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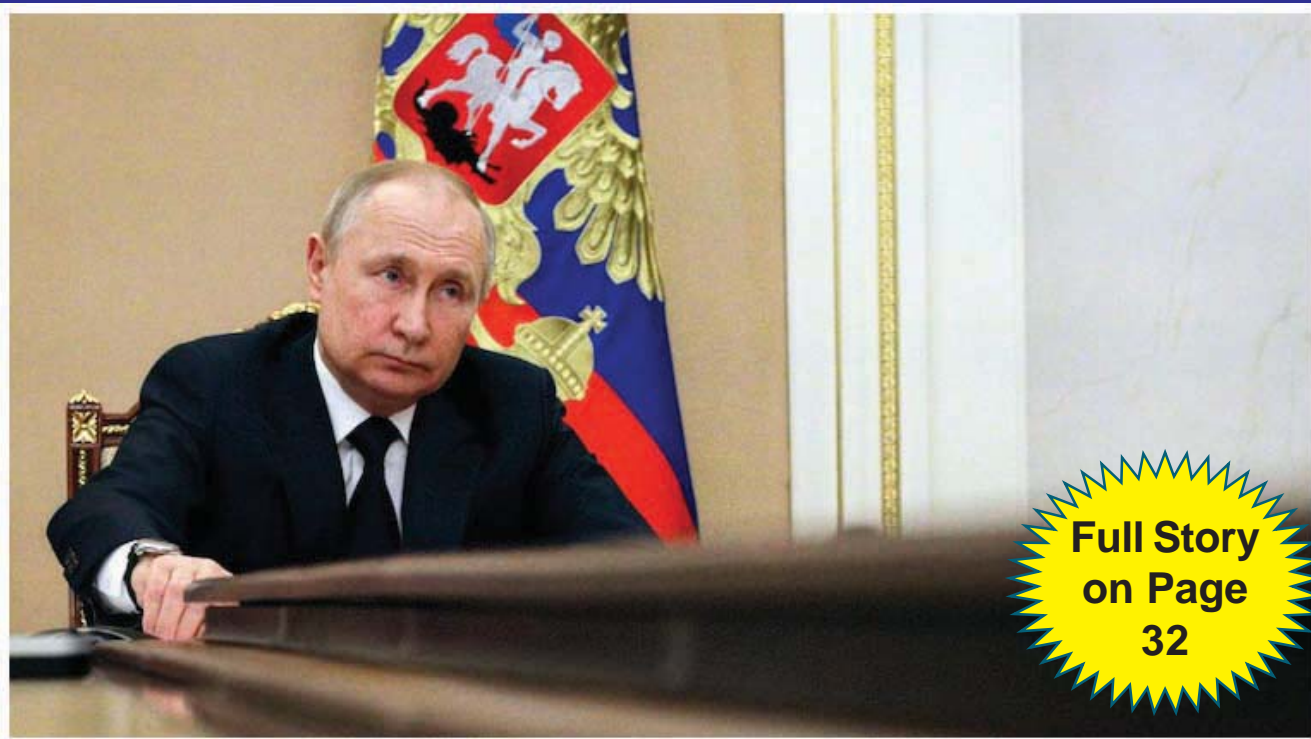
Scientists identify formation of three planetary systems around this binary star



(News agency) Scientists have identified the formation of three planetary systems around a binary star system called SVS 13. Located 980 light-years away, the binary star system and the complex structures of dust around it are shedding light on how planetary systems are born in these fascinating environments. The research has been accepted by The Astrophysical Journal and is available on preprint server arXiv. Bringing together three decades of study, an international group of scientists have observed a pair of stars orbiting each other, to reveal that these stars are surrounded by disks of gas and dust.

(Contd. on page 31)

Putin's rough childhood and its shadow over Ukraine and other wars



**Full Story
on Page
32**

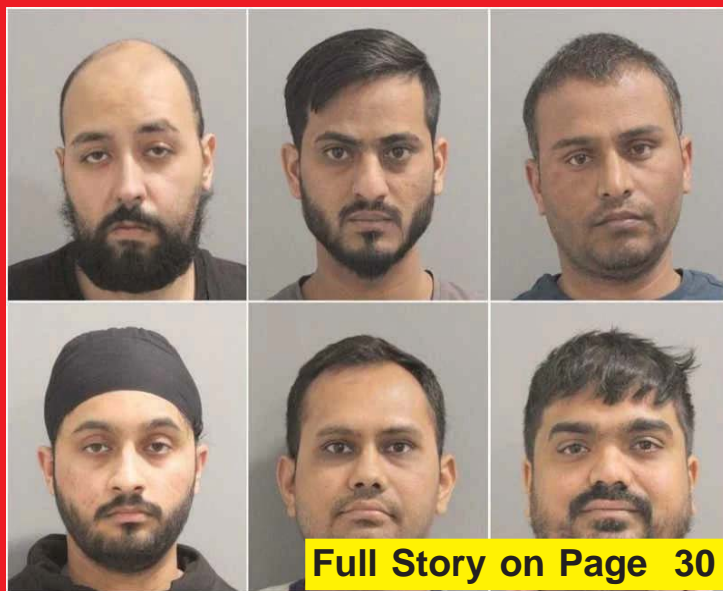
BA.2 variant has world on tenterhooks, but no need for India to press panic button yet

A record spike in Covid-19 cases in China has put the spotlight on the BA.2 stealth variant of Omicron that's behind the surge. Should India be worried too? Here's what experts have to say.



**Full Story
on Page
30**

6 Arrested In County-Wide Drug Bust: Nassau Police



Full Story on Page 30

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**Full page
Advt.**

on page 44

Five Indian students killed in Canada road accident



(News agency) On Saturday, five Indian students, all in their province of Ontario. At 3.45 am, they were killed in a car accident on a highway in the province of Ontario. At 3.45 am, when it collided with a tractor-trailer. According to the Ontario

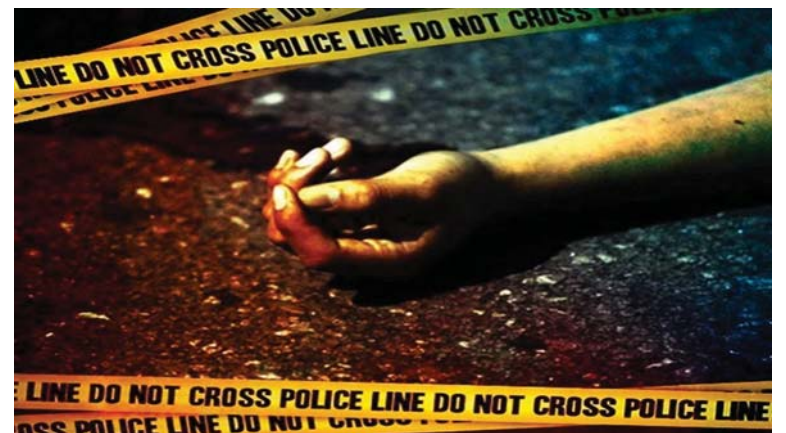
Provincial Police, five students were killed in the terrible incident, while two others were taken to the hospital with critical injuries (OPP). According to the Canadian Press, the five were identified as Harpreet Singh, 24, Jaspinder Singh, 21, Karanpal Singh, 22, Mohit Chouhan, 23, and Pawan Kumar, 23. They were in Montreal and the Greater Toronto Area for their studies. At the scene of the accident, they were pronounced deceased. Harpreet Singh is thought to be the perpetrator. Harpreet Singh is believed to have been resident in Montreal, according to the outlet CBC News. On Saturday March 12, 2022, at approximately 3:45am officers from the Quinte West

Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) responded to a motor vehicle collision on Highway 401 westbound, between Aikens Road and St Hilaire Road," the release stated. It added, "The investigation into this collision is continuing at this time and updates will be provided as they become available. No charges have been laid." External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday mourned the death of the five Indian students. "Deeply mourn the passing away of 5 Indian students in Canada. Condolences to their families. Pray for the recovery of those injured. @IndiainToronto will provide all necessary support and assistance," he tweeted.

Indian-Origin Man Killed After Carjackers Run Him Over With His Stolen Car

On Wednesday, Dr. Rakesh "Rick" Patel of Silver Spring Maryland stepped out of his Mercedes Benz to give his girlfriend a package

(News agency) Washington: A 33-year-old Indian-origin doctor was killed here after carjackers mowed him down while trying to flee with his stolen car, as his girlfriend watched the tragedy unfold in Spring Maryland. According to US media reports, on Wednesday, Dr. Rakesh "Rick" Patel of Silver Spring Maryland stepped out of his Mercedes Benz to give his girlfriend a package. Sensing an opportunity, the carjackers jumped into his



"No Security Concerns For Indian Students In Russia": Embassy's Advisory
Russia-Ukraine War: The embassy, however, said certain disruptions in Russian banking services, as well as direct flight connectivity to India, have been reported.

(News agency) New Delhi: In the backdrop of the crisis in Ukraine, the Indian embassy in Moscow has said that it sees no security concerns at present for the Indian students in Russia to leave that country. The embassy, however, said certain disruptions in Russian banking services, as well as direct flight connectivity to India, have been reported and Indian students may consider returning home if they have concerns over these aspects. The embassy issued a brief note with a title: 'Guidelines for Indian students studying in Russia'. The mission said it has been receiving messages from Indian students in universities in Russia seeking advice on their continued stay in the country. "The embassy would like to reassure all students that at present we see no security reasons for them to leave," it said. The embassy said it is in regular contact with relevant authorities with respect to the safety

and security of the Indian nationals, including students. Certain disruption of banking services in Russia and direct flight connectivity from Russia to India is, however, taking place. If students have concerns regarding these aspects and would like to travel back to India, they may consider doing so," it said.

Regarding the academic programmes, the embassy said it has been informed by a number of universities that they have already shifted to the online distance learning mode. Students are advised to exercise their discretion in consultation with their respective universities on the appropriate course of action regarding the continuation of their academic activities without disruption," it said. The Russian banking services have seen some disruptions following the imposition of severe sanctions on the country by Western powers following its military aggression against Ukraine.

car and drove away. He ran after them and managed to get in front of his car. However, the carjackers ran him down and killed him, as Patel's girlfriend watched in horror, according to 7 News. Patel was a doctor at MedStar Washington Hospital Centre and was training as a critical care fellow, NBC4 Washington TV reported. Patel was caring, social and smart, his father, Dr. Rajnikante Patel, told NBC4 Washington TV. His life was "taken away for no reason," he said. "I always used to call him my baby," his mother, Charulatta Patel, said. He was the youngest of five children, two of whom also are

doctors. The killing was senseless, Patel's mother added. "For what? A car?" the NBC4 Washington TV quoted her as saying. Washington Police have announced a reward of USD 25,000 for details of the carjackers. On Thursday, police managed to recover the car, but the suspects are still absconding. Medstar Hospital where Patel worked released a statement saying: "We are heartbroken to learn of the sudden passing of Dr. Rakesh (Rick) Patel. He served his residency here, had completed a fellowship in Infectious Diseases, and was currently training as a Critical Care fellow. Dr. Patel will be greatly missed."

Indian-Origin Singapore Artist's Works Are Orbiting Earth On Board ISS

The two artworks from the Singapore-based Indian artist are 3D-printed metal cubes featuring unique patterns, each side measuring 0.98cm

(News agency) Singapore: Two locally designed artworks by an Indian-origin artist in Singapore are now orbiting Earth aboard the International Space Station (ISS) as part of a 64-piece Moon Gallery collection of miniature works by international artists.

Kerala-born Lakshmi Mohanbabu, who moved from Delhi to Singapore in 2001 and is a naturalised Singaporean, has been working on the art project for the past two years in collaboration with the National Additive Manufacturing Innovation Cluster (Namic).

"I always felt that my artwork has a message for the world," Ms Mohanbabu told PTI. The artworks reached the space station on Monday on a cargo craft, and will spend the next 10 months as part of a test flight for artists to learn how the different designs and materials perform in the microgravity of space.

The two artworks from Singapore are 3D-printed metal cubes featuring unique patterns, each side measuring 0.98cm, according to a report by The Straits Times. They were designed by Ms Mohanbabu, based on the concepts of unity, diversity and complexity in humankind.

The first cube, titled The Cube of Interaction, was prototyped in collaboration with Associate Professor Daniel New from the Singapore Centre for 3D Printing at Nanyang Technological University (NTU). They created two iterations of the cube in different materials and identified the most suitable material. The final version was then manufactured by a local vendor via machining. The second cube, named Structure & Reflectance, features four unique faces that were made by changing the crystal orientation of steel during the 3D printing process.

This is a proprietary technique developed by Assistant Professor Matteo Seita and his team from NTU's School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering and the School of Materials Science and Engineering.

The project was supported by Namic, a national programme office that accelerates the adoption and commercialisation of additive manufacturing technologies.

Like the other artworks, the two cubes are encased in an 8-cm by 8-cm tray, each in a 1-cm by 1-cm cell where they can, depending on their size and design, float freely. "Each piece in this tiny gallery with a big mission explores the meaning of a shared human culture," states an



inscription on the Moon Gallery.

While it is hoped that the gallery will spark conversation and bring joy to the astronauts aboard the space station, its mission also has a scientific purpose, said the Moon Gallery Foundation, a non-profit organisation based in the Netherlands that promotes collaboration between the creative and space/technology sectors. At a hybrid NTU event celebrating the successful launch

of the Moon Gallery to the ISS on Monday, Second Minister for Finance and National Development Indranee Rajah said that Namic had supported over 240 initiatives in various industries like healthcare, marine offshore, aerospace and construction. It will play a major role in the future of distributed manufacturing and digital trade. "For example, 3D printing in emerging industries such as cellular agriculture

and space technology can be a key enabler in strengthening Singapore's position as a leading trade and manufacturing hub," the media report quoted Indranee, who is also Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, as saying. Moon Gallery plans to send the first permanent extraterrestrial art gallery of 100 works of art, each no larger than a cubic centimetre, to the Moon by 2025.

Dr Ashish Jha To Take Over As Biden's Covid Response Coordinator

US President Joe Biden's statement announcing Dr Ashish Jha's appointment praised him as one of the leading public health experts in America.

(News agency) Washington: Indian-American public health expert Dr Ashish Jha will take over as President Joe Biden's COVID-19 Response Coordinator next month, the White House announced on Thursday. Biden's COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients and his deputy Natalie Quillian are leaving the administration next month, it said. Biden's statement announcing Dr Jha's appointment praised him as one of the leading public health experts in America and "a well known figure to many Americans from his wise and calming public presence." Dr Jha is the dean of the Brown University School of Public Health. "...And as we enter a new moment in the pandemic - executing on my National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan and managing the ongoing risks from COVID - Dr Jha is the perfect person for the job," Biden said. "I appreciate both Jeff and Dr Jha for working closely to ensure a smooth transition, and I look forward to continued progress in the months ahead," he said. Zients, an experienced manager and government executive, was brought on by Biden before he took office to devise and execute a "wartime" federal government response to the coronavirus pandemic, including shoring up supply and distribution of

vaccines, therapeutics and tests. Biden, in a statement, praised Zients and his team for "stunning" and "consequential" progress against the coronavirus pandemic. "When Jeff took this job, less than 1 per cent of Americans were fully vaccinated; fewer than half our schools were open; and unlike much of the developed world, America lacked any at-home COVID tests. Today, almost 80 per cent of adults are fully vaccinated; over 100 million are boosted; virtually every school is open; and hundreds of millions of at-home tests are distributed every month," he said. "In addition, the US leads the global effort to fight COVID, delivering more free vaccines to other countries than every other nation on Earth. The progress that he and his team have made is stunning and even more important consequential. Lives have been saved," he said. Biden noted that the US is leading the global effort to fight COVID, "delivering more free vaccines to other countries than every other nation." The US is the worst hit nation by the pandemic. The country has reported over 968,300 deaths and more than 79,631,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to data from Johns Hopkins University of Medicine.

BJP Victory Celebrations in New York

Voters in India have voted for development, Safety, Security and Trust in Modi and Yogi: Jagdish Sewhani

Addressing a large gathering chanting Bharat Mata ji Jai and Jai Shri Ram in New York Jagdish Sewhani President of The American India Public Affairs Committee and the Organizer of the BJP Victory Celebrations in New York thanked the voters of UP and other states for bringing back BJP in power in four states. This shows that today's voter is smart, intelligent. They have totally rejected the politics of Dynasty and policy of appeasement corruption and voted for development, better Law and

order.

It is a Historical win for BJP in UP where after 37 years voters have re-elected the same party back to Power, this shows peoples trust in Yogi ji and Modiji. This is an endorsement of Prime Minister Modiji's pro poor, Pro Farmer and pro Development policy.

We have won the Semifinals with Landslide because people have faith in Modi and I'm confident that Voters in Bharat will re-elect Narendra Modi in 2024 with much bigger margin asserted

Mr Sewhani.

The Prime Minister Modi since 2014 has been working relentlessly for making Bharat as Vishwaguru, because of Modiji today Bharat is moving in direction of Atmanirbhar Bharat in defense, High tech and other fields.

More than 100 million Farmers have benefited from PM Kisan yojana, 89 million housewives benefited from PM Ujjwala yojana and received free gas cylinders, millions of families got free Ration under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana

and more than 1.8 billion Vaccines shots were given said Mr Sewhani Mr Sewhani thanked Prime Minister Modi for safely bringing back thousand of students from Ukraine.

Narendra Modi is World's Most popular leader. Today world is looking at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for solution and end war between Russia and Ukraine said Mr Sewhani.

Dr Bhupi Patel, Harry Brar, Animesh Goenka and others also spoke at Victory celebrations



Jagdish Sewhani Addressing BJP Victory Celebrations in New York



Jagdish Sewhani and other community leaders at BJP victory celebrations



Jagdish Sewhani with Harry Brar Director Asian Affairs Nassau County and Enthusiastic supporters of BJP at Victory Celebrations



Bjp victory celebrations in NY



Jagdish Sewhani and other community leaders at BJP victory celebrations



Jagdish Sewhani and other community leaders at BJP victory celebrations



Jagdish Sewhani and Dr. Bhupi Patel at BJP Victory Celebrations



Jagdish Sewhani with Ashok Vyas from ITV Gold at BJP Victory Celebrations

Have survived Russia of 90s, want war to stop, say citizens of Russia and Ukraine staying in Goa

Denis and Victoria, citizens of Ukraine and Russia respectively are against the ongoing war. Both of them have been in Goa and expressed concern over their countries engaging in a full-scale war



To make matters worse Denis's mother, who holds a Russian passport, too is stuck in Ukraine. "My grandmother is 86 years old. She is diabetic and too old to even socialise. There is a war going on and she doesn't want to leave her house," said Denis. Denis elaborates that his grandmother stays in Vinnytsia, Ukraine and has been ill for some time. "My mother went to see her sometime back and she too is stuck. I feel so helpless and frustrated now. I want to go and save my family but I can't go because of the war. I cannot even meet my mother and grandmother. They are living in constant fear and supporting each other and I am very scared for their safety," he said.

Denis has organised some protest gatherings in Goa. When asked if he felt a sense of anger between the Russians and Ukrainians in Goa Russia, he

said that by and large, things remain peaceful. "There is no problem as such. My scooter has ribbons of the Ukraine flag and 80% don't have any problems. A 10% may look in a certain way but there is no problem," he said. Denis adds he has organised protests and he is not scared and wants the war to stop. "I survived the Russia of the 90s and I am ready to face anything today as well," he said. Denis adds that he sees no possibility of the war ending soon. He stated that civilians have been killed and schools and hospitals have been targeted. "Stop this war. Why target school property? Why kill innocent people? It's twenty days since the war and they haven't been able to control even Kyiv. And so this could well go long," he said. Meanwhile, a Russian citizen, Victoria, doesn't support the way Russia waged war against

Ukraine. She's been keeping in touch with her friends via social media and has been worried ever since the war broke out. She doesn't want her full name revealed for security reasons.

"There were protests in Moscow and the protesters were jailed and action is taken against those who speak against war," she said. Victoria is scared of raising her voice in public in Goa, fearing that it might land her in trouble in Russia later. She gets along well with Ukrainians here. Interesting, Victoria has many friends in Ukraine. They are living in constant fear. "I have cried on some days and have been so confused on other days. I mean we always believed we were one. There were never any differences and there are no differences, but this is all so confusing," she said. When asked what the environment was at home, she said that her parents felt the war was justified.

(News agency) In the coastal state of Goa, one can easily spot several Russians and Ukrainians. Areas like Arambol, Morjim and Ashwem house a majority of such nationalities. There are some who've been in the coastal paradise for years while many others are here simply to spend their holidays. And then there are many who wish to return home as soon as possible but cannot do so because of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. India Today TV met several citizens from both countries and enquired if there was any tension that had developed after the war and also the problems their near and dear ones are facing back home. Denis Chernenko, a Ukraine national, has been in Goa for the last eight years. He studied in St Petersburg and his family resides there. But his grandmother is still in Ukraine and stuck because of the war.



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Chinese Vignettes-China, India should be partners, not rivals, says Chinese FM



(Staff Reporter) Much is happening in China, domestically as well as internationally. While China tries to settle its own differences with neighbour India, Western lawmakers have called on China to play mediator in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as it entered its third week.

China over the week

India and China have had a history of highs and lows. The bilateral relations reached rock bottom, when in 2020 the armies of both sides engaged in a violent clash in the Galwan Valley. Following the deadly clash, both sides gradually enhanced their manpower by deploying more soldiers as well as heavy armaments.

On Monday, addressing his press conference on the sidelines of their annual meeting of parliament, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi acknowledged that the two countries had 'suffered some setbacks' and called for managing the border differences through consultation as the 'situation does not serve the fundamental interests of the two countries and peoples.' The minister added that 'some forces' have always tried to stir up conflict between the neighbours. However, the two countries, which account for one-third of humanity, can control their destiny and achieve their goals 'only by staying independent.'

On Friday, India and China met for the 15th round of high-level military talks to "move forward", narrow their differences and find a reasonable solution to the stalled issues. A joint statement released by the two countries stated that they carried forward their discussions from the previous round held on January 12. While the

atmosphere was positive, the meeting, which lasted for 13 hours, failed to achieve any immediate breakthrough. But hope to resolve the issues at the earliest. That's not it for China. The country has found itself embroiled in the ongoing war in the West. China chooses to maintain a diplomatic distance from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, the stance to 'not step in' does not sit well with the

European lawmakers who have identified Beijing as a potential peacemaker in the conflict, given the close ties between President Xi and President Putin. "We [Europeans] cannot be the mediators, that is clear ... and it cannot be the US either. Who else? It has to be China, I trust in that," said the European Union's Foreign Affairs Chief Josep Borrell, after his phone call with Wang Yi. Ukrainian Foreign

Minister Dmytro Kuleba also said that he had been assured that "China is interested in stopping this war, Chinese diplomacy has sufficient tools to make a difference, and we count that it is already involved." President Xi during his call with French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz made it clear that Beijing has been critical of Western sanctions against Russia. According to reports, China is considering purchasing or increasing stakes in Russian energy and other companies, such as Gazprom, to secure its imports, despite its pledge to maintain normal trade relations with Russia. While its ties with Russia remain 'rock solid,' it urges 'maximum restraint' to avoid a large-scale humanitarian disaster.

China in world reportage

Tensions are once again running high between China and the US, with the former accusing the latter of going to 'great lengths' to engage in constant competition between the two countries.

According to the South China Morning Post, US President Joe Biden urged Congress to send to his desk a legislation intended to strengthen its competitiveness against China. Beijing, also added, that Washington's repeated interference in China's internal matters will only undermine the relations between the two countries, and consequently, such immature moves will only lead to the disruption of international peace and stability. Additionally, China has also blamed the United States for instigating the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Beijing reiterated that Washington had failed to consider Moscow's 'legitimate' security concerns of NATO's continuous eastward expansion. At his press conference on Monday, Chinese FM Wang Yi accused an unspecified 'major power' of still having a 'Cold War mentality' and seeking to maintain its position as a hegemon. And made it clear that China opposes any form of bullying by major powers, and is committed to pushing international governance to achieve greater equality.

India, Australia virtual summit later this month

(Staff Reporter) India and Australia will hold a virtual summit later this month led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian PM Scott Morrison. It is expected that a big announcement will be made during the meeting.

The last such virtual summit between the two leaders took place in June 2020. At that time, amid the covid crisis, it was the first such virtual summit PM Modi had with any foreign leader.

