



The South Asian



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## Kill as many blacks as possible

US supermarket shooter's goal in chilling 180-page manifesto



Full Story  
on Page 28

The West is tired of  
China's power games.  
India could take advantage

From Covid to waning  
popularity of BRI, there is lots  
that is not in China's favour.  
India could step-up its game



Full Story  
on Page 31

## Finally, United States takes cue from other nations, re-opens embassy in Kyiv

(News Agency) Taking a cue from other nations, the United States has also re-opened its embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine on Wednesday, said media reports. The embassy had closed down around three months ago. During the closure, the country had also withdrawn American diplomats from Kyiv before the Russian invasion began in February. This comes as Canada had also opened its embassy in the Ukrainian capital recently. US embassy operations resumed in Kyiv on Wednesday, said the State Department.

(Contd. on page 31)

## Greenhouse gas, sea level all broke records in 2021, says UN, warns of 'climate catastrophe'

(News Agency) Warning against impending climate catastrophe, the United Nations has said that four key climate change indicators— Greenhouse gas concentrations, sea level rise, ocean heat and ocean acidification—all set record highs in 2021. A report released by the UN's World Meteorological Organization said these extreme climate changes caused hundreds of billions of dollars in economic losses.

(Contd. on page 31)

## Amarnath Yatra: The pilgrimage and the politics

On Tuesday, the Centre held three high-level meetings on Jammu and Kashmir, two of them on the Yatra's security. The government announced that every pilgrim would be insured for Rs 5 lakh and given Radio Frequency Identification tags for security

(By Staff Reporter) In April this year, Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Secretary Apurva Chand said that the Amarnath Yatra this year would be "historic", with six to eight lakh pilgrims visiting the shrine in the Himalayas. "It will be twice the size than ever before." On Tuesday, the Centre held three high-level meetings on Jammu and Kashmir, two of them on the Yatra's security. The government announced that every pilgrim would be insured for Rs 5 lakh and given Radio Frequency Identification tags for security. Like most things about



Kashmir, the Amarnath Yatra is special significance – for being tied up in the politics of the first since the abrogation of Article 370, and the first since that begins on June 30 and the two-year Covid gap. concludes on August 11, holds

(Contd. on page 31)



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# Indian-origin academic Dr Swati Dhingra appointed to Bank of England's monetary panel

Dr Swati Dhingra is the first Indian-origin woman to be appointed as an external member of the Bank of England's interest rate-setting committee



(News Agency) Leading UK-based academic Dr Swati Dhingra has been named as the first Indian-origin woman to be appointed as an external member of the Bank of England's interest rate-setting committee. Dhingra is an Associate Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics (LSE) having specialisation in international economics and applied microeconomics. Dhingra, who studied at the University of Delhi and got her Masters from the Delhi School of Economics, will join the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on August 9 for a three-year term. The Bank of England's independent MPC makes decisions about the operation of monetary policy of the UK. It comprises the Governor of the Bank of England, its three Deputy Governors, one member of the Bank with responsibility for monetary policy and four external members who are appointed by the Chancellor. UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak announced her appointment last week, describing her as someone who will bring "valuable new expertise" to the

committee, which has the crucial task of setting the country's interest rates. "Dr Swati Dhingra's experience in international economics will bring valuable new expertise to the MPC. I am delighted to appoint her to this role and look forward to seeing her contribution to policymaking in the coming years," the Indian-origin finance minister said in a statement. Dhingra will replace current external member, Michael Saunders, who has been on the MPC since August 2016. "The work of the committee is of great importance as the UK faces an

exceptional cost of living crisis amid the global challenges of the pandemic and the war," said Dhingra, with reference to her appointment. "It will be an honour to learn from the Bank's vast expertise and regional visits, 'to listen and to explain', and to bring evidence to bear on the crucial policy decisions of the committee," she said. The Governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, welcomed the move saying the academic's "insights and perspective" will be hugely beneficial to the Bank's discussions. "We will benefit from her extensive research in international economics," he said. Besides her role at the London School of Economics, Dhingra is an elected member of the Council of the Royal Economic Society and is on the Editorial Board of the peer-reviewed 'Review of Economic Studies' and an Associate Editor for the 'Journal of International Economics'. She is also a Research Associate on the Trade Programme at the Centre for

Economic Performance, and a Research Fellow of the Centre for Economic Policy Research. She completed her MS and PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has been a member of the UK's Trade Modelling Review Expert Panel and LSE's Economic Diplomacy Commission in the past. She is currently a Director of the Royal Mint Museum and a member of the Steering Group for "The Economy 2030 Inquiry" research project. According to the UK government's Treasury department, the appointment of external members to the MPC is designed to ensure that the committee benefits from thinking and expertise in addition to that gained inside the Bank. Each member of the MPC has expertise in the field of economics and monetary policy and are independent and do not represent particular groups or areas. Dhingra was reportedly appointed following an open recruitment process run by the Treasury, based on recommendations to Sunak by a panel of advisors.

## Indian-Origin Accountant, 73, Jailed For Fraud, Money Laundering In UK

**Sukhvinder Singh, 73, was sentenced on four counts of fraud and one count of money laundering at York Crown Court in north-east England**

(News Agency) London: An Indian-origin chartered accountant (CA) has been sentenced to five-and-a-half years of imprisonment by a UK court after being convicted for exploiting a vulnerable victim out of money and assets worth 331,858 pounds. Sukhvinder Singh, 73, was sentenced on four counts of fraud and one count of money laundering at York Crown Court in north-east England on Thursday. The court heard that the victim, identified only as 'A', has learning, social, and physical disabilities and was targeted and duped by Singh. "Singh put himself forward as a trusted friend and professional financial adviser for an individual with considerable vulnerabilities. His actions, in diverting money and property for his own personal gain, was a huge breach of trust, and failed to support

and protect the victim," said Andrea Thomas, a Senior Crown Prosecutor for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Serious Economic Organised and International Directorate (SEOCID). "He may have obtained further assets from the victim but for the work of North Yorkshire police who helped to build a strong and compelling case. The conviction and sentence follow close team working between the CPS and police and results in justice for the victim. The CPS will be seeking to start proceedings on getting back Singh's ill-gotten gains," he

said. An investigation by the North Yorkshire Police force discovered that when A's parents had died, Singh had offered to sort out the financial affairs. However, the CA instead took 34,000 pounds from the victim's bank account and paid into his own in September 2016. In the same month, Singh transferred the ownership of A's home in the town of Harrogate, valued at around 275,000 pounds to one of his own companies. No money was paid back to A, in return. Singh created a number of documents on his computer, including agreements and letters, to facilitate the

fraud. Some of the documents claimed to be from A and those with responsibility for A's affairs, agreeing to transfer them to Singh, the CPS revealed. At the time of Singh's arrest, the CPS said that evidence was seized that revealed he was trying to obtain further assets belonging to A, including an apartment in Spain (worth over 62,000 pounds) and around 5,000 pounds held in a bank account in Jersey. The CPS said it is committed to continuing to work closely with law enforcement and investigatory authorities to bring such individuals engaging in fraudulent practices to justice. Its SEOCID unit is relatively new, having been launched in April 2022 as a response to the changing nature of crime by bringing together specialists in organised and economic crime.







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# 2 Sikh men killed: India slams Pak over 'continued targeting of minority community members'

(News Agency) India on Sunday "registered strong protest" with Pakistan over the continued targeting of members of the minority community hours after two Sikh men were brutally gunned down in broad daylight by unidentified assailants in Pakistan's Peshawar city. In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs said it has asked the authorities concerned to "sincerely investigate the matter and take strict action against those responsible for this deplorable incident."

"We have seen the reports on the brutal killing of two Sikh traders by unidentified armed men in Peshawar. Sadly, this is not the first such case or a rare occurrence," it said.

"We expect that the Government of Pakistan, in discharge of its responsibilities, will look after the safety,



security and well-being of its minority communities," it added.

The deceased—identified as Ranjit Singh (42) and Kuljeet Singh (38)—were at their shops selling spices at Batta Tal Chowk in the Sarband area when two assailants

arrived on a motorbike and opened fire. Police have been dispatched to the site to take note of the matter. They are determining whether the deceased were victims of targeted killings.

Around 15,000 Sikhs live in Peshawar,

mostly in the Jogan Shah neighbourhood of the provincial capital.

Most of the members of the Sikh community in Peshawar are involved in business, while some also run pharmacies.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan has strongly condemned the attack and directed the police to take immediate steps to arrest the culprits. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has also denounced the killing, saying, "Strongly condemn the killing of our Sikh citizens in Peshawar, KP. Pakistan belongs to all its people."

"Have ordered a high level inquiry to ascertain facts. The killers will be arrested & meted out exemplary punishment. My most sincere sympathies to the bereaved families."

## President Kovind Reaches Jamaica On Landmark Visit, Gets Rousing Welcome

**President Kovind was accorded a ceremonial welcome, a Guard of Honour and a 21-gun-salute, in the first-ever visit by an Indian head of state, and was escorted by the Chief Defense Staff of Jamaica**



(News Agency) Jamaica: President Ram Nath Kovind, who is on a four-day visit to Jamaica, arrived at Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston where he received a rousing welcome from the Jamaicans and the Indian expatriates. This is the first-ever visit by an Indian President to Jamaica. He is accompanied by his wife, first lady Savita Kovind, daughter Swati Kovind, Union Minister Pankaj Chowdhary, Lok Sabha MP Rama Devi, Satish Kumar Gautam and Secretary-Level Officers. President Kovind was accorded a ceremonial welcome, a Guard of Honour and a 21-gun-salute, in the first-ever visit by an Indian head of state, and was escorted by the Chief Defense Staff of Jamaica. On the Jamaican side, the Governor-General of Jamaica Patrick Allen, Prime Minister of Jamaica Andrew Holness, members of the cabinet, Chief of Defense Staff and commissioner of police were

present. Meanwhile, on the Indian side, Masakui Rungsum, High Commissioner of India to Jamaica and his spouse Zingcharwon Rungsum were present. Upon his arrival at Pegasus Hotel in New Kingston, Jamaicans and the Indian expatriates extended a warm welcome to President Ram Nath Kovind. Several programmes are scheduled during the President's visit to Jamaica which include paying a floral tribute at the shrine of the Rt. Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey as well as a signing ceremony (MOU agreement) to be held at the Prime Minister's house. President Kovind will also inaugurate "Ambedkar Avenue", a road named after Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar tomorrow. He will also inaugurate the Jamaica-India friendship garden. In the evening, President Ram Nath Kovind will gift cricket kits to aspiring cricketers in Jamaica. A cricket kit will also be handed over to

Billy Heaven, President of the Jamaica Cricket Association.

There have been regular bilateral tournaments between India and the West Indies cricket team. Some of the matches (T-20, ODI and Test matches) take place in Kingston as well. This has made India and Jamaica natural partners for cooperation in sports. An Memorandum of Understanding in the field of sports cooperation between the

two countries is in its final stages. The programme will conclude with an expatriate community event. India is committed to strengthening linkages with Indian expatriates in Jamaica, and encouraging their participation in the process of national development. President Kovind is on a state visit to Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines from May 15 to 21.

He had a one-day technical halt in Milan, Italy. This is the first visit by the head of state of India to these two countries. India and Jamaica have traditionally enjoyed cordial relations based on democratic values, common linkages of history, a Parliamentary democratic system, membership in the Commonwealth, use of the English language and the love for cricket.

## Security forces on high alert in NCR in view of recent terror incidents in Punjab

(News Agency) Security forces are on high alert in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) following the recent terror incidents in the neighbouring state of Punjab. The Faridabad Police has increased vigilance and sounded alert among all the police stations in-charge of the area. Last week, a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) was fired at the Intelligence Wing headquarters of Punjab Police in Mohali, triggering a blast that shattered windows. Just a day before the Mohali blast, the Punjab Police had thwarted a possible terror attack and arrested two men in a village in Tarn Taran district with an explosive device packed with RDX. The recent terror incidents in Punjab have raised security concerns in Delhi-NCR as well. The security forces are wary of possible attacks by terror groups and have increased vigilance to prevent such attacks. The Faridabad Police

said, "In view of the recent incidents in Punjab, vigilance has been increased in the NCR area, due to which the Faridabad Police has also been alerted by all the police stations in-charge from the point of view of security, on the instructions of the higher officials, the people of the area, RWA chief etc." The police officials have been asked to ensure that all the tenants, drivers, assistants, maids in the area are verified. They have been asked to be on alert for any suspicious persons in the area. Inspector Naveen Kumar, in-charge of Sadar Police Station, has also informed the sarpanch about the recent terror incidents and has asked them to be on alert. He has also asked the companies in the area to install CCTV, as well as make sure that their employees, staff, servants, have been verified by the police.







# Indian Navy's oldest air station completes 69 years in service of nation

(News Agency) INS Garuda, the oldest Air Station of the Indian Navy completed 69 years in service of the nation. Originally setup as a British-era airfield to support Royal Airforce activities, the base came up in the Kochi city in the Southern state of Kerala, on India's west coast. From supporting Royal Airforce activities in the 1940s, the air station has come a long way and plays a major role major operational and training role, as the only Naval Air station under India's Southern Naval



Command. In 1941, the airfield was setup to support the Royal Airforce and two years later it was established as a Royal Navy Air Station to support Royal Navy ships. In 1952, five years after

India's independence, the base was rechristened 'Venduruthy II' and later in 1953 commissioned as INS Garuda, by the then Indian Defence Minister Mahavir Tyagi. Among the major contemporary

roles of INS Garuda include the active conduct of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations in the Indian Ocean Region. The station has played a significant role in the enormous

air efforts that were carried out to aid Kerala during the devastating 2018 floods. Recently, a Naval helicopter from INS Garuda had also provided emergency medical evacuation for a foreign Navy sailor and brought her to shores for treatment, following which she was repatriated. In his address, Commodore VB Bellary, Commanding Officer, INS Garuda emphasized on the need to always remain operationally ready and reiterated the station's commitment towards meeting all tasks.

## Dalai Lama, Buddhist spiritual leaders from 12 countries participate in Indian govt co-hosted event



(SAI Bureau) 24 Buddhist spiritual leaders, including Tibetan Spiritual leader Dalai Lama on Monday, participated in an event co-hosted by the Indian government. Over half of the Buddhist spiritual leaders were from 12 countries, countries which are Cambodia, Vietnam, South Korea, Mongolia, Russia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Australia, the UK, Thailand, Mexico,

Bangladesh, and Brazil.

This included Most Ven. Dharma Master Hsin Tao, member of the supreme Dhamma council, Linju mountain monastery, and museum of world religion, Taiwan. The event will later see the participation of top Indian govt ministers--Union Minister for Law and Justice Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister for Culture Tourism G. Kishan Reddy, and Minister of State for Culture Arjun Ram Meghwal. The day-long event is also being co-hosted by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC). India headquartered IBC was founded

in 2013 and aims to provide a platform for the global Buddhist community. The development comes on a day when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be at Nepal's Lumbini on a one-day trip. Lumbini is the birthplace of Lord Buddha. During the stay, which comes on Buddha Purnima, PM will address a gathering and hold talks with Nepal PM Deuba. During the event Dalai Lama, who is also a patron of IBC in a spiritual message said, "we are celebrating Vesak, which commemorated the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment

after enduring six years of austerity".

Interestingly, Prime Minister will participate in the "Shilanyas" ceremony for the construction of a centre for Buddhist culture and heritage, in a plot belonging to the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), New Delhi within the Lumbini Monastic Zone. The construction of the Centre is being undertaken by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) under the auspices of the Lumbini Development Trust with the support of India's Culture Ministry.

## Indian Army says China building infrastructure near Arunachal border Indian Army said China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is engaged in infrastructure capacity enhancement across the international border in Arunachal Pradesh

(SAI Bureau) The Indian Army's Eastern Command chief on Monday said China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is engaged in infrastructure capacity enhancement across the international border in Arunachal Pradesh.

General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command, Lt Gen R P Kalita, however, said the Indian side is also continuously upgrading its infrastructure and capabilities to deal with any situation that may arise along the border.

"Across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Tibet region, a lot of infrastructure development is going on. The other side is constantly upgrading their road, rail and air connectivity as well as 5G mobile network so that they are in a better

position to respond to a situation or mobilise forces," he said at a press conference here.

The Chinese authorities have built border villages close to the LAC that can be used for dual purposes, Kalita said.

"We are continuously monitoring the situation. We are also upgrading our infrastructure and capabilities as well as the mechanism to handle the situation. These have put us in a robust position," he added. The Indian Army Commander acknowledged that difficult terrain and inclement weather conditions have been the biggest challenges while enhancing capabilities and infrastructure in forward locations, leading to delays in completion of the projects.

When asked about the border stand-offs between the two large armed

forces at several places, he said that the actual boundary is not properly demarcated, especially along the McMahon Line.

"It has created different perceptions of the border between India and China that are not agreed upon by both sides. While most of the time, we handle the situation through existing mechanisms, at times it has led to frictions," Kalita said. He also denied that any intrusion is taking place along the border with China and whatever is reported, that is only due to the perceptual issue.

"Once the boundary is properly demarcated, I hope there will be no problem," he said, adding there has been no case of intrusion since the 1962 war.

Asked about the Land Borders Law that China enacted from January

giving more power to the PLA to protect their sovereignty and boundary, he said that the Army and other stakeholders are analysing various implications of the new laws. "The necessary deductions have been made and we are preparing our forces to meet the challenge," he said without elaborating. Kalita added, "The eastern border has numerous challenges. We have displayed exemplary professionalism and bravery. Last one year has been extremely eventful and we have been rising up to meet all challenges. We are ready to take on all challenges in future." He said that for the India-China border, the Indian Army has a robust mechanism in place. This includes bilateral agreements and various protocols to defuse tensions and maintain peace and tranquility.



# CBI seeks Hong Kong's assistance in probe into Rs 156-crore diamonds over-invoicing case

The CBI has sent a judicial request to the authorities in Hong Kong seeking information about fake invoices which led to remittance worth Rs 156 crores



(SAI Bureau) The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) moved for letters rogatory (LR), a judicial request, before a Mumbai court as the agency sought Hong Kong's assistance in the probe into a money laundering racket. The agency is investigating a racket wherein diamonds were imported to India with inflated invoices of around Rs 156 crore. The central agency has sent the judicial request to the authorities

in Hong Kong seeking information about fake invoices which led to remittance worth Rs 156 crores in June-July 2019. The diamonds were imported to India from Hong Kong and hence the CBI sought assistance from its law enforcement agencies to collect the required information. The case allegedly involves Customs officials at

Mumbai International Airport. The agency was granted permission to investigate concerned customs officials under Section 17 A of the Prevention of Corruption Act. The probe into the case revealed that diamonds imported to India showed over-invoices value of around Rs 156 crore. However, the actual value of the consignment was only Rs 1 crore.

## '36,000 temples were destroyed by Mughals': BJP leader Eshwarappa stokes fresh controversy

**KS Eshwarappa has alleged that 36,000 temples were destroyed by Mughals and said all those temples would be restored in a peaceful manner by the government**

(SAI Bureau) Former Karnataka minister KS Eshwarappa, who was sacked following allegations of corruption, sparked fresh controversy when he alleged that over 36,000 temples were destroyed by Mughals during their reign. Eshwarappa said, "Why was a temple shifted in Srirangapatna and a mosque built in its place? A total of 36,000 temples were destroyed by the Mughals. We will revive all of them." He claimed all 36,000 temples would be restored without any clashes, abiding by the law in a peaceful manner as per the court's judgments. "Today, Muslims are also accepting that there was a Hanuman temple in Srirangapatna. During that time, they shifted the



temple to the other side and saved the Hanuman temple, but why was the temple shifted? Why was a mosque built in its place? What does Congress say about this?" he questioned. The Srirangapatna issue revolves around Jamia mosque in the town, in the erstwhile capital of Tipu Sultan, in Karnataka's Mandya district. A right-wing group, has submitted a petition to the Mandya deputy commissioner seeking permission to offer pooja at the mosque, as it believes that idols of Hindu deities are still inside the mosque. The activists alleged that the mosque was built on a Hanuman temple.

## Unwarranted, says India after Islamic nations' group comments on Kashmir

**India hit out at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation for their 'unwarranted' comments on the delimitation exercise being carried out in J&K**



(SAI Bureau) India on Monday slammed the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for its "unwarranted" comments on the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir and asked the grouping to refrain from carrying

out its "communal agenda" at the behest of one country, in an oblique reference to Pakistan. India's strong reaction came after the OIC criticised New Delhi over the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir.

"We are dismayed that the OIC secretariat has once again made unwarranted comments on the internal affairs of India," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said. "As in the past, the Government of India categorically rejects the assertions made by the OIC secretariat on the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir which is an integral and inalienable part of India," he said.

Bagchi was responding to media queries on the OIC statement on the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir. "The OIC should refrain from carrying out its communal agenda vis-a-vis India at the behest of one country," Bagchi said.

The delimitation commission, tasked with redrawing parliamentary and assembly constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir, notified its final report earlier this month.

## After Kejriwal's 24-hour power supply claim, BJP leader holds 'reality check' in Delhi

**A day after Arvind Kejriwal claimed 24-hour power supply in Delhi, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari went on a "reality check" at electrical shops in the national capital on Monday**

(SAI Bureau) A day after AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal claimed 24-hour power supply in Delhi, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari on Monday went on a "reality check" at electrical shops after which he accused the Delhi chief minister of lying in his rally in Kerala.

Just to lure the voters in Kerala, Kejriwal "lied" about 24-hour power supply in Delhi, Tiwari said after visiting nearly half a dozen shops selling inverters in his North East Delhi constituency.

"I met some shop owners in Bhajanpura, Ghonda and other areas in North East Delhi. They reported good sale of inverters due to power cut," Tiwari said. Instead of handling the "dilapidated" condition of water and power



supply in Delhi, Kejriwal is offering "false" promises to the people of other states where polls are to be held, he alleged.

Speaking at a political rally in Kerala on Sunday, Kejriwal had accused the earlier parties that ruled Delhi of corruption and added that the AAP saved money after coming to power and spent it on free

electricity. Earlier, governments would squander money by inflating a 100 crore project to a 1,000 crore project. After the Aam Aadmi Party's honest government came to power in Delhi, "we started saving money in each and every single project. And with the money we saved, we started giving free electricity to Delhi residents 24 hours a day," he had said. Kejriwal had also claimed that in the AAP regime, Delhi got rid of night-long power cuts, voltage fluctuations and higher electricity bills. "In five years, the AAP government has completely transformed power supply situation to the point that inverter and generator shops are shut in Delhi now," he had said while promising free electricity supply to the people of Kerala.



# Bhartiyata, nationalism: Congress top brass meet in Delhi, releases Udaipur declaration

**After a brainstorming session on organisational reforms, Congress released a detailed copy of its Udaipur declaration. The party resolved that all members would protect and follow Gandhian values and the Nehruvian idea of India**

(SAI Bureau) Congress top brass met once again on Tuesday to chalk out a future course of action on organisational reforms discussed during the three-day Chintan Shivir held in Rajasthan's Udaipur. The party has also released a detailed copy of its Udaipur declaration. Congress party's general secretaries, in-charges and CLP leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi were present at the meeting held at AICC headquarters in Delhi. India is my country and I am proud to be an Indian. Remember that proud feeling of Indianness?

Congress has, and always will fight for to keep spirit of India, and the teachings of Gandhi ji & Nehru ji alive. According to sources, it was decided that a two-day conclave will be held in every state so that the members of Pradesh Congress Committees (PCC) are informed about the changes that are to be made in the coming months. Also, state units will prepare a list of empty posts at block, district and state levels. A

meeting between the General Secretary and in-charges will also be held at AICC Headquarters tomorrow, May 18.

The resolution reads: Indian nationalism is the core character of the Congress and in contrast, the p s e u d o - nationalism of the BJP is centred on the hunger for power. It is the duty of every Congressperson to bring out this difference to the people. In the prevailing extraordinary circumstances, the political group stressed that every Congressperson should imbibe the principles of Bhartiyata and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

The Congress has always believed in unity and inclusiveness, and

appreciated and celebrated the diversity of India. Our Nav Sankalp is to once again uphold the unity in diversity in ourThe party also resolved that all



members would protect and follow Gandhian values and the Nehruvian idea of India. "Today, the ruling party has launched a conspiratorial attack on the Indian Constitution, the principles and rights enshrined in it and on Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideas. The first blow of the attack on Constitutional

rights is on the dalits, adivasis, backward classes, minorities, women and the poor of the country. Simultaneously, all the autonomous bodies and institutions protecting the rights of citizens have been undermined and hollowed out to serve the interests of those in power," the resolution read.

Further, Congress has vowed to establish extensive contact and dialogue with all social, cultural and non-governmental organisations, think tanks, trade unions and civil society groups. "In order to protect this spirit of nationalism and democracy, the Indian National Congress is determined to establish dialogue and contact with all like-minded parties and will keep the avenues open for forming pragmatic alliances according to the political situation, while ensuring the organisation's strength, capability, and presence in all blocks and districts of the country," the declaration read.

## India: At least 27 dead, 70 injured after massive fire engulfs 3-storey building in capital Delhi

(SAI Bureau) At least 27 died and scores were injured after a massive fire engulfed a three-storey commercial building in west Delhi on Friday evening. The tragedy took place near Mundka metro station, Delhi Fire Director Atul Garg confirmed. According to reports, around 30 fire tenders are still at the spot and ambulances are stationed for the rescue work even as officials are in the process of recovering more dead bodies. More than 40 people sustained burns and have been hospitalised. Around 60 to 70 people have been rescued from the building, the police said. According to fire department officials, information about the

blaze was received at 4.40 pm, following which 24 fire tenders were rushed to the spot, reported news agency ANI. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Sameer Sharma has said that the fire started from the first floor of the building, which houses the office of a CCTV camera and router manufacturing company. The tragic incident triggered a wave of condolence messages from the

political leaders. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, "Extremely saddened by the loss of lives due to a tragic fire in Delhi. My thoughts are with the bereaved families. I wish the injured a speedy recovery." President Ram Nath Kovind also extended condolences to the bereaved families. "Distressed by the



tragic fire accident at a building near Mundka Metro Station in Delhi. My condolences to the bereaved families. I wish for speedy recovery of the injured," Kovind tweeted. Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted, "Shocked and pained to know abt this tragic incident. I am constantly in touch wid officers. Our brave firemen are trying their best to control the fire and save lives. God bless all (sic)."

