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## US airlines warn of 'chaos' ahead of 5G roll-out; Indian pilots have sounded warning bells too



(SAI Bureau)-On Monday, major US passenger and cargo carriers warned of "chaos" and "catastrophic disruption" as the country prepares to roll-out 5G 'C-

Band' service by telecom companies on January 19. In a letter to the National Economic Council Director, Secretary of Transportation, and Federal

Aviation Administration (FAA), the chief executives of several airlines under the banner 'Airlines of America', called for immediate  
(Contd on page 30)

## Britain says it is supplying anti-tank weapons to Ukraine



(SAI Bureau)-Western countries say they fear Russia is preparing a pretext for a new assault on Ukraine, which it invaded in 2014. Britain said on Monday it had begun supplying Ukraine with anti-tank weapons to help it defend itself from a potential invasion, during a stand-off with Russia which has massed troops near the Ukrainian border. Western countries say they fear Russia is preparing a pretext for a new assault on Ukraine, which it invaded in 2014.

(Contd on page 30)

## Indian embassy calls for dialogue with Nepal on Lipulekh boundary issue



(SAI Bureau)-In its first reaction after the announcement of the construction of a road in Lipulekh led to an outrage among the polity in Nepal, Indian Embassy in Kathmandu on Saturday said the position of the Government of India on the India-Nepal boundary is known and has been conveyed to the Nepali Government.

(Contd on page 30)

## Peru beaches suffer oil spill blamed on waves from Tonga volcanic eruption



(SAI Bureau)-Peruvian authorities sealed off three beaches Monday after they were hit by an oil spill blamed on freak waves caused by the volcanic eruption in Tonga. The Pampilla Refinery, part of the Spanish company Repsol, said there had been a "limited spill" of oil off the

coast of Callao and Ventanilla districts near Lima Saturday due to the violent waves produced by the eruption on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. It said the spill occurred during offloading from a tanker.

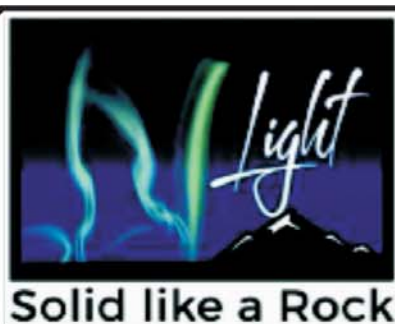
(Contd on page 30)

## Plan to 'dim sun rays' gets thumbs down from experts. Here is why



(SAI Bureau)-Serious concerns have been raised over the plan to 'dim sun's rays' to tackle climate change by over 60 policy experts and scientists on Monday. Calling it potentially dangerous, these experts said that the idea of cooling Earth's surface with the

(Contd on page 30)



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Sharanjit S. Thind, Dr. Bobby Kalotee, Mrs. Madhu Pareek of NAVIKA and other guests.



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Secretary Pradeep Tandon taking Oath



Executive Council Members Dr. Neeru Bhambri and Mr. Gary Sikka taking Oath.



Mr Gary and Mrs Ravinder Sikka of Mint getting honored.





## Even teleprompter could not take so many lies: Rahul Gandhi after PM Modi's Davos speech

***After PM Narendra Modi's teleprompter seemingly malfunctioned at Davos, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took a dig at the Prime Minister saying: "Even the teleprompter could not take so much of lies"***

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday, January 18, tweeted: "Even the teleprompter could not take so many lies." His tweet came after an alleged teleprompter malfunction during PM Narendra Modi's speech at the World Economic Forum's Davos summit. Prime Minister

Narendra Modi addressed the World Economic Forum's Davos Agenda summit online on the first day of the five-day event on Monday, joining a host of other global leaders who will share their visions for the state of the world in 2022.

The teleprompter malfunction

occurred during his address and seemed to catch PM Modi off guard and he had to stop midway while talking. The incident took and continued to trend on Twitter at number 1 since then.

After Rahul Gandhi shared the tweet on Tuesday, Twitter users shared an old video of the

Congress leader where he can be seen telling mediapersons: "Narendra Modi cannot speak on his own. He reads from a teleprompter that is operated by a controller." During his special address at the Davos Agenda summit, Prime Minister Modi outlined the reforms

implemented by his administration to address the country's retrospective taxation problem.

He also mentioned his government's asset monetisation efforts and large-scale infrastructure projects underway in India.

## Actress assault case: Actor Dileep moves Kerala HC to prohibit media coverage

Malayalam actor Dileep has filed a plea in the Kerala High Court seeking an injunction against the media coverage in the Malayalam actress assault case. In the appeal, Dileep said that the media was violating the directive of a secret trial and that it should be stopped.

Dileep alleged that the probe team is trying to create public sentiment against him by conducting a media trial and the probe team and the prosecution are trying to sabotage the trial of the case. Dileep also demanded that the publication of news be stopped till the completion of the trial court proceedings and stern action be taken against the media for those who violate the court order of a secret trial.

Meanwhile, the Kerala High Court allowed five new witnesses to testify in the case. The court also accepted the request to summon the original records of the phone

call details. The High Court also directed the state government to appoint a prosecutor within 10 days to complete the hearing expeditiously.



house of Suraj Sarath, the accused in the case. The raid was conducted based on film director Balachandra Kumar's statement that Dileep had conspired to endanger the investigating officers in the actress

assault case.

The raid was carried out by a team led by SP Mohanachandran. The probe team said there would be further investigation needed to ascertain whether the 'VIP' in this case revealed by Balachandrakumar is Sharath.

Ernakulam district Crime Branch SP Mohanachandran is probing the case that Dileep and other accused conspired to endanger the investigating officers of the Malayalam actress assault case.

Apart from the first accused actor Dileep, a case has been registered against his brother Anoop, sister's husband Suraj, Anoop's brother-in-law Appu and Dileep's friend Baiju Chengamanadu under various sections including criminal conspiracy. It is learned that the conspiracy took place at Dileep's home in Aluva.

**POLICE RAID RESIDENCES OF DILEEP'S FRIEND, RELATIVE**

On Monday, police conducted a raid on the residences of Dileep's brother-in-law and friend in Ernakulam. The raids were carried out at the





## Delhi tableau unlikely to be part of 2022 Republic Day parade: Sources

**An official said that there will be no tableau from Delhi in the Republic Day Parade 2022, adding that the reason is not known**

(News Agencies)-The Republic Day parade this year is unlikely to have a tableau from Delhi, official sources said on Monday.

However, there was no version available from the Delhi government on the matter. "There will be no tableau from Delhi in the Republic Day

Parade 2022. The reason is not known," an official said, adding that this year, 'Delhi-City of Hopes' was chosen as the theme for the tableau.

In 2020, too, there was no tableau of Delhi in the Republic Day parade. Last year, Delhi's tableau had participated in the parade on

Rajpath where the city government had displayed its Chandni Chowk Redevelopment model to portray the amalgamation of architectural heritage of the Walled City of Shahjahanabad with modern infrastructure.

Sources in the central government said a total of 56 proposals had come from states and central ministries. Out of these, 21 were shortlisted and a similar process of selection is adopted every year, they said.







## West Bengal to take out its Netaji-themed tableau if Centre doesn't allow it on R-Day: Sources

**West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee wrote a letter to PM Narendra Modi on Sunday asking him to reconsider the Centre's decision to "abruptly exclude" the state's proposed Netaji-centred tableau from the Republic Day Parade**

After Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking him to reconsider the Centre's decision to "abruptly exclude" the state's proposed tableau from the Republic Day Parade, sources said the West Bengal government will use a tableau on Netaji and freedom fighters during the state's Republic Day programme. Sources said the West Bengal government will take the decision if the Central government does not review its decision. Sources in Nabbana told India Today TV that the

state's Netaji-themed tableau was passed till the design stage but no information was given to the state for the model creation stage, claimed a state government official to India Today TV on Sunday.

In her letter, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the people of West Bengal were "deeply pained" by the exclusion, which amounted to "belittling and undermining" Bengali freedom fighters.

West Bengal's proposed tableau this year commemorated the contributions of Netaji Subhas

Chandra Bose on his 125th birth anniversary and carried portraits of "some of the most illustrious sons and daughters of this country Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Rabindranath Tagore, Birsa Munda and many patriots", Mamata Banerjee said.

"I have been profoundly shocked and hurt by the decision of the Government of India to abruptly exclude the proposed tableau. It is even more baffling that the tableau was rejected without assigning any reasons," she wrote in her letter. In 2020 as

well, the tableau pitched by the West Bengal government was rejected by the Centre.

**WE WEREN'T CALLED FOR FURTHER MEETINGS: BENGAL GOVT**

Sources in the West Bengal government told India Today that the tableau had been passed until the design stage but no information was given for the model creation stage.

"A total of five meetings happened between the West Bengal government team and the central government's department which looks after the Republic Day

Parade. After that, we were not called for further meetings or approvals," said the official.

On the matter, BJP leader Dilip Ghosh said, "TMC government purposely makes such tableaux which get rejected so they can do politics over it."

**IS CENTRE TAKING OUT NETAJI-THEMED TABLEAU?**

On Sunday, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's grandnephew Chandra Kumar Bose said he had been informed by the Centre that a tableau on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose would be part of the Republic Day Parade in Delhi.

## Show cause notice to cops for allowing meeting between Param Bir Singh, Sachin Vaze

Four police officials from Navi Mumbai Police have been served show cause notice in connection with the alleged secret meeting between former Mumbai Police commissioner Parambir Singh and dismissed assistant police inspector Sachin Vaze.

In November last year after hearing at the Chandiwal Commission, Param Bir Singh

and Sachin Vaze allegedly met for over two hours in secret in a nearby hall while the policemen escorting Vaze were reportedly waiting outside.

Sachin Vaze is in judicial custody in the Antilia Bomb scare case. Vaze is lodged at the Taloja prison and is brought for hearings at the Chandiwal Commission by Navi Mumbai police officials.

The fact regarding the secret

meeting was brought to light by Mumbai Police officials who visited the spot on the same day.



They informed their counterparts at Navi Mumbai regarding the

violation of protocols by the escorting police team.

One sub inspector and three constables are under inquiry following the allegation. The Navi Mumbai Police has served show cause notice to the four policemen for alleged flouting of rules while escorting Sachin Vaze to the Chandiwal Commission.

The Chandiwal Commission has been set up by the Maharashtra

government to conduct inquiry into allegations levelled by Param Bir Singh against former state home minister Anil Deshukh of allegedly demanding Rs 100 crore a month as extortion from hotels and bars in Mumbai. According to Param Bir Singh's allegation, Anil Deshmukh had asked Sachin Vaze and ACP Sanjay Patil to extort the money every month.



# Sanyukt Samaj Morcha declares tie-up with Chaduni faction for Punjab Assembly polls

The Sanyukt Samaj Morcha on Monday announced an alliance with the Gurnam Singh Chaduni-led political outfit for the February 20 Punjab Assembly polls.

The Sanyukt Samaj Morcha (SSM) also announced 20 more candidates for the Assembly elections.

Balbir Singh Rajewal-led Sanyukt Samaj Morcha (SSM) is a political front of the farmer unions that had taken part in the stir against the Centre's farm laws. Chaduni is the chief of the Haryana-based Bharatiya Kisan Union (Chaduni) and had earlier formed the Sanyukt Sangharsh Party (SSP) to contest the polls.

The SSM has given 10 seats to the Chaduni-led party.

This comes a day after Chaduni's outbursts against the SSM for offering only nine seats for the polls.

SSM's parliamentary board member Prem Singh Bhangu

**The Sanyukt Samaj Morcha announced an alliance with the Gurnam Singh Chaduni-led political outfit for the February 20 Punjab Assembly polls**



said an alliance has been formed with the SSP, adding that 10 seats have been given to the Chaduni-led party. Bhangu said, "We are trying to contest on a common symbol

and have a joint campaign."

The party gave tickets to Lakhwinder Singh from Ferozepur City, Kuldip Singh Wazirpur from Nawanshahr, Balwinder Singh from Batala,

Tarun Bawa Jain from Ludhiana (West ), Harkirat Singh from Atam Nagar, Gurpreet Singh Kotli from Gidderbaha, Sukhminder Kumar from Malout, Anroop Kaur from

Muktsar and Boota Singh Shadipur from Sanaur.

Chamkaur Singh will contest from Bhucho, Sarabjit Singh from Dhuri, Mora Singh from Ferozepur Rural, Satnam Singh from Raja Sansi, Surinder Singh from Jalalabad, Amarjit Singh Maan from Sunam, Bhagwant Singh from Bhadaur, Abhikarn Singh from Barnala, Gurnam Singh Bikhi from Mansa, Chota Singh Miyan from Sardulgarh and Simardeep Singh from Payal. The SSM had earlier announced 10 candidates.

Farmer leader Rachpal Singh of the Chaduni faction said they will soon decide their candidates on 10 Assembly seats of Samana, Ajnala, Nabha, Fatehgarh Sahib, Bholath, Gurdaspur, Sangrur, Shahkot, Dakha and Dirba.

Voting for Punjab's 117 Assembly seats is scheduled for February 20 and the counting will take place on March 10.

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# How six major deras to influence Punjab elections in 68 Assembly constituencies

***There are six major deras in Punjab including Dera Sacha Sauda, Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Noormahal Dera (Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan), Sant Nirankari Mission, Namdhari Sect and Dera Sachkhand Ballan. These deras influence 68 Assembly constituencies during elections.***

Punjab has been greatly influenced by Sikhism which is based on the principles of secular-religious doctrine (Miri Piri) which says religion and politics are bound together.

Besides Sikhism, Punjab is also known for various religious sects called Deras which are often called the poor cousins of institutionalised religion.

There are six major deras in Punjab including Dera Sacha Sauda, Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Noormahal Dera (Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan), Sant Nirankari Mission, Namdhari Sect and Dera Sachkhand Ballan. These deras are the most influential and influence 68 Assembly constituencies during elections.

Radha Swami Satsang Beas has its influence in 19 constituencies, Dera Sacha Sauda in 27, Dera Noormahal in 8, Sant Nirankari Mission in four, Dera Sachkhand Ballan in eight and Dera Namdhari Sect in two Assembly constituencies.

With elections around the corner, leaders of various political parties pay visits to these deras. Recently, Chief Minister Charanjit Channi visited two deras including Radha Swami Satsang Beas and Dera Sachkhand Ballan. Chief of Radha Swami Satsang Beas also paid a visit to CM Channi. CM Channi has also been a regular visitor at Dera Sachkhand Ballan to consolidate dalit votes as this dera belongs to his own Ravidasia community. He has also announced to set up a Guru Ravidas Vani Adhyana Centre worth Rs 50 crores.

BJP, Congress, Akali Dal and leaders of various other

parties were also seen at Dera Sacha Sauda at Salabatpura, Bathinda besides its Sirsa headquarters to seek blessings.

However, when asked both the politicians and the Dera representatives claimed their motive was to seek and give blessings besides promoting welfare activities.

Former Punjab BJP cabinet minister Surjit Kumar



Jayani who recently visited Dera Sacha Sauda's Salabatpura branch claimed he has been a Dera follower since past several years.

"I have not come here for the first time and have been a regular visitor ever since I attained adulthood. I became their fan after I found that dera helped people get rid of addiction of various kinds. Those who became followers of dera were able to change their lives, started taking an interest in studies and got jobs," said Surjit Kumar Jayani.

Interestingly, the senior Shiromani Akali Dal leadership this time did not show much interest in deras and

particularly avoided visiting Dera Sacha Sauda due to a controversy which resulted a backlash in 2017 elections. Sikhs are angry with the DSS after the jailed chief dressed like Guru Gobind Singh and some of its followers were accused of blasphemy.

A dera representative denied DSS's involvement political activities and said that the dera is only involved in religious and welfare activities but confirmed that there is a political wing which takes care of the political decisions.

"Our political wing is authorised to take such decisions which are taken after consulting the followers," said a dera representative.

Well known political analyst Professor Pramod Kumar, Director of Institute for Development and Communication (IDC), called the deras as humanities currencies but says they still can influence the elections. "There are hundreds of deras but only six major deras influence the elections. These sects are run by babas who became sole mediators between the God and devotees for imparting holistic knowledge and guidance in politics. They are influential but their influence will be limited this time following a backlash in the previous elections," said Prof Kumar.

The religious sects or the deras seems to have learned a lesson from the previous elections and are now avoiding favouring any political party to save themselves from a backlash. The deras may influence over 50 constituencies but will not be able to play a major role in 2022 Assembly elections.





## Assam govt to implement Project Sadbhavana from Feb 1

**To clear all old cases and close pending files prior to May 10, 2021, the Assam government will implement Project Sadbhavana from February 1. The state government will also initiate implementation of e-Office system at the Assam Secretariat by May 10, 2023**

(News Agencies)-Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said that to clear all old cases and close pending files prior to May 10, 2021, the Assam government will implement Project Sadbhavana from February 1.

"Taking decisive action to clear all old cases and close the long-pending files, the state

government will start implementation of Project Sadbhavana from February 1. There are many old cases pertaining to various departments at the Janata Bhawan (Assam Secretariat) and in such cases, decisions have been pending for years. While the old files are gathering dust at the rack, the citizens have to make visits in

pursuing the cases, hoping for some decision by the concerned department," Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Taking part in an interactive programme with the officials of Janata Bhawan in connection with Project Sadbhavana at Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati, the Assam Chief Minister urged the

officials to redefine their roles and re-dedicate themselves to the service of the people.

The Assam government will initiate implementation of the e-Office system at Janata Bhawan, which is targeted to be made operational across all departments in the secretariat by May 10, 2023.

"Once Project Sadbhavana is

brought to a logical conclusion on May 10, the state government will initiate implementation of e-Office system at Janata Bhawan, which is targeted to be made operational across all departments at the secretariat by May 10, 2023," added CM Sarma.

The Assam Chief Minister further said that under Project Sadbhavana, in the first phase, a window of two months will be given to all the citizens for registration and quoting the file number or reference to government communication regarding the old cases and this can be done online in the government Sadbhavana portal. "Those who do not have access to the internet, can also approach Public Facilitation Centres and subsequently register and give the details. The citizen will be provided a unique number for tracking the progress of the case. Simultaneously, all the departments will undertake the exercise to collect, document and examine all the old files and the cases dating before May, 2021. In the second phase, the departments will be given time till April, 2022 to clear all the old cases and subsequently close the files. The exercise will be completed by May 10, 2022," the Assam Chief Minister said.

Stating that the government will use technology extensively in completing this exercise, CM Sarma said that the portal will be used for inviting responses from the citizens. Citizens can track the progress of their response also.

## I&B ministry issues notice to Tamil TV channel for airing kids' satire show mocking PM Modi

Tamil Nadu BJP has raised objections to a kids' satirical show for allegedly belittling Prime Minister Modi. The state BJP chief K Annamalai alleged that certain scenes from the show mocked the demonetisation of currency done by the centre in 2016.

BJP in a letter to the private channel wrote that the satirical show had taken a dig at PM Modi on various aspects, including demonetisation and his foreign visits. The private channel was asked to cancel the show and apologise for the remarks made.



BJP took offense to a video clip of a recent episode in which two children dressed as a king and a minister discuss mockingly about a country where the ruler demonetised currency, for cracking down on black money. The clip referred to a fictional country called "Sindhia". The Indian government had announced a similar demonetisation of all Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes in 2016, aiming to curtail the flow of black money. The Information and Broadcasting ministry took cognisance of the issue and issued a notice to the

private channel. The notice read, "the channel is requested to provide comments on the complaint to this ministry within a period of 7 days, failing which further action will be taken."

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram reacted to the issue saying "only dictators can't deal with satire". Satire is an essential part of public discourse in a democracy, he said.

The ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP Dr Senthilkar S had also tweeted the video with the caption "laugh, think and enjoy".





A woman passenger received appreciation after she took charge of the steering wheel of a mini-bus and drove it for ten kilometers for the first time in her life after the driver fainted. She took the driver to the hospital and saved his life.

might worsen, Yogita gathered courage, got onto the driver's seat and took charge of the steering wheel. Initially, it was difficult for her as she has a lot of experience of driving a car, but never steered a bus or heavy vehicle.

Yogita Satav told India Today, "I am a civil engineering graduate. I have been driving small cars like the Maruti Celerio, accent and Omini Van since the last twenty odd years. This is the first time I tried my hands on a big vehicle like a mini-bus."

However, after some trial and error, she managed to put in first gear and drove the mini-bus slowly to Surya Hospital.

After the video of Yogita Satav driving the minibus went viral on social media, people have been thronging at her residence. She has been receiving praise and appreciation from near and dear ones for her act.

## Pune: Woman passenger drives mini-bus for first time after driver faints, saves his life

In a brave act, a 42-year-old woman, Yogita Dharmendra Satav, a homemaker, tried her hands on the steering wheel of a 20-seater mini-bus for the first time in her life after the driver of the bus had fallen unconscious. Rising to the challenge, Yogita slowly drove the mini bus about 10 kilometres to the Surya

Hospital, which is located at Shikrapur town about 35 kms from Pune. She took the driver to the hospital and saved his life.

The courageous and extraordinary act of Yogita made her stand out amongst 20 women who had gone out for a picnic near Pune on January 7. The driver complained of uneasiness and suddenly

fainted after covering some distance.

The driver was unwell and driving the bus in an uneasy way due to which everyone started screaming and shouting. He had brought the vehicle to a screeching halt and all the women passengers felt a sudden jolt and fell on the floor of the mini-bus.

There were around 28 passengers in the mini-bus, including twenty women and eight children. When the driver fell unconscious, Yogiya sprinkled water on the driver's face to bring him back to his feet, but the driver did not respond.

Brave act earns praises

Petrified that the driver's condition

## Maharashtra records 31,111 new Covid-19 cases, 24 deaths

**Maharashtra registered 31,111 new Covid-19 infections and 24 deaths on Monday, the state health department said**

(News Agencies)- Maharashtra saw a single-day rise of 31,111 new coronavirus infections in the 24 hours ending on Monday evening, the data updated by the state public health department said. The daily tally included 122 cases of Omicron variant. Over 29,000 people recovered from the infection and 24 died in the last 24 hours, the data said. The state currently has 2,67,334 active cases of Covid-19, it said. The Covid recovery rate in Maharashtra was at 94.3

per cent.

Out of the 7,21,24,824 Covid-19 tests conducted in the state so far, 10.04 per cent or 72,42,921 had tested positive for the virus. Over 22.64 lakh people were under home quarantine in Maharashtra and nearly 3,000 people were under institutional quarantine.

Mumbai alone accounted for 5,956 new Covid-19 cases and 12 deaths in the state. The Covid surge in the metropolitan came down by 1,939 cases from a day ago on Monday.