One of the key focus areas during the summit will be the interim trade agreement. India's trade minister Piyush Goyal and his Australian counterpart Dan Tehan had met in Delhi last month and announced that the interim trade pact will be concluded in 30 days' time and will cover areas of interest for both countries. Both countries have decided to conclude a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement in 12-18 months' time.

In 2018-19, the trade between the two countries was around US\$ 21 billion.

Australia's cumulative investment in India is about \$10.74 billion whereas

which includes India, Australia, US, and Japan, and an aggressive China in the Indo Pacific.



India's total investment in Australia is \$10.45 billion.

It is part of a series of trade pacts India has been signing. Just last month India and UAE signed FTA during the India-UAE virtual summit. Canadian trade minister had visited India last week as both sides announced the re-launch of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations.

The India, Australia summit comes in the backdrop of fast-paced geopolitical changes with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, firming up of Quad grouping

of Fumio to India in his capacity as the Prime Minister.

While this is the second virtual summit, both leaders have met 4 times in per pandemic times. First on the sidelines of East Asia Summit (EAS) in Singapore in November of 2018, then on the sidelines of G20 in Osaka in June 2019, on the margins of G7 Summit in Biarritz in August 2019, and on the margins of EAS in Bangkok in November 2019. Domestically the summit comes just a few months before Australia's federal elections. The elections are scheduled for the first half of 2022.

Both PM Modi, and Australian PM were part of a virtual Quad meet that took place earlier this month at the request of the Americans. The India, Australia summit will happen a few days after Japanese PM Fumio Kishida visits India on March 19. This will be the maiden visit

COVID-19: India to start vaccinating children aged 12 to 14 years from March 16, boosters for all above 60

(Staff Reporter) India will start administering coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccinations for children aged 12 to 14 years from March 16, the government decided after deliberations with scientific bodies on Monday.

The announcement by the health ministry is vital as schools reopen across the country with standard restrictions amid a significant fall in Covid cases. In a statement, the health ministry said, "Union Government after due deliberations with scientific bodies has decided to start COVID19 vaccination for 12-13 yr and 13-14 yr age groups (those born in 2008, 2009 and 2010. i.e those who are already above 12 years of age) of the population from



16th March 2022."

The ministry also added that it has been decided to remove the condition of co-morbidity for people above 60 years to receive a booster shot. India's Health

Minister Mansukh Mandaviya took to his official Twitter account and announced it in Hindi. His comments can be loosely translated in English as: "If the children are safe then the

country is safe! I am happy to inform you that the COVID-19 vaccination of children in the age group of 12 to 13 and 13 to 14 is starting from March 16. Also, everyone aged 60+ will now be

able to get precaution doses."

So far, India has been vaccinating children aged 15 and above and according to government figures, more than 90 million children aged between 15 and 17 have been inoculated. India's third wave of COVID-19 cases driven by the Omicron variant has receded, with the country reporting 2,503 infections on Monday (March 14) compared to more than 300,000 in late January.

As per the health ministry, children in the age group of 12 to 14 years would be inoculated using vaccine maker Biological E. Ltd's Corbevax, which received an emergency use approval in February for 12- to 18-year-olds.

Mother Teresa's former secretary to lead saint's Indian order



Missionaries of Charity since the 1997 death of the revered nun and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who dedicated her life to helping the poor in Kolkata. Members of the religious order from 110 countries gathered in the megacity to elect their new leader during a weekend prayer retreat, spokeswoman Sunita Kumar told AFP. The new superior general of the charity "has been with the organisation for a long time and was Mother Teresa's secretary for years," Kumar said.

Her predecessor, Sister Prema, had served in the role

since 2009 and had recently asked to stand down on account of poor health. Sister Prema's departure comes after the Indian government threatened to cut off foreign funding to the charity on Christmas Day last year, before backpedalling two weeks later. India's home ministry said then that the Missionaries of Charity was ineligible to receive overseas donations. But critics at the time described the move as further evidence of harassment of Christians under the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It came

soon after police in Gujarat, Modi's home state, began investigating the charity for alleged "forceful conversion" of Hindus to Christianity -- a regular accusation by hardline members of India's majority religion. Activists say that religious minorities in India have faced increased levels of discrimination and violence since Modi's government took office in 2014. The government has also increased pressure on non-governmental organisations receiving foreign funding, including rights groups.

(Staff Reporter) Mother Teresa's former secretary has been named the new head of the Indian charity founded by the Catholic saint, officials said Monday, months after the organisation's funding came under government scrutiny. Sister Joseph Michael is the third person to helm the

Paytm shares slump 13 per cent after RBI's restrictions on payments bank

(Staff Reporter) Share price of Paytm's parent company, One 97 Communications Ltd, slumped by around 13 per cent to hit an all-time low on Monday after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) barred Paytm Payments Bank from onboarding new customers. At the BSE, One 97 Communications Ltd share closed 12.84 per cent down at Rs 675.35. The scrip slipped to a low of Rs 662.25 in the intra-day. This is the lowest ever price of One 97 Communications Ltd. The share price of One 97 Communications Ltd tumbled after the RBI imposed restrictions on

Paytm Payments Bank and asked it to appoint an IT audit firm to conduct a comprehensive system audit of its IT system." Reserve Bank of India has today, in the exercise of its powers, inter alia, under section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, directed Paytm Payments Bank Ltd to stop, with immediate effect, onboarding of new customers," the RBI had said on Friday. "The bank has also



been directed to appoint an IT audit firm to conduct a comprehensive System Audit of its IT system. Onboarding of new customers by Paytm Payments Bank Ltd will be subject to specific permission to be granted by RBI after reviewing report of the IT auditors," RBI said. In its reply to the RBI's action, One 97 Communications Ltd said, "The bank (Paytm Payments Bank) is taking immediate steps to comply with RBI directions, including the appointment of

a reputed external auditor to conduct a comprehensive System Audit of its IT systems. PPBL remains committed to working with the regulator to address their concerns as quickly as possible." "The Company has been informed that this does not impact any existing customers of PPBL, who can continue to use all banking and payment services without interruption. All existing users of Paytm UPI, Paytm Wallet, Paytm FASTag, and bank accounts can continue to use these instruments, including debit cards and net banking, for payments," Paytm's parent firm said.

Congress councillor killed for refusing to join TMC, claims Adhir Chowdhury

Congress leader Adhir Chowdhury alleged that the party councillor Tapan Kandu was murdered by the goons of the Trinamool Congress.



murdered as he did not give in to their demand. Congress leader in Lok Sabha and state president of the party, Adhir Chowdhury, who paid a visit to Kandu's family in Purulia's Jhalda on Monday afternoon, alleged that Kandu was murdered by the goons of the TMC, and the local police.

"The Jhalda municipality saw a hung house after polls and Kandu and his wife were asking for help from Independent candidates. Was that a mistake? His wife has said that

the TMC, through the police, was putting pressure on them to join the TMC. The local IC had been threatening them to joining the TMC for several months. And when he (IC) could not manage that, Kandu was murdered," Chowdhury said after meeting the deceased's wife. Describing Kandu as a "martyr", he said that his dedication to the party would be remembered by the future generations. Chowdhury, during the day, led a rally in the area in protest, with some of Kandu's followers seen pelting the Jhalda

police station building with stones. Senior TMC leader and state urban development minister Firhad Hakim, however, rubbished the allegations and said that Kandu's family members were "made to say those things". "These are baseless allegations. When such mishaps happen in a family, aggrieved members listen to people and make claims without going into the root of the matter. Law requires proof and the police will collect that," Hakim said.

(Staff Reporter) The Congress had been mounting "pressure" on Monday alleged that the on its councillor Tapan Kandu to Inspector-in-charge (IC) of switch sides and join the state's Jhalda and local TMC leaders ruling camp, and the leader was

NIA files charge sheet against 2 Hizb-ut-Tahrir operatives over social media posts propagating ISIS ideology

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a supplementary charge sheet against two members of the extremist Islamic outfit Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT).

(Staff Reporter) The NIA on Monday filed a supplementary charge sheet against two members of the extremist Islamic outfit Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), which is affiliated to ISIS, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) official said. They were engaged in radicalising and recruiting gullible youth to establish an Islamic State / Caliphate or Khilafah and enforce a "so-called" draft Constitution written by the radical Islamic preacher, Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, who is the founder of HuT, the official said. Bahrudeen and Baqavi were organising meetings to recruit members and also conducting secret classes to indoctrinate, radicalise and motivate youth to work towards establishment of Islamic State / Khilafah by overthrowing the Government of India, the official said. They had also conspired to establish new cells in various districts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, etc. in order to spread the ideology of HuT, the NIA official said, adding that further investigation in the case continues.

The case registered in Madurai pertains to Mohammed Iqbal using his Facebook account "Thoonga Vizhigal Rendu is in Kazimar Street" to upload posts that denigrated a particular community and fomented communal disharmony among different religions in a manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order. Earlier, a charge sheet was filed against the two accused in May last year. The



Tata sons chief N Chandrasekaran appointed as Air India chairman

(Staff Reporter) Tata Sons Chairman N. Chandrasekaran has been appointed as Air India Chairman, a group spokesperson said. The development comes as the Tata Group scouts for a new Air India CEO-MD. Earlier this month, ex-Turkish Airlines head Mehmet Ilker Ayci, who was named as the new Air India CEO-MD, declined the position. No reason was given for Ayci's decision. Last month, the Tata Group-led Air India announced the appointment of Ayci as the new Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of the airline. At that time,

Ayci while accepting the position said he is "delighted and honoured to accept the privilege of leading an iconic airline and to join the Tata Group". He was expected to take the charge on or before April 1. Ayci, 51, until recently was the Chairman of Turkish Airlines and was also on its Board of Directors prior to that. Recently, the Tata Group bought the debt ridden state-owned Air India from the Central government by placing a bid of over Rs 18,000 crore at an auction and on January 27, it took over the full control of the airlines.

Kerala govt to hand over Thiruvallom custodial death case to CBI

The Kerala government on Monday decided to hand over the probe into the death of a 40-year-old man while in the custody of Thiruvallam police to the CBI



(Staff Reporter) Tata Sons Chairman N. Chandrasekaran has been appointed as Air India Chairman, a group spokesperson said. The development comes as the Tata Group scouts for a new Air India CEO-MD. Earlier this month, ex-Turkish Airlines head Mehmet Ilker Ayçi, who was named as the new Air India CEO-MD, declined the position. No reason was given for Ayçi's decision. Last month, the Tata Group-led Air India announced the appointment of Ayçi as the new Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of the airline. At that time,

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UP: Gangster Act imposed on BSP candidate from Cantt Seat-Mohammad Safi

Eight people, including Mohammad Safi, a BSP candidate from UP's Cantt assembly constituency was booked under the Gangster Act on Monday

(Staff Reporter) Uttar Pradesh accused already have other police on Monday imposed the cases registered against Gangster Act

on eight people, including Mohammad Safi, a candidate of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) from Cantt assembly constituency. The



police force who went to raid the premises of the accused were also attacked. Chakeri police have registered a case under the Gangster Act against eight people.

Chakeri police filed an FIR including sections of the Gangster Act, for attacking the police team that went to raid the house at Jajmau in Kanpur and other crimes. The

them in other sections including assault, attempt to murder. It is alleged that they formed a gang led by Mohammad Arif Khan alias Chiraundha. The accused indulged in gambling, betting on cricket in the area. A case under the Gangster Act has been registered against all the accused. Their property can also be attached.

Govt promises to farmers unfulfilled, SKM to hold nationwide protest on Mar 21

(Staff Reporter) The Samyukta Kisan Morcha will hold a nationwide protest on March 21 to protest against the Centre for not fulfilling its promises, including setting up of a panel on MSP and withdrawal of cases against farmers

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) will hold a nationwide protest on March 21 to protest against the Centre for not fulfilling its promises, including setting up of a panel on MSP and withdrawal of cases against farmers, its functionaries said on Monday. It was decided after a day-long closed door meeting was held at the Gandhi Peace Foundation at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg here.

SKM leaders and members reviewed the progress made so far by the Centre on the promises made to farmers, including setting up a panel on MSP. "There has been no progress in fulfilling the promises made by the Centre to farmers on the issue of

forming a panel on MSP to make legislation on it, withdrawal of cases against farmers and expulsion of Union minister Ajay Mishra Teni from the Cabinet. So the SKM has decided to hold a nationwide protest at district and block level on March 21 against the central government for non fulfilling promises," senior SKM member Abhimanyu Kohar told PTI. The SKM, an umbrella body of 40 farm unions, had spearheaded a year-long agitation against the Centre's three farm laws.

It had suspended the stir on December 9 last year after the government revoked the contentious laws and agreed to consider its six other demands, including withdrawal of cases registered against farmers during the agitation, a legal guarantee on MSP and compensation for kin of farmers who died during the protest. Later in a

statement, the SKM said farmers will observe 'MSP guarantee week' from April 11 to 17 under its next phase of nationwide campaign. The non-implementation of the assurances given



by the government to the farmers' movement, even after three months, exposes its anti-farmer intentions, the statement said. "It was unanimously decided that between April 11 and 17, a nationwide campaign would be launched by observing MSP Legal Guarantee Week. During this week, all the constituent organizations associated

with the SKM will organize demonstrations and seminars, demanding legal guarantee of MSP as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission," the statement said.

The Morcha reviewed the written assurances given by the government to the Samyukta Kisan Morcha on December 9 and found that even after three months the government had not acted upon its key assurances, it said. "There is no trace of the assurance of forming a committee on MSP. Except Haryana, the police cases registered against the farmers during the agitation in other states have not been withdrawn. Delhi Police has spoken of partial withdrawal of some cases but there is no concrete information about that as well. "The SKM has decided to organize a nationwide protest on March 21, regarding the role of the government in the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, and the betrayal of the assurances given to the farmers' movement," the SKM statement said.

Mundra Port drug haul: Accused had links with Pak-based terror groups, says NIA

The National Investigation Agency has filed a charge sheet against 16 people in connection with the seizure of nearly 3,000 kg of heroin from Gujarat's Mundra Port

(Staff Reporter) The National Investigation Agency filed a chargesheet against 16 drug traffickers under the Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, in connection with the seizure of nearly 3,000 kg of drugs from Gujarat's Mundra Port last year. The charge sheet was submitted before an NIA Special Court in Ahmedabad. Among those named in the chargesheet, 10 have been arrested while six are missing.

The consignment that arrived at the

port in September, 2021 was intercepted by the authorities. Consignments that came in earlier were received and stored in a warehouse in Delhi for distribution in Delhi and Punjab, officials have said.

Of the six missing accused, five are Afghan nationals and one is an Iranian. Of the ten arrested, six are from Afghanistan while three are from Tamil Nadu and one from Uttar Pradesh, the NIA said in a statement. The case relates to the seizure of 2988.21 kg of heroin imported to the Mundra Port in Gujarat

through Bandar Abbas Port in Iran, the NIA said. "The drugs were found concealed in an import consignment of 'Semi-processed Talc stones' originating from Afghanistan," it said. The anti-terror agency has also established links between the accused Mohammad Hasan Hussain Dad and Mohammad Hasan Dad and other co-conspirators with proscribed terror organisations based in Pakistan, the agency said in the statement. "The proceeds of drug trafficking were channelled back to

foreign entities through hawala channels at the behest of Pak-based terror outfits for use in anti-India activities," it further read. The investigating agency has found that the smuggling of narcotics into India was carried out earlier as well by the same set of people. According to Directorate of Revenue Intelligence's Delhi zonal unit, over 16 kg of heroin was seized from a warehouse in Delhi earlier last year along with over 20 kg of the drug seized from Punjab.

No plans to make Indian music mandatory in planes, at airports: Minister VK Singh

The Minister of State for Civil Aviation on Monday said that the Centre is not planning to make it compulsory for all the airlines and airports to play Indian music in their flights and terminals



noted. India has a rich diversity of traditional music, it noted. "Owing to India's vastness and diversity, Indian music encompasses numerous genres in multiple varieties and forms, which include classical music, folk, light vocal, instrumental music, etc," it mentioned.

India has a history spanning several millennia and developed over several geo-locations spanning the sub-continent, it said. Music in India began as an integral part of the socio-

religious life, it noted. The ministry said it is in receipt of a request from ICCR to play Indian music on the aircraft being operated in India and also at airports. "It is, therefore, requested to kindly consider playing Indian music in the aircraft being operated in India and at airports following the regulatory requisites," the ministry stated. Scindia had on December 23 visited the headquarters of the ICCR here and met its president Vinay Sahasrabudde. The ICCR,

which works under the Ministry of External Affairs, had said on Twitter that various suggestions were made during the meeting, "including promotion of Indian music on flights operated by Indian air companies". Eminent artists and musicians, including Malini Awasthi, Anu Malik, Kaushal S Inamdar, Shounak Abhisheki, Manjusha Patil K, Sanjeev Abhyankar, Rita Ganguly and Wasifuddin Dagar were also present during the meeting, it added.

(SAI Bureau) The Centre is not planning to make it mandatory for airlines and airports to play Indian music on their flights and terminal premises, Minister of State for Civil Aviation V K Singh said on Monday.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) on December 27 asked all airlines and airports to consider playing Indian music in their flights and terminals.

The Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) had on December 23 requested Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia to promote Indian music on flights operated by Indian carriers. During the current Parliament session, when Congress Rajya Sabha MP Ambika Soni asked "whether the government proposes to

make it mandatory for Indian airlines and airports to play Indian classical or light vocal and instrumental music", Singh replied in the negative in his written reply.

On December 27, the MoCA wrote a letter to all airlines and airports stating that music played by most of the airlines across the globe was quintessential of the country to which the airline belongs, for example, Jazz on an American airline or Mozart on an Austrian airline and Arab music on an airline from the Middle East. "But, Indian Airlines seldom play Indian music on the flight, whereas our music has a rich heritage and culture and it is one of the many things every Indian has a reason for truly proud of," the ministry

Advocate Anmol Rattan Sidhu likely to be new Punjab AG
Senior advocate Anmol Rattan Sidhu is likely to be the new Advocate General of Punjab

(SAI Bureau) According to sources, senior advocate Anmol Rattan Sidhu is tipped to be the new Advocate General of Punjab. Advocate Sidhu has remained the president of the Punjab and Haryana high court bar association for eight terms and will reportedly be the AG, providing legal advice to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government



in the state. The post of Punjab AG fell vacant after Deepinder Singh Patwalia resigned following the Punjab assembly poll results. The AAP swept the polls, winning 92 seats in the 117-member Punjab assembly. AAP's Bhagwant Mann is set to take oath as the chief minister on March 16 in Bhagat Singh's native village.

Maharashtra govt appointed men with links to Dawood Ibrahim to the Waqf Board, claims Devendra Fadnavis

The Maharashtra opposition leader on Monday accused the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government of appointing people with links to fugitive gangster and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim to the state's Waqf Board

(SAI Bureau) Maharashtra opposition leader Devendra Fadnavis on Monday accused the MVA government of appointing people with links to fugitive gangster and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim on the state's Waqf Board, a charge rejected by ruling coalition partner NCP, which alleged that an office-bearer mentioned by him was named to the board when the BJP was in power. Speaking in the Assembly, Fadnavis said a pen drive he had submitted contained a conversation between Waqf Board members Mohammad Arshad Khan and Mudasir Lambe.

During the conversation, Lambe claimed his father-in-law was an associate of Ibrahim, while Khan said his uncle was part of the underworld, Fadnavis told the House.

State home minister Dilip Walse Patil told the Lower House that Lambe was not appointed by MVA on the Waqf

Board. "He is an elected member as of August 30, 2019. We will see how action can be taken against him," he added. Fadnavis alleged that Khan is in jail, while Lambe is outside despite facing rape charges.

The daughter of Cabinet Minister Nawab Malik, who handles the Waqf department and who is currently in jail, repudiated Fadnavis's allegation. Sana Malik-Shaikh countered Fadnavis, saying it was the previous government in the state led by him (2014-19) that appointed Lambe, whom the BJP leader accused of having links with Ibrahim, to the Board. Sana Malik-Shaikh, also the Maharashtra unit vice-president of Rashtravadi Yuvati Congress, a wing of the NCP, shared Lambe's picture with Fadnavis on Twitter as she hit back at the former chief minister.

Latching onto her claim, Maharashtra Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant demanded an investigation into

"the BJP's connection with so-called Dr Lambe" and urged Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil to take note of the new findings. Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik, a senior NCP leader, is at present in judicial custody in connection with an alleged money-laundering probe linked to the activities of Ibrahim.

"Half Truth is Full Lie!! Dr. Lambe was appointed a Waqf Board member by Fadnavis/BJP govt on 13 Sept 2019. Maha Vikas Aghadi govt was established in November 2019. My father got Minority/Waqf Dept in the first week of Jan 2020. @Dev_Fadnavis with D-Gang Relative & a Rape Accused," Sana Malik-Shaikh tweeted.

Subsequently, Sawant demanded the home minister take note of the "new findings". "In light of the new facts cited by @sanamalikshaikh and serious allegations by LOP @Dev_Fadnavis ji an investigation wrt connection of bjp with so-called Dr. Lambe needs to be done. I

urge @Dwalsepatil ji who has just given clarification on this to take note of the new findings," Sawant tweeted.

The Waqf Board is a statutory body that looks after the maintenance and use of Islamic buildings, institutions and lands. The NCP is a key constituent of the Shiv Sena-led MVA government. As per officials, Lambe is out on anticipatory bail in a rape case while Khan is lodged in the Thane Jail after being held along with four others in January this year in an Arms Act case as well as a diesel theft case being probed by Dhaighar police. Lambe was held in January last year after Khan's ex-wife accused him of rape, they said. Speaking to PTI, Khan's ex-wife claimed that his (Khan's) conversation about having links with Dawood Ibrahim were just vain boasts, adding that he spoke this way after Lambe started dropping Underworld-related names. Lambe was unavailable for comment despite repeated attempts.

Eyes on Gujarat polls, Arvind Kejriwal, Bhagwant Mann to hold rally in Ahmedabad in April

With an eye on Gujarat Assembly polls, AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann are set to hold a rally in the state next month

(SAI Bureau) After sweeping the recently concluded Punjab polls, the Aam Aadmi Party has now sets its eye on Gujarat polls. Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party convenor Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM-designate Bhagwant Mann are set to hold a rally in the state in the first week of April. Meanwhile, AAP's Gujarat in-charge Gulab Singh claimed that the

Congress has no strategy or leadership left and, in Gujarat, the fight will be between the AAP and the BJP.

Hitting out at the BJP, Gulab Singh Yadav said, "Seeing the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah are on a tour of Gujarat, it seems that perhaps the Gujarat elections should be conducted 6 months ahead of time." He further

alleged that the BJP is worried that if Arvind Kejriwal gets six months to prepare, then the Punjab situation might happen in Gujarat.

The AAP leader added that just like in Punjab, the party will declare the CM face for the polls. "There are many Bhagwant Mann in the Gujarat team," Gulab Singh Yadav said. He, however, said that there is no clarity

on who will be the AAP CM face for Gujarat CM polls yet. Talking about the party's agenda for the state, Gulab Singh Yadav said, "Aam Aadmi Party will give priority to the issues of education and unemployment, along with free electricity and free water on the lines of the Delhi and Punjab model in the Gujarat elections."

J&K Delimitation Commission makes its proposals public; invites suggestions till March 21

The draft report of the Delimitation Commission for the union territory was placed in the public domain on Monday for suggestions

(SAI Bureau) The draft report of the Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir, which has agreed to restore two assembly seats but ignored objections on other issues from political parties, was placed in the public domain on Monday for suggestions till March 21, following which the panel will visit the union territory for a public hearing. The report published in the gazettes of India appeared in local newspapers on Monday and showed that Habba Kadal seat in Kashmir division and Suchetgarh seat in Jammu province had been restored.

The BJP's Jammu and Kashmir unit

had objected to the first draft report, presented to Associate members in December, that had proposed scrapping the seats.

The panel's report has come for sharp criticism, especially from the valley-based political parties including those who are friendly to the BJP, after it had recommended an increase of six seats in Jammu province and one in Kashmir besides annexing Rajouri and Poonch areas in Jammu province with South Kashmir's Anantnag parliamentary seat.

Though the dissent report from associate members of the BJP does not

mention this, it may be mentioned here that all Suchetgarh office bearers including council members had resigned en masse after the report was leaked. They were assured by party leaders that it would be taken up by the panel. Similarly, there was disquiet about the proposed merging of Habba Kadal seat in Srinagar district with three different assembly seats. This seat has a considerable number of Kashmiri Pandit voters, who had migrated to Jammu and other areas. The same has been restored in the draft proposal put in the public domain by the Commission. The commission published

the proposal, maintaining the number of Lok Sabha constituencies at five but increasing the assembly seats from the present 83 to 90 (adding six in Jammu and one in Kashmir).

