them scurried back after Mamata Banerjee retained power.

For today's politicians, power is the essence of life. Ideology, political commitment and loyalty are variables. The party system

that existed until a decade back is under challenge. It is more like business executives seeking better career options. It has become purely transactional. Karnataka deputy speaker Anand Mamani has put the post-ideology politician's mindset in black and white. He threatened to resign if he is not made a minister. Another BJP MLA warned that unless he was given the chairmanship of a better board or corporation, he will quit. Last October, a BJP minister and his MLA son in Uttarakhand joined the Congress because the son was denied a ticket.

The crisis of confidence is so acute that the AAP got legal affidavits of loyalty signed by all its Goa candidates and photographed in the presence of party chief Arvind Kejriwal.

(Contd. on page 30)

If women are not empowered, the economy loses

Only by creating a level playing field can we see the true potential of women as well as that of the nation

It has been proven time and again that when more women enter the workforce, economies grow faster. When women are empowered, the battle to eradicate poverty is more fruitful. Studies conducted in various nations have proven that there is a direct correlation between greater gender diversity and higher GDPs.

We must ensure that all of India's women get equal access to education, equal access to opportunities, and equal pay at work. By empowering women, we increase their right to economic resources, as well as their decision-making powers. This, in turn, benefits their households and their communities. Women begin invest-



ing more in their children's education, the quality of human capital improves, and we as a nation reap the benefits of economic prosperity. If women are not empowered, the nation's economy loses. A recent study by the World Bank found that countries lose \$160 trillion in wealth due to the differences in lifetime earnings between men and women.

Women's participation in the workforce in India is still among the lowest in the world at 19.9 per cent (according to World Bank's data of 2020). Only 3.7 per cent of the leadership positions in corporate India are occupied by women. Right from boardroom representation to entry-level roles, India is striving hard to ensure a balance in gender diver-

sity. This is not to say progress has not been made. I, for one, am constantly proud of women breaking the glass ceiling in all sectors. In India, women have made it to the top as ministers and chief ministers, administrators in the government system and financial sector CEOs. As someone who started his busi-

ness from scratch, I have enormous respect for our women who are entering the world's third-largest startup ecosystem. According to a report by Bain & Company, female entrepreneurs can generate 150-170 million job opportunities in India by 2030 — that's more so why such entrepreneurs must be supported. The Union government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has placed great emphasis on the empowerment of women, beginning from their education and health, improving their quality of life to providing them loans to set up businesses. The private sector and civil society must pitch in to make this a mass movement.

(Contd. on page 31)

Origin of life on our planet': Scientists discover the largest molecule ever found in a planet-forming disk

In a new study, scientists have discovered the largest molecule ever found in a planet-forming disk

Published in the *Astronomy and Astrophysics*, the study has been conducted by the Leiden University in the Netherlands in collaboration with the European Southern Observatory (ESO). Using the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) in Chile, researchers have for the first time detected dimethyl ether in a planet-forming disc. With nine atoms, this is the largest molecule identified in such a disc to date. It is also a precursor of larger organic molecules that can lead to the emergence of life. "From these results, we can learn more about the origin of life on our planet and therefore get a better idea of the potential for life in other planetary systems," says astronomer Nashanty Brunken. "It is very exciting to see how these findings fit into the bigger picture."

Dimethyl ether is an organic molecule commonly seen in star-forming clouds, but had never before been found in a planet-forming disc. The researchers also made a tentative detection of methyl formate, a complex molecule similar to dimethyl ether that is also a building block for even larger organic molecules. "It is really exciting to finally detect these larger molecules in discs. For a while we thought it might not be possible to observe them," says co-author Alice Booth. The mol-

ecules were found in the planet-forming disc around the young star IRS 48 (also known as Oph-IRS 48) with the help of ALMA. IRS 48, located 444 light-years away in the constellation Ophiuchus, has been the subject of numerous studies because its disc contains an asymmet-

ric, cashew-nut-shaped "dust trap". This region, which likely formed as a result of a newly born planet or small companion star located between the star and the dust trap, retains large numbers of millimetre-sized dust grains that can come together and grow into kilometre-sized objects like comets, as-

teroids and potentially even planets. "What makes this even more exciting is that we now know these larger complex molecules are available to feed forming planets in the disc," explains Booth. "This was not known before as in most systems these molecules are hidden in the ice."

How Western firms quietly enabled Russian oligarchs

Behind a set of imposing metal doors in an easy-to-miss office building in a New York City suburb, a small team manages billions of dollars for a Russian oligarch. For years, a group of wealthy Russians have used Concord Management LLC, a financial advisory company in Tarrytown, New York, to secretly invest money in large U.S. hedge funds and private equity firms, according to people familiar with the matter. A web of offshore shell companies makes it hard to know for sure whose money Concord manages. But several of the people said the bulk of the funds belong to Roman Abramovich, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin of Russia. Concord is part of a constellation of American and European advisers — including some of the world's largest law firms — that have long helped Russian oligarchs navigate the Western fi-

nancial, legal, political and media landscapes. Now, with U.S. and European sanctions targeting those close to Putin, firms are wrestling with what to do with these lucrative but controversial clients. Many are ditching them. Some appear to be sticking with them. Others will not say what they are doing. In the meantime, lawyers and investment advisers are coming under intense scrutiny for work that weeks earlier was occurring almost entirely below the public radar. Concord, whose representatives declined to comment, has attracted the attention of congressional investigators. On Wednesday, a lawmaker wrote to the Biden administration requesting a freeze on Abramovich's funds at Concord. In Britain, which has a thriving industry of attorneys who specialize in hiding assets, lawmakers have taken to the floor

of Parliament to denounce lawyers and law firms that are continuing to work with oligarchs. Legally speaking, at least, there is nothing wrong with working for sanctioned companies, individuals or governments, so long as certain rules are followed. In the United States, lawyers are allowed to represent sanctioned clients in court or before government agencies, and they also can advise them on complying with sanctions. Lobbyists and public relations firms must obtain licenses from the Treasury Department to represent sanctioned entities. As a result of the bureaucratic hurdles and reputational risks, the going rate for law and lobbying firms representing sanctioned oligarchs has soared into the millions of dollars, according to people familiar with the industry.

(Contd on page 31)

Why is Poland offering fighter jets to America?

Since the Russian invasion two weeks ago, Ukraine has held its ground against Moscow's troops on the ground and on air. But why does it need Polish aircraft?

In a move that took the United States by surprise, Poland Tuesday offered to give all of its MiG-29 fighter jets to a US air base in Germany, who was then expected to pass on the warplanes to the Ukrainian military. The Pentagon, however, rejected the offer, with spokesman John Kirby explaining that Poland's declaration raised the concerning prospect of warplanes departing from a US and Nato base to fly into airspace contested with Russia in the Ukraine conflict. "We will continue to consult with Poland and our other NATO allies about this issue and the difficult logistical challenges it presents, but we do not believe Poland's proposal is a tenable one," Kirby said in a statement.

Why Ukraine needs Poland's jets

Since the Russian invasion two weeks ago, Ukraine has held its ground against Moscow's troops on the ground and in air. However, Ukrainian authorities, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have asked for weapons and



equipment. Ukrainian pilots have been trained to fly Soviet-made jets, which means that supplying them with US-made aircraft would be less efficient than providing aircraft that they are already familiar with. It is here that Poland's offer comes into the picture. The Mikoyan MiG-29 fighter jets, which Warsaw has offered, are Soviet-made warplanes first made during the 1970s. They are in operation in

a number of European countries, including Bulgaria and Slovakia. India too uses the MiG-29 aircraft. While offering its own aircraft, the Polish government also appealed to other owners of MiG-29 jets to follow its lead.

Will it help Ukraine?

If Nato was to hand over the Polish MiG-29s to Ukraine, it would be a clear signal of the West's willingness to aid Ukraine in the war. Militarily, however, the

number of planes offered would make it unlikely to be a game-changer, says an Associated Press report. MiG-29s are reportedly inferior to more sophisticated Russian aircraft and could be an easy prey for Russian pilots and Russian missiles. A senior US defense official told AP that the Ukrainians are flying relatively few of their existing aircraft, for relatively little time, as it is. The defense official,

who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the US assessment, said it's possible that Ukraine does not need more planes and would benefit most from the weapons it uses effectively every day, including anti-aircraft Stinger and anti-tank Javelin missiles. The official also said that Russia currently has the capacity to target almost the entire Ukraine with its surface-to-air missiles, including from within Russia and from ships in the Black Sea.

What is in it for Poland?

Poland's proposal to Washington is essentially a swap offer. Under this, Warsaw will supply Ukraine with the MiG-29s and in turn receive used American F-16s to make up for their loss. In a statement, the Polish Foreign Ministry said Poland is ready to deliver the jets to the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany. "At the same time, Poland requests the United States to provide us with used aircraft with corresponding operational capabilities,"

(Contd. on page 32)

As Biden and Maduro governments talk, a brief history of US-Venezuela ties

Senior US officials last week held meetings with members of the Venezuelan government. Why is this significant?



On Saturday, some senior US officials flew down to Caracas in Venezuela, a Russian ally, to meet members of the left-wing authoritarian Venezuelan government under president Nicolás Maduro. The meeting marks one of the first high-level discussions in over five years between oil-rich Venezuela and the US, which sees Maduro's re-election as not having been free and fair.

The US severed ties with Venezuela in 2019 and as of now, it recognizes Interim President Juan Guaidó and considers the 2015 democratically elected Venezuelan National Assembly,

which he currently leads, to be the only legitimate federal institution.

What is the significance of the meeting between US and Venezuelan officials?

Maduro is one of the few leaders who has offered his "strong support" to Russia as it tries to invade Ukraine, Europe's second-largest country. Previously, Russia offered its support to Maduro's regime, as countries including the US, Canada and EU recognised Guaidó. Russia, China, Cuba, Turkey and Iran supported Maduro's regime, while countries including Norway, Mexico and the Caribbean nations chose to

be neutral. As per the Center for Strategic and International Studies, from Moscow's perspective, Venezuela is a perfect opportunity for Russia to maintain a foothold in the Western Hemisphere, assert itself as a global power and also challenge a world order that it perceives as skewed towards US interests. The New York Times interprets the meeting on Saturday as being driven by a desire to further isolate Russia and separate it from its Latin American allies. Following the meeting, Venezuela released at least two US citizens who were in prison in the country.

(Contd on page 32)

The road ahead: BJP reads signals for 2024, looks at areas, strategies to work on

The BJP sees the results as a referendum on PM Narendra Modi's popularity and the party's governance record. Having refused during the campaign to accept the elections as a referendum on Modi or the Centre, many leaders now claimed the results were an approval to Modi's policies

Emboldened by its victories in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Manipur, the BJP has begun strategising for the next elections, claiming that it starts planning for the next on the same night that the results for one come out.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said indirectly that the results of Thursday would lead to a BJP victory in the next general election. Recalling how some experts had described the Uttar Pradesh election result of 2017 as having decided the 2019 Lok Sabha election, Modi said: "I believe this time also they will say that the results of 2022 have decided the results of 2024." With the results being widely seen as an endorsement to the BJP's welfare politics — various schemes and an effective delivery system, cutting across caste and religious lines — party sources said they would focus on consolidating its new "vote bank" of

"women and beneficiaries of welfare schemes" to consolidate them further.

Leaders within

Internally, the emergence of Yogi Adityanath as a leader who "managed to blend his Hindutva image into the champion of development and good governance" and got a "strong mandate for himself" could alter power equations in the party. Asked what would be the impact on the internal party system, a senior party leader said: "You cannot ignore Yogi at any point now. You cannot overlook the fact that he got a powerful mandate for himself in the most crucial state. He has emerged as a leader who is equal or just second only to Modi. None of the top leaders other than Modi got such a mandate."

Party leaders indicated that the BJP would soon start work on addressing issues in its state units, especially those hit by internal feuds including

Rajasthan and Karnataka, at the organisation level. Work will also begin to ensure that candidates handpicked by its leadership win the presidential and vice presidential elections coming up in a few months. With the numbers in its favour, the only task would be zeroing in on the "right candidate" as put by a party leader.

The BJP also sees the results as a referendum on PM Modi's popularity and the party's governance record. Having refused during the campaign to accept the elections as a referendum on Modi or the Centre, many leaders now claimed the results were an approval to Modi's policies in the last seven years. Opposition vote-banks With the Samajwadi Party bagging a significant number of seats and vote share, up from 22% to 32% the BJP faces an area of concern and will look to win back support groups that appear

to have gone with the SP. During the campaign, Home Minister Amit Shah had worked to win back the Jats — a community that got miffed with the BJP over the farmer agitation — and had extended an invitation to the Rashtriya Lok Dal; party sources indicated it could work towards getting the RLD into the NDA fold. The party will also focus on winning back non-Yadav OBC communities, sections of whom could have backed the SP in this election, the sources said. BJP leaders claim its "development agenda" has worked marvelously in all the four states, except in Punjab where it says it did not have much stake. The demolition of the BSP would be another area on which the BJP would unleash fresh strategies. The party could be taking initiatives both at the organisation and the government levels to consolidate its Dalit support base across the country.

What voters are saying through BJP's poll wins

It might take time for any analysis to approach a semblance of being comprehensive, but nothing can hide the comprehensiveness of the BJP's success — and of the Congress's complete failure — in the results of the assembly elections in five states. A similar comprehensiveness also marks the AAP's success in Punjab. In the days to come, there will be a search for multiple factors, which may have influenced voters from different social backgrounds, and state-wise explanations of the outcome to complete the jigsaw puzzle that election outcomes often are. It might take time for any analysis to approach a semblance of being comprehensive, but nothing can hide the comprehensiveness of the BJP's success — and of the Congress's complete failure — in the results of the assembly elections in five states. A similar comprehensiveness also marks the AAP's success in Punjab. In the days to come, there will be a search for multiple factors, which may have influenced voters from different social backgrounds, and state-wise explanations of the outcome to complete the jigsaw puzzle that election outcomes often are.

The dramatic victory of the AAP in Punjab, the dismal performance of the Congress and the decent showing by the BJP indicate that over and above complex templates of analysis, there is something simpler that needs to be stated and re-stated: In terms

of structure of competition, India's polity is deep into the framework of single-party dominance. Such is the dominance of the BJP that its politics of misguiding the electorate resonates with the voters and its limited achievements in the field of welfare provisioning constitute the centrepiece of its governance record.

To grasp the significance of these outcomes, it is necessary to keep at a distance these temptingly plausible explanations. They surely have a certain explanatory value. But the larger point which should not be missed is about the fundamental shift that the BJP has been able to bring about. As this writer has been repeatedly arguing, the rise of the BJP in 2014 marked the rise of a new political culture in the making. With almost every election and every political controversy, this new culture is more clearly on display. No interpretation of an electoral outcome, therefore, would be complete without taking into consideration this new political culture. There are at least three key aspects of this shift in the political culture of contemporary India. One, the average Hindu voter today appears more favourably inclined than ever to become part of a politically mobilised pro-Hindutva mass of voters. The BJP, over the past decade, has repeatedly displayed its ability to shape effective voter polarisation on the basis of religious identity. If one were not to be carried away by campaign claims about good governance and instead track

the continuous and low-volume communal rhetoric appealing to Hindus to politically organise as Hindus, particularly against Muslims, it would be clear that in most states, a large chunk of the voters would be swayed by Hindutva.

Two, voters are willing to consider leadership and personality as the most important factors in making their political choices and determining their opinions on contentious issues. The BJP has taken the leadership factor or the personality cult to a new level. Voters are most likely now to perceive governmental authority in the form of the leader. Since 2014, the emphasis on personality and the audacious claim of "Modi hai toh mumkin hai (Anything is possible if Modi is there)" has meant that everything the governments achieve or claim to have achieved is invariably linked to the persona of Modi. While this is not the first time that we have seen such politics, the extent of the current claims and their durability surpasses not just state-level personality cults but also pushes into insignificance the efforts of Indira Gandhi to project herself as the saviour of the poor. As we continue to witness the marvels of Modi's personality cult, a more systematic study of personalised authority under him is yet to happen. As such, the extraordinary shift this has brought to the game of electoral competition can only be imagined for the

time being.

Both these factors have helped the BJP in overcoming the many shortcomings, particularly its monumental mishandling of the pandemic during the second wave. Once the electorate is deeply divided on religious basis and once the voters are convinced of the extraordinary powers and sincerity of The Leader, governance failures can be easily overlooked — in fact, their occurrence can be simply rejected as opposition canard. It is no wonder then that whether in UP or in Uttarakhand, voters chose not to be concerned about what happened during the pandemic or during a natural disaster. Hindutva mobilisation and personalised imagination of authority thus operate as an insurance against misgovernance. Three, increasingly, voters are willing to endorse a proactive police state as protecting the national interest rather than demanding an institutionally moderated exercise of state powers. During the past eight years, the meanings of governance and statecraft have been entirely transformed. Extensive and consistent use of the repressive arm of the state have marked the polity. A truly hard and harsh state has been unleashed. What is more significant is that public opinion has uncritically upheld this avatar of the state. This point particularly helps us understand why the many accusations against the UP CM of being high-handed never cut much ice with the public.

China builds new bridge to Hong Kong amid Covid surge



(News Agencies) A temporary bridge has been built in Hong Kong to help bring in material from the mainland for the Covid-19 makeshift hospital. Nearly 2,000 Chinese contractors from the China State Construction Engineering are in Hong Kong for this project.

This hospital is expected to provide 1,000 more hospital beds and quarantine rooms for up to 10,000 people. The densely populated metropolis is in the throes of a record virus surge with thousands of confirmed cases every day. Chief Executive Carrie Lam said that China aims to ensure that Hong Kong has enough food and other supplies during the outbreak. To battle the surge in cases, doctors and nurses from the mainland have also been allowed

to work in the city. Beijing, on the other hand, has provided 29m rapid antigen tests and 54m masks as of Tuesday. China's national health Commission's Liang Wannian told Chinese state media Xinhua, "Reducing infection, severe cases and deaths is Hong Kong's most urgent and top priority at the current stage." Earlier, Lam had said that all Hong Kongers must undergo three rounds of compulsory coronavirus testing. "The coming one to three months are crucial in fighting the pandemic," Lam told a press briefing. Lam reiterated the city's "dynamic zero COVID" strategy similar to mainland China, aiming to eradicate any outbreaks at all costs. She repeatedly thanked mainland authorities for their "staunch support."