# Beijing Winter Olympics:

## No boycott, but no high-level political representation from India

**In the last two years, China has adopted an aggressive action at the Line of Actual Control with India in Eastern Ladakh**

No high-level political representation from India is expected during the winter Olympics that will happen in China from February 4 to 20. India has previously made it clear that it will not be joining calls to boycott the Olympics in the neighboring country. The joint statement after the Russia-India-China foreign ministers virtual meet last year hosted by New Delhi said, "the Ministers expressed their support to China to host Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games." Arif Khan is the only entry from India in terms of athletes during this year's winter

Olympics. He will represent India at the Slalom event (alpine skiing) and belongs to the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Meanwhile, Harjinder Singh has been appointed as Chef De Mission of the Indian contingent for the upcoming sporting event. He had also led the Indian contingent in the 2018 winter Olympics in South Korea. The Indian stance comes even as the border row with China continues. The last two years have seen the Chinese build-up an aggressive action at the Line of Actual Control with India in Eastern Ladakh. In

2020, India lost 20 of its soldiers due to the Chinese army's actions in Galwan valley. China has said that it lost four of its soldiers. It is not necessary to send high-level political representation, but China's allies and partners would like to show support amid the west's call for a diplomatic boycott. For President Xi Jinping, the games provide an occasion to show normalcy in the country after 2 years of the covid pandemic. The first case of covid was reported in China's Wuhan in December 2019. US, Canada, the UK, Australia

have announced that they will diplomatically boycott Winter Olympics being hosted by China over Beijing's alleged role in human rights violations in Xinjiang. This means, that while athletes of these countries will take part in competitions, there will no representation by officials or diplomats at the games. Western govt has accused China has been systematically conducting human rights violations and even genocide against minority Muslim Uighurs in the country's northwest Xinjiang, something that the Chinese government consistently

denies. Two of China's close allies, Russia and Pakistan will be represented at one of the highest political levels. Russian President Putin, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan will be in the country during the inauguration of the Winter Olympics on February 4. On February 4, that is the day of the inauguration, President Vladimir Putin will hold a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the summit level. PM Imran Khan will be in China for three days starting February 3.



# GAIL director, 5 others sent to CBI custody in corruption case

**A Delhi court has sent the GAIL director and five others, who were arrested in connection with a corruption case, to CBI custody. The CBI had recovered Rs 1.30 crore from them during a raid**

(News Agencies)-Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) Director (Marketing) ES Ranganathan and five others who were arrested in connection with an alleged corruption case will remain in CBI custody for the next six days. The CBI recovered Rs 1.30 crore from them during a raid.

A Delhi court on Monday sent all the accused to six days in CBI custody. Along with Ranganathan, the court also sent accused Saurabh Gupta and Aditya Bansal to CBI custody.

The CBI recovered cash on January 15 after conducting searches on the premises of the GAIL director. Sources said valuables in the form of gold and silver have also been recovered from the premises of ES Ranganathan.

The searches were conducted after the federal probe agency filed an FIR against ES Ranganathan and others on allegations of corruption. The CBI



has arrested six persons so far in this case. According to the FIR, the CBI received information that Ranganathan was indulging in corrupt and illegal activities in criminal conspiracy with private person Pawan Gaur and Rajesh Kumar, Director of New Delhi-based Rishab Polychem. Pawan and Rajesh were allegedly acting as middleman

and obtaining bribes from the private companies who trade in petro-chemical products marketed by GAIL.

"On December 17, 2021, Rajesh collected the demanded bribe

amount from beneficiary private parties and delivered it to Pawan Gaur for ES Ranganathan.

Source has further informed that on December 18, 2021, on the direction of ES Ranganathan, N

Ramakrishnan Nair (resident of Gurgaon) collected an amount of Rs 40 lakh from the residence of Pawan Gaur," read the FIR.

The CBI also received information about bribe being paid to the ES Ranganathan on behalf of a Delhi-based private firm. The CBI officials laid a trap and apprehended a private person and a director of a Delhi-based private company when the alleged bribe of Rs 10 lakh was being received by a person on behalf of Ranganathan. The CBI has filed an FIR naming ES Ranganathan, Pawan Gaur, Rajesh Kumar, N Ramakrishnan Nair, Saurabh Gupta of United Polymer Industries, Aditya Bansal of Bansal Agencies and both the private firms. All the named accused were searched on Saturday and six have been arrested, including Ranganathan.

## AAP crumbles in Gujarat after businessman Mahesh Savani quits party



(News Agencies)-Mahesh Savani, a Patidar leader in Gujarat, resigned from the Aam Aadmi Party on Monday. Mahesh Savani joined the Aam Aadmi Party last year.

Savani is a businessman from Surat. Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, Manish Sisodia himself had come to Surat to induct Savani in the party. Mahesh Savani submitted his

resignation saying that he wants to do social service but does not want to be with any political party. It is believed that Mahesh Savani might join the BJP soon. According to Aam Aadmi Party sources, many leaders are angry with Aam Aadmi Party Gujarat president Gopal Italia and leader Manoj Sorathia. Even party leaders are angry with in-charge Gulab Singh Yadav.

## FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

### BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

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



Photograph taken April 2015

#### DESCRIPTION

**Alias:** Bhadreshkumar C. Patel

**Date(s) of Birth Used:** May 15, 1990

**Hair:** Brown

**Height:** 5'9"

**Sex:** Male

**Nationality:** Indian

**Place of Birth:** Kantrodi Ta Viramgam, Gujarat, India

**Eyes:** Brown

**Weight:** 165 pounds

**Occupation:** Employee of donut shop

#### 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



## The Republic Day is a reminder of the spirit of federalism—and why it is under strain

On January 26, 1950 when the Indian Constitution came into force, it was a big step for the nation that had longed to achieve the ideals of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. Our Constitution tried to give a definite shape to the aspirations of the people for a sovereign, socialist, secular democratic republic through provisions like fundamental rights of all citizens. In a country of subcontinental proportions, it is necessary that the ideals mentioned in the Preamble to the Constitution should extend to all levels of governance. The overall emphasis on equality in the Constitution is visible in all arrangements made around the federal spirit and ideas.

Conscious of the differential needs of the populations of different states, the drafters of the Constitution made provisions for an equitable share of powers and responsibilities among different levels of governments. The lists in the 7th Schedule of the Constitution — Union, state and concurrent — are an example of this division, wherein each level of government has its own sphere, enabling context-sensitive decision-making. Later, institutions for local self government were added through the 73rd and 74th amendments, which strengthened grass roots democracy.

Article 246 and Article 243 G provide for this division of responsibilities. Article 280 provided for the constitution of Finance Commission to define the financial relationship and terms between the Union and states. Apart from these institutions and the Rajya Sabha, the Constitution makers also left much scope for consultative and deliberative bodies so as to strengthen the spirit of cooperation and federalism. Article 263 provided for the establishment of an Inter-State Council for smooth transition of business between the Union and states and resolution of disputes.

The Planning Commission always had space for discussion on issues concerning the federal nature of the polity and was sensitive to the different developmental requirements of states. The inter-state tribunals, the National Development Council and other informal bodies have served as vehicles of consultations between the Union, states and UTs. These bodies have been instrumental in tackling difficult issues democratically through deliberations while upholding the cooperative spirit between the Union and states. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing the worst assault on the federal system and on institutions. The Planning Commission has been scrapped. The Inter-State Council has met only once in the last seven years while the National

Development Council has not met at all. The tenure of the 15th Finance Commission was mired in controversy and many states expressed apprehensions about devolution. The misconceived GST has already taken away much of the autonomy available to states and has made the country's indirect tax regime unitary in nature. Many important and politically sensitive decisions are taken without reference to, and consultation with, the concerned states. Article 370 was removed without consulting the state legislature.

Parliament legislated on "agriculture", entry no. 14 in the state list, to enact the three contentious farm laws, overstepping its jurisdiction and imposing a law on the states. Students in Tamil Nadu have committed suicide over the discriminatory nature of the NEET examination. Other centralised examinations are also indifferent to languages spoken in different parts of India and education boards of different states. The New Education Policy has been flagged as encroaching on the federal nature of the polity. The BSF's jurisdiction was extended in Assam, West Bengal and Punjab without any consultation with the concerned states. The constitutional office of governor has come under scrutiny several times for encroaching on the powers of state executive and legislature. Recently, the rejection of the Republic Day tableaux of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal by the Centre prompted protests by the respective states.

These developments stem from an ideology that has disregard for the diversity of the country and a contempt for constitutional values. These are rooted in a monolithic conception of the country, which is the hallmark of the RSS and the BJP. Their obsession with homogeneity and the idea of "Hindi-Hindu-Hindusthan" is blinding. The philosophy of uniformity and flattening out diversity has disastrous consequences for our republic, society and ways of life. The obsession with homogeneity can escalate and destroy the progressive ideals of secularism, tolerance and mutual respect. It should be underlined that Article 1 of our Constitution declares that "India that is Bharat is a union of states", and that devolution of powers is necessary in such a setting. A conscious recognition of the federal character of our polity is essential to protect our national character. A struggle at all levels against the Union government's moves to usurp federal rights has to be waged.

## BJP to face ring of fire in upcoming state elections

By Susmita Ghosh

2022 is a busy year in Indian politics, as there are upcoming state legislative assembly general elections in key states like Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab. With new alliances taking place and new members joining on both the sides, the elections in the three states will herald a 'make or break' era for the ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party. Also, it is going to set the tone and momentum for the upcoming Lok Sabha election too.

An overall seven states in India will undergo the state legislative assembly election in 2022. Beginning with Goa and Manipur, there will be elections in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, in February and March. Most of the states have BJP-ruled or an alliance government at the helm and the opposition will try hard to change the scenario this time.

Arguably, the most important of the lot is going to be the state legislative assembly general election in Uttar Pradesh. According to the trend, whoever holds the power at the Uttar Pradesh state election, also gains a major boost in securing the Lok Sabha victory. The next Indian general election is scheduled to be or before May 2024. All the political parties, for this very reason, are eyeing the upcoming cluster of elections to turn the tide in their own favour. There have been several equations at play at Uttar Pradesh as elections draw closer. Under the leadership of Akhilesh

Yadav, the Samajwadi Party has emerged as a strong contender in Uttar Pradesh. It is posing a serious challenge to the Yogi Adityanath-led government, which is relying on rallies with political superstars, along with years of good governance. However, there is an ongoing migration of MLAs from BJP and BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) to the Samajwadi party, which also proves its comfortable position right now.

Among the noteworthy, the most important mention in the list is the former minister in Yogi Adityanath-government, Swami Prasad Maurya. Besides, the dozen of ex-BJP MLAs, he has also joined by Dara Singh Chauhan, who was the environment minister in the government. The prominent political faces who crossed over to SP blamed BJP's mismanagement and inability to help the backward class citizens in UP, which will play a key role in the election too. Besides Akhilesh Yadav, Sharad Pawar, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader is one of the masterminds of the opposition alliance. He orchestrated the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance in Maharashtra among Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP to keep BJP out of power in the state assembly election. He will try to do the same in Uttar Pradesh too, where NCP is in alliance with SP.

(Contd page 31)



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# Who are the Houthis and why did they attack UAE?

A suspected drone attack on three petroleum tankers in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, left three persons - two Indians and a Pakistani national - dead on Monday. Later, the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed responsibility for the attack, warning that the "UAE is an unsafe state as long as its aggressive escalation against Yemen continues."

One of the Arab world's poorest countries, Yemen has been devastated by a near seven-year civil war, which started after Houthis captured the capital Sana'a, following which Saudi-led forces intervened and fought the rebels with the aim of ending Iranian influence in the region and restoring the former government. The UAE joined the Saudi campaign in 2015 and has been deeply involved in the conflict ever since, despite announcing the formal withdrawal of its forces in 2019 and 2020.

Monday's drone attack marks a shift in strategy by the Houthis, who have so far trained their guns and missiles more on Saudi Arabia - with which Yemen shares a border - than on the UAE. The last Houthi-claimed attack on the UAE was in 2018. So, who are the Houthis?

Founded in the 1990s by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a member of Yemen's Shia majority, the Houthi movement has a pretty straight forward slogan or sarkha: "God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam." After Yemeni soldiers killed Hussein in 2004, his brother Abdul Malik took over. After Yemen's civil war in 1962-70, the once-powerful Zaidis first started to get sidelined. They were further alienated from the 1980s onwards, when Sunni ideals were increasingly rising to prominence in neighbouring Saudi Arabia. At the time, several disgruntled Shia Yemenis, unhappy with their long-time authoritarian president and Saudi ally Ali Abdullah Saleh, joined Saudi militant groups who were fighting against Riyadh.

Eventually after a series of protests and assassination attempts, Saleh stepped down from his post in 2012. But the Houthis' moment of reckoning came in 2014 - they decided to ally with Saleh and were able to seize Sana'a and overthrow the then-new president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi. In December 2017 however, the Houthi's killed Saleh after they realised he was going to switch sides and ally with the Saudi-led coalition.



During his brief career as president, Hadi was unable to restore order in the country, which was fraught with corruption, widespread hunger, unemployment, attacks by jihadists, and a growing separatist movement in the south. It was Hadi's weakness that allowed the Houthis to swoop in and capture much of northern Yemen, which remains under their control even today.

How did Saudi Arabia get involved?

The rise of the Houthis sent alarm bells ringing across Sunni Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led coalition - backed by the US, UK and France - then launched an air campaign in Yemen, with the aim of defeating the rebel group. What the coalition thought would take only a few weeks has stretched on for seven years, growing into a full-blown civil war.

The coalition troops were able to drive out the Houthis from the south of Yemen, but have failed to remove them from most of the north-west region. Tens of thousands have been killed in the process, in what is widely considered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Both sides have been accused of committing countless war crimes and targeting civilians.

In retaliation, the Houthis have also targeted several locations across Saudi Arabia, including airports and oil facilities.

Over the last year, the two sides have been engaged in a tense battle to capture the Marib province, which is the government's only remaining stronghold in Northern Yemen and houses vast oil and gas infrastructure.

UAE has been a member of the Saudi-led coalition since March 2015. But for the most part UAE-

backed forces like the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), and the Joint Forces led by Saleh's nephew, haven't really borne the brunt of the Houthi's wrath as much as Saudi has. In 2019, the UAE announced that it was slowly withdrawing from Yemen, announcing a "strategic redeployment" from the port city of Hodeidah as part of a UN-led peace process. In recent weeks however, the UAE-backed

southern Yemeni Giants Brigades launched an aggressive attack in the oil-rich southeastern province of Shabwah and advanced towards Marib. Earlier this month, Houthis claimed that they had seized a UAE ship, the Rwabee, off the Yemen coast, which was carrying "weapons for extremists". Abu Dhabi denied the allegations, calling it a "dangerous escalation". Abdul Ilah Hajar, adviser to the president of

Founded in the 1990s by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a member of Yemen's Shia majority, the Houthi movement has a pretty straight forward slogan or sarkha: "God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam."

the Houthis' Supreme Political Council in Sanaa, said the recent attack was a warning. "We sent them a clear warning message by hitting places that are not of great strategic importance," he told AFP. The last time the Houthis claimed responsibility for an attack in the UAE was in 2018, when UAE-backed forces made advances on the Red Sea coast and nearly seized Hodeidah, before the UN intervention. Following Monday's drone attack, the Saudi coalition announced that it had launched air strikes targeting the rebel-held capital Sanaa. "In response to the threat and (out of) military necessity, air strikes have begun in Sanaa," the official Saudi Press Agency said on Twitter.

## Boost Your Health in the New Year Four Reasons to Get a COVID-19 Vaccine Booster

By the We Can Do This COVID-19 Public Education Campaign

January is a month when Americans are making New Year's resolutions that often include pledges to take steps for better health. The new year is also a great time to wish good health on others and yourself, and COVID vaccines and boosters can go a long way to making the new year healthy for everyone.

Here are the top reasons to get a COVID-19 vaccine booster early in 2022: Boosters provide increased protection over time and against new variants. COVID-19 vaccines continue to work very well at preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death.

A booster shot is another dose that boosts—as the name suggests—immunity to the virus as time passes, and it offers additional protection against variants like Delta and Omicron. Vaccinated people who have also had a booster are less likely to get sick; but if they do catch the virus, the illness is usually less severe, even with the variants. Everyone ages 12 and up should get a booster. Viruses tend to spread more quickly in winter months. As the temperature drops, people tend to spend more time inside. Crowded indoor spaces are perfect places for COVID and other viruses to spread, even sometimes among people who are fully vaccinated. In addition to masking in public indoor spaces, make sure you get a booster on the CDC-recommended schedule. Limiting the spread of COVID-19 through boosters

can help control the pandemic. The more a virus spreads, the more likely it is to mutate, increasing the chances of the development of more contagious and dangerous variants. As more people get COVID-19 vaccines and boosters, the spread of the virus will be limited, reducing the chance of new variants emerging. Fully vaccinated people continue to be protected against severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Boosters provide extra protection from cases that can lead to wider spread of the virus and the development of future variants. The best way to control COVID-19 and prevent variants is for more vaccinated people to get boosters.

Boosters are easy to get and available to all vaccinated people age 12 or older. Just like the vaccines, booster shots are available at no cost to anyone living in the U.S. Anyone who got the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine should get a booster in five months, and those vaccinated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine should get a booster two months after initial vaccination. Vaccinated adults 18 years and older may choose any available vaccine as a booster, regardless of the type or brand of vaccine received previously; only the Pfizer vaccine is available as a booster for those ages 12 to 17. Boosters are safe and easy to get and are a great first step to a healthy 2022. For more information and to find a vaccine, visit [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov).







# How the India-Japan friendship can help global peace, prosperity

**Seventy years after diplomatic relations were established between the countries, they have evolved into natural partners**

The year 2022 marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and India. The entire year will be marked by celebratory events. This is an opportunity to reminisce, be mindful of the present and envision our future. It gives me pleasure that we can celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Independence of India and the 70th anniversary of Japan-India diplomatic relations together. Formal relations between Japan and India began in 1952. After the Second World War, instead of signing the multilateral San Francisco Peace Treaty, India opted for concluding a bilateral peace treaty with Japan, considering that honour and equality should be ensured for Japan to rejoin the international community. This is the cornerstone of our long-standing friendship. But even before the establishment of diplomatic relations, the goodwill between the people of the two countries was deeply rooted through business, academic and cultural exchanges. In 1951, when India hosted the first Asian Games in New Delhi, it invited Japanese athletes. This was one of the first occasions where the Japanese flag was hoisted after WWII. This experience soothed the minds of Japanese people who were struggling to rebuild their country. After 70 years of multi-layered exchanges, the relationship between our two countries grew into a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership". Our partnership is based on a deep respect for each other's contributions in promoting peace, stability and development in Asia

and beyond. I am proud that today, especially under the leadership of both prime ministers, we recognise each other as natural partners to work together for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" and various other global issues. We also have a long history of people-to-people exchanges that can be traced back to the sixth century. Buddhism was brought to Japan and, in 752, an Indian monk, Bodhisena, performed the consecration ceremony for the Great Buddha Statue at Todai-ji, which is one of the most important temples in Japan. Fast-forward to the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th Century - Japan needed natural resources to modernise its industry. Many Japanese travelled to India to purchase cotton, iron ore, etc. The exchanges among artists should also be mentioned. This includes an interaction between the Nobel Laureate in literature, Rabindranath Tagore and

Okakura Tenshin, a Japanese philosopher. The 70th anniversary is based on the theme "building a future for our centenary." This is the mantra that will guide us this year. The message is that we

**After 70 years of multi-layered exchanges, the relationship between the two countries grew into a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership"**

will together create our future and propel ourselves towards the 100th-anniversary landmark and beyond. I strongly believe that the future offers enormous possibilities for our partnership. First, we, as democratic countries in Asia, can cooperate to contribute to global peace and prosperity. We share political, economic and strategic interests based on the firm foundations of common values and traditions. We are continuing our efforts to

build a rules-based free and open international order. There are a plethora of fields that we can cooperate in security issues including cyber security, outer space and economic

security. Second, our economic relations can be further augmented. For long, Japan has been the largest ODA (Official Development Assistance) donor to India. One of the

most recent and ongoing examples of our collaboration is the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail project. Japan is also one of the largest investors in India. Both countries have also promoted economic cooperation in other countries to enhance social infrastructure and connectivity. Our economic partnership can further strengthen the economy of the Indo-Pacific, as well as the world economy. Third, cultural

exchanges including literature, movies, music, sports and academics are essential for our relations, enabling a better understanding. I am delighted to hear that the number of Japanese learners is increasing in India. I firmly believe that these young, ignited minds of our countries will be the foundation of an even stronger friendship in the future. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, our ties continue to flourish. Even though the number of in-person interactions may have been impacted, this in no way does this imply that our ties have weakened. Our long history substantiates that. Our common vision for the future will never be affected. We can strengthen our partnership even during the pandemic by utilising digital technology as a facilitator of new and innovative methods to stay in touch with each other. I would like to conclude by extending my best wishes for this special year 2022. I hope it turns out to be memorable for our countries and people.

## What is 'twindemic'? Flu is back in Europe even as it fights Covid

Raising concerns of a "twindemic," Influenza has returned to Europe amid a surge in Covid cases. A situation like this could put excessive pressure on the already exhausted healthcare systems. Last winter, it was believed that Covid had temporarily eradicated the flu, a virus that globally kills about 650,000 a year. However, this notion was changed late last year when flu viruses started circulating in Europe at a 'higher-than-

expected rate.' According to the data released by the European centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), in December, the number of flu cases in the intensive care units surged as there were at least 43 cases in the last week of the year. ECDC's top expert on influenza Pasi Penttinen said, "If we start to lift all measures, the big concern I have for influenza is that, because we have had such a long time of almost no

circulation in the European population, maybe we will shift away from normal seasonal patterns." As per the data published by the French health ministry, three regions in France, including Paris, are facing a flu epidemic. France culled 600,000 to 650,000 chickens, ducks and other poultry, officials revealed. This comes at a time when Europe is already struggling to battle the Omicron variant of coronavirus. Recently, the

World Health Organization said that in the next two months, over half of the people in Europe are on track to contract the Omicron variant of coronavirus.

According to Hans Kluge, regional director for WHO's European office, "At this rate, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) forecasts that more than 50 per cent of the population in the region will be infected with Omicron in the next six to eight weeks."





# Why India needs a Green Deal

**The Indian Green Deal will simultaneously solve two of the most pressing challenges of today - emissions and equity**

With super cyclones like Amphan in the east or Tauktae in the south, severe droughts in Maharashtra, incessant rains, and flooding in Chennai or Uttarakhand, and Delhi on a complete lockdown earlier because you couldn't see or breathe, threats from climate change (and pollution at the local level) for India are not in the distant future. We are right in the middle of it. To make matters worse, we are dealing with an unprecedented economic crisis, partly pandemic-induced and partly pre-pandemic.

Given the magnitude and severity of the crisis, we need to think out of the box. Minor tweaks won't work anymore. What is required is to rethink the model of development itself, to chalk out a just, inclusive, and sustainable path. A start can be made in the upcoming budget. The Indian government had promised 10 per cent of the GDP as Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) package for Covid recovery. We believe if this amount is spent judiciously on what we call an Indian Green Deal (IGD), India can come out on top of the crisis and stay ahead of the climate change curve.

We put forth a proposal, which can form the blueprint of a policy required for India to achieve the net zero target by 2070, as per the commitment made at COP26 in Glasgow. We pick a few sectors of the Indian economy, some of which currently have a high carbon footprint, and propose a 10-year plan to fundamentally alter this impact even as

they generate jobs.

The overall plan has three categories: Infrastructure development, care economy, and a green energy programme. The promised 10 per cent of the GDP should be split into three parts - 5 per cent for infrastructure development, especially rural infrastructure; 3 per cent for the care economy; and the remaining 2 per cent for green energy.

It helps that the employment generating capacity of these sectors is quite high. Our calculations, based on the PLFS May 2019 report on employment, tell us that not only does the IGD absorb those who are currently unemployed, it also generates extra jobs, which can certainly absorb a significant section of disguised unemployment. To contrast the IGD with a business-as-usual scenario, let us say, if the amount committed to green energy in IGD were spent on the fossil fuel sector, it would have generated only 2.4 million jobs instead of the 8 million it generates in our proposal. So, quite contrary to the common perception, the move to a green economy is a win-win proposition both on emissions (and pollution) and employment.

