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Top US health advisors recommend Pfizer, Moderna Covid vaccines over J&J shot



and Moderna vaccines don't come with that risk and also appear more effective, advisors to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

It's an unusual move and the CDC's director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, must decide whether to accept the panel's advice.

Until now the U.S. has treated all three Covid-19 vaccines available to Americans as an equal choice, since large studies found they all offered strong protection and early supplies were limited. J&J's vaccine initially was welcomed as a single-dose option that could be especially important for hard-to-reach groups like homeless people who might not get the needed second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna options.

(Contd on page 35)

(SAI Bureau)- Most Americans should be given the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines instead of the Johnson & Johnson shot that can cause rare but serious blood

clots, U.S. health advisors recommended Thursday. The strange clotting problem has caused nine confirmed deaths after J&J vaccinations - while the Pfizer

21-year-old model, crowned as Miss Universe 2021, after 21 years



(SAI Bureau)-Chandigarh-based Harnaaz Sandhu is the talk of the town. On December 12, 2021, after 21 years, at the age of 21 Harnaaz Sandhu, became the Miss Universe of the 70th edition of the pageant in Eilat, Israel, and brought the crown back to India. Only two Indians before her have won the pageant so far -- Sushmita Sen in 1994 and Lara Dutta in 2000.

(Contd on page 35)

Nagaland killings

NSF holds massive protest rally in Kohima, urges PM Modi to constitute court monitored panel



Days after killing of 14 civilians in Nagaland's Mon district, thousands of people, students in Kohima on Friday protested against the civilian killings by the security forces and demanded to repeal the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) from the North-Eastern region.

(Contd on page 36)

A Booster In 100 Days To Beat Omicron: The New Challenge



(SAI Bureau)- At a plant nestled along a highway 20 miles north of Boston, hundreds of Pfizer Inc. workers are gearing up to produce millions of doses of a new vaccine that looks more and more like the next phase of fighting Covid-19. Work on the project started the day after Thanksgiving at the 70-acre facility in

Andover, Massachusetts, just as the World Health Organization designated a new coronavirus strain, omicron, a variant of concern. The goal of the effort: make a booster shot customized against the highly mutated virus in less than 100 days.

(Contd on page 33)

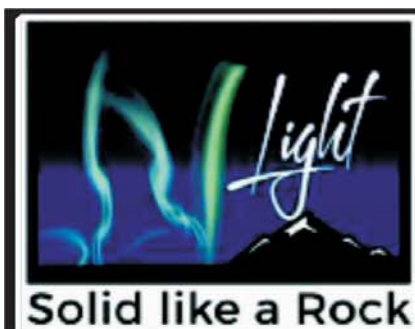
Europe battles to vaccinate kids as EU chief warns Omicron could become dominant variant



(SAI Bureau)-WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the Omicron variant should not be dismissed as 'mild' as Europe battles a new COVID-19 wave.

As Europe continues to battle against the virus, Italy on Wednesday decided to impose coronavirus tests for everyone arriving from EU countries and five-day mandatory quarantine for those who haven't been vaccinated.

(Contd on page 35)



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Indian-American Doctors Donate \$300,000 For Local Community In New Jersey

Indian American doctors have donated USD 300,000 for the development of a food bank and an Indian community centre in the state of New Jersey as part of their efforts to give it back to the community they live in. The Monmouth Ocean County

Association of Physicians of Indian Origin has donated USD150,000 each for a food bank and an Indian Cultural Centre in Toms River in New Jersey, a media release said Friday. MOCAPPI, which has been able to raise over USD

500,000 over the years through the annual charitable galas, popular golf outings, and other events, will continue to work for the betterment of society through its impactful donations. "It was a long-time dream of MOCAPPI members to make

an impactful donation which is being fulfilled today by making a USD150,000 donation to the Fulfill Food Bank of Monmouth Ocean Counties and USD150,000 to the Indian Cultural & Community Centre to build a much-needed Community

Hall in Toms River," MOCAPPI president, Dr Avinash Gupta said. "With everyone's participation, generosity and thanks to our past presidents' efforts, we have been able to raise over USD500,000 over the years," he added.

Meet Chanel's New Indian-Origin Global CEO Leena Nair

(Insider Bureau)-Leena Nair, the first female and youngest-ever Chief Human Resources Officer of Anglo-Dutch FMCG major Unilever has stepped down to join French luxury group Chanel as its Global Chief Executive Officer. She was a member of the Unilever Leadership Executive (ULE), which is responsible for delivering Unilever's business and financial performance.



"Leena Nair, CHRO, has decided to leave the company in January 2022 to pursue a new career opportunity as Global Chief Executive Officer, Chanel Ltd," Unilever said in a statement while announcing Change to its Leadership Executive.

According to the reports, Ms Nair, in her new position with the French luxury group Chanel, will

be based in London.

"I would like to thank Leena for her outstanding contribution over the last three decades. Leena has been a pioneer throughout her career at Unilever, but no more so than in her role as CHRO, where she has been a driving force on our equity, diversity and inclusion agenda, on the transformation of our leadership development, and on our preparedness for the future of work," Unilever CEO Alan Jope said. She has played a critical role in building our purpose-led, future-fit organisation, which is now the employer of choice in over 50 countries globally, he added.

Ms Nair, an alumna of XLRI Jamshedpur, had joined HUL, Unilever's Indian subsidiary in 1992 and worked for 30 years.

Indian American Gautam Raghavan Elevated To Key White House Post

(Insider Bureau)-US President Joe Biden on Friday elevated Indian American Gautam Raghavan to a new position making him head of the White House Office of Presidential Personnel. Biden announced Raghavan's promotion to the key White House post after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced his intent to appoint Cathy Russell as the next executive director of UNICEF. Russell is currently the head of WH PPO. Under Cathy's leadership, the White House Office of Presidential Personnel (PPO) has broken records in both speed and diversity of hiring, working relentlessly to ensure



that our federal government reflects America and delivers for the American people, Biden said. "I am also pleased that Gautam Raghavan, who has worked in tandem with Cathy from Day One, will become PPO's new director -- a seamless transition that will enable us to continue building a federal workforce that is efficient, effective, dependable and diverse," Biden said in a statement.

A first-generation immigrant, Raghavan was born in India, raised in Seattle and graduated from Stanford University. He is the editor of "West Wingers: Stories from the Dream Chasers, Change Makers, and Hope Creators Inside the Obama White House." He lives with his husband and their daughter in Washington, DC.

Gautam Raghavan has served as deputy assistant to the President and deputy director of the White House Office of Presidential Personnel since January 20, 2020. Previously, he was the first employee hired by the Biden-Harris Transition Team where he served as deputy head of Presidential Appointments. "Raghavan served as chief of staff to US Representative Pramila Jayapal (WA-07), the Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and advised organisations focused on advancing civil rights and social justice, serving as an advisor to the Biden Foundation and as vice president of Policy for the Gill Foundation," the White House said.



Gangster Suresh Pujari brought to Mumbai, remanded to Maharashtra ATS custody till Dec 25

Gangster Suresh Pujari, who was extradited to India from the Philippines last night, has been remanded to Maharashtra ATS custody for a period of 10 days.

(News Agencies) - Gangster Suresh Pujari, who is wanted in several cases of extortion across Mumbai, Thane and Karnataka, was extradited from the Philippines and brought to India on Tuesday night. A team of Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) officials brought the gangster to Mumbai on Wednesday morning.

Sources from ATS said that on December 11, ATS took over the investigation of Mahatma Phule Chowk police station in Kalyan. In this case, the complainant had alleged that Suresh Pujari made calls to him from abroad to extort money while threatening to kill him if he failed to meet his

demands.

A Red Corner Notice (RCN) was issued against him on December 20, 2016, which is valid till December 19, 2021. He was in the Philippines where he had been detained for the last two months.

During the investigation, Suresh Pujari was arrested by ATS, Maharashtra at about 2 am on Wednesday, when he arrived at Delhi airport. He was brought to Mumbai on a commercial flight at about 9 am on Wednesday. ATS officials said that it was a classified operation which went off smoothly. Officials have recovered two international SIM cards from the gangster.

By afternoon, he was produced in the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Thane. He has been remanded to ATS custody for a period of 10 days. An investigation is in progress.

Pujari had earlier worked with gangsters Ravi Pujari and Chota Rajan. Around a decade ago, he parted ways from Ravi Pujari and formed his own gang. Ravi Pujari was traced in Senegal and then brought to India in 2019. Based on the RCN issued by the Thane and Mumbai police against Suresh Pujari, he was traced by authorities in the Philippines in October.

Suresh Pujari would threaten small-time businessmen, wine

shop owners and politicians like Omi Kalani from Ulhasnagar and Jitendra Awhad from Thane in the past. He had participated in major shootout attacks while working for Ravi Pujari in Mumbai. He was also involved in the case against Ravi Pujari, where advocate Majeed Memon was attacked. His modus operandi was to carry out shootouts at the victims' premises and then the shooter would leave a letter or chit at the spot. This was observed in areas like Ulhasnagar, Kalyan, Dombivali and Thane. He would also threaten over the phone and would finally settle for small amounts of extortion money.

Proud XLRI Jamshedpur celebrates alumna Leena Nair's appointment as Chanel CEO



"It is a matter of great pride for us at XLRI that Jamshedpur alumna, Leena Nair, has taken over as the global CEO of Chanel, the world's leading company in luxury fashion," said Dr Madhukar Shukla, XLRI Professor and Chairperson of Alumni Affairs. Leena Nair, a gold medalist from the 1990-1992 batch of XLRI Jamshedpur, is now the CEO of the world's leading luxury fashion multinational brand Chanel.

"It is particularly special for me since she was my student from 1990 to 92. She was the only female student during those times who insisted on getting a shop floor job at the beginning of her career. Such initiatives made her a well-rounded professional who had a holistic understanding of business," said DR Madhukar Shukla.

A few years back, XLRI felicitated Leena Nair with a Distinguished Alumnus Award.

"Needless to say, she is an inspiration for our students and alumni, and especially for female students," Dr Madhukar said. Leena's teachers at Kolhapur's Holy Cross School congratulated her and wished her success. "We wish for her success even today and we are extremely proud that she is a student of our school."

Humbled and honoured: Leena Nair

Leena Nair, the new CEO of Chanel, said she is "humbled and honoured" to be appointed to the top post at the French luxury fashion house.

"I am humbled and honoured to be appointed the Global Chief Executive Officer of CHANEL, an iconic and admired company. I am so inspired by what Chanel stands for," Nair said in social media posts.

"It is a company that believes in the freedom of creation, in cultivating human potential and in acting to have a positive impact in the world," she said. Nair joins the ranks of Indian-origin executives such as Parag Agrawal, Sundar Pichai and Sadya Nadella, helming global companies.

Lakhimpur Kheri violence: Priyanka Gandhi steps up attack, shares videos of kin of deceased

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday reiterated her demand that Minister of State for Home Ajay Misra be sacked following the SIT's statement that the Lakhimpur Kheri violence was a "pre-planned conspiracy", as she shared videos of the kin of the farmers and a journalist killed in the incident in which they sought justice. She also shared a video on

Twitter in which Union Minister Misra can be seen losing his cool at reporters in Lakhimpur Kheri. Mishra's son Ashish Misra is among the 13 accused in the violence.

Sharing the video, Priyanka Gandhi tagged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and used the hashtag in Hindi, "Ajay Misra Teni ko barkhast karo (sack Ajay Misra Teni)".

Tagging the prime minister and Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Priyanka Gandhi also posted videos of kin of three of the four farmers and a journalist killed in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence in which they sought justice and sacking of Ajay Misra following the SIT statement.

The opposition has renewed its demand for the minister's dismissal after a special investigation team (SIT) told a local court that the Lakhimpur

Kheri violence in which eight people, including four farmers, were killed was a "pre-planned conspiracy".

Two separate FIRs were filed in the incident. The SIT had arrested 13 people, including Ashish Misra, in the first FIR in connection with the death of the four farmers and the journalist. In the second FIR relating to the death of two BJP workers and a driver during the violence, the SIT had arrested four people.

CBI recovers Rs 2.10 cr cash from residence of Indian Railways chief engineer, 4 held in bribery case

The CBI recovered Rs 2.10 crore in cash from the residence of Indian Railways chief engineer in a bribery case on Wednesday, a day after a deputy chief engineer was apprehended.

(News Agencies) -A day after apprehending Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer (Coaching) in the Indian Railways, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested another senior ranking officer in the bribery case and recovered Rs 2.10 crore in cash during the searches.

On Tuesday, the CBI had apprehended Ranjit Kumar Borah, Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer (Coaching) from Guwahati along with Chintan Jain (Director of Sun Shine Devices Private Limited, Patna), Niraj Kumar (an employee of Chintan Jain) and other unknown public servants and private persons. A day later on Wednesday, the CBI arrested VK Upadhyay, Chief Electrical Engineer in this case, along with three apprehended earlier. "During the investigation,



the role of chief engineer also allegedly came into the limelight and he was also apprehended," said the CBI. During the searches at nine locations in Assam's Guwahati, Bihar's Patna and Uttar Pradesh's Noida linked to the accused, the officials recovered Rs 2.19 crore in cash

along with several other incriminating documents. "Out of this, cash of Rs 2.13 crore along with details of three flats in Noida were found at the premises of the Chief Engineer (Electrical). Cash of Rs 6 lakh along with details of six flats in the name of Deputy Chief Engineer and his family

members including at Guwahati were found at the premises of Ranjit Kumar Borah," said the CBI officials. The arrested accused were produced today before the competent court in Guwahati. "It was alleged that the public servant, while posted earlier as Deputy Chief Electrical

Engineer (Construction) in North Frontier Railways, had obtained two immovable properties - benami flats, as illegal gratification from the director of a private company," said the CBI. According to officials, the accused, Ranjit Kumar Borah, had allegedly demanded a bribe of Rs 2.10 crore from private persons in lieu of two benami flats for extending undue benefits to him in the past and also assured to extend undue favour in future as well. "It was also alleged that the private person started transferring the bribe money to the public servant in instalments. CBI laid a trap and apprehended the public servant & the employee of private company as soon as a bribe of Rs 15 lakh was exchanged between them," added the CBI.





Delhi Police collaborates with NLU to impart legal education to officers, investigators

Delhi Police has collaborated with the National Law University to impart legal education to officers and investigators.

(News Agencies) -Delhi Police and National Law University (NLU) have joined hands to impart comprehensive legal education at all levels of basic police training. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to this effect was signed by Commissioner of Police, Delhi, Rakesh Asthana and Vice-Chancellor, NLU, Prof Srikrishna Deva Rao, today at Vimarsh Hall, PHQ, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi. The partnership aims to disseminate legal knowledge and processes among police personnel and to make them aware of their role in national development through short-term courses, lectures, seminars, workshops, and conferences. Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner of Police, Delhi, Rakesh Asthana underlined that 70% of our battle in the investigation is fought in the court of law and a strong legal foundation is very significant for securing

a conviction in any case. Keeping this in mind, an investigation has been separated from other law & order duties and a separate wing has been dedicated for this at the police station level, he said. Rakesh Asthana commended the contribution of NLU and further wished that this collaboration will strengthen Delhi Police's resolve to serve its citizens more effectively by means of more professional investigation and securing convictions for criminals. The Vice-Chancellor, NLU, Prof Srikrishna Deva Rao said NLU is entering into a mutually beneficial collaboration with the most professional police organisation of the country, and it is a matter of pride for NLU to impart law education to police officers of the national capital. It will be a dialogic engagement with Delhi police whereby both will learn from each other, he said. The National Law University, Delhi is located in Dwarka and is one of the most prestigious

national law schools in the country. Established in 2008, it is offering academic courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The law module is designed to provide inputs to police officers in Delhi with dynamic and complex problems in law-related matters. The programmes include relevant law-oriented learning for police officials through case studies, role plays, and other practical methods. NLU faculty will undertake courses on the Constitution of India, Code of Criminal Procedures, Indian Evidence Act, Indian Penal Code, and important Minor Acts like POCSO, Arms Act, JJ Act, NDPS Act, IT Act, MCOCA, etc. Besides designing basic legal training for DANIPs officers and Sub Inspectors, NLU will also conduct promotion courses for ASIs/SIs and refresher courses for in-service officers. E-learning modules have also been designed on relevant law-related subjects.

Mass culling begins in Kerala's Kottayam amid bird flu scare



(News Agencies) -The culling of ducks and other birds in Kerala's Kottayam has been confirmed. The ducks and birds in a one-kilometer radius of the region will be culled.

The rapid response teams of the animal husbandry department are leading the culling efforts. The burning of the culled ducks is done by the concerned local bodies.

On Wednesday, 11,268 ducks were killed in three panchayats. 1,681 ducks of one farmer alone were culled. There are ten rapid response teams working on this. In Nedumudi and Karuvatta of Alappuzha, a total of 18,000 ducks will be killed and set on fire. On Wednesday, 2022 ducks were culled in Nedumudi alone. The efforts will be strengthened in the coming days.

There is a ban on selling or buying duck and eggs in the region till further announcement. While the virus is not overtly harmful to the human body, it can be deadly in some cases. No case of human infection has been reported so far.

Unclaimed bag on Jammu-Srinagar highway sparks panic, traffic suspended briefly

(News Agencies) -An unclaimed bag found lying on the strategic Jammu-Srinagar national highway in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district on Wednesday afternoon sparked a security scare and prompted authorities to suspend vehicular traffic for over an hour, officials said.

They said the bag was found lying near Cafeteria Morh on the 270-km highway, the only all-



weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country.

The bomb disposal squad and sniffer dogs were pressed into service. It was found that the bag contained clothes and had apparently fallen out of a vehicle on the highway, the officials said. The highway was reopened for traffic after over an hour. Efforts are on to identify the owner of the bag so that it can be returned, they said.

Amid protests, Kozhikode school welcomes gender-neutral uniforms

A Kerala higher secondary school has adopted a gender-neutral uniform despite some groups opposing the move. A higher secondary school in Kozhikode's Balussery decided to end different uniform rules for girls and boys.

About 200 students of the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Balussery will be wearing a shirt and trousers as school uniform when they go to attend their classes.

"The idea was proposed initially as part of implementing gender-inclusive concepts in the school. The Parents Teachers Association also agreed to the idea proposed by the teachers," said Indu R, the school principal.

Indu R said some parents sought an overcoat for students but consensus was reached over shirt and trousers as uniform. Earlier, a lower primary school



in Ernakulam adopted a gender-neutral uniform.

However, some groups such as the Muslim Students Federation (MSF) objected to the move. They staged a protest outside the school.

"There will always be resistance when there is change. The

students have not expressed any discomfort so far. They have the freedom to wear what makes them comfortable," Indu R told India Today.

The principal said the students of Plus-Two would continue to wear the old uniform. The school's Parent Teachers

Association (PTA) president, K Shybu, said the change was received well by both parents and teachers.

"A few parents have demanded an overcoat and the PTA agreed to it. The students can choose full-sleeve or half-sleeve as per their choice. We intend to put

forth a message of gender equality," said Shybu.

STUDENTS WELCOME CHANGE IN UNIFORMS

Students welcomed the change. Sivananda, a student, said the uniform gave them a confidence boost. "We are happy to be the beginning of change," she said. Another student, Luthfia Lukman, said pants and shirts were not clothes worn only by boys. "Both girls and boys use them. It is more comfortable and convenient than other uniforms," she said.

Education Minister V Sivankutty said there was no need for unnecessary controversies as the Kerala government aimed at making schools a gender-neutral space for students. Earlier, Higher Education Minister R Bindu announced the adoption of gender-neutral uniforms officially on Wednesday at a virtual event.

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Human rights group lists 39 incidents of hate crime against Christians in Karnataka this year

PUCL, a human rights group, released a report documenting 39 incidents of hate crimes against Christians in Karnataka.

The People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) claims that there were 39 recent incidents of hate crime against Christians in Karnataka. According to a report titled, 'Hate crimes on Christians in Karnataka, 2021', the members of the Christian community especially in rural Karnataka continue to face discrimination and threats of violence.

The report states that apart from the documented attacks, there are several other cases that are undocumented due to various legal and financial constraints. It also states that in most cases, Christians have been forced to shut down their places of worship and are banned from assembling for their Sunday prayers.

"Effectively, these attacks on gatherings by Hindutva groups with the complicity of the State function as a bar on the freedom to practice religion itself. Far from the right to propagate religion, today the attacks in Karnataka are actually on the right to freely profess and practice religion," the report read.

The report names the perpetrators as Hindutva organisations saying, "The perpetrators behind these communal hate crimes in all the instances are Hindutva organisations, namely Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Bajrang Dal, Hindu Jagran Vedike. A new organisation's name that has emerged from the accounts is that of Banjara Nigama. This organisation appears to be small but is rather violent." It adds that two MLAs - Sunil Hegde and minister M.C. Narayana Gowda - were also named by community members as people who supported the police in targeting them.

Manavi, an activist, said that "We have found that police and certain right-wing outfits harass pastors and people who have wilfully converted. Around 39 incidents have been recorded from January to November."

REPORT ALLEGES POLICE COLLUSION WITH HINDUTVA GROUPS

The report says, "Almost in every instance of mob

violence studied in this report, it can be observed in the chain of events that the police have colluded with Hindutva groups. The police actively work to criminalise the lives of Christians and stop them from organising prayer meetings. This complicit role of the police emboldens a culture of intolerance and bigotry."

KARNATAKA MINISTER DEBUNKS ALLEGATIONS
IT Minister CN Ashwath Narayan told India Today TV that PUCL is instigating by making unwanted statements.

"What has not happened, they are saying it did. We respect all cultures. The present bill is very progressive. We are not going against the Constitution. Whatever is enshrined in the Constitution has been upheld very well, very systematically in this bill," he said. He also added that the videos of attacks on Christians could be false. "Videos can be fabricated. Our party has not given any scope to anybody to take the law into their hands," he said.

OPPOSITION CONGRESS CLAIMS REPORT HAS

TRUTH

Congress MLA and former minister UT Khader told India Today TV that PUCL will not randomly make allegations of such magnitude without investigating the matter properly.

"We have seen that sometimes, the police are forced to collude by the ruling party representatives, BJP leaders. Where strict action is to be taken, this action is not taken. Those who are involved are rescued by MLAs who bring the accused out of police custody. All this shows police hands are tied by the BJP government and hence they cannot take action against anti-social activities," he said.

Slamming minister CN Ashwath Narayan, Khader said, "The ruling government can't say more than this. When they are involved, how can they say no? CM says every action will lead to a reaction. What is more than this?"

The report was reportedly written after speaking to 39 pastors and recording each of these incidents.

Goa minister Milind Naik resigns from cabinet amid allegation of sexual exploitation

(News Agencies) -Goa's Urban Development Minister and BJP legislator Milind Naik tendered his resignation from the state cabinet on Wednesday after the Congress alleged that he was involved in a sexual exploitation case. The Chief Minister's Office (CMO) issued a statement late on Wednesday night, saying that Naik has tendered his resignation to ensure a "free and fair probe".

The CMO said in a tweet that Naik tendered his resignation as a

minister, which has been accepted and sent to the governor.

The BJP MLA, who represents the Mormugao Assembly constituency in South Goa, held the urban development portfolio in the Pramod Sawant-led cabinet. He was also a part of the previous cabinet led by the then chief minister Manohar Parrikar. Earlier in the day, Congress Goa chief Girish Chodankar accused Naik of being involved in the sexual exploitation of a woman by misusing his power as a cabinet

member. He demanded that Sawant should sack the minister and the police should initiate a probe into the allegation against him. A fortnight back, Chodankar had first time raised the issue, but had not named the minister at that time. He had given 15 days' time to the chief minister to remove the minister from the cabinet. CM Sawant had asked Chodankar to name the minister and also provide the copy of the complaint filed by the victim against him.

ED seizes Rs 51 cr more from firm having Chinese links, total Rs 238 cr recovered so far

The ED on Wednesday seized Rs 51.23 crore more from bank accounts and virtual accounts with payment gateways, belonging to PC Financial Services Private Limited (NBFC). Till date, the total seizure in the case is around Rs 238 crore.

(News Agencies) -The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has seized an additional amount of Rs 51.23 crore lying in bank accounts and virtual accounts with payment gateways, belonging to PC Financial Services Private Limited (NBFC) under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), officials said.

This recent seizure is in continuation of earlier seizures of Rs 106.93 crore and Rs 131.11 crore.

The ED, during a money laundering investigation, initiated a probe under FEMA

against PC Financial Services Private Limited, an NBFC company, that provides instant personal micro loans through its mobile application 'Cash Bean' for suspicious foreign outward remittances.

PC Financial Services Private Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oplay Digital Services, SA de CV, Mexico, which is a subsidiary of Tenspot Pesa Limited, Hong Kong owned by Opera Limited (Cayman Islands) and Wisdom Connection I Holding Inc (Cayman Islands), which are ultimately beneficially owned by Chinese national Zhou Yahui.