## Police inspect Amarnath Yatra route as security arrangements continue

(SAI Bureau) Jammu and Kashmir Police has started the arrangements for the security of Amarnath Yatra. A team of High-ranking officials including SSP Ganderbal inspects Yatra route from Baltal to Shri Amarnath Holy Cave. reviewed for the safety of the Pilgrims. Also took stock of enroute deployment and other security measures to be put in place during the upcoming Yatra." said SSP Ganderbal Nikhil Borkar The Police also

Secuirty forces had earlier said that there is a threat to the Amarnath Yatra, but all the security arrangements are in place to secure both the routes. SSP

Ganderbal Nikhil Borkar along with other senior officers visited Baltal Base camp, Domail and Holy Cave to review the security related arrangements enroute Amar Nath Cave. SSP Ganderbal was accompanied by SDPO Kangan Yasir Qadri-JKPS, SHO PS Sonamarg and other police officers of the district. "During the visit to Holy Cave SSP Ganderbal inspected all the routes leading to the Holy Cave for a smooth Yatra. Moreover, all other security arrangements were

took a detailed security review of Base camps at Baltal and Domail, besides other strategic locations and camping sites along the Yatra route.

The Police also reviewed traffic management for smooth passage of Yatra convoys and availability of parking places. They also directed all the officers to maintain the highest level of alertness, ensure proper access control and check/frisking of all vehicles before and during the Yatra.





# Supreme Court defers demolition of Supertech's Noida Twin Towers to August 28

**Supertech Ltd has petitioned the Supreme Court requesting directions to defer the demolition of the Noida Twin Towers by three months**



(SAI Bureau) Property developer Supertech Ltd has petitioned the Supreme Court requesting directions to defer the demolition of the Noida Twin Towers by three months. Supertech's Apex and Ceyane towers were originally scheduled to be demolished with the help of explosives on May 22. The Supreme Court had ordered their demolition on August 31 last year as the twin towers had come up in violation of building norms. The demolition work on

the Supertech's twin 40-storied towers in Noida's Sector 93A has already begun and a test blast was carried out on April 10 by Edifice Engineering and Jet Demolitions, a private company roped in by the Noida authority to demolish the property.

However, at a hearing today, the demolition company Cited a report of the trial blast carried out last month and told the bench that the building is sturdier than anticipated. It sought more time to demolish

the towers. The company also said they have to ensure that debris from the blast does not damage nearby buildings. Agreeing to defer the demolition, the Supreme Court said, "The status report submitted before us indicates that a test blast was carried out upon which it redesigned the final buildings and stated that it may not be possible to demolish the structure by May 22 and time is required until August 28... Time is granted."

## Assam flood: Road, rail links cut off, nearly 2 lakh people affected in state

**Incessant rain has triggered floods and landslides in Assam, affecting nearly 2 lakh people in 20 districts of the state**



(SAI Bureau) Road and rail links were cut off as heavy rain and flooding with landslides continued to wreak havoc in Assam. Nearly 2 lakh people in 20 districts of the state have been adversely impacted by the floods, a PTI report stated. A deadly mudslide triggered by the incessant deluge claimed three lives Haflong revenue circle, while two flood-related deaths were reported in Cachar district. Overall, around 1,97,248 people have been affected by the floods and landslides. Disaster management officials said Cachar and Hojai districts are the worst-hit. To further compound troubles, the weather office has forecast heavy to very heavy downpour in Assam over the next three days.

Embankments have been breached at 16 locations in different districts in the last 24 hours. Roads, bridges and houses have been completed or partially damaged in

several areas. A state bulletin said Dima Hasao district has been completely cut off due to landslides and a breakdown of communication channels, adding that all roads and railways leading to Haflong have been blocked since May 15. National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Fire and Emergency Services, have been pressed into service to carry out rescue and relief operations in the flood-hit areas. The evacuation of about 2800 passengers from two trains was completed with help from the Air Force and other agencies on Monday after the two locomotives were stranded on the tracks due to landslides and waterlogging.

Around 55 relief camps have been opened in seven districts, sheltering 32,959 people. Another 12 relief distribution centres are also operational in other districts.

## The Sela Tunnel-importance and the strategic edge it promises

**Upon completion, which is likely by the end of this year, the Sela Tunnel above 13,000-ft will boost all-weather connectivity to the Line of Actual Control with China**

(SAI Bureau) The strategically-significant Sela Tunnel project in Arunachal Pradesh is nearing completion. The project entered a decisive phase after a final blast earlier this year marked the culmination of excavation. Upon completion, which is likely by the end of this year, the Sela Tunnel above 13,000-ft will boost all-weather connectivity to the Line of Actual Control with China. A look at its features and why the project matters.

**What does the Sela Tunnel project include?**

The project, being executed by the Border Roads Organisation, includes two tunnels and a link road. While Tunnel 1 will be 980 metres long single-tube, Tunnel 2 will be 1,555 metres with one bi-lane tube for traffic and one escape tube for emergencies running alongside. The link road between the two tunnels will be 1,200 metres.

Tunnel 2 will be one of the longest tunnels to have been constructed above an altitude of over 13,000 feet. The project also involves construction of an approach road of 7 km to Tunnel 1, which takes off from BCT Road, and a link road of 1.3 km, which connects Tunnel 1 to Tunnel 2. The total length of the

project, including the tunnels, the approach and the link roads, will be around 12 km. Located in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, the tunnel project will provide an alternate axis to the Sela pass, which is at 13,700 feet. It will be on the BCT Road – the Balipara, Charduar and Tawang axis, which is more than 300 km long. The estimated cost of the project is Rs 700 crore.

**Why is the project important?**

All-weather connectivity to Tawang and other forward areas in the sector will be the most important advantage that the project promises. At the moment, Sela pass stays closed for a few winter months. The project will provide a new alignment on the axis towards the LAC, and allow movement of military and civil vehicles all through the year.

Laying the project's foundation stone in February 2019, the government had highlighted its three benefits: "All weather connectivity to Tawang and forward areas"; reduction in "more than one hour of travel time from Tezpur to Tawang" and travellers avoiding "dangerous snow covered Sela top at a height of 13,700 feet."



# Haridwar Dharma Sansad case: SC grants 3 months interim bail to hate speech accused

The Supreme Court has granted an interim bail of three months to Jitendra Narayan Tyagi on medical grounds in connection with the Haridwar Dharma Sansad case



Muslims. A bench comprising Justices Ajay Rastogi and Vikram Nath directed Tyagi, formerly known as Wasim Rizvi, to give an undertaking that he would not indulge in hate speech and not give any statement on electronic or digital, or social media. Tyagi had approached the top court after the Uttarakhand High Court dismissed his bail plea in March this year. The case against him and others had been lodged on the complaint of Nadeem Ali, a resident of Jwalapur Haridwar at Haridwar Kotwali on January 2, 2022. He had alleged in his

complaint that Dharma Sansad or religious Parliament was organised in Haridwar by Hindu sages from December 17 to 19 last year and in the garb of this event, the participants were instigated to wage a war against Muslims. Objectionable words were used against the holy Quran and Prophet Mohammad, Ali had said in his complaint, adding these provocative statements had later gone viral on social media. These videos were circulated by Wasim Rizvi alias Jitendra Narayan Tyagi, Yati Narsinghanand, and others, he had alleged. The FIR also alleged

that an attempt was made by Prabodhanand Giri to spread violence against the people living in Haridwar's mosques. On Nadeem Ali's complaint, Narsindhanand Giri, Sagar Sindhu Maharaj, Dharamdas Maharaj, Parmanand Maharaj, Sadhvi Annapurna, Swami Anand Swaroop, Aswani Upadhyay, Suresh Chavan along with Swami Prabodhanand Giri, Jitendra Narayan were booked under Sections 153A, 295 and other relevant sections of the IPC for allegedly delivering hate speeches in the name of religion at the conclave.

(SAI Bureau) The Supreme Court grounds in connection with the on Tuesday granted three Haridwar Dharma Sansad case months of interim bail to Jitendra involving alleged inflammatory Narayan Tyagi on medical speeches made against

## Kashmir: Police bust LeT module, female terror associate among those arrested



module of proscribed terror outfit LeT by arresting an active Pakistani trained terrorist, 2 hybrid terrorists and 4 terrorist associates. The Pakistan trained terrorist has been identified as Arif Ajaz Shehri son of Ajaz Ahmad, resident of Nadihal, who had gone to Pakistan on valid visa in year 2018 through Wagah Border and infiltrated back to this side after obtaining illegal arms training and started actively working with proscribed terror outfit LeT in Bandipora. The 2 hybrid terrorists have been identified as Ajaz Ahmad Reshi son of Ab Majeed resident of Rampora and

Shariq Ahmad Lone, son of Mohammad Sadiq Lone resident of Gundpora. The arrested terrorists were tasked to carry out attacks on Police/SF and other soft targets particularly in Bandipora district," said Vijay Kumar, IG Kashmir. The female terror associate has been identified as Sheema Shafi Waza, daughter of Mohammad Shafi resident of Tawheedabad Bagh. Other three terror associates have been identified as Riyaz Ahmad Mir, Ghani Mohammad Waza, Maqsood Ahmad Malik "Incriminating materials, arms ammunition including 02 Pistols,

03 Pistol Magazine, 25 Pistol rounds, 03 Hand Grenades were recovered from their possession. Besides, 01 Ecco Van bearing registration No. JK15A-1528 which was being used in ferrying of terrorists from Bandipora to Nowgam, Pantha Chowk and Srinagar was also seized. Moreover, 03 Scooties were also seized which were being used for doing recce of Police, security establishments, monitor movement of security forces and ferrying of terrorists in Bandipora areas. Similarly, 01 Maruti-800 Car and 01 Pulsar Bike were also seized," said Vijay Kumar, IG Kashmir.

(SAI Bureau) Jammu Kashmir is one female terror associate. Police has busted a Lashkar-e-Taiba terror module in Bandipora district of North Kashmir. Police recovered. Six vehicles with arms and ammunition have also been recovered. "Bandipora Police along security forces busted a terror

## MP man flees with car from showroom on pretext of test drive

A man was arrested by the police for allegedly fleeing with a new Tata Harrier on the pretext of a test drive in the Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh

(News Agency) A man, posing as a prospective buyer reached a car showroom in the Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh. However, things took a turn after the man sped off with a new Tata Harrier on the pretext of taking a test drive.

### MAN FLEES WITH CAR

Talking about the matter, Sidhi SP Mukesh Srivastava said, 'A young man reached the agency to buy a vehicle but he fled with the car on the pretext of taking a test drive. The agency operators chased the man to a long distance but couldn't catch hold of him.

The incident was immediately reported to the police, who then announced a reward of Rs 10,000 for anyone who catches the accused.

### ACCUSED ARRESTED

According to the SP, it was only after four hours, the police were informed that a vehicle has been parked in an unclaimed condition in Khajuri Kothar, Kotwali police station. Soon after receiving the information, the police reached the spot and took the vehicle into its possession. Along with this, the two accused who robbed the vehicle were also arrested.





# Varanasi court sacks Gyanvapi survey commissioner for 'leaking to media'

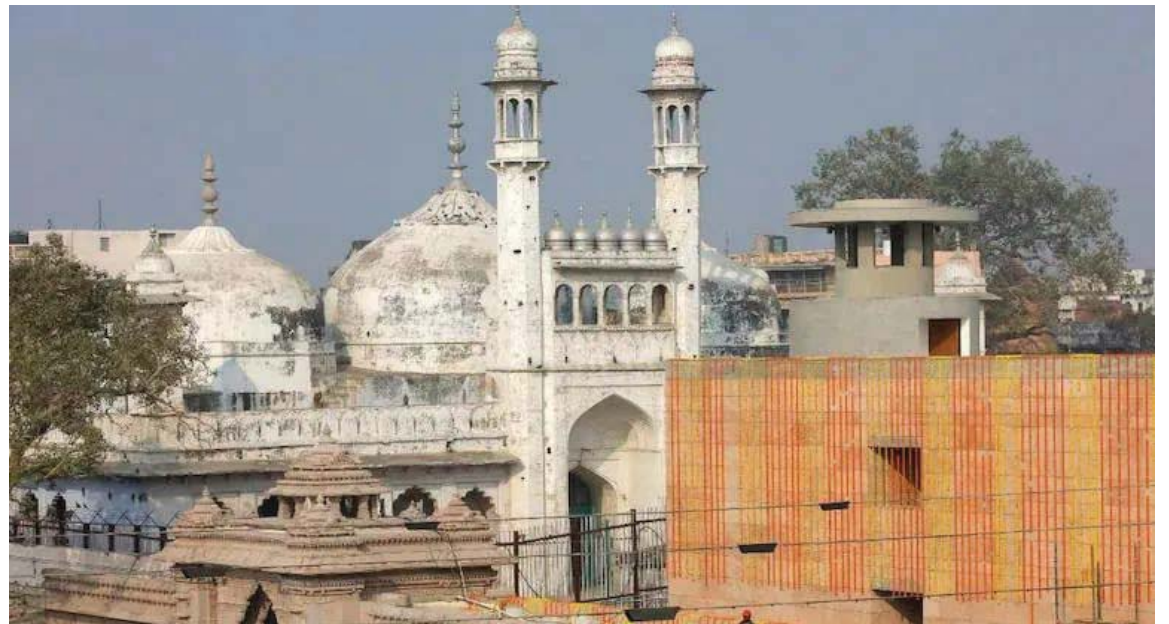
**The Varanasi civil court had appointed a team to survey the complex of the Gyanvapi mosque after claims and counter-claims over the mosque being built on a temple**

(News Agency) The team appointed by a Varanasi court to survey the premises of the Gyanvapi Mosque complex has been given two days to submit its report before the court. The civil court in Varanasi, which was hearing the case, removed one of the three commissioners it had appointed - Ajay Mishra. Mishra's assistant had reportedly leaked info about the survey to the media.

The two others - Vishal Singh and Ajay Pratap - will continue as Court Commissioner and Deputy Court Commissioner respectively. The Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi, next to the

Kashi Vishwanath Temple, is embroiled in a long-drawn legal battle. A court in Varanasi directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to probe the structure of the mosque after claims were made of the mosque being built after demolishing a temple. Several petitions have been filed before the Supreme Court, Allahabad High Court and Varanasi Court alleging that the mosque was built by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb by demolishing the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in the 16th century.

**THE GYANVAPI CASE AND THE ORIGINAL PETITION**



A petition was filed in 1991 in the Varanasi court where the petitioners and local priests sought permission to worship in the Gyanvapi Mosque complex. The petitioners said that the mosque was built on the orders of Aurangzeb by demolishing a

part of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple during his reign in the 16th century.

**WHEN WAS THE CASE REVIVED?**

A Varanasi-based lawyer, Vijay Shankar Rastogi, filed a petition in the lower court claiming

illegality in the construction of the Gyanvapi Masjid and sought an archaeological survey of the mosque. This came in December 2019 after the Supreme Court verdict in the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi title dispute in Ayodhya.

## Groom parties till late during 'baarat', disgruntled bride marries another man

**A groom in Rajasthan's Churu partied late during his 'baarat,' while his disgruntled bride married another man**



(News Agency) A bride in Rajasthan's Churu district refused to marry her groom after his drunken dancing delayed the baarat (wedding procession) for hours. The incident occurred in Rajgarh tehsil's Chelana village. On Sunday, May 15, Sunil, the groom, and his relatives arrived in the bride's village. The baarat set off for the bride's house at 9 pm, but the groom and his friends got drunk and continued to dance to the DJ's beats, causing the procession to be delayed for hours. The muhurat, or auspicious time to begin wedding pheras, was 1.15 am, and the groom showed no signs of slowing down. The bride's side, as well as the bride herself,

had enough of the commotion caused by the baarat's drunken dancing. Frustrated with being kept waiting, the bride decided to return the baarat. Her family then made the decision to marry her off to someone else. A day after the incident, the groom's family went to the Rajgarh police station to file a complaint against the bride's family. The bride's side claimed that the groom and his family were careless about the wedding pheras and that this attitude would continue in the future. Meanwhile, after consulting with the police, both parties decided to cite family issues as the reason for the wedding cancellation and provided written confirmation.

## Hundreds of farmers march to Mohali as talks fail with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann

**Leaders of 23 farmers' unions met with Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann this morning with their demands**



(News Agency) The Punjab government and farmers' unions are now in an impasse as talks between them failed. Leaders of 23 farmers' unions met with Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann this morning with their demands. Their demands included compensation of Rs 500 per quintal wheat, lifting of the ban on the export of wheat, cancellation of the paddy sowing schedule, uninterrupted power supply, Minimum Support Price, or MSP, on 23 crops, including maize and green grams. The unions were invited by the Chief Minister's Office to Bhagwant Mann's official residence but the talks did not materialise. Jagjit Singh

Dallewal, one of the farmer leaders, told India Today TV that they only wanted to raise their demands before the chief minister but the authorities deputed an official delegation which was not acceptable to them.

The farmers' unions, meanwhile, have decided to continue their protests until their demands are met.

Hundreds of protesting farmers reached Mohali to begin an indefinite protest against the state government outside the Amb Sahib Gurudwara. The police have barricaded all roads leading to the protest site to stop farmers from marching towards Chandigarh.



## Kerala to launch India's first state-owned OTT platform on Nov 1

(News Agency) Minister for Cultural Affairs Saji Cheriyan revealed the name of the OTT platform as CSpace, which is an initiative of Kerala State Film Development Corporation (KSFD) on behalf of the state government, through video conferencing at a function in Kalabhavan Theatre, here on Wednesday. KSFD Chairman Shaji N Karun presided over the function. The launch of CSpace, which boasts several unique features, will coincide with the state's formation day on November 1. Noting that this was a first-of-its-kind initiative in India, Cheriyan said the launch of the state-owned OTT will mark a new beginning and will considerably help in the growth of Malayalam cinema. Assuring that the new OTT will not create

a crisis for the movie business, Cheriyan said films will be streamed on CSpace only after their theatrical release. "CSpace ensures profit sharing, transparency and high-end technical quality," he said. Cheriyan said the OTT platform will also showcase films with artistic value irrespective of their performance at the box office, along with internationally recognised and award-winning films, best films screened at the annual International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), short films and documentaries. The registration of films to be streamed on CSpace will begin on June 1, for which necessary arrangements have been made at Chitrangali Studio as well as the head office of KSFD in the state capital.

## Petitioner demands sealing of Shahi Idgah Masjid in Mathura, next hearing on July 1

**A fresh plea has been filed in a Mathura court demanding the sealing of Shahi Idgah Masjid. The petitioner claimed the mosque has been built at the place believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna**



(News Agency) A fresh plea has been filed in Mathura court seeking sealing of Shahi Idgah Masjid. The petitioners have alleged that the historical evidence about the land, which is claimed as the birthplace of Lord Krishna, is being destroyed and sought sealing of the place. Advocate Mahendra Pratap Singh, who is the president of Krishna Janma Bhumi Nyas and the plaintiff in the Krishna Janma Bhumi - Idgah dispute, filed an application in the Mathura court, appealing that the Shahi Idgah, which is built on the land claimed as the birthplace of Lord Krishna, be sealed as the opposite party is continuously destroying historical evidence that is crucial in this case. On Tuesday, a petition was filed in the court of Civil Judge Senior Division, Mathura. Mahendra Pratap Singh alleged that the opposite party, which is the

caretaker of the Shahi Idgah, is destroying artifacts that are connected to the birth of Lord Krishna. He claimed that it was imperative that the Shahi Idgah be sealed. The matter will come up for hearing on July 1. Talking to India Today, social activist Vijay Upadhyay appealed that these matters are already in the court and if there is any evidence to prove that such activities are taking place inside the Shahi Idgah, it should be placed before the court, instead of seeking a blanket sealing order for the Shahi Idgah. Ten separate petitions have earlier been filed in Mathura courts by different Hindu groups seeking the removal of the mosque, which they claimed was built at the birthplace of the deity, within the 13.37-acre premises of the Katra Keshav Dev temple.

## Facing FIR, Cong MLA submits resignation to Gehlot

**Congress MLA Ganesh Ghogra has resigned over an FIR against him**

(News Agency) Congress leader Ganesh Ghogra sent his resignation as an MLA to Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday, a day after a case was registered against him for creating ruckus in Dungarpur district, official sources said. Such resignation letters need to be addressed to the assembly Speaker. Ghogra, however, addressed it to Gehlot, marking a copy to Speaker C P Joshi. In his resignation letter, Ghogra said that despite being a ruling party MLA and the Youth Congress' state president, he was being neglected and his voice was being suppressed by the local administration and officers. Sources in the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said Ghogra's resignation letter has been received. The Dungarpur MLA, however, could not be contacted. On Tuesday, Ghogra took part in a dharna outside the Panchayat Bhawan in Dungarpur while district administration officials, including the sub-divisional magistrate and



tehsildar, were locked up inside, according to police. The officials were locked up by a group of locals who were upset over the non-approval of leases they had applied for at a camp organised earlier as part of the 'Prashasan Gaon ke Sang' campaign. A case was registered against Ghogra and others at Dungarpur's Sadar police station under sections 186 (voluntarily obstructs any public servant in the discharge of his public functions), 143 (unlawful assembly), 342 (wrongful confinement), 347 (wrongful confinement to extort property, or constrain to illegal act) and 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) of the Indian Penal Code. Hazari Lal Meena, Station House Officer of Sadar police station, said 11 people, including Ghogra, have been named in the FIR and 50-60 unidentified people have been booked.

## Government sets May 22 for unification of Delhi's three civic bodies

**The government has fixed May 22 for the formal unification of Delhi's three civic bodies**



(News Agency) The Ministry of Home Affairs issued a notification on Wednesday announcing May 22 as the appointed date for the unification of Delhi's three civic bodies. According to the notification, the Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2022 will come into effect from May 22. The legislation was approved by Lok Sabha on March 30 and by Rajya Sabha on April 5. President Ram Nath Kovind had given his assent on April 18. The three existing civic bodies - the East Delhi Municipal Corporation, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation will become one under the bill. According to the legislation, the unification of the municipal corporations in Delhi will ensure

synergised and strategic planning and optimal utilisation of resources.

Earlier, Delhi's chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal had challenged the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to win the upcoming Delhi civic body polls due this year. "If you [BJP] have the courage, conduct MCD elections on time and win [the civic polls]. If we lose, we will leave politics," Arvind Kejriwal said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah while introducing the bill in Parliament, said the BJP has no fear of losing the civic elections and is ready to contest the polls soon after delimitation. "Since 2014, we have fought many elections. We are not scared of losing and we don't become arrogant when we win," said Amit Shah.



# Indo-Nepal relationship improves, Bolster court infrastructure over bilateral talks and MoUs

By Susmita Ghosh

The bilateral talk between India and Nepal resumes in full swing on the auspicious occasion of Buddha Purnima. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met his Nepalese counterpart Sher Bahadur Deuba on his fifth official visit to Nepal. In the presence of the two country leaders, there are six Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) signed between India and Nepal.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Nepalese Prime Minister Deuba on Monday in Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha. It was also the first visit of any PM India to Lumbini and its religious-political importance is immense. The main agenda was to discuss ways to deepen current cooperation and expand new areas in the comprehensive bilateral partnership between India and Nepal.

The bilateral talks centered on strengthening cooperation in hydropower and connectivity. Following their meeting, they signed six MoUs on cultural and educational collaboration and other sectors. Modi met Deuba after giving prayers at the ancient Maya Devi shrine.

Nepal relies heavily on India for the transportation of services and goods that plays a vital role in the economy. Nepal imports and exports goods to the other countries via India as well. This bilateral conversation will help to improve connectivity and overseas trade in next few years. In the current global context, the increasing and stronger friendship between India and Nepal will work for the betterment of all the other countries.

The hydropower project between the Shatadru (Sutlej) hydroelectric company of India and the Nepal Electricity Board was signed between the two countries. It is estimated that the project will create 2,100 million units of electricity per year. The project is expected to cost Rs 4,900 crore and will provide job opportunities for many. Nepal would receive 21.9 percent free electricity after its completion.

PM Modi also proposed to increase the military forces within the borders and improve the route connectivity over the

sea routes. This will help to restore the strong relations of India with Nepal and secure bilateral relations for the future. India also wishes to work on the roadways and connectivity to Nepal that will allow the transportation of raw goods and materials between the two countries. This will also lead to the development of the small industrial towns in the remote areas and allow better means of communication.

At the same time, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Lumbini Buddhist University have inked an agreement to establish a chair named after Ambedkar for Buddhist education. ICCR has also signed a deal with Kathmandu University (KU) to create the ICCR Chair of Indian Studies. This development will allow foreign exchange students to participate in academic activities across both the countries and provide more opportunities for growth in the education sector.

Moreover, Kathmandu University and the Indian Institute of Technology (IITM) in India have signed a letter of agreement (LoA) for a Master's level joint degree program after the meeting. This will provide remarkable opportunities in the education sector and will allow more foreign students to participate in teaching and academics. India and Nepal had a close relationship for years before it went into a state of decline in the recent past. Now, with the change of leadership in Nepal, the broken diplomatic connection is on the mend. The Deuba-led government wants to use the India ties and they are all in to the development goals. The recent treaties will go a long way to improve the Indo-Nepal bilateral relationship. It will also help the countries deal with the aggression of China across the North-Eastern front too. In all, the MoU signed by both the countries will provide great opportunities for the future and will strengthen the socio-cultural connection between India and Nepal undoubtedly.

India has a sanctioned strength of more than 24,000 judges in the district judiciary but only 20,000-odd courtrooms, including 620 rented halls. A report compiled by the Supreme Court

(SC) registry on what ails the 3,028 court complexes in the country threw up disconcerting statistics: 26% did not have separate washrooms for women, 46% didn't have purified drinking water; 95% didn't have basic medical facilities; 67% were not disabled-friendly; 49% didn't have libraries, and 73% didn't have computers on judges' dais with video-conferencing facility.