Sheikh Hasina thanks PM Modi for evacuating Bangladeshis from Ukraine under Operation Ganga

Russia-Ukraine war news updates: Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina has thanked PM Narendra Modi for rescuing Bangladeshi nationals from war-torn Ukraine

(News Agencies) Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed her gratitude towards her Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, for safely

evacuating her countrymen from Ukraine amid the Russia-Ukraine war, said government sources. India on Tuesday started evacuating its stranded citizens from Ukraine's Sumy to Poltava under 'Operation Ganga' after Russia announced a temporary ceasefire from 10 am (Moscow time). The ceasefire was effected so

that humanitarian corridors could be established in the cities of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv and Mariupol.

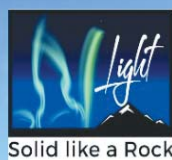
According to Puneet Singh Chandhok, president of the Indian World Forum, an Indian convoy consisting of 12 buses left from Sumy and all Indians from the city

have been evacuated. The Indian convoy was escorted by officials of the Indian Embassy and the Red Cross. The convoy



also evacuated nine Bangladeshis from Ukraine. It also picked up Nepali and Tunisian students. Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Tuesday said: "I checked with the control room, 694 Indian students remain stranded in Sumy. Today, they have all left in buses for Poltava."

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The first signs of global warming are now clearly visible. We urgently need to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Nothing and no-one will be spared from climate change. This warning is therefore to all people, all countries and, in particular, to the Belgian Council of Ministers who, on the weekend of March 20 and 21, will have to decide what action to take regarding essential measures linked to the Kyoto Protocol.



Pakistan police arrests 'obsessed' father for killing 7-day-old daughter

A man who was obsessed with having a boy as his first child was arrested in Pakistan's Punjab province for allegedly killing his seven-day-old daughter



(News Agencies) Aman, who was Thursday for allegedly killing his obsessed with having a boy as a seven-day-old daughter in first child, was arrested on Pakistan's Punjab province, a

gruesome incident that sparked nationwide outrage. The incident happened on Monday in Punjab's Mianwali when Shahzaib Khan shot dead his seven-day-old daughter. A manhunt was launched by the police to nab him.

On Thursday, the 22-year-old Khan was arrested from Bhakkar, a place some 490 kms from Lahore. "The beastly-natured murderer father of the newborn girl has been arrested. The IGP Punjab has directed the police officials concerned to personally monitor this case and ensure that the murderer gets exemplary punishment from the court of law," the IGP spokesperson said in a tweet on Thursday. There has been widespread condemnation from all walks of life over the incident, demanding exemplary punishment for the suspect. According to senior

police officer Ismail Kharak, Khan had married his cousin Mishal Fatima two years ago, and she gave birth to a daughter a week ago. "Hearing about the news of the birth of the girl who was named Jannat by her grandparents, Khan started cursing his wife and daughter," Kharak said. Quoting Fatima, the officer said that Khan was furious and left the house a few days ago, only to return on Sunday to kill his daughter. "Fuming in anger, he first beat me and cursed our daughter. Later, he took out a pistol from the cupboard and pumped bullets into her body," Fatima said. She informed the police that her husband was obsessed with having a boy as a first child from their marriage. "My husband was obsessed about having a boy, but no one in the family knew that he would commit such a gruesome crime - killing his own daughter," she said.

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਨਵੇਂ ਸਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫੀ

ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਲਿਬਰੇਸ਼ਨ ਫੋਰਸ ਤੇ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਈ

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China helping Russia to counter West's information war on Ukraine



capturing footage of where the troops are stationed. state media explicitly stating that reports must

From landing an not criticise Russia or use exclusive interview with the word. Government Denis Pushilin, the head of officials have also reiterated the breakaway Donetsk that Beijing supports its People's Republic, or talking 'no-limits' friendship with to Russian soldiers, Russia. This was reflected in Chinese foreign minister journalist Lu Yuguang has been pushing Kremlin's Wang Yi's remarks earlier views as most of the Russian this week where he news channels and agencies described China's have been banned as part of relationship with Russia as the sanctions by the West, "rock solid and the reports the newspaper. prospects for cooperation

Moscow describes its actions in Ukraine as a very broad." "No matter how "special military operation" to sinister the international disarm its neighbour and Russia will maintain their unseat leaders it calls neo-Nazis, while the Western strategic resolve and keep media calls it an pushing forward the "invasion". China also refuses comprehensive strategic to term the act as "invasion" partnership of coordination in and even issued directives to the new era," Mr Wang said.

(News Agencies) Even getting access to the working for a state-owned though China has claimed Russian army in a bid to Chinese broadcaster has to hold a neutral position in counter the information war been reporting freely from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine against the Western media. Russian-captured cities in war, a report has emerged According to UK newspaper Ukraine, holding interviews about a Chinese journalist Telegraph, a journalist with the Russian soldiers and

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Over 16-foot wall or through desert, Afghans scramble to leave country for Iran

Following the Taliban takeover of the nation six months ago, Afghanistan has been plunged into a financial crisis. Thousands of men, women, and children have already fled the nation while thousands still scramble to leave the country for Iran or beyond

(News Agencies) Amid a roar of engines and clouds of dust, Sattar Amiri clammers into a pickup truck with his wife and infant son in a remote Afghan frontier town, ready for a perilous drive through the desert. Like the thousands of desperate migrants around him, he has only one goal — to reach Iran. “I have no choice,” says 25-year-old Sattar. “There is no future in Afghanistan.”

In Zaranj, a border town in southwestern Afghanistan, people smugglers say the flow of would-be exiles now reaches 5,000 to 6,000 a day — four times more than before the Taliban’s return to power in August. At night, the most daring try to scale the imposing wall that separates this arid city from Iran, despite the risk of being shot by border guards. But when the sun comes up, thousands of men, women and children pile into old four-wheel-drive vehicles on a longer journey through mountains and deserts via Pakistan.

Afghanistan has been plunged into financial crisis following the Taliban takeover six months ago, worsening an already dire humanitarian situation after decades of war.

Many Afghans are scrambling to leave the country for Iran or beyond in search of work to send money back to their families. Others fear being targeted by the Taliban because of their association with the previous Western-backed regime or the US-led foreign forces who finally withdrew on August 31.

Sattar lost his job as an army mechanic when Afghanistan’s military collapsed six months ago and since then says he has “not even managed to earn 1,000 Afghanis” — about \$10.

In desperation, he sold his house in Mazar-e-Sharif to finance his family’s escape to Iran, where he plans to take any job he can get. Nearly a million Afghans left their homes between August and December last year in an attempt to flee, according to a recent report by the International



Organization for Migration (IOM). This exodus has transformed Zaranj into a people-smuggling den of misery.

‘They will really kill me’

In the city’s dilapidated hotels, migrants sleep on carpets while waiting their turn to cross, despair and fear etched into their faces. Mohammad, a former policeman, is trying to reach Iran after having twice been beaten by the Taliban, who demanded a service weapon he had already handed in.

“If they come a third time, they will really kill me,” says the 25-year-old from Daikundi province, declining to reveal his full name. While widespread retaliations have so far not been reliably reported, the UN says more than 100 people with links to the former regime — mostly security personnel — have been killed by the Taliban.

The city’s smugglers are rubbing

their hands with glee at the steady stream of clients — which could become a flood with the arrival of spring and more favourable weather.

Behind the wheel of his 4x4 pickup, Hamidullah has doubled the price for driving migrants across the desert.

“We used to take three million (Iranian) toman (about \$120), now it’s six million,” says the grinning 22-year-old, who pays the Taliban a cut to operate. Every day, hundreds of drivers park their vehicles in a Zaranj lot, where they pile the men into the bed of the pickup, and cram women and children into the cab. The gathering is carried out in full view of the Taliban, who charge each vehicle 1,000 Afghanis (\$10) — even providing an “official” stamped receipt.

AFP counted around 300 trucks in the lot one day last month,

each filled with about 20 people — or about 6,000 migrants a single day.

The Taliban denied people were leaving in those numbers, and called such reports “propaganda”.

“The claims that 6,000 Afghans are leaving (daily) for other countries only through one border on one day is propaganda,” said Mohammad Arsalan Kharutai, Deputy Minister for Refugees and Repatriations. “This many Afghans are not leaving,” he told AFP in response to a direct question at a news conference, adding “neither are there exact numbers that anyone can prove”.

Still, AFP filmed the battered vehicles making their way for hours along rutted desert tracks — sometimes reaching speeds of up to 120 kilometres per hour (75 miles per hour). When they

reach the Pakistan border, the migrants are handed over to smugglers on the other side, and a treacherous journey by foot begins to the Iranian border.

For Maihan Rezai, the longer journey is unthinkable.

As a member of the minority Shiite Hazara ethnic group, the 20-year-old design student would be easy prey for fighters from Jundallah, a radical Sunni operation responsible for numerous kidnappings in the desert. “Before, they used to behead people, but now they hold people and demand a ransom,” he says. So Rezai and his friends aim to climb the border wall, which stretches from Zaranj as far as the eye can see.

Turn a blind eye It is a formidable barrier — a five-metre (16-foot) concrete wall topped with barbed wire and dotted with watchtowers manned by armed guards. The people smugglers who know the best place to cross are supposed to bribe the guards to turn a blind eye to those scaling the walls at night, but sometimes they cut corners to save money. “The smugglers lie to us,” says Maihan, who has already made several failed attempts. In the last six months between 70 and 80 people have been killed by Iranian bullets, several Taliban fighters guarding the area told AFP on condition of anonymity. But even if you make it over, the euphoria is often short-lived. Iran, already hosting 3.4 million Afghans in 2020 — mostly illegal migrants rather than genuine refugees — has been expelling more than 2,000 people a day recently, according to the Taliban. Still, Sadat Qatal and Waheed Ahmad plot their attempt from their spartan Zaranj hotel room, their four children alongside them. Waheed’s brother made it across in January — one of only a handful among 80 who tried that night, he said — and phoned from Iran to tell of his success. “He told me that many died,” the 30-year-old shudders. “All this is because of hunger... if we still had hope, we would never leave the country.”



Pakistan PM Imran Khan seeks legal opinion on no-confidence motion

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has sought legal opinion on the no-confidence motion submitted by the Opposition parties, holding his government responsible for uncontrolled inflation

(News Agencies) Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has met the Attorney General and sought legal opinion on the no-confidence motion submitted by the Opposition parties which have held his government responsible for the uncontrolled inflation. According to the Dawn newspaper, the government is anxious and making all attempts to foil the Opposition's move to oust the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) regime led by Khan, who has already claimed that the powerful Pakistan Army is backing him.

The no-confidence motion, signed by about 100 lawmakers from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), was submitted with the National Assembly Secretariat on Tuesday.

Khan, 69, is heading a coalition government and he can be removed if some of the partners decide to switch sides, which is not unusual in parliamentary democracies.

The report said that besides meeting Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, whose removal has been sought by the Prime Minister's (former) closest confidants in the party, Prime Minister Khan also met Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Khalid Javed Khan and sought his legal opinion on the no-confidence motion. The prime minister is scheduled to meet leaders of the PTI's allies, including the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Grand Demo-cratic Alliance and party leaders in Sindh, it said. Opposition parties blame Khan's government for uncontrolled inflation that has broken the back of poor people of the country, while Khan accuses them of trying to remove as he was not willing to condone the alleged corruption by the leading Opposition leaders.

Soon after the Opposition submitted its no-confidence motion in the National Assembly (NA) Secretariat, Khan said that he was going nowhere and that he did not fear the Opposition's move. "The government will not be ousted, and will emerge stronger," Khan was quoted as saying.

Information Minister Fawad



Chaudhry said that the prime minister was quite confident that the Opposition would face disappointment and the government would become stronger after he regained confidence in the NA.

Khan also said that he was happy this would be the Opposition's 'last attempt' to oust him.

"We will defeat them in such a way that they will not be able to recover from it until 2028," he said, indicating that he would be reelected in 2023 for another 5-year term.

Khan, a former cricketer, came to power in 2018 and elections are to be held in 2023 if he succeeded to ward off the challenge of no-trust move.

The prime minister also said that there were "multiple foreign hands" backing the Opposition, adding he was completely prepared to handle the political situation.

"A Captain doesn't reveal his strategy all at once," he said.

He also alleged that lawmakers were offered bribes of Rs 180 million (USD 1 million).

He reiterated that the Pakistan Army would never support "these thieves" (Opposition leaders).

"The Opposition does not have the support of the people so they say the establishment is with us."

"What will happen if the no-trust move does not succeed? A mind game is being played, and I am the master of mind games," Khan added. On Tuesday, PML-N president and Leader of the

Opposition Shehbaz Sharif, who was flanked by former president and PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, told a press conference that "We have taken this decision for the people of Pakistan and not for ourselves". As per rules, signatures of at least 68 Members of Parliament were required to force the Speaker to summon a session, which should be convened between three to seven days to conduct a vote on a no-confidence motion.

In the house of 342, the Opposition needed the support of 172 members to remove the Prime Minister and his Cabinet.



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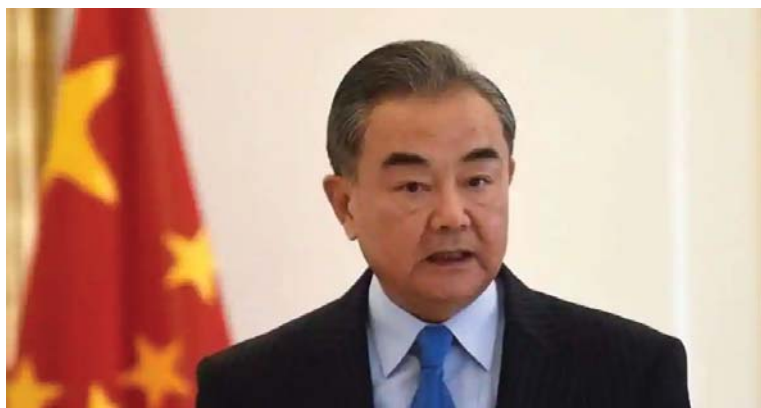
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India, China should help each other, not drain each other's energies: Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi



(News Agencies) Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi conceded that ties with India had "met with some setbacks" amid tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The Chinese foreign minister said both countries should help

each other accomplish goals instead of "draining each other's energies", while adding that "some forces" have tried to create division between the two Asian countries. India and China have been locked in a border tussle since May 2020. In June 2020, Chinese and Indian troops had clashed at Galwan leading to the death of 20 Indian soldiers and 4 PLA soldiers although reports claimed the casualties among the Chinese troops was much higher. In February last year, the Chinese government had said it was

pulling out troops from the forward areas along the LAC, however, India's Army said Chinese troops hadn't pulled back completely and were fortifying positions and building infrastructure.

In January, the two nations concluded the 14th round of corps commander-level meeting at the Chushul-Moldo border.

In a joint statement, the two sides said had a "frank and in-depth exchange of views" on the issues related to the LAC in the western sector while seeking to

maintain dialogue via military and diplomatic channels. India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar had said that India will not agree to any status change along the LAC. "We are absolutely clear that we will not agree to any change in the status quo. Any attempt to change the LAC unilaterally by one side. So however complex, however long it takes, however difficult it is, I think that clarity is what guides us," Jaishankar said while adding that "friction points" still needed to be resolved.

India-Sri Lanka maritime exercise begins in Visakhapatnam

The India-Sri Lanka bilateral maritime exercise has begun at the Visakhapatnam port

(News Agencies) The India-Sri Lanka bilateral maritime exercise, known as SLINEX, started at the Visakhapatnam port on Monday. This is the ninth edition of the two-phase naval exercise. The first phase - the harbour phase - is underway at the Visakhapatnam port and will continue till Tuesday. It will be followed by the sea phase on March 9 and 10 in the Bay of Bengal.

The Sri Lanka Navy is being represented by SLNS Sayurala, an

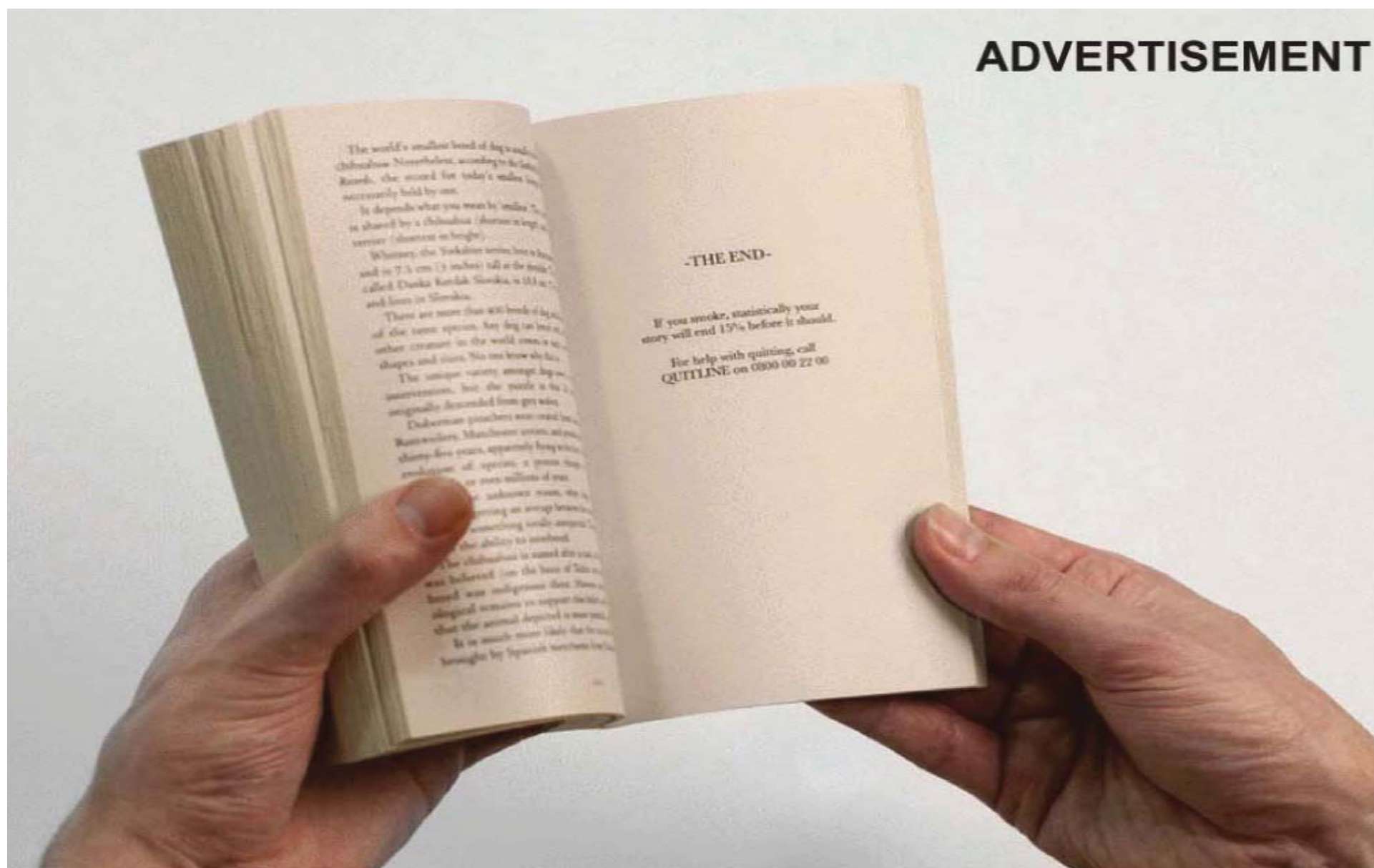
advanced offshore patrol vessel, and the Indian Navy by INS Kirch, a guided missile corvette. Other participants from the Indian Navy include INS Jyoti, a fleet support tanker, advanced light helicopter (ALH), Seaking and Chetak helicopters and Dornier maritime patrol aircraft. The previous edition of SLINEX was conducted off Trincomalee in October 2020.