The original Indian company was

incorporated in 1995 by Indian nationals and obtained NBFC license in 2002. After RBI approval in 2018, the ownership moved to the Chinese-controlled company.

According to the ED, their investigation has revealed that the foreign parent companies of PC Financial Services Private Limited brought FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) worth Rs 173 crore for lending business, and within a short span of time, made foreign outward remittances worth Rs 429.29 crore in the name of payments for software services received from related foreign companies.

The company also showed

domestic expenditure of Rs 941 crore, the investigating agency said.

"Detailed investigation into the foreign expenses paid by the NBFC revealed that most of the payments were made to foreign companies, which are related to and owned by the same Chinese nationals who own the Opera Group. All foreign service providers were chosen by the Chinese owners and the price of

the services was also fixed by them," the ED added.

The officials claim they found evidence of exorbitant payments, which were blindly allowed by the dummy Indian directors of PC Financial Services Private Limited without any due diligence and on the instructions of the Country Head Zhang Hong, who directly reported to Zhou Yahui.



Big push for local defence industry, govt to place orders for items in indigenisation lists



This list was prepared by late General Bipin Rawat after holding several rounds of consultations with government and private manufacturing industries.

(News Agencies) -With more than 200 items put in the indigenisation list, the defence ministry is going to place orders from the indigenous industry which would mean billions of dollars of business for domestic companies. The Defence Ministry under the DMA headed by late

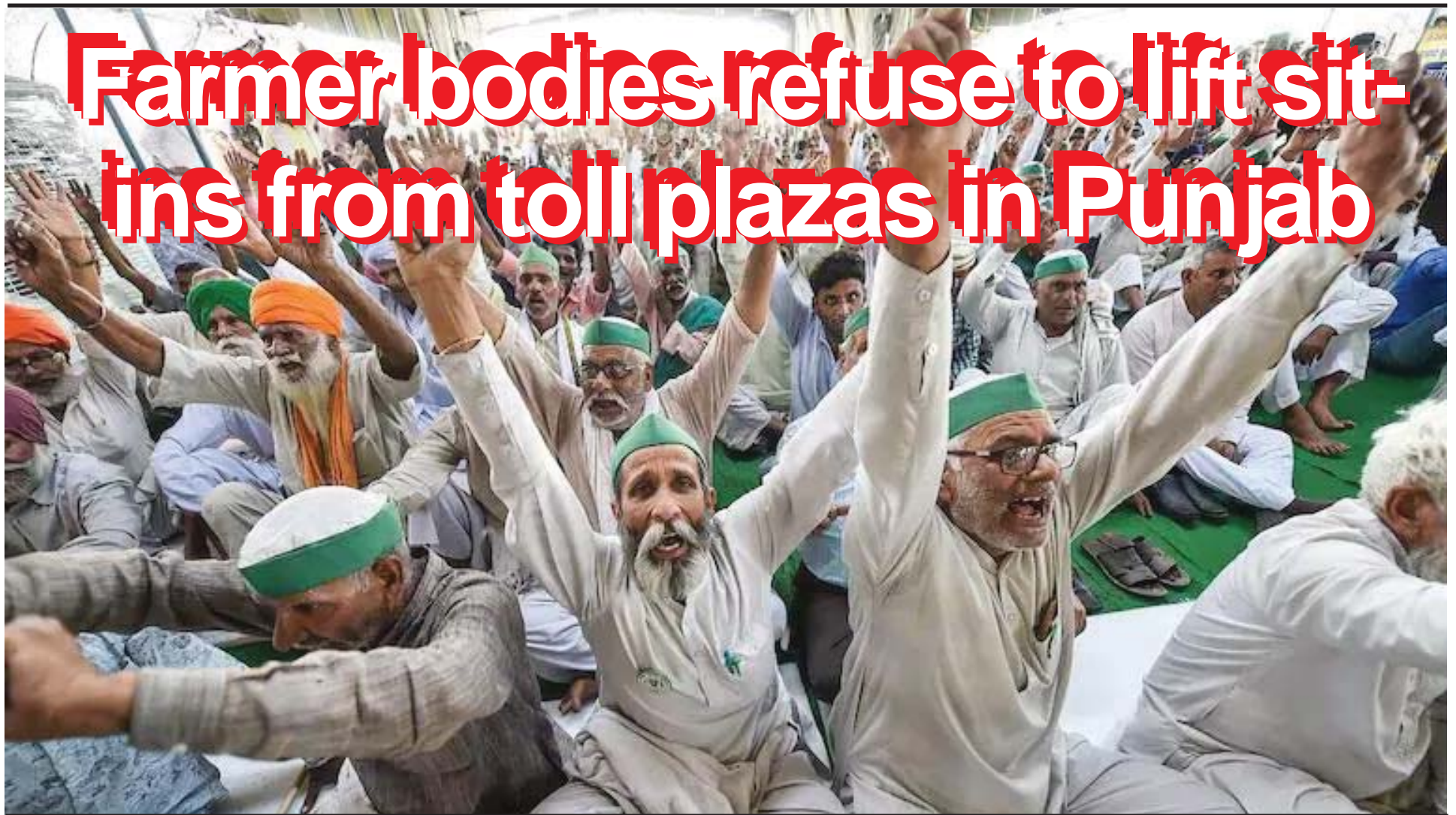
Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat had come out with two lists of 108 items each which had to be mandatorily acquired from local industry with exception only during emergencies.

"The big push to the domestic industry would be through this list as now the Prime Minister's

Office has asked us to follow up the positive list with orders for the industry," top government sources told India Today TV. The Sources said the list is being prepared and would be followed up with the stakeholders soon. This list was prepared by late General Bipin Rawat after holding

several rounds of consultations with government and private manufacturing industries to assess future capabilities of Indian industry which will be able to meet the requirements of the Armed Forces. "The Defence industry can now use the opportunity to build robust

Research and Development facilities but also will enhance the self-reliance pursuit of the nation. The second positive list also provides an excellent opportunity for 'start-ups' as MSMEs will also get a tremendous boost from this initiative", defence officials said.



Farmer bodies refuse to lift sit-ins from toll plazas in Punjab

Some farmer bodies refused to lift sit-ins at toll plazas in protest against unreasonable hike in toll fees.

Several farmer bodies in Punjab on Wednesday refused to lift sit-ins at toll plazas in protest against "unreasonable" hike in toll fee.

Farmer bodies had earlier announced to lift the 'dharnas' at various places, including toll plazas, petrol pumps, shopping malls, and residences of BJP leaders, from December 15.

However, except toll plazas, the farmers' outfits on Wednesday lifted their protests

going on at other places for more than a year.

Meanwhile, National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) regional officer R P Singh (Chandigarh) said out of total 30 toll plazas in Punjab, five opened till Wednesday evening.

Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) chief Joginder Singh Ugrahan claimed that the toll rates had almost been "doubled".

He accused the government of making

"unreasonable" hike in the toll fee and by doing so, it was trying to recover losses from people.

Ugrahan further said the 'dharnas' would continue until the toll fee is brought to the previous level.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (Lakhawal) general secretary Harinder Singh and BKU (Dakunda) president Buta Singh Burjill Lakhawal said they would not lift sit-ins in protest against the hike in toll fee.

The farmer bodies also held several programmes at various places in the state for their "victory".

Farmers, including women, danced to the beats of 'dhol', sang songs, and distributed sweets, among themselves. Farmers from Punjab and Haryana started returning from the Delhi borders from December 11 after the suspension of the agitation against the three farm laws which had been repealed.

Must discuss if Legislative Council needs to be there or not, says minister KS Eshwarappa

Soon after the results for 25 council seats were announced, RDPR Minister KS Eshwarappa opened a can of worms by questioning the very existence of the Legislative council. Congress, however, claims the council is an important aspect of the legislation process.

Speaking to India Today TV, he said: "A lot of money is used. This is a problem faced by all political parties. That is why we need to discuss this, whether the council needs to be there or not. This is not one man's decision. All the 3 parties need to sit and discuss, or in the council itself this can be discussed."

The BJP and Congress won 11 seats each, JD(S) won 2 and 1 went to an independent. These results will now change the equation of the 75-member house in favor of the BJP while passing bills.

But other Ministers were very circumspect on the issue.

Dr K Sudhakar, Health Minister, said that in politics, the influence of caste and money is becoming vicious and needs a larger deliberation. "The intent and ideology of having an upper house is a good thought but the manner in which it is being formed is in a sorry state of affairs."

Similarly, Revenue Minister R Ashoka focused on corruption

in the entire process and said the system can't be blamed.

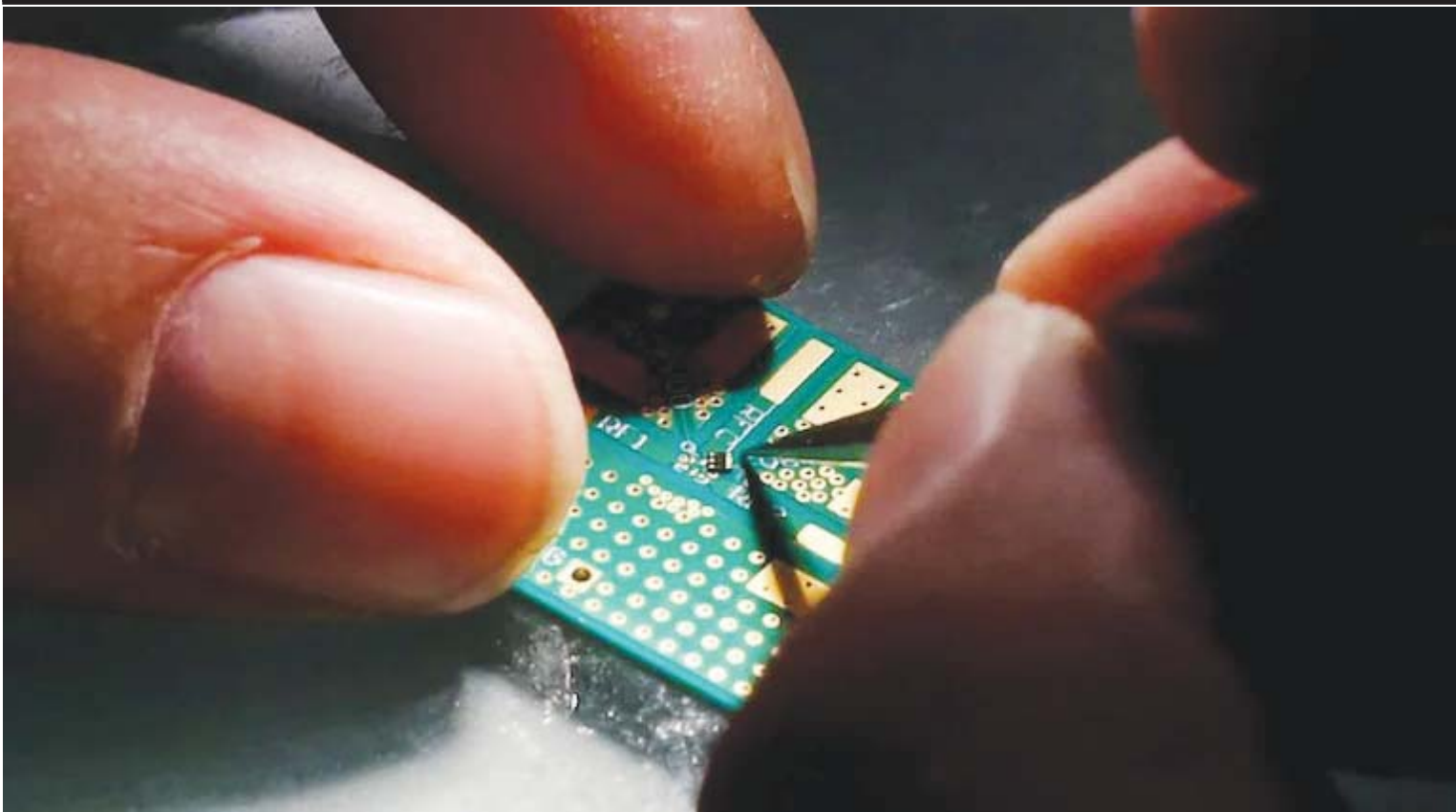
"Many members have complained about corruption in MLC election. Many states do not have upper house. So far, we have not thought of doing away with the council."

Aravind Limbavali, BJP MLA was even more blunt. "I don't agree. This argument can be applied for the assembly also. In some constituencies, money and muscle power plays a big role. If anything is wrong, it should be set right. This should be the attitude," he said. But the Congress party wanted to know if this was just a minister's outburst or the BJP's official stand. Ajay Singh, Congress



MLA, said any decision will need to be taken at the highest level. "In Karnataka, we have a council and assembly. Good discussions happen for people and it's necessary to have a council." Even Congress MLA

HK Patil said the constitution makers found the Council necessary, so it is necessary. "I feel council should exist but it should be effective and it should serve the purpose for which it is created."



Govt clears Rs 76,000 crore scheme to boost semiconductor, display manufacturing

The move, said Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, would boost the development of a complete semiconductor ecosystem, ranging from design, fabrication, packaging, and testing.

The government on Wednesday approved a Rs 76,000-crore scheme to boost semiconductor and display manufacturing in the country in an bid to position India as a global hub for hi-tech production, and attract large chip makers. The move would further India's ambitions to be self-reliant in electronics manufacturing, bring massive investments and result in 35,000 specialised jobs apart from indirect employment for one lakh people.

In the current geopolitical scenario, trusted sources of semiconductors and displays hold strategic importance and are key to the security of critical information infrastructure.

The semiconductor scheme also comes at a time when the world is witnessing a severe crunch of semiconductors, a key component used in cars to electronic devices. The supply has been disrupted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many production centres to close intermittently. Announcing the decision of the Cabinet, IT and Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the Rs 76,000-crore scheme has been approved for development of semiconductors and display

manufacturing ecosystem.

Incentives have been lined up for companies engaged in silicon semiconductor fabs, display semiconductor fabs, compound semiconductors, silicon photonics, sensors fabs, semiconductor packaging and semiconductor design.

"Today's historic decision will boost development of complete semiconductor ecosystem, ranging from design, fabrication, packaging, and testing,"

Vaishnaw said.

With the semiconductor incentive scheme in place, the government

expects

investments of around Rs 1.7 lakh crore and 1.35 lakh jobs in the next four years, he added. The government is looking at least two greenfield semiconductor fabs and two display fabs in the country, while at least 15 units of Compound Semiconductors and Semiconductor Packaging are expected to be established with government support under this scheme.

1) Investment support for setting

up silicon, display, and compound semiconductor fabs 2) DLI (Design Linked Incentive) for Design and innovation #Semiconductor #MakeInIndia pic.twitter.com/Ukbc6QErJK

- Ashwini Vaishnaw (@AshwiniVaishnaw) December 15, 2021

Under Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme, support will be provided to 100 domestic

An independent 'India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)' will be set up to drive the long-term strategies for developing a sustainable semiconductors and display ecosystem in the country

companies of semiconductor design for Integrated Circuits (ICs), Chipsets, System on Chips (SoCs), Systems & IP Cores and semiconductor linked design. The DLI scheme will offer incentive of up to 50 per cent of eligible expenditure and product deployment linked incentive of 6-4 per cent on net sales for five years. An independent 'India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)' will be set up to drive the long-

term strategies for developing a sustainable semiconductors and display ecosystem in the country.

The new mission will be led by global experts in semiconductor and display industry, and will act as the nodal agency for efficient and smooth implementation of the scheme.

India is looking to push electronics manufacturing to USD 300 billion in coming six years from USD 75 billion now, and semiconductor chips are a crucial part of that ecosystem.

The scheme charts out a plan for skilling and training of 85,000 high-quality engineers, and works out a roadmap for next 20 years. Tata Group has already announced its intention to foray into semiconductor

manufacturing. Sources told PTI that a Vedanta Group firm will again make investment to set up a semiconductor manufacturing plant in India. According to the Ministry of Electronics and IT sources, two big electronics chip companies and two display manufacturing units each entailing investments in the range of Rs 30,000-50,000 crore are expected to be set up within the next four years.

Further, 20 companies

Rajasthan: Hundreds turn up for Congress's 'jan sunwaai' to make their grievances heard



As Gehlot government gears up to celebrate three years in office, hundreds turned up at the Congress office to make their grievances heard.

The Ashok Gehlot government has been gearing up for a grand celebration of completing three years in office this month.

But on Wednesday, scores of people came to the Congress office in Jaipur, to make their grievances heard during 'jan sunwaai', the first-of-its-kind at the PCC, in months.

During its chequered tenure so far, the state dispensation has been busy staving off risks posed by internal rumblings with the government fighting political battles from outside as well as people inside the set-up.

Perhaps, it is the people of the state who, in this period, bore the brunt of a government which has been absent while the people have been dealing with job losses, unemployment and have had little relief at hand.

Santosh Sharma, a 61-year-old woman, had been running from pillar to post to get her pension but was allegedly being asked to pay a bribe.

"I have been facing trouble for nine years. They asked for money at the DO office. I don't have money to eat, what will I give," Santosh Sharma told India Today TV.

"Jan sunwaai has been directed by Rahul Gandhi so that all ministers conduct public hearings on a regular basis," said Congress worker Swarnim Chaturvedi.

Another petitioner wanted the government to put forth the stance of REET candidates assertively in court.

"We have qualified for REET but our result has been stopped. So, we want the minister to put forth our stand during the hearing on December 17 so that our result is announced and we can become teachers in future," another petitioner said.



BJP MP in Rajya Sabha calls protesting opposition members Omicron, threat to democracy

A BJP MP in Rajya Sabha the protesting opposition members "Omicron", alleging they were a threat to democracy.

A BJP MP on Wednesday dubbed the opposition members protesting in Rajya Sabha as "Omicron", alleging they were a threat to democracy, and asked them to get the "Modi vaccine" for protection against the new coronavirus variant.

Participating in a short-duration discussion on the situation arising out of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus in the Upper House of Parliament, BJP MP Shiv Pratap Shukla alleged that the opposition members were running away from the debate as they did not want to recognise the efforts of the government in controlling the virus and only wanted to disturb the House.

He also urged them to follow social distancing norms and wear masks while protesting in the Well of the House.

We are all discussing Omicron and Omicron is standing right before us," Shukla said, pointing towards the opposition members.

"I feel that there cannot be a bigger Omicron than this, which is not allowing Parliament to function. That is why there is a

danger to democracy in Parliament because of these Omicrons. These Omicrons are not becoming silent even when the Chair is making efforts," he said, again pointing towards the protesting opposition members. The opposition objected to his remarks, with Manoj Kumar Jha of the RJD saying he has no right to speak so.

"Our senior member from BJP, while speaking on the debate, called all of us (opposition) as Omicron. Is it right to use such language. Such terminology angers us," Jha said, adding, "We all should

collectively take back the suspension (of 12 members) and the dignity of the opposition should be restored."

The opposition has been protesting the suspension of 12 opposition members in Rajya Sabha.

BJP MP Shukla said when the entire world was fighting Covid-19, two vaccines were developed in India and a majority of the population were administered these vaccines.

"Some people used to say these are 'Modi vaccines' or 'BJP vaccines', but they too have taken these vaccines to save their lives," he said, in a swipe at the opposition.

He said the WHO has expressed concerns over the new variant. It is very important to be cautious against this

"I feel that there cannot be a bigger Omicron than this, which is not allowing Parliament to function. That is why there is a danger to democracy in Parliament because of these Omicrons."

virus.

"But what should we do about this new virus, which, instead of sitting on its seat, has come into the Well," he said, pointing towards the opposition members.

He said the government is taking caution to ensure that there are no casualties and has already issued guidelines to tackle the Omicron variant.

Pointing towards the protesting Shiv Sena members, he said,

"Shiv Sena is dancing here even though 18 (Omicron) cases are in Maharashtra alone."

Bhubaneswar Kalita, who was in the Chair, first asked Sushmita Deb to initiate the discussion but she was not allowed to do so as she raised the issue of suspension of the MPs.

Initiating the discussion, G K Vasan (TMC-M)

congratulated the government and the prime minister for vaccinating the people. "...both the state and central governments should be together to get rid of Covid," he said, calling for rigorous screening.

He said the opposition and the government should come together to help and find a solution to the emergency situation in the country.

He said all decision making on Omicron should be based on scientific management and expert advice, as he called for the need for booster doses of vaccine to come out of the pandemic. He said political parties and leaders should set an example and keep social

gathering and rallies to a minimum.

A Navaneethakrishnan of the AIADMK urged the protesting members to allow him to speak. "Our central government headed by prime minister is doing very good work...Health is Wealth...our prime minister is waging an all-out war to protect India against the pandemic," he said.

"What you are doing is undemocratic. That is not correct. We have a robust healthcare system in place in India. A robust healthcare system is in place because of the efforts of the prime minister. Our PM is guarding us like Maduraveeran and Ayyanar (Tamil folk deities)," he said.

Ram Nath Thakur of the BJP also lauded the government's efforts in checking the spread of the new variant and said all should be cautious and should follow guidelines and protocols to protect themselves. Syed Zafar Islam of the BJP, in his maiden speech in Rajya Sabha, said the emergence of the Omicron variant is a serious issue and is spreading across the globe. In countries like the UK, 44 per cent of new Covid cases are of the Omicron variant.

Nation bids farewell as Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Rawat and wife cremated with full military honours

As millions watched on television and hundreds packed into Brar Square, the couple's two daughters Tarini and Kritika conducted the last rites of their parents taken away from them so brutally.

The nation on Friday bid farewell to its first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen Bipin Rawat as he was cremated with full military honours along with his wife Madhulika Rawat. Military Advisor to CDS Brig L.S. Lidder also killed in the Mi-17V5 helicopter crash in Tamil Nadu was also cremated with full military honours.

Earlier in the day, Gen Rawat's mortal remains were laid in state at his residence to enable people to pay homage. A total of 12 officers from the three Services of the rank of Brigadier and equivalent were on vigil duty over the mortal remains while it is laid in state. Several dignitaries paid last respects to Gen Rawat and his wife at their residence including Home Minister Amit Shah and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. "Gen Rawat was the epitome of bravery and courage. It was very unfortunate to lose him so early. His commitment towards the motherland will forever remain in our memories," Mr. Shah said on social media afterwards.

"I extend my condolences to the family of Gen Bipin Rawat and his wife. This is an unprecedented tragedy and our thoughts are with their family in this difficult time. Heartfelt condolences also to all others who lost their lives. India stands united in this grief," Mr. Gandhi said on Twitter.

Around 1400hrs, the remains were taken in a military procession from his residence to Brar Square crematorium in Delhi Cantonment which was accompanied by a huge wave of people chanting slogans.

Six officers, two each from Army, Navy and Air Force, of the rank of Lieutenant General and equivalent were the Pall (National Flag) Bearers. In all, 99 personnel from three Services and 33 members of the triservices band formed the front escort while 99 all ranks formed the Rear Escort. The gun carriage was provided by the Ceremonial

Battery of Army's 2233 Field Regiment.

Several dignitaries paid their last respects at the crematorium by laying wreaths including Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, foreign Ambassadors in addition to family members.

At the funeral, a total of 800 service personnel were in attendance and Gen Rawat was accorded a 17 gun salute, as per laid down protocols. After the playing of the Last Post and Rouse by tri services buglers, the funeral pyre will be lit by his two daughters around 1645hrs.

Senior foreign military commanders from Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka also attended the last rites of Gen Rawat and bid final farewell.

Gen Shavendra Silva, CDS and Commander of the Sri Lanka Army as well as Adm Ravindra Chandrasiri Wijegunaratne (Retd), former CDS of Sri Lanka and Gen Rawat's course mate at National Defence College were in attendance.

In addition, Brig Dorji Rinchen, Deputy Chief Operations Officer, Royal Bhutan Army, Lt Gen Waker-UZ-Zaman, Principal Staff Officer, armed forces division of Bangladesh and Suprobal Janasewashree Lt Gen Bal Krishna Karki, Chief of General Staff (equivalent to Vice Chief of Army Staff), Nepali Army also paid their respects. The process of identification of 10 other military personnel who were killed in the tragic chopper crash is still continuing, officials said.

The lone survivor of the crash, Gp Capt Varun Singh's condition continues to remain critical but stable and treatment is continuing at Command Hospital, Bengaluru, an IAF official said.

On the tri-service inquiry headed by an Air Marshal that was ordered on December 8 to investigate the chopper crash, the IAF said that the inquiry would be completed "expeditiously and facts brought out." "Till then, to respect the dignity of the deceased, uninformed speculation may be avoided," it said on social media.

