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SpaceX launches Christmas presents, supplies to International Space Station



capsule loaded with more than 2,950 kilograms of gear for the station's seven astronauts. Several minutes later, the first-stage booster landed upright on an ocean platform, six years to the day that Elon Musk's company accomplished its first booster touchdown in 2015. This particular booster was making its first flight. A few days ago, a SpaceX booster made its 11th flight. "It's critical to lower the cost of spaceflight to continue to reuse these boosters more and more times. A hundred is a big milestone, so we're excited about that," said SpaceX's Sarah Walker, a mission manager. "We're also excited to see how few new boosters we have to produce as the years go by." Among the items due to arrive

(SAI Bureau)- SpaceX launched Christmas gifts, goodies and supplies to the International Space Station on Tuesday and got a present in return: the company's 100th successful rocket landing. The predawn liftoff from NASA's Kennedy Space Center was barely visible in the fog and clouds, as the Falcon rocket hoisted a Dragon

(Contd on page 30)

Madagascar minister 'swims 12 hours' to shore after helicopter crash



(SAI Bureau)-Malagasy minister Serge Gelle was one of two survivors to have swum some 12 hours to shore after their helicopter crashed off the island's northeastern coast, he and national authorities said on Tuesday.

Gelle became minister in August as part of a cabinet reshuffle carried out

(Contd on page 31)

Fuel prices in Sri Lanka hiked; govt says talks on with India for LoC



(SAI Bureau)- Sri Lanka's state oil entity and the Indian Oil Corporation's local subsidiary have raised the prices of petrol and diesel amidst a severe foreign exchange crisis in the country even as the government said that negotiations are underway with India

and Oman to work out credit lines for fuel purchases.

The state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) had urged the government for a price hike. However, the government has not allowed them

(Contd on page 31)

No evidence Omicron has lower severity than Delta variant: study



(SAI Bureau)-There is "no evidence" that Omicron has a lower severity than the Delta strain, according to a study in the UK which also found that the new variant of coronavirus largely evades immunity from past infection or two vaccine doses. The study by researchers from Imperial College London in the UK estimates that the risk of reinfection with the Omicron variant is 5.4 times greater than that of the Delta variant

(Contd on page 30)

Ayodhya land deals: Cong seeks top court probe, BSP says cancel sale

(SAI Bureau)- SENIOR Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi on Thursday said the probe ordered by the Uttar Pradesh government into land transactions in Ayodhya was inadequate and

that the Supreme Court should investigate the "loot". The Yogi Adityanath government ordered the probe on Wednesday, the same day as The Indian Express reported how elected public representatives and relatives of state government

(Contd on page 31)



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



(News Agencies)-Leena Nair, the first female and youngest-ever Chief Human Resources Officer of Anglo-Dutch FMCG major Unilever has stepped down to join French luxury group Chanel as its Global Chief Executive Officer.

She was a member of the Unilever Leadership Executive (ULE), which is responsible for delivering Unilever's business and financial performance.

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

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

"I would like to thank Leena for her outstanding contribution over the last three decades. Leena has been a pioneer throughout her career at Unilever, but no more so than in her role as CHRO, where she has been a driving force on our equity, diversity and inclusion agenda, on the transformation of our leadership development, and on our preparedness for the future of work," Unilever CEO Alan Jope said.



US President Biden announces intent to appoint 4 Indian-Americans to AANHPI Advisory Commission

Indian-Americans Ajay Jain Bhutoria, Kamal Kalsi, Sonal Shah, and Smita Shah are among 23 leaders to be appointed as commissioners to US President Joe Biden's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.

US President Joe Biden on Monday announced his intent to appoint four Indian Americans -- Ajay Jain Bhutoria, Sonal Shah, Kamal Kalsi and Smita Shah -- as members of his Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.

The Commission will advise the President on ways the public, private, and non-profit sectors can work together to advance equity and opportunity for every Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community, the White

House said.

It is also charged with advising the President on policies to address anti-Asian xenophobia and violence, ways to build capacity in AANHPI communities through federal grantmaking and policies to address the intersectional barriers that AANHPI women, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities face, a media release said.

In all, the White House announced 23 advisory members.

Bhutoria is a Silicon Valley technology executive, community leader, speaker,

and author that has been recognized for his work, the White House said.