The detailed proposal, published in leading newspapers on Monday, also carried two dissenting notes signed by four of the five associate members - three National Conference Lok Sabha MPs (Farooq Abdullah, Hasnain Masoodi and Mohammad Akbar Lone) and BJP MP Jugal Kishore. Union Minister Jitendra Singh is the fifth associate member of the commission.

Chinese economic decline: Bane or Boon for India?

By Susmita Ghosh

The Chinese economy is facing a slump in recent years, after a decade of brisk growth. The impact of economic slowdown will have a negative impact on the country itself. There is a chance as well for the neighbouring countries that share a border, be it land or maritime

boundary with

China, to face

several

consequences

from this

occurrence.

China's

economy is in

a considerably

weaker

position than

what Beijing is

likely to admit

and there are enough grounds behind the present scenario. The Chinese in-house numbers that are presented to the world, is not very trustworthy, as it keeps changing to fit the state narrative. However, an overall analysis of the general Chinese financial trend ensures that the country is undergoing an economic meltdown.

Among the causes that led to an economic downtrend in China, the most prominent one, is, of course, the Covid-19 factor. China was one of the early outbreak countries for the recent worldwide Coronavirus pandemic. Until the introduction of the vaccine, the lockdown protocol was the only way of survival for the population. However, it crippled the dynamic sector of the economy. With export, travel and tourism industries affected, the loss touched the billion-benchmark over just a period of months.

Followed by the pandemic, the other aspect to bring the Chinese economy to a standstill, was the energy supply shortage scenario. There were various factors, like restrictions on the import of Australian coal, severe weather conditions, alongside the Chinese Government's plan to reduce carbon emission. Consequently, a massive amount of factories had to shut down, which hurt nationwide production.

Another factor that is still impacting the Chinese economy is the property market crisis. The sales in their top 100 company dropped, with more than 80 percent failing to reach their annual sales target. The property giant Evergrande missed its debt deadline, whose liabilities

exceed US\$300 billion. The company was declared in default, which was a massive shock to the national and foreign investors. Even after a year, no proper solution is yet to be found in the property industry. Increasing credit stress with a sharp decline in the sales figures results in fighting for its survival.

The Chinese economic meltdown can be a massive opportunity for India. The neighbouring democracy can use its own growth momentum to bridge the gap with the Chinese economy. India can take the place of China as a top tech-producing country in the world

gap with the Chinese economy. India can take the place of China as a top tech-producing country in the world. With a similar standard of rich human resources, fulfilling the target is quite possible.

However, there are a set of problems for India too, as are quite dependent on the Chinese export. From paper to electronics, fertilizer to lifesaving drug components, the list is endless. If the chain is stopped, or the price is increased due to the Chinese economic crisis, the whole of India may suffer as an aftershock.

There is another aspect also, of which India and all the other countries sharing a border with China should stay aware of. Expansion during the time of an internal crisis is an old Chinese trick. It is often used to turn the tide of public opinion. The Chinese state has used this card multiple times to rally the mass, who, with the spirit of jingoism, turn a blind eye to the economic meltdown. War is a tool as well that can be branded as a necessary evil. It will justify a slump, even though it is the result of a series of poor administrative decisions that led to the economic collapse. Like the Russian aggression in Ukraine, there is a high probability of the Chinese military movement to the Indian borders or towards Tibet and Hong Kong.

India and all the other Chinese neighboring countries should opt for a cautious approach at this time while putting appropriate emphasis on border security. It is a moment of opportunity, which, if properly utilized, can be used for own economic growth. However, it requires proper planning across the nation to achieve that objective.

The Chinese economic meltdown can be a massive opportunity for India. The neighbouring democracy can use its own growth momentum to bridge the

What about anti-Hindu, anti-Sikh phobias, asks India at UN meet on Islamophobia

The UN General Assembly on Tuesday adopted a Pakistan-sponsored resolution to declare March 15 as International Day to Combat Islamophobia, with India expressing concern at the elevation of the phobia against one religion to such a level while excluding others. The resolution, introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), was adopted by consensus. It was backed by 57 members of OIC and eight other countries, including China and Russia.

Explaining India's position on the resolution, TS Tirumurti, the country's permanent representative to the UN, expressed deep concern at the rise in instances of discrimination, intolerance and violence against members of many religious communities in different parts of the world. "Let me also state that we condemn all acts motivated by anti-Semitism, Christianophobia or Islamophobia. However, such phobias are not restricted to Abrahamic religions only," he said.

Tirumurti noted that Hinduism has more than 1.2 billion followers, Buddhism more than 535 million and Sikhism more than 30 million, and said the time had come to acknowledge the "prevalence of religiophobia, rather than single out just one". He added, "It is in this context that we are concerned about elevating the phobia against one religion to the level of an international day, to the exclusion of all the others. Celebration of a religion is one thing but to commemorate the combating of hatred against one religion is quite another." Tirumurti also argued the resolution "may well end up downplaying the seriousness of phobias against all other religions".

While explaining India's position, Tirumurti cited what he contended were religion phobias that have affected the followers of non-Abrahamic religions, including "anti-Hindu, anti-Buddhist and anti-Sikh phobias". "These contemporary forms of

religiophobia can be witnessed in the increase in attacks on religious places of worship like gurudwaras, monasteries, temples etc or in spreading of hatred and disinformation against non-Abrahamic religions in many countries," he said.

He also cited the destruction of the Bamyān Buddhas in Afghanistan, "violation of gurudwara premises, massacre of Sikh pilgrims in gurudwara, attack on temples, glorification of breaking of idols in temples" and said these incidents "contribute to the rise of contemporary forms of religiophobia against non-Abrahamic religions".

Tirumurti said India, as a pluralistic and democratic country that is home to almost all world religions, has always welcomed "those persecuted around the world for their faith or belief".

He said, "They have always found in India a safe haven shorn of persecution or discrimination. This is true whether they were Zoroastrians or Buddhists or Jews or people of any other faith. Therefore, it is with deep concern that we have viewed the growing manifestation of intolerance, discrimination or violence against followers of religions, including rise in sectarian violence, in some countries."

Tirumurti said India is proud that pluralism is at "the core of our existence and we firmly believe in equal protection and promotion of all religions and faith". In this context, he said, it was unfortunate that the word "pluralism" finds no mention in the resolution and its sponsors did not take on board India's amendments to include the word in the text. India hopes the resolution does not set a precedent which will divide the UN into "religious camps", and it is important for the world body to remain above "religious matters which may seek to divide us rather than bring us together", he said. The representatives of France and the European Union also expressed reservations that the resolution singled out only Islam while religious intolerance is prevalent across the world.



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Why the West should focus on China

Whatever the outcome of the Ukraine conflict, it heralds a transformation of the current world order

The Russian offensive on Ukraine on the night of February 23-24 shocked the world. It was unexpected, surprising and avoidable. Vladimir Putin's decision to go on the offensive, whatever the rationale, has only one end — a regime change. The longer the war lasts, the greater the number of casualties and the more severe the world's response towards Russia. This situation could have been circumvented by a more rational approach towards Russia's security concerns. A one-liner from the US, saying that NATO's expansion will address Russian security interests will provide the impetus to end the current conflict.

The clouds of war were gathering for over a month, as there was concern over the buildup of Russian military forces close to the borders with Ukraine, followed up by military exercises with Belarus. The trigger for the conflict has been



the rise of anti-Russia/Putin and pro-Europe lobby in Ukraine, led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and with the tacit support of the US and the West.

The situation became deeply polarised after battle lines were drawn in 2015, with Ukraine's breakaway Donbas region seeking a merger with Russia, after Crimea's unification with the latter. In addition, the condescending attitude of the US and Europe towards Russian interests was — and continues to be — a major irritant and that negatively impacts Russia and

Putin's self-respect. Russia has, over the years, quite correctly questioned the relevance of NATO — a grouping of the Cold War era — and its expansion eastwards. For instance, NATO included the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries of Georgia and Ukraine, earlier part of the Soviet Union, in its "Partnership for Peace" programme, despite Russian objections.

All this brings to the fore the biggest unanswered question: Why is the US doggedly

pursuing Cold War-era strategies against Russia, when the demon on the block is China? Whatever the outcome of this East-West conflict, it heralds a transformation of the current world order. Geopolitics will never be the same, especially with Germany and Japan announcing militarisation initiatives, polarisation in Europe and the strengthening of the anti-US nexus of China-Russia-Turkey-Iran.

It is too early to draw lessons but a matter of concern is that once again, the attention of the

US and the West has been diverted from China, the main adversary, to a war that should not have taken place. China has been learning lessons from the US's functioning and handling of global challenges, to put it simplistically, to see "what it takes to be a leading world power". This is apparent from China's changing focus towards modernisation and force structuring since 2004, outcomes of the lessons learnt from the US-supported conflicts in both the Gulf Wars, and invasions and conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and the "colour revolutions" of the 1990s. This is reflected in the White Papers issued periodically by China enunciating its military strategy. So, there has been a transition from "winning local wars in conditions of modern technology, particularly high technology" in 1993 to "winning local wars under

(Contd on page 28)

Message from New India in recent election results

It wants new ideas and a government with the right intent to keep the country firmly on the path of growth and development

March 10 proved to be a monumental day in the BJP's journey as a party committed to ushering in a New India where the politics of development overrides the politics of differences of religion, caste and class. The BJP retained power in four states — Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. All the victories bear testimony to the fact that people, especially women, have unwavering faith in the leadership and vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In political contests, it is legitimate for the opposition to fight the incumbent. It is the demand of a healthy, strong, vibrant democracy. But the nature of the fight also defines the health of the opposition. In fighting the BJP, the Congress adopted a campaign of half-truths and complete lies. Whether it was politicising the concerns of some farmers over the farm laws or compromising



the security of a border state, or playing politics over unfortunate rapes in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress stopped short at nothing. In doing so, however, the party lost all its leftover ideological and moral standing in the eyes of the voters. The fact that today the Congress is celebrating that the Aam Aadmi Party, and not the BJP, won

Punjab after receiving probably its worst political drubbing, says something about the state of the Congress. The Congress' malicious campaign against the BJP stands completely rejected by the final voice in any functioning democracy—the voice of the people. That said, it is important to understand the verdict because some are still

trying to downplay the BJP's win calling it a result of polarisation. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP has won a vote share of nearly 41.6 per cent gaining over the 39.67 per cent it received in 2017, emerging as the first party since 1985 to come to power in two consecutive elections. The rise in vote share shows that this is a pro-incumbency vote for the

BJP in India's most populous state. The AAP in Punjab has won about 42 per cent vote share in an election where people overwhelmingly wanted to throw out the Congress. Yet, the BJP is being given far less credit for its feat. The mandate for the BJP in UP shows that 2014 was no fluke. The state has in the 2017 assembly elections, 2019 Lok Sabha polls and again 2022 state elections unequivocally declared that it wants BJP's double-engine governance. Manipur, after the Northeastern state of Assam, has given a pro-incumbency mandate in favour of the BJP. No blockades, bombs and curfews in the state since 2017, showed the people that the BJP was there to keep its promises. Five years of peace and development left no doubts in the minds of the voters of Manipur when they reached the polling booths.

(Contd on page 28)

Ukraine Crisis Could Mark the Beginning of Pushback against American Overreach

How long would the US lecture the world and get away with it? Perhaps not for very long, judging by the straws in the wind. Even the closest of American friends and allies are turning restive at American sanctimony and unilateralism.

"Simply, I do not care ... We don't have the right to lecture you in America ... The same goes the other way," Mohammed Bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, responded when asked whether Biden had misunderstood things about him. Mohammed Bin Salman (MbS) and the crown prince of UAE are in no hurry to take the call of the American President who wants them to pump more oil to prevent a steep rise in petroleum prices, as a result of American sanctions on Russia.

The US has an uncanny ability to jump in and out of one conflict after another, enmeshing both partners and adversaries alike, who are then left to pick up the pieces. Be it Iraq or Afghanistan – remember the US leaders saying that they had not gone in for nation-building? After delivering the hapless Afghani people to the Taliban and turning Nelson's eye towards the



ensuing humanitarian crisis, the democracy.

Biden administration has now trained its guns on Russia. That Ukraine is being wrecked and innocent civilians getting killed is unavoidable collateral damage for the world's oldest

Recently President Biden alluded to the most dreaded eventuality. "... as we provide this support to Ukraine ... we will defend every inch of NATO territory ... If they move once ...

granted, if we respond, it is World War III, but we have a sacred obligation on NATO territory... (but) ... We will not fight the third World War in Ukraine." Be careful world what you wish for, you may just get

it!

SCRIPTING A MANMADE TRAGEDY

But how was this manmade tragedy in Ukraine scripted? President Biden had called Putin a killer, accused him of interfering in American Presidential elections, and staging cyber-attacks. Then came the carrot in the form of a three-hour long meeting last June in Geneva between the American and Russian Presidents, after which the former remarked that there were "genuine prospects of significant improvement in ties".

However, the US continued supplying lethal and non-lethal munitions including Javelin anti-tank missiles to Kyiv. In 2021, security assistance worth \$450 million was made available. The US also stepped up training of the Ukrainian military by deploying some 150 personnel

(Contd on page 29)

Why Australia, Netherlands are taking legal action against Russia over 2014 MH17 crash

Australia and the Netherlands will launch a new legal case against Moscow over its alleged role in the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 that crashed in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region in 2014, when Crimea was annexed by Russian forces. What is their case?

Amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Australia and the Netherlands will launch a new legal case against Moscow over its alleged role in the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 that crashed in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region in 2014, when Crimea was annexed by Russian forces.

All 298 passengers and crew on board were killed when the plane crashed on 17 July 2014, after it was hit by a missile, alleged to be Russian. The plane was flying between Amsterdam and Kuala Lumpur and was over eastern Ukraine when it got hit by a missile. At



the time, a civil war was being fought in the region, between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatist rebels. There were 38 Australian nationals, 196 Dutch nationals, 43 Malaysians on board.

The government of the Netherlands has denied that the legal action is a result of the war between Russia and Ukraine, saying it is a result of consultations between the two countries after Russia withdrew from negotiating further. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison recently said that Russia's

(Contd on page 28)

Everyday Economics: What are WPI and CPI inflation rates?

WPI and CPI are two different baskets of goods and services. The government assigns different weights to different goods and services based on what is relevant for those two types of consumers

Any inflation rate essentially tells us the rate at which prices have been rising in an economy. As such, an inflation rate is expressed as a percentage. If the prices of onions rose from Rs 10 a kg last year to Rs 15 a kg this year, the inflation rate will be 50%. That's because a kg of onion is Rs 5 — that is, 50% — more than the base price (Rs 10) in this example. For every month, inflation rates are calculated both on a year-on-year basis — how prices have changed over the past year — as well as on a month-on-month basis — how prices have changed over the past month.

Inflation rates are calculated for all commodities and commodity groups. So, we have inflation rates for onions as well as for all food items. But, the price

of any commodity, say onions, also varies whether one buys the commodity in the wholesale market or whether one buys in the city mall. Comparing last year's wholesale prices of onions with this year's retail store prices will be misleading. So, the government comes out with two indices — one for mapping inflation in the wholesale market and one for mapping inflation in the retail market. Inflation rates are also calculated for rural and urban markets for better policy analysis.

The two most-often used inflation rates in the country are the year-on-year

The former is called the wholesale inflation rate and the latter is called the retail inflation rate. Both WPI and CPI are price indices. In other words, these are two different baskets of goods and

services. The government assigns different weights to different goods and services based on what is relevant for those two types of consumers.

The two tables below bring out the differences.

The CPI-based inflation data is compiled by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (or MoSPI) and the WPI-based inflation data is put together by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (or DPIIT). Looking at the way the two indices are constructed, it becomes clear how and why the two inflation rates are different.

For instance, the WPI is dominated by the prices of manufactured goods while the CPI is dominated by the prices of food articles. As such, broadly

speaking, if food prices go up sharply, it will bump up the retail inflation rate far more than it would spike the wholesale inflation rate. The reverse will happen when prices of manufactured products (such as TVs and cars) rise sharply.

A key difference that must not be missed is that the WPI does not take into account the change in prices of services — say a haircut or a banking transaction. But CPI does. If services such as transport, education, recreation and amusement, personal care etc. get significantly costlier, then retail inflation will rise but there will be no impact on wholesale price inflation. Since these two inflation rates are calculated based on two very different indices, it is not uncommon to find them at considerable variance with each other.

Why is Mumbai experiencing a heatwave in March?

The Konkan region, including Mumbai, has been experiencing sweltering heat in the recent days, with the maximum temperatures touching the 40 degrees mark. Why is there a heatwave over Konkan in March?

The Konkan region, including Mumbai, has been experiencing sweltering heat in the recent days, with the maximum temperatures touching the 40 degrees mark.

What is a heatwave?

A region or locality is considered to be under the influence of heatwave if the maximum temperature reaches or exceeds 40 degrees Celsius in the plains, or 30 degrees Celsius in hilly regions. Over the coastal regions, the threshold for the maximum temperature is 37 degrees.

When the maximum temperature departure ranges between 4.5 and 6 degrees, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) declares heatwave. For instance, if the normal temperature of a locality should be 40 degrees, and the actual recorded temperature is 45 degrees, the locality is under heatwave.

Likewise, severe heatwave is declared when the recorded maximum temperature of a locality departure from normal is over 6.4 degrees. This apart, if the locality records over 45 degrees and 47 degrees on any given day, then the IMD declares heatwave and severe heatwave, respectively. In India, heatwaves occur from March to

June, occasionally in July. The peak heatwave events have been reported in the month of May. As per the IMD, the most heatwave prone states are Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Vidarbha, and parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and occasionally over Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

So, why is Konkan experiencing heatwave conditions?

The ongoing heatwave in Konkan, including Mumbai, is because it is under the direct influence of the prevailing heatwave in the adjacent Saurashtra-Kutch regions of Gujarat. "The hot and dry winds from northwest India are reaching parts of Konkan. In addition, the slow movement of sea breeze along the Maharashtra coast and the overall clear sky

conditions have together resulted in such hot conditions," said an official from Regional Meteorological Centre, Mumbai.

Is this heat unusual for March?



On Monday, the Santacruz observatory in Mumbai recorded 39.6 degrees. Ratnagiri recorded the decade's hottest day with the day temperature touching 40.2 degrees. But climatologically, this is not unusual as both the minimum and maximum temperatures over Maharashtra gradually begin to rise in March, a month for the seasonal transition, IMD officials said. In particular, Konkan experiences temperatures

above 35 degrees on many days this month. IMD temperature records reveal that Mumbai (Santacruz) recorded over 40 degrees in March during 2021, 2019, 2018, 2015 and 2013, with the hottest March day (41.7 degrees) recorded on March 28, 1956. Ratnagiri has recorded over 38 degrees in March on six instances between 2011 and 2020. The highest maximum temperature recorded here was 40.6 degrees in 1982 and 2011.

What is the forecast?

The IMD has warned that heat wave to severe heat wave conditions will prevail over Kutch – Saurashtra till March 16. As the hot and dry winds continue to blow from these areas of Gujarat over Konkan, especially north Konkan districts including Mumbai, the maximum temperatures will remain around 38 degrees Celsius at least for the next two days. The IMD has issued an 'orange' alert, warning that severe heat wave is likely to prevail over Mumbai, Thane, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Palghar, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts till Tuesday, and a 'yellow' alert over these coastal districts on Wednesday.

Delhi hate speech case: A missed opportunity for justice

Police pleaded that the time was not right to file cases, despite the availability of evidence. Even more disturbing was the court's acceptance of this plea

The Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, D N Patel, retired on March 12. Judges, for better or worse, are known and remembered through their judgments. If today we remember Justice H R Khanna and shall cherish his memory for a long time to come, it is because of his judgment in the ADM Jabalpur case, holding that personal liberty is inalienable even when the country is in a state of Emergency. Justice Patel too had a similar opportunity, through which he could have covered himself in glory. But he allowed it to pass.

The case before Chief Justice Patel pertained to a criminal writ petition filed by social activist Harsh Mander, whereby he sought directions to the Delhi Police to



register FIRs against BJP leaders Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma, Kapil Mishra and Abhay Verma, for allegedly making hate speeches alluding to those protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. These speeches purportedly led to violence in North-East Delhi and reportedly resulted in the death of

53 persons, and caused injuries to several hundred. Before the matter was heard by the Chief Justice's bench, it had come up before a bench presided over by Justice S Muralidhar on February 26, 2020. The speeches were captured on camera, and the videos of the same were played in court.

In one video, Anurag Thakur was seen raising the slogan "Desh ke gaddaron ko", and egging the crowd to complete the same, which responded by saying "Goli maro....ko". The same slogan was allegedly repeated by Abhay Verma, a sitting MLA. In another video, Kapil Mishra, with DCP

North-East Delhi standing by his side, was seen telling the crowd, "I am making one thing clear... we will hold our peace till Trump leaves. After that, if Jaffrabad and Chandbagh are not cleared in three days we will have to hit the streets...". In yet another video, Parvesh Verma, MP, allegedly compared the protestors at Shaheen Bagh with those who were behind turning Kashmiri Pandits out of Kashmir, and also warned that such people could enter their homes, and rape their mothers and daughters.

After watching the videos, the court asked why no FIRs were registered on the basis of the same. In response, the Government of India, represented by no less a person than the

(Contd on page 29)

Monetising surplus land held by state is a good idea, it needs to be done with transparency, sensitivity to public interest

Considering that land monetisation is a complex process, entrusting this work to a separate agency is the right way to go about it

Last week, the Union cabinet approved the creation of a National Land Monetisation Corporation to monetise the surplus land holdings of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and other government agencies. Considering that various arms of the state have considerable land holdings across the country, monetisation of their "surplus, unused and under-used non-core assets in the nature of land and buildings" is a prudent strategy as it will lead to more efficient utilisation of these "under-utilised" assets.

The rationale for creating a land monetisation corporation is multifold. First, a detailed and comprehensive inventory of the state's land holding will not only help it identify the surplus land, and push for monetising it, but will also help create a database for potential investors. After all, properly marked land parcels with geographical identifiers, with their boundaries clearly demarcated, and with the legality of title well established, will provide greater clarity and certainty to private investors. Second, public sector entities hold vast tracts of land



that are either unused and underused land. As per reports, the total vacant land available with Railways is estimated at around 1.25 lakh acres. Similarly, the defence ministry also has considerable land holdings outside of the cantonment boundaries. Thus, collating them under a single entity will lead to a more efficient monetisation drive, and better utilisation of these assets. Third, proceeds from the monetisation of these assets will help generate additional resources, boosting

government coffers. After all, land in and around prime areas can possibly generate substantial returns. Fourth, auctioning off surplus land will increase the supply of land, which may address the issue of the "artificial" scarcity of land that exists in certain areas. This could depress prices and thus have a moderating effect on costs of projects.

Considering that land monetisation is a complex process, entrusting this work to a separate agency is the right way to

go about it. As the government itself has acknowledged, it requires "specialised skills and expertise" in areas such as "market research, legal due diligence, valuation, master planning, investment banking and land management." A separate entity, housed with professionals with specialised skills is better suited for this task. However, the entity will have to grapple with several issues. First, the estimation of surplus land may be a contentious issue. Ministries, departments, and public sector entities may be reluctant to demarcate land parcels as "surplus". Second, the corporation will have to grapple with issues such as the absence of clear titles, ongoing litigation, and muted investor interest. Third, there is also the issue of the encroachment of government land to contend with. But while this monetisation drive should lead to more efficient outcomes, it does raise questions over the management of commons, and whether public purpose can be better looked after by more effective management of public land by the state.

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Bail provisions in UAPA, and the case of Cong ex-councillor Ishrat Jahan

This was the first time a trial court had granted bail in a UAPA case. Earlier, five persons had been granted bail by the Delhi High Court in the larger riots conspiracy case

A Delhi court on Monday (March 14) granted bail to former Congress councillor Ishrat Jahan in an Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) case filed in connection with the 2020 Northeast Delhi riots.

This was the first time a trial court had granted bail in a UAPA case. Earlier, five persons had been granted bail by the Delhi High Court in the larger riots conspiracy case.

Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat granted bail to Ishrat Jahan despite the prosecution arguing that there were limitations contained in Section 43D(5) of the UAPA, a provision which makes grant of bail virtually impossible, as it leaves little room for judicial reasoning.