The figures are undeniably startling for a country with 40 million cases choking the system at the district level. The first encounter of a common man with the judiciary poses multiple barriers in terms of court procedure, and the decrepit infrastructure only compounds the hardship. To strengthen the justice delivery mechanism, the SC, headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) NV Ramana, recently proposed a National Judicial Infrastructure Authority (NJIA). NJIA was envisaged as an umbrella body to move from ad-hoc committees to a more streamlined, accountable and organised structure. The proposal considered an enactment on the lines of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) so that the funds allocated by the Centre and states for infrastructure could be utilised through special purpose vehicles. CJI Ramana also wrote a letter to Union law minister

Kiren Rijiju in January, clarifying that the proposed structure would not only have judges but also representatives from the department of justice, finance ministry, national informatics council and central public works department. But the government's indisposition and unwillingness to the proposal were finally conveyed to the CJI during the joint

conference of chief ministers and high court chief justices last week when Mr Rijiju turned down the proposal. According to people aware of the matter, the Centre did not specify reasons for its resistance but remained firm that the existing system should continue, letting the executive take care of judicial infrastructure. This development is unfortunate, considering the dismal state of affairs and the glaring fact that the existing apparatus has evidently proved to be grossly deficient in fulfilling the need of the justice delivery mechanism and the aspirations of the people who visit the courts. The Centre's rejection came hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised all support to the judiciary. According to a 2018 study, failure to deliver timely justice costs the country 9% of the annual GDP. Given the dismal state of affairs, the government would do well in shedding its apprehensions, and commence a dialogue afresh on NJIA to arrive at a mutually agreeable mechanism that can give India a state-of-the-art judicial infrastructure -- a much-awaited and desired reform.

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# Climate change is hurting insurers

**Insured losses from natural catastrophes have increased 250% in the last 30 years, with perils such as wildfires and storms, seen as particularly impacted by climate change**

Climate change is hurting the insurance industry and only 8% of insurers are preparing adequately for its impact, consultants Capgemini and financial industry body Efma said in a report on Tuesday. Insured losses from natural catastrophes have increased 250% in the last 30 years, with perils such as wildfires and storms, seen as particularly impacted by climate change, causing an even faster rise in insured losses, the report said. Insurers' main catastrophe risk in the past was typically from hurricanes in U.S. states such as Florida and Texas, Seth Rachlin, global insurance industry leader at Capgemini, told Reuters. "We've seen with the flooding in Europe and wildfires in Australia, wildfires in California, it's becoming a broader geographic issue, affecting a broader percentage of the earth." Germany and other parts of Europe were hit by flooding in July 2021, while heavy rains



deluged Australia's east coast earlier this year. Climate change is hurting the insurance industry and only 8% of insurers are preparing adequately for its impact, consultants Capgemini and financial industry body Efma said in a report on Tuesday. Insured losses from natural catastrophes have increased

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"We've seen with the flooding in Europe and wildfires in Australia, wildfires in California, it's becoming a broader geographic issue, affecting a broader percentage of the earth." Germany and other parts of

Europe were hit by flooding in July 2021, while heavy rains deluged Australia's east coast earlier this year. More than 30% of insurers globally restrict investment in unsustainable companies, and more than 20% restrict insurance cover to unsustainable companies, the report said. Seventy-four percent of the insurers interviewed felt that climate change made it hard to insure some areas. Regions such as California have seen insurers pull out due the number and severity of wildfires. read more Seventy-one percent of insurance customers said the offer of discounts would make them highly likely to cut the exposure of their property or other assets to natural catastrophe risk. More than 4,900 insurance customers were polled in 16 countries in Jan and Feb 2022 for the report. The report was also based on interviews with more than 270 senior insurance executives in 27 markets.

## When will the Artemis mission launch to the Moon? Nasa answers

**Nasa has released a detailed schedule for the mission to liftoff from Cape Canaveral between July 26 to December 23 this year**

Aimed to boost human presence on the Moon, the Artemis mission will return astronauts to the lunar surface as countries rush to explore Earth's natural satellite. The Space Launch System, which is set to return to the launch pad for wet dress rehearsals, has 73 windows to launch the mega Moon mission this year.

Nasa has released a detailed schedule for the mission to liftoff from Cape Canaveral between July 26 to December 23 this year. The Artemis-1 mission will see an uncrewed launch to the Moon, where the Orion capsule will complete a lunar voyage and return to the Earth, showing the system's durability.

"Should the launch subsequently be called off, there is a minimum of 48 hours until a second launch attempt can be made. There is then a 72-hour minimum before a third attempt can be made, due to the need to resupply the cryogenic storage sphere with more propellant from nearby sources," Nasa said.

**HOW DOES NASA IDENTIFY LAUNCH WINDOWS?**



While launching is the final step when the rocket lights up, pushing humans and cargo out of Earth Orbit, it's not the biggest event, since arriving at that moment takes a lot of effort. The launch of the spacecraft will be determined by the alignment of the Earth and Moon along with several criteria.

"To determine potential launch dates, engineers identified key constraints required to accomplish the mission and keep the spacecraft safe. These launch

periods account for the complex orbital mechanics involved in launching on a precise trajectory toward the Moon while the Earth is rotating on its axis and the Moon is orbiting Earth each month in its lunar cycle," Nasa said in a statement.

The key things that determine a launch window include:

\* The launch day must account for the Moon's position in its lunar cycle so that the SLS rocket's upper stage can time

the trans-lunar injection burn with enough performance to successfully intercept the "on-ramp" for the lunar distant retrograde orbit.

\* The resulting trajectory for a given day must ensure Orion is not in darkness for more than 90 minutes at a time so that the solar array wings can receive and convert sunlight to electricity and the spacecraft can maintain an optimal temperature range.

\* The launch date must support a trajectory that allows for the skip entry technique planned during Orion's return to Earth. A skip entry is a maneuver in which the spacecraft dips into the upper part of Earth's atmosphere and uses that atmosphere, along with the lift of the capsule, to simultaneously slow down and skip back out of the atmosphere, then reenter for final descent and splashdown.

\* The launch date must support daylight conditions for Orion's splashdown to initially assist recovery personnel when they locate, secure, and retrieve the spacecraft from the Pacific Ocean



# Gyanvapi: Fading Minorityism in India and Zealots' Last Stand



Turning on the news these days usually entails listening to shrieking voices over the Gyanvapi Mandir in Kashi. The mosque's name is said to have come from an adjacent well, known as the Gyanvapi or the Well of Knowledge. The fact that it — ostensibly — is the only mosque in the world with a Sanskrit name eschews human logic, but it is what it is!

The present-day debate over the Gyanvapi temple is not the first. Since 1194, the masjid has been a bone of contention. The so-called 'flag-bearers' of Nehruvian secularism, the 'devotees' of the Constitution and the 'believers' of Islam, especially the 'chieftains' — the clerics and ulema — have been caught on the wrong foot this time. Part of this trepidation arises from the fear of losing the VETO they have enjoyed hitherto. Part of this

nervousness comes from the fact that the Constitution is being followed verbatim, upholding its true spirit — with no compromises.

Using acrimonious and obscene language on national television no longer suffices to gratify the Muslim clerics, so they must laud and extol the gory Timurids — also known as Mughals — and their grisly Islamic invasion. This is the very cabal that has an uncanny scorn and loathing for anything and everything (invariably and inexorably) innately indigenous. Simply put, anything and everything that has Hindu roots.

Both A.S. Altekar and Hiuen Tsang's historical accounts, which were documented under the Indian Evidence Act of 1872, mention a temple and a hundred-feet-long Shiva Linga. As per Altekar's 1937 book History of

Benares: From the Earliest Times Down to 1937, which was written when he was the dean of Banaras Hindu University's Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, the Gyanvapi Mosque is said to have been mounted in 1669 under the reign of Aurangzeb, who ordered the razing of the ancient Vishweshwar temple and the erection of a mosque in its place.

On May 14, 1937, Professor Paramatma Sharan, a Banaras-born historian, made a declaration on behalf of the British government wherein he cited portions from Maasir-i-'Alamgiri, written by the historian during Aurangzeb's period, which claimed that Gyanvapi Mosque was a temple in the 16th century. The temple's plinth was unharmed and served as the mosque's courtyard. One of the walls was saved as well, and it became the qibla wall, the mosque's most elaborate and essential wall facing Mecca. The mosque was constructed using materials from the fallen temple. There was no temple on the site for more than a century after the mosque was constructed.

In the 18th century, Rani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore built the current Kashi Vishwanath temple to the south of the mosque. It has become one of the most important and beloved Hindu religious centres over the

years. Instead of facing the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, an antique sculpture of the Nandi (bull) within the enclosure of the current Kashi Vishwanath temple faces the mosque's wall. It is said that Nandi stands facing the old Vishweshwar temple's sanctum sanctorum. Many Hindus have long believed that during Aurangzeb's invasion, the original lingam of the ancient Vishweshwar temple was hidden by priests in the Gyanvapi well, which has sparked a desire to perform puja and rites at the pious site where the mosque now sits.

The vehement contempt against Hindus and their culture isn't the making of the RSS or the BJP, as it is made out to be by the Lutyens' cabal and their comrades. And so, this case isn't entirely new either, for it was filed in the district court against the British government by then Muslim groups to avail the right to offer namaz in the entire Gyanvapi complex in 1936. Despite the fact that seven witnesses appeared on behalf of the claimants while 15 appeared on behalf of the British government, the right to offer namaz in the Gyanvapi mosque was granted on August 15, 1937. Alas, this date is a game of fate! It was further explicitly stated that such prayers couldn't be

offered anywhere else in the Gyanvapi complex. On April 10, 1942, upholding the decision of the lower court, the High Court dismissed the appeal.

On October 15, 1991, Pandit Somnath Vyas, Dr Ramrang Sharma and a few others petitioned the court for permission to build a new temple in Gyanvapi, as well as the right to worship. In 1998, Anjuman Inazaniya Masjid and the UP Sunni Waqf Board, Lucknow had two petitions filed on their behalf against this order. Vijay Shankar Rastogi, former district government advocate, was appointed as a litigant in this case on October 11, 2018. An order was issued to carry out an archaeological survey in the complex on April 8, 2021, which began on April 14, 2022. What is even more hard to digest is that invaders who lived in tents and never erected a structure claimed to have built magnificent marvels in India. It is indeed a charade concocted and peddled by the (pseudo) left-liberals, which conceals and obliterates the fact that no matter if it is the Kashi Vishwanath temple, the Ram Mandir, the Kali temple of Kashmir, the Krishna temple of Mathura, the Atala Devi temple of Jaunpur, Saraswati temple of Bhojshala or the temple found under the mosque in Mangaluru,

(Contd on page 29)

## The spirit of assimilation is India's trump card

**It's unfortunate that every thinking Indian needs to today define their position on issues like mosques, temples, hijab and azaan while serious economic, educational, unemployment and social problems cry for attention**

There is Maulana Tauqeer Raza Khan, the Ittehad-e-Millat Council party chief and cleric, and there is Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati, the priest of the Dasna Devi temple in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. Unfortunately, both have loudspeakers with decibel levels that no one wants to control. Raza abuses the prime minister, blatantly calls for jihad and aims to provoke Muslims against Hindus. Narsinghanand, slapped on the wrist with a few FIRs, calls for genocide.

How much of a resonance they have in their communities beyond social media or WhatsApp is not known but one thing is clear: A majority in both the communities are invested in the future of a safe and prosperous India. People of both communities want their children to study hard and be treated fairly in the competitive world of education and employment. One can hope that the hate-filled words don't carry far. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat was absolutely right when he said that you cannot imagine

India without the contribution of Muslims. And, "the day it is said that Muslims are unwanted here, the concept of Hindutva will cease to be," he had said. It's unfortunate that these remarks don't reach the rabble-rousers who peddle hate. It's also unfortunate that every thinking Indian, with a minimum sense of civic responsibility, needs to today define her position on issues like mosques, temples, hijab and azaan while serious economic, educational, unemployment and social problems cry for attention. But let's use this occasion as an opportunity to create a new social compact in which each one of us, whichever God we pray to, contributes to lowering tension and blurring the communal divide. For, this is a country where the great poet Iqbal once said about Lord Ram: "Hai Ram ke wajood pe Hindostan ko naaz/Ahle nazr samajhte hain us ko Imam-e-Hind!" (The people of India feel proud to find Ram among them/ People of vision take him as a great

spiritual leader of India). Iqbal's words are not frozen in time but have to be part of a continuous process of assimilation. For this to happen, there has to be reform and rethinking on both sides.

Muslims must start thinking about the ideology of negating the BJP and vowing to vote for anyone who is "capable of defeating the BJP."

This has done a world of harm to them because the parties wanting to "defeat the BJP" seem to be caught in a time warp — in a world in which dynasties are privileged. There was a time, during the six decades of Congress rule, when it was held — and the Congress is guilty of perpetuating this myth — that to come to power at the Centre, you needed the Muslim vote. That myth was shattered in 2014 and in virtually every election since then.

Muslims know that these parties have failed to address their social, educational and security problems. Yet, these parties banked on their vote. No

wonder, the refrain of all these parties — the Congress, Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party, and the AIMIM — is that the RSS and BJP are out to marginalise the Muslims. Why don't these parties have Muslims in their top echelons?

The controversy over the hijab in a few districts in Karnataka was sought to be made into a national issue when it found no resonance in any other state. The fears of India becoming a Hindu theocratic state are also overblown as secular and peace-loving Hindus vastly outnumber the bigoted, rabid fringe. When a young Hindu man in Hyderabad, B Nagaraju, was murdered in full public view by the Muslim brother of his wife Ashreen Sultana, his only crime being that he and his wife were in love, very few in the community stood up and spoke against it. Even the usual suspects who issue pamphlets were silent.



# At 100 years, the University of Delhi is a 'Mini Bharat'

Since its inception, the university has cherished the democratic values of free speech and diversity

From 750 students in 1922 to over 6 lakh students from across India in 2022, the University of Delhi (DU) has come a long way. Not only has the university evolved with the nation, but it has also played a crucial role in its evolution. With 90 colleges under its umbrella, DU has played an important role in framing the discourses that guide the nation's growth. Since its inception, the university has cherished the democratic values of free speech and diversity. The atmosphere of free-spirited discussions and camaraderie makes DU a big draw for students across India. Over the years, it has become one of the most sought-after universities in the country.

It is rightly said that a nation is as strong as its institutions. This credo is dear to DU: The university continues to lend support to nation-building by nurturing the finest young minds. It echoes the values of the nation and is a microcosm of our vibrant society: It's a "Mini Bharat" where students from all financial backgrounds and all regions of the country have always received a warm welcome. DU also has an excellent gender ratio. While the university had just 82 girls in 1930, its constituent colleges now have 3,24,067 women students — more than 50 per cent of the total student population. The number of departments has increased from eight to 86 in the course of its 100-year journey. DU has the largest pool of seats to offer and its research facilities and infrastructure are among the best in India. It wasn't all hunky-dory from the start. In its initial years, the university shuffled between rented buildings. Additionally, DU witnessed intense competition from other colleges and universities. Post-Independence (and Partition), the university also faced the challenge of accommodating students from the then-West Punjab. Nevertheless, DU expanded and new colleges — including Hansraj College (1948), SGTB Khalsa College (1951), Deshbandhu College (1952), and Kirori Mal College (1954) — were started. Subsequently, in the 1960s, several new women's



colleges — Lakshmibai, Kamala Nehru, Gargi, and Janki Devi — were set up under the university.

In 1973, the university got a new South Campus, which became the hub of extraordinary life sciences research — including affordable HIV tests, and genome sequencing of rice, among others — that gave the university global recognition. In the last two decades of the previous century, the university added the Shaheed Sukhdev College of Business Studies, Shaheed Rajguru College of Applied Sciences and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College to its fold. DU's School of Open Learning, established in 1962, provides an excellent opportunity to more than 1,50,000 students every year to enrol themselves

in graduation/post-graduation courses while preparing for competitive exams or working on the side. Today, five DU colleges — Miranda House, Lady Shri Ram College, St Stephen's, Hindu, and Shri Ram College of Commerce — rank amongst the top 10 in the central government's National Institute Ranking Framework. The university has a rich history of its students participating in the Indian freedom struggle. Revolutionary Chandra Shekhar Azad had found refuge in the students' hostel of Ramjas College when the British had launched a manhunt to nab him. In 1942, DU students took an active part in the Quit India Movement. In fact, Mahatma Gandhi came to the university to seek the support of

students. After Independence, evening classes were started in Ramjas College for students who had come from across the newly-chalked out borders. In 1975, when an Emergency was imposed over the country, former Union minister Arun Jaitley, who was then the Delhi University Students Union president, participated in the movement against the order. Along with several other student union leaders, he was also imprisoned. Students and teachers' associations have never feared voicing their concerns at DU. The strong support for freedom of expression keeps the university thriving and reaffirms the idea of "unity in diversity" — a principle fundamental to India. DU caters to a significant number of

students from the northeast region, who in turn bring their unique values and make the varsity more pluralistic. Similarly, students from the southern states add to the diversity of the institution. This assimilation of cultures bridges the gap between regions, unifies the country, and helps students get a cosmopolitan perspective.

In 100 years, DU has created invaluable intellectual, cultural and social capital for a modern nation. Its alumni have excelled in all walks of life — business, politics, films, and sports. As it enters its 101st year, the university has a lot to look forward to — from the introduction of the Central Universities Common Entrance Test to the implementation of the New Education Policy of 2020. In the coming years, the university will be offering solutions to global problems while continuing to contribute to nation-building. In the next 25 years when India completes 100 years of Independence and DU turns 125, the university could be amongst the top-ranking institutions in the world, proving the mettle of the Indian education system and the country's intellectual might.

## India Must Lead Quad Effort to Pull Out Sri Lanka from Clutches of China's Debt Trap Diplomacy

The statement issued by Sri Lanka's newly appointed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was nothing short of an intimation, nay confirmation, of the apocalyptic economic crisis that the island nation confronts. The numbers thrown by Mr Wickremesinghe are self-explanatory of the mess that he will need to clean up to put Sri Lanka back on track. Government revenues cover only 40 per cent of the expenditure being incurred. The fiscal deficit is around 13 per cent of GDP. The foreign exchange reserves are virtually non-existent. According to Wickremesinghe, "It is a challenge for the treasury to find USD 1 million." Petrol stocks are down to just one day. Sri Lanka is looking at power cuts of around 15 hours a day because a quarter of the electricity is produced from oil which the government has no money to buy. There are huge shortages of medicines. Shortages of virtually every other commodity, including food, are inescapable. With the government being "compelled to print money" to pay salaries, there is a danger of hyper-inflation. Government finances will get more

squeezed because of massive rise in interest rates.

The economic meltdown has had a huge political impact with Wickremesinghe's predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa literally having to be flown out in a chopper lest he be lynched by an incensed mob protesting on the streets. The politics of the country is sharply divided, even polarised, and there is little sign of politicians putting aside their deep differences and coming together to pull the country out of the existential crisis it faces. Quite to the contrary, and in a somewhat cynical way quite understandably, the opposition smells a golden opportunity to not only take advantage of the situation but also settle scores with the Rajapaksa clan and its political allies. The game of thrones will however only worsen the crisis in the country and prevent both meaningful reform and hard decisions. Clearly, assuming that Wickremesinghe survives in office to do what he has promised, the task before him is Herculean. He doesn't have a whole lot of political capital backing him to make the sweeping changes and inflict the horrible

pain that is concomitant of any meaningful structural adjustment programme. As a single member from his party in Parliament, Wickremesinghe will have to depend on the support of his political rivals on both the left and the right to put things together, which is easier said than done especially given the extremely unpopular and harsh economic measures that will have to be taken to revive the economy. Although Wickremesinghe is an experienced politician, and is on a good wicket with many of the countries that Sri Lanka is looking at for assistance, his record in office has been rather patchy. In other words, while he has the experience, Sri Lanka's experience with him has not exactly been stellar. But he has nothing to lose really. If he can pull Sri Lanka out of the crisis, he will have cemented his legacy and his place in the history of his country; if he fails, falters or even falls, he won't be much worse for it because no one really expected much from him anyway. Be that as it may, in his statement, Wickremesinghe gave an idea of the sort of adjustments that will have to be made.

(Contd on page 29)



# Putin is Winning the Energy War as Europe's Paradoxical Drama on Russian Gas Imports Rages on



buyers would then transfer their payments in euros/dollars as per their contracts to the first account. The money from here would then be converted into rubles by the Central Bank of Russia and transferred to the second K account by Gazprombank on behalf of the European buyer. These euro/dollars turned rubles would then reach the Russian gas seller, hence meeting Putin's demands.

## THE EUROPEAN PARADOX

The European Commission now says that European buyers should make a statement that their contractual obligations are fulfilled once they pay in euros or dollars. But EU nations do not seem to agree upon whether the second account and the conversion of payments to rubles would breach sanctions and the EC has largely left that matter open-ended by not once explicitly stating that any such ruble payment contravenes sanctions. While the EU continues with conflicting messaging, several German, French and Italian countries have already opened payment accounts in Gazprombank and

are ready to meet Russia's demands.

This comes at a time when Bulgaria and Poland have already been cut out by Russia for standing their ground against payments in rubles.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. REUTERS/Albert Gea - RC2M1U9CJ4VF

The German economy ministry has been in favour of this mechanism all along. German Economy Minister Robert Habeck said on Monday that companies would be paying their bills in euros and that European sanctions would still allow Russian banks to transfer internally to "so-called K accounts." "That is, in my view, in conformity with the sanctions, also according to the EU commission." It appears that this period of orchestrated ambiguity may be a window opened for European buyers as they rush to open their accounts in the Gazprombank to quickly pay their dues as per Russia's guidelines before a tougher decision is laid out by the EU.

Naturally, Poland, which took

a more transparent stand against Russia's ruble payment decree and got cut off by Moscow along with Bulgaria three weeks ago, is incensed by this development. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki minced no words when he said, "I am disappointed to see that in the European Union there is consent to pay for gas in rubles." Standing his ground, he says that Poland would stick to the rules and will not yield before Putin's blackmail. 45% of Poland's gas imports come from Russia, whereas Bulgaria gets 80%.

To narrow it down, Russia wants payments in rubles and has presented a mechanism through which European buyers can fulfil that demand. The European Union seems to accept this mechanism without accepting the demand itself—a paradoxical drama that is slated to rage on in the coming months. Meanwhile, gas prices are hitting record highs and with that the European import bill is swelling, helping Putin sell lesser gas for more European cash than he did before the war.

Amid the Russia-Ukraine war and all the ruckus about Russian energy imports, the West is emerging as a champion in doublespeak. Even as it wished for India to not buy Russian oil at a discount, the West has vacillated on the issue of buying Russian energy itself, leading to an increase in imports. The European Union is in a particularly hypocritical position, divided by Russia's 'blackmailing' tactics. Not only is it far from weaning off Russian energy imports, but the EU is also on its way to complying with Russia's ruble payment condition.

If media headlines are anything to go by, if at one moment the EU is imposing sanctions on Russian gas imports so as to not bankroll Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in the next moment, it is scrambling to circumvent the same sanctions and bankroll Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, the bloc is divided over how far its boycott of Russian gas can go and Putin's "pay in ruble" curveball did the rest of the damage. But after hoodwinking EU countries like Bulgaria and Poland on ruble payments, the EU has hinted that companies can go ahead with Russia's scheme to dodge the sanctions in place without them being violated. Putin's decree to pay in rubles, thereby helping Russia dodge sanctions, has been followed by a mind-boggling array of mixed messaging from the European side. While most European nations rejected the demand at first and the head of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen even warned that companies trying to fulfil Russia's new gas payment demands would amount to a breach of sanctions, the EU is

now finding a wider consensus about allowing companies to go ahead with the new system of payment prescribed by Russia.

Russia demands that if European nations want Russian gas, they must pay for it in Russian currency. A closer look at the new mechanism in place reveals that European energy buyers must open a foreign currency account and a second special 'K' account at the Russian Gazprombank in Switzerland, which is conveniently exempted from EU sanctions and therefore can be used to make payments as long as they are in euros/dollars. The

## Lessons for today from India's 2006 wheat crisis

**With the expertise available in the country now, algorithms can be built to assess the impact of weather and pest events on crop size and quality**

I was "cooling off" (a bureaucratic term for spending a minimum period in the state after a central posting) in Ranchi in June 2006, hoping to be back in Delhi by October. One morning, I get a call from the establishment officer asking me to report as Secretary of Food and Public Distribution the next day. I was parachuted to the job and asked to "hit the deck running", of a ship in turbulent waters. Import of wheat had begun and India was trying to avoid a food crisis. How we avoided the global food crisis of 2008 is another story.

While measures to manage the situation were underway, I made efforts to understand how it came to such a pass. Figure 1 offers some insights. Procurement in 2006-07 (April-March) at 9.23 MMT was far below the requirement (note that the 2006-07 procurement figures relate to the 2005-06 crop of wheat). The buffer stocks were drawn down by 2 MMT, a cardinal error in food management. The stock position at the end of a poor procurement season had put the government in a tight spot. What led to this situation? The central pool had been carrying large stocks and there was wide criticism that these were being held for no good reason and costing the taxpayer huge sums of money (some even said "to feed" the rats!).

The government had, after due consideration, decided to liquidate some stocks with the FCI for export. Figure 2 explains the numbers for wheat.

Coincidentally, procurement had started going down from a high of 20.6 MMT to 15.8 MMT in 2003-04, marginally up to 16.7 mmt in 2004-05 to drop again to 14.8 MMT in 2005-06. This trend and the resultant depletion of stocks went "unnoticed".

With the advantage of hindsight, one can draw some conclusions. The exuberance that India has a food surplus and can feed its people and "the world" resulted in the unintended depletion of public stocks. The drawdown on public stocks without reviewing the production and stock position every quarter was ill-planned. Overlooking the drop in production almost every alternate year, particularly in 2000-01, 02-03, and 04-05 followed by 05-06 proved costly.

Not estimating the impact of climate change (high temperatures) on production—grain formation and grain size/weight—turned out to be critical.

The last point above was the game-changer. The Department of Food, overconfident about procuring large quantities, believing that the crop size estimated by the

Ministry of Agriculture is above 75 MMT, went about disposing of old stocks. By the time the third advance estimates came by end of May (there were no drones or satellite imagery in those days), the damage was done. I did turn to a few private sources to understand the impact of weather and the extent of private stocks. No official data existed on India's privately-held stocks of grains.

The government depended on only production and public stock data to take policy decisions, ignoring the importance of private stocks in the market. The CEO of an MNC showed me how their company tracked temperature changes in North-West India on a daily basis and came to the conclusion, using changes in grain formation and grain weight, to arrive at a crop size of 68 MMT. Government agencies had missed this important part. Another CEO had drawn up a time series of a "wheat balance sheet" for India, based on production, export, import, procurement, consumption (NSSO data) and private stocks. He had foreseen a shortage. A third, from a market agency, gave me access to daily prices from across two dozen markets, a "real-time" ticker on my computer screen. These were eye-openers.