Indo-Russia bond strengthens with S-400 deal, despite USA Sanction threats

By Susmita Ghosh

The Indo-Russia bilateral relationship took a better turn with the recent S-400 defense deal. Even with an approaching threat of a major sanction from the USA, India went forward with the defense cooperation pact. It will offer a manifold boost to India's protective measures against the China-Pakistan aggression across its northern and north-western sectors. As a fitting conclusion to the India tour of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, 28 deals were signed across the different sectors. The defense deals between the two countries may result in US dissatisfaction. Among all the new pacts and treaties, the most highlighted is the S-400 defense system deal. The S-400 system can be a massive boost to any country's defense system. In 2018, India has purchased five of these and the final product delivery, supposed to begin by 2021 and the first of them will be operational in 2022. Compared to the analogous competitor systems, the S-400 system is far more superior. It is somewhat like the Iron Dome in Israel. It is superior to the American MIM-104 Patriot system as well. The S-400 needs less time to activate, covers more area at higher speed and at a lower price range. Several countries like Algeria, Turkey, even China has the defense system in their possession now. China deployed the S-400 system across the LOC line in their recent battle against India. To counter the China-Pakistan aerial aggression, a series of S-400 systems of their own was a high need for India. Conversely, this deal may create inconveniences in another sector for India. Both the USA and Russia are among the biggest arms suppliers in India. This deal

over the American system will cost dearly for the USA equivalents. The Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which may stir up trouble. It has a goal of weakening traditional American adversaries like North Korea, Russia, Iran and so on. The USA president can put up to 12 sanctions to any nation making arms deal with these nations. When it comes to their relationship with the USA, India took a calculated risk. The USA has been an active ally in various Indian quagmires in the recent decades. However, the Indo-Russia relationship that goes back to years after Indian independence, took a hit in the recent years. While India took a clear anti-Taliban stance, Russia took a softer and pro-negotiation approach. The renewed relationship by the signed deals can help mend the broken bridge between the two countries. The USA, on the other hand, is taking measured steps when it comes to India. While Russia is one of the countries they remain wary of, their primary country of concern now is China. India is a major partner in the USA's global strategic movement against China on several fronts. The S-400 system is to be used primarily against China as well. Besides the \$5.4 Billion US dollars defense system deal between Russia and India, there are other multimillion dollar weapons deals too. India can hope to gain a strategic partner in Russia without annoying the USA much. Even though there is precedence of sanctions against Turkey for the same allegation, it is less likely to be repeated. At the same time, Russia will look forward to India for partnership when they are being withdrawn for the aggression against Ukraine.



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Why tornadoes are the hardest disasters to link to climate change



Some jumped to connect last week's twisters with global warming. Scientists aren't so sure.

After tornadoes barreled through six U.S. states late last week, killing at least 88 people and flattening warehouses, nursing homes, and factories, many were quick to blame the warming climate for at least some of the damages.

Over the weekend, many in the news media speculated that global warming may have played a role and pressed policymakers for answers. Deanne Criswell, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, called the devastating tornadoes "our new normal." President Joe Biden, responding to a question from reporters at a press conference on Saturday, said that "everything is more intense when the climate is warming - everything" but emphasized on Monday that "we can't say with absolute certainty" that climate change was to blame.

The questions are hardly a surprise: After all, it's become increasingly common - and scientifically supported - to blame floods, heat waves, and even intense hurricanes on the increasing temperatures from fossil fuel use. Friday's record-breaking heat caused many to speculate that climate change might have played a role in the disaster; there's also evidence that tornadoes are shifting

eastward, perhaps because of changing temperatures.

But tornadoes, scientists say, are extremely difficult to link to climate change. According to a 2016 report from the National Academies of Sciences, tornadoes are the most challenging weather event to attribute to global warming - after heat waves, wildfires, extra-tropical cyclones, and even heavy

making it hard for scientists to see how twisters might change in the coming years.

"Our models don't produce tornadoes," Hausfather said. Climate models, he explained, split the world into 100- or 25-kilometer wide boxes and simulate what happens in each box. But tornadoes form in areas that are less than one kilometer wide - much too small to be easily modeled.

That means scientists have to use other methods to analyze how twisters will be affected by the warming climate.

Researchers argue that there could come a point when research clearly demonstrates a link between tornadoes and a warming world.

snowfall. "They are the single extreme that we have the least confidence around," said Zeke Hausfather, a climate scientist and the director of climate and energy at the Breakthrough Institute.

That's for several different reasons. First, most studies linking climate change to weather events (a field known as "extreme event attribution") model the world's climate in two different ways: with human-caused warming and without. But those climate models don't have a fine-enough resolution to simulate tornadoes,

Tornadoes require a few different ingredients to form: first, potential energy created by warm, moist air near the ground and cool, dry air overhead. In so-called "Tornado Alley" in the central U.S., for instance, tornadoes are formed by warm air flowing in from the Gulf of Mexico to the southeast, and cool air coming from over the Rocky Mountains. Second, they require "wind shear," a change in wind speed or direction from the ground to the sky, to wind up the tornado's spin.

Harold Brooks, a senior scientist at the National Severe Storms

Laboratory, says that there is evidence that a warming climate could affect one of those ingredients, but not the other. There's good evidence, according to Brooks, that the potential energy of storms could increase as the world heats up. But wind shear could decrease or increase in a warming planet, and scientists aren't yet sure which effect will win out.

To make matters more complicated, tornadoes can also be affected by the precise way that thunderstorms form - whether they form as isolated storms, as in Friday's disastrous events, or as a huge line. Isolated storms, Brooks says, are more likely to create tornadoes. But, he adds, there's no understanding yet of how global warming could influence the exact mechanisms of thunderstorm formation.

Researchers argue that there could come a point when research clearly demonstrates a link between tornadoes and a warming world. "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," Hausfather said. But at the moment, there's no clear data to indicate that tornadoes are increasing in number or intensity. (There are more tornadoes now than in the 1950s, but scientists say that's because of changing monitoring techniques.)

Indian President's visit to Bangladesh on 'Victory Day' is a huge gesture



President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind is all set to pay an official visit to Dhaka from December 15-17 to participate in the ongoing Victory Day celebrations currently underway to observe the golden jubilee of the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 - a happening which was largely possible due to India's direct and indirect intervention both diplomatically, and militarily. Similarly, India too, December 16, which is marked as the Victory Day (Vijay Divas in Hindi), is celebrating in a big way holding meetings, workshops, photo exhibitions commemorating the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh as a free and liberated nation. While Dhaka is all spruced up to receive the Indian President, on its part, India sending its President to Bangladesh is an extraordinarily huge gesture signifying the importance India accords to Bangladesh. Such a gesture and the subsequent visit is bound to further reinforce the bilateral ties between the two friendly countries.

Bangladesh also seems enthusiastic to welcome the Indian President and his entourage and is thus reciprocating the gesture in equal measure in Dhaka. Other than being present in the Victory Day celebrations, President Kovind will hold talks with his Bangladesh counterpart, Abdul Hamid and will also be called upon by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Home Minister, other Cabinet Ministers and top dignitaries of the Bangladesh government.

Regarding this high-profile upcoming visit of the Indian President, it will not be impertinent to remind the readers about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bangladesh visit (March 26 - 27, 2021) to take part in the centenary celebrations of the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the visit was impactful.



Kolkata Durga Puja Bags UNESCO Heritage Tag; Modi, Mamata Hail Move As 'Proud Moment'

"Durga puja in Kolkata has just been inscribed on the intangible heritage list. Congratulations India," the UN agency posted on Twitter with a picture of an idol of the goddess attached to it. The UNESCO on Wednesday accorded heritage status to Kolkata's Durga puja festival, bringing glory to the country, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee lauding the move.

"Durga puja in Kolkata has just been inscribed on the intangible heritage list. Congratulations India," the organisation said in a tweet attaching a photo of the goddess with hashtag 'living heritage'.

Modi has hailed UNESCO's decision as a "matter of great pride and joy for every Indian".

"Durga Puja highlights the best of our traditions and ethos. And, Kolkata's Durga Puja is an experience everyone must have," he said.

The chief minister underlined that Durga puja was not just a festival, but an emotion.

"Proud moment for Bengal! To every #Bengali across the world, Durga Puja is much more than a festival, it is an emotion that unites everyone. And now, #DurgaPuja has been added to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. We are all beaming

with joy!" she tweeted. The Ministry of Culture, too, took to the microblogging platform to extend its wishes to the residents of the city on this achievement.

"Overjoyed that 'Durga Puja in



Kolkata' joins the @UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Many congratulations! It is a confluence of the rich heritage and culture of the county's art, crafts, rituals and practices. Jai Maa Durga!" the ministry wrote. The department of state information and cultural affairs in Bengal issued a statement to congratulate the people of the state as well as the country.

"The 16th Committee of UNESCO for safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

(ICH) in its meeting held on 15th December 2021 in Paris has inscribed Durga puja in Kolkata on the representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity," it said. The department also noted that

Commission, said the annual

Red Road carnival, which

displays the craftsmanship that

goes into the making of Durga

Puja pandals, have made more

people across the world aware

of the grandeur that is

synonymous with the festival.

"It was Chief Minister Mamata

Banerjee who started the Red

Road Carnival to showcase the

art work, culture and traditions

associated with the festival.

Durga puja is being celebrated

for decades, but the festival got

a new dimension with the

carnival," he stated.

Welcoming the development,

indologist and academician

Narsingha Prasad Bhaduri said

Durga puja is a "universal

festival" binding millions of

people.

He, however, claimed that the

festival should have been

accorded the status much

earlier.

The annual Red Road carnival,

organised ahead of the

immersion ceremony, was last

held in 2019.

The event was cancelled this

year as well as in 2020 owing

to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Soumen Dutta, one of the

officials of Forum for Durgotsab

- an apex body of community Durga puja committees in the city - said organisers of the ten-day gala have finally got their due credit.

"Our hard work over the years

has yielded desired result. The

magnitude of Durga puja

celebrations in Bengal has no

parallel in the entire world," he

underlined.

On its website, UNESCO said

the "festival has come to signify

home-coming or a seasonal

return to one's roots".

"Durga Puja is seen as the best

instance of the public

performance of religion and art,

and as a thriving ground for

collaborative artists and

designers. The festival is

characterised by large-scale

installations and pavilions in

urban areas, as well as by

traditional Bengali drumming

and veneration of the goddess,"

it added.



Wuhan Lab Leak "More Likely" Origin Of COVID-19, Says Researcher

Asked by the panel about the probability of a lab leak as the origin of the pandemic, Canadian molecular biologist said a "lab origin is more likely than natural origin at this point". A Canadian molecular biologist on Wednesday told cross-party members of Parliament (MPs) on the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee that a leak from a laboratory in Wuhan region of China is now the "more likely" origin of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Dr Alina Chan, specialising in gene therapy and cell engineering and co-author of 'Viral: The Search for the Origin of COVID-19', told the Parliament panel's evidence session on scientific research that the pandemic was being caused by the unique feature of the coronavirus called "furin cleavage site", which has been linked to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Asked by the panel about the probability of a lab leak as the origin of the pandemic, Chan said a "lab origin is more likely than natural origin at this point".

"We all agree that there was a critical event at the Huanan Seafood Market, that was a superspreader event caused by humans. There is no evidence pointing to a natural animal origin of the virus at that market," she noted. On the question of her level of confidence that the world would eventually be able to establish the true origins of COVID-19, Chan said it was simply a matter of time. "Right now it's not safe for people who know about the origin of this pandemic to come forward. It might be five years from now, it might be 50 years from now, but we live in an era where there's so much data being collected and stored...we just need a credible, systematic investigation," she said. On whether the virus was modified in the lab before a leak, Chan said: "We have heard from many top virologists that a genetically engineered origin of this virus is reasonable...and this includes virologists who themselves have made modifications to the first SARS virus. "We know now that this virus has a very unique feature, called the furin cleavage site

that makes it the pandemic pathogen it is. So, without this feature, there's no way this would be causing this pandemic. "Only recently in September did a proposal get leaked showing that scientists from the EcoHealth Alliance were in collaboration with the Wuhan Institute of Virology developing this pipeline for inserting novel furin cleavage sites, these genetic modifications, into SARS-like viruses in the lab." Chan stressed that the burden was on the scientists in question to show that their work did not result in the creation of SARS-COV2, the virus behind COVID-19, and that an investigation of documents being made available by US-based EcoHealth Alliance could hold the key. Her co-author, Lord Matt Ridley, was also asked similar questions about the lab leak theory and he concurred with Chan's assertion that it was "more likely than not" the cause behind the pandemic. "We have to face the fact that after two months we knew the origins of SARS through markets, and after a couple of months we knew the

origin of MERS through camels. In this case, after two years we still haven't found a single infected animal that could be the progenitor of this pandemic; that's extremely surprising," he said. Ridley, along with Chan, agreed that any leak was most likely an "accident" as he traced the journey of scientists a few years ago to bring SARS-like viruses back to Wuhan for experiments. "It does have to be taken seriously. It is regrettable that in 2020 there was a pretty systematic attempt to shut down this topic," he noted. Ridley added: "We need to find out so we can prevent the next pandemic. We need to know whether we should be tightening up work in laboratories or whether we should be tightening up regulations relating to wildlife sales in markets. At the moment we are really not doing either." "We also need to know to deter bad actors who are watching this episode and thinking that unleashing a pandemic is something they could get away with.

Chemical Air Pollution Creates New Toxins Over Time: Study



Remnants of industrial chemicals in the air can potentially transform into new substances more toxic and persistent than the original pollution, according to a global study published on Wednesday. Using samples gathered around the world, the study published in Nature found that these previously unidentified products are present in the atmospheres of 18 big cities including Lagos, New York, Tokyo and Warsaw.

Regulatory guidelines like those listed in the Stockholm Convention assess the danger of different chemical pollutants based on how long they remain in the environment, how toxic they are and to what degree they contaminate living things.

But, the study notes, this approach has been limited to a list of known substances and does not take into account how they may change as they break down.

The research proposes a new framework using laboratory tests and computer simulation to predict what chemicals will arise as products interact with the air and how toxic they will be.

Study main author John Liggio, a research scientist for Environment Canada, worked with a team to test the framework on nine flame-retardant chemicals most commonly found in the atmosphere.

"They are chemicals that are added to a large variety of materials to delay the onset of fire," Liggio told AFP.

In a laboratory, they observed how these chemicals changed over time when in contact with oxidants in the air and found that they gave rise to 186 different substances.

Comparing these new substances with field samples, they found 19 derived from the five most common flame retardants. None of the 19 had ever been identified in the ambient atmosphere before.



From the archives:

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a man of iron

His finest hour was the accession of over 550 scattered principalities, but he was also a lieutenant to Mahatma Gandhi, best able to reconcile the impracticalities of Gandhian philosophy with the realities of local politics.

The slender figure in a spotless white sari was bent intently over the spinning wheel as I waited patiently before making my request. This was four decades ago in Delhi, where I had gone to meet Manibehn Patel, then member of Parliament, for permission to see the Sardar Patel microfilms. Yes, she said finally, but no extractions to be taken, which put me in a quandary. In the next few weeks, over endless cups of tea, for which I would leap out from my desk in the Archives to take down notes of what I had been reading, I entered the fascinating world of the Sardar. There was indeed a bit of iron in his constitution which made him unbending, committed and focused, inherited by his daughter Manibehn, who had taken the Gandhian vow to remain unwedded, taking care of her illustrious father and keeping a record of his papers, letters and notes for posterity.

Born on October 31, 1875, in Nadiad, a small town in Gujarat, Vallabhbhai was fourth in a family of five brothers and a sister and spent his early childhood in completely rustic and rural settings. His father Jhaverbhai, of the Leva Patidar community, settled down in his ten acres of ancestral property in Karamsad. Apart from attending the village school, Vallabhbhai helped his father in the field. There being no English school at Karamsad he attended a tutorial course in English before leaving for Petlad, a neighbouring town where he

studied till the fifth standard. Following traditional Patidar customs, Vallabhbhai was married to Javerbai from a nearby village, who brought with her a handsome dowry. His studies incomplete, Vallabhbhai went to Nadiad, from where at 22 he completed his matriculation. In his student years, he showed an aptitude for indigenous sports like kabaddi and wrestling and displayed leadership qualities by boldly challenging corrupt school authorities. Although not academically inclined, he showed considerable grit and determination in learning the English language through hard work and memorising.

After three years, he passed the district pleaders' examination and moved to Godhra in a bullock cart with his wife and belongings. Precision, shrewdness, and good judgement of people ensured his early success in the legal career and raised his hopes of going to England for further legal studies. However, a strange mix-up resulting from the fact that he shared the same initials with his older brother Vithalbhai, led the latter to proceed to England instead, leaving Vallabhbhai with the care of his family. Vallabhbhai obeyed like a soldier despite his personal disappointment. Tragedy struck a few years later when Jhaverbai died following surgery. The well-known anecdote about how Vallabhbhai continued with his cross-questioning in court despite receiving news of his wife's death, reveals the unyielding

firmness in his character. Shortly after, Vallabhbhai proceeded to England to pursue legal studies, leaving his son and daughter with an English lady associated with an esteemed school in Bombay so that their English was perfected. With labour and application, Vallabhbhai passed the final law examination in 1912 with distinction. On returning to India, he became a successful England-returned criminal lawyer wearing tailor-made suits, frequenting the Gujarat Club, playing a formidable hand of bridge and commanding hefty fees.

Vallabhbhai was soon drawn to municipal politics and in 1924 went on to become the municipal president of Ahmedabad. Vallabhbhai's municipal experience was vital for he saw close quarters the intransigence of the British bureaucracy. However, it was during the rare occurrence of a green famine in Kheda in 1917, when standing crops were destroyed in excessive rainfall and the Government's demand of steep revenue was unduly harsh, that the peasant in Vallabhbhai was stirred to action. The Gujarat Congress invoked the Gandhian programme of non-violent mass movement and advised peasants to withhold payment of revenue even as their land was confiscated. Working together, Vallabhbhai and Gandhi brought the agitation to a successful completion with the government agreeing to postpone recovery of dues from poor peasants.

How Indira Gandhi won the 1971 war



During the 1971 India-Pakistan war, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, faced with over 10 million refugees from East Pakistan, had waged a multi-pronged strategy.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi conducted herself with remarkable patience and restraint. She won the war decisively - splitting Pakistan into two, with the new country, Bangladesh, consisting of over 60 per cent of Pakistan's population. The 1971 victory was significant on many counts. The local population of East Pakistan was extremely hostile to the Pakistani Army and civil services, while it greeted Mukti Bahini with open arms.

Opinion in India was near-unanimous, backing Indira Gandhi to the hilt. For instance, Syed Shahabuddin, otherwise considered a 'hawk' among Muslim intelligentsia, had turned a vocal supporter of the creation of Bangladesh. He was in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) then and later wrote extensively on how the 1971 was a watershed year for Muslims in India.

"For the first time after 1971, Indian Muslims realised that Pakistan offered them no hope, no future and itself had no future. Muslims of India were and are convinced that the fulfillment of their aspirations depends entirely upon their standing in their own country, India," Shahabuddin wrote, adding, "That realisation not only put Indian Muslims on the right track but also gave them the courage and determination to face their situation squarely, to stand up and assert themselves."

According to Shahabuddin, the creation of Bangladesh gave a boost to the emergence of Indian Muslims as a factor in Indian politics.

Prior to 1971, Indian Muslims hardly spoke their mind - it was only after 1971 that they began to give voice to their opinions and became part of the national mainstream.

To her defence chiefs, Indira Gandhi had given complete freedom and adequate time and resources to gear up for action. Her only condition was that the war should be brief, without creating international complications and bringing others into the field.

Dismiss Rahul Gandhi's plea with costs, says BJP worker who filed defamation case



The affidavit in reply, filed by Shrishrimal through advocate Niteen Pradhan with Rohan Mahadik, states Gandhi could have preferred a revision application against the order before the Sessions Court instead of directly approaching the High Court with a quashing petition.

ABJP worker from Mumbai, Mahesh Shrishrimal, has opposed a plea of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and prayed that the plea be dismissed with cost. The case was heard in relation to Rahul Gandhi's "commander-in-chief" comment. The court has deferred the hearing till January 25.

The affidavit in reply, filed by Shrishrimal through advocate Niteen Pradhan with Rohan Mahadik, states Gandhi could have preferred a revision application against the order before the Sessions Court instead of directly approaching the High Court with a quashing petition.

The six-page reply states the settled position of law is that inherent powers must be exercised with caution and circumspection by the courts. The case pertained to his "commander-in-thief" comment against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018 while addressing a public rally in Rajasthan. Gandhi had tweeted the same on September 24, 2018. Shrishrimal, a resident of Girgaon had claimed that by calling the Prime Minister "commander-in-thief", Gandhi had alleged theft against all members of the BJP and Indian citizens.

Gandhi, through his lawyer Kushal Mor, said that since he is an elected representative, he is many times exposed to frivolous and vexatious litigation,

motivated by the sole purpose of furthering political agendas.

Gandhi's plea further added that the plea in the magistrate's court was filed only to harass him and tarnish his public image.

However, the complainant in his reply says that he has made out a prima facie case against Rahul Gandhi. He even entered into the witness box and lead evidence and after scrutinizing the material on record and evidence led by Shrishrimal, the Magistrate was pleased to pass the order of issuance of process against Gandhi.

Shrishrimal states: "It is pertinent to note that before passing the order, the magistrate has formed opinion that factual ingredients constituting the offence existed and therefore the process was issued against Gandhi summoning him for trial."

Shrishrimal affidavit stresses that, "Order has been passed after duly considering the preliminary evidence produced by the complainant."

Pradhan states that the locus for prosecution for defamation is set out in Code of Criminal Procedure. The section postulates a "person aggrieved" as opposed to "person defamed". Thus the legislature has not intended that only the person defamed would have the locus of initiating criminal prosecution for defamation, says Pradhan.

Shrishrimal says, "Gandhi had admittedly published the defamatory statement against the Prime Minister by calling him

commander-in-thief, thereby not only tarnishing his image but by implication and insinuation comparing all BJP functionaries including me, to thieves and lowering their reputation in society at large."

He adds, "Gandhi deliberately published the said video containing his defamatory allegations on social media, so that the newspaper agencies and other media will further amplify, publish and circulate the same to the public at large."

The affidavit adds: "Gandhi has, maliciously knowing the statement to be false and far from the truth, made such defamatory statements against the Prime Minister and by insinuation against BJP functionaries like me. I further said Gandhi knows and was aware of the natural and ordinary consequences of his acts."

The legal stand of Shishirmal is that, "words are actionable, if false and defamatory, and Gandhi needs to be dealt with according to law."

He has added, "In the verification statement recorded by the magistrate, I have categorically set out how my esteem as a BJP functionary was lowered in the eyes of my relatives and other members of society."

This case will now be heard on January 18 and Justice Sandeep K Shinde has asked the Girgaum magistrate court to defer its hearing till January 25.

Is Sheena Bora alive as claimed by Indrani Mukerjea? Forensic reports reveal the truth



Indrani Mukerjea, accused of murdering her daughter Sheena Bora in 2012, has written a letter to the CBI director stating that Sheena Bora is alive.

In a dramatic turn of events, former media executive

Indrani Mukerjea, who is accused of killing her daughter Sheena Bora in 2012, has allegedly written a letter to the director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) stating that Sheena Bora is alive.

The officials of the CBI are tight-lipped about the controversial development. However, sources say the alleged letter holds no value as the forensic reports had confirmed that the body, then exhumed by the police, was of Sheena Bora.

Indrani's alleged letter is based on the account of a woman who allegedly told her inside prison that she has seen Sheena Bora alive in Kashmir.

A report by the forensic department of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) had concluded that the skeleton remains belonged to Sheena Bora. The medical examination report, which is part of the CBI's chargesheet, was based on various parameters of the recovered body including height, age and sex which were consistent and matched with the history of Sheena Bora.

The expert team also concluded that 23-year-old Sheena Bora was strangled to death and

the cause of death was asphyxia.

The body of Sheena Bora was exhumed in 2015 by the police and several medical examinations were conducted to conclude if the body was of Sheena or not.

Based on the opinion by multiple forensic experts, eye witness accounts, statements of accused and evidence, the CBI concluded that Sheena Bora was murdered.

According to the investigators, Sheena Bora was killed in 2012 by Indrani Mukerjea in conspiracy with her then husband Peter and ex-husband Sanjeev Khanna over financial dispute.

Peter has been denying the allegations of having any role in killing of Sheena Bora.

The Mumbai Police, led by then Police Commissioner Rakesh Maria, uncovered the murder in 2015, after Indrani's driver Shyamvar Rai was arrested by the police.

Shyamvar Rai allegedly told the police about the killing of Sheena Bora, role of Indrani and where the body was disposed.

In the light of alleged letter written by Indrani, it would be interesting to see if CBI takes any cognisance or not.

How conman Suresh Chandrashekhar extorted over Rs 200 crore from businessman's wife from jail



A billionaire in jail, his wife desperate to secure bail, and a conman looking to make crores. As the wife spent hours talking to and negotiating with who she believed was a senior government official, the conman wove an intricate web of deceit to make over Rs 200 crore, all while sitting in a cell of Tihar jail in Delhi.