The UAPA was enacted in 1967, and later strengthened by the Congress government in 2008 and 2012. To deny bail under the UAPA, the court must be satisfied

that a "prima facie" case exists against the accused.

Section 43D(5) reads: "Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code, no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV ("Punishment for terrorist activities") and VI ("Terrorist organisations") of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application for such release:

"Provided that such accused person shall not be released on bail or on his own bond if the Court, on a perusal of the case diary or the report made under section 173 of the Code is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true."

This provision leaves very little room for judicial reasoning, and

makes the grant of bail virtually impossible under UAPA. In the case of Zahoor Ahmed Shah Watali, the Supreme Court in 2019 confirmed that courts must accept the state's case without examining its merits. However, courts have since read this provision differently, emphasising the right to a speedy trial and raising the bar for the state to book an individual under UAPA.

Prosecution's arguments

Special Public Prosecutor Amit Prasad had argued that there were two embargoes on the court while considering Ishrat Jahan's bail application. He argued that the first limitation is Section 437 CrPC which circumscribes the jurisdiction of the court in relation to offences carrying punishment of life imprisonment or death.

Also, the prosecutor argued, the material/evidence collected against the accused must prevail "until it is contradicted or disproved by other evidence and on the face of it shows

the complicity of the accused in the commission of the offence". It was argued that the court was required to come to a finding on the basis of broad probabilities after analysing the entire chargesheet and not conduct a mini trial by dissection of evidence.

Ishrat Jahan's defence

Ishrat Jahan's lawyer, advocate Pradeep Teotia, had argued that Section 43D UAPA "only puts restrictions but is not an absolute bar to the grant of bail". He had argued that there is no cogent material in the chargesheet to disclose the commission of a terrorist act.

Limitations on court

On the limitation posed by Section 437 CrPC, the court referred to the provision that allows a person to be released on bail if "such person is under the age of sixteen years or is a woman or is sick or infirm".

On Section 43D of UAPA, the

court said that bail can be denied if it is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation is prima facie true. In the case of Ishrat Jahan, however, apart from the general conspiracy and applicability of UAPA, the material collected against the accused and her role in the larger conspiracy of the riots has to be looked into. The court noted that the material collected against Ishrat Jahan shows that it was not she who created the idea of a chakka jam, and she was not a member of any WhatsApp group or any organisation involved in this conspiracy. The court held that even if she was connected to the other accused in the larger conspiracy case, "the fact remains that she was neither physically present in Northeast Delhi for riots nor was she part of any group, or in any CCTV footage, or in any conspiratorial meetings..."

Indian-American astronaut Raja Chari to conduct first spacewalk today, upgrade solar panels

Astronaut Raja Chari will conduct his first spacewalk on Tuesday as he goes out of the airlock in the vacuum of space

Indian-American astronaut Raja Chari, who arrived on the Space Station last year will walk out of the safety of the airlock into the vacuum of space to conduct his first spacewalk. He will be joined by Flight Engineers Kayla Barron as they upgrade the International Space Station, whose services have been extended till 2030.

The two astronauts will remain in the vacuum of space for nearly 6.5 hours on Tuesday as they prepare the Space Station for upgrades to the solar panels that power it up. Nasa said that the duo will exit Quest, then translate over to the Starboard-4 truss structure and install modification kits that will ready the space station for its third roll-out solar array.

Both Chari and Barron had been preparing for the spacewalk for over a week and had readied their spacesuits and placed their spacewalk tools inside Quest.

The green signal was given by Nasa after the final procedures review and a conference with specialists on the ground.

Nasa has planned for the installation of six ISS Roll-Out Solar Arrays (iROSA) that will soak up the energy of the Sun to provide electrical power for the numerous research

and science investigations conducted every day. The new panels will give the aging station a much-needed electrical boost, as demand for experiments and space tourists grows. The new panels will increase the station's total available power from 160 kilowatts to a maximum of 215 kilowatts.

While Chari and Barron will be outside the Space Station, astronauts Thomas



Marshburn and Matthias Maurer will help the spacewalkers in and out of their suits and monitor and guide them during the exterior maintenance job. While it is the maiden spacewalk for Chari, it will be the second for Barron. Astronaut Raja Chari was selected as the commander of the

Crew-3 mission to the International Space Station in 2020 and launched to the flying outpost a year later. A colonel in the US Air Force, Chari was selected to be an astronaut in 2017. Chari has accumulated more than 2,500 hours of flight time in his career. He was also selected as a member of the Artemis Team and is eligible for assignment to a future lunar mission.

His father, Srinivas Chari, left for the US from Hyderabad at a young age for an engineering degree.

The spacewalk comes amid an ongoing tension between the US, Europe, and Russia over Ukraine that has sparred into space cooperation with all of them imposing sanctions against each other on the ground. Nasa will conduct the second walk of the month on March 23, where astronauts will conduct repairing and maintenance work on the ISS.

MSME Development Forum :

To connect, deliberate, share information and explore new opportunities under one roof

Since 2014, MSME (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises) Development Forum, a non-profit organization is working for "Making India as World's Manufacturing, Exporting, Sourcing & Investment Hub" & "Transforming job seekers to job creators." **Rajnish Goenka, Chairman of MSME Development Forum** shared his views with **Susmita Ghosh, Managing Editor, The South Asian Insider Weekly** on its values and prospects...



Rajnish Goenka is actively involved in promoting MSMEs & Start-Up Ecosystem in India by working with Centre & State Governments, Bureaucrats, Corporate, PSUs, Banks, Industry Associations and Youth & Budding Entrepreneurs

What is your inspiration every day that motivates you even when you are at the peak?

The biggest motivation today is a collaborated world, as overall situation have

changed. MSME cannot survive without corporates and vice versa. Earlier the circumstances was created by the Government but now to create big projects, we need PSUs and corporates. But to supply them and maintain their supply chain, components and sometimes marketing, MSME sector is very vital. We need to follow THREE Mantras to stay motivated - Be happy, be busy and be healthy. Keep doing your work, pay back to the community without bothering about achievements.

In this Covid-19 pandemic, when people losing their jobs and facing immense financial crunch, what are the ways out to be job creators from job seekers?

According to me we all need to convert 'adversity to opportunity.' Many returned to their villages during the trying times but never returned till today as they are

happy with their agricultural activities, even though the situation is coming back to normal. I used these three phases of Covid period of time to reinvent new things, study and interact with my near and dear ones. We have introduced around 15 Covid items like hand sanitizer, masks and so on. I have also served and fed several needy people, twice a day, looking after the cooking and distribution.

How you anticipate the future growth of Indian MSME sector in the global market?

Today we have proved to be the most friendly and reliable country. Huge opportunities poured in as we have become the alternative of China of late. Hence, according to me, all should extend their businesses to India as there is reasonable facilities provided with global prospect. Lot of foreigners, MNC corporates have already shifted to India. There are several SMEs who want to collaborate with Indian SMEs, more in groups, help feel safe, explore, research, spend money and avail consultancies.

Your message to the future generation of entrepreneurs? How can the new generation be inspired to participate actively in the MSME sector?

India has become 3rd largest unicorn hub. Job creation is 40 lakhs a year but the demand is 2.5 crores, so quite obviously one gets frustrated if not acquire

a job. India's PM is concerned about this problem, hence he is arranging every other alternatives to convert job seekers to job creators. Talent and capacity are available in India incalculably, only need courage and confidence to be a job creator. Being MSME forum, our job is to act as a catalyst between the giver and the taker and spread awareness on different Government schemes. I want to tell the youth - Government being so supportive, world is your market, just avail it.

What are your future and expansion plans in the coming three years, both in India and abroad?

We have launched a new team under Dr. Mamta Binani as the President on March 10, 2022 in Kolkata, West Bengal. I feel credit line without collateral for MSMEs is a top priority. Banks are a more reliable source of credit and can't be left uninformed in the journey

of expansion. The major role played by MSMEs in India's vision of becoming a USD 5 trillion economy, as 6.3 crores such establishments account for 30 per cent of the nominal GDP.

We are the richest entrepreneurial country as we have around 35 percent share in global trade. The Govt made funds of 7.5 lakh crores on package and extended 2 lakh crores credit currency scheme. This has been done for the youth to increase entrepreneurship strength.

We have organized various events, summits, workshops, expos & seminars all over India & abroad too. Presently, we have 12 global chapters including Dubai, London, Sydney, Switzerland, New York, New Jersey and many more in pipeline. Our upcoming Expo is going to be held from Sept 15 - 17, 2022 in Delhi.



'Stealth Omicron' behind China's virus outbreak, says expert

(Staff Reporter) As China grapples with a new virus wave, authorities say the recent outbreak is being driven by the highly contagious "stealth Omicron" or the B.A.2 lineage of the Omicron variant. Zhang Wenhong who is an infectious disease expert with Shanghai's Fudan University said that infection is still in its early stages as Shanghai recorded 41 new coronavirus cases on Monday. Reports claim the B.A.2 sub-variant spreads faster than the original Omicron variant. Wenhong informed that although

the death count may be low but it still puts pressure on medical resources. On Tuesday, the country reported 5,280 new COVID-19 cases with the northeastern Jilin city being the worst hit. Reports said the Jilin accounted for over 3,000 coronavirus cases. The Volkswagen factories in the Jilin was closed amid the outbreak. Authorities in Jilin banned citizens from travelling in and out of the area without notifying local police. In Shanghai, the authorities have undertaken mass testing

and reportedly cordoned off individual apartment buildings. On Monday, residents in Shenzhen spend their first day under lockdown as restrictions spread to other major cities battling the virus. The country reported over 1,000 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours with several cities on lockdown including Shenzhen even as authorities follow China's strict "zero Covid" strategy. The authorities moved to cancel several domestic flights in Beijing and Shanghai. China has witnessed a surge in coronavirus cases

since last September due to the Delta variant as it locked down several towns, however, after South African authorities declared the presence of Omicron variant in November last year, the new variant has led to increased infection cases in the country. China had reported the first case of the virus to the World Health Organisation on December 31, 2019, after it was detected in Wuhan since then over 6 million people have died due to the virus even as the WHO warned the figure could be two or three times higher.

Bangladesh to ban 'immoral character' evidence in rape cases

(Staff Reporter) Bangladesh will ban questions probing the "immoral character" of rape victims in criminal cases, authorities said Tuesday, after a long campaign by rights groups against humiliating interrogations of traumatised survivors. Experts say the country's Evidence Act, a 19th-century relic of the British colonial era, has been routinely used to discredit the testimony of victims during court cross-examinations and police investigations. Women activists have

spent more than a decade demanding the law be amended and last year a coalition of rights groups petitioned Bangladesh's top court for its repeal. Justice Minister Anisul Huq told AFP that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's cabinet resolved to remove the character evidence provisions from the law.

He said the law currently allows those accused of rape to "ask questions as to the immoral character of the victim" but this would be banned, with parliament expected to formalise the decision by

June. "This is another step towards empowerment of women," he said. Prominent activist Nina Goswami of the local Ain o Salish Kendra rights group hailed the move as a "remarkable achievement".

She said character evidence had hindered justice for decades, with many survivors deciding not to seek charges against their attackers out of fear of social humiliation. "This will now stop," she said. Last year the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) said character

evidence had been used to cast doubt on victim testimony, making it difficult to secure guilty verdicts. Rights groups have said the number of rapes has increased alarmingly in recent years, blaming legal loopholes and a culture of impunity for violence against women. National anger over the issue has boiled over into sustained public protests, as in 2020 when members of the student wing of Hasina's party were arrested and charged in a gang-rape case that outraged the public.

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With China trying to bail out Russia, challenges and opportunities for India

The Chinese angle in Russia-Ukraine war or Putin-West conflict throws up certain challenges and also presents some opportunities to India.

(News agency) About a week after Russia's President Vladimir Putin said his Ukraine invasion was progressing as planned, reports suggest his government has reached out to China for help. This exposes Russia, which has remained a super-power for about a hundred years, including the Soviet era, as it turns to rising super-power of the world, China. The Chinese angle in Russia-Ukraine war or Putin-West conflict throws up certain challenges and also presents some opportunities to India.

THE CHINA POST

This move has the potential to force a realignment of forces involved in Russia-Ukraine war. It is reflected in the US's warning to China of serious consequences if it steps into the war in East Europe to reinforce Russia.

The move is, however, also an admission of the inability of Russia to dominate 'weak' Ukraine that has received active aid from the West. China's entry in the Russia-Ukraine war may tip the scale decisively in favour of Putin, both domestically and internationally. This would widen the ambit of the war something that the US and Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Europe have been assiduously trying to avoid. It may force Nato countries take a direct role in Ukraine to stave off Russia aided China. Sensing bigger trouble with China's participation, US President Joe Biden's National Security Advisor (NSA) Jake Sullivan warned China's foreign policy advisor Yang Jiechi in a face-to-face meeting that they held in Rome, Italy. Such warnings are unusual in international diplomacy. But the seven-hour meeting on Monday between Sullivan and Yang was a little different. On Tuesday, the US military said Russia would exhaust its ammunition to continue its invasion of Ukraine. China, thus, becomes crucial for both Russia and the US-Europe coalition.

CHALLENGES FOR INDIA

Neutrality in international conflicts has served India well from the days of first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to incumbent Narendra Modi. However, this neutrality has not been neutral it was tilted towards Soviet Russia in pre-liberalisation era and closer to the American bloc thereafter.

India's recent positioning of neutrality at the United Nations meetings over the Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought relief in the Russian camp but stretched discomfort on the West side.



Russia has offered India to purchase its oil at a cheaper rate while the West has exhorted India to speak from the parapet of the democratic West. The West is vehement in putting pressure on India to not support the aggressor backed by a communist authoritarian regime, not even through abstention during a vote in the UN.

Gradually, the West's 'you are either with us or against us' policy is being pushed to bring countries like India. Some action has been seen against Bangladesh for staying neutral in the Russia-Ukraine war in Europe cancellation of Covid-19 vaccine doses to the country.

Experts have warned India that despite its nuanced position at the UN in the Russia-Ukraine war, which essentially is an expansion conflict between Putin and Nato in Europe, it is facing a huge risk. For example, if Russian invasion of Ukraine continues for long, a consequent rise in oil prices might disrupt India's economic recovery severely. India imports more than 80 per cent of its oil requirements. Buying cheaper oil from Russia ignoring the West's sanctions may result in some punitive action against India. India depends hugely on the Russian weapons and military equipment to keep its forces prepared against two hostile neighbours. If Russia is forced to seek Chinese help to replenish its military

essentials within three weeks of its high-stakes war, India is already in a placed precarious situation.

Keeping the West in good stead then is prudent for India. But this requires condemning Russia. A Catch-22 situation for the Indian government.

To maintain a neutral portfolio in a highly polarised world may end in the loss of both the worlds for India, experts have warned. However, this is an unlikely result for a country and economy of the size as India's in such an intricately globalised world.

Unlike Bangladesh, India is too big to punish. And, unlike China, India is a bigger consuming market than a net supplier exploring markets elsewhere. This is where India's neutrality presents it opportunities.

OPPORTUNITY IN CRISIS

India has not supported Russia if it did not condemn Putin for invading Ukraine, alarming the West. Beyond the ethics and morality of humanity, India has followed the policy of reciprocal diplomacy. The West has not been an automatic India-backer when China invaded its territories, captured its land or changed the status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and when Pakistan launched wars and proxy war through terrorism, and continued refusing to vacate occupied territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh despite the UN resolution declaring that

the merger of princely state to India was legal and valid.

The West did not automatically shared India's concerns over infiltration of terrorists and execution of terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India in a Pakistan-sponsored design. Even terrorists who India sought to be sanctioned were blocked by China and the West did not side with India.

The West, however, woke up to the threat of terrorism only after 9/11 attacks on the US and sought India's support both in its war on terror and subsequent reconstruction of ravaged territories in Afghanistan and elsewhere. India's stand is nuanced and reciprocal.

It is this neutral position of India that makes it a potential mediator between Russia and the West to end the war in Ukraine. India has repeatedly called for ceasefire and to find peace through talks. PM Modi asked both Putin and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his telephonic conversations to hold direct talks to find a solution.

There is more. If China participates in the Russia-Ukraine war to bail out Putin, the US and other Nato countries are likely to retaliate. This would not only prolong the war but also make it truly multi-dimensional. War often ends up in weakening the participants. A weakened China is stronger India given the current equation of the two Asian giants.

Pakistan government to deploy paramilitary forces in Islamabad ahead of no-confidence motion

(News agency) With an eye on the no-confidence motion moved by the opposition parties against the Imran Khan government later this month in the National Assembly, Pakistan's federal government has tightened the security to maintain law and order situation. The decision to deploy paramilitary forces was made after the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party announced a plan to hold a public gathering in Islamabad on March 27, Pakistan's Geo News reported citing sources. The report said that Pakistan's Interior Ministry has sent a summary to the Cabinet regarding the deployment of at least 1,000 paramilitary personnel in Islamabad. After PTI made the announcement about holding the public rally, the opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) called the people and workers of opposition parties to begin a long march towards Islamabad on March 23 to stage



a sit-in. This announcement was made by PDM president Maulana Fazlur Rehman after attending the meeting of the joint opposition at the residence of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistani newspaper Dawn

reported. Amid the ongoing political turmoil in the country, PTI senator Javed Khan announced that the voting for no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan is expected

to take place after March 27. The PTI senator said in a tweet that the "biggest rally" in Pakistan's history will take place in Islamabad's D-Chowk on March 27 in front of the Parliament

House, where the Pakistani PM will give a "historic speech." "Voting on the no-confidence motion will take place after March 27. The opposition will face complete defeat. Confidence in PM Imran Khan will [increase]," Pakistani newspaper Dawn reported. Last week, while addressing a public meeting in Lower Dir district, Imran Khan urged people to gather at D-Chowk on the eve of the no-trust vote.

The opposition parties in Pakistan are jettisoning mutual hatred to oust Imran Khan as they submitted the no-trust motion in the National Assembly secretariat on March 8. While the PTI government has exuded confidence to defeat the no-trust motion, the Opposition is sure that they will oust Imran Khan.

Afghan diplomats under pressure from Taliban regime

(News agency) Afghan embassies around the world that have refused to recognise the new Taliban regime are struggling to stay afloat and facing increasing pressure from Kabul to accept loyalist replacements.

None of the country's 60 or so ambassadors, consuls or heads of diplomatic missions who were appointed by Western-backed former president Ashraf Ghani have agreed to serve the hardline Islamist group since it seized power in August last year. The Taliban government has yet to be formally recognised by any nation, and the international community is grappling with how to deal with the country's new rulers while also helping Afghans face an economic and humanitarian crisis. "We are in a very unfortunate ... situation, but we still have to continue to operate in these difficult circumstances," said Youssof Ghafoorzai, the ambassador to Norway. "The embassies still have a very important role to play in terms of trying to increase whatever humanitarian support is possible. But also (to help) discussions on the political track... to stabilise the situation."

Aid and cash reserves, frozen by the United

States and the international community after the Taliban seized control, are trickling back into the country, which has long depended almost entirely on donors. But Ghafoorzai and his colleagues have had no contact with the new regime, and staff have not been paid for months. The Afghan embassy and its consulates in the United States are being shut in the coming week.

"The Afghan Embassy and consulates are under severe financial pressure. Their bank accounts are not available to them," a US State Department official told AFP. The embassy and Washington have made arrangements for an "orderly shutdown of operations in a way that would protect and preserve all diplomatic mission property in the United States until operations are able to resume," the official said. Across the world, Afghan ambassadors have been forced to dramatically scale down their activities, reduce energy bills and food costs, and even move into smaller premises. They have also increased consular fees to generate revenue.



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Nepal PM Deuba to visit Sri Lanka for BIMSTEC summit

(News agency) Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba will soon attend 5th BIMSTEC Summit (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and



happened. So, we would like to see it's working in concrete terms," he added. Earlier in January, Secretary-General of BIMSTEC H.E. Tenzin Lekphell, on his visit to Nepal, appreciated Nepal's contribution in advancing the process of the organisation.

Lekphell had called on foreign minister Dr Narayan Khadka and

Economic Cooperation. He is due to attend the summit on March 30 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The seven-nation BIMSTEC, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand was founded in 1997. "The Prime Minister will attend the summit. This is a regional grouping and we would like to see more concrete work," Prakash Sharan Mahat, ruling Nepali Congress Spokesperson told WION.

"Through BIMSTEC not much is happening. Earlier on the basis of the principles, many agreements were reached between the countries. But in reality, in terms of a regional corporation not much has

stated that the fourth BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu was an important milestone in streamlining the areas of cooperation and institutional strengthening of the organisation.

Expressing Nepal's commitment to contribute constructively to help BIMSTEC make further advances, Khadka underlined the need to fifth summit to build on the progress made thus far and to provide significant breakthroughs towards realising the regional aspirations.

Among the seven members of the BIMSTEC, five are also members of the dysfunctional South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Afghan group rejects murdering polio vaccinators

(News agency) An Afghan group opposed to Taliban rule rejected on Sunday the police's accusation that its members had killed polio vaccinators on a campaign to eradicate the crippling virus. Police had said two members of the National Resistance Front (NRF) had been arrested in connection with killing seven vaccinators on February 24 in the northern province of Kunduz. The NRF were the last group to hold out against the Taliban takeover last year, retreating to the Panjshir Valley, which eventually fell in September, weeks after the former government forces capitulated.

The health workers were killed in separate attacks while on a house-to-house vaccine campaign. "The arrested men have confessed to their crime and said they shot the polio vaccinators after receiving orders from their leaders from the Resistance Front in the province," Kunduz police spokesman Qari Obaidullah Abedi had told AFP. According to the spokesman, the arrested men also confessed that "they were paid" for the murders. NRF rejected the accusations as "Taliban propaganda".

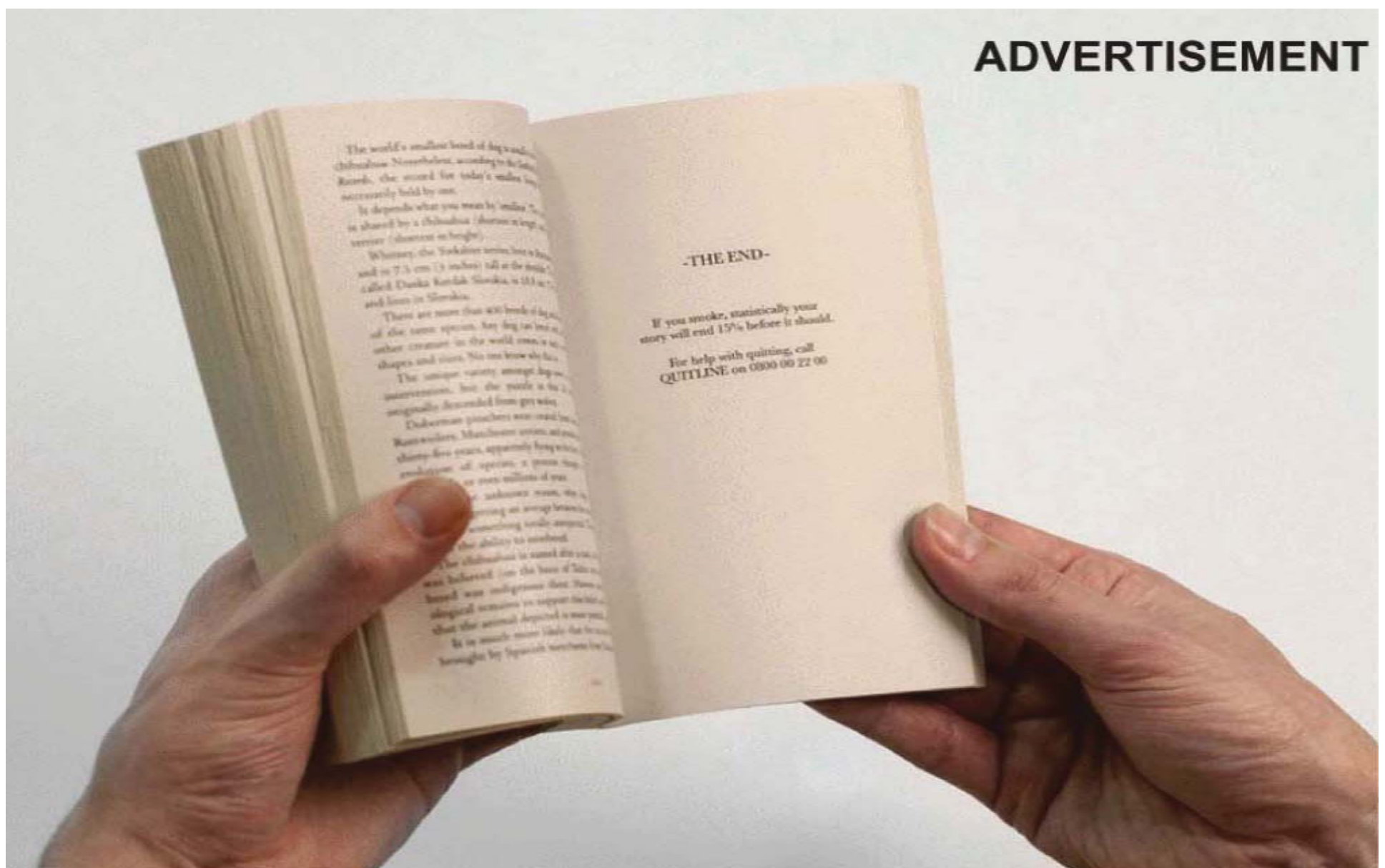
"The National Resistance Front condemns the perpetrators of this attack and we strongly believe it was conducted by the Taliban or one of their terrorist partners," Ali

Nazary, spokesman for the NRF, told AFP. The NRF is led by the son of legendary late anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was assassinated by Al-Qaeda in 2001. In total, eight polio



vaccinators were killed on February 24 -- seven in Kunduz and one in the neighbouring province of Takhar. Polio teams in Afghanistan were frequently targeted by insurgent groups until the Taliban's takeover in August. Since then, the hardline Islamists have said they want to work with the United Nations to stamp out the disease. In the past, polio vaccination drives in Afghanistan -- and neighbouring Pakistan -- were accused of being fronts for spying, while some clerics said the vaccine was a conspiracy to sterilise Muslims. Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only two countries in the world where polio remains endemic.