# North Korea reports another fever surge amid Covid-19 crisis

**On Tuesday, North Korea reported another large jump in illnesses believed to be Covid-19**

North Korea on Tuesday reported another large jump in illnesses believed to be Covid-19 and encouraged good health habits, as a mass outbreak spreads through its unvaccinated population and military officers were deployed to distribute medicine.

State media said the anti-virus headquarters reported another 269,510 people were found with fevers and six had died. That raises North Korea's deaths to 56 after more than 1.48 million people became ill with fever since late April. North Korea lacks test kits to confirm coronavirus infections in large numbers, and the report didn't say how many of the fever cases were Covid-19. The outbreak is almost certainly greater than the fever tally, considering the lack of tests and resources to monitor and treat the sick. North Korea's virus response comes down to isolating people with symptoms at shelters, and as of Tuesday, at least 663,910 people were in quarantine.

In addition to lacking vaccines for its 26 million people, the country also grapples with malnourishment and chronic poverty, and lacks public health tools, including antiviral drugs or intensive care units, which suppressed hospitalisations and deaths in other countries. Some experts suspect North Korea is underreporting deaths to soften the blow for authoritarian leader Kim Jong Un, who already was navigating the toughest moment of his decade in power. The pandemic has further damaged an economy already broken by mismanagement and US-led sanctions over Kim's nuclear ambitions. The North's fatalities may surge in coming weeks as those who develop symptoms later succumb to the illness. It's also possible that fever cases are underreported by officials who worry about punishment or people don't report their symptoms because they fear the strict quarantine measures, analysts say.

North Korea acknowledged domestic Covid-19 infections for the first time last Thursday, ending a widely doubted claim it was virus-free throughout the pandemic.

Describing the outbreak as a "great upheaval", Kim imposed



measures including restrictions on movement and quarantines. But while he raised alarm over the virus, Kim also stressed that his economic goals should be met, indicating large groups of people will continue to gather for agricultural, industrial and construction work.

The official Korean Central News Agency said Tuesday that the military had deployed officers from its medical units to help with the transport of medicine to pharmacies in Pyongyang, which began to stay open 24 hours a day to deal with the crisis. The types of medicine being given was unclear.

KCNA said the army units "expressed their will to convey the precious medicines, elixir of

life, associated with the great love of Kim Jong Un for the people to the Pyongyangites". State media are also driving public campaigns aimed at promoting health and hygiene and teaching people "common sense" on disease prevention. North Korean TV aired an animated video advising viewers to switch their masks frequently and keep at least a metre (yard) distance from other relatives even at home, and also a lengthy interview with an infectious disease expert who broke down the outbreak with graphics showing the number of cases by region.

The North's Rodong Sinmun newspaper on Tuesday

published several articles about anti-virus habits and the pandemic response of other countries. It mentioned vaccines and Pfizer's Paxlovid antiviral pills without identifying their American developer.

But the article, which attributed its information to the Chinese internet, insisted that such drugs were costly and could be less effective against new virus variants and that strong pandemic restrictions will continue to be necessary. It's unclear whether the North's admission of an outbreak communicates a willingness to receive outside help. The country shunned millions of vaccines from the UN-backed COVAX

distribution program, likely because of international monitoring requirements attached to those shots. South Korea has publicly offered to send vaccines, medicine and health personnel, but North Korea has so far ignored the proposal amid icy relations between the rivals over a stalemate in larger nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang. Some experts say Kim's praise of China's pandemic response during a virus meeting last week indicates that the North would be more willing to receive help from its main ally.

Experts say the only realistic outside help would be offering limited supplies of vaccines to reduce deaths among high-risk groups, including the elderly and people with preexisting conditions.

"With the country yet to initiate Covid-19 vaccination, there is risk that the virus may spread rapidly among the masses unless curtailed with immediate and appropriate measures," Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, the World Health Organisation's regional director for Southeast Asia, said in a statement.

He said WHO is ready to provide North Korea with technical support to increase testing and with essential medicines and medical supplies.

## What Lancet Commission says about the impact of pollution on India's GDP

**The study notes that economic losses due to modern forms of pollution have increased as a proportion of GDP between 2000 and 2019 in India, China, and Nigeria**

A latest Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health says that increases in deaths due to modern forms of pollution were particularly evident in south Asia, east Asia and southeast Asia. The factors responsible for this include rising ambient air pollution, rising chemical pollution, ageing populations and increased numbers of people exposed to pollution. Significantly, India remains one of the worst affected countries when it comes to air pollution.

The report also estimated the present value of future output lost when a person dies prematurely due to pollution in six regions, including India, China, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the US and EU15. It said that in the year 2000, India lost output equivalent to 3.2 per cent of its GDP as a result of pollution. Further, the study notes that economic losses due to modern forms

of pollution have increased as a proportion of GDP between 2000 and 2019 in India, China, and Nigeria, and are now conservatively estimated to amount to approximately 1 per cent of GDP in each of these countries. Overall, as a result of pollution, 9 million people die prematurely per year, which corresponds to one in six deaths worldwide. In fact, air pollution remains responsible for causing most deaths in the world, causing about 6.7 million deaths in 2019. Water pollution was responsible for about 1.4 million deaths. Even so, there has been some reduction in the deaths attributable to the types of pollution associated with extreme poverty. The global cost of fossil fuel air pollution is estimated to be about US \$8 billion per day. Greenpeace, in its World Air Quality Report 2021, which was

released in March, noted New Delhi as the most polluted capital in the world, in terms of PM 2.5. PM 2.5, one of the principal pollutants in Northern Indian cities including Delhi, is estimated to cause over 3,000,000 premature deaths. These deaths lead to the loss of 62,700,000 years of life, 2,700,000 emergency room visits due to asthma, 2,000,000 preterm births and 1,755,200,000 work absences. Of these over 2 million preterm births, over 350,000 are in China and 981,000 in India.

The report mentions that in 2021, Central and South Asia had some of the world's worst air quality and were home to 46 of the world's 50 most polluted cities. Further, according to the United Nations Environment Programme, 70 per cent of global air quality related deaths occur in this region.



# What India Must and Must Not Do to Help Sri Lanka Get Out of the Economic Mess

Sri Lanka has got a new Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, under most unenviable circumstances. Unlike what the Indian public believes, the Sri Lankan prime minister's job is vastly different from that of their Indian counterpart. Until President Gotabaya Rajapaksa gets the Constitution amended to end the controversial Executive Presidency and empowers the Prime Minister and his Cabinet through Parliament, the political impasse of the past weeks will continue, one way or the other. A constitutional debate on whittling down the Executive Presidency is going to consume more time and energy than already, further delaying the roadmap for economic recovery.

As a friendly neighbour, India has multiple roles assigned by anxious citizens for Sri Lanka's political stability, economic recovery, and strategic security. It owes not only to India's own needs, as often wrongly surmised in Sri Lanka but owes even more to Indian concerns that Sri Lanka does not end up with a 'failed state' tag as many had branded Pakistan in the neighbourhood. Nor should Sri Lanka become a 'basket case' as the West had dubbed Bangladesh at Independence. The Gota

presidency should owe the last straws, like sacrificing 25-percent tax revenue, slashing the taxpayers' list by a million, banning the import of essentials without a thought, and taking to 'organic fertilizers' overnight, without prior consultations, preparations, education, and stocks.

Plain and simple, Sri Lanka lived beyond its means. The Gota presidency should owe the last straws, like sacrificing 25-percent tax revenue, slashing the taxpayers' list by a million, banning the import of essentials without a thought, and taking to 'organic fertilizers' overnight, without prior consultations, preparations, education, and stocks. But the economic and forex crises of the present are a 'legacy issue' for which all are equally responsible, ever since the economic reforms in 1978.

## ANAND MODEL

As the new Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe should have the courage to own up for having introduced lop-sided economic reforms in 1978. This caused imported dairy products from New Zealand and Australia to kill the local village-based industry. These exporter-nations now should have the grace to assist in the re-discovery of Sri Lanka's

traditional dairy industry, and also help identify new export markets.

India, for instance, has the successful 'Anand' model that could help re-create the Sri Lankan dairy industry. This could restore the confidence of the rural population in the changing times, also put some cash into their pockets, and possibly also cut down import-bill by a certain degree. India also had an agreement for bi-annual gifting of 25,000 cattle-heads to Upcountry Tamils of recent Indian origin, or 'Estate' Tamils. New Delhi can revive the project and extend the scheme to all parts of Sri Lanka, as fast as it can.

Tea, incidentally linked to the lives and livelihoods of the 'Estate Tamils', is another export commodity that has been badly hit by Gota's 'organic fertiliser' scheme. With no forex reserve to import cloth from Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka's value-added textile exports have also been hit. Indications are that Indian suppliers, especially from the South, have benefited. While the new Sri Lankan government helps restore market confidence in the nation, New Delhi too may have to work with its industries, to see if the re-routed global trade did not adversely impact the neighbourhood

economy more than already. These require grassroots-level discussions and adjustments at multiple levels. Tourism is the third Sri Lankan forex earner and a major one at that. It's the one worst hit, beginning with the 2019 Easter serial blasts, followed by the global COVID-19 lockdowns. The current phase of unending political instability, in the face of the forex crisis, food and fuel shortage, hitting both the hospitality industry and transport sector, has worsened the situation when the nation was on the road to recovery. Using Sri Lanka's current tourism plight, and Maldives' successful recovery mode, the Indian industry can be encouraged to build the elusive tourism-hub model, to which Bhutan and Nepal too can be added in due course.

Tourism is the third Sri Lankan forex earner and a major one at that. It's the one worst hit, beginning with the 2019 Easter serial blasts, followed by the global COVID-19 lockdowns.

In the post-war era, the government of then-President Mahinda Rajapaksa invited reputed Indian agronomists and also IT czars, to re-build the former and create an IT/ITE industry, for local and export markets. (Contd on page 30)

## Behind BKU split, tensions between faction 'sympathetic to BJP' & Tikaits, 'who backed opposition'

**Bharatiya Kisan Union split again Sunday, with the breakaway faction calling itself BKU (Arajnaitik). This is the eleventh split in the BKU**

A day after the Naresh and Rakesh Tikait-led Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) split Sunday, politics within the organisation has emerged as the main likely cause for the division.

The breakaway faction blamed "politicisation" of the parent body — and its "open support" to parties in opposition to the BJP — and the Tikaits' "dictatorial control" for the split. However, sources within the union claimed that political aspirations of those in the rebel group, and their "sympathies for the BJP", led to the break.

Founded in 1987, this is the eleventh split in the union, which was one of the main organisations leading the year-long farmers' protest against the now-repealed farm laws brought by the Modi government in 2020.

The new group, BKU (Arajnaitik or 'apolitical'), was formed in Lucknow, with Rajendra Malik — head of the Gathwala Khap (a group of 84 villages) — as its head. The split coincided with the death

anniversary of former BKU president — and Naresh and Rakesh Tikait's father — Mahendra Singh Tikait, who died in 2011.

Rajesh Singh Chouhan, a farmers' leader from eastern UP who served as vice-president of the Tikait-led body, has been made president of the new group. "BKU was an apolitical organisation, fighting for farmers rights. It also led the farmers protest on the three (controversial) farm laws. But ahead of the assembly elections (in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab) it took a political character, favouring one party and opposing others," alleged Dharmendra Malik, the former national media in-charge of the BKU who joined the breakaway group as its national spokesperson.

Mallik added: "We became part of opposition (against the BJP). We sit with Kejriwal. When we go to Bengal, we sided with Mamata (Banerjee, Chief Minister). In Telangana, we took CM K.

Chandrashekar Rao's side. In UP, we sided with the Samajwadi party and the RLD.

"We have openly announced support for opposition parties (those against the BJP), which was not good for an organisation like BKU. This was the main reason for the split." Rajendra Malik alleged that the "BKU had become a pocket organisation of the Tikaits (controlled by them) — Naresh Tikait was president, his wife is head of the women's wing, his son Gaurav is head of youth wing, brother Rakesh is spokesperson of BKU — what will other leaders do?" "Their dictatorial behaviour led to the split in the organisation," he said.

BKU national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait, however, blamed the BJP for the division in the organisation.

"They (the BJP) have seen the power of farmers during the farmers' protest (against the three farm laws) and the BJP is trying to divide the farmers' union. In

a few days, it will be clear who was behind (the split), but always remember it is the public who made movement, not the leaders," said Tikait.

He added: "Our best wishes are with those who work for farmers' interests. We were convincing these leaders to remain united for the cause of the farmers, but I think there was pressure on them. The government (the BJP government at the Centre) have not fulfilled our demand for minimum support price (MSP), and now they are trying to weaken farmers' organisations."

Sources within the BKU also alleged that those in the breakaway group had hoped for assembly tickets in this year's UP and Punjab elections. When that did not happen, disgruntlement led to division in the organisation, they said.

"Dharmendra Malik, who is the main person behind the split, was hoping to get an assembly seat from Budhana (in UP).



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# China, Pakistan discuss steps to strengthen security, speed up CPEC projects

**Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and his Pakistani counterpart Shehbaz Sharif held talks to strengthen security of Chinese citizens in Pakistan and fast-tracking of CPEC projects**

(NewsAgency) Enhanced security for Chinese nationals working in Pakistan and fast-tracking of the USD 60 billion CPEC projects figured high in the first talks between Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and his newly-appointed Pakistani counterpart Shehbaz Sharif on Monday.

According to several reports, a large number of Chinese workers deployed in Pakistan for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects started leaving the country after the suicide bomb attack at the Karachi University last month in which three Chinese language teachers were killed and another injured.

Sharif assured Li of "enhanced security" for Chinese nationals working in Pakistan during their telephone talks on Monday, Pakistani newspaper Express Tribune reported. Several Chinese personnel died in the last few years in attacks by religious extremist groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the

Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) fighting for the independence of Balochistan.

The Pakistan Army has formed a separate brigade to protect the Chinese personnel. Chinese experts say while Pakistan security mainly focussed on major projects, those working in smaller institutions, like the Karachi University where the suicide bomber struck, remained soft targets.

The Pakistani side will strengthen security measures for all Chinese institutions and nationals in Pakistan to prevent similar incidents from happening again, Sharif told Li. Li pointed out that the Chinese side is shocked and outraged by the recent attack on Chinese nationals in Karachi, and strongly condemns the terrorist attack. Li hoped that Pakistan will bring the perpetrators to justice as soon as possible, make every effort to handle follow-up matters, comfort the bereaved

families and the injured, and comprehensively strengthen security measures for Chinese institutions and citizens in Pakistan to ensure that similar tragedies will not happen again, China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Sharif also assured speeding up of the CPEC projects, acknowledging that the much publicised strategic project, stated to be the flagship of the Chinese President Xi Jinping's pet multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is hit by delays, specially under the previous Imran Khan government. The ambitious USD 60 billion CPEC is a 3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects connecting China's northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Gwadar Port in the western Pakistan province of Balochistan. India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

A handout released by the Prime

Minister's Office (PMO) in Islamabad said Sharif expressed his government's resolve to fast track the ongoing and new CPEC projects.

He highlighted the need for both sides to work together and enhance cooperation between the relevant agencies of the two countries in order to fully operationalise special economic zones (SEZs) in Pakistan as soon as possible. Before the fall of the Imran Khan government, China had agreed to roll-over USD 4.5 billion debt due to it from Pakistan in March, according to former Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. Cash-strapped Pakistan's economy is currently aided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Sri Lanka — another recipient of Chinese loans and investments in the sub-continent — approached the global lender after economic collapse, raising questions on why the two countries faced bankruptcy despite securing heavy funding from Beijing.

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# Sri Lanka economic crisis: Police step up action against rioters

**Sri Lanka economic crisis: At least 230 people have been arrested on charges of violation of curfew, attacking the public and causing damage to public and private properties since May 9**

(News Agency) Sri Lankan police on Monday came under pressure to arrest the Rajapaksa family loyalists involved in attacks on peaceful protesters last week, even as it arrested over 200 people on various charges following the violence that left nine people dead. The clashes forced a curfew being imposed last Monday. Police have arrested some 230 people on charges including violation of curfew, attacking the public and causing damages to public and private properties since May 9. "The police said they have already arrested over 200 people for attacking the government politicians. We condemn such violence. But they have no hurry to arrest the government-backed attackers of protesters," Nuwan Bopage from the young lawyers' association told reporters. The Attorney General too had asked the police to expedite the investigations. The government-backed mob went berserk attacking the protesters demanding the resignations of



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother and ex-premier Mahinda Rajapaksa on May 9 after the then prime minister addressed several thousands of them at his official residence while refusing to quit.

The attack triggered widespread violence against Rajapaksa loyalists, leaving nine people dead and wounding over 200 others. The police said at least 78 parliamentarians,

including the former prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, had faced arson attacks on their properties. The former premier came under siege in his official residence before being rescued to safety to a highly-secured naval base in Trincomalee. Police have urged the public to provide information on government-backed attackers. They have arrested a worker from the ruling party-controlled

municipal council of the Colombo suburb of Moratuwa. The police set up dedicated phone lines for the public to provide information on the attackers while entrusting the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) with the investigations. The ruling party politicians have called for additional security for them as they are due to attend Parliament on Tuesday, the first

since the violence broke out that killed 9 people and left over 200 people injured.

Sri Lanka is going through the worst economic crisis since independence in 1948. A crippling shortage of foreign reserves has led to long queues for fuel, cooking gas and other essentials while power cuts and soaring food prices heaped misery on the people. The economic crisis also triggered a political crisis in Sri Lanka and a demand for the resignation of the powerful Rajapaksas. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa sacked his Cabinet and appointed a younger Cabinet as a response to the demand for his resignation. A continuous protest opposite his secretariat has now gone on for well over a month. Last Monday, Gotabaya Rajapaksa's elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned as the prime minister to make way for the president to appoint an interim all political party government. Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed the country's new prime minister on Thursday.

## Sri Lanka's main Opposition decides to offer conditional support to new government

**Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), Sri Lanka's main opposition party, said on Monday that it would offer conditional support to the new government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe**

(News Agency) Sri Lanka's main Opposition party, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), on Monday said it would offer conditional support to the interim all-party government headed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to help tackle the country's crippling economic and political crisis.

Wickremesinghe, the United National Party (UNP) leader, was appointed as Sri Lanka's 26th prime minister on Thursday as the country had been without a government since Monday when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's elder brother and prime minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa, resigned after violence erupted following an attack on anti-government protesters by his supporters.

"As a responsible political party, Samagi Jana Balawegaya believes saving the country from the current crisis is of the utmost importance," the SJB said in a statement.

"Accordingly, without taking any portfolio and on behalf of the betterment of the country, SJB in its parliamentary

group discussion today decided to fully support the current government in its efforts at economic recovery," it said. But the support came with certain riders. "If the government groups try to accommodate defections from SJB or connect SJB parliamentarians for activities that are against the SJB principles, the parliamentary group has decided to unconditionally withdraw this support," it added. The SJB had earlier declined to support Wickremesinghe as the Prime Minister of the interim all-party government, saying the 73-year-old had no mandate since he was a solo representative of his party in the 225-member Parliament.

Following his appointment last week, Wickremesinghe wrote to SJB leader Sajith Premadasa, urging bipartisanship.

"We all know very well that Sri Lanka is facing a colossal economic, social, and political crisis. It is irrefutable that we must all unite to end this crisis that's intensifying every day and to

establish a stable economy. All of us have a historical responsibility to secure the future of the next generation, given that our actions at this moment will decide the path of this country," Wickremesinghe wrote.

SJB's conditional support notwithstanding, Wickremesinghe on Monday said that the 21st Amendment to the Constitution to curb presidential powers will be discussed with the Attorney General's Department on Monday so that it can be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

The 21st Amendment is expected to annul the 20A, which gave unfettered powers to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa after abolishing the 19th Amendment, which had made Parliament powerful over the president. "21st Amendment: This will be taken up for discussion with the Attorney General's Department tomorrow [Monday] and then be presented to the Cabinet for approval," Wickremesinghe tweeted.

The powerful Rajapaksa family

tightened their grip on power after their massive victory in the general elections in August 2020, which allowed them to amend the Constitution to restore presidential powers and install close family members in key positions. In his 2019 presidential bid, Gotabaya Rajapaksa won a convincing mandate for the presidency during which he sought full presidential powers over Parliament.

Meanwhile, Wickremesinghe, who on Sunday held discussions with representatives of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank on the current economic crisis in the country, said the two financial institutions have pledged support to assist in procuring essential items like medicine, food, and fertilisers.

Sri Lanka has been grappling with unprecedented economic turmoil since its independence from Britain in 1948. A crippling shortage of foreign reserves has led to long queues for fuel, cooking gas and other essentials, while power cuts and soaring food prices have heaped misery on citizens.



# China, Pakistan discuss steps to strengthen security, speed up CPEC projects

## Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and his Pakistani counterpart Shehbaz Sharif held talks to strengthen security of Chinese citizens in Pakistan and fast-tracking of CPEC projects

(News Agency) Enhanced security for Chinese nationals working in Pakistan and fast-tracking of the USD 60 billion CPEC projects figured high in the first talks between Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and his newly-appointed Pakistani counterpart Shehbaz Sharif on Monday. According to several reports, a large number of Chinese workers deployed in Pakistan for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects started leaving the country after the suicide bomb attack at the Karachi University last month in which three Chinese language teachers were killed and another injured. Sharif assured Li of "enhanced security" for Chinese nationals working in Pakistan during their telephone talks on Monday, Pakistani newspaper Express Tribune reported.

Several Chinese personnel died in the last few years in attacks by religious extremist groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) fighting for the independence of

Balochistan.

The Pakistan Army has formed a separate brigade to protect the Chinese personnel. Chinese experts say while Pakistan security mainly focussed on major projects, those working in smaller institutions, like the Karachi University where the suicide bomber struck, remained soft targets.

The Pakistani side will strengthen security measures for all Chinese institutions and nationals in Pakistan to prevent similar incidents from happening again, Sharif told Li. Li pointed out that the Chinese side is shocked and outraged by the recent attack on Chinese nationals in Karachi, and strongly condemns the terrorist attack. Li hoped that Pakistan will bring the perpetrators to justice as soon as possible, make every effort to handle follow-up matters, comfort the bereaved families and the injured, and comprehensively strengthen security measures for Chinese institutions and citizens in Pakistan to ensure that similar tragedies will not

happen again, China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Sharif also assured speeding up of the CPEC projects, acknowledging that the much publicised strategic project, stated to be the flagship of the Chinese President Xi Jinping's pet multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is hit by delays, specially under the previous Imran Khan government.

The ambitious USD 60 billion CPEC is a 3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects connecting China's northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Gwadar Port in the western Pakistan province of Balochistan. India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). A handout released by the Prime



Minister's Office (PMO) in Islamabad said Sharif expressed his government's resolve to fast track the ongoing and new CPEC projects. He highlighted the need for both sides to work together and enhance cooperation between the relevant agencies of the two countries in order to fully operationalise special economic zones (SEZs) in Pakistan as soon as possible. Before the fall of the Imran Khan government, China had agreed to roll-over USD 4.5 billion debt due to it from Pakistan in March, according to former Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. Cash-strapped Pakistan's economy is currently aided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Sri Lanka -- another recipient of Chinese loans and investments in the sub-continent -- approached the global lender after economic collapse, raising questions on why the two countries faced bankruptcy despite securing heavy funding from Beijing.

## Blast at Karachi's busy Bolton market kills 1, injures 12

Police and rescue officials were rushed to the site after a loud explosion was reported



(News Agency) A woman was killed and 12 others have been injured in an explosion in Karachi's Kharadar, the local media reported. The blast took place in the Bolton Market area of the port city.

A blast ripped through the Kharadar area of #Karachi leaving one woman dead and as many as a dozen people injured. Eyewitnesses said that the sound of the blast could be heard in faraway areas pic. Police and rescue officials

were rushed to the site after a loud explosion was reported.

The exact cause of the blast is yet to be ascertained with locals suggesting that it could have been caused by an explosive device, Saama TV reported.

The Bolton market, the blast site, is a densely populated area and one of the busiest business hubs of the city. The incident comes weeks after a suicide attack at the Karachi University killed three Chinese teachers and a local last month.



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# Good news for girls' education in Afghanistan? Taliban says so

**Afghanistan's Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani said that no one in the Taliban opposed girls' education and "very good news" on the matter would be announced soon**

(News Agency) Afghanistan's interior minister promised "very good news" soon on the return of girls to secondary schools, in a rare interview broadcast Monday by CNN. At the end of March, the Taliban, who took power after US forces withdrew from the country last August, closed high schools and colleges for girls just hours after their reopening. The unexpected reversal, ordered by Hibatullah Akhundzada, the supreme leader of the Taliban and of the country, outraged many Afghans and the international community.

"I would like to provide some clarification. There is no one who opposes education for women," said Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, long one of the most secretive Taliban leaders and who only showed his face in public for the first time in March.

He argued that girls could already go to primary school. "Above that grade, the work is continuing on a mechanism" to allow girls to attend secondary school, he said in his first televised interview. "Very soon you will hear very good news about this issue," he said.

Haqqani hinted that the "mechanism" was linked

to school dress codes, explaining that education should be based on Afghan "culture" and "Islamic rules and principles," and referred "more broadly" to the issue of women wearing the hijab. "Very soon you will hear very good news about this issue," he said.

Haqqani hinted that the "mechanism" was linked to school dress codes, explaining that education should be based on Afghan "culture" and "Islamic rules and principles," and referred "more broadly" to the issue of women wearing the hijab. Sirajuddin Haqqani himself is still on the FBI's most-wanted list, with a \$10 million reward for any information that could lead to his arrest.

On CNN, the minister said that "the last 20 years was a situation of defensive fighting and war" but that he wanted in the future "to have good relations with the United States and the international community."

"We do not look at them as enemies," he said, insisting that the Taliban intends to respect the agreement signed with Washington in 2020, in which they pledged not to let Afghanistan become a haven for terrorists targeting Americans again.