How would the deal impact emissions? The green energy programme would

result in curbing India's total carbon emissions by 0.8 gigatonnes by 2030 as compared to the projections based on the Stated Policies Scenario (STEP) by the International Energy Agency (IEA). Investment in this programme has two components - energy efficiency and clean renewable energy. India's use of energy per unit of GDP (energy intensity) is substantially

**The green energy programme would result in curbing India's total carbon emissions by 0.8 gigatonnes by 2030 as compared to the projections based on the Stated Policies Scenario (STEP) by the International Energy Agency (IEA).**

higher than the global average, which can be significantly reduced through the first component. As a result, India would save almost one-third of the energy it would have used in the absence of the programme.

The elephant in the room, though, is how will this 10 per cent of the GDP be financed, that too for 10 years. This is indeed a huge sum, especially for a developing country. There are two ways this can be financed - a global just transition package from the greatest emitters of the world, and a tax on the Indian elite. Both, quite justifiably, put the burden of adjustment on those whose lifestyles are primarily responsible for the climate crisis. If looked at globally, India's carbon emissions stand at 3 per cent of the cumulative global emissions as

compared to the US's 25 per cent. A just way to address this gross inequality could be for those countries that have contributed (currently or cumulatively) more emissions than the global average pay for the energy transition of those who have contributed less. The extent of the payment would depend on where a country lies on the global scale of emissions. According to our calculations, such an international global carbon tax settlement process would yield an annual sum of around \$270 billion for India, a little more than what is required for IGD. If we look at this inequality nationally, the richest 10 per cent of Indians emit five times as much as the poorest. To hold the elite responsible, IGD can be made into a revenue-neutral policy where part of the expenditure is financed through an increase in taxes on luxury items, wealth and inheritance taxes, which are either low or non-existent in India. Another part can be financed by a carbon tax, which also addresses emissions but would be regressive, unlike the other taxes. To compensate for that, a carbon dividend - in the form of free electricity, public transport, and free rations - can be built into the policy proposal. The Indian Green Deal will simultaneously solve two of the most pressing challenges of today - emissions and equity. The problem lies not in the realm of ideas but the political will to deliver on them.





## Kerala has lost a doyen of environmental activism, one it will miss in this age of climate crisis

"ecological Marxist" organisation.

The late poet Sugathakumari had written that she was attracted to the Silent Valley movement after reading an article by Prasad in Mathrubhumi. She was among the poets and writers who, under the leadership of N V Krishna Warrier, formed an organisation in 1980 to save the Silent Valley. It was a unique movement in world history, wherein writers came together to resist environmental destruction. The only other similar instance I know of is that of the "Group of 100" founded by the famous Mexican Writer Homero Aridjis in 1985.

Prasad published a few volumes aimed at educating Kerala's civil society on environmental issues. Among them is his 2012 treatise, "Climate change and ecosystems". At the height of the raging debates on the Madhav Gadgil Committee report on the Western Ghats in 2013, he teamed up with environmental lawyer Harish Vasudevan to publish another volume, "Western Ghats: Gadgil-Kasturirangan Reports and Reality".

Activism and writing are not always identical. The activist has to be amidst people, organising and motivating them while garnering available scientific facts.

In M K Prasad's demise, Kerala has lost a doyen of environmental activism, at a time when a major environmental crisis is looming on the state's horizon - the impact of the 292-km long and eight-metre-high "embankment" proposed for the K-Rail semi high-speed railway line. He was a prominent signatory to the open letter written to the Kerala Chief Minister by 37 progressive intellectuals on January 22, seeking a halt to the project. Prasad was a leading member of the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP; established in 1962) since 1967. An international biographer of the KSSP described it as "a people's movement emphasising the role of science as a vehicle for self-reliance and popular participation in development, libertarian pedagogical approaches, the dignity of all persons, appropriate technology and a bottom-up approach to development... they see science as a vehicle for

transformative education". KSSP's membership consists of experts in multiple domains and progressive activists. A professor of botany, Prasad was the leading biologist among them. His direct involvement in Kerala's environmental protection can be traced back to 1970 when KSSP began a movement to highlight air and water pollution in the Eloor industrial area near Kochi. Many public and private sector factories in the area were polluting the Periyar river and the air in the region. The first initiative to stop this pollution was taken by the Kochi Science Society. The movement reached KSSP through Prasad - perhaps the Parishad's first direct involvement in an environmental protection movement. In the mid-1960s, N V Krishna Warrier, a founding leader of the KSSP, was engaged in activism in an individual capacity. But following the Kochi movement, KSSP became directly involved in environmental activism. In 1977, the Kerala government was going ahead

with a plan to build a hydroelectric project across the river Kunthi that flows through Silent Valley, the evergreen rainforest in the Palakkad region. The dam was to come up right in the interior of the forest. KSSP was initially reluctant to get involved in any resistance against the project because it believed in the need to generate electricity for people's welfare. At the instance of Satish Chandran Nair, an ecologist who had walked around extensively inside Silent Valley to study its ecological importance, Prasad visited the rainforest in 1977. He was convinced of the importance of preserving this rich treasure of biodiversity. The submergence of 830 hectares of forestland, from which the streams and tributaries of the Kunthi originate, would have destroyed the riparian ecosystem. After that visit in 1977, Prasad started publishing his findings in local science and literary journals.

In the KSSP members' camp held at Kalady in 1977, a resolution drafted by Prasad asking the organisation to oppose the project was presented. Prasad was not present at the meeting. The participants at the camp did not approve the resolution but resolved to investigate the matter. A committee consisting of Prasad, M P Parameswaran and K P Kannan, among others, was constituted. Their 1978 report, "The Silent Valley Hydro-Electric Project: A Techno-Economic and Socio-Political Assessment" persuaded the KSSP to join the resistance movement to save the Silent Valley. So, in a sense, Prasad's first visit to the Silent Valley was a watershed in KSSP's history. KSSP is a left-leaning organisation. At a time when left parties strongly supported the project, it was difficult to go against it on ecological grounds. In the EPW in 1998, historian Ramachandra Guha described KSSP as an

## Why do Indians do so well abroad?

In these times of hyper-nationalism, inevitably fuelled by the 75th anniversary of independence, I have been flooded with messages, forwarded by patriotic relatives, friends and random persons, extolling India's greatness. One such message was provocatively titled "Who's running the World?" (with no apologies to Noam Chomsky). Here is a synopsis: One day, Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi were arguing about who was in charge

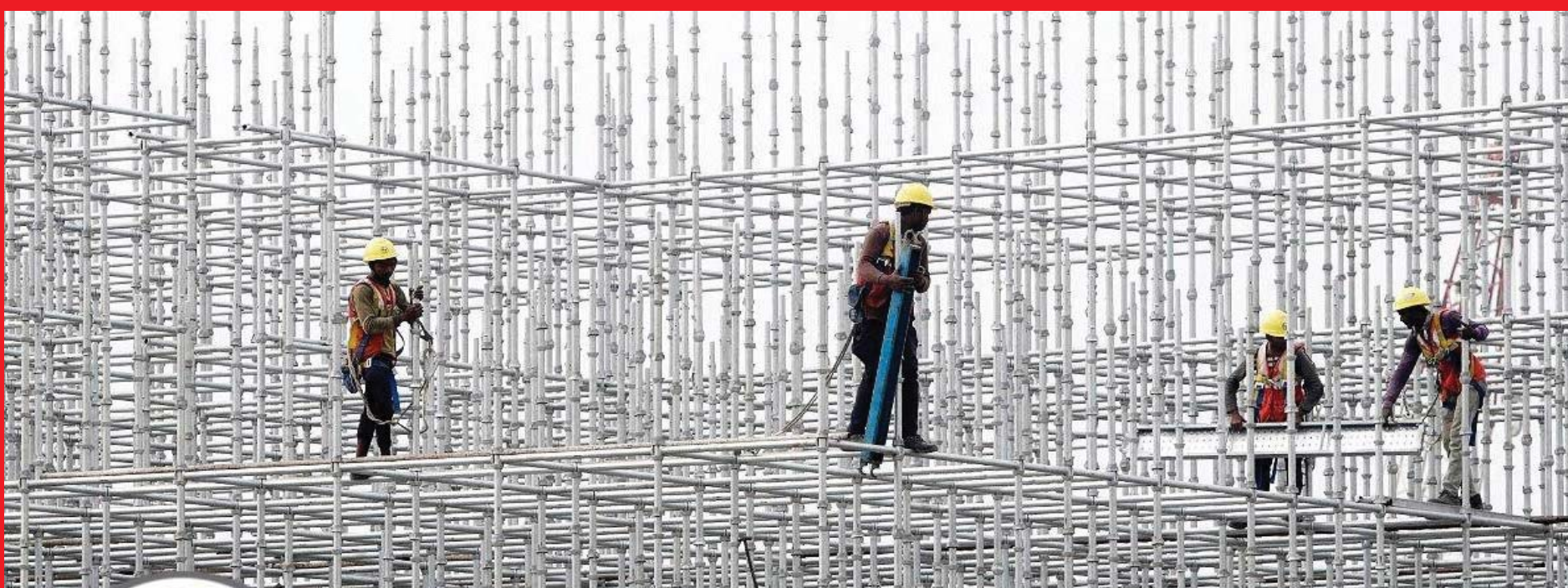
of the world. After much deliberation, Modi replied that all he knew was that the leading CEOs of the world were Indian. The message then rattles off a list of companies, many of which are household names (think Google and Microsoft) and, after 21 such examples, a shorter list of Indians who have ascended to political heights in other countries. And this was before a person of Indian origin ascended to the helm of Twitter and the omission of persons of Indian origin who have headed

prestigious global NGOs such as Medicins sans Frontiers and Amnesty International or headed US states or European countries (Portugal and Ireland and some predict the UK in the near future!). There is little doubt that persons born in India outperform all other nationalities in the sheer scale of their success when they migrate to the "West" (essentially, Europe and North America). Earlier this week, I read that people of Indian origin top the list of US unicorns' immigrant founders.

But I wondered if these observations reflected more on the "greatness" of the country they had migrated to rather than India herself? What struck me was the discrepancy between a few million Indians doing so well abroad, the most celebrated of whom were taking their companies (and, in some instances, countries) to dizzying heights, while India herself, despite being home to over a billion fellow Indians, continues to languish at the bottom of virtually every list of

countries ranked on desirable goals such as human development, income equality, food security, gender equality, air quality, transparency, universal health coverage, literacy and sanitation. In the World Happiness Report 2020, we rank alongside Afghanistan, South Sudan and Yemen. And what's more worrying, our rankings on these lists has been falling in recent years. I know I'm not alone in wondering about this conundrum.





# What the budget needs to do

The last two quarters have seen a substantive recovery in the Indian economy. As growth has rebounded, so too has every indicator of the formal economy. Corporate profitability of our largest firms has hit a new record this year. So have GST collections, another indicator of the formal economy, with an average monthly collection of Rs 1.2 trillion in the second and third quarters. The budget deficit is expected to be well under what we forecasted last year. All of this is good news.

The glass though is half full. As many commentators have pointed out, the informal economy was particularly badly hit by Covid and its associated lockdowns. Small enterprises, retail, hospitality, and construction were all hammered. These were our main source of recent employment growth. Agricultural employment has risen in the last year-and-a-half, while manufacturing and services employment has fallen - this is the opposite of development. Informal urban employment has led to first-time buyers of everything from toothpaste to two-wheelers. This consumption story has driven our economic growth for the last 30 years. Informal service sector jobs may not seem like great jobs to us, but they are greatly prized relative to eking out a marginal existence in agriculture. Covid and its associated restrictions have been a perfect storm for the informally employed. A study by researchers from Azim Premji University tells us that both earnings and employment fell for those at the bottom of the urban employment pyramid. We need to insure the most vulnerable against such shocks, but even more, we need to create good job opportunities for the unskilled, equip people at all levels to participate more fully in the modern economy, and systemically promote wider policies of inclusion. What can the budget do? It needs to create good jobs for the unskilled. The way it can do so directly is through accelerating spending on infrastructure. The National Infrastructure Pipeline has identified a good set of

projects. The government should be complimented for its intention and ambition; what we need now is implementation. To have a bigger impact on the economy, we need to invest quickly and at scale. A credible time-bound implementation plan is what we should hear about in the budget.

Most countries developed by putting millions to work in labour-intensive manufacturing. Millions of the unskilled and less-educated can be employed in good manufacturing jobs where a average productivity is 15 times the national average. We do not have the huge firms in export-oriented labour-intensive sectors that employ millions in China, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. Foxconn's largest factory in China, making iPhones among other products, reportedly employs 4,00,000 people. It employs over 1 million in the country overall. Compare that 1 million with 15 million employed in all larger manufacturing companies in India. Samsung employs 1,00,000 people in its largest phone assembly plant in Vietnam. These giant factories are missing in India. Take another example of labour-intensive manufacturing. A company we visited in Vietnam manufactures agarbattis. They learnt by sending 10 workers to a factory near Chennai for training. Today they employ 10,000 people making agarbattis, which they mainly export to India. Even when the technology is Indian and the market is India, mass manufacturing seems to be more efficient 4,000 km away from the country. The economics must be fixed - we need labour reform, so employing people is less expensive and improved logistics to move goods around more cheaply.

We need not look too far to learn how. In 2020, Bangladesh overtook India in per capita GDP. Bangladesh has thrived by

putting millions to work in manufacturing. A booming garment sector employs 4.4 million. A large garment factory in Bangladesh employs 30,000-50,000 people - 10 times what you'd find in India. As 80 per cent of those employed in garment factories are women, Bangladesh has twice the female labour force participation ratio of India. In June and September 2020, the government passed four labour laws that are a major step forward in helping

**The National Infrastructure Pipeline has identified a good set of projects. The government should be complimented for its intention and ambition; what we need now is implementation**

balance flexibility with protection for labour, formal and informal. These laws have since been left

dormant. The budget should announce a time frame for implementation, notification by the Union government and then by the states.

The budget must also look at investments in education and skilling. In the absence of massive employment in unskilled occupations, we must depend on education and skills. India has among the least skilled workforces in the world. Under 5 per cent of our workforce is formally skilled, compared to 96 per cent in South Korea, 75 per cent in Germany and 52 per cent in the US. That is why the work of the National Skills Development Corporation is so important and must go much further and faster. Can the budget specify how it will be empowered to function as originally designed: An independent entity controlled and run by the private sector that is then held accountable for delivering on our skilling targets? Education is even more important, especially primary education. Pratham's education reports make for sobering reading. Their last comprehensive report says that just 44 per cent of children

in Class V can read a text meant for Class II. And just 23 per cent of children in Class V can do division. With schools closed for the last year-and-a-half in most states, education outcomes have fallen further. The New Education Policy has a proposal that every second standard child should be able to read and do arithmetic at the second standard level as a foundation for further education. This welcome initiative must receive greater dedication and focus from both government and industry. School education is a state subject, so the Union budget can at best incentivise states to do the right things, say by linking the flow of additional funds to those that demonstrate improved second standard learning outcomes.

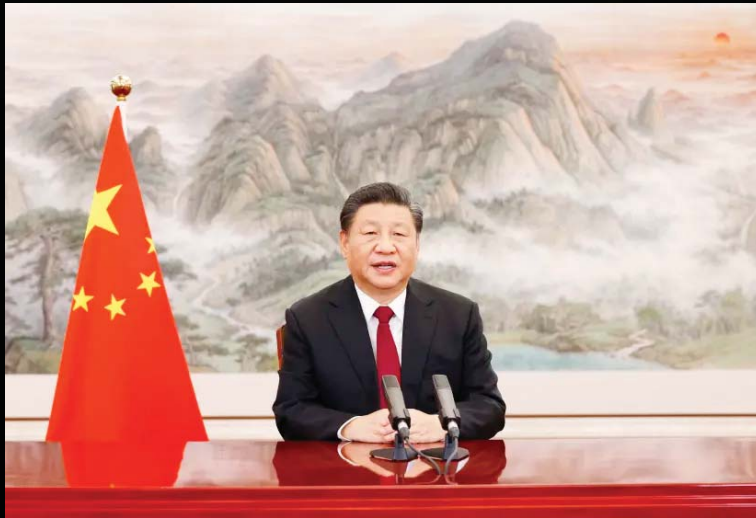
Industry can help too. As a part of CSR, many companies work actively with schools. Education is already the largest single area for CSR spending, accounting for one-third of the Rs 9,000 crore spent by the top 100 companies. My best estimate is that the top 1,000 firms in the CII membership work with around 30,000 schools. Assuming an average second standard student body of 50 per school, if every CII company worked on this one goal of ensuring a child entering the third standard can read and do arithmetic at the second standard level, we could improve education outcomes for 15,00,000 children a year. Can the budget incentivise companies to go beyond their mandated 2 per cent CSR spend by deducting the increment from profit before tax?

Other policies for economic inclusion must go beyond social inclusion. These include measures like reducing tariffs to benefit millions of consumers instead of thousands of firms. Industrial policies that help all firms such as the ease of doing business, instead of incentivising a selected few. For more on these, I would refer the reader to my book, *The Struggle and the Promise: Restoring India's Potential*, published this month. A good budget would be an inclusive budget.



# World Economic Forum: Xi highlights the need of 'fostering new opportunities' at Davos 2022

Speaking at the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Davos Agenda, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised the need to overcome all obstacles. "We must do everything that is necessary to clear the shadow of the pandemic and boost economic and social recovery and development," he said. The weeklong virtual event which started today will feature heads of state and government, CEOs and other leaders. "How to beat the pandemic and how to build the post-Covid world? These are major issues



of common concern," he highlighted. "As the momentum of the world is either progress or regresses,

without contradiction nothing will exist. We need to learn from long history cycles and foster new opportunities. But first, we need to embrace cooperation and jointly defeat the pandemic," Xi said.

Xi also spoke about a massive surge in global inflation. He said that there is a need to keep the industrial supply chain smooth. "For that, we should make the generally acceptable rules for digital economy," he highlighted. Several heads of state will address the event including Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, Australian Prime Minister

Scott Morrison, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, and EU Commission's chief Ursula von der Leyen.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also deliver a special address via video conferencing. As the Davos Agenda 2022 is bringing world leaders together, PM Modi will deliver the 'State of the World' address, which is scheduled at 8:30pm IST. As per the WEF website, the event will also mark the launch of several forum initiatives. This includes efforts to accelerate the race to net-zero emissions.



## The virus is here to stay. We must learn to live with it

It has been a long time since January 2020, when the first case of Covid-19 was reported in India. We've come a long way since those early days of uncertainty, when there was no treatment and no vaccine. Things have changed in many ways since then, but they do not seem to be changing quickly enough. Everyone is aware that the Indian government, the healthcare and frontline workers and doctors have done a commendable job. However, as we look back and take stock, there are a few questions we must ask. Have we done well? Yes. Have we learnt our lessons well? Yes and no. And last but not the least, have we anticipated challenges well? No. We were not the first country to bear the brunt of the virus - and it was possible to learn from other countries. In the

first wave, for example, we managed to keep casualties low with the use of steroids - a lesson that Italy had learnt the hard way and we had learnt from them. But that is an exception rather than the rule. One can argue that we had meagre resources in terms of health infrastructure and while no one can ramp this up overnight, one can certainly look at prudent optimal utilisation. Facing a third wave now, we may need to act differently. Despite good intentions and efforts, there were multiple times when we did not act swiftly despite adequate, reasonably accurate information available on what was headed our way. We came up rather short in our preparations for the second wave, whether we choose to admit it or not. Our vaccination related decisions always followed, and were taken, post

the rising number of cases. This was the case before the second wave, when we tiptoed around with the vaccine against a raging super-cyclone or now with the vaccination decision on "precaution" doses. Policy and interventions have not had a reality check. Our interventions do not always match up to the changing on-ground situation, even though we are up against a virus that is a nimble operator and has already seen so many mutations. Let us look at the evidence. Only masks and lockdowns have been conclusively proven to slow down transmission. Why this predilection of many states then with night and weekend curfews? If they were indeed effective - and given the number of times we have taken recourse to them - we should by now have generated

enough data to defend or junk them. Our policies and actions have to be flexible and adjust to the changing face of the pandemic. We should not resort to the same steps just so it appears we are doing. Responses that do not make any material difference, and are yet repeated over and over again, create fatigue in people and precipitate violations. Particularly so when they impact daily lives and livelihoods. In our obsession with keeping people's spirits high and getting on with life, we trivialised the pandemic and failed to teach people to live with it safely. We oscillate between the two extremes of unreasonable panic and wanton carelessness. The path to follow is the middle one, and each state government should take a call on this based on their ground realities.

## India to begin Republic Day celebrations from Subhas Chandra Bose birth anniversary on January 23: Reports

India might start the Republic Day celebrations every year from January 23 instead of January 24 in order to include the birth anniversary of the country's freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose, news agency PTI reported citing government sources.

The sources have said that the latest reports are in line with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi government's focus on commemorating important aspects of our history and culture.

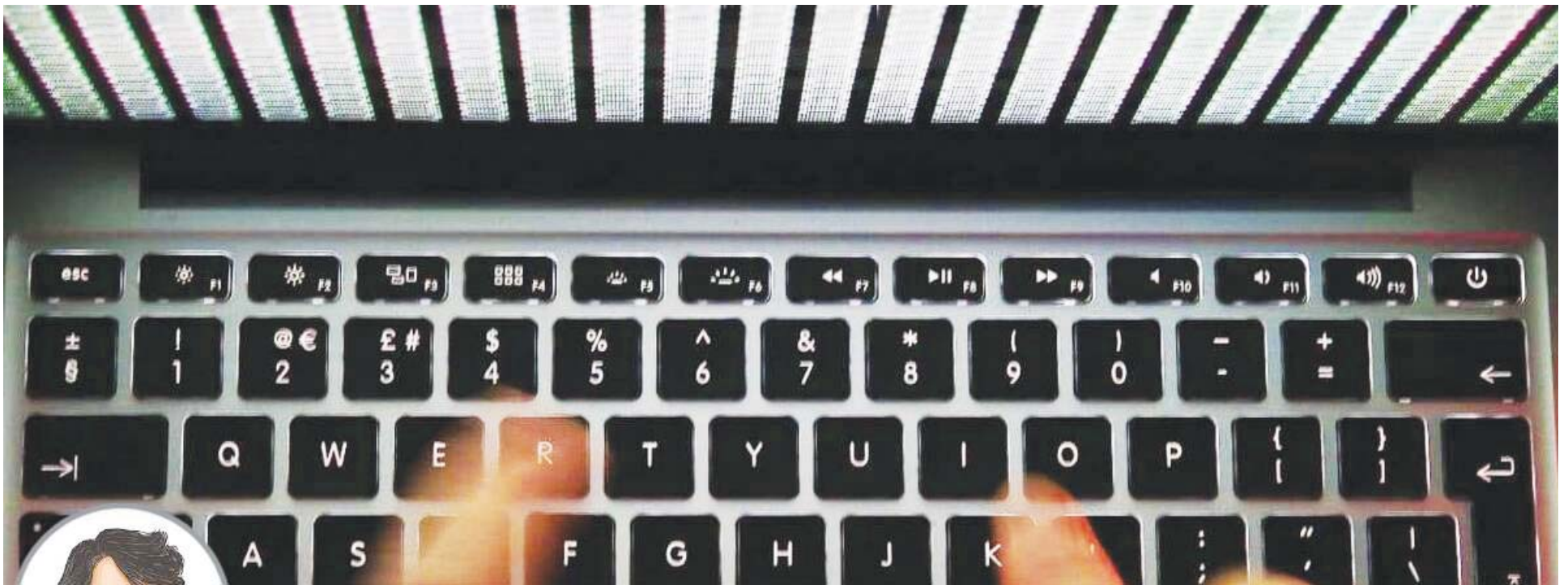
India celebrates January 26 as Republic Day, which is a national holiday in the country. The nation marks the date on which the Constitution of India came into effect on January 26 in 1950.