From June 2020 to May 2021, conman Suresh Chandrashekhar, using some mobile applications and voice modulation softwares, made several calls to Aditi Singh, wife of former Ranbaxy owner Shivendra Singh who is in jail.

Suresh, posing as an officer - sometimes as Law Secretary, Home Secretary, representative of Home Minister Amit Shah, and representative of Prime Minister's Office -- extorted Rs 215 crore from Aditi on the pretext of helping her husband get out of jail.

India Today has accessed 84 audio clips of Suresh Chandrashekhar where he posed as government officials and spoke to her over phone.

How Suresh Chandrashekhar duped ex-Ranbaxy owner's wife. It all started on June 15, 2020, when Aditi received a call on her mobile from a landline number. A lady asked for her and stated that Anoop Kumar, Law Secretary for the Government of India, would like to speak.

Within a few seconds, she transferred the phone and a man came on the phone line and introduced himself as Anoop Kumar, the Law Secretary of India. He stated that he was calling on the instructions of the PMO (Prime Minister's Office). Suresh, who was impersonating Anoop Kumar, made references to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the submissions made in court by them with regard to an expression made by Aditi's husband to contribute to healthcare through letters sent to the government.

US Congress approves import ban targeting forced labour in China

On Thursday, US Senators gave final congressional approval to a bill banning imports from China's Xinjiang region unless businesses can prove their products were produced without forced labour.

US Senators gave final congressional approval Thursday to a bill barring imports from China's Xinjiang region unless businesses can prove they were produced without forced labour, overcoming initial hesitation from the White House and what supporters said was opposition from corporations.

The measure is the latest in a series intensifying U.S. penalties over China's alleged systemic and widespread abuse of ethnic and religious minorities in the western region, especially Xinjiang's predominantly Muslim Uyghurs. The Biden administration also announced new sanctions Thursday targeting several Chinese biotech and surveillance companies, a leading drone manufacturer and government entities for their actions in Xinjiang.

The Senate vote sends the bill to President Joe Biden. Press secretary Jen Psaki said this week that Biden supported the measure, after months of the White House declining to take a public stand on an earlier version of the legislation.

TREATMENT OF UYGHURS IN CHINA- The United States says China is committing genocide in its treatment of the Uyghurs. That includes widespread reports by

rights groups and journalists of forced sterilization and large detention camps where many Uyghurs allegedly are compelled to work in factories.

China denies any abuses. It says the steps it has taken are necessary to combat terrorism and a separatist movement.

ALLEGED FORCED LABOUR

The U.S. cites raw cotton, gloves, tomato products, silicon and viscose, fishing gear and a range of components in solar energy as among goods alleged to have been produced with the help of the forced labour. Xinjiang is a resource-rich mining region, important for agricultural production, and home to a booming industrial sector. Detainees also are moved outside Xinjiang and put to work in factories, including those in the apparel and textiles, electronics, solar energy and automotive sectors, the U.S. says. "Many companies have already taken steps to clean up their supply chains. And, frankly, they should have no concerns about this law," Sen. Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican who introduced the earlier version of the legislation with Oregon Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley, said in a statement. "For those who have not done that, they'll no longer be able to continue to make Americans -

every one of us, frankly - unwitting accomplices in the atrocities, in the genocide," Rubio said.

OVERWHELMING APPROVAL FOR BILL

As in the House earlier this week, the compromise version passed the Senate with overwhelming approval from Democrats and Republicans. The swift passage came after what supporters said was offstage opposition from corporations with manufacturing links to China, although there was little to no overt opposition.

Apple's lobbying firm lobbied on Apple's behalf, a federal disclosure form shows. Apple, like Nike and other corporations with work done in China, says it has found no sign of forced labour from Xinjiang in its manufacturing or supply chain. Some Uyghur rights advocates and others said they had also feared private opposition from within the Biden administration as it sought cooperation from the Chinese on climate change and other issues. Psaki, in her statement Tuesday night, noted export controls and import restrictions, sanctions, diplomatic initiatives and other measures the Biden

administration had already taken targeting forced labour from Xinjiang. The Senate also approved Biden's nominee for ambassador to China, veteran diplomat Nicholas Burns, on a 75-18 vote Thursday.

Advocates credited unrelenting support from rights groups and lawmakers, including statements from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, with helping the bill prevail.

CONFRONTING CHINA

With the legislation, sanctions and months of other new measures, "the United States is way ahead" of the international community on confronting China on abuses of Uyghurs, said Nury Turkel, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and vice chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

How can anyone get China to change "without going after the most important thing to the Chinese government, which is their economic interest?" asked Turkel, who praised Congress - but not the administration - for what he called coherent messaging on the matter. The legislation requires government agencies to expand their monitoring of the use of forced labour by China's ethnic minorities. Crucially, it creates a presumption that goods coming from Xinjiang are made with forced labour.



Agra's environment activists mark 'Jhunjhuna Day' to draw attention to Yamuna river pollution

On Thursday, environmental activists marked 'Jhunjhuna Day' in Agra to draw attention to the polluted state of the Yamuna river.

On Thursday, environmental activists marked 'Jhunjhuna Day' (Rattle Day) in Agra to draw attention to the polluted state of the Yamuna river. They gathered at the aarti (prayer) site on the banks of the river and shook their rattles for five minutes to express their dissatisfaction.

Members of the River Connect Campaign, an association which aims to clean up the Yamuna, criticised the inaction of the public representatives of Agra on Thursday.

Speaking to India Today, journalist Brij Khandelwal said the MLAs, MPs and mayor had not done anything to improve the

condition of the Yamuna river, which is the lifeline of Agra city. He said, "The elected representatives have presented a united front of apathy and indifference towards the revival of the Yamuna river. To draw the attention of the public representatives towards their

own callous attitude, Yamuna devotees expressed their dissatisfaction by playing rattles for five minutes." Brij Khandelwal, who is also the convenor of the River Connect Campaign, said, "Other cities got a lot during BJP's rule but Agra has got peanuts." Meanwhile, environmental activist Devashish

Bhattacharya said, "The Yamuna was dirty in the past, it is dirty today and will remain like this in the future by the grace of Agra's public representatives."

On the occasion of Jhunjhuna Day, an extensive cleaning drive was carried out at Itmad-ud-Daula View Point.

'Winter of severe illness and death for unvaccinated': US President Biden warns amid Omicron threat

"We are looking at a winter of severe illness and death for the unvaccinated," US President Biden said on Thursday amid the threat of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

US President Joe Biden warned on Thursday (December 16) that the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is going to spread more rapidly in the United States and that a winter of severe illness and death awaits the unvaccinated. Getting an update on the pandemic from top health advisers, Biden also said it is past time for people to get booster shots and urged them to do so as quickly as possible. "We are looking at a winter of severe illness and death" for the unvaccinated, Biden said. At least 36 states have reported confirmed Omicron cases, officials from the Centers for Disease Control said on Wednesday. "If you're vaccinated and have



your booster shot, you're protected from severe illness and death," Biden said. Biden said the Omicron variant

had not spread as fast in the United States as it could have thanks to his administration's policies. "It's here now. It is

spreading and it's going to increase." "Get your booster shot. It's critically important," he said. SPIKE IN CASES

Evidence of the spike in coronavirus infections was on display in Miami, Florida on Thursday, where drivers lined up on the highway to get into a testing site.

Over the past month, new cases have risen nationwide nearly 40% to a seven-day average of 121,000 new infections per day, according to a Reuters tally.

According to the New York Times, there were 4,127 new infections in Florida on December 15, nearly 1,500 more than the 7-day average. Deaths nationwide have risen 18% since mid-November to an average of 1,300 lives lost a day. Covid hospitalisations have risen about 45% over the last month.

Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin to hold virtual China-Russia bilateral meet on Dec 15

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin are set to hold a virtual bilateral meet on December 15.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will hold a virtual summit this week to discuss bilateral relations and international issues, amid tensions between Moscow and the West over the massing of tens of thousands of Russian troops near its border with Ukraine.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin mentioned no specific topics and said details would be released after Wednesday's video meeting.

"The two heads of state will give full review of China-Russia relations and cooperation in various fields this year," Wang said at a daily briefing on Monday. Wang added the



leaders will also "make top-level designs for the development of bilateral relations next year." US President Joe Biden warned

Putin during a call last week that Russia would face painful sanctions that will do resounding economic harm if it again invaded

Ukraine. Putin responded that "Russian troops are on their own territory, and they don't threaten anyone," according to his foreign

affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov. In recent years, China and Russia have increasingly aligned their foreign policies to counter US domination of the international economic and political order. Both have faced sanctions over their internal policies, China over abuses against minorities, especially Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, and for its crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. Beijing and Washington also remain at odds over trade, technology and China's military intimidation of Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory. Wang said the bilateral meeting of the US rivals was expected to "further enhance the high-level mutual trust between the two sides."

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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.



[illegible]

US troops scot-free after Afghanistan drone attack. What really happened?

(News Agencies) -The United States on Monday said that no disciplinary action will be taken against its troops and officials responsible for the ghastly drone attack that killed 10 Afghan civilians.

Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby on Monday informed that that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved a series of recommendations following an investigation into the deadly August incident.

"The secretary's not approving or calling for additional accountability measures," Kirby told reporters during a briefing. "I do not anticipate there being issues of personal accountability to be had with respect to the August 29th airstrike," he added. The investigations by two officers, Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., head of the military's Central Command, and Gen. Richard D. Clarke, head of the Special Operations



Command, found no grounds for penalising any of the military personnel involved in the strike, said Kirby, the Pentagon's chief spokesperson.

"But in this particular case...there was not a strong enough case to be made for personal accountability" and no one was found criminally negligent, he said.

The US military had carried out the drone strike near the international airport in Kabul against the ISIS-K militants who were readying themselves to

launch another suicide attack at the Hamid Karzai International Airport.

They claimed to have successfully killed the Islamic State - Khorasan (ISIS-K militants), but a survey of the area and interview of the civilians done by WION revealed that the strike actually claimed the lives of civilians.

That strike killed an aid worker, along with his nieces and nephews.

What led to the drone strike? During the last days of the

chaotic pull-out of troops from Afghanistan, the US had received an intelligence report about an imminent attack by the ISIS-K militants on Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

It was just days after 13 US service members were killed outside of the Kabul airport by a suicide bomber.

At the time, officials claimed that they had received intelligence information about a white Toyota carrying a car bomb.

It was reported that the US officials were monitoring the car and its driver, as he made several "suspicious" stops near the airport.

After monitoring him for nearly 8 hours, US launched a 20-pound Hellfire missile from a drone.

Even before the details of the casualties emerged, the US troops hailed the attack, claiming that ISIK militants were

killed, with General Mark Milley-US' highest military rank officer-justifying the bombing, saying, "The procedures were correctly followed, and it was a righteous strike."

But it was later revealed that an aid worker, Zemari Ahmadi, was driving the car. And the airstrike killed seven children and two other adults, apart from Ahmadi- none of those linked to IS terrorists.

Pentagon admits mistake Days after news reports emerged that the civilians were the ones who lost their lives instead of the terrorists, the United States admitted its mistake.

At that time, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin issued a statement, apologising to the relatives of those killed in the drone strike.

Kirby said the decision to launch a drone strike was taken after thoughtful analysis and proper intelligence reports.

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**This is how
Huawei is
associated with
China's state
surveillance**



Huawei technologies for a long time has dismissed questions pertaining to its role in China's state surveillance. While the company claims that it is selling general-purpose networking gear, a report by The Washington Post suggests that the company has had a bigger role than what has been told. China is trying to build, what is being dubbed as one of the world's most sophisticated surveillance technology. Security officials in the Henan province of China have authorised a surveillance system through which they aim to track journalists and international students and various other "suspicious people."

The Washington Post reviewed over 100 Huawei PowerPoint presentations, out of which many were marked as "confidential." The presentations depict how the company's technologies can help the government identify individuals by voice. It can also help in monitoring political individuals, managing ideological reeducation and labour schedules for prisoners. In response, the company issued a statement saying, "Huawei has no knowledge of the projects mentioned in the Washington Post report. Like all other major service providers, Huawei provides cloud platform services that comply with common industry standards." Huawei's public denial further raises a major question about the transparency at the world's largest vendor of telecommunications gear. Huawei had earlier said that it has not developed or sold systems that target any specific group of people. However, the Washington Post reviewed over 3,000 PowerPoint slides. These slides highlighted the surveillance projects co-developed by Huawei.

Taliban seek ties with US, other ex-foes

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi also told The Associated Press that the Taliban government wants good relations with all countries and has no issue with the United States.

Afghanistan's new Taliban rulers are committed in principle to education and jobs for girls and women, a marked departure from their previous time in power, and they seek the world's "mercy and compassion" to help millions of Afghans in desperate need, a top Taliban leader said in a rare interview. Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi also told The Associated Press that the Taliban government wants good relations with all countries and has no issue with the United States. He urged Washington and other nations to release upward of \$10 billion in funds that were frozen when the Taliban took power Aug. 15, following a rapid military sweep across Afghanistan and the sudden, secret flight of U.S.-backed President Ashraf Ghani. "Sanctions against Afghanistan would ... not have any benefit," Muttaqi said Sunday, speaking in his native Pashto during the interview in the sprawling pale brick Foreign Ministry building in the heart of the capital of Kabul.

Making Afghanistan unstable or having a weak Afghan government is not in the interest of anyone," said Muttaqi, whose aides include employees of the previous government as well as those recruited from the ranks of the Taliban. Muttaqi

acknowledged the world's outrage at the Taliban-imposed limitations on girls' education and on women in the workforce. In many parts of Afghanistan, female students between grades 7 and 12 have not been allowed to go to school since the Taliban took over, and many female civil servants have been told to stay home. Taliban officials have said they need time to create gender-segregated arrangements in schools and the workplace to meet their severe interpretation of Islam.

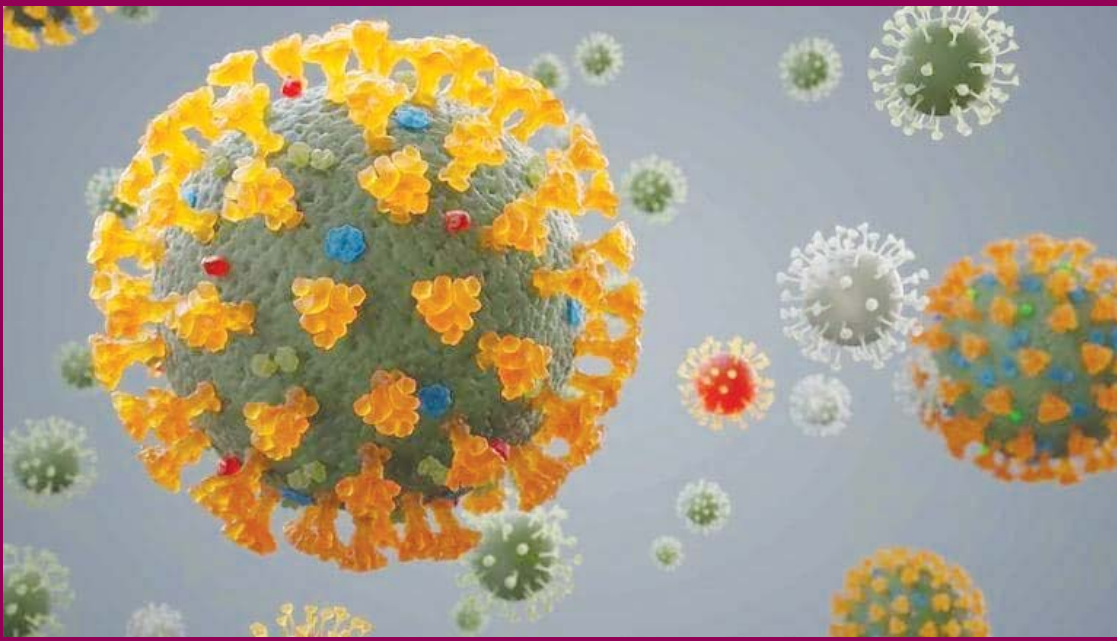
When they first ruled from 1996-2001, the Taliban shocked the world by barring girls and women from schools and jobs, banning most entertainment and sports, and occasionally carrying out executions in front of large crowds in sports stadiums. But Muttaqi said the Taliban have changed since they last ruled. "We have made progress in administration and in politics ... in interaction with the nation and the world. With each passing day, we will gain more experience and make more progress," he said.

Muttaqi said that under the new Taliban government, girls are going to school through grade 12 in 10 of the country's 34 provinces, private schools and universities are operating unhindered, and 100% of women who had previously worked in the

health sector are back on the job. "This shows that we are committed in principle to women participation," he said. He claimed the Taliban have not targeted their opponents, instead announcing a general amnesty and providing some protection. Leaders of the previous government live without threat in Kabul, he said, although most of them have fled. Last month, the international group Human Rights Watch published a report that said the Taliban summarily killed or forcibly disappeared more than 100 former police and intelligence officials in four provinces. However, there have been no reports of large-scale retribution. Muttaqi alleged the government that took power after the U.S.-led coalition ousted the Taliban regime in 2001 carried out widespread revenge attacks against the Taliban. Hundreds disappeared or were killed, with thousands fleeing to the mountains, he said. The Taliban were ousted for harboring al Qaida and Osama bin Laden for masterminding the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. Muttaqi insisted poverty and the dream

of a better life - not fear - drove thousands of Afghans to rush to Kabul's airport in mid-August in hopes of getting to America. The crush of people had generated searing images of men clinging to a departing American C-17 aircraft, while others fell to the ground as the landing gear retracted.

He said the Taliban have made mistakes in their first months in power and that "we will work for more reforms which can benefit the nation." He did not elaborate on the mistakes or possible reforms. Muttaqi pushed back against comments by U.S. Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie who told the AP last week that al-Qaida has grown slightly in Afghanistan since U.S. forces left. McKenzie is Washington's top military commander in the Middle East. In a February 2020 deal that spelled out the terms of the U.S. troop withdrawal, the Taliban had promised to fight terrorism and deny terrorist groups a safe haven. Muttaqi said Sunday that the Taliban have kept that promise, along with a pledge not to attack U.S. and NATO forces in the final phase of the withdrawal, which ended in late August.



Leak from Wuhan lab the 'more likely' origin of Covid pandemic: Molecular biologist tells UK Parliament

Dr Alina Chan, a Canadian molecular biologist, told the UK Parliament on Wednesday that a leak from the laboratory in China's Wuhan is now the "more likely" origin of the Covid-19 pandemic.

(News Agencies) -A Canadian molecular biologist on Wednesday told cross-party members of Parliament (MPs) on the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee that a leak from a laboratory in Wuhan region of China is now the "more likely" origin of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Dr Alina Chan, specialising in gene therapy and cell engineering and co-author of 'Viral: The Search for the Origin of COVID-19', told the Parliament panel's evidence session on scientific research that the pandemic was being caused by the unique feature of the coronavirus called "furin cleavage site", which has been linked to the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Asked by the panel about the probability of a lab leak as the origin of the pandemic, Chan said a "lab origin is more likely than natural origin at this point".

"We all agree that there was a critical event at the Huanan Seafood Market, that was a superspreader event caused by humans. There is no evidence pointing to a natural animal origin of the virus at that market," she noted.

On the question of her level of confidence that the world would eventually be able to establish the true origins of COVID-19, Chan said it was simply a matter of time.

"Right now it's not safe for people who know about the origin of this pandemic to come forward. It might be five years from now, it might be 50 years from now, but we live in an era where there's so much data being collected and stored...we just need a credible, systematic investigation," she said.

On whether the virus was modified in the lab before a leak, Chan said: "We have heard from many top virologists that a genetically engineered origin of this virus is reasonable...and this includes virologists who themselves have made modifications to the first SARS virus.

"We know now that this virus has a very unique feature, called the furin cleavage site that makes it the pandemic pathogen it is. So, without this feature, there's no way this would be causing this pandemic.

"Only recently in September did a proposal get leaked showing that scientists from the EcoHealth Alliance were in collaboration with the Wuhan Institute of Virology developing this pipeline for inserting novel furin cleavage sites, these genetic modifications, into SARS-like viruses in the lab." Chan stressed that the burden was on the scientists in question to show that their work did not result in the creation of SARS-COV2, the virus behind COVID-19, and that an investigation of documents

being made available by US-based EcoHealth Alliance could hold the key.

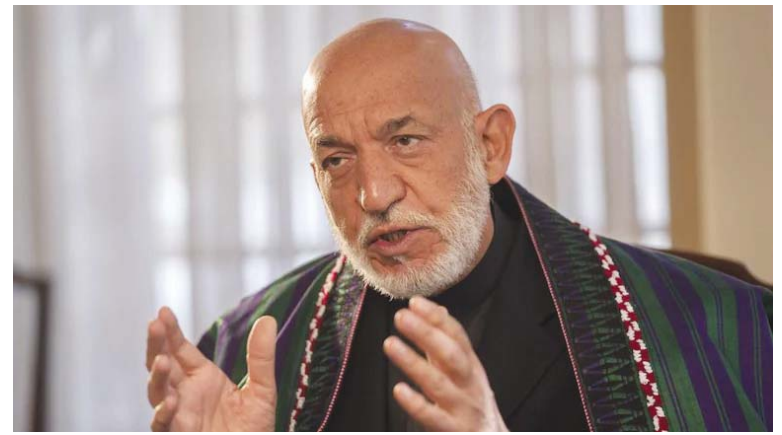
Her co-author, Lord Matt Ridley, was also asked similar questions about the lab leak theory and he concurred with Chan's assertion that it was "more likely than not" the cause behind the pandemic.

"We have to face the fact that after two months we knew the origins of SARS through markets, and after a couple of months we knew the origin of MERS through camels. In this case, after two years we still haven't found a single infected animal that could be the progenitor of this pandemic; that's extremely surprising," he said.

Ridley, along with Chan, agreed that any leak was most likely an "accident" as he traced the journey of scientists a few years ago to bring SARS-like viruses back to Wuhan for experiments. "It does have to be taken seriously. It is regrettable that in 2020 there was a pretty systematic attempt to shut down this topic," he noted.

Ridley added: "We need to find out so we can prevent the next pandemic. We need to know whether we should be tightening up work in laboratories or whether we should be tightening up regulations relating to wildlife sales in markets. At the moment we are really not doing either.

Karzai 'invited' Taliban to stop chaos



When Ghani left, his security officials also left. Defense minister Bismillah Khan even asked Karzai if he wanted to leave Kabul when Karzai contacted him to know what remnants of the government still remained. It turned out there were none. Not even the

(News Agencies) -Kabul police chief had remained. The Taliban didn't take the Afghan capital - they were invited, says the man who issued the invitation.

In an Associated Press interview, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai offered some of the first insights into the secret and sudden departure of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani - and how he came to invite the Taliban into the city "to protect the population so that the country, the city doesn't fall into chaos and the unwanted elements who would probably loot the country, loot shops."

When Ghani left, his security officials also left. Defense minister Bismillah Khan even asked Karzai if he wanted to leave Kabul when Karzai contacted him to know what remnants of the government still remained. It turned out there were none. Not even the Kabul police chief had remained.

Karzai, who was the country's president for 13 years after the Taliban were first ousted in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, refused to leave.

In a wide-ranging interview at his tree-lined compound in the center of the city where he lives with his wife and young children, Karzai was adamant that Ghani's flight scuttled a last-minute push by himself, the government's chief negotiator Abdullah Abdullah and the Taliban leadership in Doha that would have seen the Taliban enter the capital as part of a negotiated agreement. The countdown to a possible deal began Aug. 14, the day before the Taliban came to

power.

Karzai and Abdullah met Ghani, and they agreed that they would leave for Doha the next day with a list of 15 others to negotiate a power-sharing agreement. The Taliban were already on the outskirts of Kabul, but Karzai said the leadership in Qatar promised the insurgent force would remain outside the city until the deal was struck.

Early on the morning of Aug. 15, Karzai said, he waited to draw up the list. The capital was fidgety, on edge. Rumors were swirling about a Taliban takeover. Karzai called Doha. He was told the Taliban would not enter the city.

At noon, the Taliban called to say that "the government should stay in its positions and should not move that they have no intention to (go) into the city," Karzai said. "I and others spoke to various officials and assurances were given to us that, yes, that was the case, that the Americans and the government forces were holding firm to the places (and) that Kabul would not fall."

By about 2:45 p.m., though, it became apparent Ghani had fled the city. Karzai called the defense minister, called the interior minister, searched for the Kabul police chief. Everyone was gone. "There was no official present at all in the capital, no police chief, no corps commander, no other units. They had all left."

Ghani's own protection unit's deputy chief called Karzai to come to the palace and take over the presidency.

India raises issue of attacks on minorities in Bangladesh

When asked if India raised the issue of the situation of minorities in Bangladesh, Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla said that all matters of importance were discussed.