"SLINEX aims to enhance inter-operability, improve mutual understanding and exchange best

practices and procedures for multifaceted maritime operations between both navies," a government statement said. The harbour phase would include professional, cultural, sporting and social exchanges. Exercises during the sea phase will include surface and anti-air weapon firing exercises, seamanship evolution, aviation operations including cross deck flying, advanced tactical manoeuvres and special forces operations at sea. "These will further enhance the high

degree of inter-operability already existing between the two navies," the government said. "SLINEX exemplifies the deep maritime engagement between India and Sri Lanka and has grown in scope over the years to strengthen mutual cooperation, in consonance with India's policy of 'Neighbourhood First' and the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)'," it said.

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US gave a nod, then rejected Poland's offer: All about Ukraine's fighter aircraft saga

The US had earlier given its nod to Nato countries for providing fighter aircraft to Ukraine. Once Poland offered to pitch in, the US rejected the offer, saying it could trigger an escalation.

(News Agencies) Ukraine's quest for additional fighter jets to take on Russia's air superiority has hit a dead end. With the inconsistent stand taken by the United States and Poland, there is little hope for Ukraine to get the Soviet-era MiG-29s they were hoping for. Just days after the US green-lit Nato countries providing fighter aircraft to Ukraine, the efforts only seem to be just symbolic that cannot fructify on the ground.

In a fresh offer, Poland said it's willing to give 28 MiG-29 fighter jets that can be operated from the Ramstein airbase, the US air force base in Germany.

The US has rejected the offer saying it's not tenable as it could trigger an escalation between Russia and the Nato countries. "The prospect of fighter jets at the disposal of the Government of the United States of America departing from a US/NATO base in Germany to fly into airspace that is contested with Russia over Ukraine raises serious



concerns for the entire NATO alliance," Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said. Initially, Poland denied reports that it would send its MiG-29s to Ukraine in exchange for US-made F-16s. Russia is far superior to Ukraine when it comes to air superiority. Ukraine has around 90 fighter jets and 34 attack helicopters against Russia's 1,500 fighter aircraft

and 538 combat choppers.

Earlier, the European Union had also said that it would send fighter aircraft to Ukraine but it's not clear which countries

have made the offer. It was speculated that Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia could be among those who can provide air support, since they

use Mig-29 and Su-25 which the Ukraine air force also uses. While the US and other Nato countries have provided military aid like anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft systems and ammunition among other military needs, providing fighter aircraft is a sticky subject as it will likely be viewed as direct involvement in the war. Despite Nato not joining the war, Ukraine has been fighting, putting up stiff resistance against Russia for a fortnight now. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has also been pushing for a no-fly zone, which essentially means no Russian aircraft can enter the Ukrainian airspace; a request that's been rejected by the US and Nato as it would mean direct involvement.

US border authorities in California find 52 reptiles hidden in man's clothing

A man had 52 lizards and snakes hidden in his clothing as he tried to slither past US border agents in California, authorities said Tuesday



(News Agencies) A man who tried to slither past US border agents in California had 52 lizards and snakes hidden in his clothing, authorities said Tuesday. The man was driving a truck when he arrived at the San Ysidro border crossing with Mexico on February 25 and was pulled out for additional inspection, US Customs and Border Protection said in a statement. Agents found 52 live reptiles tied up in small bags "which were concealed in the man's jacket, pants pockets, and groin area," the statement said. Nine snakes and 43 horned

lizards were seized. Some of the species are considered endangered, authorities said. "Smugglers will try every possible way to try and get their product, or in this case live reptiles, across the border," said Sidney Aki, Customs and Border Protection director of field operations in San Diego. "In this occasion, the smuggler attempted to deceive CBP officers in order to bring these animals into the US, without taking care for the health and safety of the animals." The man, a 30-year-old US citizen, was arrested.

US man who got first pig heart transplant dies after 2 months

The first person to receive a heart transplant from a pig has died, two months after the groundbreaking experiment, the Maryland hospital that performed the surgery announced Wednesday

(News Agencies) David Bennett, 57, died Tuesday at the University of Maryland Medical Center. Doctors didn't give an exact cause of death, saying only that his condition had begun deteriorating several days earlier. Bennett's son praised the hospital for offering the last-ditch experiment, saying the family hoped it would help further efforts to end the organ shortage. "We are grateful for every innovative moment, every crazy dream, every sleepless night that went into this historic effort," David Bennett Jr. said in a statement released by the University of Maryland School of Medicine. "We hope this story can be the beginning of hope and

not the end." Doctors for decades have sought to one day use animal organs for life-saving transplants. Bennett, a handyman from Hagerstown, Maryland, was a candidate for this newest attempt only because he otherwise faced certain death - ineligible for a human heart transplant, bedridden and on life support, and out of other options. After the Jan. 7 operation, Bennett's son told The Associated Press his father knew there was no guarantee it would work. Prior attempts at such transplants -- or xenotransplantation -- have failed largely because patients' bodies rapidly rejected the animal organ.

To fight Covid abroad, US aims to contribute to vaccines for next disease

(News Agencies) The Biden administration announced Tuesday that it intends to contribute \$150 million over the next three years to a global effort aimed at rapidly producing a vaccine in case a new biological threat emerges. Still, activists and health experts urged the United States to do more to fight the current coronavirus pandemic. The financial commitment, which will require approval from Congress, is a small fraction of what is needed for the project being undertaken by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, a global foundation. The coalition's CEO, Dr Richard Hatchett, has announced a \$3.5 billion, five-year effort to "face down the next Disease X with a new vaccine in just 100 days." Tuesday's announcement echoes a plan announced by President Joe Biden in his State of the Union address when he pledged to invest in an effort to produce new vaccines within 100 days of the arrival of future coronavirus variants. The contribution was announced by Samantha Power, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, during a summit convened by the British government and the coalition, known as CEPI. The coalition also supports COVAX, the international effort to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to the world, which has struggled to get doses into people's arms. "Our eyes, like yours, are also on the horizon — on the epidemic or pandemic that has yet to come," Power said, addressing the summit's attendees by video. "While we continue our current efforts to end this pandemic, we are not losing sight of our long-term preparedness goals." The administration's commitment comes as Biden is under pressure to do more to combat COVID, as well as to prepare for the next pandemic. Last week, the administration asked Congress for an additional \$22.5 billion to fight the pandemic at home and overseas, and Biden is expected to host his own



global COVID summit in the coming weeks.

The president has repeatedly said that the United States has contributed more money, and donated more coronavirus vaccine doses, to the world than any other nation.

But two recent analyses, one by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the other by Public Citizen, suggest the United States is not living up to his promise that the nation would be the "arsenal of vaccines."

The Kaiser Family Foundation's analysis found that, when donations of money and doses are measured against a country's gross domestic product, the United States does not lead the world. The analysis found that when gross domestic product is considered, the United States ranks 12th in financial donations and sixth in donations of doses.

"It was a surprise," said Jen Kates, who directs the foundation's global health and HIV policy efforts and conducted the analysis. "The White House has said the U.S. is doing more than any other donor. We just wanted to interrogate that a little bit and see: Does it hold up if you look at it from this perspective?"

A new analysis by Public Citizen, titled "An Incomplete Arsenal," raises questions about whether the administration is falling behind on its timeline to deliver 1.2 billion doses to the world by this fall, as Secretary of State Antony Blinken pledged in

December.

When the White House announced its new pandemic preparedness plan last week, much of which will also need congressional funding, it no longer attached a timeline to the 1.2 billion doses pledged. So far, the State Department says, nearly 487 million doses have been shipped. To meet the

1.2 billion dose target, the United States would have to donate more than 70 million doses a month — a figure that, Public Citizen notes, is far higher than the current reported monthly donation of about 55 million doses.

"The modest targets that the administration itself set out are likely not to be achieved this

year, and that's shocking," said Zain Rizvi, an expert on pharmaceutical innovation and access to medicines and the report's author.

White House officials declined to comment on the Kaiser analysis. But they pointed to Tuesday's announcement, as well as their funding request to Congress and a plan to ramp up vaccine manufacturing announced by Biden last year, as evidence that the president is committed to doing more.

Vaccination rates continue to lag in low-income countries, even as vaccines become more widely available, for a variety of reasons including vaccine hesitancy and a lack of infrastructure and personnel to administer the shots. Only 14% of the population of low-income nations has received at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford.

Texas man guilty for role in assault on US Capitol in landmark win for prosecutors



(News Agencies) A Texas man who joined the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump was found guilty for his role in the attack on Tuesday (March 8), a milestone victory for federal prosecutors in the first such case to go before a jury. The defendant, Guy Reffitt, was found guilty on all five of the felony charges he faced, including bringing a gun onto the Capitol grounds and obstructing an official proceeding. Reffitt's trial was seen as an important test case as the U.S. Justice Department attempts to secure convictions from the hundreds of defendants who have not taken plea deals.

The federal jury in Washington returned the unanimous verdict after just two hours of deliberation. Reffitt, who is currently in custody,

will learn the length of his prison sentence at a court hearing scheduled for June 8. Reffitt faces up to 20 years in prison, although defendants rarely get the maximum sentence. Reffitt never entered the Capitol, but the video showed him egging on the crowd and leading other rioters up a set of stairs outside the building. Reffitt, who wore a bulletproof vest and a helmet, persisted up the staircase even as police officers pelted him with pepper balls and doused him with chemical spray. Some 200 defendants have already pleaded guilty to charges relating to the attack, which sent lawmakers running for their lives. Reffitt's trial was seen as an important test case as the U.S. Justice Department attempts to secure convictions from the hundreds of defendants who have not taken plea deals.

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Fraud Investigation in Food Aid Puts Focus on Role of Nonprofits

The F.B.I. is investigating what it called a “massive fraud scheme” in the Minneapolis area as the government cracks down on misuse of pandemic assistance

The F.B.I. said in legal filings that groups overseen by Feeding Our Future had received more than \$65 million from federal food programs during the coronavirus pandemic.Credit...Jenn Ackerman for The New York Times

By David A. Fahrenthold

MINNEAPOLIS — Last year, with the federal government making available huge new sums of money for programs to feed needy children during the pandemic, a nonprofit organization called Advance Youth Athletic Development set up what it described as an enormous child care operation in northeast Minneapolis that could prepare 5,000 dinners each weeknight. Based on the group’s claims, the State of Minnesota channeled \$3.2 million of the federal food aid to the program. But on a subzero morning in January, the F.B.I. carried out a series of pre-dawn raids around the region. It revealed a sprawling investigation into Advance Youth Athletic Development and other groups like it — and the much larger nonprofit organization, Feeding Our Future, that was responsible for ensuring that the money provided to the smaller groups was spent properly.

In court filings, the F.B.I. said it had discovered a “massive fraud scheme” among groups that Feeding Our Future was supposed to oversee, saying they siphoned off tens of millions of dollars by charging taxpayers for nonexistent meals. In affidavits filed in federal court, the Justice Department said it was investigating at least 15 different feeding operations. Together, the F.B.I. said, these groups — all of which were supposed to be overseen by Feeding Our Future — had received more than \$65 million from federal food programs during the coronavirus pandemic. “Almost none of this money was used to feed children,” the government wrote in one filing. “Instead, conspirators misappropriated the money and used it to purchase real estate, cars and other items.”

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When a reporter recently visited the address listed for Advance Youth Athletic Development, there was no sign of a kitchen or a large child care facility. It was a second-story apartment.

“No. No. No,” said Lul Mohamoud, a neighbor in the apartment across the hall, when asked if she had ever seen 5,000

children there. “I have never seen any kids going in there.”

No one has yet been charged in the case, and the leaders of Feeding Our Future, Advance Youth Athletic Development and other nonprofit groups have denied wrongdoing.

But the case has highlighted how the government’s reliance on nonprofits to help carry out an array of programs can increase vulnerability to fraud — a problem that only increased over the past several years, as Washington pumped trillions of dollars into pandemic aid packages.

That aid has focused new attention on the role of nonprofits in particular in acting as conduits and overseers of

federal money that flows through them via the states and then to smaller organizations that carry out programs. States and the federal government count on groups like Feeding Our Future to guard against corruption — even as the system incentivizes the organizations to push more money out the door by giving them a cut of it. In his State of the Union address last week, President Biden said that “billions” in pandemic aid had been stolen, and that he would soon name a chief prosecutor for pandemic fraud.

In Minnesota, state regulators said that even after they grew suspicious of Feeding Our Future, they had been constrained by the courts from stopping the organization. In fact, the state paid the group more than \$197 million after the first suspicions were raised. One of the groups overseen by Feeding Our Future listed a second-floor apartment in this building in Minneapolis as the site of a day care center from which it could prepare 5,000 meals per weeknight for needy children. Credit...Jenn Ackerman for The New York Times

“The scale of this, and the rapidity of it, is astonishing,” said State Senator Roger C. Chamberlain, a Minnesota Republican whose committee oversees the food programs. He said his goal was to understand “why this system failed and collapsed

completely. Because it certainly did.” In all, more than 200 investigators from the F.B.I. and other agencies raided 15 homes and offices around the Twin Cities.

The Minnesota case involves two multibillion-dollar federal food-aid programs, both funded by the Agriculture Department but administered by states. One pays for meals at pre-schools, emergency shelters and aftercare centers. The other pays for meals at summer ac-

uously.”

Since the F.B.I. raids, news coverage by The Star-Tribune and Sahan Journal, a local nonprofit media outlet, has revealed that some of the operators of Feeding Our Future sites had criminal records, and that a former top aide to Mayor Jacob Frey of Minneapolis, a Democrat, was among those under investigation. The aide has denied wrongdoing. Minnesota first approved Feeding Our Future as a sponsor in 2018. In its first years, the group oversaw only a few feeding sites — and, at times, seemed to struggle with overseeing itself.

In February 2020, for instance, the I.R.S. revoked the group’s nonprofit status after it failed to file an annual report for three years. (Feeding Our Future says that status was later reinstated, but the I.R.S. still lists it as revoked.) In other filings, Feeding Our Future said it had a three-member board to provide outside oversight of its finances. But the man listed as the board’s president from 2018 to 2020, Ben Stayberg, a bartender and electrician, said he had been tricked into taking the job and had “absolutely nothing” to do with overseeing the organization. “I had a friend, she was like, ‘Will you just sign, put your name on there?’” he said in an interview. “I was like, ‘All right.’” Mr. Stayberg declined to give the friend’s name.

When the pandemic hit, Feeding Our Future’s world changed. School was out. Children were hungry. Starting in 2020, Congress poured money into the feeding programs and allowed the Agriculture Department to waive rules that had been put in place after previous scandals to make sure states watched the watchdogs. For instance, state officials no longer had to visit feeding sites in person to see whether they were doing what the paperwork said. After that, Feeding Our Future began to grow rapidly, adding dozens of new sites to its network. Some of them were startup nonprofits that had sprung up during the pandemic and never

served food before.

From 2019 to 2021, the number of children in Feeding Our Future’s network increased to about 400,000, from about 4,000, according to state records. The revenue flowing through its network increased to \$197 million from \$3.5 million.

Feeding Our Future’s share grew to about \$19 million, which its founder and president, Aimee Bock, said she spent largely on salaries for her 80 employees and supplies for feeding sites. She said she paid herself \$190,000.

But there were puzzling features at some of the group’s new sites. In Minneapolis, two Feeding Our Future locations claimed to be running large child care centers out of the same small building — one feeding 2,000 children a day, the other 500, according to state records. (Ms. Bock said the state records were wrong, and she had never claimed that food was served there.)

Another operation, housed in the nearby Safari Restaurant, claimed to be feeding 6,000 children a day on its own — more than the total number of children living in the restaurant’s ZIP code. Ms. Bock said the children came from surrounding areas, because the food was appropriate for East African immigrants, many of whom live in the area.

Advance Youth Athletic Development’s site — the location that turned out to be a second-story apartment — had obtained nonprofit status in June, using a fast-track I.R.S. process for groups that expect to have receipts of less than \$50,000 per year. The F.B.I. said that after the nonprofit partnered with Feeding Our Future, it asked for \$730,000 in reimbursements in its first month.

A lawyer for Feeding Our Future said the group never had an accountant on staff.