When it replaced the Government of India Act (1935) as the governing document of India. The nation was turned into a newly formed republic.

Earlier, the government had started the celebration of the birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose as Parakram Divas.

Other important days that have become a yearly affair are Partition Horrors Remembrance Day (August 14), National Unity Day (October 31), Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas (November 15), Constitution Day (November 26), Veer Baal Diwas (December 26).





# Countering hate in the digital world

**Content moderation should be considered a late-stage intervention. Individuals need to be stopped early in the path to radicalisation and extremist behaviour to prevent the development of apps such as Bulli Bai**

Ongoing police investigations to identify the culprits behind the condemnable "Bulli Bai" and "Sulli Deals" apps, which "auctioned" several prominent and vocal Muslim women, implicate individuals born close to the turn of the century. At first glance, this indicates that digital natives are not resilient against problems such as disinformation, hate speech and the potential for radicalisation that plague our informational spaces. But placed within the broader context of decreasing levels of social cohesion in Indian society, that such apps were even created requires us to frame our understanding in a way that can point us towards the right set of long-term interventions. To understand how we got here, we need to start by looking at the effect of new media technologies developed over the last 20 years on our collective behaviour, and identities. Technologies have changed the scale and structure of human networks; and led to abundance and virality of information. Social scientists hypothesise that these rapid transitions are altering how individuals and groups influence each other within our social systems. The pace of technological evolution coupled with the speed of diffusion of these influences has also meant that we neither fully understand the changes nor can we predict their outcomes. Others have focused on their effects on the evolution of individual, political, social, cultural identities. These identities can be shaped consciously or subconsciously by our interactions, and consequently affect how we process information and respond to events in digital and physical spaces. Our identities ultimately bear on our cognitive processes - arguments against our defining values can activate the same neural paths as the threat of physical violence. The rise of social media has been linked to the strengthening of personal social identities at the cost of increasing inter-group divisions. Some have suggested that personalised feeds in new media technologies trap us in "echo chambers", reducing exposure to alternate views. While other empirical work shows that people on social media gravitate towards like-minded people despite frequent interaction with ideas and people with whom they disagree. People can also self-select into groups that reinforce their beliefs and validate their actions. We still need a better understanding of the broader psychosocial effects, specifically in the Indian context. Experience, though, suggests that when these beliefs are prejudices and resentment against a specific group of people, the feedback loops of social confirmation and validation can result in violence. Even pockets of disconnected actions, when repeated and widespread, can destabilise delicate social-political relations built over decades. Harms arising out of escalating levels of polarisation and radicalisation are primarily analysed through the lens of disinformation and hate speech which gives primacy to motives. This framing leaves room for some actors to evade responsibility since motives can be deemed subjective. And for others to be unaware of the downstream consequences of their actions - often, even those taken with good intentions can have unpredictable and adverse outcomes. The information ecosystem metaphor, proposed by Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner, compares the current information dysfunction with environmental pollution.

## Indian govt invites sanitation workers, autorickshaw drivers, and frontline workers as Republic Day guests

According to a senior Ministry of Defense official, a special effort has been made to provide opportunities to those who have never seen the Republic Day event. This year's Republic Day celebrations at Rajpath have been open to individuals from all walks of life. The number of visitors is expected to be significantly reduced this year because to COVID-19 restrictions. "We're considering a population of 5,000 to 8,000 people, but we haven't decided yet." He noted that 25,000 people attended the event last year. For the safety of visitors, only double-vaccinated invitees are allowed. And in the enclosures, they request guests to maintain a six-foot distance, wear

masks and follow other COVID-19 protocols. All guests will be thermally screened, and medical support will be available in case of closure, he added. "We will telecast the Republic Day celebrations on the internet, television and other social media platforms for all viewers," he said. We are encouraging people to be a part of the celebration from home, " he added. For guests to get a better view of the live acts at the event, ten giant LED screens have been constructed on either side of the Rajpath. "The celebration will begin at 10.30am, which is 30 minutes late from its scheduled time. The delay has been made to ensure better visibility during flypast performances, " he said.

Before the parade begins, a band of Central Armed Police Forces will perform to build an atmosphere of patriotism. A total of 75 aircraft will participate in the flypast this year to mark 75 years of Independence. For the first time, visitors will get a glimpse of some unseen visuals from the cockpits of fighter planes performing manoeuvres on Republic Day, "he said. Tableaus of 12 states and the Union Territories and nine ministries will participate in the event. The requests from West Bengal and Tamil Nadu to reconsider the inclusion of their tableaux in the Republic Day parade can not be revisited. They have been informed about the reasons for their non-inclusion, said senior defence ministry officials.



# Pak PM Khan, defence minister exchange heated words over neglect of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

**Defence Minister Pervaz Khattak said that he would not vote for Prime Minister Imran Khan if new gas connections were not given to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province**

(News Agencies)-Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and Defence Minister Pervaz Khattak had a heated exchange of words when the latter said he would not vote for him and complained about the neglect of the north western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province by the government, according to a media report on Friday.

The incident occurred on Thursday during a meeting of the parliamentary party of the ruling alliance, presided over by Prime Minister Khan, at the Parliament House, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The defence minister, while attending the meeting to clear a controversial Supplementary Finance Bill-2022, commonly called mini-budget, reportedly said that he would not vote for

the prime minister, Khan, if new gas connections were not given to the people of the less developed province.

Khattak was elected to the National Assembly from Nowshera-I of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province.

The sources said that on Khattak's complaints, the prime minister became angry and asked him to stop "blackmailing" him.

On this, the defence minister left the meeting hall but was later called back by the prime minister, the report said.

After the meeting, the prime minister sat in his chamber for almost the whole day and met a number of legislators hailing from his Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and other parties in the ruling



coalition. According to sources, Khattak was of the view that the province was being neglected in terms of provision of electricity and gas, while these facilities were being enjoyed by the people of other provinces.

The defence minister told the prime minister that if the situation lingered on, the people of the province would not vote for

prime minister and I did not tell him that I will not vote for him if gas connections are not given to the people of KP," he said. Khattak said he left the meeting hall for a smoke.

"I am a smoker and I went outside the meeting hall to smoke," he added.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Political Affairs Shahbaz Gill later confirmed that Khattak had raised the issue of non-provision of gas to the people of KP.

He said the defence minister told Minister of Energy Hammad Azhar that gas supply schemes in KP were being blocked and no new gas connections were being given to the people of the province.

PTI, the newspaper quoted sources as saying. However, Khattak told the media after the meeting that he neither harshly talked to the prime minister nor hurled any threat of not voting for Khan and had just raised the issue of gas shortage and ban on new gas connections in the province.

"Imran Khan is my leader and

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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.

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# North Korea tests railway-borne missile in latest launch amid rising tension with US

## Amid rising tension with the US, North Korea tested a railway-borne missile in its latest launch on Friday, marking its third weapons test this month

(News Agencies)-North Korea tested a railway-borne missile in its firing drills on Friday, state media KCNA said on Saturday, marking its third weapons test this month, which triggered a US push for fresh sanctions against the isolated state. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it had detected what it presumed were two short-range ballistic missiles launched eastward from North Pyongan Province on the northwest coast of North Korea.

The official KCNA news agency said a firing drill was held to "check and judge the proficiency in the action procedures of the railway-borne regiment," which the country tested for the first time last September, designed as a



potential counter-strike to any threatening forces.

It was the third time North Korea has launched ballistic missiles since New Year's Day, an

unusually rapid pace of weapons tests. The previous two launches involved what state media called "hypersonic missiles" capable of high speeds and manoeuvring

after launch.

The drill came just hours after Pyongyang slammed the US pursuit of new UN sanctions over a series of recent

launches as a "provocation" and warned of a strong reaction. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not attend the drill. KCNA said it was held "at short notice" from the military's general staff but the regiment precisely struck the target set in the east coast with "two tactical guided missiles."

The regiment "demonstrated high maneuverability and rate of hits," and discussed ways to "set up proper railway-borne missile operating system across the country," KCNA said. North Korea has defended the missile tests as its sovereign right to self-defence and accused the United States of intentionally escalating the situation with new sanctions.

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

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# Taliban use pepper spray to disperse women protesters demanding right to work, study

**On Sunday, Taliban forces used pepper spray to disperse a group of women protesters demanding the right to work and study in Afghanistan**

(News Agencies)- Taliban forces on Sunday fired pepper spray at a group of women protesters in Afghanistan's capital demanding rights to work and education, three demonstrators told AFP. Since seizing control of the country by force in August, the Taliban authorities have imposed creeping restrictions on Afghans, especially on women.

Around 20 women gathered in front of Kabul University, chanting "equality and justice" and carried banners that read "Women's rights, human rights", an AFP correspondent reported. **TALIBAN USE PEPPER SPRAY**

The protest however was later dispersed by the Taliban fighters who arrived at the scene in several vehicles, three women protesters told AFP.

"When we were near Kabul



University three Taliban vehicles came, and fighters from one of the vehicles used pepper spray on us," said a protester, who asked not to be named for security reasons.

"My right eye started to burn. I

told one of them 'shame on you', her eyes and face.

and then he pointed his gun at me." An AFP correspondent saw a

Two other protesters said that fighter confiscate a mobile phone of a man who was filming the demonstration.

one of the women had to be taken to hospital after the spray BEING A WOMAN IN TALIBAN- CAUSED AN ALLERGIC REACTION TO RULED AFGHANISTAN

The hardline Islamist group have banned unsanctioned protests and frequently intervened to forcefully break up rallies demanding rights for women.

The Taliban authorities have blocked women public sector employees from returning to work, many secondary schools have still not reopened for girls, and public universities are shut. Long distance trips for women who are not accompanied by a close male relative have been banned.

The authorities have also issued guidelines that prevent television channels from broadcasting serials featuring women actors. Meanwhile, many women are living in hiding, fearful of a regime notorious for human rights abuses during their first stint in power between 1996-2001, before being ousted by a US-led invasion.

## China says it warned away US warship in South China Sea

**China has said that it has warned away a US warship in the South China Sea, in the latest uptick in tensions in the disputed waterway.**

Chinese forces followed and warned away a US warship that entered waters near the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, the country's military said on Thursday, in the latest uptick in tensions in the disputed

waterway. The Southern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army said the USS Benfold "illegally" sailed into Chinese



territorial waters without permission, violating the country's sovereignty, and that Chinese naval and air forces tracked the ship. "We solemnly demand that the US side immediately stop such provocative actions, otherwise it will bear the serious consequences of unforeseen events," it added. The US Navy said the Benfold "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Island, consistent with international law". "At the conclusion of

the operation, USS Benfold exited the excessive claim and continued operations in the South China Sea," 7th Fleet spokesman Mark Langford said. The United States frequently carries out what it calls freedom of

navigation missions in the South China Sea to challenge Chinese territorial claims. China has established military outposts on artificial islands

in the waters, which are crossed by vital shipping lanes and also contain gas fields and rich fishing grounds. The South China Sea has become one of many flashpoints in the testy relationship between China and the United States, with Washington rejecting what it calls unlawful territorial claims by Beijing. China claims vast swaths of the South China Sea. Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines all have overlapping claims.

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# China's population grew by less than half-a-million in 2021; birth rate falls for 5th consecutive year



**According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), at the end of 2021, China's population on the mainland has grown to 1.4126 billion from 1.4120 billion in 2020**

China's population grew to 1.4126 billion by the end of last year, increasing by less than half-a-million as the birth rate fell for the fifth consecutive year, stoking fears of a looming demographic crisis and a consequent economic slowdown in the world's most populous nation. At the end of 2021, China's population on the mainland has grown to 1.4126 billion from 1.4120 billion in 2020, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said.

China's population increased by

480,000 in a year-on-year comparison from 2020, as per the NBS data.

The number of new births in 2021 stood at 10.62 million, down from 12 million in 2020, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. Earlier this month, Henan province, the country's third-most-populous administrative region, reported that its number of newborn children fell to 920,000 in 2020 - a 23.3 per cent decline from 2019 - as the birth rate dropped to 9.24 births per 1,000 people. Experts

have warned that a demographic turning point may be around the corner in China, threatening its booming economic growth, the Post report said.

In such a situation, the ratio of people in the workforce and dependent persons (retired with pension and other benefits) may be adversely affected, straining the economy.

Chinese provinces have started announcing a slew of supportive measures to motivate couples to have three children to prevent a steep decline in birth rates.

Beijing, Sichuan and Jiangxi provinces have rolled out supportive measures such as increased parental leave, maternity leave, marriage leave and paternity leave, state-run Xinhua news agency reported earlier.

China permitted all couples to have two children in 2016, scrapping the draconian decades-old one-child policy which policymakers blame for the current demographic crisis.

Last year, China passed a revised Population and Family Planning

Law allowing Chinese couples to have three children in an apparent attempt to address the reluctance of couples to have more kids due to mounting costs. The decision to permit the third child came after the once-in-a-decade census in 2020 showed that China's population grew at its slowest pace to 1.412 billion. The census figures revealed that the demographic crisis China faced was expected to deepen as the population above 60 years grew to 264 million, up by 18.7 per cent.

## Beijing reports first local Omicron case ahead of Olympics

**Beijing recorded its first local Omicron infection weeks before the Winter Olympic Games are due to start, state media reported on Sunday**

(News Agencies)-Beijing has reported its first local omicron infection, according to state media, weeks before the Winter Olympic Games are due to start.

The infected person lives and works in the city's northwestern district of Haidian and had no travel history outside of Beijing for the past two weeks. The individual experienced symptoms on Thursday and was tested on Friday for Covid-19, officials said in a news



conference Saturday during which they confirmed the infection.

The infection comes less than three weeks before the Winter Olympic Games' opening ceremony on Feb 4., and around two weeks before the start of Lunar New Year celebrations in China. So far, multiple cities in China have reported omicron infections, including Shanghai, the western city of Xi'an, cities in southern Guangdong province such as Zhuhai and Zhongshan,

and the city of Tianjin, which is 30 minutes from Beijing by high-speed rail. Officials across the country have urged residents to stay in their cities for the new year, instead of traveling back to their hometowns. China has adopted a strict "zero-Covid" policy, with authorities locking down residential compounds and even entire cities such as Xi'an when a local outbreak has been discovered in an effort to stamp out community transmission.





# Pakistan launches first-ever National Security Policy; here's what it says about India

**Pakistan on Friday launched its first-ever National Security Policy (NSP) which aims to "deter war" through all elements of national power**

(News Agencies)-Pakistan, in its first-ever National Security Policy (NSP) launched on Friday by Prime Minister Imran Khan, makes it imperative for itself to deter war and defend the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty at "all costs" by using all elements of national power.

The NSP 2022-26, with references to India, has been framed after seven years of diligent and rigorous analysis and consultations led by the National Security Division.

The full 110-page NSP document will remain classified. However, a shorter, nearly 50-page version is being published.

The public version, seen by PTI, is meant to provide an insight into the overall vision and direction of the country's national security. Section V of the policy provides an insight into the traditional concept of security and efforts by policymakers to deal with various threats.

Its guiding principle reads: "Ensure the defence and territorial integrity of Pakistan in all their manifestations." After highlighting various challenges to security, the NSP in its major policy guideline says: "Deter war through all elements of national power, while exercising our right to self-defence if war is imposed." The cardinal policy objective, according to the NSP, is to "defend Pakistan's territorial integrity at all costs" and adds that it was only possible by having the conventional capability and full-spectrum deterrence. "Deter any aggression by maintaining a cost-effective and adaptive military focused on modernisation and optimisation of force structures to ensure adequate conventional capability and maintain full spectrum deterrence within the precincts of credible minimum nuclear deterrence, without getting involved in an arms race," it said. In an apparent reference to India,

it says that "with a regressive and dangerous ideology gripping the collective conscience in our immediate neighbourhood, the prospects of violent conflict have grown immensely."

"The possibility of use of force by the adversary as a deliberate policy choice cannot be ruled out," it adds.

The policy warns that Pakistan is committed to defending its territorial integrity in response to any military misadventure.

"Requisite conventional capabilities will be ensured through astute investment in constant modernisation of our armed forces without embroiling in any arms race," it said.

"In addition, indigenisation of defence production, increased capabilities in network centricity, battlefield awareness, electronic warfare capabilities, and other force multipliers will be prioritised," the policy says.

The NSP says the nuclear deterrence occupies a critical

role in the security calculus of South Asia.

"Pakistan's nuclear capability deters war through full spectrum deterrence within the precincts of credible minimum nuclear deterrence in concert with our conventional military capabilities and all elements of national power," it said.

The policy says the expansion of India's nuclear triad, open-ended statements on nuclear policy, and investments in and introduction of destabilising technologies disturb the strategic balance in the region and Pakistan's deterrence regime is vital for and aimed at regional peace.

The policy says that hybrid warfare is an evolving concept with expanding and blurring boundaries and hybrid threats against Pakistan originate from states and their proxies as well as from non-state actors.

"Pakistan will adopt a holistic,

interconnected whole-of-nation approach to neutralise attempts to undermine Pakistan's security and stability through hybrid warfare," it notes.

It says the security of land, air, and sea borders along with space and cyber domains is paramount.

"Special attention is required to manage lingering border disputes which continue to pose security threats, particularly along the Line of Control and Working Boundary where ceasefire violations by India threaten civilian lives and property while endangering regional stability," it claims. Pakistan should strengthen and enhance space-based technology and its application to meet future challenges to combat disinformation and influence operations while enhancing information and cyber security, data security, and surveillance capacity, it said.



# North Korea fires two suspected missiles in fourth launch this year

The launch came after the North conducted a pair of flight tests of a purported hypersonic missile on January 5 and 11 and also test-fired ballistic missiles from a train on Friday

(News Agencies)-North Korea on Monday fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea in its fourth weapons launch this month, South Korea's military said, with the apparent goal of demonstrating its military might amid paused diplomacy with the United States and pandemic border closures.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North likely fired two ballistic missiles from an area in Sunan, the location of Pyongyang's international airport, but didn't immediately say how far they flew.

Japan's Prime Minister's Office also said it detected a possible ballistic missile launch from North Korea, but didn't immediately provide more details.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida instructed his government to do its utmost to gather information about the launch and ensure the safety of vessels and aircraft.



Japan's Coast Guard issued a warning for vessels traveling around Japanese waters to watch out for falling objects, but no immediate damage was reported. The Coast Guard later said that the North Korean projectile is believed to have already landed but didn't specify where.

The launch came after the North conducted a pair of flight tests of a purported hypersonic missile on Jan. 5 and Jan. 11 and also test-fired ballistic missiles from a train Friday in an apparent reprisal over

fresh sanctions imposed by the Biden administration last week for its continuing test launches.

North Korea has been ramping up tests in recent months of new missiles designed to overwhelm missile defenses in the region.

## US IMPOSES SANCTIONS

Some experts say North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is going back to a tried-and-true technique of pressuring the U.S. and regional neighbors with missile launches and outrageous threats before offering negotiations meant to

extract concessions.

A U.S.-led diplomatic push aimed at convincing North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program collapsed in 2019 after the Trump administration rejected the North's demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities. Kim has since pledged to further expand a nuclear arsenal he clearly sees as his strongest guarantee of survival, despite the country's economy suffering major setbacks amid pandemic-related border closures and persistent U.S.-led sanctions. His government has so far rejected the Biden administration's call to resume dialogue without preconditions, saying that Washington must first abandon its "hostile policy," a term Pyongyang mainly uses to describe sanctions and combined U.S.-South Korea military exercises.

Last week, the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on five North Koreans over their roles in obtaining equipment and technology for the North's missile programs in response to the North's earlier tests this month. The State Department ordered sanctions against another North Korean, a Russian man and a Russian company for their broader support of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction activities, and the Biden administration also said it would pursue additional U.N. sanctions over the North's continued tests. The announcement of the sanctions came just hours after North Korean state media said Kim oversaw a successful test of a hypersonic missile on Tuesday, which was the country's second test of the system in a week, and claimed that the weapon would greatly increase the country's "war deterrent."

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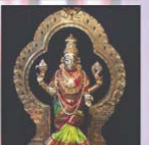
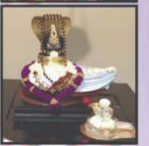


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# Bacha Posh, the Afghan tradition that allows girls to access the freedom of boys



**In the heavily patriarchal, male-dominated society of Afghanistan, where women and girls are usually relegated to the home, there is one tradition which allows girls access to the male world -- bacha posh**

In a Kabul neighborhood, a gaggle of boys kick a yellow ball around a dusty playground, their boisterous cries echoing off the surrounding apartment buildings. Dressed in sweaters and jeans or the traditional Afghan male clothing of baggy pants and long shirt, none stand out as they jostle to score a goal. But unbeknown to them, one is different from the others.

At not quite 8 years old, Sanam is a bacha posh: a girl living as a boy. One day a few months ago, the girl with rosy cheeks and an impish smile had her dark hair cut short, donned boys' clothes and took on a boy's name, Omid. The move opened up a boy's world: playing soccer and cricket with boys, wrestling with the neighborhood butcher's son, working to help the family make ends meet.

In Afghanistan's heavily patriarchal, male-dominated society, where women and girls are usually relegated to the home, bacha posh, Dari for "dressed as a boy," is the one tradition allowing girls access to the freer male world.

Under the practice, a girl dresses, behaves and is treated as a boy, with all the freedoms and obligations that entails. The child can play sports, attend a madrassa, or religious school, and, sometimes crucially for the

family, work. But there is a time limit: Once a bacha posh reaches puberty, she is expected to revert to traditional girls' gender roles. The transition is not always easy. It is unclear how the practice is viewed by Afghanistan's new rulers, the Taliban, who seized power in mid-August and have made no public statements on the issue.

Their rule so far has been less draconian than the last time they were in power in the 1990s, but women's freedoms have still been severely curtailed. Thousands of women have been barred from working, and girls beyond primary school age have not been able to return to public schools in most places.

With a crackdown on women's rights, the bacha posh tradition could become even more attractive for some families. And as the practice is temporary, with the children eventually reverting to female roles, the Taliban might not deal with the issue at all, said Thomas Barfield, a professor of anthropology at Boston University who has written several books on Afghanistan.

"Because it's inside the family and because it's not a permanent status, the Taliban may stay out (of it)," Barfield said.

It is unclear where the practice originated or how old it is, and it is impossible to know how

widespread it might be. A somewhat similar tradition exists in Albania, another deeply patriarchal society, although it is limited to adults. Under Albania's "sworn virgin" tradition, a woman would take an oath of celibacy and declare herself a man, after which she could inherit property, work and sit on a village council - all of which would have been out of bounds for a woman.

In Afghanistan, the bacha posh tradition is "one of the most under-investigated" topics in terms of gender issues, said Barfield, who spent about two years in the 1970s living with an Afghan nomad family that included a bacha posh. "Precisely because the girls revert back to the female role, they marry, it kind of disappears."

Girls chosen as bacha posh usually are the more boisterous, self-assured daughters. "The role fits so well that sometimes even outside the family, people are not aware that it exists," he said.