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US woman dies after 3-year-old son accidentally shoots her

An American woman died of bullet injuries in Chicago after her 3-year-old son accidentally shot her with his father's pistol



(News agency) A three-year-old American child accidentally shot and killed his mother while playing with a gun in the suburbs of Chicago, police said Monday. The tragedy, all too common in the United States, took place on Saturday evening in the parking lot of a supermarket in Dolton, a

suburb of the Midwestern city. The young boy was sitting in the child-seat in the back of a car, with his parents in the front. Without anyone knowing how, he managed to get his hands on his father's pistol. The child "began playing with it inside the car. At some point the child pulled the trigger," local police chief Robert Collins told AFP. His mother, Daejah Bennett, 22, was shot in the back of the neck. She was rushed to a Chicago hospital where she was pronounced dead. The father was taken into custody while police investigated whether he possessed the gun legally and whether he should face charges, Collins said. The death is just one in a staggering series of comparable accidents. "Every

year, hundreds of children in the United States gain access to unsecured, loaded guns in closets and nightstand drawers, in backpacks and purses, or just left out," and shoot off rounds accidentally, according to a recent report by Everytown For Gun Safety. The organization, which campaigns for better supervision of firearms and in particular for requirements that they be stored securely, estimates that "unintentional shootings" by minors cause an average of 350 deaths each year. More generally, firearms are used in approximately 40,000 deaths a year in the United States, including suicides, according to the Gun Violence Archive website.

US working towards global coalition far beyond G7, Nato partners: White House

Some biggest countries like China and India are not part of America's economic warfare against Russia, but that does not undermine the efforts of the Biden administration against Moscow, says the White House press secretary

(News agency) The Biden administration is working to build a global coalition far beyond G7 and Nato partners, the White House has said. Some of the biggest countries like China, India, Brazil and Mexico are not part of America's economic warfare against Russia, but that

does not undermine the efforts of the Biden administration against Moscow, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

"Not just China, but some of the biggest countries in the world, like India or Brazil, some countries in Latin America like

Mexico, they are not part of this economic warfare against Russia. Is this something that undermines the effort from the White House and European countries?" I would say it doesn't undermine our efforts. We have been working to build a global coalition far beyond the G7 and

our Nato partners, and had a great deal of success in that. And every country has to decide where they want to stand, where they want to be as we look and the history books are written," Psaki said during her daily news conference.

"As we have seen, the impact of the president's leadership on the global stage and the economic consequences that have been put into place have led Russia and the Russian economy to be on the brink of collapse. And there's no question that over time, that will have an impact," she said in response to a question. China is unlikely to be very helpful to Russia during these economic sanctions, Psaki said.

"I think what we are looking at here, one is if China were to decide to be an economic provider or to take additional steps there to Russia, they only make up 15 to 20 per cent of the world's economy. The G7 countries make up more than 50 per cent. So, there are a range of tools at our disposal and coordination with our European partners should we need to use them," she said.

But this is an area that the United States is watching closely, Psaki said, asserting that there would be consequences for China if it provides military supply to Russia.

At the Foggy Bottom headquarters of the State Department, its spokesperson Ned Price said the US was watching very closely the extent to which China or any country in the world provides materials, economic, financial, rhetorical or otherwise, to this war of choice that Russian President Vladimir Putin is waging against Ukraine and its people.

"And we have been very clear, both privately and publicly, with Beijing that there would be consequences for any such support," Price told reporters. Russia and China, when you combine their GDPs, it's something like 25 per cent of global GDP. When you combine the GDP, the economic might of the United States, the European Union, our allies in the Indo-Pacific, our other allies and partners that have joined us, well over 50 per cent," he said.

Nothing but an accident, says US on firing of missile from India into Pakistan

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday that the firing of a missile by India into Pakistan last week was nothing "other than an accident"



(News agency) The United States has said there is no indication that the recent firing of a missile from India which landed in Pakistan was anything other than accidental. India on Friday said it accidentally fired a missile two days back that landed in Pakistan and that the "deeply regrettable" incident was caused

by a technical malfunction in the course of its routine maintenance.

"We have no indication as you also heard from our Indian partners that this incident was anything other than an accident," State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at his daily news conference on Monday. "We refer you of course to the Indian Ministry of Defense for any follow up. They issued a statement on March 9th to explain precisely what had happened. We don't have a comment beyond that," Price said in response to a question.

White House having early discussions about Biden traveling to Europe

(News agency) The White House is weighing the possibility of President Joe Biden traveling to Europe in the coming weeks for face-to-face talks with European leaders about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, according to three US officials familiar with the deliberations. The prospective trip is yet to be finalised. One possible destination for the meetings would be Brussels, which is the headquarters for NATO, one of the officials said Monday. Another official said the White House was looking at Biden visiting NATO headquarters on March 24, with other potential stops in Europe. Biden's potential trip would follow Vice President Kamala Harris' visit to the eastern flank NATO countries of Poland and Romania last week to discuss with leaders there the growing refugee crisis in eastern Europe sparked by the Russian invasion. The trip would underscore the Biden



administration's support for NATO allies. NBC News first reported that the discussions for a potential Biden trip are underway. NATO members are worried about being drawn into a military conflict with nuclear

power Russia. Biden has repeatedly said that the United States will not send forces into Ukraine, but will defend "every inch" of NATO territory. White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said that the United

States was closely engaged with its NATO partners and European allies but that there had not been any final decision about a presidential trip. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, the

biggest attack on a European state since World War Two, the United States and its allies have coordinated broad sanctions against Moscow and President Vladimir Putin as punishment.



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US warns China against helping Russia, China accuses US of spreading false information

(News agency) On Monday, reports emerged suggesting that Russia had asked China for military aid in its fight against Ukraine. After US warned China against helping Russia, China has now accused the US of spreading false information. After Western reports quoting US officials stated that Russia had asked China for military equipment to be used in Ukraine, the US issued a warning to China.

US WARNS CHINA

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan warned China against helping Russia evade punishment from global sanctions that have hammered the Russian economy, or to provide military aid to Moscow in its war on Ukraine. Jake Sullivan and senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi spoke on the issue in Rome on Monday.

CHINA SAYS 'FALSE NEWS'

Now, in response to the reports, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China has accused US officials



of spreading disinformation with "sinister intent".

"The United States has been spreading false information against China on the Ukraine issue recently with sinister intentions," Chinese foreign

ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said on Monday, while answering a foreign reporter's question on whether China will assist Russia with arms.

"China's position on the Ukraine issue is consistent and clear, and

we have always played a constructive role in persuading peace and promoting talks," he added.

WHAT HAS RUSSIA SAID

On Monday, Russia said it does not need China's help. "No,

Russia has its own potential to continue the operation, which, as we have said, is unfolding in accordance with the plan and will be completed on time and in full," said Dmitry Peskov, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman.

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Why the West should focus on China

conditions of informationisation” in 2004 and currently, calls for “winning informationised local wars” since 2015.

China is now once again witness to the inaction and vulnerabilities of the US and developed world in the face of adversity. In the current conflict, the ineptitude of the US/NATO to support Ukraine with “boots on the ground” is bound to embolden China in its nefarious design to annex Taiwan. This could also lead to increased hostility by China in

the resolution of land disputes with the neighbouring countries, as well as in the South and East China seas. Though the nuclear alert issued by Russia seems to be overkill, it highlights the danger of the indiscriminate use of nuclear resources by autocratic leadership. It needs to be noted with concern that the US, despite repeated efforts, has been unable to get China to come aboard nuclear arms limitation agreements.

There are, therefore, more urgent

priorities for world peace than the proverbial “rubbing Russia’s nose in the dust” such as mutually-accepted principles for the exploitation of niche and emerging technologies, militarisation of space, and the robustness of the current international institutions.

Another issue of concern is racial double standards and prejudice. There is a simmering feeling of “White supremacy” — whether in the remarks

of journalists in the Western media or implied in the statements of leading political figures from Europe. Maybe the harassment of Indian students fleeing Ukraine is a reflection of this malaise.

For India, the greatest lesson is that it will have to meet the Chinese challenge on its own. There is no likelihood of the US or any other nation getting involved in India’s fight with China. Let us focus on atmanirbharta in all its dimensions.

Message from New India in recent election results

In Goa, the BJP is set to form its government for the third consecutive time. In Uttarakhand, the BJP has broken the jinx of an incumbent never being able to return to power with a clear majority. There is no doubt that in Punjab, the BJP needs more time and more effort to build itself up.

The message for political parties from the people is clear: New India has no time to waste on the politics of dynasty, caste, religion and opportunistic alliances. New India wants new ideas

and a government with the right intent to keep the country firmly on the path of growth and development. When Modi assumed charge as prime minister in 2014, he spelt out the larger agenda of the government, which promised pro-poor policies. About eight years down the line, beneficiaries of government schemes in every nook and corner of India are speaking up. Even as some sections try to mute their voices, the beneficiaries are speaking through their ballot. TV cameras on the ground this

election season reported how people thanked the government for free ration, pucca houses, money received in their accounts under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, social reforms and not compromising on its ideological moorings of cultural nationalism. The BJP, as PM Modi stated, is working towards 100 per cent saturation of all welfare schemes unleashing the full potential of Digital India. In the 75th year of independence, PM Modi has set the nation on a path to reinvent itself. The

“Amrit Kaal” that he talked about is not a promise set far in the future. It is a work in progress, the benefits of which have started rolling out giving the poor and marginalised a quality and dignity of life that other parties served only as poll-talk tokenism. The Indian electorate believes that this Amrit Kaal is a reality, which India under PM Modi and the BJP is well on course to achieve. The electorate believes in the honesty of BJP’s efforts and it shows in the results.

Why Australia, Netherlands are taking legal action against Russia over 2014 MH17 crash

“unprovoked” and “unjustified” invasion of Ukraine “underscores the need to continue our enduring efforts to hold Russia to account for its blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter, including threats to Ukraine’s sovereignty and airspace.”

Russia and the Netherlands have initiated legal proceedings before the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) under Article 84 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation. Both the countries first held Russia responsible for the plane crash in 2018, but Russia, in 2020, unilaterally pulled out from negotiations.

MH17 crash: What happened in 2014?

A series of events led to Russia’s annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014. The previous year, in November 2013, anti-government protests started in Ukraine’s capital Kyiv.

The protesters were unhappy with pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich’s decision to forego a deal that would have led to increased integration of Ukraine and the European Union. Russia supported Yanukovich, while Europe and the US expressed support for the protesters.

By February 2014, the situation had escalated, with state repression encouraging more people to join the protests. The same month Yanukovich fled Ukraine, which made Russia anxious about losing influence in Europe’s largest country, which was part of the Soviet Union until the

Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

To address this, Russian troops wasted little time in annexing Crimea. By March 2014, the troops had taken control of the peninsula. Russian President Vladimir Putin justified the annexation by saying that the decision was taken to protect the rights of Russian speakers and Russians living there.

A controversial referendum was held, which the US and EU called illegal. More than 90 percent of the voters voted to join Russia in this referendum. Shortly after, in regions of eastern Ukraine called Donetsk and Luhansk, pro-Russian separatists held referendums and declared independence from Ukraine. This was the beginning of fighting between the separatist rebels and Ukrainian forces that have led to the deaths of at least 15,000 people.

It was during this fighting that the Malaysia Airlines plane MH17 was hit by a missile and crashed in eastern Ukraine. A number of ceasefire deals have been announced since then but none have been effective in resolving the territorial conflict.

On what grounds are Australia and the Netherlands making their case against Russia?

In a recent statement, Morrison highlighted that both Australia and the Netherlands will rely on “overwhelming evidence” to hold Russia responsible. The evidence includes the downing of MH17 by a Russian surface to air missile system, the transportation of the missile system from

Russia to an agricultural field in eastern Ukraine, and the fact that the missile system was returned to Russia after the plane was downed.

“The Russian Federation’s refusal to take responsibility for its role in the downing of Flight MH17 is unacceptable and the Australian Government has always said that it will not exclude any legal options in our pursuit of justice,” Morrison said.

The legal proceedings initiated by the two countries are governed by Article 84 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, which deals with settling disputes in case of disagreement between two or more states. In such cases, the Council takes a vote to settle issues.

What have investigations into the MH17 crash found?

Russia has repeatedly denied playing a role in the MH17 plane crash. In 2020, Dutch investigators said that the plane was indeed hit by a surface-to-air missile operated by pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. The Dutch Safety Board (OVV) conducted three investigations into the downing of the flight.

It said that the flight crashed after the detonation of a 9N314M-type warhead launched from the eastern part of Ukraine using a Buk missile system. The missile detonated to the left and above the cockpit of the plane because of which the forward section of the aircraft was penetrated by

hundreds of high-energy objects coming from the warhead.

Because of this impact and subsequent blast, three crew members were killed immediately and the plane broke up in mid-air, one of the OVV investigations said. The debris from the plane fell in an area of 50 sq. kilometers.

The OVV also said, “Ukraine had sufficient reason to close the entire airspace over the eastern part of Ukraine as a precaution. Instead, on military grounds flying at lower altitudes was restricted.” On the day this plane crashed over 160 commercial planes flew over the area.

After a Dutch-led joint investigation (which included Australia, Belgium and Malaysia) concluded in May 2018 that the missile system came from a Russian base, the Netherlands and Australia decided to hold Russia responsible. Russia has not only denied the allegations but has called the Dutch investigations “biased, superficial and politicised”. The BBC notes that four days after the crash, two of Russia’s senior generals accused the Ukrainian government of deliberately pushing MH17 off its flight path and into the war zone. It also says that Russians highlighted a blip on the Russian radar, which showed a Ukrainian fighter jet instead of a commercial plane.

In 2019, Dutch prosecutors charged four individuals including three Russians and one Ukrainian who they said were responsible for targeting the plane.

Ukraine Crisis Could Mark the Beginning of Pushback against American Overreach

of the Florida National Guard's Task Force Gator as also an unspecified number of men from Special Operations Command Europe.

As tensions over Ukraine mounted in January, Biden threatened Russia with grave consequences if it invaded Ukraine, adding a caveat – "It depends on what (Russia) does. It's one thing if it's a minor incursion and we end up having to fight about we have to do and not do" It was left to the White House aides to soothe Kyiv's frayed nerves.

After Russia recognised the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk – breakaway enclaves in eastern Ukraine – President Biden promised strong sanctions against Russia but clarified unequivocally that the US would not engage Russia militarily and would only protect the territorial integrity of NATO members. This position has since been reiterated several times. It is meant to assure the American public that the US was not getting drawn into another conflict and also to pre-empt external pressure at a future date. But could this unusual public stand have emboldened Moscow to launch a full-fledged invasion?

As if anticipating that Russia would swallow the bait, the US quickly rolled out the harshest economic sanctions in history, purportedly in coordination with Europe. Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov were personally targeted along with other senior political figures. Just when it was needed the most, the planned meeting between Secretary Blinken and Lavrov was scrapped.

A ONE-SIDED NARRATIVE?

The West has since not stopped adding fuel to the fire by rushing supplies of all kinds of weaponry including anti-tank and surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine. Efforts are underway to also persuade Poland to transfer its Russian-made fighter aircraft to Kyiv, except that the former is playing hardball. Furthermore, as per unconfirmed reports, American ex-marines (and Chechen fighters on the Russian side) are heading for the conflict zone in large numbers. It does not require much imagination to decipher who is paying the mercenaries? This effectively means American boots on the ground, which is bound to provoke Russia more.

Information warfare is at its peak with the West controlling the narrative and demonising Russia. On March 5, Russia was accused of attacking Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine with missiles. Hardly anyone cared to look at the map or ask what would Russia gain from such a misadventure, as given the physical proximity its own territory and populace would have been subjected to nuclear radiation. It transpired that during the cross firing a shell or two had accidentally fallen some half a kilometre away from the reactor, which was never in danger. Meanwhile,

Ukraine continues to be pounded as the invading Russian forces, mindful of limiting civilian casualties, slowly gain ground. President Zelensky's gritty resistance is descending into bluster as he persists with needling Putin, terming Russian action as genocide and terrorism and demanding Western military and material support. He has been insisting on the institution of a no-fly zone over Ukraine, which is a ruse to draw NATO into direct confrontation with Russia. He is refusing to see the writing on the wall and appears to be presiding over the decimation of his country. Only time would tell if he would be hailed as 'David' or be equated to Nero who kept fiddling as Rome burned.

And then there is the European Union (EU) which has generally deferred to the US instead of standing up for its interests, partly because of its security dependence on Washington. EU and Russia are neighbours; the US is an Ocean away. EU and Russia have interdependencies; the US, particularly its big business, is more concerned about safeguarding its economic interests in China. France, a lead actor in EU and NATO, is unlikely to forget or forgive being blindsided by Biden on the AUKUS deal. Nor can NATO fathom why Biden decided to hasten American exit from Afghanistan without even token consultations.

In the first flush of the conflict, President Biden managed to prevail upon the newly elected German chancellor to put the Nord Stream 2 project in cold storage. However, soon the enormity of

the challenge and economic cost of disruption of Russian oil and gas supplies dawned on European majors, forcing them to be selective in replicating American sanctions.

LONG-TERM IMPACT OF UKRAINE CRISIS

Be it the EU, the Arab world, the ASEAN region, Taiwan, Japan or India, there is more than subterranean anxiety about overdependence on the US as a global leader, prompting a recalibration of geostrategic assumptions. Let me reflect on India-America relations which have galloped from near-estrangement to comprehensive engagement in the preceding two decades. Yet there is a sense of continued tentativeness because of Washington's reluctance to give due weightage to New Delhi's geostrategic, security and socio-economic compulsions.

Whether it is terrorism emanating from Pakistan, import of oil from Iran, our long-standing defence cooperation with Russia, interests in Afghanistan or Myanmar, India's democratic institutions or societal dynamics – the US tends to be prescriptive or judgmental. After every Presidential election, South Block holds its breath till the new White House incumbent reaffirms business as usual with India.

Reverting to the Russian invasion, not surprisingly the American media, which is hard placed to find anything positive about India even in normal times, has been very critical of our stand and so have many Congressmen and members of the

strategic community. The official circles have shown some appreciation for India's predicament due to her critical dependence on Russian military hardware.

In private, there has been measured pressure on India including perhaps during the hastily convened virtual Quad summit on March 3. The possibility of Biden administration imposing CAATSA sanctions on India cannot be ruled out, which would set the ties back and possibly temper India's interest in Quad.

The Ukraine crisis will have reverberations across the spectrum. Ukraine will rue its decision to part with nuclear weapons in 1994 and trust the solemn commitments of big powers, but for which it would have never met the present fate. North Korea will feel vindicated. Talks with Iran will become more difficult. The global arms race including a quest for weapons for mass destruction would get keener. The Western military-industrial complex will be popping the bubbly; China may decide to test the resolve of a distracted US, by undertaking a misadventure. Global economies will take a hit due to rise in the cost of imports and supply side disruptions.

Swedish Chancellor Count Axel Oxenstierna, in a letter to his son in 1648 wrote, 'Thou dost not know my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed'. The present crop of world leaders is determined to prove the Chancellor right!

Delhi hate speech case: A missed opportunity for justice

Solicitor General, came with all guns blazing to defend the police's action in turning a blind eye to speeches which, prima facie, answered the description of "hate speech", and threatened to disturb the peace and harmony between different religious groups in terms of section 153A(a) and (b) of IPC. In his order, Justice Muralidhar noted that the refrain of the SG's submission has been that the time was not "appropriate" or "conducive" for the registration of FIRs in relation to those clips. On being asked by the bench what would be the conducive time, the SG said that it was not possible for him to give any timeframe. The court asked the police to seriously consider the consequences that would ensue with each day's delay in registering the FIRs. It posted the matter for February 27, 2020, after the Special Commissioner of Police assured the court that he would himself view all the videos, not limited to those placed in court, and take a conscious decision, which would be communicated to the court on the following day.

On February 26 itself, close to midnight, a notification was issued transferring Justice Muralidhar to the Punjab & Haryana High Court with immediate effect. Consequently, on the following day, the matter came before the Chief Justice's bench. The SG submitted that the police were in the process of examining the audio/video clips, and that considering the complexity of the matter, they needed four weeks' time to take a final decision. The court agreed to the request, and adjourned, posting the case for further hearing on April 13, 2020.

The court did not even bother to find out whether the Special Commissioner of Police had examined the videos, and taken a conscious decision on the same as per his submission before Justice Muralidhar's bench. Besides, the police, which was obliged to promptly register an FIR on the apparent commission of cognisable offences and on account of Justice Muralidhar's observations, got a reprieve. How could the police, which is supposed to maintain law

and order at all cost, not register cases against the persons appearing in the videos, and hide behind the plea that the time was not appropriate and conducive for such an action? The plea, besides being not supported by any law, was frivolous and untenable. More disturbing was the ready acceptance of this plea by the court – which, under the Constitution, is the custodian and protector of the life and liberty of the people – when the videos prima facie showed that a particular community was being targeted. By adjourning the case to a distant date, the court put the same on the back-burner. In July 2020, the petitioner withdrew the writ petition, reserving his right to approach the jurisdictional court. His frustration can well be imagined when he decided to withdraw the petition although the jurisdiction to grant the relief rested in the High Court as well.

The heavens would not have fallen if the FIRs had been registered. Even if they were to fall, then, in the words of Lord Mansfield, "Let justice be done though heavens fall".

Scientists identify formation of three planetary systems around this binary star

Using the Very Large Array (VLA) and the Atacama Large Millimeter/Submillimeter Array (ALMA), the scientific group has studied the binary star SVS 13, still in its embryonic phase. This work has provided the best description available so far on a binary system in formation. Models of planet formation suggest that planets form by the slow aggregation of ice and dust particles in protoplanetary disks around forming stars. Usually these models consider only single stars, such as the Sun.

However, most stars form binary systems, in which two stars rotate around a common centre. Very little is yet known about how planets are born around these

important twin star systems, in which the gravitational interaction between the two stars plays an essential role. "Our results have revealed that each star has a disk of gas and dust around it and that, in addition, a larger disk is forming around both stars," says Ana Karla Díaz-Rodríguez, a researcher at the IAA-CSIC and the UKALMA Regional Centre (UK-ARC) at The University of Manchester, who leads the work. "This outer disk shows a spiral structure that is feeding matter into the individual disks, and in all of them planetary systems could form in the future. This is clear evidence for the presence of disks around both stars and the existence of a common disk in a binary system."