Then came the F.B.I. raids. “My entire house shook,” Ms. Bock said. On the morning of Jan. 20, she said she heard banging and then saw F.B.I. agents at her front door. “All I could see were the spotlight and three guns, and they were just shouting, ‘Get down here! Get

The watchdogs can keep as an “administrative fee” up to 15 percent of the funds they pass along. Critics say that creates a perverse incentive: a reason for the watchdog not to bark

your hands up!"

In an interview, Ms. Bock said she did not believe anyone in her network had cheated the system.

But if there was fraud, she added, "every test we have in place and every protection we have in place didn't catch it. Is it possible? Absolutely. And if they got one over on us, I will help hold them accountable."

Guhaad Said, the leader of Advance Youth Athletic Development, said the state's numbers were wrong.

"I don't know where that number came from," he said in a phone interview. "I don't know where the 5,000 children came from."

That number appeared on the group's application to enroll in one of the food-aid programs, which Feeding Our Future submitted to the state.

Mr. Said said his group had served meals at the site but declined to cite how many. He blamed Feeding Our Future for the discrepancy.

"There was not proper oversight," he said. "So people may have made some mistakes here and there. But there was no intention to go out there and waste government money."

In Minnesota, state regulators had grown alarmed by Feeding Our Future's growth and lack of financial controls by summer 2020, a spokeswoman for the state's Department of Education said. It tried to stop payments for many of the group's sites. But Feeding Our Future asked a judge to intervene, accusing the state of discrimination because of its work with African immigrants and saying the state had not proved any alle-

gations of fraud. If its payments were cut off, the organization told a judge, the results would be catastrophic, leading to bankruptcy, lost jobs and hungry children.

A judge ruled that the state had not taken the necessary steps to stop the payments. After that, Minnesota officials called in the F.B.I. and continued to channel aid through the group while federal agents conducted a nine-month investigation.

After the F.B.I. raids, Feeding Our Future was blocked from receiving state food aid. The group sought to formally dissolve in late February. Minnesota's attorney general, Keith Ellison, said on Thursday that he was conducting a separate investigation of the group to determine whether it had violated state nonprofit

laws.

The state has also sought to cut ties with a second sponsor called Partners in Quality Care, which had supervised some of the nonprofits that worked with Feeding Our Future. A lawyer for Partners in Quality Care said it was fighting the action and had no indication that it was under investigation. As of last year, Feeding Our Future and Partners in Quality Care together oversaw 53 percent of the money that Minnesota disbursed through these two federal aid programs. But even after the F.B.I. raids, there are suggestions that some people are still trying to game the system. Lily Crooks, who operates a small day care center in Minneapolis, said she had worked with Feeding Our Future and received about

\$30 per month for a year for the snacks she served her children. After Feeding Our Future was raided, she said, a new sponsor called to recruit her — and immediately offered a plan to fool the state.

What if, the woman suggested, Ms. Crooks told the government that her snack was actually a full meal instead? "We could call it breakfast" and make five times more, Ms. Crooks recalled the woman saying.

What if, the woman suggested, Ms. Crooks told the government that her snack was actually a full meal instead? "We could call it breakfast" and make five times more, Ms. Crooks recalled the woman saying. Ms. Crooks said she declined, and was disheartened by the offer. "They are watchdogs, right?"

Irvine Man Arrested on Charge Alleging He Fraudulently Obtained More Than \$5 Million in COVID-Relief Loans for Sham Companies

LOS ANGELES — An Orange County man who fled after authorities searched his residence on Wednesday is in federal custody today after he was arrested at the U.S.-Mexico border and charged with fraudulently obtaining more than \$5 million in COVID-relief loans for three sham companies.

Reddy Raghav Budamala, 35, of Irvine, was arrested at the border early Thursday morning by federal law enforcement and made his initial court appearance Thursday afternoon in the United States District Court in Los Angeles. At that hearing, a United States Magistrate Judge ordered Budamala held without bond because he posed a flight risk.

A criminal complaint filed Thursday charges Budamala with one count of wire fraud. According to an affidavit filed with the complaint, Budamala in 2019 formed or acquired three shell companies with no operations — Hayventure LLC, Pioneer LLC, and XC International LLC. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the enactment of federal programs designed to address the economic fallout from the pandemic, Budamala allegedly submitted to the Small Business Administration (SBA) seven applications for pandemic-relief loans under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL).

As part of the applications filed from April 2020 through

March 2021, Budamala falsely represented to the banks administering the COVID-relief business loan programs that his companies employed dozens of individuals and earned millions of dollars in revenue, and that he needed the money for payroll and business expenses, the affidavit alleges.

The listed addresses for the companies were bogus, nonexistent or residential. The states where Budamala's companies purportedly operated have no records of those companies paying wages to any employees, and bank records for the companies reflect no significant business income or operating expenses. During a February 2021 interview with a State Department official in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a United States passport, Budamala said he wanted the passport so he could get a job, according to the affidavit.

The SBA and the banks funded six of the loans and disbursed \$5,151,497, the affidavit states. Budamala allegedly applied to have several of the loans forgiven and falsely represented that he had used the SBA money entirely for payroll.

Once the loans were funded, Budamala used the money to pay for personal expenses, including the purchase of a \$1.2 million investment property in Los Angeles, the purchase of a \$597,585 property in Malibu, a \$970,000 investment in an EB-5 Immigrant Investor Visa Pro-

gram and a nearly \$3 million deposit into Budamala's personal TD Ameritrade account, according to the affidavit.

A complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

If convicted of the charge, Budamala would face a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison. IRS Criminal Investigation, the FBI, and the Small Business

Administration's Office of Inspector General investigated this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney Gregory D. Bernstein of the Major Frauds Section is prosecuting this case.

In May 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force

bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts.

**Let's go to
explore a magical
place**

***Come into the lap of
Nature, Explore Hiking,
Day Camping, *fishing &
*Hunting on 100 Acres of
Unexplored & Beautiful
land backing to
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* Limited spots available,
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APOLLO
FARMS & RESORTS

Bay Area twin brothers sentenced for \$2 million pandemic aid fraud

Two brothers in Marin County have been sentenced for defrauding the federal government of about \$2 million in pandemic relief funds. Caesar Oskan of San Rafael, 67, was sentenced to 18 months in prison and ordered to pay nearly \$1,493,904 in restitution. His twin, Ester Ozkar of Novato, was sentenced to a year in prison and ordered to pay \$509,038.41 in restitution and a \$1 million fine. The brothers conducted separate schemes that involved creating fictitious companies to apply for relief funds, authorities alleged. They did so through the Economic Injury Disaster Loans program and the Paycheck Protection Program, which aimed to help businesses keep workers on the books during the coronavirus crisis. Oskan — also known as Sezer Ozkan — submitted 27 applications for aid for fake compa-

nies with fake payroll and tax documents. The scheme netted him more than \$1.7 million in government loans and advances, the prosecution said. Ozkar — also known as Eser Ozkay — submitted eight fraudulent applications and collected nearly \$500,000 in aid. The federal funds were offered to employers whose companies existed before Feb. 15, 2020. Oskan and Ozkar created their fictitious entities after that, but they modified their state incorporation documents to back-date the companies' formation. The defendants pleaded guilty in May to making false statements to financial institutions. Oskan was sentenced on Feb. 13 by U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer in San Francisco. Ozkar was sentenced by the same judge on Dec. 15.

Lawyers for both defen-

dants asked the judge to spare them from prison, noting their cooperation with authorities.

In a sentencing memorandum to the judge, Colin Cooper, the defense attorney for Oskan, said his client is "humiliated and deeply ashamed by his conduct." "Mr. Oskan tried to pay back some of the loans prior to learning about the federal investigation," Cooper wrote. "He succeeded in paying back \$105,600 before his arrest, and subsequently has paid back the rest."

Ozkar's lawyer, Karen McConville, wrote that her client has "demonstrated his sincere remorse and extraordinary acceptance of responsibility." "At an early stage he took steps to make full restitution, and all the funds that were taken have been repaid," she wrote. "The offense occurred during a period in which



Mr. Ozkar's stability — financial and emotional — was disrupted by the loss of his wine country tourism business due to recent wildfires, coupled with a sense of frustration that he had unfairly been denied the disaster relief loan for which he had applied through the Small Business Administration.

"He realizes fully, of course, that none of these circumstances can in any way justify the acquisition of government loans based on false information, but his actions were influenced as much by misguided passion as by greed." The judge ordered Oskan to surrender to prison by May 25 and Ozkar by March 15.

Georgia man who used COVID relief funds to buy Pokemon card sentenced to prison

Sentence includes payment of \$85,000 in restitution



DUBLIN, GA: A Laurens County, Georgia man has been sentenced to federal prison after admitting he lied to obtain a COVID-19 disaster relief loan, then used a large portion of the money to buy a collectible trading card. Vinath Oudomsine, 31, of Dublin, Ga., was sentenced to 36 months in prison after pleading guilty to one count of Wire Fraud, said David H. Estes, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia. U.S.

District Court Judge Dudley H. Bowen also fined Oudomsine \$10,000, ordered him to pay restitution of \$85,000, and to serve three years of supervised release after completion of his prison term. There is no parole in the federal system. "Congress appropriated funding to assist small businesses struggling through the challenges of a global pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Estes. "Like moths to the flame, fraudsters like

Oudomsine took advantage of these programs to line their own pockets — and with our law enforcement partners, we are holding him and others accountable for their greed." As described in court documents and testimony, starting on or around July 2020, Oudomsine applied to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) ostensibly for an "entertainment services" business in Dublin

that Oudomsine claimed had 10 employees and gross revenues of \$235,000 in the 12 months preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of fraudulent representations on Oudomsine's application, the SBA deposited \$85,000 into Oudomsine's bank account on Aug. 4, 2020. Oudomsine later used \$57,789 of the funds to purchase a Pokemon trading card. Oudomsine agreed to forfeit the Pokemon card — "Charizard" — as part of the prosecution. "The SBA Office of Inspector General continues to safeguard taxpayer dollars by protecting SBA programs from fraudsters seeking to gain access to pandemic assistance through deception," said SBA OIG's Special Agent in Charge Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite. "OIG remains committed to rooting out bad actors and protecting the integrity of SBA programs. I want to thank the U.S. Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners for their dedication and pursuit of justice." "COVID-19 disaster relief loans are issued by the government to help businesses

struggling to survive during a pandemic, not to use for trivial collectible items," said Philip Wislar, Acting Special Agent in Charge of FBI Atlanta. "This sentence highlights the FBI's commitment to aggressively pursue anyone who would abuse taxpayer dollars and divert them from citizens who desperately need them." Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General, and an investigator from the U.S. Attorney's Office investigated the case. Oudomsine was prosecuted for the United States by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jonathan A. Porter and Patrick J. Schwedler, and Asset Recovery Unit Chief Xavier A. Cunningham handled forfeiture in the case.

Nonprofit CEO Pleads Guilty to Wire Fraud in Relation to Covid-19 Loan Fraud

Defendant Misappropriated \$305,854 in Paycheck Protection Program Loan Funds

Greenbelt, Maryland – Brandon Fitzgerald-Holley, age 32, of Suitland, Maryland, pleaded guilty today to wire fraud in relation to COVID-19 loan fraud. The guilty plea was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erik L. Barron; Special Agent in Charge Thomas J. Sobocinski of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Baltimore Field Office; Special Agent in Charge Shimon R. Richmond, Mid-Atlantic Region, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Office of Inspector General (FDIC-OIG); Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite, Special Agent in Charge of the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General's Eastern Region (SBA-OIG); Special Agent in Charge Michael McGill of the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, Philadelphia Field Division (SSA-OIG); and Special Agent in Charge Darrell J. Waldon of the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation, Washington, D.C. Field Office (IRS-CI).

According to his guilty plea, Fitzgerald-Holley used his non-operational nonprofit, the Coalition for Social Justice and Reform Incorporated (the Coalition), to fraudulently obtain COVID-19 relief funds. Since the Coalition's formation in 2018, the nonprofit had no employees, income, or regular operations. On March 31, 2020, Fitzgerald-Holley submitted an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) application for \$150,000 in funds to the Small Business Administration (SBA) on behalf of the Coalition. On June 3, 2020, the SBA denied the Coalition's application for an EIDL. On the same day, Fitzgerald-Holley contacted the SBA to request reconsideration of the

EIDL application. The SBA did not approve Fitzgerald-Holley's request for reconsideration of his EIDL or provide Fitzgerald-Holley with any EIDL funding.

Further, on June 13, 2020, shortly after Fitzgerald-Holley's fraudulent EIDL application was denied, Fitzgerald-Holley submitted an application to Institution 1 for a for a \$305,854 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan. Institution 1 is an online

financial technology company that specializes in small business lending and participating as a non-bank PPP lender. On the PPP loan application, Fitzgerald-Holley falsely listed that the Coalition employed 25 employees, had an average monthly payroll cost of \$122,342. In reality, the Coalition had no employees or payroll expenses. Fitzgerald-Holley also created and submitted fraudulent documents including a fraudulent IRS Form W-3, which falsely stated that the Coalition had 25 employees with total wages of \$1,385,000.

On June 13, 2020, the Coalition's PPP loan application was approved. Fitzgerald-Holley signed the note on the loan as the CEO of the Coalition. Institution 1 subsequently deposited \$305,854 in PPP loan funds into Fitzgerald-Holley's personal account on June 16, 2020. As stated in his plea agreement, upon receiving the fraudulently obtained PPP proceeds, Fitzgerald-Holley used the funds to purchase personal items including

clothing, a pool table, televisions, electronic equipment, a 2020 Dodge Charger Scat, and various accessories for the vehicle. He also used the funds to fund a vacation rental. In total, Fitzgerald-Holley misappropriated \$305,854 in PPP loan funds.

Fitzgerald-Holley faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison for wire fraud. United States District Judge George J. Hazel has scheduled

Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>. Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving Covid-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

Fitzgerald-Holley faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison for wire fraud. United States District Judge George J. Hazel has scheduled sentencing for March 7, 2021

Man accused of pandemic loan, unemployment aid fraud

Stacy V. Santemore, 46, who now lives in Houston, is charged with making false statements and theft of government funds

NEW ORLEANS — A former New Orleans resident faces federal charges that he fraudulently received a pandemic aid loan and unemployment benefits, U.S. Attorney Duane Evans said in a Monday news release. Stacy V. Santemore, 46, who now lives in Houston, is charged with making false statements and theft of government funds. In the charging document, prosecutors accuse Santemore of fraudulently obtaining a federal Paycheck Protection Program loan of more than \$89,000 by falsely claiming a business he owned was in operation on Feb. 15, 2020. He

also is accused of receiving more than \$1,000 in unemployment benefits from early April of 2020 until March of 2021, even though he was working for Amtrak. Evans said Santemore faces a possible sentence of up to five years in prison and \$250,000 in fines if convicted on the false statements count; up to ten years in prison and up to \$250,000 if convicted on the theft count. He was charged in a bill of information filed last week in New Orleans. He has not entered a plea and is set for his initial court appearance later this month. Court records did not list an attorney who could speak for Santemore.



FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution - First Degree Murder, Second Degree Murder, First Degree Assault, Second Degree Assault, Dangerous Weapon with Intent to Injure






Photograph taken April 2015

DESCRIPTION	
Alias: Bhadreshkumar C. Patel	
Date(s) of Birth Used: May 15, 1990	Place of Birth: Kantrodi Ta Viramgam, Gujarat, India
Hair: Brown	Eyes: Brown
Height: 5'9"	Weight: 165 pounds
Sex: Male	Occupation: Employee of donut shop
Nationality: Indian	

REWARD

The FBI is offering a reward of up to \$100,000 for information leading to the arrest of Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel.

REMARKS

Patel was last known to be in the Newark, New Jersey, area.

CAUTION

Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel is wanted for allegedly killing his wife by striking her multiple times with an object while they were both working at a donut shop in Hanover, Maryland, on April 12, 2015. A local arrest warrant was issued in the District Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County on April 13, 2015, and Patel was charged with first degree murder, second degree murder, first degree assault, second degree assault, and dangerous weapon with intent to injure. A federal arrest warrant was issued in the United States District Court, District of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland, on April 20, 2015, after Patel was charged with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

If you have any information concerning this person, please contact your local FBI office or the nearest American Embassy or Consulate.

Field Office: Baltimore

Learning from forest-dwelling, tribal communities to fight forest fires

coordination between ministries and agencies at the union and state levels to ensure contextually appropriate interventions that can be delivered by the forest department and local administrations. Technical knowledge should also be decentralised so that people on the ground have access to information that helps them respond to disasters and build resilience in the long

term.

A fundamental shift in making India's forests less vulnerable will also require being clear-eyed about problematic community practises. Apart from accidents and negligence, flames can leap over into wooded areas because of stubble burning in forest-adjacent fields. Occasionally, there can be sinister issues like intentional arson to clear forest land

for agriculture. However, tackling these challenges should move past blaming communities to addressing root causes of issues like incentives for unsuitable farming. Even Indians in concrete jungles are not removed from the fate and fecundity of the country's diverse and wondrous ecosystems. Forests continue to be central to our civilisation by shaping our air and rivers and to how pollinators

give life to the fields that feed us and are a source of immense aesthetic and spiritual value. Tribal communities have a strong intuitive understanding of this. There is much to learn from how their relationship with natural resources is regulated by natural rhythms and cycles. Communities' knowledge and customs should be central to how we deal with forest fires in a warming world.

What the BJP hopes to gain by merging Delhi's three MCD

For the North corporation, the share of internal revenue through property tax was half that (around 15%), while for the East body, this figure was even lower (around 9%). East corporation has around 2,28,000 taxpayers among 4,00,000 property owners, North MCD has 3,35,000 taxpayers among 1 million property owners, and South body has 4,75,000 taxpayers among its 1.1 million property owners, according to data released by the three MCDs before the last civic body elections in 2017.

The financial hit

Safai karamcharis, medical staff, healthcare workers, engineers, doctors and nurses have gone off the streets since 2015 at least 50 times, in protest against salary delays, bonuses and cashless medical cards. Trouble escalated after the AAP came to power in the Assembly in 2015 and the BJP returned to the MCDs. The BJP has constantly blamed the AAP for not paying its dues, while the latter blames corruption in the MCDs for the financial crisis.