"It's almost so invisible that it's one of the few gender issues that doesn't show up as a political or social question," Barfield noted. The reasons parents might want a bacha posh vary. With sons traditionally valued more than daughters, the practice usually occurs in families without a boy. Some consider it a status

symbol, and some believe it will bring good luck for the next child to be born a boy.

But for others, like Sanam's family, the choice was one of necessity. Last year, with Afghanistan's economy collapsing, construction work dried up. Sanam's father, already suffering from a back injury, lost his job as a plumber. He turned to selling coronavirus masks on the streets, making the equivalent of \$1-\$2 per day. But he needed a helper.

The family has four daughters and one son, but their 11-year-old boy doesn't have full use of his hands following an injury. So the parents said they decided to make Sanam a bacha posh.

"We had to do this because of poverty," said Sanam's mother, Fahima. "We don't have a son to work for us, and her father doesn't have anyone to help him. So I will consider her my son until she becomes a teenager."

Still, Fahima refers to Sanam as "my daughter." In their native Dari language, the pronouns are not an issue since one pronoun is used for "he" and "she."

Sanam says she prefers living as a boy.

"It's better to be a boy...I wear (Afghan male clothes), jeans and jackets, and go with my father and work," she said. She likes playing in the park with her

brother's friends and playing cricket and soccer.

Once she grows up, Sanam said, she wants to be either a doctor, a commander or a soldier, or work with her father. And she'll go back to being a girl.

"When I grow up, I will let my hair grow and will wear girl's clothes," she said.

The transition isn't always easy. "When I put on girls' clothes, I thought I was in prison," said Najieh, who grew up as a bacha posh, although she would attend school as a girl. One of seven sisters, her boy's name was Assadollah.

Now 34, married and with four children of her own, she weeps for the freedom of the male world she has lost.

"In Afghanistan, boys are more valuable," she said. "There is no oppression for them, and no limits. But being a girl is different. She gets forced to get married at a young age."

Young women can't leave the house or allow strangers to see their face, Najieh said. And after the Taliban takeover, she lost her job as a schoolteacher because she had been teaching boys.

"Being a man is better than being a woman," she said, wiping tears from her eye. "It is very hard for me. ... If I were a man, I could be a teacher in a school."





## Tonga volcano eruption triggers tsunami warnings in Japan, Pacific islands

**An underwater volcano off Tonga triggered tsunami warnings and evacuation orders in Japan and caused large waves at several South Pacific islands**

An underwater volcano off Tonga erupted on Saturday, triggering tsunami warnings and evacuation orders in Japan and causing large waves in several South Pacific islands, where footage on social media showed waves crashing into coastal homes.

Japan's meteorological agency issued tsunami warnings in the early hours on Sunday and said waves as high as three metres (9.84 feet) were expected in the Amami islands in the south. Waves of more than a metre were recorded there earlier.

Public broadcaster NHK said no damage or casualties had been reported, interrupting its regular programming to report on the tsunami advisory spanning the entire eastern

coast of the Japanese archipelago issued by the country's meteorological agency.

In a briefing, a Japan Meteorological Agency official urged people not to go near the sea until the tsunami advisory and more serious tsunami warnings had been lifted. The warnings - the first in more than five years - covered several specific areas.

He said the change in sea levels observed did not follow a familiar pattern of tsunamis following earthquakes.

"We do not know yet whether these (waves) are actually tsunami," he told the briefing.

Tsunami waves were observed in Tonga's capital and the capital of American Samoa, a U.S.-based tsunami monitor said, following the eruption at 0410 GMT

of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai underwater volcano.

The volcano, which lies about 65 km (40 miles) north of Nuku'alofa, caused a 1.2-metre (four-foot) tsunami wave, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said. The bureau said it continued to monitor the situation but no tsunami threat had been issued to the Australian mainland, islands or territories.

Tsunami waves of 83 cm (2.7 feet) were recorded by gauges in the Tongan capital of Nuku'alofa and two-foot waves were seen at Pago Pago, the capital of American Samoa, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said.

Fiji issued a tsunami warning, urging residents to avoid the shorelines "due to strong currents and dangerous waves". Jese Tuisinu, a television

reporter at Fiji One, posted a video on Twitter showing large waves crashing ashore, with people trying to flee in their cars.

"It is literally dark in parts of Tonga and people are rushing to safety following the eruption," he said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties. In New Zealand, the emergency management agency issued an advisory on tsunami activity for the country's north and east coasts, forecasting strong and unusual currents and unpredictable surges along shorelines in those areas. On Friday, the volcano sent ash, steam and gas up to 20 km (12 miles) into the air, Tonga Geological Services said in a Facebook post. It has a radius of 260 km (160 miles).

## Paraguay wildfires leave burned animals in their wake

Wildfires in southern Paraguay have left behind dozens of scorched livestock and 10,000 hectares of burned forests and grasslands during the last three days, local authorities reported. Reuters video showed on Friday (January 14) burnt, and rotting carcasses of livestock were strewn on grasslands, stark evidence of the devastating effects of massive bushfires on cattle unable to flee in time or trapped behind fences. According to firefighters, some 200 cattle, sheep, horses, and wild animals have died due to the fires that started on Tuesday (January 11) in Caapucu, southern Paraguay, following the burning of garbage in the area. Emergency crews have been working since Wednesday morning (January 12) to control the fires that have also ravaged crops.







## Worshippers at Texas synagogue had offered tea to their captor before he held them hostage

**The worshippers at a Texas synagogue had offered tea to their captor before he brandished a gun and held them hostage in a 10-hour siege**

Worshippers invited a stranger into a Texas synagogue when he knocked on their door and offered him tea before he brandished a gun and held them hostage in a 10-hour siege the FBI called a "terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted."

Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, who was among the four congregants taken captive on Saturday, the Jewish sabbath, told CBS on Monday that he and others managed to escape after he threw a chair at the hostage-taker and then rushed for an exit door.

The FBI identified the man as Malik

Faisal Akram, a 44-year-old British citizen.

"When I took him in, I stayed with him. Making tea was an opportunity for me to talk to him. And in that moment, I didn't hear anything suspicious. Some of his story didn't quite add up, so I was a little bit curious, but that's not necessarily an uncommon thing," the rabbi said.

The rabbi returned to prayer, after which he said he "heard a click - and it could have been anything - but it turned out it was his gun."

One hostage was released unharmed after six hours of tense negotiations

aided by the suspect's family. The incident ended in gunfire with the suspect dead as members of an FBI hostage rescue team raided the synagogue.

It was unclear whether the gunman took his own life or was killed by members of the FBI team. The FBI said its Joint Terrorism Task Force was investigating the incident.

Cytron-Walker, the rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, west of Dallas, Texas, said he drew on hostage training from the FBI to determine when to try to escape.

"When I saw an opportunity where he

wasn't in a good position, I made sure that the two gentlemen who were still with me, that they were ready to go, (and that) the exit wasn't too far away," Cytron-Walker said.

"I told them to go. I threw a chair at the gunman, and I headed for the door, and all three of us were able to get out without even a shot being fired."

Police in England said they detained two teenagers for questioning in connection with the case.

Hate crimes targeting the US Jewish community constitute over half of all religion-based crimes nationwide, the Anti-Defamation League said.

## Tonga volcano eruption: Satellite images capture destruction in South Pacific islands

New satellite imagery captured on Tuesday morning shows the aftermath and damage caused by a large eruption of an undersea volcano in the South Pacific nation of Tonga. Continuous smoke kept rising from the underwater Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai (HTHH) volcano before the eruption on January 15. Tsunami waves were noticed across the Pacific

Ocean as the eruption sent a huge plume about 30 kilometres into the sky. Today's satellite imagery provided by Maxar Technologies shows the destruction of the volcanic island as well as the volcanic debris floating in the ocean. Pictures also show land and trees in the nearby areas coated with ash and damage inflicted by the undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami. Damages near the main port facilities in

Nuku'alofa, possibly caused by the tsunami, are also observed in today's pictures.

According to the United Nations, significant infrastructural damages around Tongatapu have been reported. "There has been no contact with the Ha'apai Group of islands, and we are particularly concerned about two small low-lying islands - Mango and Fonoi - following surveillance flights confirming substantial

property damage," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric. Satellite images provided by Maxar Technologies showed homes with roofs before the eruption now covered in ash on the nearby islands.

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology estimated a 1.2-metre tsunami wave at Nuku'alofa at 5.30 pm local time on Saturday. The shockwave following the final eruption

travelled at over 1,000 km per hour and caused extensive damages at Nuku'alofa port. Due to the damages caused to the undersea communications cable that connects Tonga with the rest of the world, the island is left with limited communication. Aid deliveries to Tonga have also been affected due to the volcanic ash. Tonga has 169 islands, of which only 36 are inhabited.





# US airlines warn of 'chaos' ahead of 5G roll-out; Indian pilots have sounded warning bells too

**Major US airlines have warned of "chaos" and "catastrophic disruption" as the country prepares to roll-out 5G 'C-Band' service on January 19**

intervention "to avoid significant operational disruption to air passengers, shippers, supply chain and delivery of needed medical supplies" due to 5G services.

'Airlines of America' includes aviation companies such as American Airlines, Delta Airlines, Alaska Air, United Airlines, Jet Blue Airways, FedEx Express, Southwest Airlines, among others. In their letter, the CEOs wrote, "We are writing with urgency to request that 5G be implemented everywhere in the country except within the approximate 2 miles (3.2 kms) of airport runways at affected airports as defined by the FAA on January 19, 2022. This will allow 5G to be deployed while avoiding harmful impacts on the aviation industry, traveling public, supply chain, vaccine distribution, our workforce and broader economy."

On Sunday, the Federal Aviation Administration in a statement said, it has "cleared an estimated 45 percent of the US commercial fleet to perform low-visibility landings at many of the airports where 5G C-band will be deployed on January 19." "The agency approved two radio altimeter models that are installed in a wide variety of Boeing and Airbus planes. This combination of aircraft and altimeter approval opens up runways at as many as 48 of the 88 airports most directly affected by 5G C-band interference," it added. In response to this, the CEOs of airlines said in their letter the FAA's clearance did not apply to major hubs, which would essentially mean the vast majority of the

travelling and shipping public would be "grounded".

"This means that on a day like yesterday (Sunday), more than 1,100 flights and 100,000 passengers would be subjected to cancellations, diversions or delays," they explained.

They also warned that flight restrictions will not be limited to poor weather operations. "Because radio altimeters provide critical information to other

safety and navigation systems in modern airplanes, multiple modern safety systems on aircraft will be

deemed unusable causing a much larger problem than what we knew on January 5, 2022. Airplane manufacturers have informed us that there are huge swaths of the operating fleet that may need to be indefinitely grounded," the top executives of airlines wrote in their warning letter. "In addition to the chaos caused domestically, this lack of usable widebody aircraft could potentially strand tens of thousands of Americans overseas," they said painting a grim picture.

AT&T and Verizon, which won nearly all of the C-Band spectrum in an \$80 billion auction last year, on January 3 agreed to buffer zones around 50 airports to reduce interference risks and take other steps to cut potential interference for six months. They also agreed to delay

deployment for two weeks until Wednesday (January 19), temporarily averting an aviation safety standoff, news agency Reuters reported.

But the airlines are not convinced enough has been done. In a separate statement on Monday, United Airlines said, "The federal government's current 5G rollout plan will have a devastating impact on aviation, negatively affecting an estimated 1.25 million United

passengers, at least 15,000 flights and much-needed goods and tons of cargo

traveling through more than 40 of the largest airports in the country annually." They warned, "When deployed next to runways, the 5G signals could interfere with the key safety equipment that pilots rely on to take off and land in inclement weather. We won't compromise on safety - full stop." United Airlines said they are simply asking the US government to design policy for safe deployment of 5G technology, "otherwise, the radio altimeters on certain aircraft, which provide information to other safety systems like autopilot, heads-up displays, terrain warning and pitch control, will be compromised and will result in significant restrictions on 787s, 777s, 737s and regional aircraft in major cities like Houston, Newark, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago."

JetBlue Airways CEO Robin Hayes too warned of significant flight disruptions starting Wednesday. In a letter to crewmembers, he said, "The particular frequency of 5G being rolled out is close to that used by aircraft radar altimeters - the devices that measure altitude when our aircraft are closest to the ground and that are used by a number of other aircraft systems."

How does it affect India?

The aviation versus 5G debate has reached India too. On January 4, the Federation of Indian Pilots wrote a letter to Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia warning of the impact 5G services can potentially have on aircraft operations.

In the letter, Captain Surinder Mehta, president of the pilots' body, wrote, "Federation of Indian Pilots request DGCA and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India to work together to develop a plan that enables the safe and efficient implementation of 5G mobile communications services in the C-Band. It is critical to fully understand and mitigate potential 5G signal interference with radio altimeters that are integral to aircraft safety systems. We understand activation of these services is scheduled to commence soon in select cities in India." "Restricting the use of safety-critical systems when in the vicinity of 5G interference, as outlined in recent FAA ADs (airworthiness directives), is not a viable long-term solution. We should always be working to improve the situational awareness of flight crews, not restricting it," the letter added.

**The aviation versus 5G debate has reached India too. On January 4, the Federation of Indian Pilots wrote a letter to Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia warning of the impact 5G services can potentially have on aircraft operations**



# Britain says it is supplying anti-tank weapons to Ukraine

Moscow denies any plans for an attack, but has said it could take unspecified military action unless the West agrees to a list of demands, including banning Ukraine from ever joining NATO. Talks last week ended with no breakthrough. Kyiv has asked Western countries for arms to help it protect itself.

"We have taken the decision to supply Ukraine with light anti-armour defensive weapon systems," British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told parliament, saying the first systems were already delivered on Monday and a small number

of British personnel would provide training for a short or type of weapons that were



period of time.

being sent, but said: "They are

not strategic weapons and pose no threat to Russia. They are to use in self-defence."

"These are short-range .... but nevertheless it would make people pause and think what they were doing and if tanks were to roll into Ukraine, invade it, then they would be part of the defence mechanism." Ukraine's defence minister welcomed Wallace's announcement.

"Ukraine highly appreciates Britain's decision to provide a new security package with light, anti-armour, defensive weapon systems!" Oleksii Reznikov said in a tweet.

Britain has previously warned Russia of severe consequences if it launched a new military assault on Ukraine, while offering financing to enhance Ukraine's naval capabilities.

Wallace said he had invited Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu to visit London in the next few weeks to discuss the crisis, though he did not know whether the Russians would accept.

"The current gap is wide but not unbridgeable," Wallace said, voicing the hope that diplomacy would prevail and adding, "It is President (Vladimir) Putin's choice."



## Indian embassy calls for dialogue with Nepal on Lipulekh boundary issue

The outrage began after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an election rally in the Haldwani area of Uttarakhand on December 30, had announced that his government has extended a road to Lipulekh and further expansion work is going on. The Indian Embassy issued a statement on the ongoing high political activity in Kathmandu, with ruling and opposition leaders urging the Nepal government to take a more

forceful stance on the latest development along the border with India.

"The Government of India's position on the India-Nepal boundary is well known, consistent, and unambiguous. It has been communicated to the Government of Nepal," the statement said.

Nepal has called the construction of the road by India as a "unilateral" action.

"It is our view that the established inter-governmental

mechanisms and channels are most appropriate for communication and dialogue. Mutually agreed boundary issues that are outstanding can always be addressed in the spirit of our close and friendly bilateral relations," the embassy added.

Lipulekh, which lies at the tri-junction between India's northern Uttarakhand state, China and Nepal, is claimed by Kathmandu.

Earlier, the ruling Nepali

Congress issued a statement and demanded India to immediately withdraw its troops stationed in the Kalapani region and amicably resolve the border row through high-level diplomatic negotiation based on historical facts and evidence.

"Nepali Congress is clear that Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura, and Kalapani are Nepalese territories. The issue of the road construction in Lipulekh against the agreement reached at the Nepal-India Joint Commission to

resolve all bilateral issues through diplomatic negotiations is objectionable and this must be stopped immediately," the statement said.

Major political parties in Nepal have issued statements objecting to India's expansion of roads in Lipulekh.

Calls are now growing from within the ruling alliance, from Deuba's Nepali Congress and his coalition partners, to speak up and lodge a protest with India on Modi's recent statement.





# Peru beaches suffer oil spill blamed on waves from Tonga volcanic eruption

The National Emergency Operations Center said in a statement that the spill had been brought under control. Environment Minister Ruben Ramirez said the accident had affected a three-kilometer (two-mile) stretch along three beaches. "There is great damage to biodiversity, and it could even impact human health," he said. "And so it has been ordered that the area is cut off for all kinds of activity," Ramirez told reporters. Pampilla could face a fine of up to \$34.5 million, the environment ministry said, as prosecutors opened an investigation into the company for environmental contamination. Pampilla -- which did not indicate exactly how much oil was spilled -- said it was working with authorities to clean up the affected beaches. Ships worked on collecting oil still floating in the water, while workers in protective gear began cleaning oil that had washed ashore. "We want to tell the environment ministry to please follow up, and that those responsible receive a punishment, because this affects the fishermen, the population that they feed with the fish, and marine animals," local Ventanilla resident Brenda Ramos told AFP. Elsewhere in Peru, two women drowned after being caught in waves caused by the volcanic eruption in Tonga. The island nation, in the southwest Pacific, has been nearly entirely cut off from the outside world after the eruption severed an undersea communications cable. The eruption was recorded around the globe and heard as far away as Alaska, triggering a tsunami that flooded Pacific coastlines from Japan to the United States.

## Plan to 'dim sun rays' gets thumbs down from experts. Here is why



help of planetary-scale engineering schemes should be blocked by governments. The consequences of highly debated plan of solar radiation modification (SRM) could outweigh any benefits, they said in an open letter.

The plan looks to inject billions of sulphur particles into the middle atmosphere to turn back a critical fraction of the sun's rays to check global warming. It seems to have been also known for a long time that injecting a large quantity of reflective particles into the upper atmosphere have the potential to cool the planet. "Solar geoengineering deployment cannot be

governed globally in a fair, inclusive and effective manner," the letter said.

The letter has been supported by a commentary in the WIREs Climate Change journal.

"We therefore call for immediate political action from governments, the United Nations and other actors to prevent the normalisation of solar geoengineering as a climate policy option," it added.

Raising hopes about a quick fix for climate "can disincentivise governments, businesses and societies to do their utmost to achieve decarbonisation or carbon neutrality as soon as possible", cautioned the letter.

## BJP to face ring of fire in upcoming state elections

The senior leader utilizes his personal good relationship with the opposition leaders for the purpose too. Another face of the opposition unity is shown when it was announced that the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee would campaign for Samajwadi Party in the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly poll. The Trinamool Congress under her leadership stated that they will not contest the election in that state, after meeting with SP vice-president Kiranmay Nanda. However, BJP received a major boost when Aparna Yadav, daughter-in-law of former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and SP leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav joined BJP. Going against the trend of migration, the joining will surely booze the morale of BJP leaders and workers alike.

The battle is uphill for the BJP in the state elections this time, as in most states they are in

power and the air of anti-incumbency is quite high. In Punjab, the condition is a bit different where Congress is in power. However, the former CM of Punjab from Congress, Captain Amarinder Singh, moved away and formed his own party called Punjab Lok Congress (PLC). Also, he announced an alliance with the BJP for the scheduled assembly elections. The wisdom and trick formed by Amit Shah, the present Minister of Home Affairs and former BJP president, has rescued the party from dire straits several times in the past. This time too, the stakes are high. BJP cannot lose any of the states and also will try to capture the state of Punjab if they want to stay as the strongest contender in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Any other outcome and the political domination of BJP in India may have to face challenges in the coming year.





## Cuomo has \$16 million in campaign cash and no campaign. What now?

Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo may have resigned in disgrace last year amid accusations of sexual harassment, but he still controls a war chest of more than \$16 million, according to records released Tuesday.

Cuomo, once one of the strongest fundraisers in the Democratic Party, left office last summer with \$18 million in campaign funds. It was a staggering amount, especially for a departing official — though that sum has been surpassed by his successor, Gov. Kathy Hochul, whose team announced Tuesday that her campaign raised nearly \$21.6 million in five months, with more than \$21 million in cash on hand.

The most recent disclosure report showed that Cuomo's stockpile had diminished since leaving office, as he made significant expenditures to law firms, reflecting the morass of legal difficulties he has confronted.

But with more than \$16.4 million in cash on hand, Cuomo remains among the best-funded political figures in New York.

Cuomo is not fundraising as a candidate, but he has continued to communicate with supporters and to pay a few advisers — and he has also continued to take in some donations, in particular low-dollar donations, some of which came from outside New York. Some associates have said he appears interested in regaining relevance in public life, even as many big-spending onetime allies have cut ties. He reported more than \$200,000 in contributions and more than \$2 million in expenditures for the latest campaign finance period.

The release comes several weeks after top prosecutors in Nassau, Westchester and Albany counties declared the sexual harassment allegations against Cuomo to be disturbing, credible and serious, but concluded that they would not prosecute him for a crime.

Cuomo has plainly been emboldened by those developments.

Last week, Cuomo's lawyer, Rita Glavin, held a news conference in which she questioned the credibility of some of the women who accused Cuomo of misconduct, and laced into the state attorney general's office, which oversaw the investigation that concluded Cuomo sexually harassed 11 women. She declined to speculate on Cuomo's political future, but said he was exploring "whatever legal options he has available to him." Cuomo's campaign arm paid for an email to supporters Tuesday morning that sharply criticized Attorney General Letitia James and promoted Glavin's appearance. James and her team have strongly defended the report. At the same time, Cuomo has remained in touch with associates and onetime allies, sounding some of them out over

the past several months about the political landscape, even as many Democrats have made clear they hope he stays on the sidelines. One Democrat familiar with some of Cuomo's calls said that he appeared to have started increasing his outreach in the New York political arena this month, as a judge dismissed a criminal complaint that had accused him of groping a former aide in the Executive Mansion in late 2020. Another person who spoke with him in recent weeks said Cuomo gave the impression that he was seeking vindication, and made clear that he believed those who had called for his resignation had made a mistake. Cuomo could use his remaining funds beyond any effort to seek office himself, from making political donations — though accepting money from him would be politically fraught for many Democrats — to attacking perceived adversaries to efforts to improve his image.

## Indonesia passes law to shift capital from Jakarta to Nusantara

Indonesian parliament on Tuesday formally approved a bill giving go-ahead to shifting the national capital from Jakarta to Kalimantan on Borneo. New name of the capital will be Nusantara. First article of the bill formalised the name of the new capital Nusantara and defined the status of the city, which will become the new political center of the country with all embassies and representative offices of foreign organizations transferred there. Nusantara was declared a city of regional significance. Administration of Nusantara would become the state body responsible for managing the new capital. The president will appoint and dismiss the head of administration and his deputy, whose term of office is limited to five years. Indonesian President Joko Widodo announced the planned relocation of the Indonesian capital from the Jakarta metropolitan area to East Kalimantan in 2019. The authorities said a new capital was needed due to the congestion of the current capital, as well as in order to accelerate the economic development of Kalimantan. The project, estimated to cost over \$30 billion, has been put on hold due to COVID-19 epidemic. Shifting of Indonesian capital was necessitated due to rising concerns over the sustainability of the city due to congestion. Jakarta is also sinking very fast.