## Afghanistan envoy praises India's decision to relax fumigation rules on agricultural imports

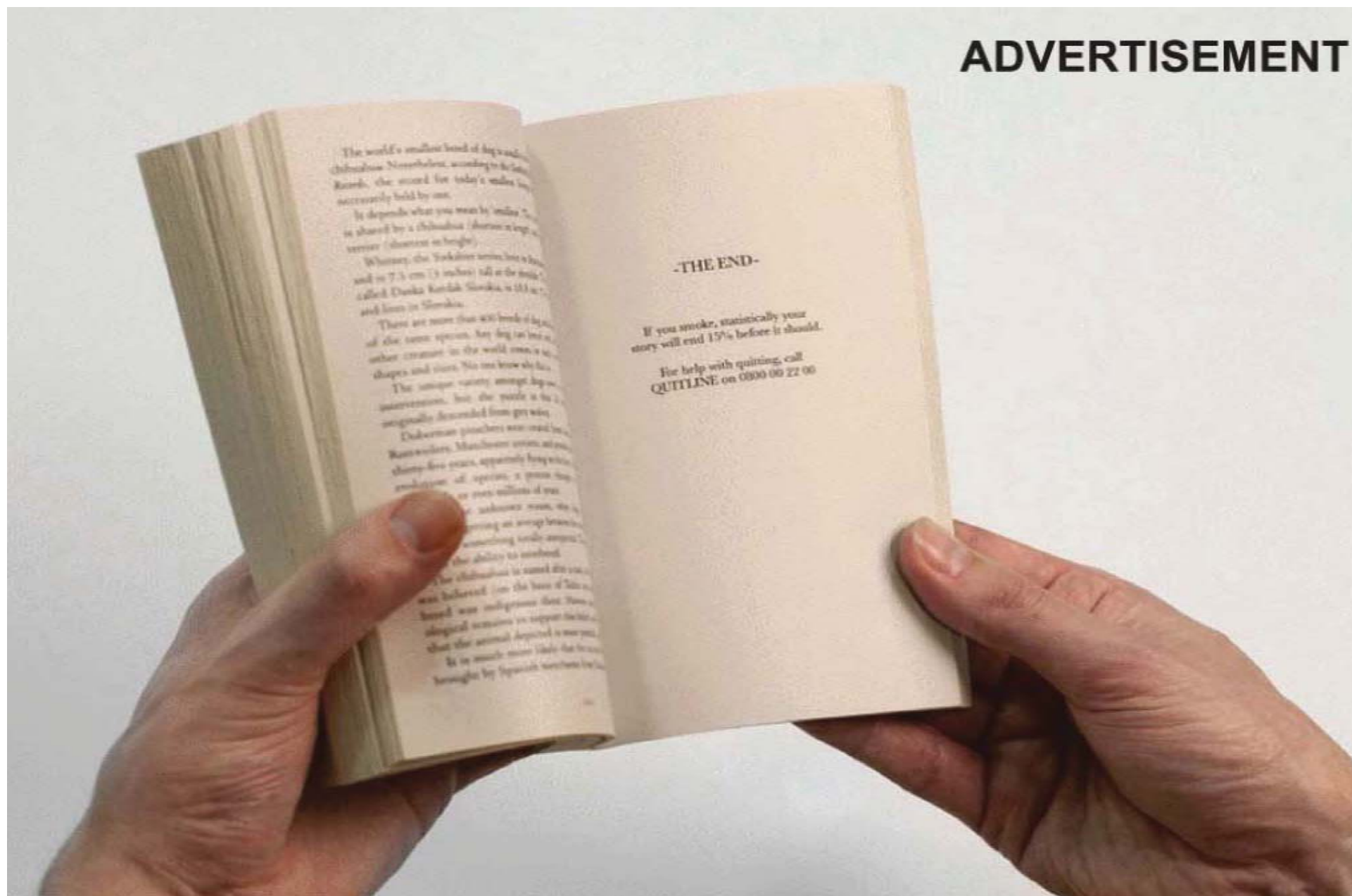
**Afghanistan's Ambassador to India, Farid Mamundzay, on Wednesday praised India's decision to extend relaxation of fumigation rules on agricultural imports**



(News Agency) Farid Mamundzay, Afghanistan's Ambassador to India, on Wednesday praised India for relaxing the fumigation norms on agricultural products imported to India till May 2023. The envoy said that the move will ease trade between our countries. Taking to Twitter, Farid Mamundzay said, "Appreciate Indian Ministry of Agriculture's decision to relax the fumigation regulations for imports of agricultural commodities until May 2023. Afghan traders consistently requested this move, which will not only ease trade between our countries but will also

benefit." "The move will also benefit struggling Afghan farmers to sell/export their products to a reliable market. Last year, many Afghan farmers planted "seeds of hopes" to reap a full harvest this year though they appear to be futile wishes. I thank @MEAIndia and @AgriGoI for their role to help our traders/farmers," he added. The Centre had relaxed fumigation regulations for the import of agricultural products from Afghanistan. The order stated that the consignments arriving till May 2023 would be exempted from fumigation treatment.

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# Embattled Sri Lanka President Gotabaya Rajapaksa defeats no-confidence motion

Amid economic crisis, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has managed to defeat a no-confidence motion tabled against him by Opposition. The island nation recently witnessed violent protests calling for the resignation of the embattled President

(News Agency) Embattled Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa-led government won two important victories in Parliament on Tuesday when its candidate for the slot of Deputy Speaker got elected while it convincingly defeated an Opposition move to hasten a debate on a censure motion that blamed him for the island nation's worst economic crisis. A no-confidence motion tabled by the Opposition Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP M A Sumanthiran to censure President Rajapaksa was defeated 119-68 in a deeply-divided Parliament, amidst nationwide protests demanding his resignation due to the hardship faced by the people.

With the no-confidence motion, the Opposition sought to demonstrate how nationwide calls for President Rajapaksa's resignation is reflected in the country's 225-member legislature.

Hours earlier, the candidate from the ruling SLPP won a key vote when its lawmaker Ajith Rajapaksha was on Tuesday elected Deputy Speaker of the country's Parliament, which met for the first time since the resignation of the former prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and the swearing-in of the new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Rajapaksha, 48, from the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Party (SLPP) was elected following a secret ballot conducted in Parliament. He secured 109 votes and the main Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya nominee Rohini Kavirathna received 78 votes. Rajapaksha is not related to the ruling Rajapaksa family but comes from the same home district of Hambantota.

House Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena said 23 votes were rejected.

The post of deputy speaker was left vacant after Ranjith Siyamabalapitiya resigned from the post twice in one month this year. The House met for the first time on Tuesday since the resignation of the former prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and the cycle of violence in which nine people, including a parliamentarian, were killed and over 200 others injured.

Both Mahinda Rajapaksa and



his son Namal Rajapaksa were absent while Basil Rajapaksa and Shasheendra Rajapaksa the other members of the Rajapaksa family were present in Parliament.

Meanwhile, TNA leader Sumanthiran, who tabled the no-confidence motion against the President for mismanaging the island nation's economy, slammed Prime Minister Wickremesinghe for his shameful conduct in supporting the government to defeat a motion moved by the Opposition. The country knows who is protecting the President, and who is protesting you. Absolutely

shameless conduct by the Prime Minister, and all those who sit at the government benches. But, I say the Prime Minister. Because this motion of displeasure, when it was drafted the Prime Minister who was in the Opposition at that time, wanted to have a look at it, said the MP.

He has traded his principles, his policy which he publicly told this country for a Prime Minister's job, Sumanthiran said, a day after Wickremesinghe said his aim is to save crisis-hit Sri Lanka, and not a person, family or group, in an apparent reference to the Rajapaksa family and its former strongman Mahinda

Rajapaksa. Responding to criticism, the United National Party (UNP), represented solely in Parliament by Wickremesinghe, has defended his vote against the Opposition's attempt to express the dissatisfaction of the House with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's handling of the crisis.

The UNP tweeted Tuesday that its leader Wickremesinghe had informed the Opposition that voting to suspend Parliament's Standing Orders was a poor parliamentary strategy.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was also criticised by Opposition

SJB parliamentarian Rohini Kavirathna, who lost her bid to become Deputy Speaker.

The Prime Minister had become a mere puppet of the Rajapaksa family, and had become a tool to carry out the Rajapaksa regime's agenda, while the first ever policy decision taken at the Parliament has been defeated, she said. The MP, as the defeated nominee for the post of Deputy Speaker, stated that as a woman within the Parliament, when she was subjected to linguistic harassments, it was the Deputy Speaker elect Ajith Rajapaksa who presided over the House. However, today, this House has shown the world that a woman still has no right to Chair the Parliament, she stated. Human rights lawyer Bhavani Fonseka tweeted after the vote that the motion's defeat exposed MPs who protect President Rajapaksa. On Tuesday, Parliament met for the first time after the appointment of new Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, as the country looks to undertake major constitutional reforms amid the worst economic crisis. Sri Lanka is witnessing an unprecedented economic crisis. In his first televised address to the nation on Monday, Wickremesinghe said the nation urgently needs USD 75 million of foreign currency in the next few days to pay for essential imports.

## China working on hypersonic missile capable of hitting car moving at five times the speed of light

(News Agency) China has made great advancements when it comes to hypersonic missiles with the country setting up a model aircraft carrier in the Gobi Desert. However, the Chinese scientists were trying to create a hypersonic weapon capable of hitting a moving target and it seems like they have succeeded in finding the solution. China is currently developing a new line of heat-seeking missiles which will be able to track and hit a car moving at five times the speed of sound, according to media reports.

The main problem in creating such a weapon is to successfully track and zero in on the target at such a speed and the team of

scientists, led by Yang Xiaogang from the tracking system which will allow China to hit 'high value' targets from a considerable amount of distance.

While a traditional heat-seeking missile uses infrared sensors to track any target, the new weapons will take the help of motion sensors in order to create a full image keeping all the variables in mind.

The success of this project will depend heavily on the development and testing of

various hardware modifications and sensor technology, according to the paper. However, Yang and his team have been given a deadline till 2025 to provide the technology for this new line of hypersonic weapons.



PLA Rocket Force University of Engineering in Xian, said that they have made great progress in finding a solution to the issue. According to the paper published by the team, the missiles will feature a new kind of



# Pentagon shows declassified UFO videos to US Congress in public hearing



military pilots have reported observing since 2004. Bray, deputy director of naval intelligence, said that US officials are unable to explain some of these sightings. Bray said that some sightings generated too little data to arrive at a logical explanation. But Bray added: "There are a small handful of cases in which we have more data that our analysis simply hasn't been able to fully pull together a picture of what happened." These, Bray said, have involved unexpected "flight characteristics" or "signature management." "When it comes to material that we have, we have no material, we have detected no emanations, within the UAB task force that would suggest it is anything non-terrestrial in origin,"

Bray added. "We know that our service members have encountered unidentified aerial phenomena, and because UAP pose potential flight safety and general security risks, we are committed to a focused effort to determine their origins," Moultrie, who oversees a newly formed Pentagon-based UAP investigation team as U.S. defense undersecretary for intelligence and security, told the hearing. Scott Bray showed two UAP clips to the panel. In one clip, a flashing triangle-shaped object in the night sky was seen. The other showed a shiny, spherical object zipping past the cockpit window of a military aircraft. "I do not have an explanation for what this specific object is," Bray said of

the second object.

Both the officials told the subcommittee that Pentagon wanted to remove stigma associated with sightings of UFOs and wanted to encourage pilots to report when they see such phenomena.

The notion of alien spacecraft received no mention in last June's UAP presentation. The focus, instead, was on possible implications for US national security and aviation safety, as it was in Tuesday's hearing. The report did, however, include some UAPs previously revealed in Pentagon-released video footage of enigmatic airborne objects exhibiting speed and maneuverability exceeding known aviation technology and lacking any visible means of propulsion or flight-control surfaces.

(News Agency) In the first such hearing in more than 50 years, top Pentagon officials showed unexplained UFO videos to members of US Congress. The term UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) is associated with aerial vehicle of extraterrestrial origin. US government is calling these "unidentified aerial phenomena" during the hearing. Ronald

Moultrie and Scott Bray, two top officials of the Pentagon appeared on May 17 before US House of Representatives intelligence subcommittee. They are appearing before the subcommittee 11 months after submission of a report documenting more than 140 cases of unidentified aerial phenomena, or UAPs, that U.S.

## US authorities find drug smuggling tunnel with rail system at Mexico border



(News Agency) Authorities in the United States revealed the finding of a massive drug smuggling tunnel from Mexico to a warehouse in an industrial area in the United States on Monday. Authorities said the hidden corridor from Tijuana to San Diego had train and ventilation systems, electricity, and reinforced walls. It was discovered near the Otay Mesa border crossing in San Diego, in a region where more than a dozen other complex tunnels have been uncovered in the last two decades. Authorities in the United States claimed they didn't know how long the tunnel had been open or how many drugs had passed through unnoticed. In connection with the investigation, they seized 1,762 pounds of cocaine, 165 pounds of meth, and 3.5 pounds of heroin. Six individuals, ranging in age from 31 to 55, have been charged with conspiracy to distribute cocaine. All of them live in Southern California. The tunnel is located in one of the border's most heavily protected sections, demonstrating the limitations of border fortifications. While walls are effective against small, crudely dug tunnels known as "gopher holes," they are no match for more sophisticated underground pathways. The most recent route, discovered on Friday, was a third of a mile long and led to Tijuana. It was roughly six stories deep and 4 feet in diameter.

## US congress panel to host first public UFO hearing in almost half a century

(News Agency) There is no shortage of theories regarding UFOs or Unidentified Flying Objects, and it has always been associated with the idea of alien spacecrafts. However, it is no longer just conspiracy theories as two top defense intelligence officials will be testifying in front of a House Intelligence subcommittee about the information that the government currently possesses about UFOs. This is the first public hearing concerning UFOs in almost 50 years and this comes almost

a year after a government report which contained 140 instances of "unidentified aerial phenomena" which were reported by the US military pilots since 2004. However, there is a slight twist to the story. The motive of this hearing has

more to do with national security than alien life. There were a few reports of flying objects which showed speeds

possibility of some secret technology which was developed by other countries.



According to AFP, the report, which was compiled by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and a Navy-led task force the Pentagon formed in 2020, will be examined once again. The two officials who will be attending the hearing are Ronald Moultrie, US defense undersecretary for intelligence and security, and Scott Bray, deputy director

of naval intelligence. The last time UFOs were actually the subject of a hearing was back in 1969 which ended with the US Air Force terminating an inconclusive UFO program code-named Project Blue Book.

## US: Presidential commission votes to process all Green Card applications within 6 months

(News Agency) A presidential advisory commission has unanimously voted to recommend US President Joe Biden to process all applications for green cards or permanent residency within six months, a proposal if adopted is likely to bring cheers to the hundreds and thousands of Indian-Americans including those waiting for it for decades. A Green Card, known officially as a Permanent Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the US as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently in the US. Indian IT professionals, most of whom are highly skilled and come to the US mainly on the H-1B work visas, are the worst sufferers of the current immigration system which imposes a seven per cent

per country quota on allotment of the coveted Green Card or permanent legal residency. The recommendations of the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (PACAANHPI) are to be sent to the White House now for approval. If adopted, it is likely to bring cheers to the hundreds and thousands of Indian-Americans and those waiting, some even for decades, for a Green Card. A proposal on the issue was moved by eminent Indian-American community leader Ajay Jain Bhutoria during the meeting of the PACAANHPI, during which all its 25 commissioners unanimously approved it. The proceedings of the meeting here in the national capital were webcast live last

week. To reduce the pending Green Card backlog, the advisory commission recommended the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to review their processes, systems and policies and establish new internal cycle time goals by streamlining processes, removing redundant steps if any, automating any manual approvals, improving their internal dashboards and reporting system and enhancing policies.

The recommendations aim to reduce the cycle time for processing all forms related to family-based Green Card applications, DACA renewals and all other Green Card applications within six months and issue adjudicate decisions within six months of applications received by it.



# US: Mother selling 4,000 ounces of breast milk to help ease baby formula shortage

(News Agency) As many parents in the US are scrambling for baby formula in the wake of an acute shortage, a woman has taken it upon herself to ease the daunting crisis. Alyssa Chitti from Utah has been providing breast milk to thousands of desperate parents who have been struggling to feed their kids.

However, she is not alone. Many mothers like Chitti are doing the noble cause.

Chitti has so far sold 4,000 ounces (118 litres) of her own breast milk, and has more than three freezers of breastmilk, which she plans to sell to families in need.

In an interview with Fox 13, she said, "I figure I'm running out of room, so might as well help someone else. I know I have over 3,000 ounces. 3,000 ounces downstairs and probably almost 1,000 upstairs," she told Fox 13.

Chitti initially decided to donate it to a local milk bank. However, she found it was much easier to see it online.

The Utah-based mother said she had been selling her breast milk at \$1 per ounce, but added that she is willing to negotiate considering how the crisis is. "It was making me nervous, just because so my



daughter was very, very colicky," she said. "I know a lot of moms need specific formulas for babies with upset tummies, and I know how hard it can be when they're upset. There's nothing you can do about that stomach pain," she added. Buying and selling breast milk online is legal in the US. However, it is unregulated, which adds to the risk because the donor may not have been screened for infectious diseases or contamination risks.

## US government sues casino tycoon Stephen Wynn over China lobbying

(News Agency) The US government has sued casino mogul Steve Wynn alleging that he did lobbying work for the Chinese government during the Trump administration.

The US justice department said it had asked Wynn to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act but he refused to do it. "Where a foreign government uses an American as its agent to influence policy decisions in the United States, FARA gives the American people a right to know," assistant attorney General Matthew Olsen said. Wynn's attorneys however disagreed with the US Justice Department asserting that he had "no obligation to register".

The US government accused the tycoon of lobbying the Trump administration to remove a Chinese national from the United States who was charged with corruption in China and was seeking asylum in the US in 2017. The US government complained that Wynn, ex-CEO

of Wynn Resorts, acted on behalf of China's former vice minister of public security Sun Lijun. Wynn had allegedly called ex-president Trump on cancelling the visa of the Chinese businessman who wanted asylum in the United States. "The filing of this suit – the first affirmative civil lawsuit under FARA in more than three decades – demonstrates the department's commitment to ensuring transparency in our democratic system," Olsen said. "Wynn conveyed the request directly to the then-president over dinner and by phone, and he had multiple discussions with the then-president and senior officials at the White House and National Security Council about organizing a meeting with Sun and other PRC government officials," the US government filing said. "During the time that he engaged in this conduct, Wynn's company owned and operated casinos in Macau, a special administrative region in the PRC," the government said.

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

**WWF**



# Kill as many blacks as possible: US supermarket shooter's goal in chilling 180-page manifesto

The 18-year-old suspect Payton Gendron took explicit inspiration from the white supremacist gunman who murdered 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019

(News Agency) Payton Gendron, the teenager charged with shooting dead 10 African Americans at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York followed an insidious racist creed gaining ground among white Americans that minorities are taking over society. He was highly motivated by the white supremacist gunman who murdered 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019.

The Christchurch killer had warned in a manifesto of a "Great Replacement" of white Christians of European descent by Blacks, Jews, Muslims, Latinos and others, a theory that has found an increasing echo in American right-wing politics and on cable news.

Lifting often word-for-word from the rambling text, Gendron produced a chilling 180-page manifesto of his own -- in which he stated his goal: to "kill as many Blacks as possible." Gendron himself came from a rural town in New York state that had a very small number of non-white residents. He learned his hate almost exclusively online, a pattern of "radicalisation" that law enforcement authorities say has only increased in

recent years to become a major threat to the United States.

Gendron drove 200 miles (320 kilometres) to the Tops market in Buffalo to carry out his attack in a neighbourhood he knew had a large African American population, during the busiest shopping period of the week. They live in a modest two-story home, with a large, well-manicured lawn, down a quiet rural lane in Conklin, New York. Nested on the winding Susquehanna River and surrounded by forests and small farms, Conklin has a handful of trucking and distribution centres, and the headquarters for an electronics company.

Its population of 5,000, according to the 2020 census, was 96 per cent white and just 0.6 per cent African-American. Gendron finished high school in June 2021 after a rough 18 months of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, when students were often isolated in their homes with classes online and personal interactions more than ever confined to social media.

The New York Times quoted

classmates saying he was generally quiet, even "reclusive," and preferred courses online even when in-person classes resumed.

He had an interest in guns common among rural US teens. But by his final year authorities had received a warning about him.

Law enforcement officials said that last year, before graduating, Gendron said his plans for the future were undertaking a murder-suicide. He was given a psychiatric assessment, and claimed he had been joking. Released after a few days, his case was apparently then forgotten until the massacre on Saturday. In his writing, Gendron said he came by his views while surfing the often radical discussion site 4chan and other conspiracy-theory websites amid "extreme boredom" during Covid lockdowns.

Much of his manifesto is lifted directly from the "Great Replacement" text posted by the Christchurch killer, Brenton Tarrant, which claims that white Europeans were threatened by "ethnic replacement" and "genocide."

"Brenton started my real research into the problems with immigration and foreigners in our white lands, without his livestream I would likely have no idea about the real problems the West is facing," Gendron wrote. Gendron spelled out in meticulous detail his plans for the attacks, choosing the target, selecting his arms, body armour, and other equipment, and how he would live-stream it with a helmet-mounted camera, just as Tarrant had done. Payton Gendron has been arraigned for the killing of 10 people in a mass shooting at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York. The 18-year-old murder suspect is the son of two New York state engineers, Paul and Pamela Gendron. They live in a modest two-story home, with a large, well-manicured lawn, down a quiet rural lane in Conklin, New York.

Nested on the winding Susquehanna River and surrounded by forests and small farms, Conklin has a handful of trucking and distribution centers, and the headquarters for an electronics company. Its population of 5,000, according to the 2020 census, was 96 percent white and just 0.6 percent African-American.



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## ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ ਦੇਣ ਦੀ ਗਾਰੰਟੀ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਖਰਚਾ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ ਦੇਣ ਦੀ ਗਾਰੰਟੀ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਖਰਚਾ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ ਦੇਣ ਦੀ ਗਾਰੰਟੀ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਹੈ।

## ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ। ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ। ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ।

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# .....Gyanvapi: Fading Minorityism in India and Zealots' Last Stand

all Islamic structures stand on desecrated places of worship of the indigenous inhabitants of Bharat, the Hindus.

Notwithstanding India being a Hindu-majority country which bequeathed its land to create the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Bangladesh, different litigations on matters of faith and places of worship have went on for almost 70 years since Independence. Here too, the votaries of 'orthodox' Islam often suffer from selective amnesia: hailing the

parliamentary mandate through the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 but rejecting the duly passed Citizenship (Amendment) Act by Parliament. Leveraging court verdict on Taj Mahal survey appeal while repudiating the apex court decision on right to alimony for Shah Bano. All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) supremo Asaduddin Owaisi dismissing the apex court verdict on Ayodhya Ram Mandir is yet another example.

Joint secretary of Anjuman Intezamiya

Masjid Syed Mohammad Yasin took jibes at the judicial process and asked, if the law orders them to get beheaded, should they comply. However, he wouldn't expect any suo-moto action, but the judges involved in the case have raised concerns over their and family's safety. Unsurprising, right? But what is even more ironical is that amid all this Mr Akbaruddin Owaisi finds time to visit the tomb of Aurangzeb, a plunderer known to slaughter Indians, when the controversy around Gyanvapi is brewing. Isn't this an attempt at rabble-rousing and provocation? Time is propitious to remember Dr Ambedkar who rightly called this the 'gangster's method of politics', characterised by never-ending and ever new unreasonable demands, followed by acrimony, denunciations, street rioting and victim-playing. The Islamic cavalry pontificates secularism, believes in mobocracy and perpetuates riots!

"India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition... Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India alone," American writer Mark Twain had once said. India's history and culture are vibrant, dating

back to the dawn of civilisation. It all started with an enigmatic civilisation that developed around the Indus River and in agricultural settlements in India's southern states. By the end of the fourth millennium BC, India had become a very advanced society. Bharat, the most modern state in existence today, is the epitome of syncretic polytheism. India is and has been a land of pluralism par excellence. "The distinguishing characteristic of Indian civilisation is its capacity to absorb synergistically the culture of foreigners," Daniel Patrick Moynihan, US ambassador to India from 1973 to 1975, is believed to have said.

Religion per se came to Bharat thanks to the Islamic invasions. Steven Ian Wilkinson of Yale University notes that the rising ethnic violence in Bharat stems from the augmented confessionalism, a specific religion-based power sharing arrangement in a democracy, and that no such arrangement can satiate the groups and will eventually lead to resentment. We as a civilisation date back to time immemorial but as a nation-state are fairly young but that doesn't mean that we will bow to the vested interests, backed by western powers and unseen hands, that often tend to sermonise Bharat.

## India Must Lead Quad Effort to Pull Out Sri Lanka from Clutches of China's Debt Trap Diplomacy

According to him, the government is currently giving a subsidy of around Sri Lankan Rupee (SLR) 30 per unit of electricity. Every litre of petrol is subsidised to the tune of SLR 80, diesel SLR 130 and kerosene SLR 295! That Sri Lanka simply cannot afford these subsidies is a no-brainer, especially given that it is broke. But making people pay economic prices of essential utilities runs the risk of massive, even uncontrollable public outrage spilling on to the streets. Add to this the challenge of dismantling the entrenched interests, including breaking some of the inefficient and corruption-ridden state-controlled monopolies like the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation and the Ceylon Electricity Board. The bottom-line is that Sri Lankan economy is likely to contract and many of the things that people were used to receiving from the state will become a thing of the past. Living standards are going to come crashing down, which will have its own political and social repercussions. India is, of course, watching the unfolding scenario in Sri Lanka with a lot of concern. The last thing India wants is to see a friendly neighbour like Sri Lanka get severely destabilised. There are both critical security and political concerns attached to what happens next. Not surprisingly, India has stepped up to the plate and already committed around \$3.5 billion to assist Sri Lanka get over the immediate crisis. Perhaps India will do more, but she has her own constraints and limitations. Even so, India can use her equities with other important players in the Indo-Pacific to help Sri Lanka. In a sense what is happening in Sri Lanka can be converted into an opportunity, even a test case, for the Quad countries to rescue countries from the clutches of China's debt trap

diplomacy. Ending China's baleful influence on strategically important country like Sri Lanka, which straddles the sea lanes in the Indian Ocean region, should be on the agenda of the Quad summit meeting in Japan.

While the scale of Sri Lanka's problems is huge for the island, helping it out isn't such a big deal if the Quad countries along with the EU work together. India needs to take a lead on Sri Lanka in working out a rescue package with its partners. But even as India will do what she can, it is just as important that Sri Lanka doesn't use any assistance coming its way as another freebie and ducks the necessary reforms it needs to undertake to put the nation back on a sustainable path. This basically means that the Lankans will have to reconcile to the fact that the free lunches have ended, and that no one else will pay their bills for them. By all accounts it appears that Sri Lanka will have to go the IMF route and start implementing the rather onerous conditionalities that will come with the IMF programme. Where India and her partners can help is in smoothening, even softening, the transition process. But the heavy lifting will still have to be done by the Lankans.