The (re)unification

The Delhi BJP has been in favour of the

unification of the three municipal corporations and has been advocating for a merger for the past few months with the central leadership, it is learnt. Sources said state unit president Adesh Gupta and leader of opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri have been advocating with the Home Ministry the need to unify the three civic bodies ahead of MCD polls scheduled in April. This, as the Delhi BJP faces significant anti-incumbency and a buoyant AAP. It also has political significance as the MCDs have constantly claimed they are devoid of

funds because the AAP-led Delhi government has been blocking it. "This would also help the party send out a message to the public of how they plan to fix the fund crisis if voted to power again," said a leader. Also, the party wants to "run the corporation after a merger for some time in a better pay with salaries being given on time and taking new initiatives" – to send out a message that it was the trifurcation that had led to the crisis and a "historical wrong" has been corrected. This, the BJP hopes, will at least help it put up a fight against the AAP.

The impact of Biden's ban on Russian oil - in Moscow, Washington, Caracas, and Tehran

everything I can to minimize Putin's price hike here at home".

Some Republicans have been urging that the US should increase the domestic production of oil. That, however, is a long-term idea, and will not address the immediate problem. It will also involve a debate on the US commitments to protecting the environment and various other complex questions. In the short term, countries such as Iran and Venezuela,

long condemned by the US and other Western governments as "rogue" regimes, are likely to be "welcomed back" into the oil market, the AP report quoted Claudio Galimberti, an analyst at Rystad Energy, as saying. A team of American officials travelled to Caracas over last weekend to discuss energy and "other issues", the White House said. Venezuela, one of the world's leading producers of oil, and a classic petro-state, is Russia's

closest ally in South America. Following the talks, Venezuela on Tuesday released two jailed US citizens, including an oil executive who was arrested in 2017 on allegations of corruption. Analysts were reading this as a peace signal by President Nicolas Maduro, who had earlier indicated in a televised address to his people that he was amenable to accepting US demands that he re-open talks with political opponents of his regime,

which the US considers illegitimate. The US has also been in negotiations with Tehran to revive the 2015 nuclear deal that President Donald Trump's administration had abandoned, in return for easing Western sanctions. A Reuters report on March 7 quoted the Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh as saying that a deal can be reached in "the shortest time" if the US accepts some conditions put by Tehran.

The post-ideology politician and erosion of the party system

The Congress took all its 37 Goa candidates for a loyalty oath "in the name of God" at a temple, church and mosque and later got a signed legal affidavit. A similar oath was administered in Manipur. Apparently, all this is intended to thwart post-poll defections. Defection-induced regime changes happened in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, MP, Assam and Tripura.

There have been two other concomitant developments. The first is the narrowing of distinction between political parties — in working style, personalised party control and political postures. The second is the ideological and policy compromises to suit the imperatives of power. Watch how Uddhav Thackeray has so well diluted Shiv Sena's aggressive Hindutva to accommodate his secular allies like

Sharad Pawar. Amarinder Singh dumped secularism days after meeting Amit Shah. Kejriwal has been more ardently pandering to deshbhakti and majoritarian religiosity than Thackeray. The other undercurrent that went unnoticed was the introduction of tele-surveys to decide CM nominees. The AAP in Punjab was the first to experiment with it. The party contacted over 21.59 lakh people on a dedicated mobile number. Respondents were asked to record their voices and send a text message or WhatsApp the name of their candidate. The survey found Bhagwant Singh Mann enjoyed the highest amount of support and everyone in AAP accepted it. This prompted the Congress to conduct its own tele-survey through interactive voice response calls. This was to make it trans-

parent. Apart from contacting 1.5 crore people from the general public, the party's coordinators sought the views of all Congress MPs, MLAs and block, district and PCC leaders. The outcome showed Charanjit Singh Channi enjoyed more support. The findings were so compelling that Navjot Singh Sidhu also accepted them.

The tele-survey may not be totally fool-proof. But it certainly marks a departure from the system of Delhi bosses imposing their favourites on the elected MLAs. For the first time, party ranks have forced the high command to adopt a democratic procedure. This comes in the backdrop of a decade of sharp decline in internal democracy across political parties. Organisational bodies were made dormant. Internal discussions and seeking MLAs' preferences

were seen as signs of "weak" leadership. In Uttarakhand, CMs were changed three times in four months. Tirath Singh Rawat was CM for just 116 days. In September, Vijay Rupani was suddenly removed as Gujarat CM and was replaced by a junior loyalist, much to the chagrin of deputy CM Nitin Patel. Even the Karnataka strong man B S Yediyurappa was not spared.

The urge to be assertive was so strong that even the Rahul-Priyanka team began replacing the Congress CMs. In September, it was Amarinder Singh. The Chhattisgarh CM had to make three Delhi visits with his MLAs to escape the axe. Even the fairly stable Rajasthan CM was on the hit list. Clearly, democratic procedures like tele-survey are unlikely to gain traction.

If women are not empowered, the economy loses

Coming to the mining industry, one that I have spent years establishing my businesses in, I see more and more women taking up unconventional roles, whether it be working at mining sites, in manufacturing or security outfits. Glass ceilings are beginning to shatter but there is a lot more to be done. Sandhya

Rasakatla from Hindustan Zinc made history last year when she was appointed the country's first-ever woman underground mine manager. Unfortunately, until recently, mining was perceived as a man's domain. The physical nature of the work and the use of heavy equipment made regulators shy away from

permitting women to work in mines. But just as women begin to enter other male-dominated professions like the armed forces — women are now getting commissioned as fighter pilots — they are doing so in mining as well. Of course, traditionally male-dominated sectors like mining need to improve not only

in terms of their gender representation but also in terms of the work culture they foster. It is the culture at the workplace that determines not just whether a woman gets a seat at the table, but also whether her voice is heard. At Vedanta, we are taking this very seriously. I truly believe that every woman

in our country deserves equal access to opportunities. It is only when we level up the playing field, do we see the true potential of our Bhartiya naari. Their success will define our nation's success. As a nation, we need to continue empowering our women to achieve our full potential as a superpower.

How Western firms quietly enabled Russian oligarchs

For many firms, the paydays are not enough to make up for the potential reputational damage of working for Kremlin-linked oligarchs. A flurry of Western lobbying, law and public relations firms recently dropped their Russian clients or operations.

A spokesperson for the law firm Skadden Arps said it is "in the process of ending our representations of Alfa Bank," a sanctioned, oligarch-controlled company. (Skadden has also represented Abramovich, the billionaire owner of England's Chelsea Football Club, but she would not say whether that work continues.)

International law firms Linklaters and Norton Rose Fulbright both said they were leaving Russia. A spokesperson for another large firm, Debevoise & Plimpton, said it is terminating several client relationships and will not take any new clients in Moscow. Ashurst, a large London-based law firm, said it would not "act for any new or existing Russian clients, whether or not they are subject to sanctions."

Accounting giants PWC, KPMG, Deloitte and EY — which have provided extensive services to oligarchs and their networks of offshore shell companies — also said they were leaving Russia or severing ties with their local affiliates.

Some firms parted ways with Russian clients whose praises they had been singing in the days leading up to the invasion.

Last month, a former Treasury official turned lobbyist wrote a letter to the White House arguing that Russia's Sovcombank should not face sanctions, citing the bank's commitment to gender equity, environmental and social responsibility.

Sovcombank had agreed to pay

the lobbyist's firm, Mercury Public Affairs, \$90,000 a month for its work.

The Biden administration recently sanctioned Sovcombank. Within hours of the announcement, Mercury filed paperwork with the Justice Department indicating that it was terminating its contract with Sovcombank.

As recently as mid-February, the British law firm Schillings represented Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov, a longtime ally of Putin. Two weeks later, the European Union and the U.S. Treasury sanctioned Usmanov. Nigel Higgins, a spokesperson for Schillings, said the firm is "not acting for any sanctioned individuals or entities."

Another lawyer, Thomas Clare, has written threatening letters to news organizations on behalf of clients, including Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska. In 2019, for example, he warned that he might try to hold The New York Times "liable for the catastrophic economic damages" facing Deripaska, who at the time was under sanctions.

Clare said this week that his firm, Clare Locke LLP, has not worked for Deripaska since September, "and we do not foresee doing so again in the future."

Russian companies like Rosneft, VTB, Alfa Bank, Gazprom and Sberbank, which are now under sanctions, have been represented by leading U.S. law firms including White & Case, DLA Piper, Dechert, Latham & Watkins and Baker Botts.

None of those firms would say whether they are still working with the Russian companies.

Baker McKenzie, one of the world's largest law firms, continues to say on its website that it represents "some of Russia's largest companies," including

Gazprom and VTB. The firm said it is "reviewing and adjusting our Russia-related operations and client work" to comply with sanctions.

In Washington, Erich Ferrari, a leading sanctions lawyer, is suing the U.S. Treasury on behalf of Deripaska, who is seeking to overturn sanctions imposed on him in 2018 that he claims have cost him billions of dollars and made him "radioactive" in international business circles.

And lobbyist Robert Stryk said he has recently had conversations about representing several sanctioned Russian oligarchs and companies. He has previously represented clients targeted by sanctions, including the administrations of President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela and former president Joseph Kabila of the Congo.

Stryk said he would consider taking the work if the Treasury Department provided him with the necessary licenses and if the prospective clients opposed Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

Concord Management, whose representatives declined to comment, appears to be devoted almost entirely to managing the money of a small handful of ultrawealthy Russians.

The unregistered investment firm has been operating since 1999 with a staff of about two dozen. It specializes in investing in hedge funds and real estate funds run by private equity firms, according to online profiles of current and former Concord employees.

Wall Street bankers and hedge fund managers who have interacted with Concord and its founder, Michael Matlin, said it oversees between \$4 billion and \$8 billion.

It is not clear how much of that belongs to Abramovich, whose

fortune is estimated at \$13 billion. Abramovich has not been sanctioned. His spokesperson, Rola Brentlin, declined to comment on Concord.

Over the years, Concord has steered its clients' money into marquee financial institutions: global money manager BlackRock, private equity firm Carlyle Group and a fund run by John Paulson, who famously anticipated the collapse of the U.S. housing market. Concord also invested with Bernard Madoff, who died in prison after being convicted of a vast Ponzi scheme.

Another recipient of Concord money was Brevan Howard, a multibillion-dollar European hedge fund company. A person familiar with the matter said Brevan Howard is preparing to return the funds to Concord, which will no longer be a client.

In a letter sent Wednesday to Attorney General Merrick Garland, Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., wrote that he had "recently received information from credible sources in the financial industry" that Concord oversees billions of dollars for Abramovich.

Cohen, co-chair of a panel focused on European security, requested that the U.S. government impose sanctions on Abramovich and seize the assets at Concord, "as this blood money presents a flight risk."

The work performed by law, lobbying and public relations firms often plays out in public or is disclosed in legal or foreign agent filings, but that is rarely the case in the financial arena.

While Russian oligarchs make tabloid headlines for shelling out for extravagant superyachts and palatial homes, their bigger investments often occur out of public view, thanks to a largely invisible

network of financial advisory firms like Concord.

Hedge fund managers and their advisers said they are starting to examine their investor lists to see if any clients are under sanctions. If so, their money needs to be segregated and disclosed to the Treasury Department.

Some hedge funds also are considering returning money to oligarchs who have not been sanctioned, fearful that Russians might soon be targeted by U.S. and European authorities. "The implication of sanctions being imposed on Russia and its oligarchs is just rippling through the private fund community," said Ron Geffner, a lawyer who advises hedge funds. While firms prefer to keep their work for unsavory clients under wraps, a leak in 2017 provided a glimpse into how Western firms helped Russian oligarchs hide assets — and what happened when those clients were targeted by sanctions. The leak, part of the Paradise Papers project, involved the files of the Appleby law firm in Bermuda. At least four clients owned private jets through shell companies managed by Appleby. When companies and individuals linked to Putin were sanctioned in 2014, Appleby jettisoned clients it believed were affected. The Russians found other Western firms, including Credit Suisse, to help fill the void.

Ben Freeman, who tracks foreign influence for the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, said Russians will likely to find new firms this time, too. "There is that initial backlash, where these clients are too toxic," Freeman said. "But when these lucrative contracts are out there, it gets to be too much for some people, and they can turn a blind eye to any atrocity."

Why is Poland offering fighter jets to America?

it said. Since Poland too is under threat from Russia, it is imperative that it not allow its own forces to be weakened post this move.

US reaction

White House officials were blindsided by the Polish announcement on the MiGs, according to an AP report. The proposal did not come up during talks with Secretary of State Antony Blinken when

he was recently in Poland, said the report, citing a US official familiar with the talks. The US official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told AP that White House officials did not think the proposal would easily solve the logistical challenges of providing aircraft to Ukraine. US Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland told lawmakers at a hearing on the Ukraine crisis Tuesday she learned

of Poland's plans only while driving to the hearing. "To my knowledge, it wasn't pre-consulted with us," Nuland told senators. **Could Russia retaliate?**

Russia has said that supporting Ukraine's air force would be tantamount to joining the war, and could spur retaliation. While this is a valid threat for EU nations and Nato signatories, it is unlikely that Russia would get into a war with the US. The

European Union and Nato has been reluctant to be overtly involved in any transfer of warplanes. However, the US could accept a "donation" of fighter jets from European nations like Poland, repaint them at the US' airbase in Germany, and transfer them to a friendly non-Nato, non-EU country (like Kosova, for instance), from where Ukrainian pilots could pick them up.

As Biden and Maduro governments talk, a brief history of US-Venezuela ties

Reuters reported that the meeting not only discussed the fate of American detainees but also the possibility of easing US sanctions on importing oil from Venezuela (oil imports from Venezuela have been sanctioned since 2019), in the event that the US banned oil imports from Russia.

Interestingly, when the US sanctioned oil imports from Venezuela in 2019, they were substituted by oil imports from Russia.

Politics in Venezuela

Maduro, who belongs to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, took his position in 2013 after the death of former president Hugo Chávez (he ruled from 1999-2013), who was Maduro's mentor. After completing his first term, Maduro began his second term in January 2019, which is seen by many Venezuelans and

members of the international community as illegitimate.

Guaidó has been seeking to form a transition government since early 2019, until internationally recognised elections can be held. The US, along with at least 57 other countries, recognise Guaidó as the interim president. After recognising Guaidó's presidency in 2019, Trump had said, "I will continue to use the full weight of United States economic and diplomatic power to press for the restoration of Venezuelan democracy."

However, Guaidó has been unable to wrest power from Maduro and has faced increasing danger after returning home from a tour he took between January-February 2020.

A brief history of US and Venezuela relations

Venezuela's troubles started in the mid-

2010s, after the global boom in commodities ended and the country slipped into an economic crisis.

While its oil-dependent economy had grown significantly during the boom, Venezuela remains one of Latin America's poorest countries. Massive investments in social spending were made during that time by Chávez, which ensured the popularity of the "chavistas", as the socialists are called.

After the economic collapse, the crime rate doubled, including drug trafficking and corruption, and inflation multiplied – a situation made worse by West-imposed sanctions. Previously, Maduro has blamed the US sanctions on the country's state oil company and government for the economic problems the country faced.

The Congressional Research Service

(CRS) notes that while the US and Venezuela had historically close relations, partly because the latter was a major US oil supplier, the frictions that started during Chávez's rule were made worse under Maduro.

The US saw the Chávez government as playing a role in undermining human rights and freedom of expression. Under Maduro, this was made worse because of his crackdowns on the opposition, media and civil society.

Essentially, for over a decade now, the US has been concerned about the deterioration of human rights and democracy in Venezuela. To counter this, the US has repeatedly resorted to sanctions, which have included revocations of visas of Venezuelan officials and their families, financial sanctions and sanctions on the Maduro government.

Biden orders government to study digital dollar, other cryptocurrency risks

Wide-ranging oversight of the cryptocurrency market, which surged past \$3 trillion in November, is essential to ensure US national security, financial stability and US competitiveness, and stave off the growing threat of cyber crime, officials said.

Analysts view the long-awaited executive order, first reported on Monday, as a stark acknowledgement of the growing importance of cryptocurrencies and their potential consequences for the US and global financial systems.

One of its key measures directs the US Government to assess the technological infrastructure needed for a potential US Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) — an electronic version of dollar bills in your pocket.

In January, the US Federal Reserve kicked the question of whether the United States should pursue a digital dollar to Congress, leading analysts to predict such a project would take years. But one official said the United States would move forward with developing a digital dollar, albeit with care given the dollar's role as the world's primary reserve currency. "We've got to be very, very deliberate about that analysis because the implications of our moving in this direction are profound for the country that

issues the world's primary reserve currency," the official said.



The order also encourages the Federal Reserve to continue research and development efforts. Nine countries have launched central bank digital currencies, and 16 others - including China - have begun development of such digital assets, according to the Atlantic Council, leading some in Washington to worry that the dollar could lose some of its dominance to China.

The US dollar remains underpinned by key fundamentals, including a commitment to

transparency, the rule of law and the full independence of the Federal Reserve, the official said.

"The dollar's role has been and will continue to be crucial to the stability of the international monetary system as a whole. Foreign central bank digital currencies and their introduction by themselves do not threaten this dominance."

The United States will monitor developments with an eye to maintaining the centrality of the dollar in the global economy, the official said.

In addition, the order asks agencies, including the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, to review other issues raised by cryptocurrencies, including systemic risk and consumer protection.

One key objective is to redress inefficiencies in the current US payments system and boost financial inclusion, especially of poor Americans about 5 per cent of whom do not currently have bank accounts due to high fees, one official said.

"Before today, there hadn't previously been an organized effort to bring together the expertise and authorities of the entire US government to inform a holistic approach to digital assets," another official added

Russia-Ukraine war India may rank among worst hit emerging economies, say analysts

India is likely to rank among the emerging economies worst affected by the Russia-Ukraine crisis as a surge in global prices of commodities is set to upend spending plans and derail its pandemic recovery, analysts say.

If the conflict lasts, India, which imports close to 85 per cent of its oil needs, is likely to see its fiscal, trade and account deficits swelled by a surge in crude oil prices to their highest in more than a decade, which will also fuel inflation.

INFLATION

"The contagion from currently rising geopolitical tension is unlikely to remain limited to financial assets and warrants a change in our key macro forecasts for FY23," said Abheek Barua, chief economist at HDFC Bank.