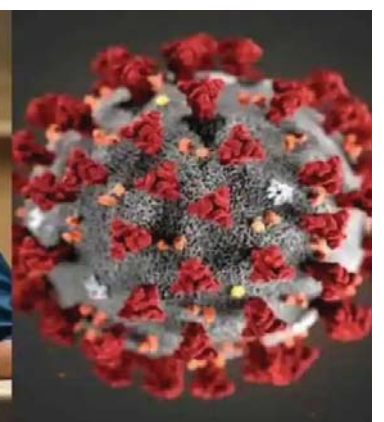
"The relocation of the capital city to Kalimantan is based on several considerations, regional advantages, and welfare. With the vision of the birth of a new economic center of gravity in the middle of the archipelago," said Suharso Monoarfa, the country's Minister of National Development Planning. The minister was quoted by Indonesia Parliament TV.

## Do healthy kids need booster shots against COVID? WHO's chief scientist answers

Soumya Swaminathan, the top scientist of the World Health Organization (WHO), stated that there is no evidence that healthy children and adolescents require COVID-19 booster doses. In the case of Omicron, she stated that each new variety does not necessitate the development of a new vaccination. At a press conference on Wednesday, she said, "There is no evidence right now that healthy children or healthy adolescents need

boosters," "No evidence at all." This comes as other countries, including the United States, Germany, and Israel, have begun to distribute booster doses to children. In the meantime, India began vaccination of youngsters aged 15 to 18 years old earlier this month. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of a third dosage of the Pfizer and BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine as a "booster" shot for children aged 12 to 15 years earlier this month, putting the

US in the lead in delivering booster doses to children. The WHO, on the other hand, has not totally discarded the need for booster doses in certain vulnerable groups of the population. According to Swaminathan, a group of renowned academics will meet later this week to discuss how governments should consider distributing boosters to their populations. "The aim is to protect the most vulnerable, to protect those at the highest



risk of severe disease and death," she said. "Those are our elderly populations,

immuno-compromised people with underlying conditions, but also healthcare workers."



# 5G wireless rollout

## Major airlines set to suspend flights to US



Major international airlines rushed to rejig or cancel flights to the United States ahead of a 5G wireless rollout on Wednesday that has triggered safety concerns, despite two wireless carriers saying they will delay parts of the deployment. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had warned that potential 5G interference could affect height readings that play a key role in bad-weather landings on some jets and airlines say the Boeing 777 is among models initially in the spotlight despite an announcement by AT&T and Verizon that they would pause the 5G rollout. Late Tuesday, the FAA began updating its guidance on which airports and aircraft models would be affected, in a move expected to dramatically lessen the impact of the nearly 1,500 notices of 5G restrictions issued by the regulator.

The world's largest operator of the Boeing 777, Dubai's Emirates, said earlier it would suspend flights to nine US destinations from January 19, the planned date for the deployment of 5G

wireless services. Emirates flights to New York's JFK, Los Angeles and Washington DC will continue to operate. Japan's two major airlines, All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines, said they would curtail Boeing 777 flights. ANA said it was cancelling or changing the aircraft used on some U.S. flights. Korean Air Lines said it had switched away from 777s and 747-8s on six US passenger and cargo flights, Taiwan's China Airlines said it would reschedule some flights and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways said it would deploy different aircraft types if needed. The airlines said they were acting in response to a notice from Boeing that 5G signals may interfere with the radio altimeter on the 777, leading to restrictions. A spokesman for Boeing had no immediate comment. The 777 last year was the second-most used widebody plane on flights to and from US airports with around 210,000 flights, behind only the 767, according to data from FlightRadar24. Industry sources said Boeing had issued technical

advisories noting potential interference, but that flight restrictions were in the hands of the FAA, which has for now limited operations at key airports unless airlines qualify for special approvals.

Radio altimeters give precise readings of the height above the ground on approach and help with automated landings, as well as verifying the jet has landed before allowing reverse thrust. Air India, which serves four US destinations with Boeing 777s, said those flights would be curtailed or face changes in aircraft type starting from Wednesday. Singapore Airlines said it had switched the aircraft used on select US routes based on guidance from Boeing and in consultation with its regulators. The announcement of cancellations came despite the wireless carriers delaying turning on some 5G towers near key airports. Airline industry sources said the decision had arrived too late to affect complex aircraft and crewing decisions for some Wednesday flights. British Airways opted to switch aircraft on its

daily flight to Los Angeles to an Airbus A380 from the usual Boeing 777 service, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters. Web tracker Flightradar24 said the A350 may also be used. The radio altimeters on the two Airbus jets have been cleared while the planemaker is still assessing its other models. The 777 mini-jumbo is a workhorse of the long-haul travel market that remains depressed following COVID-19, while its freighter equivalent has reshaped the aviation route map during the pandemic, according to a spokesperson for Flightradar24. Not all 777 flights are affected. Emirates, which is also a major user of the larger A380, will switch to the larger aircraft for Los Angeles and New York but keep flying the 777 to Washington, which is not affected. Qatar Airways, which operates both 777s and A350s to the United States, said all 12 of its US routes were operating as scheduled, with minor delays expected on flights from the U.S. to Doha. Israel's El Al said its services had not been affected.

## Pakistan geo-economic transition can't succeed without shift in its India policy

The case for major reform to get Pakistan out of the multiple crises confronting it has been articulated by its Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, in recent years. The "Bajwa Doctrine" emphasises the importance of restoring peace within by putting down various internal insurgencies, reviving economic growth, reconciling with the neighbours, rebuilding ties with the US without abandoning the strategic partnership with China, and regaining its traditional political goodwill in the Gulf. General Bajwa tied together many of these ideas in a well-received speech last March. The National Security Policy document issued by Islamabad last week is an effort to codify the Bajwa Doctrine into an actionable statement of purpose and a strategy for its realisation. The document identifies a

wide range of unexceptionable goals; what stands out is the ambition to integrate economic development into the traditional military conception of national security. The external complement to this is the emphasis on "geo-economics" in contrast to the traditional obsession of the Pakistan Army with "geopolitics". The former focuses on trade and connectivity while the latter is about power and its projection. No one has a higher stake than India in the success of the Bajwa doctrine that calls for a Pakistan at peace with itself and the region. Does Pakistan, however, have the will and capability to implement it? One reason development took a back seat to security in Pakistan is the political dominance of the army that cornered most of the economic resources, in the name of protecting the nation from the "Indian

threat". Even if the army cedes some ground, can it crack the economic stranglehold of the small but entrenched rentier classes? Pakistan has gone to the IMF more than twenty times but has been unable to forge long overdue structural changes in the economy. If the NSP is about modernising Pakistan, Imran Khan is looking to the past for political survival amidst growing unpopularity of his government whose economic incompetence imposed huge costs on the people. Barely two days after releasing the National Security Policy, Imran Khan published an op-ed outlining his vision for "Riyasat-e-Madina" in Pakistan based on the order that Prophet Mohammed had created in Madina after leading his followers out of Mecca in the early seventh century. That Imran Khan may not be in

sync with the army is also borne out by India's recent engagement with Pakistan. Delhi negotiated a ceasefire agreement with the Pakistan Army last February that was to be followed by a series of confidence-building measures, including trade. The decision to resume limited overland commerce was quickly overturned by Imran Khan, who insisted there can be no engagement with India until Delhi reversed the 2019 constitutional changes in Kashmir. Pakistan's geo-economic transition can't succeed without a fundamental shift in its India policy. Discarding the many impossible goals that Islamabad has set for itself against Delhi and coming to terms with Pakistan's relative economic decline in relation to India will be immensely painful.





# China's economy is slowing, a worrying sign for the world

Construction and property sales have slumped. Small businesses have shut because of rising costs and weak sales. Debt-laden local governments are cutting the pay of civil servants. China's economy slowed markedly in the final months of last year as government measures to limit real estate speculation hurt other sectors as well. Lockdowns and travel restrictions to contain the coronavirus also dented consumer spending. Stringent regulations on everything from internet businesses to after-school tutoring companies have set off a wave of layoffs. China's National Bureau of Statistics said Monday that economic output from October through December was only 4% higher than during the same period a year earlier. That was a deceleration from the 4.9% growth in the third quarter, July through September. The world's demand for consumer electronics, furniture and other home comforts during the pandemic has produced record-setting exports for China, preventing its growth from stalling. Overall of last year, China's economic output was 8.1% higher than in 2020, the government said. But much of the growth was in the first half of last year.

The snapshot of China's economy, the main locomotive of global growth in the past few years, adds to expectations that the broader world economic outlook is beginning to dim. Making matters worse, the omicron variant of the coronavirus is now starting to spread in China, leading to more restrictions around the country and raising fears of renewed disruption of supply chains. The slowing economy poses a quandary for China's leaders. The measures they have imposed to address income inequality and rein in companies are part of a long-term plan to protect the economy and national security. But officials are wary of causing short-term economic instability, particularly in a year of unusual political importance.

Next month, Beijing hosts the Winter Olympics, which will focus an international spotlight on the country's performance. In the fall, Xi Jinping, China's leader, is expected to claim a third five-year term at a Communist Party congress. Xi has sought to strike an optimistic note. "We have every confidence in the future of China's economy," he said in a speech on Monday to a virtual session of the World Economic

Forum. But with growth in his country slowing, demand slackening and debt still at near-record levels, Xi could face some of the biggest economic challenges since Deng Xiaoping began lifting the country out of its Maoist straitjacket four decades ago. "I'm afraid that the operation and development of China's economy in the next several years may be relatively difficult," Li Daokui, a prominent economist and Chinese government adviser, said in a speech late last month. "Looking at the five years as a whole, it may be the most difficult period since our reform and opening up 40 years ago." China also faces the problem of a rapidly a g i n g population, which could create an even greater burden on China's economy and its labour force. The National

Bureau of Statistics said Monday that China's birthrate fell sharply last year and was now barely higher than the death rate.

Private Sector Struggles As costs for many raw materials have risen and the pandemic has prompted some consumers to stay home, millions of private businesses have crumbled, most of them small and family owned. That is a big concern because private companies are the backbone of the Chinese economy, accounting for three-fifths of output and four-fifths of urban employment. Kang Shiqing invested much of his savings nearly three years ago to open a women's clothing store in Nanping, a river town in Fujian province in southeast China. But when the pandemic hit a year later, the number of customers dropped drastically and never recovered. As in many countries, there has been a broad shift in China toward online shopping, which can undercut stores by using less labour and operating from inexpensive warehouses. Kang was stuck paying high rent for his store despite the pandemic. He finally closed it in June. "We can hardly survive," he said. Another persistent difficulty for small businesses in China is the high cost of borrowing, often at double-digit interest rates from private lenders. Chinese leaders are aware of the

challenges private companies face. Premier Li Keqiang has promised further cuts in taxes and fees to help the country's many struggling small businesses. On Monday, China's central bank made a small move to reduce interest rates, which could help reduce slightly the interest costs of the country's heavily indebted real estate developers. The central bank pushed down by about a tenth of a percentage point its interest rate benchmarks for one-week and one-year lending. Construction Stalls The building and fitting out of new homes has represented one-quarter of China's economy. Heavy lending and widespread speculation

have helped China erect the equivalent of 140 square feet of new housing for every urban resident in the past two decades. This

autumn, the sector faltered. The government wants to limit speculation and deflate a bubble that had made new homes unaffordable for young families. China Evergrande Group is only the largest and most visible of a lengthening list of real estate developers in China that have run into severe financial difficulty lately. Kaisa Group, China Aoyuan Property Group and Fantasia are among other developers that have struggled to make payments as bond investors become more wary of lending money to China's real estate sector. As real estate companies try to conserve cash, they are starting fewer construction projects. And that has been a big problem for the economy. The price of steel reinforcing bars for the concrete in apartment towers, for example, dropped by one-quarter in October and November before stabilizing at a much lower level in December. The decline in home prices in smaller cities has hurt the value of people's assets, which in turn made them less willing to spend. Even in Shanghai and Beijing, apartment prices are no longer surging. There have been faint hints of renewed government support for the real estate sector in recent weeks, but no sign

of a return to lavish lending by state-controlled banks.

The financial distress of Evergrande "is a signal that money will be pushed from real estate to the stock market," said Hu Jinghui, an economist who is the former chair of the China Alliance of Real Estate Agencies, a national trade group. "The policies can be loosened, but there can be no return to the past." Local Governments Feel the Pinch The slowdown in the housing market has also hurt local governments, which rely on land sales as a key source of revenue. The International Monetary Fund estimates that government land sales each year have been raising money equal to 7% of the country's annual economic output. But in recent months, developers have curtailed land purchases.

Starved of revenue, some local governments have halted hiring and cut bonuses and benefits for civil servants, prompting widespread complaints on social media. In Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province, a civil servant's complaint of a 25% cut in her pay spread quickly on the internet. The municipal government did not respond to a fax requesting comment. In northern Heilongjiang province, the city of Hegang announced that it would not hire any more "low-level" workers. City officials deleted the announcement from the government's website after it drew public attention. Some governments have also raised fees on businesses to try to make up for the shortfall. Bazhou, a city in Hebei province, collected 11 times as much money in fines on small businesses from October through December as it did in the first nine months of last year. Beijing criticized the city for undermining a national effort to reduce the cost of doing business. Pockets of Strength in Exports Strong overseas demand for China's exports, particularly consumer goods, spurred a national wave of new factory investments, up 13.5% last year from 2020. Some areas of consumer spending have been fairly robust, notably the luxury sector, with sports cars and jewellery selling well. Retail sales rebounded 12.5% last year compared with pandemic-depressed levels in 2020. But retail sales fell in December from November, as coronavirus restrictions kept some shoppers at home.

**China is the high cost of borrowing, often at double-digit interest rates from private lenders. Chinese leaders are aware of the challenges private companies face. Premier Li Keqiang has promised further cuts in taxes and fees to help the country's many struggling small businesses**



# Explained: The Devas-Antrix deal and its aftermath

**The Supreme Court has upheld the liquidation of Devas, whose foreign investors continue to fight for compensation following the cancelled 2005 satellite deal with Antrix. A look at the deal, and the ripples from the scrapping.**

A 2005 satellite deal between Antrix Corporation — the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) — and Devas Multimedia Pvt Ltd, a start-up headquartered in Bengaluru, is at the heart of a global legal tussle between the Indian government and foreign investors in Devas. The tussle is a fallout of the cancellation of the deal in 2011 by the then UPA government citing requirement of satellite spectrum allotted to Devas for security purposes.

On Monday, the Supreme Court upheld a May 25, 2021 order of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) to liquidate Devas on the ground that the firm was created under fraudulent circumstances. The order came even as three Mauritius-based investors and a German telecom major have approached federal courts in the United States to seize assets linked to the Indian government such as those of Air India. The investors have won separate compensation awards in international tribunals, including \$1.2 billion awarded by an International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) tribunal on September 14, 2015. The Supreme Court has kept the \$1.2 billion award in abeyance. **What was the Devas-Antrix deal?**

They signed an "Agreement for the Lease of Space Segment Capacity on ISRO/Antrix S-band spacecraft by Devas Multimedia Pvt Ltd" on January 28, 2005, a month after Devas was incorporated in Bengaluru in December 2004 by two former ISRO employees. Under the deal, ISRO would lease to Devas two communication satellites (GSAT-6 and 6A) for 12 years for Rs 167 crore. Devas would provide multimedia services to mobile platforms in India using S-band transponders on the satellites, with ISRO



leasing 70 MHz of S-band spectrum. The deal progressed smoothly for six years before it was annulled by the UPA government on February 25, 2011, following a Cabinet Committee on Security decision of February 17 to terminate the agreement to use the S-band for security purposes. The government decision was taken in the midst of the 2G scam and allegations that the Devas deal involved the handing over of communication spectrum valued at nearly Rs 2 lakh crore for a pittance. How was Devas formed?

At the turn of the century, the telecom revolution threw open the possibility of satellite-based systems providing Internet services to remote areas, and top experts from ISRO began consulting global satellite communication experts in 2002-03.

According to ISRO officials from the period, the International Telecommunication Union granted India S-band spectrum in the 1970s and some of this was with ISRO. By 2003, there was a fear that the spectrum would be lost if not used effectively; 40 MHz of S-band was given to the DoT for terrestrial use and 70 MHz was to be put to efficient use by the DoS. Some of the initial consultations that eventually led to the creation of Devas

took place in the US between top ISRO officials and a US consultancy, Forge Advisors, which had satellite communication experts like Ramachandran Vishwanathan, and ex-ISRO employees D Venugopal and M G Chandrashekar. Initially an MoU was signed by Forge and Antrix in July 2003 for use of the satellite spectrum for growth of communication systems in India, but later a start-up was envisaged, and Devas Multimedia was floated.

In end-2005, the Cabinet approved the creation of GSAT-6 by ISRO for providing satellite-based video and audio services. Following this, Devas was able to attract foreign investors. Mauritius based Columbia Capital/Devas and Telcom/Devas picked up stakes for \$15 million initially in 2006 and 2007, followed by an investment of \$99.2 million in 2008-09 by the German firm Deutsche Telekom through a Singapore arm. Devas got a total of Rs 579 crore foreign investment with clearances from the Foreign Investment Promotion Board. Deutsche Telekom held 20.7% of the stake while three Mauritius investors held 37.5% when the deal was annulled in 2011.

**What happened after the scrapping?**

Devas and its foreign investors approached various international tribunals and

courts seeking compensation. Devas was awarded compensation of \$1.2 billion by an International Chamber of Commerce tribunal on September 14, 2015. Deutsche Telekom was awarded \$101 million plus interest by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Geneva on May 27, 2020, and the Mauritius investors were awarded \$111 million by the UN Commission on International Trade Law tribunal on October 13, 2020. The German investors claimed compensation for violation of an India-Germany bilateral investment treaty and the Mauritius investors for an India-Mauritius BIT. The \$1.2 billion award was confirmed by the US federal court for the western district of Washington on October 27, 2020. Antrix has gone in appeal to a US court against this order and the Supreme Court has asked for the tribunal award to be kept in abeyance through a November 4, 2020 order.

In 2013, the Enforcement Directorate was asked to look at finances of Devas after a high level team headed by former Central Vigilance Commissioner Pratyush Sinha stated that "the shareholding pattern of the company and of the Mauritius based entities needs to be looked into by an

appropriate investigative agency".

After the NDA government came to power in 2014, the CBI was asked to investigate the 2005 deal. In August 2016, the CBI filed a chargesheet against eight officials from Devas, ISRO and Antrix linked to the deal for "being party to a criminal conspiracy with an intent to cause undue gain to themselves or others by abusing official positions". Among the eight is former ISRO chairman G Madhavan Nair and former Antrix executive director K R Sridharamurthi. The CBI has charged the accused of causing a loss of approximately Rs 578 crore to the government through the deal.

The ED filed a chargesheet in 2018 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act against a former managing director of Antrix and five Devas officials, stating that Devas transferred 85% of its Rs 579 crore foreign funding to the US under various claims.

**What led to the liquidation?**

Antrix filed a plea in the National Company Law Tribunal in January 2021 for liquidation of Devas in India, which it said was incorporated in a fraudulent manner. On May 25, the NCLT ordered the liquidation, which was upheld by the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal on September 8, 2021 and by the Supreme Court on Monday.

The NCLT order held that the start-up was "incorporated in a fraudulent manner and for unlawful purposes". It said the deal with Antrix was signed on behalf of Devas by a clerk from the office of an ex-ISRO employee, M Umesh, who registered Devas Multimedia along with another ex-ISRO employee, D Venugopal.



# Telegram down? Several users report issues on Twitter



**Telegram is down. Some of the users have reported that they are experiencing issues related to accessing the app, while a few are not able to log in to the app**

It seems that Telegram is down for thousands of people as several users on Twitter are complaining that the social media app is not working properly. Some of the users have reported that they are experiencing log-in issues.

Downdetector, a popular downtime tracking site, shows that around 5,000 people have so far reported the same issue. The cited source suggests that 46 per cent of users have issues with the mobile version of the app and 18 per cent of those who use the web version.

The site also suggests that people started facing errors from 7:40PM IST and the issue hasn't been resolved yet. The popular messaging app is working fine for us, but people are reporting on Twitter that they are facing log-in errors and some are not able to

exchange messages on the app even after re-installing the app and clearing its cache. Most of the people are getting an "Updating" or "Connecting" message on the app. Currently, it is not clear what exactly the issue is with Telegram, but it seems to

have affected only a small group of people. The company hasn't yet acknowledged the error.

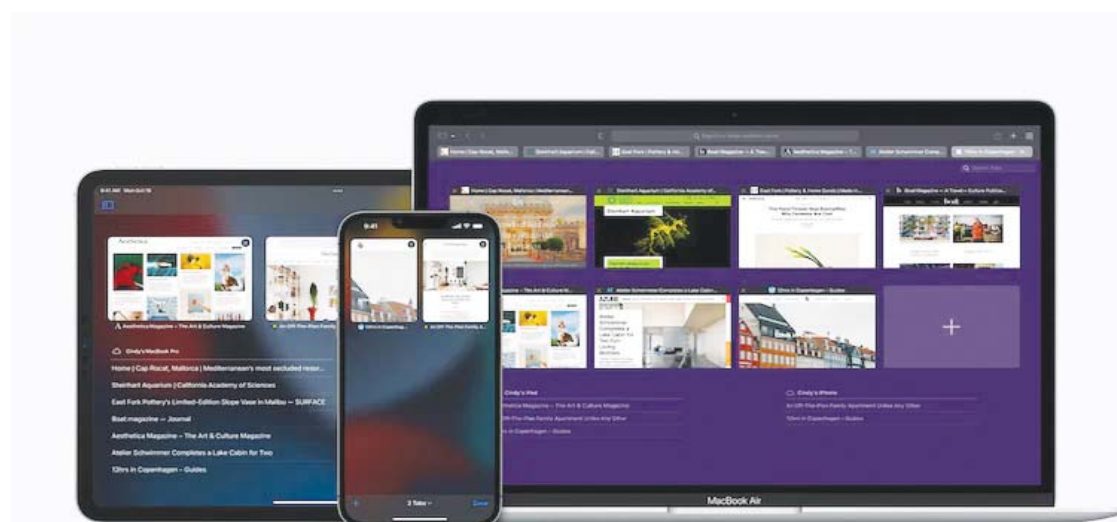
Several users have even tried to reboot their phones to solve the issue, but that didn't work for them. It seems that there is no way to fix this issue until Telegram solves it. Besides, this is not the first time that a social media service has been hit by an internet outage.

## A new Safari bug can leak some of your personal data: Story in 5 points

A major Safari bug has been discovered that can reportedly leak browsing data and some personal information available on your Google account. This news comes just days after it was reported that a Mac vulnerability can allow attackers to gain access to your sensitive data if you don't install the latest software update. While the fix for this security flaw was issued quickly, Apple is yet to address the Safari bug. Here's everything you need to know about this.

-- According to a report by FingerprintJS, a browser fingerprinting and fraud detection service, there is an issue with Safari's IndexedDB implementation on Mac and iOS.

-- IndexedDB is basically an application programming interface (API) that is built into



a browser to store your data. It follows a same-origin policy, which the cited source says is being violated by Apple's application of the IndexedDB API in Safari 15.

-- The same-origin policy is a critical security mechanism that

restricts how one origin can interact with a resource from another origin. In simpler terms, it prevents different sites from interacting with each other unless they share the domain name. For instance, if your Gmail is open on one tab and a

malicious site on the second one, then the policy restricts the latter from accessing your Gmail. This helps safeguard you from potentially malicious sites. But, this policy is being violated, which gives attackers a free hand to steal your data, as per

FingerprintJS.