(News Agencies) -President Ram Nath Kovind landed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on Wednesday for a three-day state visit to Bangladesh from December 15 to 17. He was received by his Bangladeshi counterpart, Abdul Hamid. His first state visit since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, President Kovind was "accorded a ceremonial welcome and given a guard of honour at the airport. Thereafter, he visited the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar and paid tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Subsequently, the president visited Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at 32 Dhanmondi where he paid homage to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the nation of Bangladesh," said an official statement issued by Rashtrapati Bhavan. President



Kovind engaged the political leadership of Bangladesh President Mohammad Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen, where the two sides touched upon wide-ranging issues, including India's concerns regarding recent incidents of attacks against minorities in Bangladesh. When asked if India raised the issue of the situation of minorities in Bangladesh, Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla, during a special

briefing in Dhaka after the meetings, said that all matters of importance were discussed and India found the Sheikh Hasina-led government's actions in handling the matter very "satisfactory". He added, "The discussions encompassed all issues of importance to both countries. I cannot go into details of the discussions because there is a certain level of confidentiality. But, obviously, the discussions did include issues that are important to both countries and included

questions that are topical for both countries also."

"Needless to say, we are on the same page on most of these issues. We do appreciate that certain issues are internal matters for Bangladesh, but they are important for both countries. The handling of these issues has been in many senses very satisfactory. Whatever actions are being taken are those that are in the best interest of both our countries," the foreign secretary stressed. President Kovind is in Dhaka to participate in the Victory Day celebrations. He will also be visiting the Ramna Kali Temple on the last day of his tour to inaugurate the recently renovated portion of the temple. The historic temple was destroyed by the Pakistani Army in 1971. "The President congratulated the government and people of Bangladesh on the historic occasion of Mujib

Borsho, the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Bangladesh and 50 years of India-Bangladesh bilateral relations. He said that the Liberation War of Bangladesh was an inspiring episode in recent history and India was honoured to be a part of it. He said that, 50 years ago, India and Bangladesh began a special friendship which was laid in commonalities of language, kinship, religion and cultural ethos as well as mutual respect," said the press release issued by Rashtrapati Bhavan. The president reiterated that Bangladesh has a special place in India's 'neighbourhood first' policy. He said that India's development partnership with Bangladesh is one of the most comprehensive and wide-ranging ones. "At the same time, our relationship is mature enough to handle the most complex of problems," he further stated.

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Trump aide held in contempt for defying Capitol riot probe

Former US President Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows has been found to be in contempt for defying the Capitol riot probe.

The House voted Tuesday to hold former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows in contempt of Congress after he ceased to cooperate with the Jan. 6 Committee investigating the Capitol insurrection - making it the first time the House has voted to hold a former member in contempt since the 1830s.

The near-party-line 222-208 vote is the second time the special committee has sought to punish a witness for defying a subpoena. The vote is the latest show of force by the Jan. 6 panel, which is leaving no angle unexplored - and no subpoena unanswered - as it investigates the worst attack on the Capitol in more than 200 years.

Lawmakers on the panel are determined to get answers quickly, and in doing so reassert the congressional authority that eroded while former President Donald Trump was in office.

"History will be written about these times, about the work this committee has undertaken," said Rep. Bennie Thompson, R-Miss., the chairman. "And history will not look upon any of you as a martyr. History will not look upon you as a victim."

Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md.,

another member of the panel, began Tuesday's debate on the resolution by reading frantic texts from the day of the attack revealing members of Congress, Fox News anchors and even Trump's son urging Meadows to persuade the outgoing president to act quickly to stop the three-hour assault by his supporters.

The House vote sends the matter to the US attorney's office in Washington, where it will now be up to prosecutors in that office to decide whether to present the case to a grand jury for possible criminal charges.

If convicted, Bannon and Meadows could each face up to one

year behind bars on each charge. The nine-member panel voted 9-0 Monday night to recommend charges against the former North Carolina congressman who left in March 2020 to become Trump's chief of staff.

Republicans on Tuesday called the action against Meadows a distraction from the House's work, with one member calling it "evil" and "un-American." Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, took to the floor to praise Meadows: "Make

no mistake, when Democrats vote in favour of this resolution, it is a vote to put a good man in prison."

Trump has also defended Meadows in an interview, saying: "I think Mark should do what's right. He's an honourable man. He shouldn't be put through this."

And Meadows' attorney George Terwilliger defended his client in

The committee had planned to question Meadows about the communications, including 6,600 pages of records taken from personal email accounts and about 2,000 text messages.

a statement before the vote, noting that he had provided documents to the panel and maintaining that he should not be compelled to appear for an interview.

Terwilliger said, "The Select Committee's true intentions in dealing with Mr. Meadows have been revealed when it accuses him of contempt citing the very documents his cooperation has produced."

Meadows himself has sued the

panel, asking a court to invalidate two subpoenas that he says are "overly broad and unduly burdensome." Meanwhile, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell told reporters: "I do think we're all watching, as you are, what is unfolding on the House side. And it will be interesting to reveal all the participants who were involved."

He added that he was not in contact with Meadows on the day of the attack.

Democrats quoted at length from Jan. 6 text messages provided by Meadows while he was cooperating with the committee.

"We need an Oval Office address," Donald Trump Jr. texted, the committee

said, as his father's supporters were breaking into the Capitol, sending lawmakers running for their lives and interrupting the certification of Joe Biden's presidential victory. "He has to lead now. It has gone too far and gotten out of hand."

Trump Jr. added, "He's got to condemn this s-- ASAP." In response to one of Trump Jr.'s texts, Meadows said: "I'm pushing it hard. I agree."

Members of the committee said the texts raise fresh questions about what was happening at the White House - and what Trump himself was doing - as the attack was underway.

The committee had planned to question Meadows about the communications, including 6,600 pages of records taken from personal email accounts and about 2,000 text messages. The panel has not released any of the communications in full.

Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the panel's vice chairwoman, said at the committee's Monday evening meeting that an important issue raised by the texts is whether Trump sought to obstruct the congressional certification by refusing to send a strong message to the rioters to stop. "These texts leave no doubt," Cheney said. "The White House knew exactly what was happening at the Capitol."

The investigating panel has already interviewed more than 300 witnesses, and subpoenaed more than 40 people, as it seeks to create the most comprehensive record yet of the lead-up to the insurrection and of the violent siege itself.



US President Biden to take stock of damage as tornadoes kill 64 in Kentucky

President Joe Biden will travel to Kentucky on Wednesday to view damage from last week's devastating tornadoes that killed at least dozens of people and displaced thousands more.

(News Agencies) -After widespread destruction by tornadoes last week that left dozens dead in Kentucky, President Joe Biden will visit the affected areas to take stock of the situation.

Biden announced the upcoming trip following a briefing with homeland security and disaster response officials in the Oval Office to discuss what more the federal government can do to support those affected by the natural disaster.

The White House said he would visit Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for a briefing on the response operations, and then to hard-hit Mayfield and Dawson Springs to survey the damage.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that Biden is not expected to give a speech when he visits Kentucky, but will rather be focused on meeting with local officials and "trying to be a source of comfort to people who have gone through a devastating couple of days in their communities."

"That visit is really about him receiving an update of the work that's happening on the ground, hearing directly from leaders on what they need more from the federal government, if anything,

and he's going to be very responsive to that," she said. Biden, who has already signed emergency declarations for Kentucky, said he stands ready to do the same for Illinois. He added that he has ordered his administration to make every resource available to local and state officials in Kentucky and the other states impacted by the storms. Residents of Kentucky counties where tornadoes killed dozens of people could be without heat, water or electricity in frigid temperatures for weeks or longer, state officials warned Monday, as the toll of damage and deaths came into clearer focus in five states slammed by the swarm of twisters.

Kentucky authorities said the sheer level of destruction was hindering their ability to tally the devastation from Friday night's storms.

At least 64 people were killed in the state alone, though officials believe the death toll will be lower than initially feared because many more people escaped a candle factory in Mayfield, Kentucky, than first thought.

As searches continued for those still missing, efforts also turned to repairing the power grid, sheltering those whose homes

were destroyed and delivering drinking water and other supplies. "We're not going to let any of our families go homeless," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said in announcing that lodges in state parks were being used to provide shelter.

In Mayfield, one of the hardest-hit towns, those who survived faced a high in the 50s and a low below freezing Monday without any utilities.

"Our infrastructure is so damaged. We have no running water. Our water tower was lost. Our wastewater management was lost and there's no natural gas in the city. So we have nothing to rely on there," Mayfield Mayor Kathy Stewart O'Nan said on "CBS Mornings."

"So that is purely survival at this point for so many of our people." NO WATER, NO POWER Across the state, about 26,000 homes and businesses were without electricity, according to poweroutage.us, including nearly all of those in Mayfield.

More than 10,000 homes and businesses have no water, and another 17,000 are under boil-water advisories, Kentucky Emergency Management Director Michael Dossett told reporters. Kentucky was the worst hit by far in the cluster of

twisters across several states, remarkable because they came at a time of year when cold weather normally limits tornadoes.

At least 64 people died in the state, Beshear said Monday, offering the first specific count of the dead. There were at least another 14 deaths in Illinois, Tennessee, Arkansas and Missouri.

Still, Beshear warned that it could take days longer to pin down the full death toll, with door-to-door searches impossible in some places.

"With this amount of damage and rubble, it may be a week or even more before we have a final count on the number of lost lives," the governor said.

MANY DISPLACED

Debris from destroyed buildings and shredded trees covered the ground in Mayfield, a city of about 10,000 in western Kentucky. Twisted sheet metal, downed power lines and wrecked vehicles lined the streets. Windows were blown out and roofs torn off the buildings that were still standing. Four twisters hit Kentucky in all, including one with an extraordinarily long path of about 200 miles (322 kilometres), authorities said.

New York all set to get first-ever female police commissioner



(News Agencies) -New York is all set to get its first-ever female police commissioner to lead the nation's largest police department.

Former police officer and Democratic mayor-elect Eric Adams, who will be the city's second Black mayor, picked Nassau County Chief of Detectives, Keechant Sewell—who will also be only the third Black person to lead the New York Police Department (NYPD). "Keechant Sewell is a proven crime fighter with the experience and emotional intelligence to deliver both the safety New Yorkers need and the justice they deserve," Adams said in a statement released to CNN.

"Chief Sewell will wake up every day laser-focused on keeping New Yorkers safe and improving our city, and I am thrilled to have her at the helm of the NYPD," he said.

The announcement of a new police chief comes at a time when the trust between NYPD and the public is at an all-time low, following accusations of racist and corrupt officers in its ranks. Commanding approximately 36,000 police officers in the largest city in the United States, Sewell, 49, will shoulder the tough task of maintaining security in New York at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has been accompanied by a surge in crime.

"We welcome Chief Sewell to the second-toughest policing job in America. The toughest, of course, is being an NYPD cop on the street," said Patrick Lynch, head of the main police union in the city, the Police Benevolent Association.

Homes levelled, cars overturned:



Dozens of devastating tornadoes roared through five US states overnight, leaving more than 80 people dead Saturday in what President Joe Biden said was "one of the largest" storm outbreaks in history.

Kentucky, one car was blown 75 yards up a hill and another landed on a house. No one was hurt. Reports put the total number of tornadoes across the region at around 30.

At least 13 people were killed in other storm-hit states, including at the Amazon warehouse in Illinois, bringing the total toll to 83.

In Arkansas, at least one person died when a tornado "pretty much destroyed" a nursing home in Monette, a county official said. Another person died elsewhere in the state.

Four people died in Tennessee, while one died in Missouri.

Over 80 dead as tornadoes rip through 5 US states

(News Agencies) - Dozens of devastating tornadoes roared through five US states overnight, leaving more than 80 people dead Saturday in what President Joe Biden said was "one of the largest" storm outbreaks in history.

"It's a tragedy," a shaken Biden said in televised comments. "And we still don't know how many lives are lost and the full extent of the damage."

As darkness fell Saturday scores of search and rescue officials were helping stunned citizens across the US heartland sift through the rubble of their homes and businesses searching for any more survivors. More than 70 people are believed to have been killed in Kentucky alone, many of them workers at a candle factory, while at least six died in an Amazon warehouse in Illinois where they were on the night shift processing orders ahead of Christmas.

TOWN REDUCED TO 'MATCHSTICKS'

This event is the worst, most devastating, most deadly tornado event in Kentucky's history," said Kentucky governor Andy Beshear, adding he fears "we will have lost more than 100 people."

"The devastation is unlike anything I have seen in my life, and I have trouble putting it into words," the governor told reporters.

The western Kentucky town of Mayfield was reduced to "matchsticks," its mayor said. The small town of 10,000 people was described as "ground zero" by officials, and appeared post-apocalyptic: city blocks levelled; historic homes and buildings

beaten down to their slabs; tree trunks stripped of their branches; cars overturned in fields.

Beshear said there were some 110 people working at the candle factory when the storm hit, causing the roof to collapse.

Forty people have been rescued, but it would be "a miracle if anybody else is found alive," he said.

CNN played a heart-rending plea posted on Facebook by one of the factory's employees.

"We are trapped, please, y'all, get us some help," a woman says, her voice quavering as a co-worker can be heard moaning in the background. "We are at the candle factory in Mayfield. ... Please, y'all. Pray for us."

The woman, Kyanna Parsons-Perez, was rescued after being pinned under a water fountain.

"When I walked out of City Hall this morning, it -- it looked like matchsticks," Mayfield Mayor Kathy O'Nan told CNN.

"Our downtown churches have been destroyed, our courthouse... is destroyed, our water system is not functioning at this time, there is no power."

"It looks like a bomb has exploded," 31-year-old Mayfield resident Alex Goodman told AFP. David Norseworthy, a 69-year-old builder in Mayfield, said the storm blew off his roof and front porch while the family hid in a shelter. "We never had anything like that here," he told AFP.

In a parking lot in downtown Mayfield, volunteers were collecting warm clothes, diapers and water for residents.

WIND SPEED IN EXCESS OF 200 MILES

The tornado that smashed through Mayfield had rumbled

along the ground for over 200 miles in Kentucky and for 227 miles overall, Beshear said.

Previously, the longest a US tornado has ever tracked along the ground was a 219-mile storm

in Missouri in 1925. It claimed 695 lives.

In one demonstration of the storms' awesome power on Saturday, when winds derailed a 27-car train near Earlington,

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From Monetary Reward To Free Travel, Here're The Other Perks Given To Miss Universe Winner

Now, after seeing this crown of Harnaaz, the discussion about what exactly Miss Universe will get as a prize after winning the title has been rife among netizens. So let's find out what Miss Universe 2021 Harnaaz Sandhu got as a prize.

About Harnaaz Sandhu 21-year-old Harnaaz Sandhu is a Chandigarh-based model, actor who is pursuing her master's degree in public administration. In 2017, she won the title of 'Times Fresh Face' and thus began her journey to beauty pageants. She also won Femina Miss India Punjab 2019 and LIVA Miss Diva Universe 2021 title. She has also been a part of Punjabi films including Yaara Diyan Poo Baran and Bai Ji Kuttange. To claim the title, she has beaten 79 contestants from other countries and territories - including runner-up Miss Paraguay Nadia Ferreira and second runner-up Miss South Africa Lalela Mswane.

World's most expensive crown Earlier in 2019 Miss South Africa Zozibini and in 2020 Miss Mexico Andrea have worn the world's most expensive crown which is now worn by Femina Miss India Punjab 2019 and Miss Diva Universe 2021 Harnaaz Sandhu.

Brain with beauty Harnaaz is currently trending on social media around the world under the name 'Brain with Beauty'. Harnaaz is only 21-years-old and she has made great strides in her journey to Miss Universe. Designer of Miss Universe crown

The crown of Miss Universe changes every time. The Mouawad Power of Unity Crown was created by the Mouawad Jewelry in 2019 for the Miss Universe organisation. It is noteworthy that Harnaaz has got the most expensive crown of Miss Universe in the last few years.

Value of Miss Universe crown The crown worn by Miss Universe Harnaaz is valued at around \$5 million. In other words, in Indian currency, it is worth over Rs 37 crore.

Miss Universe crown features The crown given to Harnaaz is based on nature, beauty, femininity, unity, and strength. The crown contains 18-carat gold, 1770 diamonds, and a shield-cut golden canary diamond in the centerpiece. This diamond weighs 62.83 carats. The crown is decorated with leaves, petals and vines.

What Miss Universe will get? It is unknown at this time what prize money she will get after winning the title of Miss

Universe 2021. But, it is said that this amount is worth lakhs of rupees. Miss Universe is also allowed to stay in the Miss Universe apartment in New York for one year and has to share it

with Miss USA, and everything from groceries to clothing is facilitated to her by Miss Universe Organisation.

Luxurious life

Miss Universe is given a team

of assistants and professional makeup artists. This team takes care of Miss Universe makeup, hair products, shoes, clothes, jewellery, skincare for almost one year. The Organisation also offers the world's best photographers to help her build a portfolio for modelling. Fashion stylist, nutrition, dermatology, and dental services are also available for free among other luxurious services.

Miss Universe, meanwhile, receives free entry to exclusive events, parties, premieres, screenings, castings, travel expenses, and hotel expenses and is given a chance to tour the world throughout the year by Miss Universe Organisation. Not just luxurious life, Miss Universe is also given great responsibilities like, as a chief ambassador of the Miss Universe Organization, she has to attend events, parties, charity, press conferences although everything is managed by the Organisation. Responsibilities of Miss Universe - Not just luxurious life, Miss Universe is also given great responsibilities like, as a chief ambassador of the Miss Universe Organization, she has to attend events, parties, charity, press conferences although everything is managed by the Organisation.

Shashi Tharoor meets Miss Universe Harnaaz Sandhu, congratulates her



Congress leader Shashi Tharoor posted photographs of his meeting with Harnaaz Sandhu on Twitter with the caption, "Delighted to congratulate Miss Universe Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu in person on her triumphant return to India. She's excited to be back in India for the New Year holidays and India, of course, is proud to welcome her." "He added, "She's just as poised and charming in person as on stage." Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu tweeted in response to him, "Such an honour to meet you in person, sir. Thank you for your kind words."

Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor met newly crowned Miss Universe 2021 Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu on Wednesday and congratulated her on her victory. India's Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu was declared the winner at the 70th Miss Universe pageant held in Israel's Eilat on December 13, bringing home the crown after 21 years.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor posted photographs of his

meeting with Harnaaz Sandhu on Twitter with the caption, "Delighted to congratulate Miss Universe Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu in person on her triumphant return to India. She's excited to be back in India for the New Year holidays and India, of course, is proud to welcome her." He added, "She's just as poised and charming in person as on stage."

The Chandigarh-based model thanked Shashi Tharoor "for his

kind words". Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu tweeted in response to him, "Such an honour to meet you in person, sir. Thank you for your kind words." Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu beat Paraguay's Nadia Ferreira and South Africa's Lalela Mswane to win the Miss Universe 2021 pageant earlier this week. Only two Indians have won the title of Miss Universe before Harnaaz Sandhu - Sushmita Sen in 1994 and Lara Dutta in 2000.

Top US health advisors recommend Pfizer, Moderna Covid vaccines over J&J shot

RARE BLOOD CLOTS LINKED TO J&J SHOT

But the CDC's advisors said Thursday that it was time to recognise a lot has changed since vaccines began rolling out a year ago. More than 200 million Americans are considered fully vaccinated, including about 16 million who got the J&J shot.

New data from unprecedented safety tracking of all those vaccinations persuaded the panel that while the blood clots linked to J&J's vaccine remain very rare, they're still occurring and not just in younger women as originally thought.

In a unanimous vote, the advisors decided the safer Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are preferred. But they said the shot made by J&J's Janssen division still should be available if someone really wants it - or has a severe allergy to the other options.

"I would not recommend the Janssen vaccine to my family members" but some patients may -- and should be able to -- choose that shot, said CDC advisor Dr. Beth Bell of the University of Washington.

The clotting problems first came up last spring, with the J&J shot in the U.S. and with a similar vaccine made by AstraZeneca that is used in other countries. Eventually U.S. regulators decided the benefits of J&J's one-and-done vaccine outweighed what was considered a very rare risk - as long as recipients were warned. European regulators likewise continued to recommend AstraZeneca's two-dose vaccine although, because early reports were mostly in younger women, some countries issued age restrictions.

54 CONFIRMED CLOT CASES IN US

Covid-19 causes deadly blood clots, too. But the vaccine-linked kind is different, believed to form because of a rogue immune reaction to the J&J and AstraZeneca vaccines because of how they're made. It forms in unusual places, such as veins that drain blood from the brain, and in patients who also develop abnormally low levels of the platelets that form clots. Symptoms of the unusual clots,



dubbed "thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome," include severe headaches a week or two after the J&J vaccination - not right away - as well as abdominal pain and nausea.

While it's still very rare, the Food and Drug Administration told health care providers this week that more cases have occurred after J&J vaccinations since the spring. They occur most in women ages 30 to 49 - about once for every 100,000 doses administered, the FDA said.

Overall, the government has confirmed 54 clot cases- 37 in women and 17 in men, and nine deaths that included two men, the CDC's Dr. Isaac See said Thursday. He said two additional deaths are suspected.

PFIZER, MODERNA SAFER

The CDC decides how vaccines should be used in the U.S., and its advisors called the continuing deaths troubling. In comparing the pros and cons of all the vaccines, the panelists agreed that side effects from the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines weren't as serious - and that supplies now are plentiful.

Nor is J&J still considered a one-and-done vaccine, several advisors noted. The single-dose option didn't prove quite as protective as two doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Plus, with extra-contagious virus mutants now spreading, booster doses now are recommended.

Several countries, including

Canada, already have policies that give preference to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. But J&J told the committee its vaccine still offers strong protection and is a critical option especially in parts of the world without plentiful vaccine supplies or for

people who don't want a two-dose shot.

While blood clots are rare, "unfortunately cases of Covid-19 are not," J&J's Dr. Penny Heaton said.

'SHOULDN'T DISCOURAGE USE OF J&J SHOT'

The U.S. is fortunate in its vaccine availability and Thursday's action shouldn't discourage use of J&J's vaccine in places around the world where it's needed, said CDC advisor Dr. Matthew Daley of Kaiser Permanente Colorado.

The FDA also warned this week that another dose of the J&J vaccine shouldn't be given to anyone who developed a clot following either a J&J or AstraZeneca shot. The committee also heard some of the first data on reported side effects of Pfizer vaccinations in younger children. Early last month, the CDC recommended a two-dose series for that age group, and more than 7 million doses have been given so far. But few problems have been reported. Of the 80 reported cases of serious side effects, about 10 involved a form of inflammation that has been seen in male teens and young adults.

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A Booster In 100 Days To Beat Omicron: The New Challenge

Nobody yet knows how widely omicron will spread, how serious its infections will be or even whether the new shots will be necessary.

Top White House medical adviser Anthony Fauci has said that reports on severity have so far been "encouraging." But if laboratory data rolling in from around the world are reliable, the strain is better able to sidestep existing vaccines than any to date.

Of 43 US omicron infections analyzed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, four-fifths were in fully vaccinated people, although almost all the cases were relatively mild. UK health officials expect omicron to overtake delta as the dominant strain there within days.

Researchers are alarmed by some 30 mutations in omicron's spike, the protein that facilitates coronavirus's entry to cells. Changes in its appearance make it harder for antibodies to find and destroy the variant. That's prompted Pfizer, its partner BioNTech SE and their messenger RNA rival Moderna Inc. to start crash efforts to target it directly.

"It was the list of mutations we never wanted to see," said Moderna President Stephen Hoge, who heads the company's scientific operations. The vaccine maker, whose mRNA factory stands just 40 miles from Pfizer's, started working on omicron the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, and meetings ran straight through the holiday. Many employees "had their Thanksgivings ruined" by omicron, Hoge said.

Early lab data suggest that three doses of existing mRNA vaccines protect against omicron. What's less clear is how long that

protection lasts, since Covid antibodies have been seen to wane over time. Pfizer hopes to have the first real-world effectiveness data about how its existing vaccine fares against the variant before the end of the year. While the companies are tight-lipped about the details of exactly where they stand, both are bent on a fast response. When news of the variant emerged from South Africa, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla decided almost immediately to begin large-scale manufacturing of an omicron-specific shot. The work ramped up so quickly that Pfizer hasn't tallied its costs.

"I couldn't give you the number right now; I'm not even sure we talked about it," said Mike McDermott, Pfizer's global supply chain head, who gives Bourla regular updates on progress. It's very unusual for a drug company to start large-scale manufacturing on a product that may not be needed, he said.

The production process at

Andover could start any day now, McDermott said. Workers are waiting for company researchers in Chesterfield, Missouri, to finalize and deliver a master cell line containing a genetic sequence that will be used in the targeted vaccine.