February's budget was based on an average oil price of \$75 to \$80 a barrel for the fiscal year starting from April 1, but Brent briefly soared on Monday to nearly \$140, its highest in over a decade.

A senior government official said if oil prices averaged \$100 a barrel in the fiscal year to March 2023, that could shave 90 basis points off growth, taking it below 8 per cent, from a forecast range of 8 per cent to 8.5 per cent.

In such a scenario, inflation is seen rising by 100 basis points and the current account deficit could widen by 120 basis points to 2.3 per cent to 2.4 per cent of GDP.

CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT

DBS Bank says every increase of \$10 a barrel in the price of

oil lifts India's consumer price index-based inflation by 20 to 25 basis points, widens the current account gap by 0.3 per cent of GDP, and poses a downside risk of 15 basis points to growth. The oil price spike is also expected to pressure the government to lower fuel levies and reduce the burden on consumers. That in turn would dent revenues, narrowing the room for capital spending needed to boost growth.

EXCISE DUTY CUTS

Retail fuel prices could rise 10 per cent or more, starting from this week, as results flow in from elections in key states. To avoid voter backlash at the polls, state-run oil companies have not raised prices since Nov. 4. "Given the bunched-up increase in the offering, excise duty cuts might be undertaken, to ease pressure on purchasing power and incomes," said Radhika Rao, an economist with DBS Bank.

GOVERNMENT'S COFFERS

But every rupee cut from fuel levies shrinks revenue for the government's coffers by 130 billion rupees (\$1.7 billion) a year. Economists say India could lose as much as 900 billion rupees in trying to lower pump prices.

And a recent battering of markets, which forced a rethink of plans for an \$8-billion IPO of state-run Life Insurance Corp by the end of March, is likely to further dent the government's financial position.

GDP RATINGS RISK

On the plus side, the government could turn a profit by selling

some of its vast grain stockpiles following a rise in global wheat prices that could boost exports of the grain from India. That could defray expenses on its vast annual purchases of grain at prices above global levels in the effort to support farm incomes.

But India's fiscal deficit had widened to a record 9.3 per cent in the year that ended in March 2021, thanks to efforts to cushion the shock of the coronavirus pandemic and revive growth.

That meant the ratio of debt to GDP shot up to more than 90 per cent, for the worst among similarly-rated emerging markets.

Although India's ratings have held steady, agencies have warned of long-term challenges and the need to cut the debt-to-GDP ratio to more sustainable levels.

FISCAL DEFICIT

Government officials said the fiscal deficit could slip by 20 to 30 basis points from a target of 6.9 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal year ending in March if LIC was not listed by then. The ratings agencies were not very happy with the fiscal consolidation path undertaken by us in the budget. Further deterioration could concern them," said a second government official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity.

The government is reworking some key budget figures and the outcome of next year's spending plans could look very different from the budget outlined last month, he added.

Gulf Medical University to provide free seats, scholarships to Indian students returning from Ukraine

"As an Indian, it becomes my duty to help our fellow Indians during this difficult situation. We are trying to help secure the dreams and future of several displaced students," said Dr. Thumbay Moideen, Founder and President of Thumbay Group and President Board of Trustees, GMU, said in an official statement. As per university admission policy, students will be able to choose from various programs in health professions education and avail opportunities to continue their studies in collaborative medical degree program, with international universities of Italy, Ghana, Poland, and Malaysia as per their admission requirements. Founded in the year 1998, GMU is owned and managed by the multi-business conglomerate Thumbay Group a widely renowned institution, which

offers its students access to state-of-the-art medical education, healthcare, and research in addition to clinical training through various academic health centres, including Thumbay University Hospital, Thumbay Dental Hospital and Thumbay Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Hospitals located in the campus. Students can directly communicate with director of admissions, Sherly Koshy, and mail their documents to helpline@gmu.ac.ae with their credentials.

POLAND, HUNGARY ALSO LEND HELPING HAND

In an effort to help Indian medical students, Poland and Hungary have also asked them to continue their education in their respective countries. Medical students from India had met representatives from both countries

who distributed pamphlets inviting them to continue their education there. The Polish government has also announced opening their doors to Indian students so that they can finish their studies. On March 2, Union Minister VK Singh wrote on Twitter, "Poland and India share centuries of friendship and cordial relations which have brought our people together. I am happy to share with you that Polish universities will be opening their doors to our students from Ukraine so that they can finish their studies. Jai Hind!" The Budapest Semmelweis University in Hungary also said that it can accept medical students from Ukrainian universities to come and continue their studies at the university's Hungarian faculties for free until the war ends.

Assembly election 2022 Result

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has scored big in the assembly elections, winning four out of five states with a comfortable majority except Goa and Aam Aadmi Party swept Punjab. The Congress party's dismal run in elections over the past few years continued as it lost all the five states.

AAP sweeps Punjab

One of the biggest takeaway from today's election results is the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) storming into power in Punjab, winning 89 seats and leading in 3, according to the poll results declared by the Election Commission so far. In the 117-member Assembly, a party needs to get 59 seats to form the government. While the SAD won two seats and was leading in one, it's ally BSP won one, and the BJP won two seats and one seat went to an Independent candidate. AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal hailed the party's performance in Punjab as a "revolution". The AAP tsunami made several stalwarts, including three former chief ministers, bite the dust.

Big win for BJP in Uttar Pradesh

With results of the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls pouring in, the BJP has won on 16 seats and is leading on 236, while its rival Samajwadi Party is leading on 115 seats. The Apna Dal (Sonelal) and the NISHAD party, both BJP allies, are leading on 11 seats and seven seats respectively, according to EC website. The Rashtriya Lok Dal, which contested the polls along with the Samajwadi Party (SP), is leading on eight seats. The Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party is leading on five

seats. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has established a lead of over 55,000 votes over his nearest rival Subhawati Shukla of the SP in the Gorakhpur Urban constituency. Adityanath said that this victory shows that people have once again voted for nationalism and good governance. He further said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP will be forming governments in Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, and Uttarakhand.

BJP retains Uttarakhand and Goa too

That the BJP is tipped to gain a strong majority in Uttarakhand and retain power in Goa despite its state governments facing perceived anti-incumbency, only validates the long-held criticism, political watchers believe, that the Congress has become too weak to put up a strong fight against the saffron party where it is the main challenger. Political strategist Prashant Kishor has consistently cited the Congress' abysmal scorecard against the BJP in Lok Sabha and state polls to suggest a case for regional satraps to take lead in putting up a united front against the ruling party.

BJP on firm wicket for Presidential election

The BJP's victory in the assembly polls on Thursday has put the party on a stronger wicket for the election for the post of President expected later this year. The big victory for the BJP in Uttar Pradesh has given Prime Minister Narendra Modi a free hand to decide on the successor to President Ram Nath Kovind, who will complete his tenure on July 24, 2022, political analysts said. Had the Uttar Pradesh election results gone in

favour of the Samajwadi Party, the BJP would have had to rely on the support of fence-sitters such as Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) who together control a sizeable chunk of votes.

Not a good day for current and past CMs

The poll results brought gloom for several political heavyweights, including two current and five former chief ministers, who lost the electoral battle from their respective seats. Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and his Uttarakhand counterpart Pushkar Singh Dhami lost the polls from the seats they held respectively. A similar fate awaited former Uttarakhand chief minister Harish Singh Rawat and former Punjab chief ministers Parkash Singh Badal and Amarinder Singh.

Dismal Congress show

The election results came as another jolt to Congress which could not retain Punjab or come to power in Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur where it was the main rival of the BJP. The party has decided to convene a Congress Working Committee meeting soon to introspect the results, said Congress General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala. "The results of 5 states have come against the expectations of the Congress party but we accept that we failed to get the blessings of the people. Sonia Gandhi has decided to convene Congress Working Committee meeting soon to introspect the results," Surjewala said addressing a press conference in Delhi.

Moscow says no plan to overthrow Zelensky govt, but 'US must explain bio-weapon'

Russia-Ukraine war: Russia said during its special military operation in Ukraine, the Kyiv regime was found to have been concealing traces of a military biological programme implemented with the funding from the United States department of defence.

Russia's foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova on Wednesday said Moscow is not working to topple the Ukrainian government as some progress has been made in the three rounds of the talks held between Russia and Ukraine. In her weekly briefing, Zakharova said Moscow has documental evidence that bioweapons are being developed in Ukraine by the United States. Referring to the statement of US Under Secretary of state for political affairs Victoria Nuland, Maria



Zakharova said that in response to a question, Nuland has confirmed the existence of laboratories for biological research. "We are not talking here about peaceful uses or

scientific goals," Zakharova said. "What were you up to there?" "These (programmes) were financed by the US Department of Defence." "The US Defence Department and

the presidential administration of the United States are obliged to officially explain to the global community, officially, not through talking heads, about the programmes in Ukraine,"

Maria Zakharova said. "We demand details," she said. "We demand and the world awaits," Zakharova said. Both Pentagon and Ukraine have already denied the allegations of bio-weapons. As the conflict enters the 14th day with emerging evidence that Russia is attacking civilian areas, the spokesperson said they are not targeting civilians and even the Russian army's aim is not to occupy Ukraine, or destruction of the statehood, but to "de-Nazify" the country. Zakharova said Kyiv authorities are blocking evacuation efforts. "Information about humanitarian corridors is deliberately not communicated to the population," she said, adding, "Persons wishing to leave for Russia are forced to evacuate in the Western direction."

10 killed in Russian military attack in Ukraine's Severodonetsk town: Report

At least 10 people have been killed in a Russian military attack in Ukraine's Severodonetsk town

At least ten people have died in a Russian military attack in Ukraine's Severodonetsk city, according to reports. This comes as Ukraine's war with Russia entered day 14. Several key cities in Ukraine have witnessed relentless shelling as Moscow escalated its military aggression, with eyes on the capital city of Kyiv. The foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine are scheduled to meet this week in Turkey after talks held earlier failed to resolve the conflict. Two weeks into its war in Ukraine, Russia has achieved less and struggled more than anticipated at the outset of the biggest land conflict in Europe since World War II. But the invading force of more than 150,000 troops retains large and possibly decisive advantages in firepower as they bear down on key cities. The Pentagon on Tuesday estimated that



Russia retains about 95% of the combat power it has deployed in Ukraine, accounting for weapons and vehicles destroyed or made inoperable as well as troops killed and wounded. Those losses, while modest at first glance, are significant for two

weeks of fighting. Two weeks of war have created a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine that has accelerated in recent days. The United Nations estimates that 2 million Ukrainians have fled their country, and the number is expected to grow.



FINE BARBER SHOP

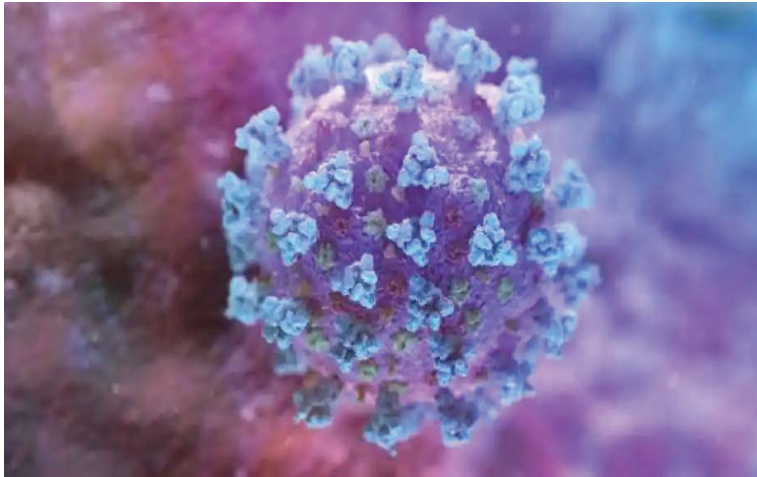
Specializing in Men's Haircut,
Color & More

Haircut, Facial, Highlights,
Color, Skin Fades & More

Harshad Kumar Valand

217 Bethpage Rd, Hicksville,
HY 11801 (Above Mithaas)

This is why some people develop life-threatening COVID-19, while others get no symptoms at all



Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. A single genetic variant disrupting a key messenger molecule in immune system signalling, called interferon alpha-10 was enough to increase a patient's risk of severe disease, according to the study published in the journal Nature. This points to the gene's crucial role in the immune system. It may suggest that treating patients with interferon, a protein released by immune cells to protect against viruses, in the early stages of infection may be beneficial.

Furthermore, the study found that variations in genes that control the levels of a vital component of blood clotting, known as Factor 8, are

associated with critical illness in COVID-19. Some of the abnormal clotting seen in severe cases of COVID-19 may be explained by this. According to researchers, factor 8 underlies the most common type of haemophilia. "It is now true to say that we understand the mechanisms of Covid better than the other syndromes we treat in intensive care in normal times -- sepsis, flu, and other forms of critical illness. COVID-19 is showing us the way to tackle those problems in the future," Baillie said. Researchers sequenced the genomes of 7,491 patients from 224 intensive care units in the UK for the study. The DNA of these people was compared with that of 48,400

other people who had not suffered from COVID-19, and 1,630 people who had suffered mild Covid. As a result of obtaining the whole genome sequence for each participant in the study, the researchers were able to create a precise map and identify genetic variations that contribute to the severity of COVID-19. The team found 16 genes that differed in the DNA of the ICU patients from the DNA of the other groups. A total of seven other genetic variations associated with severe COVID-19 have also been confirmed in earlier studies by the same team. The findings could lead to new tests and treatments to help protect the public from this virus, the team said.

Researchers in the UK have latest findings point to specific discovered 16 new genetic molecular targets in critical variants that can increase the COVID-19. These results explain severity of COVID-19 infection. why some people develop life-threatening COVID-19, while Some of the genes are associated with blood clotting, others get no symptoms at all," immune response, and said Professor Kenneth Baillie, inflammation intensity. "Our Consultant in Critical Care

Amazon's suppliers involved in forced labour in Xinjiang: Report



A report by research group Tech Transparency Project has revealed that Amazon's business is deeply interlinked with China and its suppliers have been linked to forced labour in the Xinjiang region. As per the group, Amazon's supplier list includes firms accused of using Uyghur labourers, reported Louise Matsakis, a tech investigator for NBC news.

It identified three Amazon suppliers linked to forced labour in China directly, including, Luxshare precision industry, AcBel polytech and lens technology. "The findings raise questions about Amazon's exposure to China's repression of minority Uyghurs in Xinjiang — and the extent to which the e-commerce giant is adequately vetting its supplier relationships," the

report read.

It further warned that some of the third-party sellers of Amazon may be offering products that are made using labour from the western Chinese region of Xinjiang. This includes cotton imports that are already subjected to US sanctions, said Matsakis.

Amazon, however, has declined to comment on the same. In a general statement, Erika Reynoso, a spokesperson for the company, said: "Amazon complies with the laws and regulations in all jurisdictions in which it operates, and expects suppliers to adhere to our Supply Chain Standards. We take allegations of human rights abuses seriously, including those related to the use or export of forced labour. Whenever we find or receive

proof of forced labour, we take action." Meanwhile, China has ordered the closure of nearly 160 organisations that are focused on understanding the traditional Uyghur culture.

The Xinjiang Uyghur self-governing region (XUAR), issued a notice on February 22 that stated that there had been a "revocation of registration certificate and seals of the legal reps of social organisations".

The list of 160 organisations being shut down include: the Uyghur classical literature and Muqam Research Association and Dolan farmer paintings' association, Atlan vocational training school and Intil language school, as well as Miraj vocational training school.

Russia demands explanation from US for 'biological programme' in Ukraine



Russia on Wednesday demanded an explanation from USA for supporting what it called was a military biological programme in Ukraine. The allegation of the military biological programme has been denied by Kyiv and Pentagon spokesperson has described the allegation as absurd.

"We confirm facts, unearthed as part of the special military operations, which testify to an emergency attempt to erase evidence of military biological programmes," Zakharova told reporters. "We are not talking here about peaceful uses or scientific goals," Zakharova said. "What were you up to there?" "These (programmes) were financed by the U.S. Department of Defence." In response to earlier Russian allegations about the purported military biological programme in Ukraine, a Pentagon spokesman said on Tuesday: "This absurd Russian misinformation is patently false". A Ukrainian presidential spokesperson said: "Ukraine strictly denies any such allegation". At her briefing, Zakharova said: "The US Defence Department and the presidential administration of the United States are obliged to officially explain to the global community, officially, not through talking heads, about the programmes in Ukraine. "We demand details," she said. "We demand and the world awaits."

Rajiv Gandhi assassination: Indian Supreme Court grants bail to convict

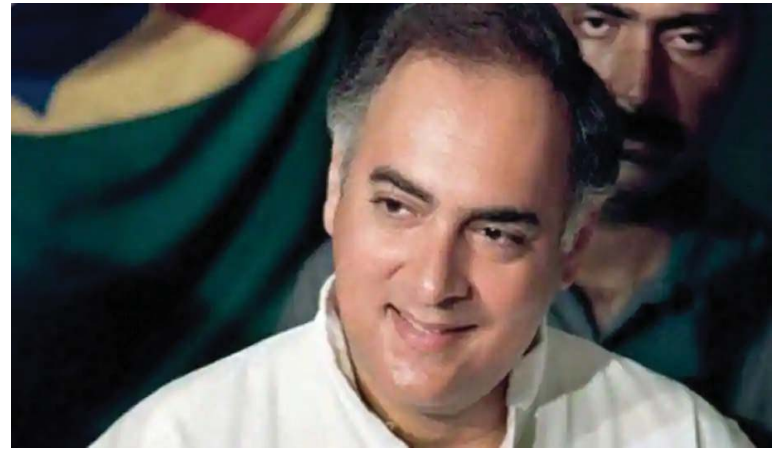
Supreme Court of India on Wednesday (March 9) granted bail to convict for the assassination of country's former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. The court granted AG Perarivalan, the convict, a bail noting that he had spent more than 30 years behind bars. A bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and BR Gavai said: "Taking into account, the appellant has spent more than 30 years of incarceration, he is entitled to be released on bail despite vehement opposition of the Additional Solicitor General (representing the Centre), the appellant is directed to be released on bail." The bench noted during the hearing that decision on Perarivalan's mercy petition had been delayed. It queried Additional Solicitor General KM Nataraj, representing the Centre, what is the role of the Governor in

sending the remission plea to the President, and does the Governor have any independent discretion in a decision taken by the state cabinet.