There are no soft options left for Sri Lanka, certainly not after the country has defaulted on its debt and payments obligations. Any delay in doing what it must do will only worsen the crisis, and might even rob Sri Lanka of whatever external support was going to come its way. Simply put, the good times are over and life is unlikely to be the same, not for the foreseeable future. The sooner the people and politicians of Sri Lanka realise this and adjust to this reality, the faster the country will get back on the rails.



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



# What India Must and Must Not Do to Help Sri Lanka Get Out of the Economic Mess

Under threats from pan-Tamil elements in South India, they backed out. The government filled the agriculture revival in the war-ravaged areas of Sri Lanka. This, New Delhi can revive across that country and also look at joint IT sector development.

## ENSURING POLITICAL STABILITY

India's continuing humanitarian assistance, aimed exclusively at aiding the people, has been mischievously interpreted in Sri Lanka as New Delhi propping up the 'unpopular' Rajapaksas in office. This has found unfortunate resonance in some responsible circles in India. Even the worst critics of Rajapaksas in their nation have not pointed to any particular Indian aid-assistance, including credit-swap, etc., going to bolster the Rajapaksas, personally or politically—as the past Chinese assistance (alone) had done.

The simple truth is that India's assistance is for the Sri Lankan people, and it can operate only through government leadership. It was the Rajapaksas exclusively until now, but the new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe would have a share of the credit (in distribution) if he clears the trust votes in the Parliament. It could be someone else if fresh elections, whenever held, throws up new leaders to office, whatever form of government they have at the time.

Beyond this, suggestions nearer home for New Delhi to play the facilitator to help Sri Lankans resolve the current political

impasse, are based on an inadequate understanding of that nation's history, social, and political culture, of which the visible ethnic differences are only a part. Though not much is reported in the media, anti-India slogans were known to have been raised at various anti-Rajapaksa protest venues, including pockets in Galle Face Green, the urban venue of what was touted as the nation's 'Arab Spring'.

India also paid a heavy price in the life of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, when the LTTE assassinated him (1991), for their perception of his failed role in the Sri Lankan peace process, Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the induction of the IPKF (both in 1987).

While most Sri Lankans, cutting across ethnicities, languages, and other internal divisions, are thankful for India's live-saving gesture of the past weeks, there are still those that do benefit from New Delhi's largesse and yet continue with their traditional anti-India posturing, without any justification. Post-protests, whenever, there may thus be a need to make a closer study of the dynamics of such sloganeering, to apply political and diplomatic correctives, where needed and possible. In this background, and given the added complexities of the hour, nations, not excluding India, would do well not to go to Sri Lankans with their textbook template models for 'problem-solving' and 'conflict-resolution', militant or otherwise. India, Norway, and to a lesser extent Japan burnt

their fingers over facilitating peace talks to the decades-old ethnic crisis, as local stakeholders ended up accusing the facilitator of taking the other side. India also paid a heavy price in the life of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, when the LTTE assassinated him (1991), for their perception of his failed role in the Sri Lankan peace process, Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the induction of the IPKF (both in 1987). Over 1,500 Indian soldiers lost their lives in a call of duty that was not theirs, to begin with.

**IT'S AGAIN SRI LANKANS' JOB** This is another area where Sri Lanka has to resolve its internal strife, which showed unshakable evidence of impending violence, more than already, especially if the political drift is allowed to continue. The pro-Mahinda rioters are identifiable, but no one has taken responsibility for the retaliatory arson, which was targeted and executed with precision. The new government will have to focus rapid attention on investigating these cases early, as already the Catholic Church is peeved at the alleged delays and manipulation of the probe and prosecution in the 'Easter blasts' case (2019). As is acknowledged, Indian agencies had shared in advance, actionable intelligence on the impending disaster, but to no avail. Instead, there were those in Sri Lanka who accused India of plotting the blasts, and, yes, to promote the Rajapaksas' electoral victories that followed. The defence ministry has since

clarified that Mahinda is being housed in the Trincomalee naval base as a former President entitled to security under such trying circumstances, and not necessarily otherwise. Like any other nation, Sri Lanka has a professional army, whose leadership has repeatedly avowed their loyalty to the Sri Lankan state (translating as whoever is the President and Supreme Commander), and not to any person in particular. This much was visible when Mahinda left office, unsung, almost unprotected. The defence ministry has since clarified that Mahinda is being housed in the Trincomalee naval base as a former President entitled to security under such trying circumstances, and not necessarily otherwise. If left unresolved for long, the arson cases, for instance, could trigger anxieties, and also trigger possibilities of expanded activities of the kind, since attributed to erstwhile left militant JVP and the breakaway Frontline Socialist Party (FSP). Leaving such suspicions and doubts unaddressed and fully resolved can complicate security perceptions in Sri Lanka. In turn, this can complicate things for India, where too left militancy is not yet a thing of the past, as is often made out to be. Here, intelligence-sharing and the rest can help both nations, unconnected to rumours of India having to send troops to Sri Lanka, which has enough and more of them—and which reports the Indian High Commission in Colombo has promptly denied, since.

## Behind BKU split, tensions between faction 'sympathetic to BJP' & Tikaits, 'who backed opposition'

He even met Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party chief) before the election, but there was difference in opinion within the union on contesting elections," a BKU leader said, pleading anonymity.

"The faction led by Malik is unhappy the Tikaits did not push for party tickets for him and a few others. A few other leaders in the union also felt overshadowed by Naresh and Rakesh Tikait," the BKU leader added. Implication of the split

The BKU is not new to divisions. In 2001, the union's youth wing president, Rishipal Ambawata, left the BKU and formed another outfit called BKU-Ambawata.

In 2011, a faction led by former state president Bhanu Pratap Singh separated from the BKU and formed the Bharatiya Kisan Union-Bhanu. In 2013, Shyoraj Singh, who had been the district president of the BKU in Gautam Buddha Nagar, joined the BKU-Bhanu. He subsequently formed his own outfit, the BKU-Lokshakti, in 2017.

In 2015, another leader, Harpal Bilari, left the BKU and formed the BKU-Asli (real).

Sunday's split is significant, however, since it is likely

to weaken the "anti-BJP stance" taken by the BKU under the Tikaits, following the farmers' agitation, which had somewhat impacted the party's performance in parts of UP.

The assembly election, which came on the heels of the farmers' agitation, had seen mobilisation of Jat voters against the ruling party, even though the farm laws were withdrawn before the elections.

The pressure built by the Tikaits on the BJP — with demands for MSP, among others — led to a setback for the party in some seats (though it managed to return to power in UP) and helped improve the SP's tally.

Even the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), which won only one seat in the 2017 UP assembly election, won eight seats in western UP this year.

The new faction is supportive of the BJP, claimed sources in the BKU.

"Even when farmers from across Haryana and UP were united on the repeal of the farm laws, Rajendra Malik (chairman of the new group) was with the BJP and advocating the end of protest," said a second BKU leader.

The leader alleged: "When Amit Shah met Jat leaders from UP to Delhi in January, he (Malik) was with (BJP leader) Sanjeev Balyan, to support BJP in the Jat belt. He did not even participate in the Muzaffarnagar rally called by Tikait during the protest and openly supported BJP MLA Umesh Malik before the elections."

An alleged attack by agitating farmers on Umesh Malik — they reportedly threw stones at the politician's car — last year added to the rift in BKU, claimed sources. Dharmendra Malik's alleged political sympathies — he had been a member of the Kisan Samridhhi Aayog, formed to boost farmer income, during the first Yogi Adityanath government in UP — despite his participation in the agitation against the farm laws was a factor too, sources said.

"After Adityanath returned to power in UP, the BJP government in the state wanted to teach the Tikaits a lesson for their open support to the SP before the elections. Malik (Rajendra) was already their supporter and a little push achieved the desired result (the split)," said a third BKU leader.

With inputs from Shikha Salaria.



# The West is tired of China's power games. India could take advantage

(By Staff Reporter) General Manoj Pande, the newly appointed Chief of the Army Staff, articulating his strategic perceptions a few days ago happened to observe that China has no intention to find an early resolution to the overall boundary dispute. It is a truism that must inform India's strategic planning process. The perception is rooted in the geopolitical logic that gives credence to the theory that China's strategic intentions are about utilising the northern border as a military pressure point in an instrumental move to draw India's national resources away from strengthening its maritime power. It is part of a broader geopolitical approach of containing India within the subcontinent. Such containment is itself part of a larger global power play between US-led Western powers and allies with China. While the global power play is enacted in several geopolitical

realms, military, economic and technological aspects play the part of significant levers in this strategic contestation. While its economic and technological aspects provide some flexibility to India to preserve and strengthen its developmental goals, the military aspects are the most challenging as they call for shaping the military instrument that can defend our territorial integrity on the western and northern borders while enhancing our maritime capabilities. India as a strong maritime power has potential to play a significant role in the larger global power game. Geographically, the role is anchored in the Indian Ocean region, which is also where China's strategic vulnerabilities lie as it hosts the trade routes required to sustain China's economic growth. To the Chinese Communist Party, disruption in maritime

trade routes in the Indo-Pacific could pose a deadly blow to its socio-economic stability and create internal instability that can threaten the Chinese State itself. However, it is also the case that the disruption will, to varying degrees, adversely impact many other nations/groups including US, EU, Japan, South Korea, Australia, ASEAN, India, African Union and West Asian countries. Of course, the expansive collateral damage can be wrought only by an armed conflict between two or more of the powers concerned. With the enmeshed economies, the political rationale should be about keeping the Indo-Pacific trade routes open and inclusive. Such an opinion was expressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018. But with China's aggression in Ladakh in 2020, India's stance has shifted and is

being progressively indicated by the growth of strategic cooperation with the West that extends to the Indo-Pacific and is manifested in the military, economic, technological, diplomatic and intelligence domains. Strategically, India's capacity to develop its maritime power could be weakened but politically, India has moved away from China. However, it is now experiencing the tides of deepened relations with the West in the context of the larger global power struggle. The tides have become rougher due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the consequent strategic churn in Europe. But India's refusal to take sides on the Ukraine War, in what it considers as essentially a European conflict rooted in the history of the Cold War, has not yet politically dampened its relations with the West. At least not significantly. We would need to hold it there.

## Amarnath Yatra: The pilgrimage and the politics

If the government clearly wants to ensure that things go smoothly and are better and bigger than before, even size comes with a price at the Yatra. The BJP has long called for extending the Yatra duration, and from 15 days in the 1990s, it now varies between 45 days and 60. Kashmir parties are wary of the "agenda" behind this, a suspicion that has only strengthened in the discord created by the scrapping of special status.

Initially, the annual Amarnath pilgrimage was organised by the Purohit Sabha Mattan, Anantnag, and Dashnami Akhara, Srinagar, and was a 15-day affair. In 2000, the then state Assembly, by an Act, constituted the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB). In 2005, the SASB extended the yatra to two months. Before the onset of militancy in the Valley, the annual Amarnath pilgrimage was a low-key affair, with the number of visitors less than

30,000. In the late 1990s, these numbers saw a sudden jump, and in 2011, went as high as 6.3 lakh. Incidentally, a committee set up by the government after a tragedy in 1996 when over 240 pilgrims had died following the weather taking a turn for the worse had recommended that the total number be capped at 1 lakh over 30 days, with no more than 3,400 people a day.

The separatists see in the focus on the Yatra by the BJP dispensation an "assertion of Hindu identity" and of the government's claim on Kashmir. Many of them cite environmental concerns to oppose increasing pilgrim numbers in the delicate ecosystem of the Himalayas. In 2008, the transfer of 99 acres of forest land by then J&K government headed by Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress (in a coalition with the PDP) to the SASB, for shelters and facilities for pilgrims, had triggered massive protests in the

Valley, spearheaded by separatists. After over 50 civilians were killed in action by security personnel, the government was forced to backtrack on the transfer of land.

This, in turn, had led to protests in the Jammu region, which was cashed in by the BJP. From two Assembly seats in 2008, the party numbers had risen to 10 in 2009 and 25 in 2014. The Jammu protests had also propelled Jitendera Singh to political limelight, securing for him eventually a berth at the Centre when Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister in 2014. Kashmir's fragile political situation did not have much impact on the Amarnath Yatra during the militancy years, and even during the 2008, 2010 and 2016 street protests. However, the security for the Yatra is a monumental exercise, especially after militant threats and attacks in the past.

In 1994, the Harkat-ul-Ansar threatened not to allow the Yatra till

the government removed security bunkers from the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar. After the bunkers were removed, it put up a fresh slew of demands. The Yatra, however, went off peacefully. In 2000, the first-ever militant attack on the Yatra led to the killing of 25 people, including 17 pilgrims. Both the attackers were also killed.

In July 2001, two hand grenades were hurled at pilgrims at Sheshnag, on the road to the cave shrine, killing 12 pilgrims and wounding 13.

After almost 15 years, in 2017, militants struck again, targeting a bus with pilgrims in South Kashmir, killing seven and leaving 18 injured. This time, the Centre has approved deployment of over 40,000 personnel of the CRPF and other Central forces, apart from police and Army presence along the Yatra routes.

UAVs will keep a watch while a counter-drone system will be in place to ward off any drone attacks.

## Finally, United States takes cue from other nations, re-opens embassy in Kyiv

The diplomats are also returning to the capital on the permanent basis from the western Ukrainian city of Lviv and neighbouring Poland, where they had been temporarily relocated due to the ongoing invasion.

"The Ukrainian people, with our security assistance, have defended their homeland in the face of Russia's unconscionable invasion, and, as a result, the Stars and Stripes are flying over the Embassy once again," said Secretary of State Antony Blinken. To mark the anniversary of WWII victory in Europe, the staffers of the US Embassy had started to return to Kyiv on a limited basis on May 8. But the embassy had remained closed till now. Meanwhile, Ukrainian fighters claim to blow up an armoured train with an explosive device in the occupied southern city of Melitopol. It seemed to have been carrying Russian troops, media reports said on Wednesday citing the Ukrainian territorial defence force.

## Greenhouse gas, sea level all broke records in 2021, says UN, warns of 'climate catastrophe'

"It wreaked a heavy toll on human lives and well-being and triggered shocks for food and water security and displacement that have accentuated in 2022," the WMO said in its report State of the Global Climate in 2021. "It wreaked a heavy toll on human lives and well-being and triggered shocks for food and water security and displacement that have accentuated in 2022," the WMO said in its report State of the Global Climate in 2021. "This is yet another clear sign that human activities are causing planetary-scale changes on land, in the ocean, and in the atmosphere, with harmful and long-lasting ramifications for sustainable development and ecosystems," it said. The UN agency said that in 2021, the levels of climate-warming carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere surpassed previous records. The report also confirmed that the past seven years were the top seven hottest years on record. The global annual mean temperature difference is considered from pre-industrial conditions (1850-1900) for six global temperature data sets (1850-2021). The report confirmed that put of those seven warm years on record, the year 2021 was "only" because of a La Nina event (ocean phenomenon in the Pacific) at the start and end of the year. "This had a temporary cooling effect but did not reverse the overall trend of rising temperatures. The average global temperature in 2021 was about 1.11 (plus/minus 0.13) degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level. It is just a matter of time before we see another warmest year on record," said WMO Secretary-General Professor Petteri Taalas.



# Inside Sri Lankan People's Protest, a Political Awakening is Underway

Sri Lanka is going through one of the worst crises of its history. Food has become scarce, prices have shot through the roof, and long power cuts have turned the lives of ordinary Sri Lankans upside down. The economic meltdown has also catapulted the country into a political crisis as the people demand answers and accountability from the government.

After the recent attacks on protestors in the nation's capital by supporters of the ruling party, the President has imposed a new state of emergency, giving security forces sweeping powers. The ferocity of the protests has already forced Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to resign, and protestors are demanding that his brother, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, step down as well. The present economic crisis can be traced back to a series of bad government policies. When the Rajapaksas came to power in 2019, they made a series of tax cuts taking away significant amounts of government revenue, which, in turn, affected debt servicing. This move had a domino effect on the country's other immediate needs and led to public finances becoming unsustainable. The root of this issue is primarily attributed to the government's negligence towards restructuring its debt. Sri Lanka has also failed to attract foreign direct investment, and as a result of printing surplus cash, the country's imports stood at a much higher rate than its exports. Another bad policy with catastrophic consequences was the fertiliser ban. In April 2021, Gotabaya Rajapaksa introduced an island-wide ban on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. For a country whose staple diet is rice, domestic production plummeted in just six months. Sri Lanka used to be self-sufficient in rice production, but thanks



to Rajapaksa, it now has to import over \$450 million worth of rice. No country with a consultative democracy would have made such a ludicrous decision, thus highlighting how powerful the Rajapaksas had become. The pandemic further worsened the economic situation, which eventually triggered protests across the country. Protests are not a novelty in Sri Lanka. Minorities have been doing it for decades. "Our history is very bloody," Paramie Jayakody, a 25-year-old journalist from Colombo, opines. "It has always been like that." The minority communities in Sri Lanka have been historically persecuted and vilified by the majority Sinhalese. Paramie recalls how she was told not to associate with Tamils, one of the minority groups, growing up. The Rajapaksas now-battered popularity can too be traced back to minority baiting. After the Easter Bombings of 2019 and the hysteria that followed, the promise of controlling an 'unruly' minority appealed to some Sinhalese Sri Lankans. Although the attack was attributed to a local Islamist terrorist group, the Muslim community in Sri Lanka was collectively

vilified in the aftermath. Paramie recalls her friends with beards afraid of being perceived to be Muslim and attacked. But the current situation has become so dire that people, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, and language, have set aside their differences to band together. The sheer ferocity of the protests is also because of the involvement of the middle and upper-middle classes, who have badly suffered from the economic crisis as well. Many, like Sahan Wiratunga, a 27-year-old social worker from Colombo, see the anti-Rajapaksa protests as an opportunity to heal the ethnic and religious divides in the country. These protests have brought about a newfound sense of patriotism and belonging to the people of Sri Lanka. Political awareness in Sri Lanka is low – and those who are aware are often disillusioned to find that politics is only a privilege of those who belong to the majority. However, the current situation seems to be a testament to the fact that they are capable of setting aside their differences and working together against a common adversary. Sahan admits he was not an anti-

establishment activist from the start and only began organising protests recently, along with his friends. As a result, some unexpected guests showed up at their homes – the police. Sahan, who was not at home when they arrived, had a narrow escape, but his friend was not that lucky. Along with several other activists across Sri Lanka, they were arrested for voicing their opinion against the regime. However, far from scaring the protestors, these arrests fueled their anger against the Rajapaksas, who are seen as not merely inefficient but also profoundly corrupt. The protests against the government are intense. However, the future of Sri Lanka is incredibly unpredictable. With the air of uncertainty lingering throughout the entire country, Paramie worries about the horrors the future could entail. There are four broad possibilities – the President stepping down, a military takeover, a rebel takeover, and one where all the other parties get together for a peaceful transition into a caretaker government. Right now, she feels that the President stepping down is never going to happen. A military takeover, similar to what transpired in Myanmar, seems most likely, given the past and the current displays of power and aggravated violence. The Sri Lankans have much to be concerned about, but the crisis has not garnered sufficient international attention—a fact that is echoed by many of the protestors. Paramie talks about how the Russia-Ukraine war is receiving large-scale global media coverage, and justifiably so, but she adds, "It would be great if more people paid attention to the current situation in Sri Lanka, and educated themselves about what is going on in my tiny country."

## The four-point plan to revive Pakistan's economy—from land reform to real estate

It has been a month since the so-called unity government came to power. It still seems to be labouring under the illusion that formulating a coherent programme to serve the needs of Pakistanis is rocket science. In fact, it is quite straightforward. For those in government that are committed to doing something substantial, I offer this column as unsolicited advice. To the rest of my readers, I admit that what I present here is not weighed down by the exigencies of electoral considerations — ie constituency-level patronage and the desire for our mainstream politicians to be on the right side of the establishment — but short-term expediency is precisely what has deepened our political-economic predicament. In a nutshell, Pakistan needs to revive a substantive politics of redistribution. By this I mean both policy initiatives to shake up the old order within Pakistan, as well as a recalibration of Pakistan's place in the global economic order, so as to redress historic and unequal relationships of exchange and power. The current regime will at best take short-term steps to stop the bleeding; it is already asking for relief from a gargantuan oil import bill through support from usual suspects like Saudi Arabia. It will soon slash the fuel subsidy and may even raise interest rates, or devalue the

rupee. But this is no more than putting a plaster on a festering wound. I believe that Pakistan's political impasse — both the civil-military contradiction and the broader intellectual deficit of mainstream politics — can only be addressed if redistribution takes centre stage. So here goes:

**Land reform:** Many young people may not know that legislation was passed in 1977 to cap the ceiling for land ownership at 100 acres (irrigated) and 200 acres (unirrigated). The Supreme Court's Shariat appellate bench overruled this legislation in 1989 under the guise that it was 'un-Islamic'. A petition filed by the inimitable Abid Hasan Minto challenging the bench's interpretation has been pending in the apex court since 2011. Land redistribution in rural Pakistan, alongside other agrarian reform measures, is essential to ensure millions can meet basic livelihood needs and thereby stop migrating to urban areas in search for secure employment that is a pipe dream. Similar reform measures must be undertaken with regard to forests and water bodies that represent significant livelihood sources. **Regulation of real estate:** An incredible amount of money is being minted through speculation on land in (sub) urban Pakistan. Barons like Malik Riaz

embody the financialisation of land, as well as the impotence of mainstream political parties insofar as they refuse to regulate this sector. Gated housing schemes come into being through mass dispossession, and they consolidate upward concentration of wealth. The parking of 'hot capital' in speculative sectors like real estate and the stock market must be disincentivised. It is worth bearing in mind that the angst generated when the mainstream media reports that the PSX is tanking and that 'investors' are losing confidence in the economy reflects the class interests of those who benefit from speculative investment. What we really need is for money to be invested in the long-term welfare of young working people, like health, education, and employment-generating public works. Reduction in non-productive expenditures, particularly defence: Let us not beat about the bush. Pakistan's political economy has, virtually since the country came into being, been overdetermined by the imperative of 'national security'. What eminent economist Kaiser Bengali calls "non-combat defence expenditures" have increased to the point where the costs of meeting the so-called welfare requirements of the military and its retainers is directly borne by the 'bloody civilian' working masses.



# Russia says hundreds of Ukrainians surrender at Azovstal

**Moscow claimed control of the strategic port city of Mariupol last month after a weeks-long siege, but hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers remained holed up in underground tunnels beneath the huge Azovstal industrial zone**

Russia said Tuesday that 265 Ukrainian soldiers had surrendered after staging a last stand at the besieged Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol, prompting Kyiv to call for a prisoner exchange. Moscow claimed control of the strategic port city of Mariupol last month after a weeks-long siege, but hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers remained holed up in underground tunnels beneath the huge Azovstal industrial zone. "Over the past 24 hours, 265 militants laid down their arms and surrendered, including 51 heavily wounded," the Russian defence ministry said.

Publishing images showing wounded soldiers being carried on stretchers, it said the injured were taken to a hospital in a part of the eastern Donetsk region controlled by pro-Kremlin rebels.

Elsewhere, lawmakers in Finland — which shares a 1,300-kilometre (800-mile) border with Russia — voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining the NATO military alliance. The vote paves the way for a joint application with Sweden to be submitted on Wednesday, amid fears they could be the next targets of Russian aggression. Meanwhile Kyiv said negotiations with Russia on ending the near three-month war, which has killed thousands and sent millions fleeing, were "on hold", blaming Moscow for failing to compromise.

## - ICC deployment -

Ukraine's defence ministry confirmed the soldiers had left Azovstal, expressing hope for an "exchange procedure... to repatriate these Ukrainian heroes as quickly as possible". For those remaining in the warren of tunnels underneath the steelworks complex, it said it was doing "everything necessary for their rescue" — although a military intervention was not possible. In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov did not answer questions about whether the Azovstal soldiers would be treated as war criminals or prisoners of war. President Vladimir Putin "guaranteed that they would be treated according to the relevant international laws," he said. Ukraine has accused Moscow of war crimes during the conflict, notably in the town of Bucha near Kyiv, where AFP reporters saw at least 20 bodies lying in the streets after Russian forces withdrew in late March.

The International Criminal Court said Tuesday it was deploying its largest-ever field team to Ukraine, comprising 42 investigators, forensic experts and support staff.

## - Trying to stay alive -

The army said holding the steelworks



had delayed the transfer of 20,000 Russian troops to other parts of Ukraine and stopped Moscow from quickly capturing the southern city of Zaporizhzhia.

"Azovstal defenders ruined Russia's plan to capture the east of Ukraine... This completely changed the course of the war," tweeted presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak. "83 days of Mariupol defence will go down in history as the Thermopylae of the 21st century," he said, referring to the famous last stand by the Spartans against the Persians in 480 BCE. Across the country, Ukrainian forces have managed to fight the huge Russian army for longer than many expected, fortified by weapons and cash from Western allies. After circling the capital Kyiv in the early weeks of the war, Moscow has focused increasingly on the eastern region of Donbas, bordering Russia. Ukrainian officials say Russian troops are withdrawing from around Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, to be redeployed to Donbas. But Kyiv's gains have come

at a high cost, with villages gutted and destroyed by bombs. In Ruska Lozova, just north of Kharkiv, Rostislav Stepanenko recounted to

**The army said holding the steelworks had delayed the transfer of 20,000 Russian troops to other parts of Ukraine and stopped Moscow from quickly capturing the southern city of Zaporizhzhia**

AFP how he had gone back to collect some belongings but returned empty-handed and stunned by the incessant artillery fire. Asked what he did for a living, he joked that he was "trying to stay alive". And his age? "Hopefully, I will be 54, but today I wouldn't expect that," he said with a nervous smile.

- 'Shelling without stopping' - Ukraine says Russia is targeting cities in Donbas including Severodonetsk, the easternmost city held by Ukrainian forces. Control of Severodonetsk would grant the Kremlin de facto control

of Lugansk, one of two regions — along with Donetsk — that comprise Donbas. Russia's attempt to completely encircle Severodonetsk has been repelled, with Ukrainian forces blowing up railway bridges to slow their advance. But Lugansk regional governor Sergiy Gaiday has said it was being shelled "without stopping" and two buildings at the city's general hospital had been hit overnight. "We

have 10 dead and three wounded in the region," he wrote on Telegram. Elsewhere, eight people were killed and 12 injured in Russian strikes on the village of Desna, in northeastern Chernigiv region, where a Ukrainian military base is located, emergency services said.