The binary system SVS 13 consists of two stellar embryos with a total mass similar to that of the Sun. The two stars in the system are very close to each other, with a distance of only about ninety times that between the Earth and the Sun. The work has made it possible to study the composition of gas, dust and ionised matter in the system. In addition, nearly thirty different molecules have been identified around both protostars, including thirteen complex organic molecules precursors of life (seven of them detected for the first time in this system). "This means that when planets begin to form around these two suns, the building blocks of life will be there," says

Ana Karla Díaz-Rodríguez. The scientific team has used the observations of SVS 13 obtained by the VLA over thirty years, together with new data from ALMA, and has followed the motion of both stars over this period, which has allowed their orbit to be traced, as well as the geometry and orientation of the system, along with many fundamental parameters, such as the mass of the protostars, the mass of the disks, and their temperature. Gary Fuller of The University of Manchester, a collaborator on the project, says: "This work shows how careful, systematic studies of young stars can provide a remarkably detailed view of their structure and properties."

As 3 million Ukrainians flee war and death toll mounts, Zelenskyy hints at compromise

Explosions and flames dotted Kyiv on Tuesday as Russian forces continued their relentless onslaught and drew ever closer to the heart of the Ukrainian capital. As the Russia-Ukraine conflict raged on for the twentieth day straight, President Zelenskyy hinted at a compromise that could soon bring about a cessation of hostilities.

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators met virtually for a second day of talks, with ceasefire and evacuation efforts on the top of the agenda. Meanwhile, the leaders of three European Union countries planned a bold visit to besieged Kyiv despite security risks.

CITIES UNDER SIEGE

Russia stepped up its bombardment of Kyiv on Tuesday, smashing apartments and a subway station that "killed dozens of people", according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Artillery strikes hit the Svyatoshyrskyi district of western Kyiv, adjacent to the suburb of Irpin.

The shelling ignited a huge fire in a 15-storey apartment building and killed one person. Mayor Vitali Klitschko announced a 35-hour curfew extending through Thursday morning. Elsewhere, Ukraine reported more air strikes on an airport in the west, heavy shelling on Chernihiv northeast of Kyiv and attacks on the southern town of Mykolayiv. In the country's east, Russian forces launched more than 60 strikes overnight on Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv.

ZELENSKY HINTS AT COMPROMISE

In the latest hint at compromise, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said today that Ukraine was prepared to accept security guarantees that stop short of its long-term objective of joining the Nato. Russia is vehemently opposed to Kyiv's pursuit of membership to the Western-led alliance.

"If we cannot enter through open doors, then we must cooperate with the associations with which we can, which will help us, protect

us ... and have separate guarantees," said Zelenskyy.

DIPLOMATIC DIALOGUE RESUMES

Peace talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations resumed for the second day after a technical pause to clarify terms on Monday. Ukrainian officials are playing up the hope the war could end sooner than expected, saying Moscow may be coming to terms with its failure to impose a new government on Kyiv by force.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told Reuters that it was too early to predict progress. "The work is difficult, and in the current situation the very fact that (the talks) are continuing is probably positive," he said.

HUMAN TOLL MOUNTS

The number of Ukrainians fleeing the war approached 3 million on Tuesday, according to data from the UN refugee agency showed. Half of that figure -- 1.5 million people -- represents children

forced to flee the conflict, said Unicef spokesperson James Elder.

This translates to one child becoming a refugee with every passing minute of the Russia-Ukraine war. So far, 691 civilians, including 48 children, have been killed since the invasion began 20 days ago, the UN human rights office said.

True civilian casualty figures are believed to be "considerably higher" due to delay in reports from areas with intense hostilities.

RUSSIA RETALIATES AT US

Moscow said that US President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and other top Biden administration officials have been put on the Russian sanctions list. In a statement issued on Tuesday, Russia's Foreign Ministry said that the measure is a response to the US sanctions against the Russian leadership.

6 Arrested In County-Wide Drug Bust: Nassau Police

NASSAU COUNTY, NY — A large operation by Nassau County police led to the arrest of six men who police say were selling drugs out of smoke shops across the county.

According to police, on Thursday afternoon, officers executed search warrants at five Evolve Smoke Shop locations in Nassau County. Police say it was found that tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) was being sold at the locations. During the search, police say they found large quantities of THC, as well as MDMA, heroin and cash. Police arrested six men at the locations: Mohamed Elfeky, 31, of Huntington Station; Hardik Sureshbhai Patel, 24, of Mineola; Rashmin S. Patel, 27, of Hauppauge; Mauleshkumar R. Patel, 36, of Fresh Meadows; Manpreet Walia, 25, of Bethpage; and Mahendrakumar V. Patel, 36, of Flushing. Evolve Smoke Shop has Nassau County locations in Hicksville, Mineola, Melville, Farmingdale and South Farmingdale. It also has multiple Suffolk County locations.

Elfeky has been charged with fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance, third- and seventh-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, and two counts of fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance. The other five were all charged with fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance and two counts of fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance.

All six are scheduled to be arraigned later today in First District Court in Hempstead.

BA.2 variant has world on tenterhooks, but no need for India to press panic button yet

Asurge in Western Europe. China locks down Shenzhen and readies health infrastructure. Hong Kong reports an increase in hospitalisations. For India, is it the lull before the storm? The developments in the last few days have raised concerns and many are wondering if it is our turn next. On Monday, former US President Barack Obama tested positive for Covid-19. The news put the spotlight back on Covid. In India, #COVIDISBACK trended on Twitter for a couple of hours, the hashtag directing to news reports of China putting the Shenzhen city of 17 million under a strict lockdown. China reported nearly 5,300 new coronavirus cases nationwide on Monday and almost 3,400 a day earlier, the highest daily figure in two years. Although the relatively mild Omicron variant is driving the surge, Beijing has been stringent about its zero tolerance policy towards Covid. Chinese media group Caixin Media spoke about China imposing strict restrictions. "China Ratchets Up Covid Controls," screamed headlines. It said "In the hardest hit provinces of Yunnan, Jilin and Guangdong, local governments have designated lockdown areas to prevent the virus from spreading. More than 20 regions in China have experienced Covid-19 outbreaks since the start of this year." Chinese health authorities have indicated that the surge is being driven by the Omicron BA.2 "stealth" subvariant, the most infectious lineage yet of the SARS-Cov-2 virus.

WHAT IS BA.2 LINEAGE?

BA.2 is a sublineage of the fifth variant, Omicron, which was first identified in South Africa in November last year. The World Health Organization has said the surge is not limited to China and Western Europe. Why are many countries in

Europe starting to report more infections again? Global health expert Eric Topol has attributed this to relaxed mitigation measures, BA.2's higher transmission, and waning of immunity. He, however, ruled out a new variant at this stage, tweeting, "There's no clear or consistent pattern to determine which (or all) of these factors are driving it; no new variants have been implicated."

Former Biden White House Sr Advisor, past head of Medicare/Medicaid for Obama, Andy Slavitt tweeted saying the US is next. "Based on European case increases, the US could see a new rise in Covid cases over the spring," he said.

WHAT IS GOING ON?

Experts say the coronavirus is continuously adapting, adding advantageous mutations, and deleting disadvantageous ones -- even within individual sublineages of the Omicron variant. "This is almost like a tree branch that is continuously growing," Dr Rajeev Jayadevan, Head of Research Cell of the IMA-Kochi told India Today.

WHY IS INDIA NOT WITNESSING A SURGE?

"In China, the situation is that they have very little hybrid immunity - unlike India. This means that even though they are vaccinated to a large extent, we know that vaccine protection against infection only lasts for a few months, even though protection from severe disease lasts long term," Dr Jayadevan said. India saw a deadly second wave in the summer of 2021 and infection acquired immunity coupled with improved vaccination numbers has given us the benefit of hybrid immunity unlike a country like China.

Putin's rough childhood and its shadow over Ukraine and other wars

Does Putin's traumatic childhood have a link with Ukraine and other wars? Looking at his backstory does not justify his actions but offers one of the many explanations for an unfolding crisis. And a lesson for many of us

No lead character in any meaningful story is totally good or totally bad. All believable protagonists have some bad sides and all believable antagonists have some good sides. Because that's how life is. Hence, the term: lead character.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin is the lead character in the catastrophic story that's been unfolding since his invasion of Ukraine on February 24. But every antagonist, which many think Putin is, has some convincing arguments to back his actions. Putin also does. Some may appear valid, others may not. And that's where it's essential to look at his backstory.

One might argue that a lot of people had a rough childhood but they don't invade countries. But that's also because all those people don't get to become as powerful as Putin. A look at his backstory is not a justification for his actions. But merely one of the many explanations. There is much misinformation, but here are the bits over which there is considerable agreement.

PUTIN'S BACKSTORY

Putin was born in 1952 in Leningrad (now St Petersburg), a city that lived under a long Nazi siege during World War II that killed most of the population. His father was badly wounded in the war. His mother nearly died of starvation. Before Putin was born, his parents had lost two children. They had a room in a ramshackle apartment with two families. His father worked in a factory. His mother did odd jobs. Putin was left to fend for himself against bullying in his neighbourhood.

In essence, Putin faced issues of food, shelter, attachment, bullying, and inherited parental trauma. He luckily got mentors, learnt judo, excelled in high school, got a law degree and joined the Soviet Union's main security agency KGB before entering the Kremlin. He was a macho man who many also saw as distrustful and unforgiving.

THE TRAUMA RESPONSES

Before we dig deeper into what happened to Putin and how that motivated him to do what he did and what he is doing, let's look at some general theories around the concept of trauma to understand him better.

Many experts will tell you there are four responses to threat, guided by trauma. Remember, trauma is not what happened to us. That's traumatic. Trauma is what happens to us even today because of our traumatic experiences.

Don't forget that a traumatised individual remains in a hypervigilance mode and his perception of threat is often distorted and magnified. Even a mild criticism may cause mental disregulation in some. So here are the four responses to threat, as understood by famous psychotherapist Pete Walker.

-Fight: facing any perceived threat aggressively.

-Flight: running away from the danger.

-Freeze: unable to move or act against a threat.

-Fawn: immediately acting to try to please to avoid any conflict.

No prizes for guessing Putin's response to his threats. Trauma basically leads to self-



suppression. But even if you think you have moved on, dealt with the past and are doing okay, the trauma lives in the body and mind. You deal with it with adaptations and compensation. That's your defence mechanism.

So, even when Putin looks like an aggressor, and rightly so, he might actually be defensive. Your defence mechanism is essentially a lie that you tell yourself to somehow feel less miserable about the past wounds that are still bleeding you.

Children think that the world revolves around them. And when terrible things happen in their worlds, their inquisitive minds want to know why. The easiest conclusion is: it's about them. That's how shame or self-blame is born inside us and remains behind most of what we think, say and do in life.

RINGS A BELL?

When Putin invaded Ukraine, he said he wanted to "de-Nazify" his Soviet-era constituent and stop genocides. We now can see a link between this justification and his childhood. He defended himself by learning judo. He is now defending Russia through an invasion, one might say.

In 2002, Putin talked about a huge rat that was chasing him. "Luckily, I was a little faster and I managed to slam the door shut on its nose. There, on that stair landing, I got a quick and lasting lesson in the meaning of the word cornered," he said. Now see Putin's demand amid the war in Ukraine. He has demanded that Ukraine show neutrality with regard to his tussle with the US-dominated military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato), which has been expanding in eastern Europe by making many erstwhile Soviet constituents its members. Putin has publicly called the Soviet fall the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century and the death of historical Russia, and that he would reverse it if he had a chance to alter modern Russian history.

This is a man, who now has the world holding its breath, harbouring fantasies of unlimited power. It's not without a reason. And it won't be without consequences.

WHAT FUTURE HOLDS

What might be happening to Putin, and what happened to world figures like Nazi Germany's Adolf Hitler and Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin,

who were also traumatised in childhood, can be illustrated from the following two quotes.

'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (William Faulkner) and 'More often than not, people don't know why they do things' (William Trevor).

Talking of storytelling, let's also discuss BMOG. The dictionary meaning of the term BMOG is Big Man on Campus: a male student at a college or university who is important, popular, and successful, especially at sport. It's also used for a powerful person. But that's not the usage we're talking about for Putin here.

BMOG is also a term invented by popular script doctor (yes, that's a term) Peter Russell. By BMOG, he means beginning, middle,

obstacle and climax. The four crescendos in a movie, where the lead character is asked to change, asked to learn the theme of the story, and asked to learn how to heal.

We don't know where exactly Putin is in his story. Or, whether the opportunity to recognise the independence of Ukraine's two breakaway regions controlled by Russia-backed rebels was the 'inciting incident' that typically gets stories, especially those commercially formulaic, rolling.

It could have been Georgia. It could have been Crimea. It could even have been the Soviet collapse. Who knows? We can't for sure pinpoint his 'gateway of no return' or 'mirror moment' either.

What we know is in any meaningful story, the lead character does change. But the epiphany for change doesn't come easy. Nobody can preach this to the lead character. It can't dawn upon him. He can't just realise it. He has to earn this wisdom and earn it painfully. Because that's how life often is.

We don't quite know what Putin really wants and why he wants it. As far as the storytelling world goes, the rule of thumb is: the lead character doesn't get what he wants till he changes. Sometimes, he also realises that he doesn't actually need what he always wanted. That's what 'dark night of the soul' does to you. Change you must. But what if the lead character does not change? Well, the story usually ends in a tragedy. Ukraine's is being written now.



FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

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






Photograph taken April 2015

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

REWARD

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

REMARKS

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

CAUTION

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

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

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

Field Office: Baltimore

Delhi Riots: Conduct Investigation Without Influence as Per Law, HC Tells Delhi Police



February 26, 2020. The DCP concerned told the court that the case involves technical evidence and that the investigation has zeroed down a head constable making the video and not assaulting the victim and that no stone was being left unturned in the probe. The judge, who remarked that there was no ground to disbelieve one of the highest officers in the police machinery, was further informed by Delhi police lawyer Amit Prasad that while they have identified some people, confirmation was needed from all angles.

The court was informed that the agency will take eight more weeks to complete the probe. The court clarified that it was not interfering with the manner of investigation and added, The son of a mother has died. I'm not commenting on how and when (but) it has to be taken very seriously and dealt with as per the criminal law. This court has no ground to disbelieve one of the highest-ranking officers..(I'm asking you to) without influence investigate

the matter as per the mandate of the CrPC (Criminal Procedure Code) and Delhi Police manual, the judge said. Delhi police said that the statements of the witnesses have been recorded and one of the surviving persons, who was with the deceased, has not alleged any violence and that the investigating agency was awaiting the outcome of certain other technical tests. Lawyer Vrinda Grover, appearing for the petitioner, stated that no arrest was made in the case and the police earlier made a false statement concerning the status of CCTVs in the concerned police station and that the investigating agency was not probing the second scene of the crime i.e the police station and sought permission to file a response to the police status report.

The court asked the petitioner to raise objections after the charge sheet is filed and asked her to have some faith in the investigating agency and observed that there was no reason to disbelieve

their stand by invoking the writ jurisdiction. "Suggestions in the writ petition can be taken into account for the investigation, said the court as it asked the Delhi police to carry out the investigation without any fear or influence for the purpose of justice to the victim. Last month, the high court had pulled up the police for its investigation and said that its status report, which was filed in a sealed cover, was neither here nor there. Justice Mukta Gupta had questioned the police over the increased number of injuries (20) recorded in the post mortem report of deceased Faizan as compared to the medical report prepared prior to his detention in police custody where only three injuries were recorded. Communal clashes had broken out in North East Delhi on February 24, 2020, after violence between citizenship law supporters and protesters spiralled out of control leaving at least 53 people dead and around 700 injured. The matter would be heard next in May.

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday asked the Delhi Police as to why it has not filed a charge sheet in the case concerning the death of a 23-year-old man who was forced to sing the national anthem during the 2020 northeast Delhi riots and asked it to conduct its investigation without influence as per the law. Justice Chandra Dhari Singh, who was hearing a petition by the deceased's mother seeking a speedy and proper investigation, said that the case was to be taken seriously and asked the investigating agency to take into account the suggestions by the

petitioner in her plea.

The incident relates to a video that had gone viral in which the deceased— Faizan could be seen allegedly being beaten by policemen while being forced to sing the national anthem and 'Vande Mataram'. Kismatun, the mother of deceased Faizan, has sought an SIT probe into the death of her son, who along with four other Muslim men, was seen in the video.

The woman has claimed that the police illegally detained her son and denied him critical health care due to which he succumbed to the injuries on

India's urban unemployment rate in numbers

The unemployment rate had shot up sharply during the nationwide lockdown in 2020 during the first wave of the pandemic

India's urban unemployment rate jumped to 12.6 per cent in the April-June quarter of 2021, compared to 9.3 per cent in the January-March quarter. It, however, eased from the 20.8 per cent level seen during the first wave of the Covid pandemic, the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) shows.

The numbers

The unemployment rate had shot up sharply during the nationwide lockdown in 2020 during the first wave of the pandemic.

Data shows that in the 15-29 age group, 25.5 per cent of urban youth remained unemployed in April-June 2021 as against 34.7 per cent in April-June 2020 and 22.9 per cent in January-March 2021. Urban females fared worse than urban males. In the 15-29 age group, the unemployment rate for urban females stood at 31 per cent compared with 24 per cent for males during April-June 2021. The



unemployment rate for urban females and males stood at 36 per cent and 34.3 per cent, respectively, in April-June 2020.

The unemployment rate is defined as the percentage of unemployed persons in the labour force. The urban unemployment PLFS is based on the current weekly status approach, under

which a person is considered unemployed if he/she did not work even for one hour on any day during the week but sought or was available for work at least for one hour on any day during the period.

Labour force, according to current weekly status (CWS), is the number of persons either employed or unemployed on an average in a

week preceding the date of the survey.

Labour force participation rate in current weekly status in urban areas for people aged 15 years and above was 46.8 per cent in the April-June quarter of 2021, up from 45.9 per cent in the same period a year ago. It was 47.5 per cent in January-March 2021.

CMIE data

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), which provides regular data on unemployment, the urban unemployment rate was 9.78 per cent in April, 14.72 per cent in May and 10.08 per cent in June last year. It eased to 8.32 per cent in July 2021, increased in August to 9.78 per cent and then again moderated to 8.64 per cent in September. The urban unemployment rate rose to 9.30 per cent in December and has eased since then to 8.16 per cent in January and 7.55 per cent in February 2022, as per CMIE.

As RIMC turns 100, a celebration of its legacy of courage

Several alumni of the Rashtriya Indian Military College, Dehradun, have distinguished themselves in service of the nation

Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC), Dehradun, previously the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College, turned 100 years young on Sunday. Pakistani cadets had departed from the college at the time of Partition. None of the 163 Pakistan old boys is around to call himself a Rimcollian though they started their own RIMC at Hassan Abdal, with the redoubtable Hugh Catchpole — whom India did not give an extension — as principal.

India's most charismatic general and army chief, K S Thimayya (Timmy) was an alumnus. He remained unruffled even after a spat with Defence Minister V K Krishna Menon led him to resign, though he was cajoled out of it by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. He was the first Indian to command a brigade in World

War II, and my battalion 2/5 Royal Gurkha Rifles, was assigned to his brigade in Japan where he pre-empted a mutiny in the paltan. Generals Gopal Bewoor, V N (Titch) Sharma and S Padmanabhan (Paddy), all of whom went on to lead the army, also graduated from RIMC. Padmanabhan was desperate to smash the Pakistan army during Operation Parakram in 2001 but the then Defence Minister Jaswant Singh, a soldier himself, restrained him. The Air Chiefs who graduated from RIMC are Nirmal Suri and Birendra Dhanoa (of Balakot fame). Lt Gen C P Mohanty, who retired as Vice Chief Army in January, missed becoming the fifth Rimcollian Army Chief by a whisker.

Today, two of the six operational army commands are held by Rimcollians (a third

will be added on April 1) while three Vice Admirals and two Air Marshals adorn the other two services. Other alumni, who distinguished themselves are Major Generals Shah Nawaz Khan and J K Bhonsle; the former had joined the INA. One army, two air force chiefs and one navy chief in Pakistan also graduated from Dehradun.

In 1996, Sharma led a dozen and more mainly flag rank officers to Pakistan when Maj Gen Naseerullah Khan Babar, a Rimcollian, was interior minister to Benazir Bhutto. Tongue in cheek, Dawn newspaper carried the headline, 'Indian Generals invade Pakistan'. Our meeting in Rawalpindi with the colourful Colonel Inayatullah Hassan, who used to brew his own beer in his basement, was unforgettable. He offered his indigenous brew, which I

politely refused. Reluctantly, he climbed a stool and pulled out from behind some books, a hidden bottle of White Horse. Sheepishly, he announced it belonged to fellow Rimcollian, General Gul Hassan, a retired army chief who came around routinely to sniff it, and occasionally, to take a sip. In 1997, at RIMC's platinum jubilee, a large contingent of Pakistani old boys arrived in Dehradun, led by former Air Chief, Asghar Khan. They were delighted at returning to school and revisiting their dormitories and sprung beds, which had not been shifted. Maj Taj Mohammad Khanzada, DSO, MC was as excited as a 12-year-old, showing his family his bed and cupboard.

RIMC was raised as Imperial Cadet College (Rajwada Camp) on March 13,

1922, with 27 cadets mainly from princely families; it also included ordinary people like Hiralal Atal, who was the first cadet captain and later became the first adjutant general of the Army. He asked Savitri Khanolkar to design the Param Vir Chakra, which was won for the first time by Maj Somnath Sharma, who died in action in Kashmir in 1947. Similarly, the first Indian officer to win the Victoria Cross was Prem Bhagat. Both were Rimcollians.

As part of the celebrations, Rimcollian old boys will play cricket, hockey and squash with younger cadets, whom they will probably trounce because the umpires and referees are old boys. Around 500 Rimcollians with families will commemorate the centenary and much fun and joy will be had.

Galapagos tortoises belong to new species: Study

Genetic studies of surviving Galapagos tortoises began in 1995 and four years later scientists began studying samples from extinct species

Scientists have discovered that a type of giant tortoise present on one of Ecuador's Galapagos Islands is not from the species it was previously thought to be, Galapagos National Park said.

A study concluded that the giant tortoises living on San Cristobal island, previously identified as *Chelonoidis chathamensis*, correspond genetically to a different species, the park said in a statement late on Thursday.

"The scientists concluded that nearly 8,000 tortoises

which exist today on San Cristobal are not *Chelonoidis chathamensis* but correspond to a completely new lineage that has not yet been described," the park said.

The discovery was made through a genetic comparison of the animals with a sample from the already described species, the statement added, in a study conducted by Newcastle University, Yale University and the Galapagos Conservancy.

The lineage previously thought to correspond to the



San Cristobal tortoises may belong to an extinct species that cohabited with the surviving one, the statement said. The team of investigators is recovering more DNA from the species thought to be extinct to clarify the state of the tortoises and determine how these two species (the living and the extinct) relate,"

the statement said. "For them, the name *Chelonoidis chathamensis* should be assigned to the disappeared species and the living taxon should receive a new name." Genetic studies of surviving Galapagos tortoises began in 1995 and four years later scientists began studying samples from extinct

species. The Galapagos -- whose rich biodiversity inspired Charles Darwin's theory of evolution -- is home to a large variety of flamingos, albatross and cormorants.

Ecuador recently extended the marine reserve around the islands by 60,000 square kilometers (23,166 square miles).



From transport app to life-saving tool, journey of Kyiv Digital's transformation

Kyiv Digital has transformed from the city's official app to buy transportation tickets to a life-saving tool since Ukraine's invasion. Before Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, people in the capital used to pay for parking or utility bills through the app. But after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the app's focus was changed in just 24 hours. The mastermind behind this transformation is Kyiv deputy mayor Petro Olenych. It now has 1.5 million users and is one of the top free applications in the Ukrainian app store as per a spokesperson for CDTO the app.