The bench also noted that there is sufficient material on record in connection with his conduct during imprisonment, along with his educational qualifications. Perarivalan was represented by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayan in the apex court. He informed the court that his client was released on parole thrice and there was no complaint regarding his conduct. The bench also noted the Central government's submissions that the state government does not have power to take a stand on mercy petition, especially when the death was commuted to life. Nataraj, opposing bail to

Perarivalan, submitted that he has already availed the benefit of a mercy petition once, and his death penalty was commuted to life sentence by the top court in 2014, against the backdrop of delay in considering the mercy petition. He added that his remission application has been submitted before the Governor who, in turn, said the competent authority to decide is the President.

Granting bail to Perarivalan, the bench said it will be subject to the satisfaction of the trial court's conditions and directed him to report to the local police, during the first week of every month. In February last year, the Union Home Ministry had informed the Supreme Court that the Tamil Nadu Governor has recorded that the President is the competent authority to deal with



the pardon plea of Perarivalan. Parole to Perarivalan, who has been in jail since his arrest in 1991, was granted and extended by the Tamil Nadu government periodically. In 2014, the top court had commuted his death penalty, for aiding in making the bomb, which killed Rajiv Gandhi, to life imprisonment on the ground of delay in deciding their mercy petitions. On various

occasions, the Supreme Court had expressed its dissatisfaction over the pendency of the pardon plea of Perarivalan for over two years with the Tamil Nadu Governor. Perarivalan had moved the top court seeking premature release and remit of his sentence. He had also cited the recommendation made by the state government in 2018 for his release.

Narcotics trafficking has intensified since Afghanistan 'developments': NSA Doval

In growing signs of worry with Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval has said "The problem of narcotics trafficking has intensified in last one year" in the "light of developments in Afghanistan" which is "evident in growing number of seizures in the past year". Taliban took over Afghanistan in August of last year as the previous Ghani regime collapsed.

Speaking at the Colombo Security Conclave in the Maldives on Wednesday, NSA Doval said, "We remain vulnerable to the threats of trafficking, organised crime and maritime terrorism". He pointed out how Indian and Sri Lankan authorities had busted narcotics being transported at the high seas.

He said, "Based on specific intelligence, a joint operation of India's narcotic Bureau, Indian navy along with our Sri Lankan counterparts recently seized over 800 kg of high-quality drug over the high seas that valued over \$267 million." He further added, "Our agencies and services have been continuously working for various such intelligence inputs and will carry out more operations. Close cooperation on such issues will be in our mutual interest."

India's NSA is in the Maldives for



the 5th National Security Adviser level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave which includes India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Mauritius has been added as the fourth member of the group, making it a quad grouping.

Bangladesh and Seychelles participated as observers. At the meet, he called for "Institutionalisation of our cooperation with a concrete

roadmap and defined charters of objectives", pointing out that "as maritime neighbours, we face common security challenges, our national security is deeply intertwined with our collective security aspirations in the region."

The 4th meeting of the NSAs happened in Colombo on November 28, 2020, where India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives agreed to expand the scope and

membership of the group and renamed it the Colombo Security Conclave. The next meeting of the conclave is scheduled to be held in India at the deputy NSA level. The next NSA level dialogue will also be held in India. At the meet in the Maldives on Wednesday, NSAs discussed the significance of close cooperation between Member and observer countries in maritime safety and security,

countering terrorism and radicalisation. NSA Doval said, "As maritime national, our security at very basic level depends on the security of our coast. Our coasts are vulnerable and numerous threats such as maritime terrorism, smuggling, trafficking. Numerous strategic installations on our coasts that are vital for our security and development and prosperity of our nation and our people."

As part of 75th year of independence, ISRO to launch 75 satellites built by Indian academia

Indian academia is gearing up to build 75 satellites, that are expected to be launched by ISRO rockets between August 15, 2022, and 2023. Efforts in this regard are being carried out to commemorate the 75th year of Indian independence. The project is being carried out under the technical guidance of Dr Mayilsamy Annadurai, a former Director of the Indian Space Research Organisation's lead centre for the design and development of satellites. WION spoke to Dr Annadurai regarding this ambitious goal that lay ahead.



Initiated by the Indian Technology Congress Association (ITCA), the project aims to bring together universities, engineering colleges and schools that will design, build, integrate and test their student-built satellites. Back in 2021, a handful of Indian academia had built 3 satellites known as 'UNITYSat', which was launched as a co-passenger in ISRO's PSLV C51, Amazonia mission. According to Dr

Annadurai, some of the major lessons that students learned from building UNITYSat are being implemented in the ongoing project of building 75 satellites. To test the new systems that are being incorporated in the upcoming satellites, an engineering model will be flown in the coming months. Once the validation is completed successfully, the students will be trained to build the nano-satellites and carry out the related tasks, with the support

of an Indian space start-up. While the respective academic institutions are bearing the cost of this initiative, some state governments such as that of Karnataka have also pitched in with financial support to help students from their government-run schools. To cut short the time to fabricate 75 satellites and make the mission frugal, the start-up is expected to provide satellite-building kits, to the students. Once placed in orbit by the PSLV rocket, each satellite is designed

to remain in earth orbit for up to a year and provide data to the ground stations.

This will give the students the experience of not just building the satellite, but also the ability to operate the ground station to track the satellite and gather, analyse the data obtained. While each of the 75 satellites is meant to have an individual objective, such as capturing images, collecting data, monitoring radiation, other parameters, that will not be the

only task at hand. The constellation of 75 nano-satellites will also be used to test concepts such as the internet of things, low-earth communication, inter-satellite communication, among others. This is being done to keep the mission going, even if a few satellites fail. This concept also has the potential to be improvised, even beyond this 75 satellites mission, Dr Annadurai added. Playing a lead role in this mission of ensuring design, development, fabrication, testing and launching of 75 nano-satellites (each weighing less than 10kg), ITCA is being supported by the Indian Space Research Organisation.

In the next year, ITCA and ISRO will mentor the students, provide their technical support, review the progress of the mission and suggest corrections as necessary. The project monitoring committee comprising of experts from within and outside ISRO is to meet every few weeks to track the progress of the mission and ensure its facilitation.

UN cultural agency moves to protect Ukraine's heritage sites

"The first challenge is to mark cultural heritage sites and monuments and recall their special status as protected areas under international law," UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said in a statement

The United Nations' cultural agency (UNESCO) said on Tuesday it had bolstered protective measures to preserve Ukraine's endangered cultural heritage in light of Russia's invasion of its neighbour.

The first challenge is to mark cultural heritage sites and monuments and recall their special status as protected areas under international law," UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said in a statement. To avoid deliberate or accidental damages, the agency is marking cultural sites and monuments in Ukraine with the distinctive "Blue Shield" emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

"The marking with the



emblem of the Convention also comes from the fact that Russia and Ukraine are two countries to have ratified this important convention", Lazare Eloundou Assomo, the director of the UNESCO World

Heritage Centre, told Reuters. "International conventions, when we ratify them, we commit to respect them," he said, adding that UNESCO was monitoring all sites in Ukraine where cultural

heritage could be at risk.

Partnering with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the agency assesses damage by analysing satellite imagery for priority sites

which are endangered or already impacted.

A dozen such sites are already covered by the monitoring system, according to the UNESCO statement. Of the properties included on the World Heritage List, UNESCO said it considers the Saint Sophia Cathedral in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv and related monastic buildings a priority.

"We are not waiting for the media to act," he said, stressing the urgency of marking the sites.

UNESCO plans to meet on Wednesday and Thursday with Ukrainian cultural professionals, including World Heritage Site managers and museum directors, in order to determine whether they might need technical or financial assistance.

Is it advisable to eat right before bedtime? Experts answer

Experts suggest the best time to eat before you hit the bed to improve overall health



time you eat them.”

Does it also affect one's energy levels?

Yes, and a bedtime meal can also hamper your sleep due to indigestion, said Dr Abhishek Subhash, consultant internal medicine, Bhatia Hospital Mumbai. Eating heavy meals just before sleeping can make you sluggish the next day. “You will feel inactive and tired,” added Dr Patel.

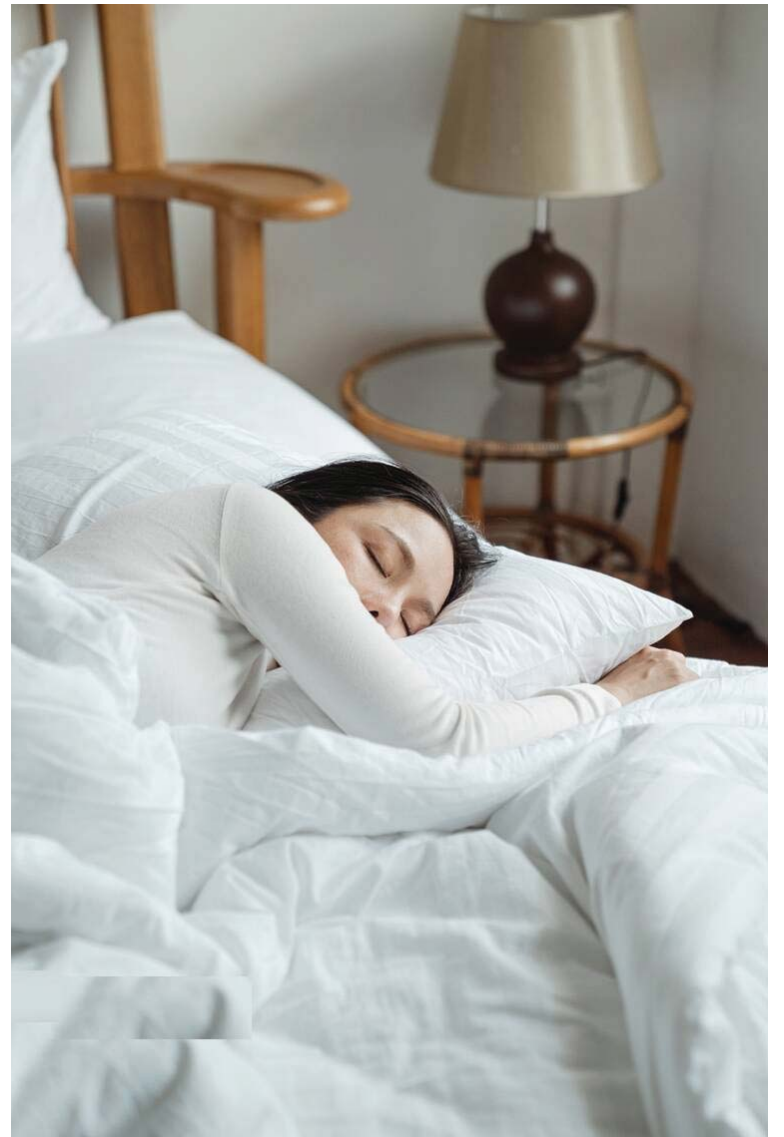
What is the ideal gap?

Since the body's metabolism is slow after sunset, it is best to avoid carbohydrates before sleeping as it can become difficult to digest, and lead to weight gain.

A one to two hours gap after dinner is always recommended between meals and sleep, said Dr Abhishek. “It also depends on the quality of food that you eat at night. If you consume processed and junk food rich in sugar and trans fat it will impact your digestion,” he said.

But what about people who cannot avoid meals close to bedtime?

If you have to eat just before bedtime, ensure to have a healthier and light meal. Most



importantly, be aware and If you already have had enough mindful of your calorie intake calories, then it is fine to not during the entire day so you can have any at night, said Dr balance it accordingly at night. Abhishek.

(News Agencies) According to Dr Jinal Patel, dietitian, Apollo Spectra Hospital, Mumbai, doing so tends to “slow down the body's metabolism”, and can lead to certain chronic diseases. “The body finds it difficult to digest carbohydrates if consumed right before sleeping; as a result, you may gain weight and also experience acidity problems. One may also have abdominal pain, discomfort, constant heartburn and acidity — ultimately leading to Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). Additionally, those who eat late at night are prone to obesity, heart problems, and diabetes. Binge eating eating junk food, especially late at night, will further narrow down and clog arteries because of cholesterol and fatty deposits

(called plaque),” explained Dr Patel.

A 2020 study published in Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism also stated that all these factors can make one gain weight even while sleeping because as one's metabolism slows, it boosts blood sugar and other chemicals that contribute to weight gain and also type 2 diabetes. “It's not just what you eat, but when you eat that may be a factor in promoting conditions like obesity,” said study author Dr Jonathan Jun, associate professor of medicine, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. “You might eat this same number of calories in that 24-hour period, but your body will handle those calories differently depending on what

Biden's State of the Union: Drug Pricing, Mental Health Care, and his 'Test to Treat' COVID Plan

In his first State of the Union address, President Joe Biden expressed cautious optimism about the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Biden also talked about prescription drug pricing and pushed to allow Medicare to negotiate with drug companies.

He also introduced the “test to treat” initiative, designed to get people medication after testing positive for COVID-19

(News Agencies) The war in Ukraine dominated the State of the Union address, but the pandemic, mental health, and prescription drug costs also featured prominently in the president's speech. While the Russian invasion of Ukraine dominated much of President Biden's State of the Union address on Tuesday, the president also touched on health matters ranging from the pandemic to mental health to the high cost of prescription drugs.

Cautious optimism for COVID-19

Although the coronavirus is still circulating in communities throughout the United States, Biden emphasized that the country has reached a new stage in the pandemic. “Severe cases are down to a level not seen since July of last year,” he said. But

“thanks to the progress we have made this past year, COVID-19 no longer need control our lives.”

He pointed to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's revised mask guideline released last week as one sign of progress. Under this metric, much of the country now falls in a low or medium COVID-19 community risk category.

Biden also promised that “we're leaving no one behind or ignoring anyone's needs as we move forward.”

However, many health experts say the change in mask guidance means that as more Americans go unmasked while the coronavirus still circulates, people who are immunocompromised or otherwise vulnerable face an even greater risk. In spite of the administration's efforts to deal

with the pandemic, a recent Axios-Ipsos poll suggests that many Americans are not giving the president credit for progress made over the past year. While 58 percent of people said the administration did an excellent good job at the development and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines, smaller numbers felt the administration supported businesses during the pandemic or protected healthcare workers. Even as the president looked forward, he was careful to not rule out another COVID-19 wave. This reticence is likely driven by the administration's premature declaration of success last July, only to be burned by the Delta and Omicron surges. I cannot promise a new [coronavirus] variant won't come,” Biden said. “But I can promise you we'll do

everything within our power to be ready if it does.” He emphasized that the fight against the virus will be ongoing, and called on Congress to provide funds to stockpile tests, masks, and antiviral treatments. In addition, the administration will continue to encourage more Americans to get vaccinated and boosted — and will push for the approval of vaccines for children under 5 years old. The president also emphasized the need to continue sending vaccine doses to other countries in need. Karen L. Edwards, PhD, a professor in the public health program and chair of the department of epidemiology and biostatistics at University of California, Irvine, said these efforts will help transition the country to a more “normal state of affairs.”

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China looks to copy SpaceX, plans to develop Falcon-9 like reusable rockets

Dubbed as New-Generation Manned Launch Vehicle, the rocket will not only send humans to the Space Station but will also find a larger role in deep space missions

(Staff Reporter) China had aced the space race in 2021 with a record 55 launches beyond Earth's orbit including two astronaut missions to its under-construction Space Station. Beijing is now eyeing new milestones as it aims to develop reusable rockets just like SpaceX's Falcon-9. The next generation of launch vehicles will transport crew and cargo to the Tiangong space station. Dubbed as New-Generation Manned Launch Vehicle, the rocket will not only send humans to the Space Station but will also find a larger role in deep space missions as Beijing aims to reach Mars and nearby planets. According to the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), the new vehicles will be capable of carrying a new, larger spacecraft than the Shenzhou. According to



Space.com, while CASC did not reveal the timeline for the development of the rocket, a white paper released by China recently said that the country will integrate space science, technology, and applications while pursuing the new development philosophy in the next five years.

The spacecraft will take inspiration from the Falcon-9, which was the first to pioneer the technology behind reusable rockets. The Chinese launch vehicle will also work on a similar principle where the first stage will restart its engines to help it decelerate after the launch objectives are

complete. The vehicle will use grid fins for guidance and the tethered recovery device will help in conducting a soft landing. According to reports, the new rocket could use refined RP-1 kerosene fuel and liquid oxygen, building on engines developed for China's newer Long March 5, 6, 7, and

8 rockets. The country currently uses the Long March 2F rocket to transport its astronauts to the Space Station in microgravity. China will develop two versions of the reusable rocket, where one will be able to carry 14,000 kilograms to low Earth orbit and the other will have a lift-off capacity of 18,000 kilograms. China has so far conducted 207 space missions between 2016 to December 2021 and it aims to speed it up in the new year as well. "In the next five years, China will continue to improve the capacity and performance of its space transport system and move faster to upgrade launch vehicles. It will further expand the launch vehicle family, send into space new-generation manned carrier rockets and high-thrust solid-fuel carrier rockets, and speed up the R&D [research and development] of heavy-lift launch vehicles.", the white paper had noted.

Chandrayaan-2 makes exciting new discovery below Moon's surface

The new observations provide insight into the dynamics of the lunar exosphere and activities in the first few tens of meters below the lunar surface

(Staff Reporter) As it awaits the arrival of its successor in August this year, Chandrayaan-2 has once again found new developments happening under the surface of the Moon. Chandra's Atmospheric Composition Explorer-2 (CHACE-2) instrument onboard Chandrayaan-2 has found Argon-40 in the tenuous lunar exosphere. The new observations provide insight into the dynamics of the lunar exospheric species and activities in the first few tens of meters below the lunar surface that could pave the way for understanding the composition of the lunar surface. The observations show the presence of Argon in the equatorial and mid-latitude regions of the Moon. While it's not the first time that Argon-40

has been detected on the Moon, so far these detections had been limited to near-equatorial regions as seen by the Apollo-17 mission.