Meanwhile in the town of New York, north of Donetsk, residents say they have been under artillery fire for a month, and it is getting worse. "Now they are shooting at us from the west, east and south," seamstress Valentyna

Kanebalotskaya told AFP.

## - NATO bids 'no direct threat' -

Fearful of Russia's ambitions, Sweden and Finland are poised to give up decades of military non-alignment and join NATO. Putin said on Monday the move posed "no direct threat for us... but the expansion of military infrastructure to these territories will certainly provoke our response". His reaction was more moderate than comments earlier by deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov, who called the expansion a "grave mistake with far-reaching consequences". The NATO bids must be unanimously approved by the alliance's 30 nations, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday voiced his objection. He accused Finland and Sweden of harbouring terror groups, including outlawed Kurdish militants. But US Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced confidence that the bids would succeed and is due to meet Turkey's foreign minister in Washington on Wednesday. As well as practical support for Ukraine, Western nations have sought to punish Russia with unprecedented economic sanctions, with the EU currently mulling a ban on Russian oil.

Hungary is blocking the ban, citing the cost, and Putin on Tuesday claimed Europe risked committing "economic suicide". Many EU nations are also dependent on Russian gas but are in a quandary after Moscow demanded payment in rubles to circumvent the sanctions.

Italian energy giant Eni announced a potential workaround Tuesday involving opening two accounts with Russian energy firm Gazprom's bank. It proposed making payments in euros which would be converted into rubles through the Moscow stock exchange.



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# Why are forest fires in the hills intensifying this summer?

Forest fires continue to scorch several hectares of green cover in the Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. In April, Himachal reported close to 750 forest fires, while Uttarakhand recorded over 1,500 such incidents. On April 30, Uttarakhand witnessed 51 large fire incidents — the maximum by any Indian state. While 76 children in Balika Ashram, Shimla, had to be hurriedly rescued as the forest nearby caught fire on May 1, the Kasauli Air Force Station struggled to douse the fire that flared up Sunday afternoon. What's fuelling the fierce and more frequent forest fires in hills this summer?

## What causes forest fires?

The forest fire season in India lasts between November to June. Several factors like temperatures, precipitation, vegetation, and moisture contribute to the scale and frequency of these fires. According to the Forest Survey of India, nearly 36 per cent of India's forests are prone to frequent fires. Higher fire incidents are reported in March, April and May due to ample availability of dry biomass (fuel load) following the end of winter and the ongoing summer season. Most forest fires, according to experts, are man-made due to changes in agriculture and unchecked land-use patterns.

## How are forest fires classified?

Forest fires are broadly categorised into three categories — ground, surface and crown fire. Fires that burn organic material in the soil are called ground fires, and they burn slowly, under vegetation. Surface fires are caused largely by burning of dry leaves, branches and other materials on the ground. Such fires spread swiftly, as in the case of fires in Himachal. Crown fires burn quickly, from one tree top to another and have huge flames with intense heat. Such fires are rare in India. Meanwhile,

large forest fires are the most challenging to control due to their intensity, geographical cover and duration that can go up to 5 days.

## Has there been a spike in fire incidents this year?

The FSI data on forest fire points between March 1 and April 30 this year shows a clear spike in incidents coinciding with rising heatwave conditions. The number of forest fire points rose from 8,735 to 42,486 during the four weeks in March. However, the week-wise progress in the number of forest fire points in April peaked in the first week, fell to 13,719 in the second week and picked up to touch 20,285 in the last week.

Why are fires raging in Himachal forests?

Himachal has witnessed almost 750 fires in April. These

fires have ravaged around 5,662 hectares in the forests of Shimla, Chamba, Bilaspur, Dharamshala, Hamirpur, Kullu Mandi, Rampur, Nahan and the Great Himalayan National Park at Shamshi in the Kullu region.

This is a big jump from 2020-2021 when the state had reported 1,045 forest fire incidents in the entire summer. The last time the state had experienced such ferocious fires was in 2018-2019 when their number touched 2,544.

Blaming hot and dry weather for the frequent fires, Ajay Srivastav, principal chief conservator of forests, Himachal, said: "Usually the forests are humid during April. But this time, the last rainfall took place in February. We had a rain deficiency of 90-94 per cent this April against 84 per cent in the corresponding period last year. The

chir pine forests are crackling dry, there is zero humidity — one spark and the entire forest catches fire."

Forest officials said that human negligence is also contributing to these fires. Even a cigarette butt, or the act of setting dry leaves on fire can trigger a massive fire, they added.

## Have forest fires worsened this year in Uttarakhand?

In the last three months, Uttarakhand has recorded at least 1,791 forest fires that have scorched over 2,891 hectares of forest

**Forest fires continue to scorch several hectares of green cover in the Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. What causes forest fires? How are they classified? Has there been a spike this year? How vulnerable are forests in Uttarakhand and Himachal?**

land, including 2,079 hectares of reserve forest areas. These fires have caused estimated damage to property worth over Rs 74 lakh and death of at least one person.

While the numbers are lesser in last year's comparison, the issue of forest fires intensifying mainly in mid-February and continuing usually till mid-June is a major problem for the hill state which has forests in almost 71 per cent of its geographical area.

Nishant Verma, chief conservator of forests, admitted that the number of forest fires this year increased significantly in the month of April mainly due to unexpected rise in temperature and less rain. He added that strong wind velocity also contributed majorly to spreading the fires fast across the jungles.

## How vulnerable are forests in

## Uttarakhand and Himachal?

Out of the total forest land in Uttarakhand, 26 per cent consists of pine trees. Dry pine leaves are highly inflammable and significantly increase the fuel load. Officials admit that the situation is alarming because the peak time for forest fire — the third week of May when the temperatures are the highest — is yet to come.

In Himachal, of the 196 forest ranges in Himachal Pradesh, 80 are vulnerable to fires. The chir pine forests which make up 15 percent of Himachal's forests, are most prone to fires. The chir forests are spread over an area of 1258.85 sq km, which is about 3.4 per cent of the total forest area of the state.

## How have other places prone to forest fires fared so far?

Apart from Himachal and Uttarakhand, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tripura, Mizoram and Odisha report frequent forest fires annually.

Incidentally, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha — along with Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra — have been the top five states reporting high number of large forest fires ranging between 143 to 441 between November 2021 and April 2022.

## How can these fires be prevented and doused?

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change lists the following methods to prevent and control a forest fire: construction of watch towers for early detection; deployment of fire watchers; creation and maintenance of fire lines, besides involvement of local communities. Use of remote sensing technology and Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) satellite data for detection of active forest fires is also advised.



# Inflation in wholesale prices: Looking back, looking ahead

## High WPI inflation will further convince RBI to raise interest rates and do so urgently

Since the start of the inflation-targeting regime of RBI, most of the focus has been on consumer price inflation. That's because that is the inflation rate that RBI seeks to target and keep at the 4% mark. But over the past year, the inflation in wholesale prices has been surging in a rather unprecedented manner.

Since April last year, WPI (wholesale price index) based inflation has been above 10% in every single month. In April 2022, as the latest data from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade shows, WPI inflation crossed another psychological mark: it went beyond 15%. This is the 13th month of double-digit inflation growth and, as such, now rules out arguments that a low base effect is in play. For instance, the inflation in April last year was 10.7%. The 15% spike comes on top of that 10.7% spike in wholesale prices.

What's fuelling WPI inflation?

Table below provides both the inflation rate as well as the weight of different sub-

components. It is important to note the weight in order to understand the overall impact of inflation in any single component.

As can be seen, while the highest inflation has been in fuel prices, it is the smallest contributor to the overall index. Similarly, while manufactured products inflation is the least — albeit in double digits — it is likely to have had almost six-times the impact on the overall inflation because of the weight. Food inflation has been hovering around the 9%-mark since December 2021. According to Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA Limited, "The heatwave led to a spike in prices of perishables such as fruits, vegetables and milk, which along with a spike in tea prices pushed up the primary food inflation". On the face of it, the most egregious culprit appears to be the spike in fuel prices. In April, this component witnessed a spike of nearly 39%. But while the Ukraine crisis may have been the most proximate reason, the fact is that fuel price inflation has been

soaring right through the past year (see CHART 1), long before the Ukraine invasion.

However, one must keep in mind the relatively low weight of fuel prices in the index. The biggest push would be coming from the inflation in manufactured products; it has been in double digits for most of the past 12 months.

### What to expect?

There is no one-to-one correlation between wholesale price inflation and retail inflation. However, RBI's studies have found that an increase in WPI-food inflation tends to have a "significant" impact on retail food inflation. In other words, when wholesale food inflation goes up, it leads to higher food prices for consumers as well.

It is noteworthy that retail food inflation was already pretty high at 8.3% in April. Over the next two months, one can expect retail food prices to possibly increase further simply on account of higher food inflation in the wholesale market.

What's even worse, however, is that higher

retail prices of food tend to spike wholesale food prices in turn. In other words, one can get into a vicious cycle if inflation is left unaddressed. Lastly, even though RBI does not target WPI inflation does not mean it does not monitor it. Imported inflation in the form of high energy and commodity prices is a fact of life, and it will continue to force RBI to take action.

High WPI inflation will further convince RBI to raise interest rates and do so urgently. Expect interest rates to go up by at least 75 basis points (that is three-fourth of a percentage point) in the next two months. The flip-side of raising interest rates sharply, however, is that they will dampen the overall demand in the Indian economy at a time when overall consumer demand is still fledgling.

The RBI, thus, has a tough balancing act to perform: contain inflation (especially from sources over which it has no control, such as high fuel prices) while ensuring not snuffing out domestic economic recovery.

# How to strengthen cyber security the right way

## CERT-In directions on cyber security compliance are rushed. They need to be more graded

On April 28, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) issued "directions" under Section 70-B(6) of the Information Technology Act 2000 (IT Act) relating to information security practices, procedure, prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents. These directions have brought about a wide-ranging expansion in the scope of obligations of the above requirements compared to the Information Technology (The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team and Manner of performing functions and duties) Rules, 2013 (Rules). Among the activities in which compliance is sought by service providers, intermediaries, data centres and body corporates are the synchronisation of computer clocks to the network time protocol set at the National Physical Laboratory and National Informatics Centre (NIC), mandatory reporting of all cyber incidents within six hours of noticing or being brought to their notice in the prescribed format, designating point of contact and notifying CERT-In and undertaking to perform such actions for cyber security mitigation when notified by CERT-IN, maintaining all logs of all ICT systems up to 180 days within Indian jurisdiction and for data centres, virtual private network service providers, cloud service providers and virtual private server providers to maintain all records of their users and usage for a minimum of five years.

While the overall thrust towards a

robust cyber incident reporting and security regime is prudent, some of the provisions in the absence of clarification from CERT-In have raised concerns amongst industry observers and cyber security experts. For some time now, CERT-IN has been struggling to get information and incident reporting from service providers, intermediaries as well as body corporates as per the rules and its mandate under section 70B(4) of the IT Act. This was impacting its responsibility as a collector, analyser and disseminator of information on cyber incidents as well as coordinating incident responses and emergency measures. So, it took recourse to the directions, which strangely do not differentiate between the scales and nature of the incident. Some cyber incidents are far more common and occur regularly. An organisation might receive hundreds of phishing emails and the effort to notify each would drastically increase their compliance cost. It would also be interesting to know what CERT-In's strategy will be for dealing with commonplace cyber incidents and its own capacity enhancement in terms of handling the compliance sought.

A window of 60 days has been provided before implementation of these compliances begins. Given the scale of the revamp, this might be too short a window. The government must look at the concerns that arise from such directions and work out a

realistic time scale. The ugly episode of the Twitter incident around compliance with the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, last year is a stark reminder of the pitfalls of rushing in compliances without factoring in concerns. In this case, there will be multiple companies even from the MSME sector that will take time to set up systems for compliances. All covered entities also have to mandatorily enable logs and maintain them for 180 days within the Indian jurisdiction. At present, most entities maintain logs for around 30 days, and in order to maintain logs for 180 days, the additional data storage device cost would be huge. Similarly, data centres, virtual private server providers, cloud service providers and virtual private network service providers will need to retain additional information for five years or more after the cancellation or withdrawal of registration. The virtual asset industry too will have to maintain all KYC records and details of all financial transactions for five years. The compliance cost in each case is going to rise substantially. Many of the entities will have to shift their servers geographically as well as add excess storage capacity. Most importantly, the recruitment of additional manpower for compliance may take far longer. A realistic timeline would be six months,

which would allow the entities to effectively migrate to the new regime. The penalty for non-compliance is stiff (including up to one year of imprisonment and monetary fines). But it is also unfair to create unrealistic deadlines for industry.

This is also going to significantly affect organisations that have maintained their servers offshore, although the move is in line with the government's stated objective of localising data storage. But what cannot be denied are privacy concerns. With VPNs and virtual asset wallets being asked to store and share KYC and transaction data, these concerns become evident. VPNs have been successful for corporates as well as individuals because they address privacy concerns. There have been very few instances where these tunnels have been used for criminal activities and support from the providers was not obtained by law enforcement authorities. In the absence of legislative backing for data protection, which has been on the anvil for more than two years, the question is: How will the user have any say on which information can be held back or how his sensitive personal information is being protected?

While CERT-In has been proactive in recognising the changing frontiers of technology and trying to deal with hitherto unknown cyber threats, it is wanting in terms of a graded approach to ensuring compliance.



# India has taken a good first step towards removing sedition law

The country and its institutions are strong and stable enough to decide in a free, fair and objective manner whether the offence of sedition is needed or not, and if so under what form with strong guidelines to prevent its misuse



It is rare that the prime minister himself conveys, in a pending proceeding before the apex court, his clear and unequivocal views about respecting human rights, protecting civil liberties and further respecting the freedoms granted to the people of India. It was refreshing to find the categorical assertion by the PM in an affidavit: "One of India's strengths is the diverse thought streams that beautifully flourished in our country." In the 75th year of our Independence, as our nation is marking "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav", PM Modi has appealed to Indians to work harder to shed our colonial baggage, which includes colonial laws and practices.

These are not empty words only for an affidavit. Under his leadership, nearly 1,500 old colonial-era laws have been scrapped. About 25,000 compliance rules which were creating hurdles, have been removed and many offences that were a hindrance to development have been decriminalised. There was also in the affidavit a profound statement of great intent: "Laws and compliances which reeked of a colonial mindset have no place in today's India."

With this background, it was conveyed, that the Government of India has decided to re-examine and reconsider the provisions of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code which deals with sedition. The history of the sedition law in India is in many ways unique. During the British Raj, it was part of the penal law from the very beginning. The British government in India not only framed the law, defining various offences, but also made sedition a very serious offence, punishable with imprisonment for life and a fine. The definition of sedition was a little vague, whereby any attempt to bring hatred or contempt or attempt to excite disaffection towards the government constituted sedition. Disaffection includes disloyalty and feeling of enmity. Sedition was designed to perpetuate the hold of the British on the people of India, and any attempt at disloyalty was enough for the

offence. Great leaders of the freedom movement became the targets of the law. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the first person to be convicted of sedition in colonial India because the British government thought that his writings in his celebrated Marathi newspaper, Kesari, were causing disaffection against the British Raj. He was imprisoned for 18 months. Even Gandhiji, in 1922, was sentenced to six years for his article in Young India on the charge of "attempting to excite disaffection towards his majesty's Government established by law in British India". Many others were also prosecuted and convicted.

Significantly, during the making of the Constitution, December 1, 1948, K M Munshi moved an amendment in the Constituent Assembly proposing sedition be dropped "as constituting a restriction on right to freedom of speech and expression particularly in the context of the painful experience to punish Indians by the British authorities for even innocuous expressions and criticism of colonial government." Article 19 (1)(a)(g) provides for various freedoms including freedom of speech and expression while clause 19 (2) to (6) enumerates provisions for constituting reasonable restrictions on the exercise of such rights. It must be noted that in none of the said clauses is the offence of sedition mentioned as grounds for "reasonable restriction". There are expressions like "interest of sovereignty and integrity of India", and security of state public order but not sedition. Sedition simply means "deshdroh". Yet, it has continued in the IPC. There have been judgments from various high courts in this regard but a constitution bench of the Supreme Court delivered a judgment in 1962 (Kedarnath Singh vs The State of Bihar) where it held that "unless accompanied by incitement or call for violence criticism of government cannot be labelled Sedition". There has been genuine criticism about why this colonial-era provision should be a part of our statute. The Congress party, which

claims to be the inheritor of the freedom movement, never tried to scrap this law though it ruled India for nearly 60 years. Certain freedoms are fundamental under our constitutional scheme. There have been cases of rampant abuse and the latest is a hilarious instance from a particular state where singing the Hanuman Chalisa amounted to sedition. Surely, there is a need for a review of the law. India, in the 75th year of its independence, is strong and stable enough to decide in a free, fair and objective manner whether the offence of

sedition is needed or not, and if so under what form with strong guidelines to prevent its misuse, and clearly enunciate the circumstances in which it can be invoked. The PM has trusted the process by which so many old laws have been repealed, offences decriminalised and thousands of compliance burdens removed. All this was done in a peaceful manner with due consultation. This is the institutional strength of India. I am quite sure the same process will entail a relook at the whole issue of sedition to the satisfaction of all concerned where a healthy balance is maintained between respect for human rights and civil liberties and the compelling need to fight terrorism, and separatism and whose clear agenda is to break India. I must conclude with a word of gratitude for the PM for demonstrating extraordinary leadership in a matter that has divided the country for the last few years. Let's hope the inner strength of the country will help us arrive at a healthy conclusion. Equally, the Supreme Court has shown judicial statesmanship by agreeing with the government's request to give time for the review and by passing appropriate interim protections in the meantime.

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# Reliance's mega \$6.5 billion push to challenge Unilever, others

Reliance had set a goal to achieve 500 billion rupees (\$6.5 billion) of annual sales from the business within five years, according to a Reuters report



(By Staff Reporter) Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance is planning to acquire dozens of small grocery and non-food brands as it targets building its own \$6.5 billion consumer goods business to challenge foreign giants like Unilever, Reuters reported quoting sources familiar with the plan. Reliance is eyeing building a portfolio of 50 to 60 grocery, household and personal care brands within six months and is hiring an army of distributors to take them to mom-and-pop

stores and bigger retail outlets across the nation, the report said.

## RELIANCE RETAIL CONSUMER BRANDS

The consumer goods push under a vertical named Reliance Retail Consumer Brands will come on top of Ambani's brick-and-mortar store network of more than 2,000 grocery outlets and ongoing expansion of "JioMart" e-commerce operations in India's nearly \$900 billion retail market which is one of the

biggest in the world. Reliance is in final stages of negotiations with around 30 popular niche local consumer brands to fully acquire them or form joint venture partnerships for sales, said the first source familiar with its business planning. Reliance had set a goal to achieve 500 billion rupees (\$6.5 billion) of annual sales from the business within five years.

## RELIANCE VS UNILEVER

With the new business plan, Reliance is seeking to challenge some of the world's biggest consumer groups, like Nestle, Unilever, PepsiCo Inc and Coca-Cola, which have been operating for decades in India, according to the report. Unilever's India unit reported sales of \$6.5 billion in the fiscal year ending March 2022, and says that nine out of 10 Indian households use at least one of its brands. "There is a fair bit of brand value which is attached to the established names and it becomes very

difficult to compete with them," said Alok Shah, a consumer analyst at India's Ambit Capital. "If inorganic is the route for Reliance, they will be able to scale up much faster. But they'll need to get the pricing and distribution right to compete with bigger rivals," he said.

## HIRING, PRODUCT CATEGORIES

Reliance did develop a few so-called private labels where it hired contract manufacturers to make cola drinks and noodle packs for sale in its own retail network, but that business generates only 35 billion rupees (\$450 million) in annual sales, said the second source. Foreign firms had been already uneasy about Reliance's supermarket strategy, where its private labels were competing for shelf space with brands of global rivals, Reuters reported last year. Reliance's new consumer goods push targets deals with popular Indian brands. Among the brands

it is in talks with for acquisition or potential joint venture, according to one of the sources, is Sosyo, a soft-drink brand of a near 100-year old Indian company, Hajoori, based in the western state of Gujarat and popular for its flavoured drinks. LinkedIn profiles reveal how Reliance has been slowly ramping up efforts to expand its consumer business. In recent weeks, it has hired senior executives from companies like Danone and Kellogg for quality control and sales. One LinkedIn job ad by Reliance stated it had short-listed staples, personal care, beverages, and chocolates as categories for initial launches, and was hiring mid-level sales managers for the business in more than 100 cities and small towns.

Among the main tasks of such executives will be to appoint distributors and manage merchants, the ad stated, Reuters reported.

# How Adani group outstripped JSW to become India's 2nd largest cement maker



(By Staff Reporter) Asia's richest man, Gautam Adani-led Adani group, has acquired a controlling stake in Switzerland-based Holcim AG's cement businesses in India in a deal worth \$10.5 billion. With this, the Adani group became the second biggest cement producer in the country. Gautam Adani's conglomerate acquired 63.19 per cent of Ambuja Cements Ltd and its subsidiary ACC in fierce bidding with other companies. The transaction is expected to close in the second half of 2022, Holcim said, as per a Reuters report.

## GAUTAM ADANI'S BIG MOVE

Adani group sought to chase ready-made assets that would immediately give them a big presence in the market. India is the second largest cement producer in the world and accounts for more than 7 per cent of the global installed capacity, according to government data. Ambuja and ACC have a combined capacity to make at least 66 million tonnes per

annum (MTPA). The two companies together have 23 cement plants, 14 grinding stations, 80 ready-mix concrete plants and over 50,000 channel partners across India. Adani group has in the last couple of years diversified beyond its core business of operating ports, power plants and coal mines into airports, data centres and clean energy. The group had last year set

up two cement subsidiaries -- Adani Cementation Ltd and Adani Cement Ltd -- under Adani Enterprises Ltd. Adani Cementation Ltd was planning to set up two cement units at Dahej in Gujarat and Raigarh in Maharashtra. Adani group, the buyer of the two companies, has become the second-biggest player in the country after UltraTech Cement, which has a capacity of 120 million tonnes per year. The

Adani group acquired 63.19 per cent of Ambuja Cements Ltd along with related assets. Ambuja's local subsidiaries include ACC Ltd, which is also publicly traded. "The Adani Family, through an offshore special purpose vehicle, announced that it had entered into definitive agreements for the acquisition of Switzerland-based Holcim Ltd's entire stake in two of

India's leading cement companies - Ambuja Cements Ltd and ACC Ltd," the Adani group said in a statement. "The value for the Holcim stake and open offer consideration for Ambuja Cements and ACC is USD 10.5 billion, which makes this the largest-ever acquisition by Adani, and India's largest-ever M&A transaction in the infrastructure and materials space," the statement said.

## Why world's top cement maker Holcim is exiting India?

**Holcim, which had entered the market 17 years ago, held a 63.19 per cent stake in Ambuja and a 4.48 per cent in ACC, while Ambuja owns a 50.05 per cent stake in ACC**

(By Staff Reporter) Switzerland-based world's top cement maker Holcim is making an exit from the Indian market. Gautam Adani's conglomerate clinched a deal to buy Holcim AG's cement businesses in India for \$10.5 billion, becoming the country's number 2 cement manufacturer. The divestment by Holcim marks its latest effort to reduce exposure to carbon-intensive cement production and boost its environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) credentials. Holcim, which had entered the market 17 years ago, held a 63.19 per cent stake in Ambuja and a 4.48 per cent in ACC, while Ambuja owns a 50.05 per cent stake in ACC. Ambuja and ACC combined have the capacity to produce at least 70 million tonnes of cement annually, second only to UltraTech Cement, which boasts a capacity of 120 million tonnes. Together, Ambuja and ACC own 31 cement making facilities and

employ over 10,700 people. However, in spite of this, Holcim chose to sell its business in India.

## NOT ONLY INDIA

Holcim has also been selling units outside North America and Europe in a bid to sharpen its focus on key markets and diversify into building product areas like roofing. The company sold its Brazilian operation for \$1 billion and also exited Indonesia last year.

## ENVIRONMENT FACTOR

Holcim's exit is part of the group's 'strategy 2025' that aims for sustainable solutions for the building materials sector. The significance of cement in the overall group is already declining compared to ready mix concrete, aggregates, roofing, and green building solutions. The sale of the Indian operations, which included 31 cement plants, would lower Holcim's CO2 profile,

Holcim Chief Executive Jan Jenisch said, Reuters reported. Making cement is an energy intensive industrial process which produces high levels of carbon, a situation which has deterred many investors and weighed on Holcim's share price. Its shares were indicated 2.9 per cent higher in premarket activity. "Around 26% of our CO2 emissions are in India, so we will have a much reduced CO2 footprint," Jenisch said. "We will always make cement, but we will decarbonise cement. We are happy to build up other segments like building solutions and products," he said.

## MONEY MATTERS

Holcim will use cash raised from the sale of its Indian business for acquisitions focused on building products and solutions, Chief Executive Jan Jenisch said on Monday, with the cement-maker currently eyeing 10 potential targets.



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# Are you working from home? Here are 6 ways you can stay fit

(News Agency) Working from home is becoming more common as a result of its multiple advantages for both the employee and the employer, but there are a few potential drawbacks to remote work as well. Most remote work is done while sitting at a computer or on the phone. Employees may find themselves stuck in one place for an extended amount of time, especially if there are no meetings or coworkers to urge them to get up and move about.

All of this can contribute to an unhealthy lifestyle. So, to help you stay active while still getting your work done, you can follow these tips. 10 ways to avoid inactivity in the at-home workplace and stay fit:

## 1. START THE DAY WITH A STRETCH:

Before you relax into your home office chair and take a two-hour meeting, stretch to get your joints and muscles moving. Stretching also helps to reduce joint and muscle aches that might occur from sitting for lengthy periods of time.



## 2. KEEP EXERCISE EQUIPMENT NEARBY:

Aside from scheduling walks or stair climbs, it's a good idea to keep hand weights, resistance bands, exercise mats, pushup bars, and chairs visible and possibly even "in your way." When you take a break from your laptop, you can pick up the weights, do some repetitions, do pushups and leg exercises, utilise the resistance bands, and gain strength for a few minutes at a time.