"Kyiv Digital has become the essential tool for warnings and alarms in the city. The novelties include a map of bomb shelters, map of available pharmacies and the access of insulin, a map of grocery stores, a map of points with free water and bread, pet shops, humanitarian headquarters, and more," the spokesperson said. "The app has been around for a while and



I found it very useful [before] because you could pay for parking on it and buy tickets for buses and trolleybuses," said Denys Malakhatka, a scientific academic researcher. "Since the war started, they changed the app. They now send you alerts about when to take shelter and I also really like the fact that they let you know when the potential attack has ended," said

Malakhatka. "I think it's great that they tell you when it's over and you can relax," he said. "We must adapt our services and we have done. Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities are working more cohesively and productively than ever. The reason is obvious. We defend our country, our cities, our residents, our parents, our children and our future. This is

our home so we will fight to the last," said Olenych in a statement. "There are eight to 10 alarms a day – and when I'm sleeping I don't want to hear them as well," said Kyle Kondratiev, a lightning designer-turned humanitarian volunteer. Russia stepped up its bombardment of Kyiv on Tuesday, smashing apartments and a subway station, while

civilians in 2,000 cars fled Mariupol along a humanitarian corridor in what was believed to be the biggest evacuation yet from the desperately besieged seaport. On the diplomatic front, another round of talks began between Russia and Ukraine via video, and the leaders of three European Union countries — including Poland, a NATO member on Ukraine's doorstep — planned a visit to the embattled capital in a bold show of support. With the number of people driven from the country by the war eclipsing 3 million, large explosions thundered across Kyiv before dawn from what Ukrainian authorities said were artillery strikes, as Russia's assault on the capital appeared to become more systematic and edged closer to the city centre. Moscow denies targeting civilian areas in Ukraine, despite widespread evidence suggesting otherwise, with Western powers and rights groups accusing it of committing possible war crimes.

Remove Bottlenecks in Providing Housing to Kashmiri Migrants, Parl Panel Tells Home Ministry

The parliamentary committee on home affairs has asked the ministry to speed up infrastructural work to rehabilitate Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir, and remove bottlenecks in the work to accommodate 6,000 Kashmiri migrants.

The committee said it is concerned about the slow progress in the construction of transit accommodation for the Kashmiri migrants at the cost of Rs 920 crore.

"The committee recommends that the MHA may remove bottlenecks hampering the construction of remaining transit accommodations and create a monitoring mechanism for timely completion of the remaining accommodations. Adequate allocation may be requested from the Ministry of Finance for the purpose," the committee report said.

According to the home ministry, the J&K government has reported that due to the onset of militancy in Kashmir valley in the 1990s, nearly 64,951 registered Kashmiri migrants are currently residing in the Union

Territory and elsewhere in the country.

The home ministry also told the committee that 3,000 state government jobs have been created for the Kashmiri migrants under the Prime Minister's Development

Package-2015 (PMDP-2015) at an outlay of Rs 1,080 crore. The J&K government has appointed 1,739 migrants and selected additional 1,098 under the scheme. A monthly cash relief of Rs 3,250 to the registered Kashmiri migrants

with the ceiling of Rs 13,000 per family; and monthly dry ration of 9 kg rice, 2 kg atta per head and 1 kg sugar per family have been provided, the MHA said.

The ministry also said in case of a Kashmiri migrant

settling in Delhi, the government will reimburse the expenditure incurred by the Government of NCT of Delhi (GNCTD) on the monthly cash relief of Rs 3,250, out of which, the GNCTD's share is Rs 1,000 per person.



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Over 20,000 plant species to go extinct since humans don't need them anymore

A new study shows that plant species that will not be useful to humans will go extinct unless they tolerate human pressures, adapt, or shift distributions

Humans have had an impact on Earth. This impact is now visible in the form of climate change, global warming, rising sea temperatures, and extreme weather events. In research that catalogs over 80,000 plant species, scientists have found that most of them, over 20,000, will go extinct thanks to their minimal usefulness to humans.

The study that categorises plant species worldwide finds that on this human-dominated planet, many more species of plants are poised to "lose" rather than "win." Researchers suggest that in a rapidly changing world, species may tolerate shifting conditions, adapt, or migrate to new habitats. Species that benefit humankind may have an additional advantage of survival.

"Those that cannot tolerate, adapt, migrate, or prove useful will be the ultimate losers in the Anthropocene and may become extinct," the report states. The findings of the study have been published in a paper in *Plants People Planet*, classifying a significant portion of plant species as winners or losers.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Naturalist Charles Darwin, in his theory of evolution, has proposed that evolution works on the theory of survival of the fittest. This means that individuals in a population, or community, are more likely to survive if they are fit in a genetic sense. The new study working on similar lines indicates that human choices now largely dictate the environmental conditions across much of the globe and, as a result, species of plants and animals can survive or will go extinct.

"Species lucky enough to be directly or indirectly aided by human activities are likely to survive and can be thought of as



"winners," while those that are pushed to ecological irrelevance or extinction by those same activities are the ultimate "losers" in evolutionary terms," researchers at the Smithsonian said in a statement.

MORE LOSERS THAN WINNERS

Researchers place 86,592 species of vascular plants—a large group of plants that have vascular tissue that transport water, nutrients, and other substances—into the eight categories that describe their prospects for survival. These categories include winners useful to humans and winners not useful to humans, losers useful to humans and losers not useful to humans, and currently neutral species.

"The results suggest that currently, many more species are losers than winners and that if the tentative winners and potential losers realize their projected trajectories, losers in the future will continue to greatly outnumber future winners," the paper read.

John Kress, botany curator emeritus

at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, who led the study said that 86,592 species might sound a large number but it is actually just under 30% of the nearly 300,000 known species of vascular plants. Kress and Krupnick categorized 20,293 species of plants as losers, with the vast

majority of those losing species being identified as not useful to humans. By contrast, the researchers found just 6,913 species of winners, with all but 164 of those species having some human use.

"Now and in the future, plants have to adapt to the environment humans have created or they will go extinct. Our results suggest that this means the plant communities of the future will be more homogenized than those of today," Gary Krupnick, head of the museum's plant conservation unit said in a statement.

Changing climate and environmental conditions due to human activities is set to put in motion several triggers that will be highly challenging for plant and animal species to adapt to, hinting at more extinctions in the future to come.

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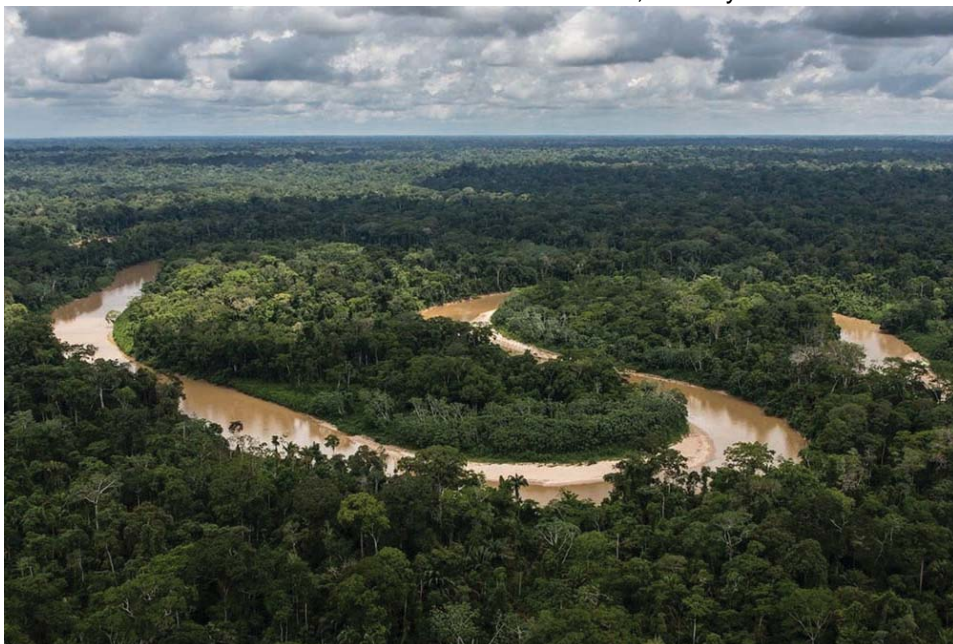


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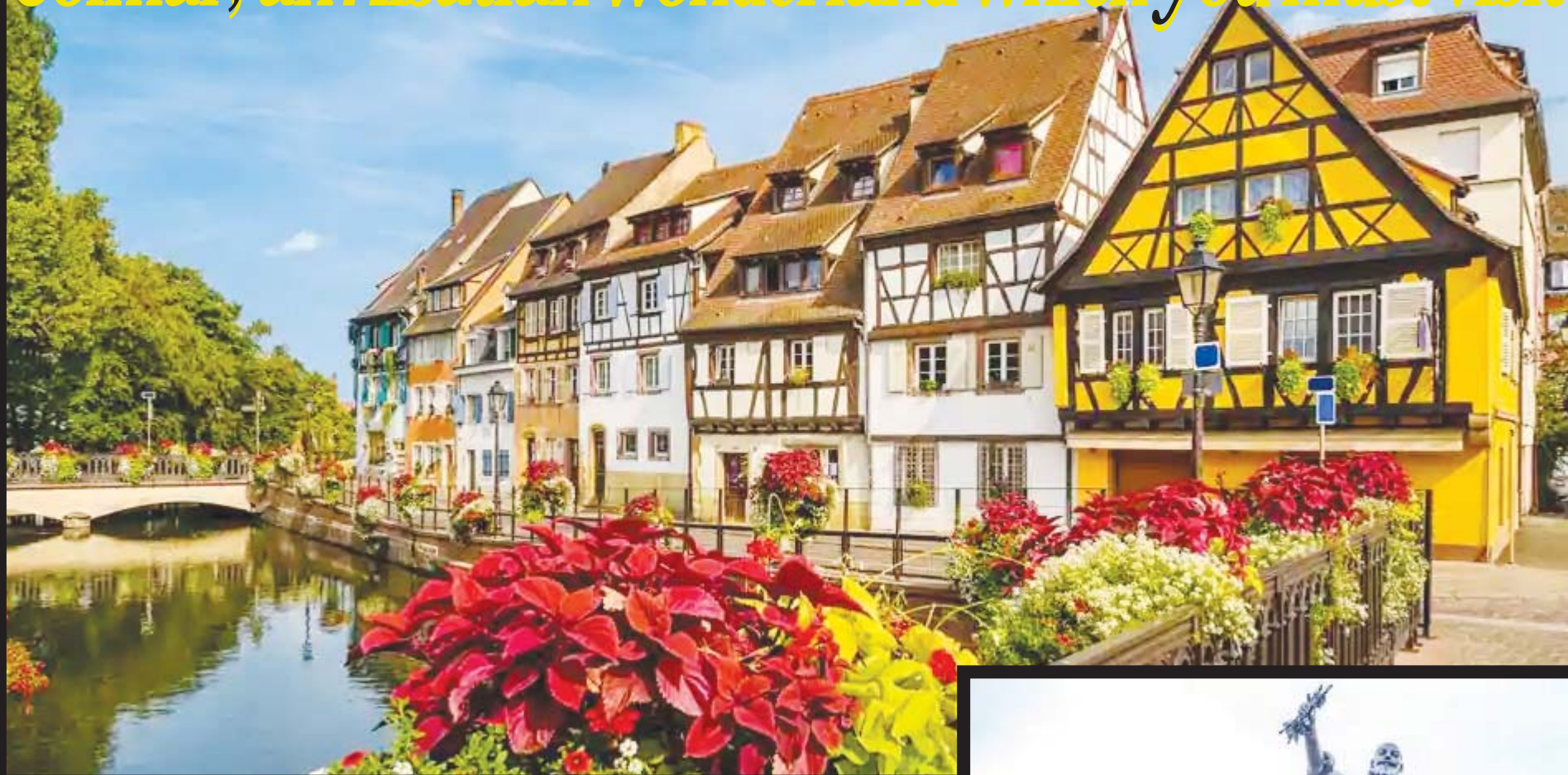
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Colmar, an Alsatian wonderland which you must visit



I have an acute weakness for towns or cities with canals - Amsterdam (Netherlands), Venice (Italy), Copenhagen (Denmark). But one of my all-time favourites is Colmar in France's Alsace region. This quaint town is perched on the edge of the Rhine river. This is where France meets Germany and these two distinct cultures intertwine to create a unique experience that is Colmar. History buffs might have heard the name Alsace Lorraine as the disputed region, which switched hands between Germany and France repeatedly and also partly contributed to both the World Wars. For those who haven't, let me elaborate. After several years of the Swedish rule in the 17th century, Colmar joined the Kingdom of France. But, after 1871 (with the defeat of Napoleon III), the city returned to Germany until World War I. It was then reoccupied by the Germans during World War II. It was the last town in France to be liberated at the end of the war and it's been French ever since. Owing to its swinging past, the locals switch between German and French languages effortlessly. It is no surprise that one will notice the German influence on Colmar's architecture - overflowing with half-timbered medieval buildings and flower-lined canals.

Walking on the streets of Colmar, I could see my childhood fairytales come to life. There's a wooden bell tower just perfect for Rapunzel to have let her hair down, tiny cottages that would make the perfect home for the Gingerbread man and a candy coloured bakery that Hansel and Gretel would have frequented. Any direction you look, there are pastel waterside houses, balconies overflowing with blooms, windows with heart cutouts.

The weekend was cold and it was a bit overcast, which added to the chill. However, that didn't stop me from walking around the town as I wrapped myself in my coat. I finally reached the peak of prettiness in the area near the Quai de Poissonniers nicknamed Petit Venice. A walk along Petit Venice led me to St Peter's Bridge where the view was a picture-perfect row of half-timbered houses by the canals. Some houses even date back to the 17th century, unscathed by the wars. Also, known as the merchants' quarters, this is where the butchers, fishermen, pastry chefs, tanners (people who tan animal hides) lived back in the day.

Having stopped at a nearby cheese and sausage stall, the owner shared a very likeable fact about Petit Venice. If he is to be believed then, the variety of colours the buildings adorned has a story to tell. Back in the

day, the different colours were used to display the types of businesses - so for example, if you were a baker, your house would be pink or a fisherman would have a red house.

One cannot just come to Colmar and not take a canal tour. I decided to take one and see a different side of the town from the boat. The 30-minute boat tour slowly glided over the shallow water and passed through the residential district, the covered market and the city centre. The man who was rowing mentioned that these boats were originally used by the market gardeners to transport their vegetables to the markets.

Once, I got off the boat tour, I walked into the Colmar Cathedral. The impressive spire of St Martin's Church can be seen from many points around town, but it is definitely worth a look up close - both the ornate facade and the beautifully decorated interior. However, St Martin's Church is not a cathedral (as it is not under the control of a bishop) and is only called so due to its massive structure.

Since I passed by the covered markets on the boat, I thought why not see how it looked from the inside. Markets are my happy place. A red building on the edge of the Petit Venice, designed in 1865, is home to merchants providing the best olive oil, smelly cheese and all other perfect produce you would expect for a



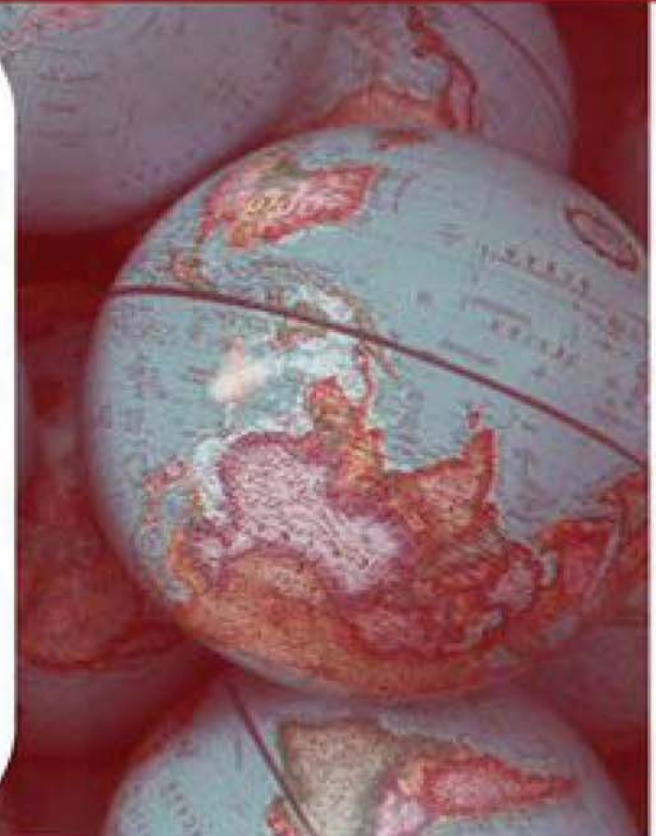
French city. Another great activity you could do is to rent a bicycle and ride part of the Alsatian wine route. It is a great way to explore Colmar's countryside or another beautiful village nearby called Eguisheim. Alternatively, you could also visit the Unterlinden Museum which covers nearly 7000 years of history. From prehistoric times to contemporary works, there's not much the museum doesn't touch on. The primary area of the

museum is the one that houses the Isenheim Altarpiece dating back to 1515. It is a two-sided painting done on hinged panels that the priests could move depending on the season. Looking back, my weekend was mainly popping into street side shops, sampling some traditional Alsatian biscuits and local charcuterie. This indeed is the most picturesque setting in all of France.

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WWE star Scott Hall dies at 63, experts on why hip surgeries can trigger heart attack

Experts say the risk of heart attack may increase in people undergoing any major surgical procedure, especially those who have pre-existing heart disease.



(News agency) WWE star Scott Hall, also popularly known as Razor Ramon, died on Tuesday at the age of 63. He had been put on life support after suffering from multiple heart attacks. Hall had developed a blood clot as a result of complications from hip replacement surgery earlier this month, according to reports. (Also read: Shane Warne dies of suspected heart attack at 52; know what may cause sudden heart attacks) Experts say the risk of heart attack may increase in people undergoing any major surgical procedure, especially those who have pre-existing heart disease. There are several

studies that say hip replacement surgeries have led to heart attacks in patients.

"Any major surgical procedure performed under general anesthesia triggers the adrenergic system of the body which puts stress on the cardiovascular system. This is by increasing heart rate blood pressure and clotting tendency in the body. Persons with pre-existing heart disease may at times not be able to withstand this insult and develop a heart attack during or soon after the surgery. This risk is further enhanced by stoppage of blood thinning medication to reduce the bleeding from the wound," Dr Atul Mathur, Executive Director - Interventional Cardiology and Chief of Cath Lab, Fortis Escorts Heart Institute, Okhla,

New Delhi says in an interview with HT Digital. Heart attack can get triggered due to pulmonary embolism, a condition where a blood clot breaks loose and travels through the bloodstream to the lungs. "During the surgery, patients are extremely stressed out. However, when you don't move around clots form in the veins of lower limbs. This is called as deep vein thrombosis (DVT). If this clot gets dislodged from there and goes to the lung arteries this can block the blood flow to the lungs. This condition is usually called Pulmonary Embolism," Dr Ankur Phatarpekar, Director Cath Lab & Interventional Cardiologist, Symboisis Hospital told HT Digital. "The symptoms include shortness of

breath, cough, chest pain. If this is left untreated, the mortality rate is up to 30% but in case it is treated early the mortality rate is 8%. Physical activity and blood thinners are given prophylactically can help prevent clot formation," adds Dr Phatarpekar. Dr Mathur says this is the reason all patients undergoing major surgeries are screened for their ability to withstand this surgical stress by performing cardiac stress tests if they are above 40 years age or a simple echocardiogram in others. "On this basis they can be stratified for the risk of heart attacks related to the surgery and necessary precautions can be taken," adds the expert.

Deltacron: Why Experts Say You Shouldn't Worry About this Latest Coronavirus Variant

- A new variant called Deltacron, which contains genetic material from both Delta and Omicron, has been identified in Europe and the United States.
- The variant remains rare, having been detected in only a handful of people.
- Infectious disease specialists say there's no evidence yet that shows this recombinant variant is more transmissible or virulent, but studies are underway to better understand Deltacron's viral traits.

(News agency) The World Health Organization (WHO) announced Trusted Source that scientists have identified a new variant called Deltacron, which contains genetic material from both the Omicron and Delta strains of COVID-19. This latest variant has been detected in Europe and the United States but remains rare, according to WHO officials. According to infectious disease specialists, coronavirus strains are known to recombine with one another, especially when there are multiple variants circulating at high levels. But how recombinant events impact the virus's traits — like how infectious and virulent they are — are unclear and require careful research. So far, there's no evidence suggesting there are any changes in severity or level of infectiousness with this recombinant variant. There are numerous studies underway to determine if there are any changes in Deltacron's epidemiology, WHO officials said.

"The data is too limited at this time to make these assessments," said Dr.

Nesochi Okeke-Igbokwe, an internal medicine physician based in New York City, to Healthline. "Nonetheless, it is too preliminary to go into panic mode about this variant until more data is collected and analyzed."

What is Deltacron?

Scientists who identified Deltacron say the variant contains the Omicron-version of the spike protein, which is the part of the novel coronavirus that attaches itself to human cells, along with the Delta version of the virus's backbone. Some public health experts have speculated that the combination of Delta and Omicron's genetic material could produce a variant that contains Omicron's increased infectiousness and Delta's virulence. Coronaviruses are known for their recombination ability, and much of the

time, the changes have minimal impact on the virus's behavior. "This was expected, and there's no evidence that



these recombination events are significantly changing the behavior of the virus," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security in Maryland and an infectious disease expert, speaking with Healthline.

How concerned should we be?

Infectious diseases experts say it's early to be concerned about Deltacron. The

variant remains rare and has not spread at a concerning pace so far. There is also no data suggesting it can spread more easily than its predecessors or cause more severe disease. Still, the behavior of any new variant is unpredictable, says Okeke-Igbokwe, and only time will tell if Deltacron will trigger a new wave. "It is unclear at this time if Deltacron is more transmissible or if it can cause severe disease as compared to other variants," she said. Okeke-Igbokwe notes that the U.S. is now better equipped to deal with new variants that emerge. Adalja adds it's unlikely that Deltacron will outsmart the immunity obtained from prior infection and vaccination. The COVID-19 vaccines have proven to be effective against the most important outcomes — hospitalization, severe disease, and death — even in the face of new variants. "I do not think any variant (recombinant or ordinary) will be able to erase everything immunity does," Adalja said. "It's not an off/on, but a spectrum of protection."

Top 5 skin care tips to keep in mind before and after the Holi celebrations

These 5 tips will help take care of your skin before and after the Holi celebrations. Take note.

(News agency) As the most colourful festival is finally here, it is important to keep skincare in mind as Holi celebrations go beyond dry colours and flower petals. There are synthetic elements in certain colours and of course, we end up using other materials that can have a damaging impact on skin and hair. It is important to keep certain tips in mind to protect the skin and hair before and after the colourful celebrations. It is crucial to keep your skin and hair safe so here are the top 5 useful

and easy tips for pre and post Holi celebrations. **Moisturise** Keeping your skin moisturised is the most important step. Apply a gentle moisturiser that keeps you protected from the hazardous effects of colours and the synthetic elements in it. Pick a moisturiser that suits your skin type and helps retain moisture. **Hydrate** You can go for a good water based toner to maintain the nourishment level for your skin. You can either go for a clinically recommended toner or a herbal

one is also a good choice.

Oiling

Applying oil to your skin and hair before the Holi celebration begins is always a good idea as it helps in getting rid of the colours post celebrations in a much easier way.

Scrub

Before the final cleanse regime, go for some homemade scrubbing as it will help in getting rid of the dead skin and the remaining colours post the festivities.

Cleanse



-Finally, use a good cleaner to complete the skincare. Go for a natural mild cleanser and complete the process thereafter, apply some specialist.

Study finds key details about 'punch drunk syndrome' and Alzheimer's

The syndrome, also known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), is linked to repeated blows to the head and causes a type of dementia similar to Alzheimer's.

(News agency) Scientists studying damaged brains of boxers and other sports people have found key details about a head injury-linked disease called "punch drunk syndrome" that could help the development of new diagnostics and treatments for Alzheimer's. The syndrome, also known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), is linked to repeated blows to the head and causes a type of dementia similar to Alzheimer's, which is characterised by behavioural changes, confusion and memory loss. CTE can affect people who play contact sports such as boxing, rugby, soccer and football, but can currently be diagnosed only after death, since brain tissues have to be removed and analysed to confirm presence of the disease. Like Alzheimer's - a brain-wasting condition that affects up to 50 million people worldwide - CTE features the abnormal build-up of certain proteins in the brain. One of those, tau, forms filaments that clump up in tangles inside



cells. In this study, published in the journal Nature on Wednesday, researchers from Britain's Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology (LMB) were able to detail the atomic structures of the abnormal tau filaments in CTE. "Our new knowledge of these structures could make it possible to diagnose CTE in living patients by developing tracer compounds that will specifically bind to the tau filaments of CTE," said Michel Goedert, an LMB researcher who co-led the study. The research involved scientists extracting tau filaments from the brains of three people with CTE

post-mortem - one former professional American football player and two former professional boxers. The filaments were then imaged using a technique known as cryo-electron microscopy. The team found that while the tau structures from the three patients with CTE were identical, they were also different from those seen in Alzheimer's. This could in future help doctors distinguish between various forms of dementia when diagnosing patients, the team said, and also furthers understanding of how and why tau forms disease-specific clumps and folds. "We don't know the chemical nature of these molecules yet, but we suspect they may play a role in the assembly of tau into filaments, and that their abundance may determine why some individuals develop CTE and others do not," said Sjors Scheres, who co-led the work. He said the next stage of research will be to identify those molecules and understand more about their role in tau build-up.