Pfizer's Andover plant, acquired in 2009 in the \$68 billion purchase of vaccine maker Wyeth, specializes in biologic products. For the Covid vaccine, it performs two early steps: producing large quantities of a DNA template for the vaccine from the cell line, and then converting that into the mRNA that forms the core of the vaccine.

The mRNA will be sent to another Pfizer facility in Kalamazoo, Michigan. That facility makes the lipid nanoparticles that coat the mRNA and protect it from enzymes in the body that degrade it. Kalamazoo also has vaccine vial-filling operations.

South of Boston, Moderna's Norwood, Massachusetts facility

has clean-room suites for making mRNA and the lipid nanoparticles that coat the fragile genetic material. Formerly owned by Polaroid, the factory is the vaccine maker's first and has been rapidly scaling up since the pandemic began.

In 2020, it took Moderna 42 days to produce batches of its original Covid vaccine and 63 days to start human trials with government researchers. With omicron, "our goal is to hit a timeline like that for sure" Hoge, the Moderna president, said.

One reason that both Pfizer and Moderna can move quickly with omicron is that they have the honed the process with both the original vaccines as well as variant vaccines for beta and delta strains the companies produced earlier this year. While the delta and beta variant vaccines may not be needed, it provided a dry run for omicron.

Even after the vials of vaccine are filled and finished,

uncertainties loom, starting with what human trials regulators will require, if any. The FDA's current guidance, which the agency reiterated in an email, calls for immunogenicity trials to compare the human immune response to virus variants induced by the modified vaccine against the response to the authorized vaccine.

But Pfizer research head Mikael Dolsten says the company is exploring whether, in an emergency, it could obtain clearance without the omicron-specific trials. The agency may allow the drugmakers to submit human data from other variant-specific vaccines that show its approach is likely to be successful. The FDA declined to comment on confidential discussions with vaccine developers. It said it encourages them to reach out early and often to discuss clinical data needed for new vaccines to help fight Covid.

Europe battles to vaccinate kids as EU chief warns Omicron could become dominant variant

Amid a rise in coronavirus cases Hungary, Greece, Spain and Germany began vaccinating kids. In the Netherlands, authorities decided to close primary schools early as the country battles a fresh wave of virus. European leaders have been alarmed by the Omicron threat as WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the new variant has been spreading "at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant".

France also continues to battle against the virus reporting over 63,000 COVID-19 cases even as over 75 per cent of the population



has been vaccinated. Britain on Monday had confirmed its first Omicron death as PM Boris Johnson moved to "Plan B" to combat Omicron with mask-wearing made mandatory in

public transport and in shops. The UK has already reported over 4,700 Omicron cases. Meanwhile, WHO expert Abdi Mahamud said Omicron could become the dominant strain in

Europe even as WHO chief Tedros warned that the new variant should not be dismissed as "mild". WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan also warned countries to prepare for a "large wave of cases" amid the Omicron threat.

WHO has pointed out that 41 countries across the world are yet to vaccinate 10 per cent of their population as WHO chief said: "Let me be very clear: WHO is not against boosters. We're against inequity. Our main concern is to save lives everywhere, adding, "it's a question of prioritisation."



Satellite imagery captured by space firm Maxar Technologies, gives a chance to rewind some of these events that took place throughout 2021

The year 2021 has been an eventful year globally and some of the events managed to register their impression even in space. Satellite imagery captured by space firm Maxar Technologies, a supplier of commercial satellite imagery, gives a chance to rewind some of these events that took place throughout last year.

January

January witnessed a change in guard at the White House and the celebratory fireworks following the inauguration ceremony were seen in the satellite images.

As the world prepared to come out of the COVID19 pandemic, vaccination became the prime focus all over the world. The busy headquarters of the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, Serum Institute of India in Pune can be seen in the satellite images.





Satellite image ©2021 Maxar Technologies

February

As governments set up large scale vaccination drives, some of these sites were seen in satellite images. Dodger Stadium, a baseball stadium of Major League Baseball in California was converted into a vaccination site.

In early February, Myanmar's military executed a coup d'état and threw out the democratically elected

government. Several civilian protests were seen on the streets of Myanmar against seeking reinstatement of democracy and release of political leaders. Street murals painted by activists were captured in the satellite pictures. Another major development was seen through satellite images in the Himalyan mountains where an almost year-long standoff

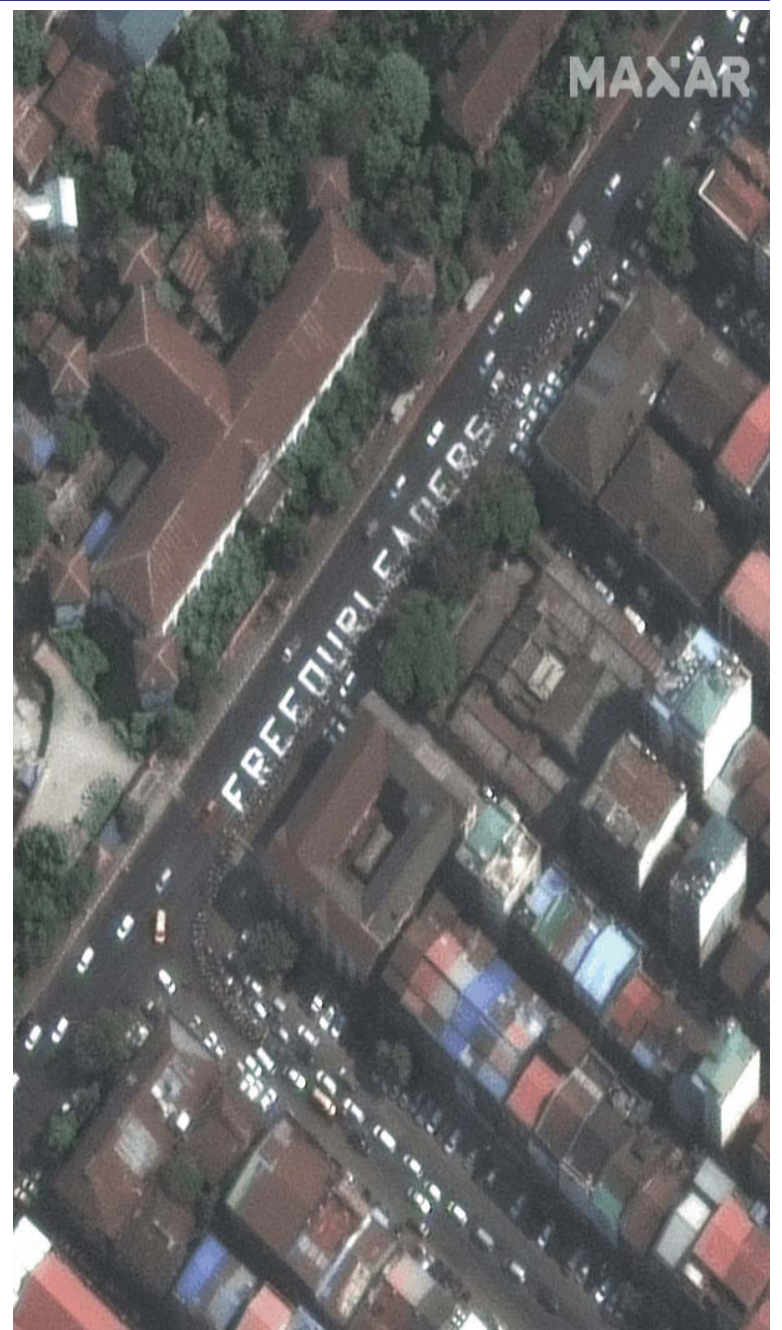
between the Indian and Chinese ground forces at the north and south bank of Ladakh's Pangong Lake was resolved. Both troops disengaged from their forward positions and destroyed the temporary structures. Although the standoff between the two sides continues in other areas, this was a significant development that was reflected in the satellite pictures.



March

One of the world's busiest trade routes--Suez Canal--was blocked for over 6 days as the container ship Ever Given was wedged across the waterway. 400-meter-long vessel is one of the largest container ships in the world. It was estimated that the obstruction held almost \$9.6bn worth of goods each day. Satellite images captured the scenes at Suez closely as a multi-national effort to free the trade route lasted for days.

The ongoing protest by several farmer groups in India kept on building at the borders of New Delhi. The build-up of protestors and temporary shelters, set up at one of the key protest sites, Singhu Border, were captured in satellite pictures.





April

April witnessed a resurgence of the Coronavirus pandemic as the second wave driven by its Delta variant swept India. As hospitals ran out of capacity, new makeshift hospitals had to be created. Some of the makeshift Covid hospitals that were earlier established but later discontinued due to a low number of cases after the first wave, had to be reopened. One such case was seen through satellite images where a makeshift hospital set up by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at Delhi Cantt was restarted.

While North Korea skipped its customary military parade to mark the 109th birth anniversary of former leader Kim Il Sung, satellite images taken a week earlier did show a marching formation at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang. The formation spelt a message that roughly translated to "Push through at all costs".

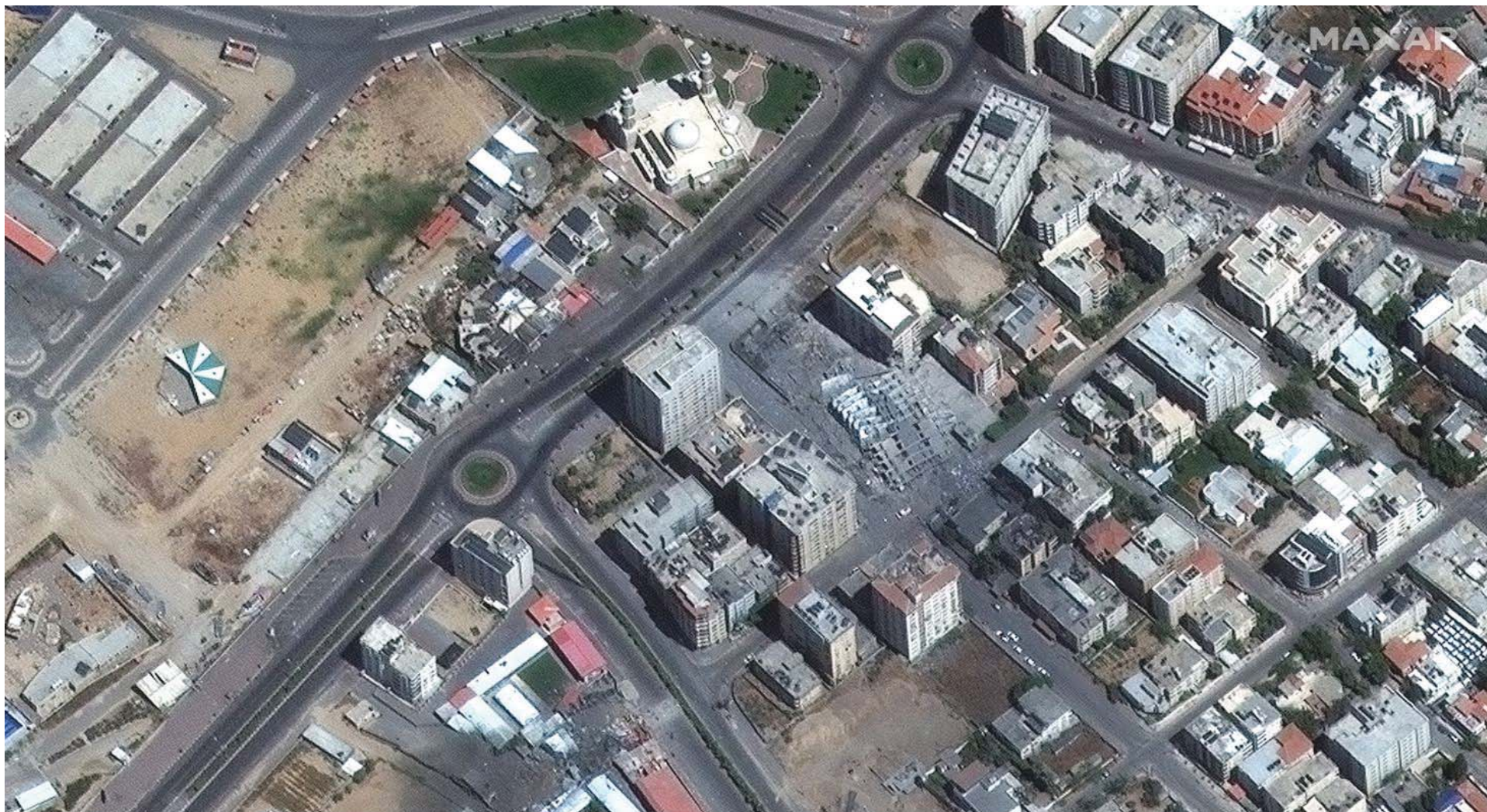
May

As the second wave of the pandemic continued to spread, the ongoing season of the world's biggest cricket league-Indian Premier League (IPL) had to be called off and later completed after a gap of 3 months in the UAE. The tournament was paused on May 4, the day a match was scheduled to take place at Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium. Satellite images taken days later after the postponement showed a prepared stadium with the IPL and sponsors branding.

Clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police were reported starting May 10 that left hundreds injured. The conflict increased significantly as the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched rockets toward Jerusalem and Israel carried out airstrikes in Gaza. More than 200 people died before a cease-fire could be reached after 11 days.

June

MV X-Press Pearl, a Singapore-flagged cargo ship carrying 1,486 containers, caught fire and sank off the coast of Sri Lanka in June 2021. India dispatched its naval ship INS Sarvekshak to assist Sri Lankan efforts. The vessel carried chemicals and goods harmful to the oceanic environment.





July

After several months of wait and delay, the 2020 Summer Olympics began in Tokyo, Japan on 23 July.

August

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan was arguably the biggest news event of the year. The sudden capture of Kabul, led to unprecedented scenes on the ground. Kabul airport became the center-stage, where thousands of people camped in an attempt to flee the country. Satellite images captured the exceptional humanitarian crisis.

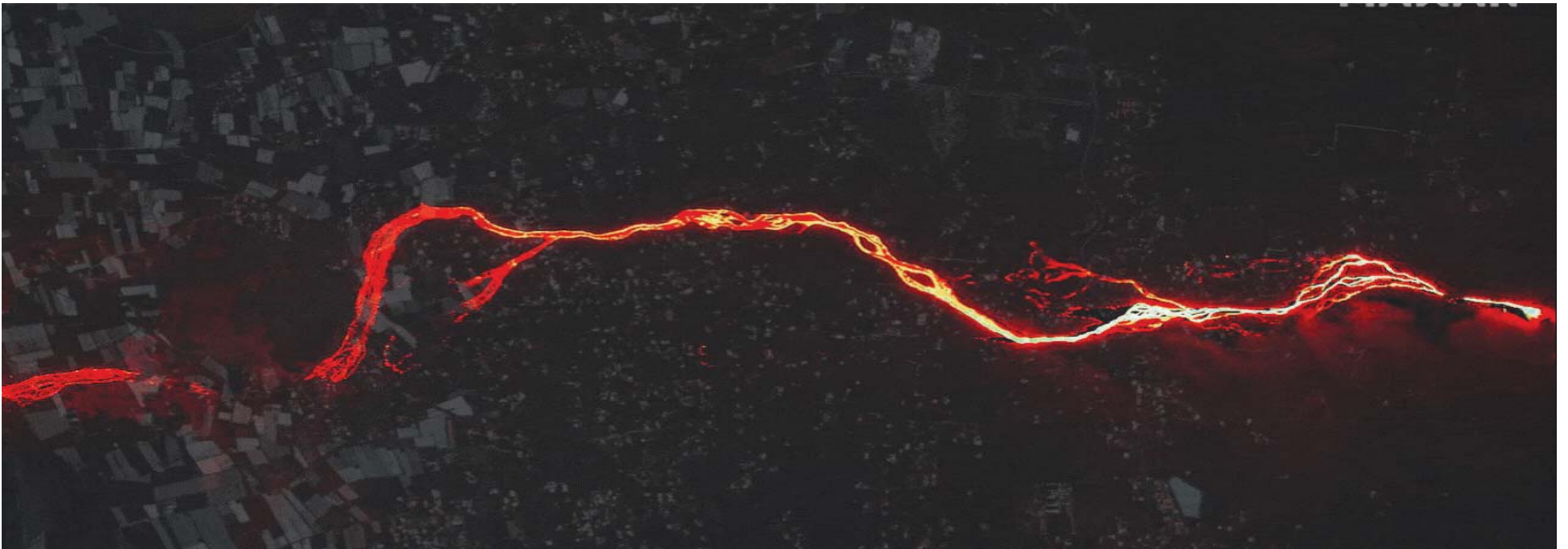
September

A volcano on the Spanish island of La Palma in the Canary Islands started eruption on 19 September 2021. The lava flow from the Cumbre Vieja volcanic eruption covered an area of over 1000 hectares, due to which 7,000 people were evacuated.

October

On October 20, a satellite captured a mock target resembling the shape of a U.S. aircraft carrier in the Taklamakan Desert in Central China. The report released next month by the U.S. Naval Institute showed that China has been building infrastructure that allowed it to simulate attacks on the life-size mock-ups of US Navy carrier strike group vessels used as targets.





November

Tensions rose to a new high along the Russian-Ukrainian border as an unusual Russian build-up was witnessed even in satellite imagery. Ukraine claimed that about 90,000 Russian soldiers were deployed near the border areas. The troops were pulled out later only after talks between US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

December

Around 100 people were killed in a tornado outbreak that witnessed more than 45 tornadoes within a span of 24 hours in the US. The destruction caused in the eight states was seen in satellite imagery as well.

Nagaland killings NSF holds massive protest rally in Kohima, urges PM Modi to constitute court monitored panel

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) held a huge protest rally in the capital city of Nagaland, where thousands joined to demand justice for Oting victims. The protesters gathered at Old MLA junction in Kohima and protested against the killings of 14 civilians at Oting village and Mon town on December 4 and 5



memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) demanded to constitute a court-monitored committee to be headed by a retired Supreme Court /High Court Judge in order to ensure that the Oting incidents are probed in a free and fair impartial manner. "The Federation reiterate our stand that the Special Investigation Team (SIT) being set up by the Nagaland government will not do justice to the willful acts of the Indian Armed Forces under the protection of the repressive AFSPA. More, so, the Government of India must admit to the utter failure of its intelligence agencies and publically apologise to the Naga people for furthering their subjugation of the Nagas through its policy of militarisation. Justice should be delivered immediately to the victims of the Oting incidents and to all the pending cases related to the excess committed by the Indian Armed Forces," NSF said in the memorandum.



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Refugees denied Covid-19 shots because drugmakers fear lawsuits: Report



More than 100 national governments have promised to offer vaccines to all the displaced people on their soil, but the UN says refugees are often excluded from such schemes because of administrative or cultural hurdles.

Tens of millions of migrants may be denied Covid-19 vaccines from a global programme because some major manufacturers are worried about legal risks from harmful side effects, according to officials and internal documents from Gavi, the charity operating the programme, reviewed by Reuters.

Nearly two years into a pandemic that has already killed more than 5 million people, only about 7 per cent of people in low-income countries have received a dose. Vaccine deliveries worldwide have been delayed by production problems, hoarding by rich countries, export restrictions and red tape. Many programmes have also been hampered by hesitancy among the public.

The legal concerns are an additional hurdle for public health officials tackling the coronavirus even as officials say unvaccinated people offer an ideal environment for it to mutate into new variants that threaten hard-won immunity around the world. Many Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers have required that countries indemnify them for any adverse events suffered by individuals as a result of the vaccines, the United Nations says.

Where governments are not in control, that is not possible.

The concerns affect people, such as those displaced by the Myanmar, Afghanistan and Ethiopian crises, who are beyond the reach of national governments' vaccination schemes.

For refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, as well as people afflicted by natural disasters or other events that put

them out of reach of government help, the global programme known as Covax created a Humanitarian Buffer a last-resort reserve of shots to be administered by humanitarian groups. Gavi, the vaccine alliance, is a public-private partnership set up in 2000 to promote vaccination around the world.

But that buffer does not have any mechanism to offer compensation. Gavi, which operates Covax with the World Health Organization (WHO), says that where those applying for doses, mainly NGOs, can't bear legal risks, deliveries from that stockpile can only be made if vaccine-makers accept liability. The companies that are willing to do so under these circumstances provide only a minority of the programme's vaccines, according to people familiar with the matter and the documents, written by Gavi staff for a board meeting starting at the end of November.

More than two-thirds of COVAX doses have come from Pfizer Inc and its partner BioNTech SE, AstraZeneca PLC and Moderna Inc, Gavi says. Moderna declined to comment. AstraZeneca and Pfizer said they were in talks with Gavi but declined to comment further. All three said they are committed to making doses available to poorer nations at relatively low prices. Pfizer said it was collaborating directly with governments in Jordan and

Lebanon to donate doses for refugees.

Mainly because of the legal concerns, less than 2 million doses have so far been sent from the buffer, Gavi says. About 167 million people risk being excluded from national programmes, according to United Nations data cited in the documents.

Unless all the firms accept legal liability, "access to vaccines for some populations will remain a challenge," the Gavi documents say, adding that new crises will

Refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers and people afflicted by natural disasters that put them out of reach of government help, the global programme known as Covax a last-resort reserve of shots to be directed by humanitarian groups.

generate additional demand to cover displaced populations.

The vaccine makers' reluctance to take on the legal risks is "a major hurdle" in attempts to provide vaccines for the buffer, a spokesperson for Gavi told Reuters. Gavi did not comment on the details in the documents, but said applications for vaccines are confidential until the doses are delivered. In September, Gavi's CEO, Seth Berkley, tweeted an appeal to drugmakers to waive their requirements for legal indemnity.

Three Chinese drugmakers have agreed to shoulder legal risks when their shots are delivered through the buffer: SinoVac Biotech Ltd, Sinopharm Group Co. Ltd, and Clover Biopharmaceuticals Co. Ltd,

according to the Gavi document. The drugmakers did not respond to requests for comment.

Johnson & Johnson of the United States confirmed it would waive a requirement for indemnity for deliveries from the buffer: "We are proud to be part of this effort to protect the world's most vulnerable people," said Paul Stoffels, Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee and Chief Scientific Officer. He did not elaborate.

However, less than one-third of Covax supplies have come from these four firms, Covax data shows: Clover's shot has not yet been approved so is not in use. The global industry association, the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA), said "no company has refused to consider" taking on the legal risk. However, in the case of shots delivered from the buffer, it said some firms felt they could not do so without full knowledge of where and how vaccines would be used.

It would be hard to continuously monitor vaccines for safety in refugee camps, and delivery is logistically very challenging and not suitable for all types, said the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA), which represents large pharmaceutical companies in Europe. People may blame vaccines for problems that emerge afterwards even if they are unrelated, it said.

"This could then lead to an increased number of litigation

cases ... during which the safety and efficacy of the vaccine would be publicly questioned," it said in a statement to Reuters. That might lead to increased vaccine hesitancy and a slower recovery from the pandemic, it said.

So far there is scant information on Covid vaccine litigation, but claims made to out-of-court compensation programmes are one measure of the risk. A programme in the United States has so far not paid out anything, public data show; neither has one set up by the WHO for lower income countries, the WHO said. In Europe, a handful of compensation awards have been granted for undisclosed amounts of money, official data from Denmark, Germany, Norway and Switzerland show.

Globally there have been few reported Covid infections among refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers testing is not always systematic and infections can generate only mild symptoms especially in younger people.

But cramped conditions and weak healthcare expose them to high infection risk. This, combined with low levels of vaccination in a mobile population could favour the emergence of new variants and be a vector for infection, said Mireille Lembwadio, Global Vaccination Coordinator at the International Organization of Migration (IOM), a UN-related body that advises governments and migrants.

"Leaving them unvaccinated could help spread the virus and its variants across the world," she said.



What you need to know about Omicron

Researchers around the world are rushing to figure out what the variant will mean for the coronavirus pandemic.

As scientists race to decode the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, the tally crossed 60 in India as three new infections were reported from Telangana. At least eight more people were found to be infected with Omicron in Maharashtra, of which, seven are from Mumbai and one from Vasai Virar.

Delhi reported four more cases of Omicron with Maharashtra reporting the highest number of cases at 28, followed by Rajasthan at 17. Omicron cases have also been reported in Karnataka (3), Gujarat (4), Kerala (1) and Andhra Pradesh (1) and Union Territories of Delhi (6) and Chandigarh (1).

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN INDIA? Tamil Nadu Health Secretary Dr J Radhakrishnan has written to district health officials to intensify monitoring and implementation of Covid-19 appropriate behaviour in

public places. This comes after suspected Covid omicron variant cases in Tamil Nadu. The Health Secretary instructed authorities to review the inventory of health facilities including beds, oxygen beds, ICUs, ventilators, medicines, in the 12-point instructions in the letter which has been sent.