-- The bug can easily help expose data as any website on this browser can now access the names of databases for any domain and not just its own. Moreover, some of the sites like YouTube on Google's network add unique user-specific identifiers in database names. This means that the attacker will be able to use this data and precisely identify your browsing history and details of your account when you are logged in to your Google account on this browser.-- Unfortunately, those who are using Safari for browsing won't be able to do anything to get rid of this bug. Users will have to wait for Apple to release a fix for this. The cited source says that around 30 popular sites are affected by this bug, and these include Instagram, Netflix, Twitter, Xbox and more.



# Fact Check: 2010 image from Germany passed off as construction of LPG pipeline in Gorakhpur

**India Today Anti Fake News War Room has found the viral post claiming "World's longest LPG pipeline coming up in UP's Gorakhpur" misleading**



As elections in Uttar Pradesh draw closer, the precarious Covid-19 situation has ensured that political parties and their supporters rely on digital campaigns more than ever. And since the BJP announced Yogi Adityanath as its candidate from Gorakhpur (Urban), a section of social media users are sharing a postcard with an image of an under-construction project. In the viral image, a huge pipe can be seen being laid underground with the help of cranes.

The postcard reads, "World's longest LPG pipeline coming up in UP's Gorakhpur, to be commissioned by 2023. The Kandla-Gorakhpur pipeline is being built at a cost of Rs 10,000 crore. The 2,757-km long pipeline will supply gas to 34 crore households. A game-changing project that will usher in LPG revolution in India!"

The archived versions of similar posts can be seen here and here.

India Today Anti Fake News War Room (AFWA) has found the claim along with the image to be misleading. Though such a project in UP is in the works, the picture used on the viral postcard was originally taken 12 years ago in Germany.

Using keyword search, we came across an article from March last year that had used the same image to report on the LPG pipeline work in UP. We

then ran a reverse search on this higher resolution image and found a report published by "The New York Times" on April 8, 2010. Here, the caption along with the picture says, "Cranes lower a section of pipe into the ground near Lubmin, Germany. Sean Gallup/Getty Images".

For further confirmation, we visited the official "Getty Images" website and found the original photograph which was taken by Sean Gallup in Germany.

The Getty Images caption said, "A worker shouts commands as cranes lower a section of pipe into the ground for the OPAL pipeline on April 8, 2010 near Lubmin, Germany. The OPAL and NEL pipelines will carry natural gas from Russia arriving through the Nord Stream pipeline from the Baltic Sea across Germany and to other countries in Europe. The Nord Stream project delivers Russian natural gas directly to western Europe and avoids countries in between, such as Poland and Ukraine."

A report by "The Times of India" dated February 22, 2019, gave details of the Rs 9,000-crore Kandla-Gorakhpur LPG pipeline project.

Then petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan had said the 1,987-km long pipeline will cater to cooking fuel needs of a fourth of India's population.

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# UK Covid monitor: Fall in cases faster than surge, R-value lowest in a year

**After the peak of 2.2 lakh Covid cases on January 4, 2022, the UK is now witnessing a sharp decline in number of cases**

Covid situation in one of the hardest hit countries the United Kingdom is gradually improving. After the Omicron variant was first detected in South Africa, the UK was among the first few countries where cases rose dramatically, and daily cases reached a peak of 2.2 lakh on January 4, 2022. But while the rise was steep, the fall in daily cases looks sharper. It took 14 days for new cases in the country to climb from one lakh to two lakh, but only 10 days to return to the below-one lakh level. The UK recorded 70,160 new cases on January 16, which was a 33-day low. Average daily cases in the country were also at a 22-day low of 1.06 lakh on January 16. At 0.67, the reproduction rate that indicates the pace of the spread of infection is at the lowest level in over a year.

Though the infection spread rapidly in the UK and daily new cases were much higher than during the previous waves, the proportion of severe illnesses was comparatively much lower. Deaths and hospitalisations rose amid the

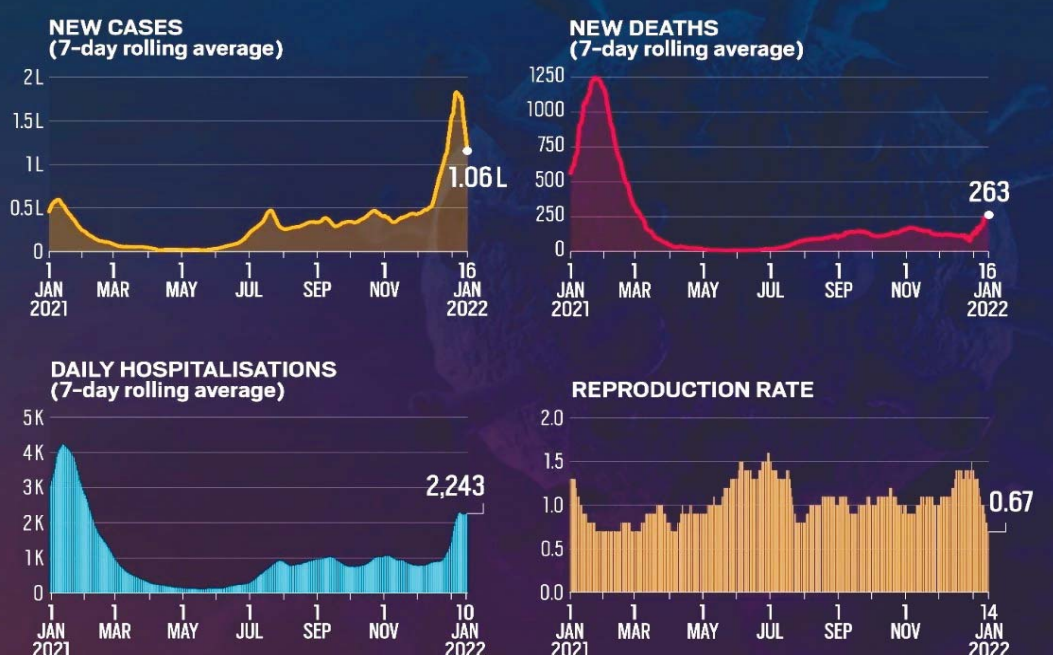
rise in infection, but they were not in proportion with the cases.

While daily average deaths rose to as high as 1,250 during the previous peak in January 2021, it is 263 now. Daily hospitalisation also rose to over 4,200 in January 2021, while it has remained below 2,300 so far in January 2022. Going by the generic trend, deaths and hospitalisation numbers change with a lag of around 10 days. Hence, they are expected to fall in the coming days as daily cases are also declining.

Scientists in the UK have suggested that the country could be one of the first to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic. Professor David Heymann of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine is reported to have said that the UK is the closest to any country to being out of the pandemic if it is not already. Experts believe the pandemic may turn into an endemic soon. Media reports suggest Plan B of Covid restrictions earlier imposed in the UK may also be revoked soon.

## STEEP RISE, SHARPER FALL IN U.K. COVID CASES

REPRODUCTION RATE LOWEST IN A YEAR NOW



Note: Reproduction rate indicates the pace of spread of infection  
Source: Our World in Data, U.K. Government





# Punjab polls: AAP's Ferozepur candidate joins Congress

**Amandeep Ashu Banger, the AAP's candidate from Ferozepur Rural assembly constituency, joined the Congress in the presence of Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi on Monday**

AAP's Ferozepur Rural candidate Amandeep Ashu Banger on Monday quit the party and joined the ruling Congress in Punjab, alleging that Arvind Kejriwal's outfit runs like a "multinational company" with only Delhi leaders calling the shots.

Welcoming Banger into the Congress fold, Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi told reporters that the leader will contest the February 20 Assembly elections from the seat on the ruling party's ticket. He claimed that people are rejecting the Arvind Kejriwal-led outfit.

"Their bubble has burst," said Channi.

After joining the Congress, Banger alleged that he felt humiliated and the state leaders have no say in the party.

He alleged that he was forced by the AAP leadership to spend money on electioneering to woo voters.

AAP functions like a "multinational company" and all leaders from Punjab have no voice in the outfit and leaders from Delhi "dictate terms" to them, he alleged.

"I was feeling stressed in this environment, which was also hindering the so-called development agenda and welfare of Punjab by the party," he added.

"Besides, (AAP senior leader) Raghav Chadha's behaviour is rude and has been directing AAP workers to follow his command without taking the Punjab leadership into confidence. They only need Yes men," Banger alleged.

He said he had earlier joined AAP as he was impressed by their ideology and thought they will bring some positive change, but reality turned just the opposite.

On AAP seeking people's feedback to pick up its CM's face, Banger said, "He will only be a dummy candidate while the party's Delhi leadership will call the shots."

Channi said after finding out "anti-Punjab agenda" of the Aam Aadmi Party and realising that Kejriwal "only sells dreams", he quit the party.

Channi said Punjab needs such courageous people, who want to work for the betterment of the state and quit the party even when announced as party candidate.

He said Banger's example is not an isolated one.

"Earlier, many MLAs left them, saying they do not have faith in their leadership. Three of AAP's MPs had also left them earlier because of the dictatorial attitude they faced in the party," said Channi.

On the occasion, Channi accused AAP of targeting farmer leaders out of frustration.

AAP leaders have accused the Sanyukt Samaj Morcha, a political front launched by various farmer bodies for fighting next month's Assembly polls, of approaching party workers and volunteers with various offers to be its candidates.

"Various allegations are being made against farmers now. There is great resentment among farmers and

people of Punjab regarding this," Channi told reporters here while asking AAP to first look into the allegations of money being exchanged for party tickets.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal had recently trashed allegations that money was being exchanged for party tickets, saying this does not happen in his party.

"They are questioning the funding source from farmers but I seek an account of crores of rupees which NRIs gave them last time at the time of polls," said Channi. Channi also described as "drama" the Aam Aadmi Party's move to seek people's suggestion on who should be its chief ministerial candidate for Punjab, saying people know Kejriwal's antics and said in a lighter vein that people are responding with his (Channi's) name in the AAP survey.

When asked if his party will declare its CM face before next month's Punjab polls and if he has raised this issue with the central leadership, Channi again replied in a lighter vein, telling the reporter, "Your question is very good. When I get an opportunity, I will ask Rahul Gandhi and let you know".

AAP leader Raghav Chadha had said earlier in the day that it will be only AAP which will go to the state Assembly polls with the chief ministerial face.

Chadha said none of the other political parties, including the ruling Congress, announced the name of their chief ministerial candidate.





# CDC Updates Mask Guidelines - Cloth Masks Least Effective

Jan 16, 2022 -- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has updated its guidance on face masks, saying loosely woven cloth masks offer the least protection against COVID-19 and N95 and KN95 masks offer the most.

The CDC update doesn't come out and say Americans should avoid cloth masks but clarifies that some kinds of masks work better than others.

"To protect yourself and others from COVID-19, CDC continues to recommend that you wear the most protective mask you can that fits well and that you will wear consistently," the CDC said in its first updated mask guidance since last fall.

"Loosely woven cloth products provide the least protection, layered finely woven products offer more protection, well-fitting disposable surgical masks and KN95s offer even more protection, and well-fitting NIOSH-approved respirators (including N95s) offer the highest level of protection," the CDC says.

Members of the public should consider wearing N95 and KN95 masks in certain situations, such as in crowded public places, the guidance says. Previous guidance raised concerns about supply shortages of those masks. The new guidance says specially labeled "surgical" N95 respirators should be reserved

for health care workers.

The agency is catching up to health experts who in recent months have recommended ditching cloth masks for N95 respirators or 3-ply surgical masks as a defense against the highly transmissible Omicron variant. The Mayo Clinic, for example, now requires all staff and visitors to wear N95 or KN95 masks.

"We have known for many months that COVID-19 is airborne and therefore, a simple cloth mask is not going to cut it," Leana Wen, MD, an emergency doctor and public health professor at George Washington University, said last month.

The CDC is still recommending that children under age 2 not wear masks. Students and staff at all K-12 schools should wear masks, regardless of an area's vaccination status, the CDC says.

If you do wear a cloth mask, make sure it has multiple layers of tightly woven, breathable material, the CDC says. Don't wear a cloth mask if it has gaps around the sides of the face or nose, exhalation valves or vents, single-layer fabric, thin fabric that doesn't block light, or has wet or dirty material.

To get the best fit and most protection out of a cloth or disposable mask:

"Wear two masks, such as a disposable mask

underneath and a cloth mask on top.

"Combine a cloth mask or disposable mask with a fitter or brace.

"Knot and tuck ear loops of a 3-ply mask where they join the edge of the mask.

"If you're wearing a disposable procedure mask, fold and tuck unneeded material under the edges.

"Wear masks that attach behind the neck and head with either elastic bands or ties, instead of ear loops.

The CDC says N95 or KN95 respirators should fit closely on the face with no gaps and be comfortable when worn properly. N95 masks are so named because they can filter out 95% of particles in the air. "A respirator has better filtration, and if worn properly the whole time it is in use, can provide a higher level of protection than a cloth or procedural mask. A mask or respirator will be less effective if it fits poorly or if you wear it improperly or take it off frequently," the CDC says.

The CDC updated guidance says people should consider respirators in certain situations, such as:

"While caring for a person sick with COVID-19.

"If you're immunocompromised, an older adult, or at risk for severe illness.

"When working and interacting in a job with people who may not be wearing masks.

"When riding on planes and public transportation.

"In crowded indoor or outdoor public settings.

"If your COVID vaccinations are not up to date.

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## Fed Website for Free COVID-19 Tests Opens Jan. 19

Americans will be able to order free, at-home rapid COVID-19 tests online at COVIDTests.gov starting Jan. 19.

The tests will ship within 7 to 12 days after being ordered, senior officials from President Joe Biden's administration said Friday. The U.S. Postal Service will handle the shipping and delivery through first-class mail. People will input their name and mailing address on the website and can share an email address to receive updates on the order, according to NPR. People won't need to pay shipping costs or enter a credit card number to

order tests, according to the website's homepage.

The website will be offered in both English and Spanish. The Biden administration will also set up a phone number so those without internet access can place orders.

Officials didn't share a specific time that the website will open, according to The New York Times - simply that it will go live sometime on Wednesday. Each household will be limited to ordering four tests.

On Saturday, people with private insurance will also be able to seek reimbursement for tests

they purchase on their own. At the same time, some insurers have said it could take weeks to set up a system for smooth reimbursement, the newspaper reported.

Friday's announcement is the latest step in the president's pledge to get coronavirus tests to Americans. In December, Biden said his administration would purchase 500 million tests and distribute them to Americans for free. On Thursday, he announced that the administration would buy another 500 million tests, bringing the total to 1 billion.

So far, the administration has signed contracts to produce 420 million tests, the newspaper reported. With the website opening next week and the lag in shipping, the tests will likely arrive by the end of January at the earliest, which could be after the peak of the current coronavirus surge in some parts of the country.

At-home tests have been in high demand, with some pharmacies, retailers, and websites reporting no stock in recent weeks. People have lined up at community testing sites for hours to get tested as the

national average of daily cases has climbed above 800,000 this week.

Some consumers have also been confused about how or when to use at-home tests. On Friday, Biden administration officials said that people should use rapid tests for three reasons: "if they begin to experience COVID-19 symptoms"

"when it has been five or more days after being exposed to someone who tests positive" "if they are gathering indoors with a high-risk person and want to check if they are negative"

## Covid: Greater Manchester elective surgery to restart, mayor says

Non-urgent surgery and hospital appointments will restart in Greater Manchester this week, the region's mayor has said.

Hospitals in the area cancelled all non-urgent activity in November due to a rising Covid-19 infection rate. Andy Burnham said elective activity would restart "with day cases" in the next few days and "progressively increase" after that. However, he said services in the region remained under "considerable pressure".

The Local Democracy Reporting



Service said the Labour mayor made the announcement as he updated the region on the local coronavirus response.

'Good news'

He said the pause had been "kept under regular review" and as the region's hospitals "make further progress on the number of people... who can be discharged, we'll be able to progressively increase the level of activity and get back to what might resemble a normal level of service".

"I know [the news] will be well received by patients who feel

frustrated by the current situation and have been worried," he said.

"Patients who have had operations or procedures cancelled should just wait to hear from the NHS, but the good news is that it is starting again. "There is still considerable pressure on the system, so people will have to bear with our NHS colleagues."

The pause on elective activity did not affect cancer or urgent care including cardiac surgery, vascular surgery and transplantation.



# Planet-killer asteroid passes near Earth. Track it live here

A huge asteroid, which is around twice the size of world's tallest building Burj Khalifa, is going to pass Earth on Tuesday (January 18).

According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the rock, which is identified as asteroid 7482 (1994 PC1), will pass the Earth at a distance of roughly 1.98 million kilometres. The giant rock, which is bigger than any building on Earth, has been classified as 'potentially hazardous' and 'Near-Earth Object' due to its closeness to the planet when it passes.

If an asteroid of this size god forbids collides with a planet like Earth, it can lead to catastrophic destruction. Luckily, it is highly unlikely in this case. This makes it highly crucial to track such rocks.

This rock will be closest to Earth



at 4.51 pm EST on January 18 (3.21am IST on January 19).

This rock, which is about 1.6 km wide, is designated as an Apollo-

class asteroid. It means it has an orbit broader than Earth's and

that its orbital path around the Sun may cross our planet's.

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# Scientists identify first human-bred hybrid animals by using DNA sequencing

Scientists have identified the first human-bred hybrid animals by using DNA sequencing in a recent study.

The research, published in *Science Advances*, shows domestic horses were introduced in the southern Caucasus and Anatolia during the Bronze Age.

It is based on samples from the early Neolithic to the Iron Age that encompasses the presumed transition from wild to domestic horses.

"From the skeletons, we knew they were equids [horse-like animals], but they did not fit the measurements of donkeys and they did not fit the measurements of Syrian wild asses," said study co-author Eva-Maria Geigl, a genomicist at the Institut Jacques Monod in Paris.

"So they were somehow different, but it was not clear what the difference was."

A combination of textual, iconographic, and



archaeozoological data suggest that, by the mid to late third millennium BCE, domestic horses were introduced from neighboring mountain regions into Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and northeast Syria), where they were often referred to "donkey of the mountain."

According to Geigl, "They really bio-engineered these hybrids."

"There were the earliest hybrids ever, as far as we know, and they had to do that each time for each kunga that was produced - so this explains why they were so valuable." The domestication of the horse approximately 5500 years ago represents one of the most important technological innovations in the ancient world. With the harnessing of

horsepower, political, economic, and social relationships throughout the ancient world were transformed as horses revolutionized transportation and affected patterns of trade, warfare, and migration.

"Since hybrids are usually sterile, it means there was a remarkable level of energy devoted to constantly capturing

and raising wild onagers, breeding them with domestic donkeys and then training these teams of prestigious kungas (which would only last for one generation)," said Benjamin Arbuckle, an anthropological archaeologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "It really shows the innovative and experimental nature of ancient people which I think some people only associate with the modern world and also their willingness to invest a lot of resources in the artificial creation of an expensive animal used only by and for elites."

"This work settles the idea that hybrids were in fact created by ancient Mesopotamians, which is very cool," Arbuckle said.

"But we still don't know how widespread this animal was and it also doesn't address additional questions relating to other types of hybrid equids created in the Bronze Age. So there are plenty more questions."

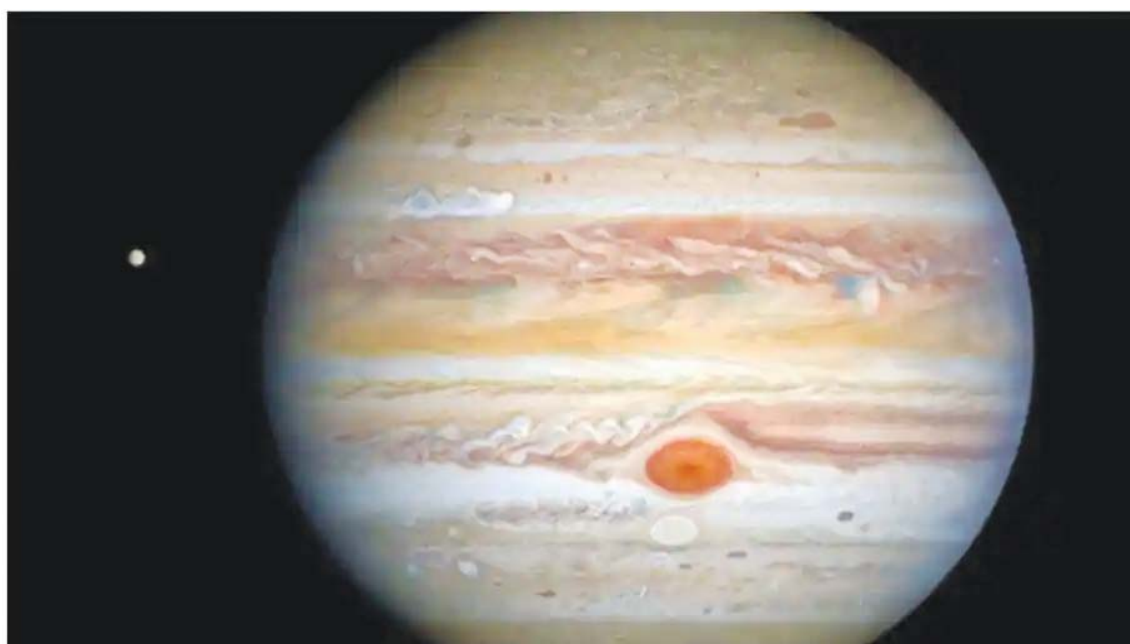
# Research finds exoplanet three times more massive than Jupiter

Citizen scientists along with a University of California, Riverside astronomer have discovered a gas giant nearly three times more massive than Jupiter. The exoplanet has same diameter as that of Jupiter.

Researchers also believed that it contained 105 times the mass of Earth in elements heavier than helium and hydrogen. Details of the finding have been published in the *Astronomical Journal* and were presented at the American Astronomical Society virtual press event on January 13.

"TOI-2180 b is such an exciting planet to have found," said UCR astronomer Paul Dalba, who helped confirm the planet's existence.

"It hits the trifecta of 1) having a several-hundred-day orbit, 2) being relatively close to Earth (379 lightyears is considered close for an exoplanet), and 3) us being able to see it transit in



front of its star. It is very rare for astronomers to discover a planet that checks all three of these boxes," he said.

Dalba also explained that the planet is special because it took 261 days to complete a journey around its star, a relatively long

time compared to many known gas giants outside our solar system. Its relative proximity to Earth and the brightness of the star it orbits also made it likely that astronomers will be able to learn more about it. In order to locate exoplanets, which orbit

stars other than our sun, NASA's TESS satellite would look at one part of the sky for a month and then, move on. It searches for dips in brightness that would occur when a planet crosses in front of a star. "The rule of thumb is that we need to

see three 'dips' or transits before we believe we've found a planet," Dalba said.

A single transit event could be caused by a telescope with a jitter, or a star masquerading as a planet. For these reasons, TESS isn't focused on these single transit events. However, a small group of citizen scientists is looking over TESS data, Tom Jacobs, a group member and former US naval officer, saw light dim from the TOI-2180 star, just once. His group alerted Dalba, who specialized in studying planets that take a long time to orbit their stars. Using the Lick Observatory's Automated Planet Finder Telescope, Dalba and his colleagues observed the planet's gravitational tug on the star, which allowed them to calculate the mass of TOI-2180 b and estimate a range of possibilities for its orbit.



## Indian Oil to invest Rs 7,000 crore in new gas distribution projects



Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner and fuel retailer, aims to invest 70 billion rupees (\$944.02 million) to build gas sales network infrastructure, including pipelines, in new areas, the company said on Sunday. IOC said it has obtained nine licences to sell gas to households, automobiles and small industries, representing about a third of the demand potential in 61 geographical areas in various states that were recently auctioned by the Petroleum and Natural Gas Board.