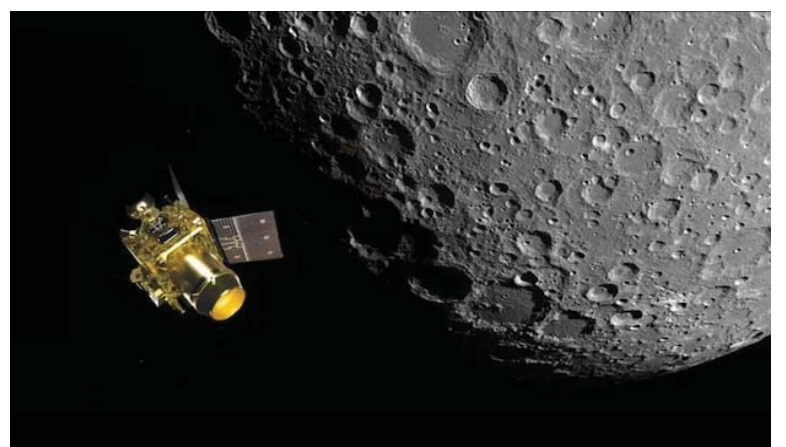
WHAT IS ARGON-40?

An inert, colorless and odorless element, Argon is a noble gas. The vast majority of Argon on Earth is the isotope Argon-40 that originates from the radioactive disintegration of Potassium-40 (K-40) present below the lunar surface. According to Isro, once formed, it diffuses through the inter-granular space and makes its way up to the lunar exosphere through seepages and faults. The lunar exosphere is the outermost region of the upper atmosphere of the Moon where the constituent atoms and molecules rarely collide with each other and can escape into

space. "Earth's Moon features a surface-boundary-exosphere. For the Moon, different constituents in the exosphere are fed from the surface by a variety of processes, such as thermal desorption, solar wind sputtering, photo-stimulated desorption, and micrometeorite impact vaporization. The exospheric atoms may be lost to space by the thermal escape," Isro said.

WHAT DID CHANDRAYAAN-2 FIND?

Led by M. B. Dhanya of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Center, the team of astronomers found an increase in the density of Argon-40 near the sunrise terminator, a decrease along the dayside, a secondary peak near the sunset terminator, and a night-side minimum. However, the biggest revelation was that



the density of Argon-40 with respect to solar longitudes is similar to that of low latitude regions, despite the differences in temperature and topography. "The observations of the Argon bulge by CHACE-2 are indicative of unknown or additional loss processes, Moon quakes or regions with lower activation energies, which call for a better understanding

of the surface-exosphere interactions and source distributions of Ar-40," Isro said. The CHACE-2 was a sequel to the CHACE experiment on the Moon Impact Probe (MIP) of Chandrayaan-1 mission and also draws heritage from the Mars Exospheric Neutral Composition Analyser (MENCA) experiment aboard the Indian Mars Orbiter Mission.

New explosive shock waves-driven rocket engine developed, say scientists



A new type of rocket engine, even faster than the speed of sound. In the 1950s, the idea of an engine, which could be powered by explosions, was proposed by Soviet scientists to launch rockets into orbit. Over the years, several prototypes have been built. But most had a cylindrical combustion chamber, which made the engine too heavy for real-life applications. By reducing the cylinder to a disk, Wang's team said that they solved the issue. In a conference paper published on cnki.net, which is the China's largest online research platform, Wang and his colleagues wrote last month that the new layout was earlier considered difficult to be built as it required a complete redesign of almost all components. But the tests have proved that the technology worked. According to Wang's team, fuel burns much more efficiently when detonated. But the detonations can risk damaging components. So, it needs to be controlled.

Europe's Solar Orbiter to hit the Sun on March 26, study winds emerging from the surface

When the Solar Orbiter arrives at its new destination on March 26, it will be less than one-third of the distance from the Sun to the Earth

(Staff Reporter) Weeks after wind that affects the environment in the vacuum of space.

The European Solar Orbiter is not far behind. The probe is all set for its first historic approach the brightest star in our solar system as it comes close to the Sun on March 26 after crossing paths with Mercury on March 14. At the moment, the massive probe is crossing directly between the Earth and the Sun, about halfway between our planet and its parent star. This unique position in space will allow scientists to study space weather and the Sun-Earth connection. The probe will study the constant stream of particles known as the solar

The European Space Agency (ESA) said that scientists can use today's Earth-Sun line crossing to study it in a unique way, combining Solar Orbiter observations with those of other spacecraft operating nearer the Earth, such as the Hinode and IRIS spacecraft in Earth orbit, and SOHO, stationed 1.5 million kilometers away from Earth. The Solar Orbiter is around 75 million kilometers away from the Sun as of now, moving closer every second. This is the same distance as the spacecraft achieved during its close pass

to the Sun on 15 June 2020. During the close approach later this month, the spacecraft may also be able to pinpoint the origin of any event on the solar surface. "Even if no big event takes place there is still a lot of science that can be performed in analysing the evolution of the same packet of the solar wind as it travels outwards into the Solar System," the European space agency said in a statement.

How close will it come to Sun?

When the Solar Orbiter arrives at its new destination on March 26, it will be less than one-third of the distance from the Sun to the Earth. ESA will target ground-based telescopes to the



Sun as well in an attempt to reveal more information about the miniature flares dubbed campfires that the mission revealed in its first images. "What I'm most looking forward to is finding out whether all these dynamical features we see in the Extreme Ultraviolet Imager (coined campfires) can make their way into the solar wind or not. There are so many of them!" Louise Harra, co-Principal Investigator for EUVI said. ESA will be operating all ten instruments during the close approach to gather as much data as possible.

Covid-19 shrinks brain, caused memory loss, tissue damage: Study

Participants in the research showed "a worsening of executive function" responsible for focus and organising

(Staff Reporter) Covid-19 can cause the brain to shrink, reduce grey matter in the regions that control emotion and memory, and damage areas that control the sense of smell, an Oxford University study has found. The scientists said that the effects were even seen in people who had not been hospitalised with Covid, and whether the impact could be partially reversed or if they would persist in the long term needed further investigation.

"There is strong evidence for brain-related abnormalities in Covid-19," the researchers said in their study, which was released on Monday. Even in mild cases, participants in the research showed "a worsening of executive function" responsible for focus and organising, and on an average brain sizes shrank between 0.2% and 2%. The peer-reviewed study, published in the Nature journal, investigated brain changes

in 785 participants aged 51-81 whose brains were scanned twice, including 401 people who caught Covid between their two scans. The second scan was done on average 141 days after the first scan. The study was conducted when the Alpha variant was dominant in Britain and is unlikely to include anyone infected with the Delta variant.

Studies have found some people who had Covid suffered from

"brain fog" or mental cloudiness that included impairment to attention, concentration, speed of information processing and memory. The researchers did not say if vaccination against Covid had any impact on the condition but the UK Health Security Agency said last month that a review of 15 studies found that vaccinated people were about half as likely to develop symptoms of long Covid compared with the unvaccinated.

Government proposes hike in third-party motor insurance premium from April 1

The Union government has proposed an increase in third-party motor insurance premiums beginning in the next fiscal year



(News Agencies) The Union Road Transport Ministry has proposed an increase in the third-party motor insurance premium for various categories of vehicles, which is likely to jack up insurance cost of cars and two-wheelers from April 1. According

owners of cars above 1,500cc will see a premium of Rs 7,897 compared to Rs 7,890. Two-wheelers over 150 cc but not exceeding 350 cc will attract a premium of Rs 1,366 and for two-wheelers over 350 cc the revised premium will be Rs 2,804. After two years moratorium due to Covid-19 pandemic, the revised TP insurance premium will come into effect from April 1.

Earlier, TP rates were notified by the insurance regulator IRDAI. This is also the first time that the road transport ministry will notify the TP rates in consultation with the insurance regulator. According to the draft notification, a discount

of 15 per cent is proposed for electric private cars, electric two-wheelers, electric goods-carrying commercial vehicles and electric passenger-carrying vehicles. A discount of 7.5 per cent on Motor TP premium rates for hybrid electric vehicles is proposed, the draft notification said, adding that this will be an incentive to use environment-friendly vehicles. While electric private cars (not exceeding 30KW) will attract a premium of Rs 1,780, for electric private cars (exceeding 30 KW but not exceeding 65 KW) premium will be Rs 2,904. The premium for goods carrying commercial vehicles (exceeding 12,000 kg

but not exceeding 20,000 kg) would increase to Rs 35,313 from Rs 33,414 in 2019-20. Similarly, in case goods carrying commercial vehicles (exceeding 40,000 kg), the premium will increase to Rs 44,242 compared to Rs 41,561 in 2019-20. The third party insurance cover is for other than own damage and is mandatory along with the own damage cover that a vehicle owner has to purchase. This insurance cover is for any collateral damage to a third party, generally a human being, caused due to a road accident. The ministry has invited suggestions on the draft notification by March-end.

India set to export record 7 million tonnes wheat this year



(News Agencies) India is set to export a record 7 million tonnes of wheat this year as a rally in global prices gives the world's second biggest producer of the grain an opportunity to gain market share, a top government official said. "Indian wheat exports have picked up," Sudhanshu Pandey, the most senior civil servant at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, told reporters on Saturday. "By the end of February, we had already exported 6.6 million tonnes of wheat. Still one month is left." In the 2012-13 fiscal year, India shipped a record 6.5 million tonnes. A recent rally in international prices has made wheat shipments more lucrative for traders. Benchmark wheat prices in Chicago have surged by more than 40% this week on fears of supply disruptions due to sanctions on Russia and the war in Ukraine. Russia and Ukraine together account for 30% of world wheat exports. Traders last week said India's wheat exports were expected to accelerate with a flurry of enquiries from buyers seeking alternatives to Black Sea shipments. India will also send 50,000 tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan, Pandey said, in a bid to help the country facing poverty and hunger since the takeover by the Taliban last year. New Delhi has already sent 4,000 tonnes of the grain to Afghanistan via an infrequently used land route through Pakistan.

Rupee hits all-time low vs dollar on sharp surge in oil prices

(News Agencies) In early trading on Monday, the rupee reached a new all-time low as a strong rise in international crude oil prices threatened to drive up imported inflation and worsen the country's trade and current account deficits. After touching 76.96, the partially convertible rupee was trading at 76.92/93 per dollar, its lowest level ever. According to a Reuters report, it finished at 76.16 on Friday. The rupee opened at 76.85 versus the US

dollar on the interbank foreign exchange, then fell to 76.98, a drop of 81 paise from the previous finish, according to a PTI report. The rupee plummeted 23 paise against the US dollar on Friday, closing at 76.17, its lowest level since December 15, 2021.

Why is the Rupee down?

According to experts, the Indian rupee began to decline on Monday morning as the dollar surged alongside crude oil. The US dollar

and the yen are trading higher in Asian trade this morning as investors flock to safe-haven assets. The benchmark 10-year bond yield was 6.86 percent, up 5 basis points from the previous day. Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude futures rose 9.38% to USD 129.19 a barrel as the US and its European allies consider imposing a Russian oil import ban, while delays in the prospective return of Iranian crude to global markets fueled supply concerns.

Touted as India's largest, this floating solar power project generates 42M units per year

(News Agencies) Southern Petrochemicals Industries Corporation Limited (SPIC), a private company inaugurated and fully operationalised what is being touted as India's largest floating solar power plant. Situated in the SPIC factory's premises in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, this 48-acre floating solar power plant has been set up on a large water reservoir that spans 62-acres. Capable of generating 42 million units of power per year, the plant is meant to cater to the energy needs of the SPIC and Greenstar fertilisers factories. Constructed at a cost of Rs.150.4 crores, SPIC worked with France-based floating solar power

specialists and global leader Ceil & Terre to design, engineer, and anchor the floating islands and the supply floats.

EDAC Engineering Ltd, another company of the AM international group, undertook the plant's construction.

In addition, advanced high-capacity inverters of 3.25 MW have been installed to improve the plant's reliability and reduce losses, said the company.

According to the company, the 25.3 MW DC / 22 MW AC floating solar power plant project aligns with their strategy to implement new-age green, sustainable technology and self-sufficient captive energy

generation. In floating solar power plants, the solar arrays are placed on floating structures on a water body.

This is said to reduce the evaporation of water by a significant extent (up to 60 per cent). It also generates more power owing to the cooling effect (lower temperature) offered by the water.

Inaugurating the plant, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said, "The demand for clean power is the need of the hour, and Tamil Nadu currently holds the capacity to generate more than 15,500 MW of renewable energy. The government of Tamil Nadu is focused on environmentally sustainable projects.

Gangubai Kathiawadi box office collection: Alia Bhatt's film is just Rs 36L away from entering Rs100 cr club

Gangubai Kathiawadi box office collection: The Alia Bhatt-starrer is set to become only the fourth Hindi film to earn Rs100 crore domestically since the pandemic began



domestically on Wednesday itself. This would make the Alia Bhatt-starrer only the fourth Hindi film to cross the mark in the post-pandemic era.

Film analyst and critic Taran Adarsh shared the news of Gangubai inching towards the ₹100 crore mark on Wednesday. Taking to Twitter, he wrote, "And #GangubaiKathiawadi hits

century today [Wed], the fourth #Hindi film to achieve this number [100 cr], post pandemic [#Sooryavanshi, #PushpaHindi, #83TheFilm]." In the tweet, Taran gave the

breakdown of the film's second week earnings. Gangubai earned ₹5.01 crore on Friday, ₹8.20 crore on Saturday, ₹10.08 crore on Sunday, ₹3.41 crore on Monday, and ₹4.01 crore on Tuesday. Adding the ₹68.9 crore business it did in its opening week to this, Gangubai has earned ₹99.64 crore at the global box office, just shy of the ₹100-crore mark. The film had crossed the ₹100 crore mark worldwide in its first week itself. A report on BoxOfficeIndia.com about the film's performance stated, "The way this film has collected over

the first two weeks it makes it look like the pandemic has hardly hit business...Gangubai Kathiawadi is heading for the 115 crore nett mark at least and it could even cross 120 crore nett." Before Gangubai, only three Hindi films have breached this mark since the pandemic began two years ago. Akshay Kumar-starrer Sooryavanshi earned ₹294 crore at the box office while Ranveer Singh's sports drama 83 did a business of ₹193 crore. In addition, the Hindi dubbed version of Telugu blockbuster Pushpa The Rise also grossed over ₹100 crore.

(Staff Reporter) Buoyed by good word of mouth and a slight bump due to Women's Day, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film Gangubai Kathiawadi continues to perform strong at the box

office. On its 12th day (Tuesday), the film earned just over ₹4 crore to take its total box office earning so far past ₹99 crore. As per estimates, it would cross the 100-crore mark

Madhuri Dixit recalls how a man entered her home pretending to be an electrician: 'Hum aapko dekhne aae the'

Madhuri Dixit spoke about an incident when a man entered her home pretending to be an electrician. Here's what happened next



in The Fame Game, an upcoming Netflix series. The Karan Johar-backed series shows Madhuri as Anamika Anand, a Bollywood icon whose life comes under the spotlight after she disappears one day. Recently during the

virtual trailer launch of the show, the 54-year-old actor said she was intrigued by the premise of the series and was instantly drawn to its world. "I loved the script, loved her journey. It is about fame, what follies and complications can

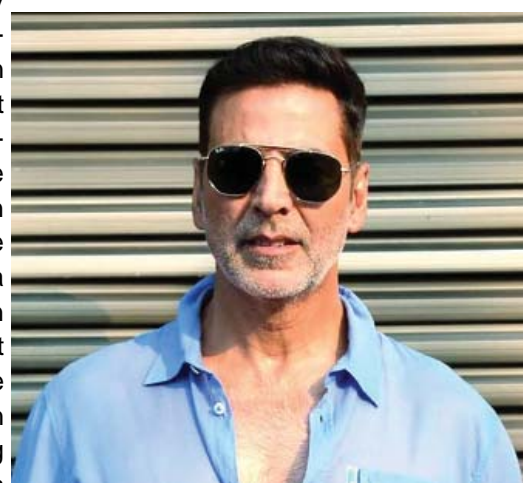
happen when there is fame in your life. It is a story about this woman whose life is seemingly perfect, till she disappeared one day and everyone wonders what happened to her, where she is?" news agency PTI quoted her as saying.

(Staff Reporter) Actor Madhuri Dixit shared an anecdote when she had to call electricians after a switchboard in her home stopped working. The actor shared the reactions of one of the men when she asked him to leave her house. Madhuri will be seen in The Kapil Sharma Show along with Sanjay Kapoor and Manav Kaul for the promotion of their upcoming series The Fame Game. Speaking to show host Kapil Sharma, Madhuri Dixit said, "Once a switchboard had gone bad in my house and four people came to fix it." One of them asked her, "Which one needs to be fixed?" She then pointed towards it and asked

them to open and check it. She added, "One person opened the box, another person was checking it." Madhuri added, "After it was fixed, I told them, 'It's sorted now you guys can leave'." She enacted the reaction of the technicians as they smiled, nodded and left. Madhuri also said, "Ek aadmi reh gaya peeche, maine bola 'Aap nahi jarahe inke saat' (One person stayed behind so I asked him 'Aren't you not going with them?') He replied, 'Hum inke saath nahi hum toh aapko dekhne aaye hai (I didn't come with them, I came here to see you).' All of them burst out laughing at the reaction of the man. Madhuri will be seen next

I am working today not because of money but for passion,' says Akshay Kumar ahead of Bachchan Paandey release

(Staff Reporter) Actor Akshay Kumar, who is gearing up for his next release Bachchan Paandey, on Wednesday said he works round-the-clock for his passion towards cinema and not for money. The 54-year-old actor added that he gets surprised when people ask him how he shoots so many films in a year. In 2020, Hindustan Times reported that Akshay is one of the highest paid actors in Bollywood. During Bachchan Paandey's promotions on Wednesday, Akshay said, "I choose to go to work in the morning and take a break on Sundays. If you continue to work everyday, then easily you have many films in



the pipeline. Everyone was working in the pandemic, including the policemen, media photographers and others. Everyone has to earn money." He added, "Today I have everything in life, I lead a good life. I can easily sit at home and not earn but what about others who want to work (and earn money)? I am working today not because of money but for passion. The day I feel disinterested is when I will stop working." The upcoming action-comedy, which will arrive in cinemas on March 18, is directed by Farhad Samji of Housefull 4 fame.



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