Jharkhand Health Minister Banna Gupta on Wednesday said that the WHO and ICMR have said that the Omicron variant has the capacity to spread seven times more than the Delta variant. "I don't think that an accurate assessment of this variant's impact has been done yet. We are taking necessary measures—testing, tracking in place," he added. Meanwhile, Niti Aayog member Dr VK Paul hinted at a potential scenario that vaccines being used to inoculate India may become "ineffective in emerging

situations." "In the wake of the last three weeks of living with Omicron, we have seen how such doubts have come up. Some of them may be genuine. We still do not have the final picture. And therefore, there is a need for us that we have to be sure about having vaccine platforms that are adaptable quickly. This possibility that we need to tweak for us to remain in the game, so to say, with changing nature of the variants remains valid," Dr Paul said.

OMICRON'S GLOBAL PRESENCE

The British government will remove all 11 countries from its Covid-19 travel red list from Wednesday because there is now community transmission of Omicron in Britain. The 11 countries which will be removed are Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique,

Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The new Omicron variant was first detected in South Africa and Hong Kong. The British government added 11 African countries to its red list from late November, meaning that only UK citizens or residents arriving from those nations were allowed in and then had to quarantine in a hotel. South Korea on Wednesday warned that it may reinstate stricter social distancing curbs as it posted a new record daily coronavirus tally due to a persistent spike in breakthrough infections among those vaccinated and serious cases. Daily tallies of infections shot past 7,000 for the first time last week, just days after passing the 5,000 mark, putting ever greater strains on the country's medical capacity. Total infections in the pandemic so far have risen to

536,495, including 128 cases of the potentially more transmissible Omicron variant, with 4,456 deaths, according to the KDCA.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE VACCINE FRONT?

Researchers around the world are rushing to figure out what the variant will mean for the coronavirus pandemic, now well into its second year. More information came Tuesday from Pfizer, which announced that its experimental pill to treat COVID-19 - separate from its vaccine - appears effective against omicron. Separate laboratory testing shows the drug retains its potency against the omicron variant, the company announced, as many experts had predicted. Pfizer tested the antiviral drug against a man-made version of a key protein that omicron uses to reproduce itself.

Pfizer vaccine less effective against Omicron variant, claims study

A major real-world study has suggested that Pfizer Covid vaccine has weaker efficacy against the Omicron variant. The study revealed that the Pfizer vaccine had efficacy of just 70 per cent against hospitalisation. The study released on Tuesday by South Africa's largest private health insurance administrator, Discovery Health, was based on more than 211,000 positive COVID-19 test results. Around 78,000 of those results from Nov.

15 to Dec. 7 were attributed to Omicron.

The 78,000 results are not confirmed Omicron cases, meaning the study cannot offer conclusive findings about the variant labelled "of concern" by the World Health Organization and reported in more than 60 countries.

South African scientists have so far confirmed around 550 positive tests as being Omicron, with the variant accounting for 78% of

sequences from November, more than the previously dominant Delta variant.

South Africa alerted the world to Omicron late last month, triggering alarm that it could cause another surge in global infections, and leading to the imposition of travel restrictions on southern Africa. South Africa's daily infections have since risen to around 20,000 in recent days. The findings from a real-world analysis are some of the earliest

on protection against Omicron outside of lab studies, which have shown reduced neutralising activity against the variant. read more

Based on analysis by Discovery's clinical research and actuarial teams, and in collaboration with the South African Medical Research Council, the study calculated that two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech offered 70% protection against hospitalisation compared with the

unvaccinated during the recent surge in cases and 33% protection against infection.

It said this represents a drop from 80% protection against infection and compares with 93% efficacy against hospital admission during South Africa's outbreak of the Delta variant, which is the globally dominant variant and considered to be the most infectious to emerge during the pandemic.

Researchers have concluded that aerospace engineers and brain surgeons are not brighter than the general population.



Brain surgeons, rocket scientists aren't necessarily smarter than you: Study

We all have heard people say "it's not rocket science" to show that something we are attempting could be relatively easy. It's now time to say that even if it's rocket science, you can do it. A new study claims that rocket scientists or brain surgeons may not be as smart or bright as they are portrayed to be. Regular people are equally as smart.

Researchers have concluded that aerospace engineers and brain surgeons are not brighter than the general population based on data from a study including 600 aerospace engineers and 148

neurosurgeons, who completed 12 tasks online using the Great British Intelligence Test (GBIT) from the Cognitron platform.

Researchers, who published the findings in the journal BMJ, stated that it is possible that both neurosurgeons and aerospace engineers are unnecessarily placed on a pedestal and that "It's a walk in the park." "Other specialities might deserve to be on that pedestal, and future work should aim to determine the most deserving profession," the paper said.

Through a series of cognitive tests that included planning and reasoning, working memory, attention, and emotion

processing abilities, researchers compiled the responses of aerospace engineers and neurosurgeons and compared them against data gathered from 18,000 regular people.

The tests were made up of 12 tasks from a library available on the Cognitron server that took 30 minutes to complete. Before taking the test, participants completed a questionnaire comprising six questions related to the specialist area, gender, age, geographical location, handedness, and level of experience. The results from the tests showed that neurosurgeons had significantly higher scores than the aerospace

engineers in semantic problem solving, aerospace engineers showed significantly higher scores in mental manipulation and attention, while no difference was found between groups in domain scores for memory, problem-solving speed, and memory recall speed.

"When each group's scores for the six domains were compared with those in the general population, only two differences were significant: the neurosurgeons' problem-solving speed was quicker, but their memory recall speed was slower," the paper said.

The research was conducted to question whether public

perceptions of rocket science and brain surgery are borne out in reality. Falling under the umbrella of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) industries, neurosurgery and aerospace engineering face difficulties in maintaining their workforce and are predicted to be understaffed in coming decades.

"Perceptions and the stereotypes underlying them are derived from various sources. Questioning these stereotypes could have implications for public outreach and future recruitment," researchers said.

How a cancer treatment can leave people with 'night vision'

Photodynamic treatment is used to treat certain malignancies, and patients frequently report an odd side effect. Many people claim to have a feeling of better "night vision" in addition to seeing unusual patterns and silhouettes in the dark. Photodynamic therapy involves the use of light-sensitive medicine that is activated by a light source.

The photo-active substance (chlorine e6) is injected into the circulation through a vein or applied to the skin, depending on the portion of the body being treated, and eventually finds its way into malignant cells.

The medicine is "turned on" when a specific laser is blasted over the damaged area, and it generates a chemical that

kills the rogue cells.

Researchers eventually discovered out why this occurred last year: Rhodopsin, a light-sensitive protein found in our eyes' retinas, interacts with chlorin e6, a photosensitive chemical that is a critical component of this sort of cancer treatment.

The research relied on what scientists already understood

about retinal, an organic substance found in the eye that is normally insensitive to infrared radiation.

The science of vision When light is collected by a succession of cones and rods in the retina, "seeing" occurs. Rods have a lot of rhodopsin, a photosensitive protein that absorbs visible light thanks to a substance called retinal that it

contains.

When exposed to visible light, the retina separates from rhodopsin.

This allows the light signal to be translated to an electrical signal, which our brain's visual cortex perceives as sight.

In fact, during the night there is "less light," which means light radiation is not in a domain visible to humans.

Wait, what!?

Scientists say water in our oceans has alien origins

We live on a planet 71 per cent of which is covered in water. It is the water that gives Earth its unique blue colour from space; but the origin of this liquid water, which sustains our seas and has nourished life for millennia, still remains a subject of intense debate.

Some researchers argue that water in one form or the other has been present in our world ever since it coalesced out of swirling clouds of dust and gas 4.5 billion years ago. Earth has always been provided with a reservoir, in short.

Yet, other scientists have a different and, frankly, much more interesting viewpoint. According to them, Earth was once parched and almost

waterless, and our oceans were merely the result of ice and water raining down from extraterrestrial sources.

Yes, aliens gave us water! The theory suggests that extraterrestrials may be responsible for most of the 332,500,000 cubic miles of water covering our planet today.

And...drumroll, please...now, British scientists are backing up the hypothesis that our seas are actually from "out of this world."

Studying grains of material from an asteroid called 25143 Itokawa brought back to Earth by a Japanese robot probe, this group of scientists concluded that these grains support the hypothesis that our oceans

came from outer space.

Luke Daly, of the University of Glasgow, says that the dust they studied provides compelling evidence that our oceans were formed from water from other parts of the solar system. He says that there is strong evidence that at least half of the water on Earth has been filtered by interplanetary dust.

The scientists report in a paper published in Nature Astronomy that the grains brought back from the asteroid contained a significant amount of water. Daly and his colleagues examined grains of dust returned from Itokawa 25143 using atom-probe tomography. By using this technique, scientists can count atoms one by one in a sample.

As Daly explains, this water was most likely created by the solar wind, a stream of particles emanating from the Sun. In the clouds of dust that float throughout the solar system, these particles would have interacted with oxygen atoms to create water molecules which would have built up in the clouds over the solar system's history.

The dust grains, as well as their water, would have been mopped up by the Earth as it orbited the Sun. According to an argument, this would have allowed water, which Leonardo da Vinci once called "the driving force of all nature," to filter down from the skies onto the earth. Professor Martin Lee of the University of Glasgow, who was

part of the group, stressed that all the water that is found in our seas did not come from solar dust grains.

Ice from comets and asteroids crashing on Earth would have made an equally substantial contribution. According to Lee, solar dust and icy comets provided us with the oceans in which life then evolved.

This discovery is important not only for providing compelling evidence about the origins of water on Earth, but for several other reasons as well. It implies that there may be water on other worlds in our solar system, perhaps in the form of ice. This has profound implications for future exploration of space and the hunt for life across the universe.

Backed by Sidhu, Siddharth Chattopadhyaya appointed as Punjab DGP

IPS Siddharth Chattopadhyaya has replaced Iqbal Preet Singh Sahota as the Director-General of Police, Punjab. Chattopadhyaya's appointment was being backed by Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu. Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and Home Minister Sukhjinder Randhawa, on the other hand, had been rallying behind Sahota. A panel of nine officers has been sent from the Union Public Service Commission for shortlisting



names for the post. The panel will send back the list of names by December 22. If Chattopadhyaya's name

features on that list, the government will have the option to continue with him.

Sidhu had even resigned as the

Punjab Congress chief over the appointment of Iqbal Preet Singh Sahota as DGP.

Later, Sidhu withdrew his resignation but put a precondition that he would resume the charge the day a new advocate general was appointed and a panel for the appointment of a new director-general of police came from the UPSC. The government notification confirming Chattopadhyaya's appointment read: "In place of Sh. Iqbal Preet Singh Sahota, IPS (PB:1988)

Special DGP Armed Bn., Jalandhar, Sh. Siddharth Chattopadhyaya, IPS (PB:1986) DGP, PSPCL, Patiala shall look after the work of Director General of Police, Punjab (HoPF) in addition to his present duties until a fresh appointment is made to the post of Director General of Police, Punjab (HoPF) as per prescribed procedure. The orders will come into force with immediate effect." Chattopadhyaya is due to retire in March.

Grofers renames itself Blinkit with eye on faster deliveries

Indian internet firm Grofers on Monday rebranded itself Blinkit as its CEO promised to speed up deliveries of everything from groceries to electronics in a burgeoning market dominated by Walmart's Flipkart and Amazon's local unit.

The SoftBank-backed firm, which until now has focused mainly on grocery deliveries, has more than 100 partner stores or warehouses in eight cities through which it makes 10-minute drop-offs to shoppers, CEO Albinder Dhindsa told Reuters.

"We saw that this is going to be the future of commerce,"

grofers IS NOW **blinkit**

Dhindsa said. "We are targeting to have almost 1,000 (partner) merchants by the middle of next year... we are also planning to expand to 100 cities by March."

Engineering graduates Dhindsa and Saurabh Kumar founded

Grofers as an online grocer in late 2013.

Its expansion into the wider Indian e-commerce space pits it directly against formidable rivals such as Flipkart, Amazon and the retail push of tycoon billionaire

Mukesh Ambani's Reliance in a market which EY expects to grow at an average 27% annually, to touch \$99 billion by 2024.

Dhindsa said the company, which currently has 2,000

employees, will hire many more engineers.

"We will add as many people as we can according to our business needs. We've hired 700 people in the last 4 months and we're looking to scale up very, very aggressively."

Another 20,000 people work indirectly for the firm as delivery workers and partners.

Dhindsa added that Blinkit, which counts investment firm Tiger Global and homegrown food delivery company Zomato among its backers, is currently evaluating its capital requirements but is not in a hurry to raise funds anytime soon.

Apple's m-cap falls short of \$3 trillion as shares fall over 2%



Apple Inc's market value hovered just shy of the \$3 trillion mark on Monday, following a stunning run over the past decade that has turned it into the world's most valuable company. The company's shares fell just over 2% on Monday to close at \$175.74, reversing earlier gains that saw them approach the \$182.86 price needed to record a \$3 trillion market value.

Apple's stock rose about 11% last week, extending its more than 30% year-to-date gain as investors remain confident that flush consumers will continue to pay top dollar for iPhones, MacBooks and services such as Apple TV and Apple Music.

The iPhone maker's march from \$2 trillion to near \$3 trillion in market value took 16 months, as it led a group of megacap tech companies such as Google-parent Alphabet Inc and Amazon.com Inc that benefited from people and businesses relying heavily on technology during the pandemic. By comparison, Apple's move from \$1 trillion to \$2 trillion took two years.



WTO rules against India's sugar export subsidies against farmers

WTO has recommended that India's support measures for the sugar sector are inconsistent with the global trade norms.

A dispute panel of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on Tuesday recommended that India's support measures for the sugar sector are inconsistent with the global trade norms, the finding which New Delhi said was "completely unacceptable" to the country. In 2019, Brazil, Australia, and Guatemala dragged India into the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism alleging that New Delhi's sugar subsidies to farmers are inconsistent with global trade rules. Brazil is the largest producer and exporter of sugar in the world.

It has recommended that India bring its "WTO-inconsistent" measures into conformity with its obligations under the Agreement on Agriculture.

"We conclude that, to the extent that the measures at issue are inconsistent with certain provisions of the Agreement on Agriculture, they have nullified or impaired benefits accruing to Brazil under that Agreement".

Commenting on the development, India said that there would be no impact of WTO panel's findings on sugar on any of India's existing and ongoing policy measures in the sugar sector.

India has initiated all measures necessary to protect its interest and file an appeal at the WTO against the report, to protect the interests of its farmers, an official statement said.

It said that these countries had "wrongly claimed" that domestic support provided by India to sugarcane producers is in excess of the limit allowed by the WTO and that India provides prohibited export subsidies to sugar mills.

The panel in its report has made certain "erroneous" findings about India's schemes to support sugarcane producers and exports.

Geologists uncover 'treasure trove' of dinosaur tracks in Poland



Hundreds of dinosaur footprints, so well-preserved that even the scaly skin can be seen, have been found in Poland, giving an insight into a complex ecosystem around 200 million years ago, geologists said.

Described by the Polish Geological Institute-National Research Institute as a treasure trove, the fossilised tracks and bones were found in an opencast clay mine in Borkowice, 130 km (80 miles) south of Warsaw.

"In the traces left by dinosaurs, you can read their behaviour and habits... we have traces left by dinosaurs running, swimming, resting and sitting," said geologist Grzegorz Niedzwiedzki.

The largest footprints of carnivorous dinosaurs are 40 cm long and in many cases the skin can be seen in detail.

"In order for such a state of preservation to be possible, a very special sequence of events had to take place in a short time," geologist Grzegorz Pienkowski said in a statement.

Several hundred dinosaur tracks, representing at least seven species, have been found and geologists say they are likely to find more.



Astronomers may have found first known planet in another galaxy

Astronomers spotted what they believe may be the first known planet in another galaxy.

More than 4,800 planets have been discovered orbiting stars other than our sun. But until now, all of them have been inside our Milky Way galaxy. The potential new world orbits two stars in the Whirlpool galaxy. That galaxy is some 28 million light-years from Earth. (That's more than 250 times as far as the Milky Way is wide.) Astronomers are calling the possible exoplanet M51-ULS-1b.

Confirming its existence would be a big deal. It would suggest that there are many other planets in other galaxies waiting to be discovered. Astronomers shared their find October 25 in *Nature Astronomy*.

We probably always assumed there would be planets" in other galaxies, says Rosanne Di Stefano. She's an astrophysicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. It's in Cambridge, Mass. But planets in other galaxies have been hard to find. Why? Distant stars in telescope images blur together too much

to observe them one by one. That makes it difficult to scout for planetary systems around each one.

In 2018, Di Stefano and a colleague came up with a way to overcome this challenge. That colleague, Nia Imara, also is an astrophysicist. She works at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Their idea was to search for planets in star systems called X-ray binaries.

X-ray binaries usually consist of two objects. One is a massive star. The other is what remains after a second massive star has exploded. The stellar corpse is either a neutron star or a black hole. Both types of dead stars are extremely dense. As a result, they have a super strong gravitational pull.

In an X-ray binary, the dead star pulls material from the other star. This heats up the compact object so much that it emits bright X-rays. That radiation stands out even within a crowd of other stars. And so astronomers can spot X-ray binaries, even if they are in other galaxies.

If a planet orbits stars in an X-ray binary, it

could transit - cross in front of - those stars from Earth's perspective. For a short time, the planet would block the X-rays coming from that system. That lost signal would point to the planet's existence.

Di Stefano's team wondered if a telescope had ever seen such a thing.

To find out, the researchers looked at old data from NASA's Chandra X-ray telescope. Those data included observations of three galaxies - the Whirlpool, Pinwheel and Sombrero galaxies. The researchers were looking for X-ray binaries that had briefly dimmed.

The search turned up only one clear planetlike signal. On September 20, 2012, something had blocked all X-rays from an X-ray binary for about three hours. This binary was a system in the Whirlpool galaxy known as M51-ULS-1.

Recalls Di Stefano says, "We said, 'Wow. Could this be it?'"

A discovery or a mistake?

To be sure, the researchers ruled out other possible explanations for the dip in X-ray light.

Scientists cautious as erupting Spanish volcano falls quiet

A volcano that has been spewing lava in Spain's Canary Islands for almost three months fell quiet Tuesday, though scientists warned the lull didn't necessarily mean the eruption is over.

Scientists recorded no seismic activity from the Cumbre Vieja volcano on La Palma island since late Monday, the Canary Islands' volcanology institute, Involcan, said in a tweet.

"That does not mean the eruption has finished, because in the past this has been followed by a new surge in activity," Involcan said.

But it added: "This is the



longest length of time with no earthquakes since the eruption began."

Rubén López, a volcanologist with Involcan, said there was "minimal activity" at the volcano

that first erupted Sept. 19.

"Hopefully it will stay that way and we can start thinking about

the end of this," he told Spanish public broadcaster RTVE. La Palma's longest eruption on record has destroyed about 3,000 local buildings, entombed large areas of farmland in lava and forced several thousand people to abandon their homes. No injuries or deaths have been directly linked to the eruption on the island of around 80,000 people. Life has continued largely as normal on most of La Palma, where a section of the southwestern side is hardest hit. The volcanic Canary Islands are a popular European vacation destination off Africa's northwest coast.

UN weather agency affirms 2020 Arctic heat record in Siberia



Average temperatures were up to 10 degrees Celsius more than usual in Arctic Siberia, playing a key role in forest fires, loss of sea ice and global temperature rise.

The UN weather agency said Tuesday it has certified a 38-degree Celsius (100.4 Fahrenheit) reading in the Russian town of Verkhoyansk last year as the highest temperature ever recorded in the Arctic, the latest in a string of "alarm bells about our changing climate."

The World Meteorological Organization said the temperature "more befitting the Mediterranean than the Arctic" was registered on June 20, 2020, during a heat wave that swept across Siberia and stretched north of the Arctic Circle.

Average temperatures were up to 10 degrees Celsius

more than usual in Arctic Siberia, playing a key role in forest fires, loss of sea ice and global temperature rises that made 2020 one of the three hottest years on record.

"This new Arctic record is one of a series of observations reported to the WMO Archive of Weather and Climate Extremes that sound the alarm bells about our changing climate," said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas in a statement.

Verkhoyansk is about 115 kilometers (70 miles) north of the Arctic Circle and a meteorological station there has been observing temperatures since 1885, WMO said.

Spokeswoman Clare Nullis said the record reading was the first of its kind in a new category of Arctic temperature monitoring, so there was no previous record

to compare it with. But 38 degrees has never been seen before in the Arctic, she said.

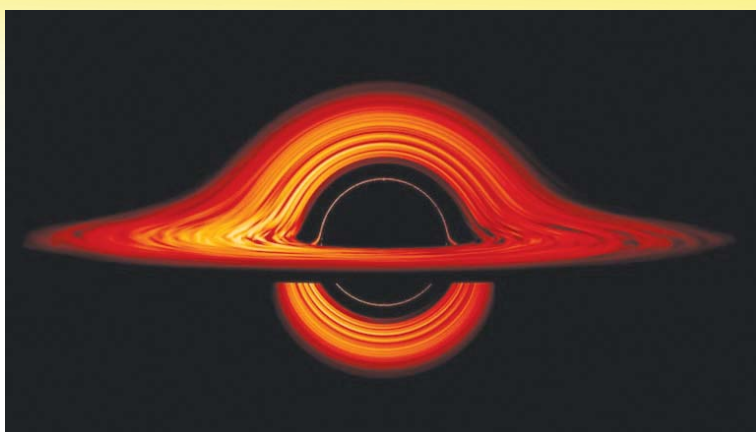
WMO is looking into a number of possible heat records, including 54.4 Celsius (129.9 Fahrenheit) recorded both this year and last in Death Valley, California, which could be a worldwide record high temperature reading, and 48.8 Celsius (119.8 Fahrenheit) on Italy's southern island of Sicily this summer - which could be the hottest temperature ever recorded in Europe.

Taalas said WMO has never had so many investigations of possible heat records going at the same time, and they take time to verify. The agency says the Arctic is among the fastest-warming regions of the world and is heating up at rates twice those of the global average.

Black hole at the centre of our Milky Way galaxy has a leak, Hubble finds evidence

The black hole at the centre of the Milky Way galaxy has a leak and is spurting blowtorch-like jets dating back several thousand years. The Hubble Space Telescope has found circumstantial evidence that the jet is still pushing feebly into a huge hydrogen cloud and then splattering.

Hubble is yet to photograph the phenomenon, but the latest observations show that the black hole that dominates the centre of our galaxy is not sleeping, instead, it wakes up from time to time as and when stars and gas clouds fall into it. Nasa said that black holes draw some material into a swirling, orbiting accretion disk where some of the falling material is swept up into outflowing jets that are collected by the black hole's



powerful magnetic fields.

In a paper published in the *Astrophysical Journal*, researchers document how the black hole burps out mini-jets every time it swallows something hefty, like a gas cloud. "The central black hole is dynamically variable and is currently powered down," said Gerald Cecil of the University of

North Carolina, lead author of the paper.