## 3. DEVELOP A ROUTINE:

Habits and rituals are extremely powerful behavioural patterns that can either keep you on track or cause you to fall off. When working from home, it's critical to establish regular habits for oneself. Establish a regular wake-up time and schedule your work and breaks. Have workout equipment or weights on hand, or simply perform pushups, walk, or use a standing desk. Use fitness apps to remind you to exercise.

## 4. GET UP FREQUENTLY:

Going out to eat or making something at home is considered healthier because it causes you to get up and move around more. It's also a good idea to use video for your conference calls at home.

## 5. JUST KEEP WALKING:

Outdoor and mobile leadership retreats are becoming increasingly popular. Moving not only feels wonderful, but it also increases blood flow, which aids in concentration, and engages the lymph nodes, which calms us. While taking a non-video conference call, try walking outside.

## 6. TAKE BREAKS TO FOCUS MORE:

Set a timer for either 25 or 55 minutes. Concentrate on one main goal. Get up when your alarm goes off and do something completely different. Go for a stroll, talk to a buddy, or think about something fantastic. Your brain and body are recharged, and your ability to focus on the following task is significantly improved.

# Does green tea help in reducing belly fat?

## Sources reveal from a few health experts to understand if green tea helps in reducing belly fat



helps in cutting down the calorie intake," she added. Dietician Chayanika Sarmah also echoed similar thoughts and said that green tea does not directly help with weight loss. "The catechins present in green tea will minutely help in reducing weight, but that is negligible. What actually happens is when people consume regular tea, the calorie intake is high because it contains milk as well as sugar. But with green tea, people usually

drink it without sugar and it does not contain milk as well. So the calorie intake is less. But green tea does not directly help in belly fat loss," she said.

"It minutely increases the metabolism, which is negligible. The difference will only come by properly maintaining the diet. Even with the diet, it is not just about reducing the calories but also keeping in mind the quality of food you are having," she added. "If you eat fruits, salads

and vegetables, you get vitamins and minerals. With water, these nutrients help detoxify your kidney and liver which automatically increases your metabolism and helps with weight loss," she further said.

A healthy lifestyle including eating healthy food, maintaining calorific balance, exercising regularly and proper sleep will help you say goodbye to the rigid belly fat. Green tea can certainly be a part of your diet though.

(News Agency) Are you of the opinion that drinking a few cups of green tea every day is all you need to do in order to reduce your belly fat? If yes, apologies for breaking your heart but that's not how it works. While drinking green tea may aid weight loss, solely relying on this drink to melt your fat away might leave you disappointed.

Enriched with antioxidants, green tea has ample of health benefits. It is known to combat skin-related issues and lower the risk of heart diseases. Over the years, it has gained immense popularity as a weight-loss drink as well. IndiaToday.in spoke to a few health experts to understand if green tea actually helps lose belly fat. Read on to know what they said. "Green tea has

received a lot of positive media attention in recent times owing to its numerous health-promoting benefits including it being anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic and containing an array of beneficial antioxidants," Nupur Saraf, Consultant Nutritionist, Nutrimend, said.

"However, when we speak of fat loss or whether green tea helps in reducing belly fat, there is no research that proves this. Fat loss cannot be attributed to consuming or eliminating any one particular item from one's diet and depends on the overall lifestyle and calorific balance maintained by one. The only way green tea could help in any kind of fat loss is if it is used as a substitute for regular tea, ie without milk and sugar which





# Study says climate change, water sports posing threat to sea turtles



(News Agency) A new study conducted by the University of Exeter has found that climate change and water sports are posing a threat to sea turtles. The study, published in the journal *Endangered Species Research*, shows that tens and thousands of sea turtles are dying every year. During the research, scientists reviewed the evidence about sea turtles from the last 57 years along the coast of Kenya, Somalia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania.

According to the study's leader author Casper van de Geer, a Ph.D. student at the Centre for Ecology and Conservation on Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall, "Turtles face many threats along the African east coast, from egg to adult." "Our aim was to bring together everything that is currently known about these turtles and to identify opportunities to better protect them in this rapidly developing region. We found that there's still a lot we don't know about these

turtle populations, like how many there actually are or where they spend most of their time and migrate to." "If we use clutches of eggs laid as a measure of population, then we see that some have recovered well in some places. For example, loggerhead turtles appear to be recovering in South Africa and Mozambique. However, leatherbacks in the same areas have not responded as positively to conservation efforts—suggesting there's something going on in their lifecycle that's stopping them from bouncing back as quickly," Geer added.

Kenyan waters are host to the green, loggerhead, hawksbill, leatherback, and olive ridley turtles. The most frequently encountered off Tiwi and Diani beaches south of Mombasa are the hawksbill turtle and green turtles. Sometimes Kenyan people are lucky enough to get a rare sighting of loggerheads or

leatherbacks. But these sea turtles face a multitude of obstacles to their survival. "Local knowledge was key to this research, just as it is vital to turtle conservation," explained Van De Geer. "Conservation work is most effective when it is supported by the local stakeholders and this is achieved through genuine engagement and cultural sensitivity." "There are great examples of this along the African east coast where people are trained and employed as rangers or monitors in the area where they grew up, and the use of community theatre or musical performances to inform people about the marine world and conservation. Ultimately, it's the people who live in a place who have the knowledge and motivation to protect it," he concluded. "There is an urgent need to identify and plan around essential areas used by marine

turtles in the East African seascape," said Gladys Okemwa, of the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute. "Despite legal protection measures, illegal take and consumption of marine turtles, particularly green turtles, still persists in the region due to cultural values. Sustained community engagement and support towards community self-policing will help to make strides in tackling the issue." "While significant progress has been made with regard to awareness, education, and law enforcement in coastal towns and villages, much work remains to be done to ensure the conservation of these magnificent animals, especially offshore, where 'ghost' (discarded or lost) fishing gear, industrial long-liners and plastic pollution still constitute a major threat," said Marcos Pereira, of NGO Centro Terra Viva in Mozambique.

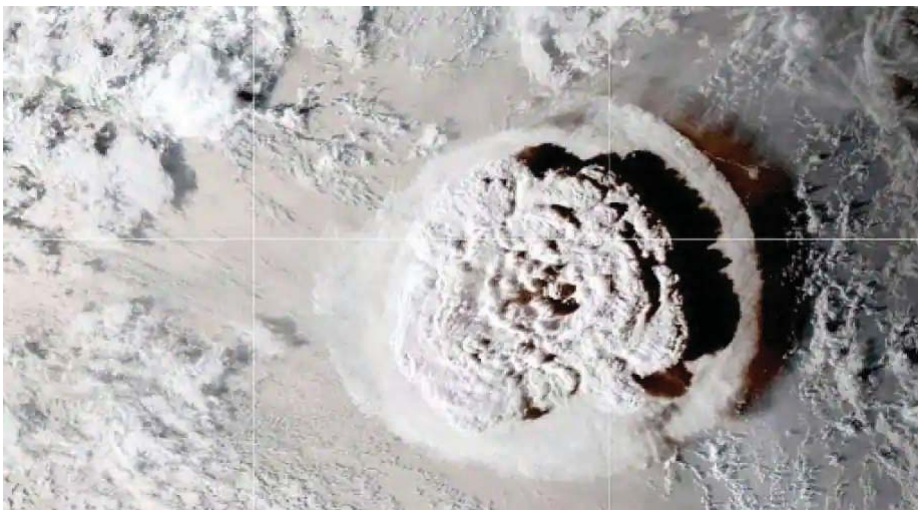
## Tonga volcanic eruption caused biggest explosion since 1883

(News Agency) According to scientists, the Tonga volcano eruption which took place in January this year was the strongest in the last 140 years.

The biggest volcano eruption to take place earlier was in 1883 when the Krakatau eruption occurred, scientists said. The researchers found the waves originating from the eruption were similar to that of the Krakatau eruption. The study revealed the

explosion in the atmosphere has not been documented in the "modern geophysical record". The Hunga explosion produced globally-detected infrasound upto 10,000 km away and also caused "ionospheric perturbations" as seismometers worldwide recorded pure seismic and air-to-ground coupled waves. The January 15 explosion had led to an "umbrella cloud" approximately 30 km above sea level as it produced a "broad range of atmospheric waves". The research found the audible sound was reported across Alaska as far as 10,000 km from

Hunga. The research appeared in the *Science* journal. The eruption had destroyed undersea the 80-kilometre long undersea cable as the Pacific



island nation remained disconnected for weeks as the eruption, shockwaves and the tsunami caused major havoc.

The carnage hampered relief efforts in the island nation of nearly 100,000 people as backup satellite links also failed due to patchy broadband connection.

The 55 kilometres long undersea cable was lost in the seabed. The explosion occurred even as the main island Tongatapu and outlying Vava'u was under lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic.

## NASA's Hubble Space Telescope spots billions year old 'Sombrero Galaxy'. Take a look!

(News Agency) NASA's Hubble Space Telescope has captured some of the mesmerising pictures of outer space over the years. It had been in operation since the 1990s and since then, it has allowed astronomers to view galaxies of all shapes and sizes from nearly every angle. One such stunning image captured by one of the greater observatories was shared by NASA—the 'Sombrero Galaxy', which is roughly around 40 million light-years away from earth. Set against a

backdrop of remote galaxies, the Sombrero, also known as 'Little Sombrero', 'NGC 7814' or 'Caldwell 43', features a bright central bulge, a thin disk full of dust, and a glowing halo of gas and stars. In its blog post, NASA stated that a few years ago 'Sombrero' galaxy, which is billions of years old, had a bright central bulge and a halo of glowing gas extending out into space. Dusty spiral arms that appeared in 'Sombrero' Galaxy are made of dusty material that

absorbs light from the galactic centre.

The galaxy is named Sombrero because it resembles a Mexican hat. Sombrero lies at the southern edge of the rich Virgo cluster of galaxies. In the 19th century, some astronomers speculated



that the galaxy was simply an edge-on disk of luminous gas surrounding a young star, which is prototypical of the genesis of our solar system. But in 1912, astronomer V M Slipher discovered that the hat-like object appeared to be rushing away from us at 700 miles per second. This enormous velocity offered some of the earliest clues that the Sombrero was really another galaxy, and that the universe was expanding in all directions.



# Omicron infection better at upping immunity than boosters, claims study

People who are vaccinated and then get infected by the Omicron variant may have better antibodies to deal with a vast range of Covid variants



(News Agency) As coronavirus continues to infect people across the world, the latest trends in India show that hospitalisation rates are very low and the recovery is faster. A new study now reveals that Omicron infections produced even better immune responses than a booster shot in

vaccinated people.

The pair of studies hint that people who are vaccinated and then get infected by the Omicron variant may have better antibodies to deal with a vast range of Covid variants. The study conducted by vaccine maker BioNTech SE and the University of Washington reassures the

world even as cases spike in several parts.

The study has been published in a preprint on the bioRxiv server. However, the authors of the study have warned people and cautioned that they shouldn't seek out infections in response to the findings.

John Wherry, a professor and director of the Institute for Immunology at the University of Pennsylvania who reviewed the study told Bloomberg that breakthrough infections should be thought of as essentially equivalent to another dose of vaccine and that if someone had covid recently, they could wait before getting another booster shot.

The researchers have argued that

offering people an omicron-adapted booster shot may be more beneficial than multiple ones with the original vaccines. "We are at the point where we may want to consider having a different vaccine to boost people," David Veessler, an assistant professor at the University of Washington told Bloomberg. Meanwhile, the study also found that response was missing in unvaccinated people who had caught omicron as their first exposure to the virus and they warned that the remaining unvaccinated could be dangerous if a new variant that is significantly different emerges. The new research comes against the backdrop of a massive surge in cases in countries like China

and North Korea. Nearly a million people remain under strict lockdown in Shanghai. Authorities have, however, said that most of Shanghai have stopped the spread of coronavirus in the community. China reported 1,159 cases of infection on Monday, the vast majority in Shanghai. Almost all were infections without symptoms. India reported 2,202 fresh cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, which is 11.5% lower than yesterday. The top five states which have registered maximum cases are Delhi with 613 cases, followed by Kerala with 428 cases, Haryana with 302 cases, Maharashtra with 255 cases, and Uttar Pradesh with 153 cases.

# Satellite to reveal how oceans absorb carbon, moderate global temperature

Observing the oceans on a smaller scale helps in determining their role in moderate climate change

(News Agency) As climate change leads to sea levels rising across the world along with jump in ocean temperatures, a new mission will find out how the oceans absorb heat and carbon from the atmosphere and moderate global temperatures. The Surface Water and Ocean Topography mission (SWOT) will be launched in November 2022 to better understand the driving forces behind climate change. The spacecraft is being developed by NASA and French space agency Centre National d'Études Spatiales (CNES), with contributions from the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) and the United Kingdom Space Agency. SWOT is a next-generation satellite that will conduct the first global survey of Earth's water, collecting data on ocean heights in order to analyse currents and eddies five times smaller than previously detected. It will also collect detailed data on freshwater lakes and rivers.

According to Nasa, observing oceans on a smaller scale helps in determining their role in



moderate climate change. The ocean has absorbed more than 90 per cent of the heat trapped by human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, making it the world's largest storehouse of atmospheric heat and carbon emissions.

The growth of heat, carbon dioxide and methane that produce greenhouse gases is

thought to take place near currents and eddies that are less than 60 miles away. Although these currents are small in comparison to the Gulf Stream and the California Current, researchers estimate that they transmit up to half of the heat and carbon from surface waters to the ocean's depths. "SWOT can help answer one of the most critical

climate questions of our time, what is the turning point at which the ocean starts releasing huge amounts of heat back into the atmosphere and accelerating global warming, rather than limiting it?" Nadya Vinogradova Shiffer, SWOT programme scientist at Nasa said in a statement.

Smaller-scale currents and

eddies are difficult to detect with current satellites, but they will be easier to detect with mission SWOT because its ability to see smaller areas of the Earth's surface will allow it to collect more precise data along coastlines, where rising ocean levels and current flow can have immediate impacts on land ecosystems and human activity. Researchers use height differences between points known as the slope to calculate the flow of currents, so measuring ocean height helps them understand currents and eddies better. SWOT's two Ka-band Radar Interferometer (KaRIn) antennas will detect currents and eddies as tiny as 12 miles (20 kilometres) across by monitoring ocean heights and slopes down to 0.16-inch (0.4-centimeter) increments. SWOT will also use a nadir altimeter, which is an older technology that can detect currents and eddies as small as 60 miles (100 kilometres). The nadir altimeter will point directly down and collect data in a single dimension.



# How Hrithik Roshan helped Rohit Roy during Kaabil, refused to give a shot during fight scene until he got a 'crash mat'

**Rohit Roy praised Hrithik Roshan and recalled an incident during the filming of Kaabil. When Rohit didn't have his crash mat, Hrithik laid out his own mat for him**



actor said that Hrithik Roshan then brought his own mat and laid it for him. The actor called Hrithik 'one of the most giving actors in the industry'. Kaabil (2017) is a romantic action thriller film directed by Sanjay Gupta and produced by Rakesh Roshan. Apart from Hrithik and Rohit, the film also featured Yami Gautam, Ronit Roy, Narendra Jha, and Suresh Menon, among others.

In an interview with Times of India, Rohit said, "Amongst the actors, the one I have enjoyed the most working with has been

Hrithik Roshan. He is one of the most giving actors in the industry. Everybody knows how talented he is but he is extremely efficient, not only when it comes to himself but with his co-stars as well." He added, "We were shooting for the last shot of Kaabil and I was supposed to take a hit from him and I was supposed to fall stone cold dead. But there was no crash mat that day. Hrithik refused to give the shot. He called for his own personal crash mat and laid it down for me. That is what warms

the cockles of your heart, you know. A superstar like him who has no need to get into something so trivial made sure that his co-actor was safe." Meanwhile, Rohit will be seen next in the psychological thriller Forensic, which will release on ZEE5 this year. It also features Vikrant Massey, Radhika Apte, Prachi Desai, and Vindu Dara Singh. Directed by Vishal Furia, Forensic is the Hindi remake of the 2020 Malayalam film of the same name, which starred Tovino Thomas and Mamta Mohandas.

(News Agency) Rohit Roy has do a fighting scene in their film Kaabil, as Rohit didn't have his crash mat. In a new interview, the

# Alankrita Shrivastava to direct film on late Pakistani model Qandeel Baloch, who was murdered by her brother in 2016

**Filmmaker Alankrita Shrivastava is all set to direct a film about late Pakistani model and social media star Qandeel Baloch who was murdered in an honour killing in 2016**

(News Agency) Filmmaker Alankrita Shrivastava is set to direct a film on the late Pakistani social media star Qandeel Baloch, the makers announced on Tuesday. Producers Vikas Sharma and Sunny Khanna, along with Alankrita have acquired the rights to the book The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch by Pakistani journalist Sanam Maher and published by Aleph. Fouzia Azeem, better known by her stage name Qandeel Baloch, was a model, actor, social media celebrity and activist. She rose to prominence due to her videos on social networks discussing her daily routine, her rights as a Pakistani woman, and various controversial issues. She was

strangled to death by her brother Muhammad Waseem.

Alankrita, whose film credits include Lipstick Under My Burkha, Dolly Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare, and web series like Made in Heaven and Bombay Begums, said she was always fascinated by Qandeel's life story. "When Qandeel Baloch was murdered in Pakistan in 2016, I



was shaken up. It was a heinous honour killing. I couldn't stop thinking about her. I started watching Qandeel's videos repeatedly, and I was fascinated. She was so charming and full of life. A poor girl from a small village worked her way up to being provocatively famous. She was just 26 when she was killed. And ironically, it's only after her death that she has been reclaimed as a feminist," the director said in a statement. This film is an ode to the courageous spirit of Qandeel, she added.

"It will chronicle her sensational and astonishing rise to fame. I hope to piece together the memories of the rebellious, funny and vulnerable young girl, whose life was cut short because she shimmered too bright. The film will celebrate her spunk and lust for life by telling her story without judgment, hopefully the way she would have liked to tell it,"

Alankrita said.

Vikas and Sunny said for them this movie is an opportunity for them to tell a unique story on female agency and systemic gender violence.

Vikas, who has produced films like Qarib Qarib Single and Dobaara among others, said the story of Qandeel deserves to be told by the right filmmaker and he is happy to have collaborated with Alankrita for the upcoming feature. "Qandeel's story needs to be told by a sensitive filmmaker who is passionate about women's stories. Alankrita is just the filmmaker for it. And not just because she is an award-winning feminist filmmaker, but because she has so much empathy for her characters. She tells their stories with candour and warmth," the producer said. Sharing similar sentiments, Sunny said the world needs to know about Qandeel.

# Country of honour, India shines at 75th edition of Cannes Film Festival

**The film personalities from India, seen on the Cannes red carpet included AR Rahman, Ricky Kej, R Madhavan, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Pooja Hegde, Tamannah Bhatia, Vani Tripathi, Shekhar Kapur and Prasoon Joshi**

(News Agency) The 75th edition of Festival de Cannes, one of the world's most prestigious film festivals was inaugurated on May 17 in the French Riviera City of Cannes. In a first, India has been designated as the Country of Honour at the festival, in tribute to the 75th year of Indian independence. Tuesday evening saw India's largest ever contingent walk the

famous red carpet, led by Union Minister of Information & Broadcasting Anurag Thakur. The film personalities from India, seen on the red carpet included Oscar winning composer AR Rahman, Grammy awards winner Ricky Kej, actors R Madhavan, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Pooja Hegde, Tamannah Bhatia, Vani Tripathi, filmmaker Shekhar



Kapur and lyricist Prasoon Joshi. In a message to the Indian delegation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted India's seamless possibilities to the filmmakers of the world.

"Our spellbinding locations, technological prowess in filmmaking, and the talent of young men and women provide a perfect backdrop for filmmakers," he said in the message. Among the cinematic highlights from

India at Cannes this year is the world premier of Rocketry-a biography of ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan, and the screening of the restored print of Satyajit Ray's 1970-urban drama Pratidwandi, to the mark the filmmaker's centenary. Actor Deepika Padukone is in the jury of the film festival this year.



# Aishwarya Rai walks the Cannes Film Festival red carpet in extravagant floral gown

**Aishwarya Rai Bachchan walked the red carpet at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday night in a black gown. The actor has been a regular at the prestigious film festival since 2002**

(News Agency) On Wednesday, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan made her red carpet debut at this year's edition of the Cannes Film Festival. The actor graced the red carpet for Tom Cruise-starrer Top Gun: Maverick in a bold and extravagant long black gown. The actor has been a regular at the Cannes Film Festival for two decades. In pictures and videos shared from the red carpet by agencies and fan clubs of the actor, Aishwarya can be seen making her way across the red carpet dressed in a black gown, embellished with an elaborate flower work from top to bottom. She posed for pictures on the red carpet and waved to cheering fans as well. Earlier on Wednesday, pictures showed Aishwarya's first look from the festival. Dressed in head-to-toe pink, Aishwarya wore a Valentino pink outfit with a pink



jacket, pink pants and chunky pink heels too. She posed for photos with Eva Longoria. Both of them are L'Oreal brand ambassadors. On Tuesday, Aishwarya was snapped arriving in Cannes with

husband Abhishek Bachchan and daughter Aaradhya Bachchan. Going by several pictures shared by fan clubs on social media, Aish opted for an all-black airport look while Abhishek wore denim pants with

a blue hoodie. Their daughter Aaradhya looked pretty in a pink sweater as she smiled with Aish for the paparazzi. However, AB chose not to pose for pictures. Aishwarya made her Cannes debut in 2002, when she walked the red

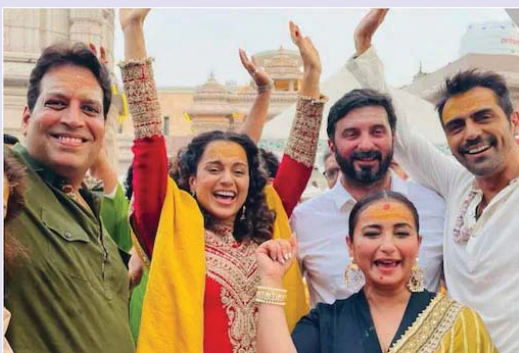
carpet with Shah Rukh Khan. The two were at the prestigious film festival for the screening of their film Devdas. Over the years, she has become the most notable Indian celeb at Cannes. The actor will be next starring in filmmaker Mani Ratnam's upcoming Tamil film Ponniyin Selvan. Touted to be a historical drama, it will also star Jayam Ravi, Chiyaan Vikram, and Keerthy Suresh. It will release on September 30. Apart from Aishwarya, there are a number of other Indian celebs at Cannes this year. Actors Nawazuddin Siddiqui, R Madhavan, Pooja Hegde, Tamannaah, Urvashi Rautela, and composer AR Rahman all walked the red carpet on Tuesday and Wednesday. Deepika Padukone, on the other hand, is a member of the Cannes jury this year.

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## Dhaakad: Kangana Ranaut, Arjun Rampal Visit Kashi Vishwanath Temple Ahead of Their Film's Release

(News Agency) Kangana Ranaut and Arjun Rampal are gearing up for the release of their upcoming movie titled Dhaakad. However, days ahead of the film's release, the two actors visited Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple along with their Dhaakad team to seek blessings. Kangan Ranaut took to her official Instagram account and dropped a series of pictures from their visit to the temple.

In the clicks, Kangana can be seen posing in a red suit with a saffron dupatta. She accessorised her look with a big ring and earrings. In one of the pictures, Kangana can be seen worshipping lord Shiva. In another click, she is posing with her hands up in the air along with her Dhaakad team including Arjun Rampal and Divya Dutta. "Har har Mahadev...Kashi Vishvanath ji ke darshan aur Ganga ji ki aarti with team Dhaakad...releasing on 20th May..." the caption of Kangana's post



reads. Just a couple of days back, Kangana also visited Tirupati Balaji to seek blessings for her movie. She was accompanied by Dhaakad producer Deepak Mukut. In the pictures that the actress later shared on her social media, she was seen dressed in a purple silk saree with golden work on it. Talking about the movie, in Dhaakad,

Kangana Ranaut will be seen in her never-seen-before intense avatar. She will be doing hard-core action in the film and her fans are super excited to witness the same. Earlier today, The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) also gave an 'A' certificate to the movie. Apart from Kangana and Arjun Rampal, Dhaakad also stars Saswata Chatterjee and Divya Dutta. Directed by Razneesh Razy Ghai, the film will hit theatres on May 20 and will clash with Kartik Aaryan and Kiara Advani starrer Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2.

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## Disha Patani Flexes Her Biceps After Lifting Weights, Rumoured BF Tiger Shroff Says 'Ripped'

(News Agency) Bollywood actress Disha Patani is fighting off mid-week blues with a hardcore weightlifting session at the gym. The 29-year-old actress shared a sneak peek into her workout routine on Wednesday via Instagram Reel. Dressed in a black sports bra and purple-black splotched yoga pants, the Malang actress lifted some heavyweights at the gym. Disha lifted the weights in slow and deft moves keeping her back straight throughout. After completing her

weightlifting session, the Radhe actress flexed her biceps and smiled at the camera. Sharing the Instagram Reel on the social media platform, Disha added a penguin emoticon to the caption. Disha's rumoured boyfriend and actor Tiger Shroff also hyped up his partner in the comments as he wrote, "Ripped." Disha was last seen in

Salman Khan-starrer Radhe, which was released last year. In her previous post shared on Sunday, Disha shared some summer-inspired selfies with fans. Dressed in a strappy white floral

workout routine on Wednesday via Instagram Reel. Dressed in a black sports bra and purple-black splotched yoga pants, the Malang actress lifted some heavyweights at the gym. Disha lifted the weights in slow and deft moves keeping her back straight throughout. After completing her

weightlifting session, the Radhe actress flexed her biceps and smiled at the camera. Sharing the Instagram Reel on the social media platform, Disha added a penguin emoticon to the caption. Disha's rumoured boyfriend and actor Tiger Shroff also hyped up his partner in the comments as he wrote, "Ripped." Disha was last seen in



summer top, Disha posed for selfies in a no-makeup look. The Baaghi 2 actress accessorised her look with a pair of golden hoops. Disha tied a portion of her hair as her fringes framed her face. In the following picture, the actress shared a mirror selfie from an elevator. Disha's Sunday summer outfit comprised a pink floral print strappy top paired with a matching white mini skirt with lace work. The Kung Fu Yoga actress also wore a shoulder bag and tied her hair in a bun for her outing. Disha will next be seen starring in Mohit Suri's second instalment of Ek Villain series, titled Ek Villain Returns.



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