Statins effective against cancer-linked weight loss

The condition known as cachexia, or wasting syndrome, is common among patients with chronic diseases such as cancer, heart failure and AIDS.



(News agency) Besides known to treat high cholesterol, statins can also be used to take care of rapid weight loss, weakness and wasting of the body due to cancer, Brazilian researchers have found. The condition known as cachexia, or wasting syndrome, is common among patients with chronic diseases such as cancer, heart failure and AIDS. A process of adipose tissue remodelling known as browning occurs in patients with cachexia and that browning significantly contributes to the rapid loss of weight and fat, according to researchers from the University of Mogi das Cruzes (UMC) in Brazil. In experiments

on mice, the team identified a key protein TLR4 (toll-like receptor 4) in this process and showed that "atorvastatin" -- a class of statins -- can attenuate its effects. Treatment with atorvastatin proved effective in extending survival, attenuating adipose tissue remodeling and reducing tumour growth [by 49.7%] in comparison with a control group not treated with the drug. "We showed that atorvastatin had a direct effect on the action of TLR4, which inhibited adipose tissue browning and reduced tumour growth," said lead author Miguel Luiz Batista Junior, Professor at the varsity.

This method to clean solar panels could save 10 billion gallons of water every year

Researchers at MIT have developed a method to clean solar panels without using water and saving enough to supply drinking water for up to two million people



the dust problem. The saved water will be enough to supply drinking water for up to 2 million people, they claim.

WHAT IS THE NEW WATERLESS CLEANING METHOD?

Researchers used electrostatic repulsion to cause dust particles to detach and rise up the panel's surface, without the need for water or brushes. To activate the system, a simple electrode passes just above the solar panel's surface, imparting an electrical charge to the dust particles, which are then repelled by a charge applied to the panel itself, according to a statement by MIT.

Published in the journal Science Advances, the research is led by MIT graduate student Sreedath Panat and professor of mechanical engineering Kripa Varanasi. Lab test showed that the drop-off of energy output from the panels happens steeply at the very beginning of the process of

dust accumulation and can easily reach a 30 percent reduction after just one month without cleaning. Even a 1 percent reduction in power, for a 150-megawatt solar installation, they calculated, could result in a \$200,000 loss in annual revenue.

"There is so much work going on in solar materials. They're pushing the boundaries, trying to gain a few percent here and there in improving the efficiency, and here you have something that can obliterate all of that right away," Varanasi said in the statement.

TOO MUCH WATER WASTAGE

Researchers estimate that water cleaning makes up to 10 per cent of the operating costs of solar installations and a reduction in these costs could improve the overall power output by allowing for more frequent automated cleanings. "The water footprint of the solar industry is mind-boggling. So, the industry has to be very careful and thoughtful

about how to make this a sustainable solution," Varanasi said.

The team added that the new system only requires an electrode, which can be a simple metal bar, to pass over the panel, producing an electric field that imparts a charge to the dust particles as it goes. The team using specially prepared laboratory samples of dust with a range of particle sizes, experiments proved that the process works effectively on a laboratory-scale test installation. "We performed experiments at varying humidities from 5 per cent to 95. As long as the ambient humidity is greater than 30 percent, you can remove almost all of the particles from the surface, but as humidity decreases, it becomes harder," Panat said. They suggest that each solar panel could be fitted with railings on each side, with an electrode spanning across the panel and the whole process could be automated.

(News agency) expected to reach 10 per cent of the global population, an estimated 10 billion gallons of water per year will be used to clean these arrays since most of these solar grids are expected to be set up in desert areas, where sunlight is abundant, where dust can reduce the output of photovoltaic panels by as much as 30 percent in just one month. Researchers at MIT have developed a way of automatically cleaning solar panels in a waterless, no-contact system that could significantly reduce

Even a worm can make decisions, says a study

(News agency) Decisions are hard. (Remember good ol' Hamlet?). From what you'll have for dinner to what you will wear for it, choices abound. And all of this may often lead to an unnecessary headache. But it turns out making a decision is not hard as it is made out to be. A worm with just 302 neurons can do this successfully. For comparison, humans have billions of neurons. The study in this regard was carried out by researchers in Salk Institute for Biological Studies in California. They studied a predatory worm called *P. pacificus*. The changes in the behaviour of the worm was studied. It was seen when the worm would bite to save its food or when it would bite to kill a competitor. In order to check the worm's ability to take decision, scientists relied more on its behaviour rather than an extremely-detailed study about how impulses traveled through the neurons. *P. pacificus*' behaviour with respect to *C. elegans* was studied. *C. elegans* is *P. pacificus*' competitor as well as its prey. It was observed that when confronted with larval *C. elegans* that are easy to overpower, *P. pacificus* bit to devour. But when a fully grown *C. elegans* tried to steal its food, *P. pacificus* bit just to deter it.

Scientists confirm several geomagnetic storms are going to hit Earth this week

(News agency) Scientists have confirmed that several geomagnetic storms are going to hit Earth this week. Geomagnetic storms are caused by ejections of the solar corona into space, resulting in disturbances to the Earth's upper atmosphere and increased drag on objects in low orbits. "There is a chance of enhancements to the auroral oval at times during 13th and 14th March as a result of two Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs) and a coronal hole high-speed stream arriving at Earth," the British Met Office advised.

The storm, a big cloud of charged particles that will fling from the Sun at about 4.5 million miles per hour (7.2 million km per hour), will be spawned by a pair of solar flares, scientists said. This is probably the strongest such event in nearly six years, and is likely more intense than a similar storm in late January, said Joseph Kunches, a space weather specialist at the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

This solar disturbance is a three-stage affair, or as Kunches said in a telephone interview from Boulder, Colorado: "We hit the trifecta." In the first stage, two solar flares moving at nearly the speed of light reached Earth late on Tuesday. Such flares can cause radio blackouts. Then, solar radiation hit Earth's magnetic field on Wednesday, with possible impact on air traffic, especially near the poles, satellites and any astronauts taking space walks. This phase could last for days. Finally, the plasma cloud sent by the coronal mass ejection, which is basically a big chunk of the Sun's atmosphere, is expected to arrive at Earth early on Thursday. This phase can disrupt power grids, satellites, oil pipelines and high-accuracy GPS systems used by oil drillers, surveyors and some agricultural operations, scientists said. There are approximately 4,000 active satellites in this space, which extends to 1,200 miles above the surface, as well as 15,000 pieces of debris like rocket bodies and defunct probes, according to space industry

analyst Seradata. GPS systems used for less-refined functions, such as the turn-by-turn navigation found in many cars, should not be affected, according to NOAA's Doug Biesecker. Kunches said the geomagnetic component of the storm may arrive a bit ahead of schedule because it follows a previous storm that left the Sun on Sunday and is currently buffeting the Earth's magnetosphere. "When you've already had one coronal mass ejection storm, sometimes the next coronal mass ejection storm is faster to get here," Kunches said. These storms could produce some vivid auroras, according to experts. In the Northern Hemisphere, the aurora borealis could be visible at mid-latitudes, which in the United States could include New York, Illinois and Iowa. Such stormy space weather is unusual in recent history, according to Harlan Spence, an astrophysicist at the University of New Hampshire who is principal investigator on the Cosmic Ray Telescope for the Effects of Radiation (CRaTER) aboard NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter.

NASA is collecting names to send into space aboard Orion capsule to the Moon

(News agency) The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is collecting names to be put on a flash drive that will fly aboard Artemis I. Artemis I will be the first uncrewed flight test of the Space Launch System rocket and the Orion spacecraft. The flight paves the way toward landing the first woman and the first person of color on the Moon. "It's free to add your name to the flash drive," said NASA spokesperson Kathryn Hambleton. "We hope this is a way to get people excited and to bring them along and inspire the next generation, the Artemis generation," Hambleton said. Since opening the submissions earlier this month, NASA has already received over one million



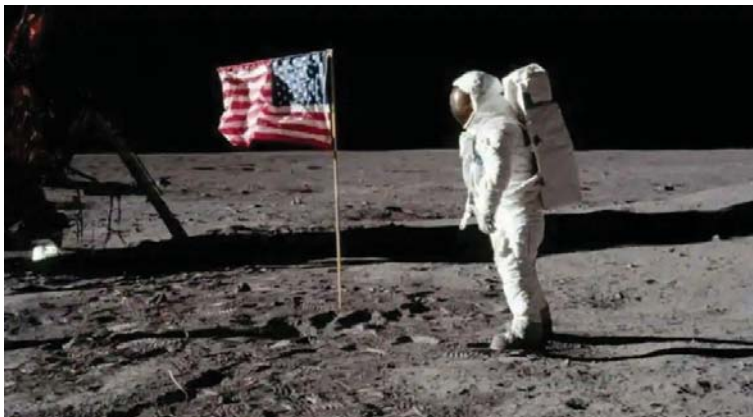
names, according to Hambleton. "We're hoping to keep up this momentum of just a little over a week ago ... to gather many more names

and generate more excitement from people around the globe that are going to ride along virtually," she said. The US space agency is shooting for a date in May or

June. All eyes will be on the historic Launch Complex 39B when Orion and the Space Launch System (SLS) lift off for the first time from NASA's

modernized Kennedy Space Centre in Florida. The 30-foot-tall, cone-shaped piece of hardware connects the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket's upper and lower propulsion stages. The adapter also houses the RL10 engine that powers the Interim Cryogenic Propulsion Stage that will send Orion on a precise trajectory to the Moon. Artemis I will be the first in a series of increasingly complex missions to build a long-term human presence at the Moon for decades to come. NASA plans to build lunar habitats and use lessons learned there for forward missions to Mars in the 2030s. Observers are encouraged that the program launched by former President Donald Trump has continued under Joe Biden, even if he hasn't been as vocal in his support.

NASA is cracking open a 50-year-old vacuum-sealed tube of lunar gas and soil



(News agency) The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is cracking open a 50-year-old vacuum-sealed tube of lunar gas and soil. It was among one of the 2,196 rock samples collected during NASA's Apollo missions to Earth. Dubbed 73001, the sample in question was collected by astronauts Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt in December 1972. The tube, 35 cm long and 4 cm (13.8 inches by 1.6 inches) wide, had been hammered into the ground of the Moon's Taurus-Littrow valley to collect the rocks. Of the only two samples to have been vacuum sealed on the Moon, this is the first to be opened. It could as such contain gases or volatile substances (water, carbon

dioxide, etc.) And the aim is to extract these gases, which are probably only present in very small quantities, to be able to analyze them using spectrometry techniques that have become extremely precise in recent years. NASA knew "science and technology would evolve and allow scientists to study the material in new ways to address new questions in the future," Lori Glaze, director of the Planetary Science Division at NASA Headquarters, said in a statement.

The US space agency has extended its target date for sending astronauts back to the moon to 2025 at the earliest, stretching out by at least a year the timeline pronounced under former President Donald Trump.

Trump's administration had set the aggressive goal of returning humans to the lunar surface by 2024, an initiative named Artemis intended as a stepping stone toward the even-more-ambitious objective of sending astronauts to Mars. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson cited delays from legal wrangling over the SpaceX contract to build the Artemis lunar landing vehicle as a major reason for extending the target date. "We lost nearly seven months in litigation, and that likely has pushed the first human

landing likely to no earlier than 2025," Nelson told a news conference. "We are estimating no earlier than 2025 for Artemis 3, which would be the human lander on the first demonstration landing." Nelson, a former astronaut and US senator appointed by President Joe Biden to lead the space agency, said delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also played a role. NASA had previously aimed to return crewed spacecraft to the lunar surface by 2028, after putting a

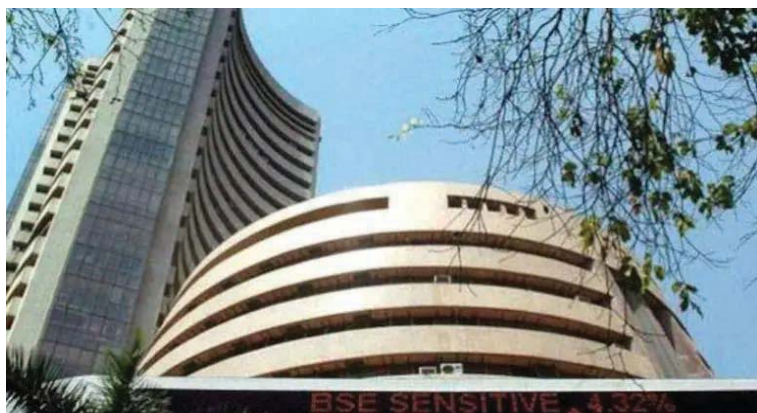
"Gateway" space station into orbit around the moon by 2024. But the Trump administration, in a surprise 2019 pronouncement from then-Vice President Mike Pence, set a deadline for putting Americans back on the moon within five years "by any means necessary." At the time, Pence said the United States was in a new "space race," borrowing vocabulary from the 1960s Cold War era, to counter the potential space weaponry capabilities of Russia and China.

Isro successfully tests boosters that will power Small Satellite Launch Vehicle

(News agency) The Indian Space & Research Organisation on Monday successfully conducted the ground testing of the newly developed solid booster stage (SS1) for its new Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV). The test was conducted at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. The test was conducted at 12:05 pm when the booster was fired up. Isro said that the successful testing has given it sufficient confidence to proceed with the first developmental flight of SSLV (SSLV-D1). The remaining stages of SSLV (SS2 & SS3) have successfully undergone necessary ground tests and are ready for integration. The testing comes on the heels of Isro hinting that it will conduct the maiden launch of the new vehicles this year. The SSLV will provide

a payload capability of 500 kilograms to a 500-kilometer planar orbit. By comparison, the PSLV — the workhorse of Isro — can take up to a 1,750-kilogram payload into SSO of 600 km altitude. It is to be noted that the government has sanctioned Rs 169 crores for the development of the project. This will cover the development & qualification of the vehicle systems and the flight demonstration through three development flights (SSLV-D1, SSLV-D2 & SSLV-D3). "The development of SSLV has been primarily envisaged to build a cost-effective launch vehicle with high launch frequency and quick turnaround capability in order to cater to the growing opportunity in the global launch services market for small satellites," the Ministry of Science & Technology had said in a statement earlier.

Share market soars amid Russia-Ukraine war: Factors that boost investors



peace talks.

While the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex had gained 1.19 per cent or 660.31 points to 55,838.88, the blue-chip NSE Nifty 50 index was up 0.97 per cent or 162.10 points at 16,684.

ASIAN STOCKS

Most stock markets in Asia firmed while oil prices extended last week's decline after both Russia and Ukraine gave their most upbeat assessment yet of prospects for talks.

CRUDE OIL IMPACT

"The single most important variable to track is crude, which has been on the softer side," said

Pankaj Pandey, head of retail research at ICICI Securities in Mumbai, as per Reuters report. India is the world's third biggest oil importer and consumer, and is thus susceptible to high inflation if oil prices rise.

"The decline in crude from the recent high... indicates that the feared high inflation may not materialise," said V K Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services, the Reuters report.

TOP STOCKS IN FOCUS

The Nifty Bank Index gained 1 per cent, helped by HDFC Bank, which added 2.3 per cent after

saying on Saturday that the central bank had lifted restrictions on some of its activities under its digital programme.

Among individual stocks, digital payments company Paytm slid 10.7 per cent, after the central bank barred Paytm Payments Bank from taking on new customers and ordered a comprehensive audit of its IT systems.

Jubilant FoodWorks, the Indian franchise partner of Domino's Pizza fell as much as 14.7 per cent. The company's top boss resigned on Friday.

(News agency) India is the world's third biggest oil importer and consumer, and is thus susceptible to high inflation if oil prices rise. The decline in crude from the recent high has boosted

investors' sentiments.

The Sensex and Nifty continued their winning runs on Monday, extending gains from last week, as oil prices declined on hopes of progress in Russia-Ukraine

Retail inflation in India rises to 6.07% in February

Retail inflation, which has been on the rise since September last year, touched 6.07 per cent in February this year, according to government data on Monday

(News agency) The annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) retail inflation rate in India in February, 2022 touched 6.07 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Monday. Retail inflation, which has been on the rise since September last year, reached 6.01 per cent in January this year. Retail inflation tracked by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures the changes in prices from a retail buyer's perspective. Wholesale inflation, which is

tracked by the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), measures inflation at the level of producers.

WHOLESALE INFLATION

Meanwhile, India's annual wholesale price-based inflation accelerated to 13.11 per cent in February from the previous month's 12.96 per cent, government data showed on Monday.

EXPORTS GROW

Meanwhile, India's exports rose 25.1 per cent to USD 34.57 billion in February on account of

healthy growth in sectors like engineering, petroleum and chemicals, even as the trade deficit widened to USD 20.88 billion, according to data released by the commerce ministry on Monday, according to a PTI report.

IMPORTS UP

Imports during the month too jumped 36 per cent to USD 55.45 billion, with inbound shipments of petroleum and crude oil surging 69 per cent to USD 15.28 billion. Trade deficit -- the



difference between imports and exports -- stood at USD 13.12 billion in February 2021, the PTI report said.

Sensex climbs over 900 points, Nifty ends at 16,871

NSE Nifty 50 index closed up 1.45 per cent or 240.85 points at 16,871.30, while the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex gained 1.68 per cent or 935.72 points to end at 56,486.02



(News agency) The Sensex and Nifty extended gains from last week to end more than 1 per cent higher on Monday, as oil prices declined on hopes of progress in Russia-Ukraine peace talks.

The blue chip NSE Nifty 50 index closed up 1.45 per cent or 240.85 points at 16,871.30, while the benchmark S&P BSE Sensex gained 1.68 per cent or 935.72 points to end at 56,486.02.

WHAT SHARE MARKET HINTS

Both indices have shed about 3 per cent each this year due to a combination of overvaluation fears, consistent selling by foreign investors, a miss on economic growth estimates and the Russia-Ukraine crisis,

according to a Reuters report.

Global markets rose on Monday, while oil prices extended last week's decline after both Russia and Ukraine gave their most upbeat assessment yet of prospects for talks.

The slide in oil prices is a positive for India in terms of containing inflation, as the country is the world's third biggest oil importer and consumer.

RETAIL INFLATION DATA

Investors will be looking out for February retail inflation data, which likely slipped marginally, according to a Reuters poll, with surveyed economists also warning about the impact of surging oil prices. The report is due later in the day.

STOCKS IN FOCUS

The Nifty Bank Index gained 2.22 per cent, helped by HDFC Bank, which added 3.3 per cent after saying on Saturday that the central bank had lifted restrictions on some of its activities under its digital programme, Reuters reported. Among individual stocks, digital payments company Paytm slid 12.9 per cent after the central bank barred Paytm Payments Bank from taking on new customers and ordered a comprehensive audit of its IT systems. Jubilant FoodWorks JUBI.NS, the Indian franchise partner of Domino's Pizza, fell as much as 12.2 per cent. Several brokerages downgraded their price target for the company after its top boss resigned on Friday.

Anupam Kher on massive success of The Kashmir Files: We had given up hope about cinema

Actor Anupam Kher says whatever trade pundits say about the formula for a hit film has gone out of the window with The Kashmir Files



(News agency) His latest film, The Kashmir Files, has surprised one and all. The response has been on a personal level, he has a lot of emotions involved in it. "First of

all, I feel the Kashmiri Pandit community who was subjected to this kind of inhuman behaviour, exodus, genocide, who were forgotten for 32 years, I feel the healing may start. The feelings they have gone through, the murders and rapes that happened... four lakh Kashmiri Pandits were thrown out of the valley. The worst part was that nobody really cared for them. That is one part of it," he says. Adding that the box office collections are encouraging, the 67-year-old says, "I feel euphoric, what an amazing thing to happen. Only cinema

can do that. We had given up hope about it, and saying 'teen ghante ki film ahi honi chahiye, this is not a song and dance film, this was not publicized fully'... it's a small triumph. My philosophy 'kuch bhi ho sakta hai' is again underlined." Kher asserts that the success of a film like The Kashmir Files proves that a well-made film can definitely find an audience. The pre conceived notions of film business, according to the actor, don't apply anymore. "All the theories that pandits of cinema throw at you 'aaj kala isa hona chahiye, vaisa hona chahiye'- aisa kuchh nahi hai. It broke all barriers, that

according to me will be a case study of how cinema and audiences have changed. It's hysterical, unbelievable... people I meet at airports, they hug me, they cry. And it has got nothing to do with Kashmiri Pandits. Any human being has that sense of guilt, how could we let this happen in our own country," he shares. Kher, who also serves as the executive producer for the film, reveals he himself couldn't find tickets, such is the demand, "Maine apne liye book karani thi teen ticket, mujhe nahi mili. I haven't felt so happy about my job."

Karisma Kapoor and Govinda lose sleep over a new 'jodi' more 'dumdaar' than theirs, fans disagree

Karisma and Govinda worked together in the 90s in 11 movies, including Muqabla (1993), Prem Shakti (1994), Raja Babu (1994), and Andaz Apna Apna (1994)

(News agency) Karisma Kapoor and Govinda, who were touted as one of the most successful on-screen couples in the late 90s, have come together to talk about a new jodi that they think is even more powerful than them. The former co-stars recently came together for a new ad for a fast food chain, which made their fans nostalgic for the old times. Also Read: Superfan Karisma Kapoor would tell parents she wanted to meet Govinda, recalls the prediction he had made for her

Karisma lying in her bed with her sleeping mask on, which read Lolo, her nickname. She gets a call from Chi Chi, which is Govinda's nickname. Govinda says "Lolo," and Karisma replies to him, "Bolo (say)." Govinda, who was wearing a nightgown, moved his landline phone receiver from one ear to the other, as he said, "Sunn ne mein aaya hai humse bhi dumdaar jodi launch hua hui hai (I have heard that a partnership has been launched that is even more powerful than ours)." Karisma removes her

straight in her bed, and asks, "humse jyada (better than us)?" Karisma adds, "I don't believe it Chi Chi." Govinda replies, "Arrey Lolo Sachhi. Isme sab hai, steamy chemistry, juicy andaaz, crunchy swag (It's the truth Lolo. It has everything, steamy chemistry, juicy attitude, crunchy swag)." Karisma then asks, "Really! Kisne launch kiya (Who launched them)." Govinda then munches on a chicken leg as Karisma moves the phone away from her years after listening to the noise. Karisma shared the



video on her Instagram account on Monday evening with the caption, "The biggest Jodi is here. If there's anyone who comes close to deserving the title of No. 1 Jodi, this is it! Right ChiChi?" Govinda also posted the ad from his account, writing, "Arre suna kya - Lolo aur mujhse bhi

'Dumdaar Jodi' launch huyi hai! With steamy chemistry, juicy andaaz aur crunchy swag, ye hi to hai number 1 jodi!" He added, "Vaise Lolo Bucket vapas to kardo," referring to the last scene in the ad in which he is seen passing the bucket to Karisma.

Salman Khan unveils Ajay Devgn's Runway 34 teaser, says he requested him to 'come on Eid' because he has no film ready



(News agency) Salman Khan has unveiled the teaser of Ajay Devgn's upcoming film Runway 34. He also mentioned that the film will release around Eid this year on April 29. The teaser shows a glimpse of Ajay Devgn as a pilot, who finds himself in a tricky situation as his plane faces turbulence amid bad weather. The film also stars Amitabh Bachchan, Rakul Preet Singh, Boman Irani and

Carry Minati. Also read: Ajay Devgn pens note to his 20-year-old self, writes about 'brutal rejections' and failure to fit in. Sharing the teaser on Instagram, Salman wrote, "I don't have any film ready toh maine apne bhai @ajaydevgn se request ki hai if he can come on Eid, Eidi dene ke liye. Chalo iss Eid hum sab celebrate karenge aur dekhenge #Runway34 (I didn't have any film release on Eid this

year, so I have requested my brother Ajay Devgn to come on Eid with the Eidi (gift). We all will celebrate Eid and watch Runway 34)." The teaser opens with a glimpse of Ajay in uniform, flying an aircraft, along with a co-pilot (played by Rakul Preet Singh). Several voices are heard talking about bad weather, with one saying that it is impossible to land at the airport due to heavy rainfall.

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