The new licences awarded to IOC relate to major districts of some states. The company is already working on gas sales projects worth 200 billion rupees. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is aiming to raise the share of natural gas in India's energy mix to 15% by 2030 from the current 6.2%. Natural gas, while still a fossil fuel, emits less CO<sub>2</sub> than coal.

India, the world's third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, has set a 2070 goal for net zero carbon emissions.



## LIC IPO: Inside details of India's biggest public issue

**With just a few months left for the launch of Life Insurance Corporation's massive IPO, preparations are in full swing to assess the valuation of the state-run insurer. Here is all you need to know**

The preparation for the much-awaited initial public offering (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) is in full swing, with approximately 2 months left before the launch of India's biggest public listing.

It's a race against time for bankers who are working round the clock to evaluate the state-run insurance company, which hasn't been valued in decades. Not just bankers but many departments of the government involved in the process are working just as hard to pull off the gargantuan task, reported Bloomberg news.

Front-page newspaper advertisements about the upcoming IPO have also become frequent, aimed at alerting millions of policy holders about the state insurer's public issue.

**DETAILS OF INDIA'S BIGGEST IPO**

Latest reports suggest that LIC will file its draft prospectus (DRHP) for its massive IPO with the regulator in the final week of January.

As the situation stands, LIC is preparing its financial results for the December quarter and data on assets under management as the information will be required in the initial prospectus for allowing foreign investors to take part in the share sale process. The government plans to complete the public issue before the end of this financial year.

The IPO of LIC will be the biggest in India's history and the government expects to raise more than Rs 1 lakh crore from the public issue, five times more than the amount raised by Paytm a couple of months ago in what became the country's

largest IPO. Many bankers have described the IPO of LIC as India's Aramco moment, given the sheer size of the public issue. It may be noted that gulf oil giant Saudi Aramco raised \$29.4 billion from its IPO.

The reason why bankers have compared LIC's IPO to Saudi Aramco is the fact that it will test the depth of India's capital markets and also the global demand for the decades-old insurance company.

### TECHNICALITIES INVOLVED

It is worth mentioning that the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management is the novel government agency overlooking the listing of the insurer, including finalising the embedded value -- a process crucial for ascribing the valuation of LIC shares.

## Cryptocurrency Bill unlikely to be introduced in upcoming Budget session

The government is unlikely to bring the bill related to the cryptocurrency in the upcoming Budget session.

The development comes at a time when there has been chatter about the government's intention to tax cryptocurrency trade and related investments. The Centre aims to hold more parleys in order to build consensus on the regulatory framework for Cryptocurrency in India, reported The Economic Times.

The report added that the central government is waiting for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to conduct the pilot launch of India's own digital currency.



The launch is expected to take place in a few months.

**CRYPTO BILL UNLIKELY IN BUDGET SESSION**

The cryptocurrency bill may not be introduced in the Budget

session of Parliament, according to a senior finance ministry official who spoke to ET. The official said since it is a complex subject, the bill will require more time.

The much-awaited bill seeks to "create a facilitative framework for the creation of the official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India."

The proposed bill also seeks to

prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India. However, it "allows for certain exceptions to promote the underlying technology of cryptocurrency and its uses," according to the bill listed for introduction on the Lok Sabha website.

Earlier, the bill was listed in the Centre's legislative business for the Winter session of Parliament, PTI reported.

It was reported that whenever the bill is brought, it would be referred to the parliamentary standing committee for wider deliberations with stakeholders, the PTI report said.



## Putham Pudhu Kaalai Vidiyaadhaa review:

# Amazon Prime anthology is a refreshing take on relationships during lockdown

**Putham Pudhu Kaalai Vidiyaadhaa review: Madhumita's Mouname Paarvayaai, featuring Nadiya and Joju George, has to be the pick of the lot**

Putham Pudhu Kaalai Vidiyaadhaa, Amazon Prime's second anthology set around the pandemic, offers a refreshing look at life and relationships during lockdown. While not all the stories leave the desired impact, the anthology is still wholesomely satisfying. When compared to the previous edition of the anthology, we get stories that are more complete and relatable in the new one. The choice to opt for a fairly younger cast, with a few surprise options such as Nadiya Moidu and Joju George, has worked strongly in favour of it. The first short - Balaji Mohan's Mugakavasa Mutham - follows two police constables, Murugan and Kuyili, who like each other. As part of their duty posting, they meet regularly and slowly start expressing their feelings for each other. When Kuyili gets posted to another location on duty, they start missing each other's company. Just when they begin to feel the pinch of each other's absence,

a young man comes seeking their assistance - he asks them to help stop his girlfriend being coerced into an arranged marriage. As Murugan and Kuyili try their best to stop the wedding and help the girl elope with her boyfriend, they get closer in the process.

This is one of the cutest stories of the anthology - to explore love between two young cops in the most uncommon places is something to cheer for. Teejay and Gouri, as the lead actors, are terrific and they perform earnestly to make their characters and performances real and believable. Their chemistry makes the whole segment come to life.

Halitha Shameem's *Loners* shines the spotlight on the need to be loved and cared for, especially during the pandemic. The segment follows the story of, Nallathangal (Nalla), who is a loner. She recently ended her relationship with her boyfriend and is now stuck inside her apartment. She finds it extremely

difficult to stay indoors and hence, joins an online video room called 'Loners in Lockdown'. This is where she chances upon Dheeran, whom she had met previously in another video room. Dheeran is coping from the loss of his close friend due to Covid-19, and is broken from inside.

Both Nalla and Dheeran get talking and heal each other in the process. Halitha continues to give us stories that touch all the right chords. *Loners* emphasises on the importance of opening up and caring without getting judgemental. The lead actors, Lijomol Jose and Arjun Das, play their respective parts so convincingly that we feel for their broken hearts.

Madhumita's *Mouname Paarvayaai*, featuring Nadiya and Joju George, has to be the pick of the lot. It explores the bond between an older couple, husband Murali and wife Yashoda, who haven't spoken to each other in a while due to a major fight. What really makes



this story stand out is that the characters barely utter any words but seamlessly convey what they mean for each other to the viewers. This short beautifully explores what it is to really care for someone without actually expressing it through words. Both Nadiya and Joju George are unbelievably effortless in this segment.

Surya Krishna's *The Mask* is a simple tale of friendship between two schoolmates Arjun and Velu, who reunite during the pandemic after years. Arjun is an IT professional and he's been guarding a secret for many years - he is gay and has been struggling to come out to his parents. When he meets Velu

after a long time, he earns the courage to deal with his situation. Though the segment opts for a very convenient ending to make its point, it deserves to be lauded for touching upon a sensitive issue. Dilip Subbarayan walks away with all the brownie points for his neat performance in this short. His is a very unique casting choice, which has worked out quite well. Richard Antony's *Nizhal Tharum Idham* follows the story of a woman in her thirties, Shobi, played by Aishwarya Lekshmi, who finds out that her dad died after suffering a heart attack. This segment is all about dealing with grief and finding purpose to continue living life.

## The Tragedy of Macbeth movie review:

# Shadows and star turns in Joel Coen's bard noir

In no particular order, Joel Coen's 105-minute *The Tragedy of Macbeth*--out on Apple TV+--reminded me of German expressionist films, film noir, gothic horror, Robert Rodriguez's *Sin City* (2005), Orson Welles' *Macbeth* adaptation from 1948, Denzel Washington's performance in *Training Day* (2001), and Frances McDormand's calculative and nervy roles in several Coen brothers' films. It's a film you will enjoy if you know your *Macbeth* and/or movies. But I'm not sure if the film ever rises above its origins and influences. Unlike the daredevil Indian *Macbeth* adaptations *Maqbool* and *Joji*, or Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), a feudal Japan-set *Macbeth* with Noh influences, the madness of *Macbeth* never spills out of the screen in Joel Coen's film. It is too meticulous, studied and hyperstylised to leave you

genuinely haunted or spooked. *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is an out-and-out experiment by a master cinephile, and on those terms alone, this is great cinema.

Ethan Coen, who had written and directed 18 feature films with his younger brother Joel for 34 years, chose to not be part of the project. *The Tragedy of Macbeth* was developed by Joel Coen and his wife Frances McDormand, who has previously played both Lady *Macbeth* and one of the *Weird Sisters* in a 2016 stage adaptation. Bruno Delbonnel shot the film digitally in black-and-white with an 1:37:1 aspect ratio, the pre-widescreen standard for American sound films. Denzel Washington plays *Macbeth*, and Frances McDormand *Lady Macbeth*.

One of the earliest surprises come from Kathryn Hunter, who is all three *Weird Sisters* in one body, sometimes divides into three, and occasionally turns into a raven. For

the three witches, she has distinct voices, which open the film over black screen. It is when we see Hunter in flesh, we realise the conceit. Her spidery body twists and turns like a contortionist's before she gets up, ambles like a big bird, the sound design underlining her liminal condition of half-crone, half-raven. Wherever you look in this exquisitely shot movie, there are straight lines, shadows and symmetry. Coen, Delbonnel, production designer Stefan Dechant, art director Jason T Clark, and set decorator Nancy Haigh wrap *Macbeth* in the archetypal German expressionist/film noir style of labyrinths and chiaroscuros.

Unlike David Fincher's *Mank*, where Erik Messerschmidt's digital black-and-white cinematography felt like an uneasy idea, the sleek, grain-less digital sheen actually works in favour of *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.



Shot entirely on sound stages, the matte paintings in the film's exterior shots, particularly the pitch-black sky with prominent stars, reminded me of another cinematic hell on earth, *Sin City*. The scene in which Lady *Macbeth* sleepwalks and washes her hands in the night is pure gothic horror. Frances McDormand in a still from the film.

I was initially not convinced by the pairing of Denzel Washington and Frances McDormand as the

*Macbeths*, but the casting makes sense once Duncan (Brendan Gleeson) is killed. As *Macbeth's* hubris increases, Washington unleashes his characteristic sound and fury that we have seen in so many of his action entertainers, particularly, *Training Day*. And with *Lady Macbeth*, now terrified, McDormand becomes cagey and cautious, a particular performance style she had made us familiar with over the years.





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*Where the Possibilities are Endless*

# 'Salon under the sea' submarine dives to 1,000 meters



It is the stuff of a James Bond blockbuster: a young, attractive woman lures a rising political star into a romantic web, all the while collecting critical information to trickle back to her handler or big bosses back home. Axios revealed this week that more than six years ago Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., began a relationship with a woman suspected of being a Chinese espionage operative. He was alerted by federal investigators in 2015 and given a "defense briefing," which resulted in him breaking off ties to the suspect. However,

Swalwell wouldn't be the first or last political figure to be "honey-trapped" - with multiple former intelligence officials surmising that such schemes carried out by Chinese spies have long played out on U.S. soil, and remain ongoing.

"I can say with a high level of confidence that there are many more of these women out there," Daniel Hoffman, a retired CIA Senior Clandestine Services Officer, told Fox News. "China's MO is to flood the zone." While several current and former intelligence and security officials and experts interviewed by Fox

News said that it was impossible to put a number on just how many honey trap scenarios might be in motion at present, one former defense and intelligence operative noted that it could be well into the hundreds - if not thousands. Such spies are assumed to be at top universities, known to speak perfect English, and routinely use social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook to connect with their prey. But it is not only about enmeshing big names - it is about having an eye for talent, and starting when one's star is about to begin rising.

In Swalwell's case, he was seemingly ensnared by a woman named Christine Fang or Fang Fang, who helped raise money for his 2014 congressional re-election campaign and recruited at least one intern in his office. However, U.S. investigators in the northern California Bay Area believe Fang was also circling close to numerous up-and-coming politicians between 2011 and 2015, engaging in sexual relationships with at least two mayors in other states. According to the report,

Fang was sent to gather information and attain influence on those rising in the ranks at the direct behest of China's Ministry of State Security, with a "handler" based out of the San Francisco consulate. In 2015, her most high profile associate - Swalwell - became a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. However, around that time, Fang abruptly fled the U.S. as the FBI was homing in. But unlike Fang, whose communications with the consulate came under scrutiny, Hoffman asserted that there are likely many more who have zero links to any officials. "The goal is to become a trusted Indeed, the California Democrat is seemingly not alone in having fallen for the bait.

"The females who are employed in this tactic place themselves in a position where they come into contact with the targeted individual.

## Thailand partners with Tinder for matchmaking trips



Summer flings have long been a happy, occasional perk of travel.

But the Thai tourism authority is partnering with dating app Tinder to offer tour packages specifically for matchmaking purposes.

Emmanuel is a civil engineer who worked extensively on one of the most transformative infrastructure projects in Nigeria. Watch what

happened. Though Thailand's borders are technically open to foreign tourists -- at least those who are willing to quarantine in a hotel room for two weeks and pay for a visa application -- the "Single Journey" initiative is aimed at locals as a way to encourage domestic travel.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the country's

official travel body, is planning nine itineraries throughout the country and is launching with three pilot trips. The first, which will take place on December 20, is a cruise along Bangkok's Chao Phraya River for up to 100 singletons. The day-long experience includes sightseeing, dinner and a talk from a Feng Shui expert "who will share tips on

how to pay homage to Buddha and ask for blessings," which should invariably give tongue-tied daters something to talk about.

The other two pilot experiences are a beachside party and concert in Phuket and a train trip to the Pa Sak Jolasid Dam in Lopburi, both in January 2021 and accommodating up to 50 people each. Bookings

open on December 15 and can be made through the Sneaksdeal website (in Thai). "The 'Single Travel Route' targets solo travelers who prefer to travel alone to various destinations in Thailand," TAT Governor, Mr. Yuthasak Supasorn, said in a press statement.

The "Single Journey" initiative is just the latest idea to stimulate domestic tourism amid the coronavirus pandemic. In November, Thai Airways -- Thai Smile's parent company -- operated a one-off "flight to nowhere" that departed from and returned to Bangkok and flew over 99 sacred Buddhist sites across the country along the way.

Elsewhere, Taiwan's EVA Airlines had a similar idea of its own. The "Love Is In the Air" promotion has scheduled three flights -- on Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day -- with on-board speed dating, followed by a romantic afternoon tea or candlelight dinner back on solid ground. Just one question -- if a couple makes a love match while on one of these trips, will the tourism board also sponsor their future honeymoon?



## Manipur actor Lin Laishram thanks Priyanka Chopra for acknowledging wrong casting in Mary Kom: 'She is gracious'



Manipur actor Lin Laishram, who talked about lack of diversity in the casting of the film *Mary Kom*, has now appreciated actor Priyanka Chopra's acknowledgement of it in a recent interview. In the film, Priyanka was seen in the title role, while Lin featured in a supporting role. During a recent interview with *Vanity Fair*, Priyanka opened up about her role in *Mary Kom*. She has said, "When I played *Mary Kom*, I was very sceptical taking it on in the beginning because she was a living, breathing icon and she made place for so many female athletes. Plus, I look nothing like her. She comes from the northeast of India and I am from northern India and we physically didn't

look alike. In hindsight, the part should have probably gone to someone from the northeast." Now, in a new statement, Lin

excluded. With the OTT gaining prominence, it seems that merit and authenticity are slowly getting the due importance that

casting is an important step in film. I believe in authenticity and inclusivity, so a girl from Manipur or the North East could have been surely cast to represent us...When it comes to playing an achiever from the Northeast a non-North Eastern person is chosen as seen in *Mary Kom*. On the other hand, why not cast people from Northeast also as normal Indians in all walks of life which we are." *Mary Kom* was released in 2014, the film won the National Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment. Priyanka also received several awards for her performance, including the Screen Award, Producers Guild Film Award and Stardust Award. Lin appeared in the 2007 film *Om Shanti Om* in a cameo role. Fans also saw her in the 2015 film *Umrika* opposite Prateik Babbar, in *Rangoon* (2017) and *Axone* in 2019.



called Priyanka "gracious and brave" for talking about the missing diversity factor in the film. She said, "It's really gracious and brave of Priyanka to finally accept this and put it out there. My admiration for her has only grown immensely. Inclusivity I feel is very hard to understand unless you are

they deserve. I am very thankful for this welcome change and looking forward to good work coming our way." Last year, while speaking to *Free Press Journal*, Lin said, "I admire Priyanka for her hard work, she really put in a lot of hours in order to look like *Mary Kom* but I always felt that

## When Govinda hid his marriage to protect image: 'My career was like my doll, was afraid someone would snatch it'

Govinda and wife Sunita have been married for over 36 years and have had the most stable marriages in the Hindi film industry. Govinda had just begun as an actor when he fell in love with Sunita and the latter even got the approval of his mother who only wanted her to be his wife. However, Govinda had once revealed he chose to hide his marital status for almost an year, out of the fear of losing his fan following.

During their joint appearance on chat show *Rendezvous With Simi Garewal*, Govinda and Sunita had shared their love story and how they went on to tie the knot. Govinda revealed that he kept his wedding a secret until the birth of their daughter Tina. "People had scared me that my girls write me love letters and loves me so much, I would lose my image and my fan following."

When host Simi Garewal asked him if it really mattered to him, Govinda denied it and said, "I



don't think so, it was more of my mistake."

Govinda had also revealed that they hardly ever went out in that one year of marriage. Opening up about what he would do if was ever asked about his marital status, Govinda said, "I used to run away, I would slip out, I always thought that person was sent by someone (to enquire) who would sabotage my career."

At that point of time, my career had become like my doll. I was afraid someone would snatch my doll."

While Sunita had denied ever feeling bad about it, Govinda accepted she did feel bad sometimes. "Sah jana bhi ek kala hoti hai, jaise ki nibhana, isne ajhe se nibhaya (to bear is also an art, like maintaining a relationship, she maintained it well)."

## Shah Rukh Khan returns to Instagram after four months, Gauri Khan joins him in new video; fans say 'king is back'

Shah Rukh Khan has finally returned to Instagram after a four-month-long break. He shared a commercial for an electronic brand on Instagram in which he features with wife Gauri Khan. The actor had not posted anything on his social media handles ever since their son Aryan Khan was arrested in a drugs case. On Wednesday, Shah Rukh shared the commercial on Instagram and wrote, "Very few times you associate with a product that has such a harmony of art and technology." The ad opens with Shah Rukh driving a luxury car to reach a lavish bungalow. He makes himself comfortable on a couch and switches on a rollable television

which complements the view from his bungalow. Soon after, Gauri also walks in and the two get seated on the couch to watch TV. The video received more than 6 lakh views within an hour. Shah Rukh's fans were pleased to see him return to social media. A fan said, "The king is back, finally." Another commented, "Very happy to see your post. I love you." One more fan said, "Good to see SRK's post after so long... Love SRK always." Shah Rukh Khan's last post was on September 19 when he shared a picture of a Ganpati idol and wrote, "May Lord Ganesha's blessings remain with all of us until we see him again next year... Ganpati Bappa Morya!







## Rhea Chakraborty enjoys luxurious vacation in Alibaug, take a tour of her villa with swimming pool, mango orchards

Actor Rhea Chakraborty is currently vacationing in Alibaug, Maharashtra. Rhea shared a series of videos from her stay on Instagram. On Tuesday, Rhea shared videos from her trip on her Instagram Stories. In the videos, Rhea can be seen walking on stairs and near the pool. Rhea also gave a glimpse of her room, which had a wooden interior and a huge window. According to the geotag added by Rhea, she is currently staying at Alibaug's Vista Rooms. As per the official website, the property is described as, "Laid with Jaisalmer stone, flushed with

a unique organic warmth. Separate to the main bungalow and across the property is an outhouse which is like a large gazebo with glass walls." The villa where Rhea was staying, comes with six bedrooms, with four on the ground floor in the main villa and two in the outhouse. The property also has lush green lawns with a mango orchard and a massive swimming pool. The cost of the room is Rs. 35,200.

Rhea Chakraborty is staying in Alibaug's Vista Rooms. Rhea Chakraborty's Alibaug stay. Rhea also shared a picture of herself sitting near the pool. She

captioned the photo, "Grateful for my hot cup of coffee and warm sunshine #rhenew." In the photo, Rhea is seen sitting with a cup of coffee in her hand, wearing a pink night suit.

Rhea started her career in 2009, when she participated in the MTV show TVS Scooty Teen Diva. She later appeared in films such as, Mere Dad Ki Maruti, Jalebi, Sonali Cable, Half Girlfriend and many more. She was last seen in Rumi Jafry's film Chehre released earlier this year. The film also starred Amitabh Bachchan, Emraan Hashmi, and Krystle D'souza in pivotal roles.

## Alia Bhatt poses with 'sun and flowers' in new batch of pics but can you decode Arjun Kapoor's comment?

On Wednesday, actor Alia Bhatt shared a series of photos on Instagram. Actor Arjun Kapoor reacted to the pictures. Sharing the pictures, Alia wrote, "Hangies with the sun & this flower." In the first few pictures, Alia made a flower her prop and smiled while looking at the camera. In the last one, she posed with a leaf. Arjun Kapoor commented on the photo and wrote, "In da Baug." Many people reacted to Arjun comment. One person wrote, "@arjunkapoor didn't understand but let's just pretend it's something dope." While another one wrote, "She is in Alibaug right now..he meant both the location and baag (garden) very smartly." Alia's friend Orhan Awatramani commented, "Are heavens kisses." One fan complimented Alia and wrote, "Not sure which flower to notice." Another fan said, "You are my always favourite with makeup or without makeup." Other fans praised Alia by calling her "beautiful," "lovely," "mesmerising," "refreshing" and much more.

Alia, who is currently dating actor Ranbir Kapoor, earlier posted pictures from their New Year vacation in Kenya's Masai

Mara. The couple has been busy lately in promoting their upcoming film Brahmastra. The Ayan Mukerji directorial is in works for years now. The film will also star actors Amitabh Bachchan, Nagarjuna, Mouni Roy and Dimple Kapadia. Brahmastra will release on September 9, 2022.

Apart from Brahmastra, Alia will also be seen in SS Rajamouli's film RRR which will release on January 7, 2022. The film also stars Ram Charan, Jr. NTR, Ajay Devgn and Shriya Saran. Alia also has Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Gangubai Kathiawadi in the pipeline, which stars actors Vijay Raaz, Indira Tiwari and Seema Pahwa in pivotal roles. Actors Ajay Devgn and Emraan Hashmi will have cameo appearances in the film.



## Nagarjuna on Bangaraju success: 'Telugu audience didn't give up on the film'

Actor Akkineni Nagarjuna is buoyed by the success of his latest Telugu release Bangaraju. He said that Telugu audiences didn't give up on the film and he will bow down to them for their response. Speaking at the success meet of the movie, which has grossed over ₹50 crore in its opening weekend, Nagarjuna thanked Telugu audiences for showing up at the theatres to watch their movie.



"The whole world fears the pandemic now. At a time when movies have been stopped from releasing in north India and we were contemplating whether to release our film or not, it is the Telugu cinema lovers who urged

us to go ahead with our release. They promised to watch our film. I bow down to Telugu audiences for giving us a blockbuster," Nagarjuna said, speaking at the event. "The success of this film is not because of the faith you have in me but it is because of the faith I have in Telugu audience," he added.

Bangaraju is the sequel to 2016 hit Telugu film Soggade Chinni Nayana. While Nagarjuna reprised the titular role from the prequel, Ramya Krishnan was seen as Bangaraju's wife Satyabhama. The film also featured Naga Chaitanya in a key role. The film also stars Krithi Shetty, Chalapathi Rao, Rao Ramesh, Brahmaji, Vennela Kishore and Jhansi among others.





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