FINDING FIRST EVIDENCE

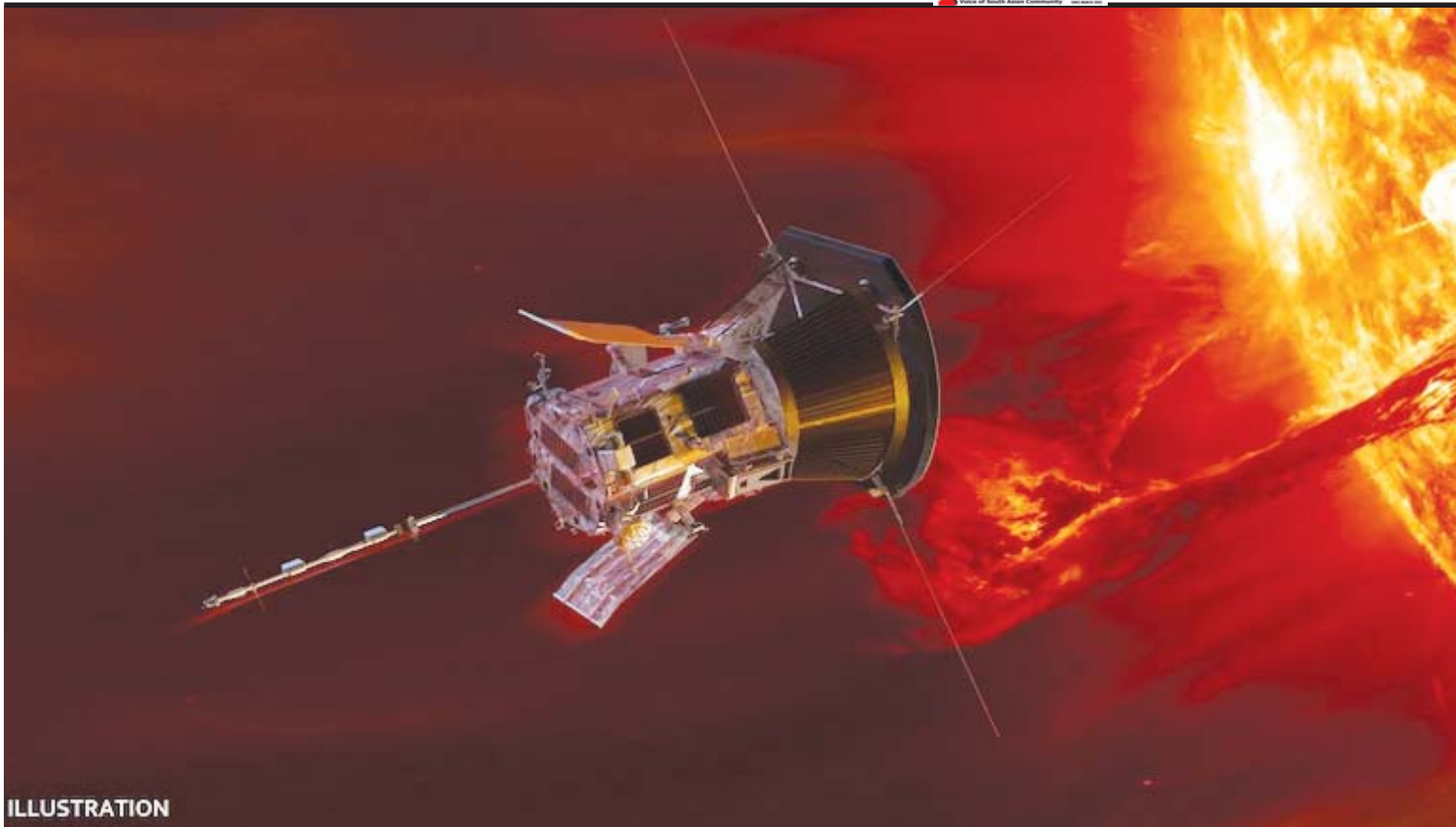
The first evidence of such jet spurting from the black hole was observed in 2013 by the Chandra X-ray Observatory followed by radio waves detected by the Jansky Very Large Array telescope in Socorro. Building on those observations, Cecil and

his team looked at archival data of such molecules as methyl alcohol and carbon monosulfide from the ALMA Observatory in Chile, which is capable of peering through the veils of dust between us and the galactic core.

The observatory revealed an expanding, narrow linear feature in molecular gas that can be traced back at least 15 light-years to the black hole. The team then found the infrared images from the Hubble that showed a glowing, inflating bubble of hot gas aligning to the jet at a distance of at least 35 light-years from the black hole. They suggested that the black hole jet has ploughed into it, inflating the bubble.

As it blows through the gas, the jet hits material and bends along

multiple streams. "The streams percolate out of the Milky Way's dense gas disk. The jet diverges from a pencil beam into tendrils, like that of an octopus. This outflow creates a series of expanding bubbles that extend out to at least 500 light-years. This larger soap bubble structure has been mapped at various wavelengths by other telescopes," co-author Alex Wagner of Tsukuba University in Japan said. The researchers then ran supercomputer models of jet outflows in a simulated Milky Way disk, which reproduced the observations. "Our central black hole has clearly surged in luminosity at least 1 millionfold in the last million years. That sufficed for a jet to punch into the Galactic halo," Wagner added.



ILLUSTRATION

Parker Solar Probe becomes first human-made object to touch the Sun

The Parker Solar Probe became the first human-made object to venture into the Sun's atmosphere.

It was in December 1903 when the Wright brothers made the first controlled, sustained and powered flight opening the world of aviation. Just over 100 years later, humans have now touched the Sun. The Parker Solar Probe became the first human-made object to venture into the Sun's atmosphere, known as the corona. During the risky maiden flight, the spacecraft sampled particles and magnetic fields emerging from the Sun, which has always intrigued astronomers the world over. Being hailed on the same scale as the Moon landings, the probe's arrival into the solar world is set to unravel unknown features about the biggest star in our solar system.

"Parker Solar Probe touching the Sun is a monumental moment for solar science and a truly remarkable feat. Not only does this milestone provide

us with deeper insights into our Sun's evolution and its impact on our solar system, but everything we learn about our own star also teaches us more about stars in the rest of the universe," Thomas Zurbuchen, the associate administrator for the Science Mission Directorate at Nasa said.

WHAT IS THE PARKER SOLAR PROBE? The Parker Solar Probe was launched in 2018 to explore the mysterious world of our Sun. Named after American solar astrophysicist Eugene Parker, the spacecraft is working to unravel the mysteries of our Sun. It will fly through the Sun's atmosphere as close as 3.8 million miles to our star's surface, well within the orbit of Mercury and more than seven times

closer than any spacecraft has come before.

The spacecraft will fly close enough to the Sun to watch the solar wind speed up from subsonic to supersonic, and it will fly through the birthplace of the highest-energy solar particles.

Nasa said that to perform these unprecedented investigations, the spacecraft and instruments are being protected from the Sun's heat by a 4.5-

"Parker Solar Probe touching the Sun is a monumental moment for solar science and a truly remarkable feat."

inch-thick carbon-composite shield, which can withstand temperatures outside the spacecraft that reach nearly 1,377 degrees Celsius.

GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER

The close approach and venture into Sun's atmosphere is set to provide critical new data that has remained elusive to astronomers so far including from within the solar wind the flow of particles from the Sun that can influence us at Earth. The probe in 2019 discovered that magnetic zig-zag structures in the solar wind, called switchbacks, but how and where they form remained a mystery.

"Scientists are hopeful that with the distance decreasing after every flyby, Parker Solar Probe has now passed close

enough to identify one place where they originate: the solar surface. Flying so close to the Sun, Parker Solar Probe now senses conditions in the magnetically dominated layer of the solar atmosphere the corona that we never could before.

"We see evidence of being in the corona in magnetic field data, solar wind data, and visually in images. We can actually see the spacecraft flying through coronal structures that can be observed during a total solar eclipse," Nour Raouafi, the Parker project scientist said.

INTO THE EYE OF (SOLAR) STORM During the first flyby, the Parker Solar probe passed into and out of the corona several times in April during the spacecraft's eighth close approach to the sun. The spacecraft encountered the specific magnetic and particle conditions at 18.8 solar radii (around 8.1 million miles) above the solar surface that told scientists it had crossed the Alfvén critical surface for the first time and finally entered the solar atmosphere.

At one point, as Parker Solar Probe dipped to just beneath 15 solar radii (around 6.5 million miles) from the Sun's surface, it transited a feature in the corona called a pseudostreamer. Pseudostreamers are massive structures that rise above the Sun's surface and can be seen from Earth during solar eclipses. The spacecraft found itself in a region where the magnetic fields were strong enough to dominate the movement of particles there. Nasa said that the first passage through the corona, which lasted only a few hours, is one of many planned for the mission.

Four Earth missions to unravel science behind extreme storms, mineral dust, changing climate in 2022



Nasa has announced four new missions that will look into the fundamentals of the global climatic systems including extreme storms, surface water, oceans, and atmospheric dust. The Earth-observing satellites will provide high-quality data on Earth's interconnected environment, from air quality to sea ice.

The four missions include a series of six small satellites for improved and rapid measurements of tropical cyclones; trace the origin and composition of mineral dust that can affect climate, ecosystems, air quality, and human health; predict extreme weather conditions including floods, wildfires, volcanoes; and evaluate the world's oceans and their role in climate change.

Nasa said that these four missions will enhance the ability to monitor our changing planet.

These missions are:
UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE BEHIND TROPICAL CYCLONES

The Time-Resolved Observations of Precipitation structure and storm Intensity with a Constellation of Smallsats (TROPICS) mission aims to improve observations of tropical cyclones with six satellites working together to provide microwave observations. The satellites will provide key data on a storm's precipitation, temperature, and humidity as quickly as every 50 minutes.

The pathfinder or proof of concept satellite of the constellation has already started working and in June 2021 it collected data from Hurricane Ida. Nasa said that the TROPICS satellites will be deployed in pairs of two over three different launches, expected to be completed by July 31, 2022. The satellite, which will be the size of a loaf of bread, will carry a miniaturized microwave radiometer instrument.

'No time to spare': WHO says Covid disrupted health services, pushed half a billion into poverty

More than half a billion people are being pushed into extreme poverty because they have to pay for health services out of their own pockets, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a press release highlighting the impact of Covid-19 on people's ability to obtain health care facilities.

In its press release, the WHO mentioned two new complementary reports -- one by the WHO and other by the World Bank -- that offered both a warning and guideposts to all countries as they strive to build back better from Covid-19.

It said, "The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to halt two decades of global progress towards Universal Health Coverage".

The WHO noted that even before the pandemic, half a billion people were pushed (or pushed still further) into extreme poverty because of payments



they made for health care.

WHAT THE REPORT SAID:

The new reports by the WHO and the World Bank warned that the financial hardship is likely to become more intense as poverty grows, incomes fall, and governments face tighter fiscal constraints.

In 2020, the pandemic disrupted health services. It also triggered the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, making it increasingly

difficult for people to pay for care, the WHO said.

"Even before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, almost 1 billion people were spending more than 10 per cent of their household budget on health," the press release quoted Juan Pablo Uribe, Global Director for Health, Nutrition and Population, World Bank, as saying. "This is not acceptable, especially since the poorest people are hit hardest. Within

a constrained fiscal space, governments will have to make tough choices to protect and increase health budgets," Juan Pablo Uribe said.

COVID-19: WHAT MADE THE NEEDY MORE VULNERABLE

The WHO press releases noted that in 2019, prior to the pandemic, 68 per cent of the world's population was covered by essential health services,

such as pre-and post-natal care and reproductive health services; immunization services; treatment for diseases like HIV, TB and malaria; and services to diagnose and treat noncommunicable diseases

like cancer, heart conditions, and diabetes. "But they had not made such advances in ensuring affordability," it said. This made the poverty-stricken section of the society vulnerable. "The poorest groups and those living in rural areas

are the least able to obtain health services, and the least likely to be able to cope with the consequences of paying for them," the press release said.

"Up to 90 per cent of all households incurring impoverishing out-of-pocket health spending are already at or below the poverty line," the WHO said.

WHAT WHO DIRECTOR TEDROS SAID

Referring to the economic crisis, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said, "There is no time to spare.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also urged all governments to "immediately resume and accelerate efforts to ensure every one of their citizens can access health services without fear of the financial consequences".

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Shilpa Shetty does Chura Ke Dil Mera step with Spider-Man, pleads with him for No Way Home ticket: 'Viaan will kill me'

With one day to go for the release of Spider-Man: No Way Home, Shilpa Shetty shared a funny video. The clip began with her entering her room while looking online for tickets and exclaiming that they were all sold out. Shilpa initially got startled

him the Chura Ke Dil Mera step. However, when she asked him for a ticket to Spider-Man: No Way Home, he was unable to help her.

"Ticket nahi doge toh (If you don't give me a ticket) there's no way home for me," Shilpa exclaimed, adding, "Viaan (her son) is going to kill me. Give me a ticket, Spider-Man."

In her tweet, Shilpa tagged Tom Holland, who is playing Spider-Man, and wrote, "With great power comes great responsibility, Spidey! And, it's your responsibility to get me the tickets lest there's No Way Home for me because I couldn't find them on the web @TomHolland1996." She added hashtags such as 'blessed' and 'gratitude'. Recently, Shilpa travelled to Riyadh for the Da-Bangg: The Tour Reloaded, headlined by Salman

Khan. Aayush Sharma, Jacqueline Fernandez, Prabhudeva, Saiee Manjrekar, Guru Randhawa, Maniesh Paul and others were also a part of the show. Shilpa is currently seen as a judge on India's Got Talent. She often shares behind-the-scenes videos from the sets, featuring her co-judges Badshah, Kirron Kher and Manoj Muntashir.



to see a person in a Spider-Man costume in her room and then excitedly said 'hi' to him. "Ek ticket de na, baba (Give me one ticket, please)," she pleaded with him. She then offered him a barter deal - she will teach him something in exchange for a ticket.

First, Shilpa tried to teach Spider-Man how to do a Bollywood-style 'thumka' or shake his hips but gave up. She then taught



Ranbir Kapoor gets asked when he will marry Alia Bhatt 'or someone else'

Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt answered fan questions at an event in Delhi to launch the motion poster of Ayan Mukerji's Brahmastra, which marks their first film together. One person wanted to know about Ranbir's wedding date. "When will you marry Alia or someone else?" Ranbir read out a query addressed to him, as the audience cheered. Alia's mouth was agape after hearing the second part of the question. Ranbir replied, "Well, haven't we seen a lot of people getting married in the last one year? I think we should be happy with that. Humari kab hogi (When will ours happen)?"

As Alia replied, "Why are you asking me?", Ranbir pointed at Ayan and said, "I am asking him, humari kab hogi (when will ours happen)?" The filmmaker then said, "Aaj ke liye ek hi date kaafi hai (The announcement of one date is enough for today), Brahmastra ki release date. Let's wait."



Ranbir and Alia have been in a relationship since 2017. They have bonded with each other's families and all of them even go on vacations together.

Last year, in an interview with former journalist Rajeev Masand, Ranbir said that he would have tied the knot with Alia, were it not for the Covid-19 pandemic. "I don't want to jinx it by saying anything. I want to tick mark that goal very soon in my life," he said. Brahmastra is the first film of a proposed fantasy trilogy. The first part will revolve around Ranbir's character Shiva, who discovers that he has the power of fire

and a mysterious connection to the all-powerful weapon Brahmastra. Alia will play his ladylove Isha. Also featuring Amitabh Bachchan, Mouni Roy and Nagarjuna Akkineni, Brahmastra is slated for a theatrical release on September 9, 2022, in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada.

Fawad Khan says he misses Bollywood, made 'great friends' in the industry with whom he is still in touch

Pakistani actor Fawad Khan said that he misses Bollywood. He appeared in a handful of Hindi films, including Khoobsurat and Kapoor & Sons. His last Indian release was Ae Dil Hai Mushkil in 2016. After the

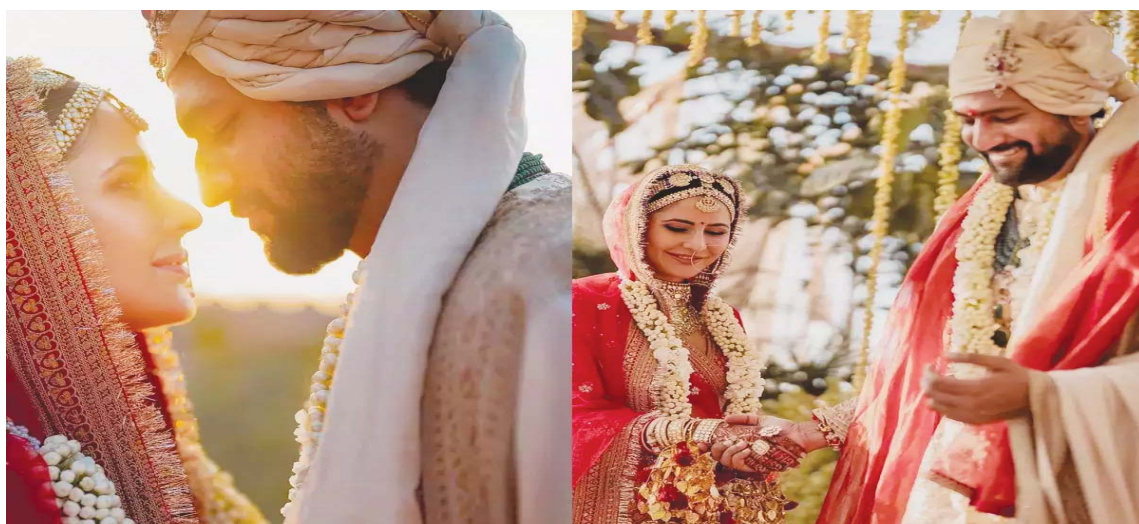
Uri attack in 2016, the Indian Motion Picture Producers Association passed a resolution to ban Pakistani artists from working in Indian films. The All Indian Cine Workers Association announced a total ban on Pakistani artists after the Pulwama terror attack in 2019. In an interview with Film Companion, Fawad was asked if he misses Bollywood. "I do. I made some great friends there, I still keep in touch with them. Yeah, I miss it. I miss Mumbai, it's a beautiful city. In fact, all the cities that I have been to, I have had a lovely experience," he said.

Fawad and his Zindagi Gulzar Hai co-star Sanam Saeed are set to reunite after eight years for a Zindagi Digital series directed by Asim Abbasi. The show, which will also stream on Zee5, was announced this week.



In a statement, Fawad said, "I think Zindagi is taking bold and brave decisions when it comes to storytelling. It's naturally evolving into a platform that encourages diversity of opinion and inclusiveness for all filmmakers and material ranging from everyday mainstream to avant-garde and noir. I feel there's a place for everyone in this artistic landscape." The as-yet-untitled show 'blends together magical realism and supernatural fantasy within a family reunion setting' and explores the themes of 'love, loss and reconciliation'.

Katrina Kaif changes Instagram profile photo after wedding with Vicky Kaushal



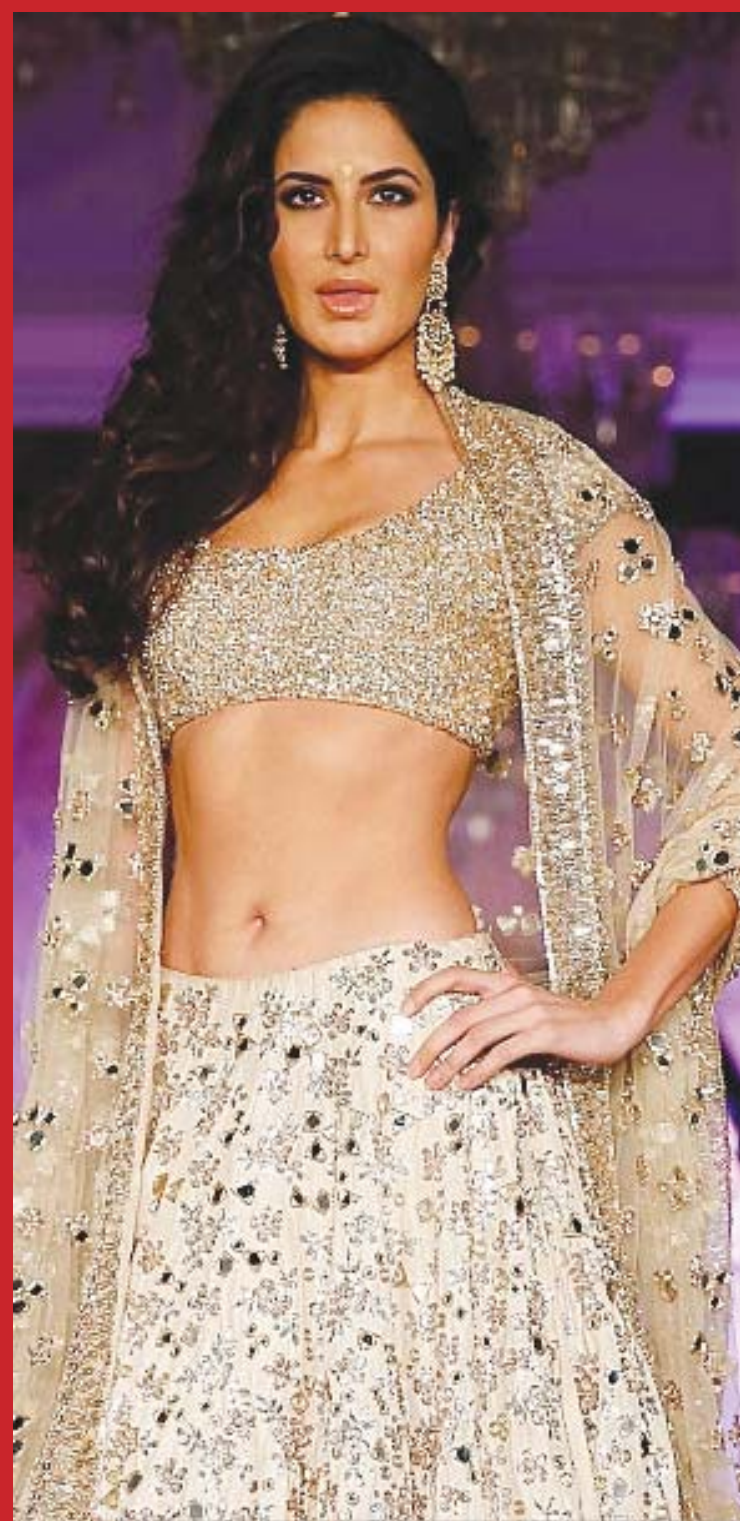
Actor Katrina Kaif has changed her Instagram profile photo a week after her wedding with Vicky Kaushal. The couple tied the knot in an intimate wedding at the Six Senses Fort Barwara in Rajasthan's Sawai Madhopur on December 9. They made their first public appearance as husband and wife at the Mumbai airport earlier this week. Katrina Kaif's current Instagram profile photo is one of the candid pictures from her first post on the social media platform after their wedding. In the photo, the newlyweds gazed at each other lovingly during the ceremony. The picture was clicked against the setting sun. A few hours after they tied the

knot, the couple took to their respective Instagram accounts and shared several pictures. They captioned the post, "Only love and gratitude in our hearts for everything that brought us to this moment. Seeking all your love and blessings as we begin this new journey together." They also shared pics from their pre-wedding festivities including haldi and mehendi ceremonies. Recently, Katrina shared several new pictures wearing a floral saree with a trailing veil. She also wore a statement uncut diamond choker with matching earrings.

Fashion designer Sabyasachi revealed on Instagram that her outfit was a 'tribute to her

mother's British heritage during the pre-wedding festivities', adding that it was 'silhouetted like a white wedding gown'. In the pictures, Vicky wore a silk embroidered sherwani and matching churidar and juttis.

After their wedding, Vicky and Katrina took a helicopter from the wedding venue. The newlyweds returned to Mumbai after their honeymoon. At the airport, Vicky wore beige trousers paired with an off-white shirt. Katrina opted for a pink salwar kameez with a sheer dupatta. She wore sindoor (vermillion) and chooda (red bangles worn by brides). The couple held hands and smiled as they posed for the paparazzi..



Ashutosh Rana recalls his reaction when he was offered Dushman, says fulfilled his 'promise' to Mahesh Bhatt

Actor Ashutosh Rana took a trip down memory lane and recalled his reaction when Mahesh Bhatt offered him 1998 film Dushman. Mahesh Bhatt was the screenplay writer of the movie. In a post shared by Humans of Bombay on Instagram, Ashutosh revealed that he asked Mahesh if he could 'scream' in excitement when he was offered the role of the villain. He also promised Mahesh that he would win an award which he later did. In Dushman, released in 1998, Ashutosh Rana essayed the role of a sadistic killer, Gokul Pandit. The film also featured Kajol, Sanjay Dutt, Jas Arora, Tanvi Azmi, Kunal Khemu, Anupam Shyam, Vani Tripathi among others.



A part of the post quoted Ashutosh as saying, "I was 4 when I first performed on a stage; I always enjoyed the spotlight! I'd even take part in local Ram-Leela plays-playing Ravan. My parents attended all my plays! Papa would say,

'Follow this passion, it'll lead to happiness.' His words became my mantra. And so after I graduated school, with my spiritual Guru's encouragement, I joined NSD; honing my skill as an actor fulfilled me. And when I felt ready, I came to Mumbai to

live my dream."

He added, "The first few weeks were spent commuting from one corner to another, looking for work. And it was during one of these auditions that I met Mr Mahesh Bhatt. He offered me a role in 'Swabhimaan', a television serial! That was my 1st break! I couldn't wait to see myself on screen! Papa told me, 'I know your talent, make the most of this opportunity!' I tried to live upto my potential & when I saw myself on screen... I still get shivers when I think of that feeling. After Swabhimaan, I got a lot of work! And although I wished to get longer screen time, maine chhote kaam bhi bade man se kiye (I essayed even the small roles with the same heart)." Ashutosh continued, "One practice I followed was never

comparing my journey with other actor's. And so, after 4 years of persevering, one day Mahesh Sir called me to his office and offered me the lead role as a villain in 'Dushman!' I was so overwhelmed that I asked him, 'Can I scream?' When he said yes, I yelled with happiness! Then I promised Sir, 'I'll win you a Filmfare Award,' And I did! I recall giving my 'Thank you' speech; it felt surreal..." The actor not only won the Filmfare Award for Best Performance in a Negative Role but also Screen Awards for the same. Recently, Ashutosh was seen in the Netflix thriller series Aranyak. Directed by Vinay Waikul, Aranyak also featured Raveena Tandon and Sartaj Kakkar.



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Year 2021

Rewind from space



Satellite imagery captured by space firm Maxar Technologies, gives a chance to rewind some of these events that took place throughout 2021

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PASRICHA & PATEL^{LLC}

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

See our full page advt. on page 35