He is a passionate advocate for the South Asian and AAPI communities in the areas of small businesses, educational opportunities, immigration issues, and technological advancement.

His expertise in the areas of organizational transformations and change management has supported critical advancements within the AAPI community, and he is committed to the creation of a compassionate and empowering environment for all, the White House said.

Disbarred Lawyer Charged with swindling more than half a million dollars from 44 clients

(Insider Bureau)-Defendant Charged with Grand Larceny and Other Crimes; Allegedly Stole Personal Injury Settlements from Victims; Faces up to 15 Years in Prison if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that disbarred lawyer Yohan Choi, 47, has been charged with grand larceny and other crimes for allegedly bilking more than 40 clients out of nearly \$620,000. Between August 2015 and August 2020, the Queens practitioner represented the victims in personal injury claims and allegedly failed to give his clients their share of the settlements.

District Attorney Katz said,

"Despite being disbarred, this defendant allegedly continued to represent clients and successfully reached settlements on dozens of personal injury cases. But, instead of taking his fair share of the proceeds, this former attorney is accused of pocketing all of the settlement money -- victimizing his clients a second time."

Choi, 47, of 23rd Avenue in Bayside, Queens, operated a law office on Northern Boulevard in Flushing for many years. The defendant was arraigned late yesterday afternoon before Queens Criminal Court Judge Scott Dunn on a 44-count complaint. Choi is charged with grand larceny in the second

degree, 41 counts of grand larceny in the third degree and the practice of law by attorney who has been disbarred, suspended or convicted of a felony. Judge Dunn set the defendant's return date for December 30, 2021. If convicted Choi faces up to 15 years in prison.

According to the charges, the defendant held bank accounts for his law practice at Chase, Capitol One and HSBC dating back to at least August 2015. A forensic examination of the accounts showed dozens of deposits for lawsuit settlements on behalf of Choi's clients.

DA Katz said, according to the complaint, in November 2016 a

woman the defendant represented in a personal injury case agreed to a settlement for \$52,500. The victim was entitled to just over \$35,000. Even though a check from the insurance company paying the settlement was allegedly deposited into the defendant's account, the woman never received any money.

Another woman Choi represented in a personal injury case agreed to settle for \$75,000 in May 2018, according to the complaint. After the lawyer's fee and other expenses were deducted, the victim was entitled to \$50,250. Choi allegedly never turned over that money, despite the insurance company

depositing a check for \$75,000 into his account.

Continuing, the DA said, a man who also hired the defendant to represent him in a personal injury matter agreed to settle his case for \$45,000 and was entitled to receive \$30,150. The investigation showed that Choi's bank account on May 12, 2020, allegedly received a check for \$45,000 from an insurance company. However, three days later that same escrow account's balance totaled just \$423. The victim never received the money he was due. According to the charges, the defendant repeated this scheme at least 41 times over the course of five years.



Rajya Sabha passes electoral reforms bill, Opposition stages walkout

On Tuesday, the Rajya Sabha passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021, amid a walkout by the Opposition. The Lok Sabha had passed the bill on Monday.

(News Agencies)-Parliament on Tuesday passed a bill to link electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem with Rajya Sabha passing it by voice vote amid a walkout by the opposition.

WHAT IS THE ELECTORAL REFORMS BILL?

The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which was passed in Lok Sabha on Monday, seeks to weed out fake voters from electoral rolls. It seeks to allow electoral registration officers to seek Aadhaar number of people who want to register as voters "for the purpose of establishing the identity".

At the same time, the amendment bill makes it clear that "no application for inclusion of name in the electoral roll shall be denied and no entries in the electoral roll shall be deleted for inability of an individual to furnish or intimate Aadhaar number due to such sufficient cause as may be prescribed".

SUPPORT FOR BILL

The bill was passed after an hour-long discussion with members of several parties who supporting it but had some concerns. They said the bill is part of electoral reforms and will help weed out fake and bogus voters in the electoral rolls. Brushing aside opposition criticism, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said, "In our democracy, the electoral process should be cleansed and that can happen only if the electoral rolls are clean."

"This bill will be opposed only by those who take advantage of fake voting. Otherwise, there is no basis for opposing

this bill," he said, adding that the new and genuine voters will never forgive them for doing so. He said the country has understood how necessary the electoral reform bill is and termed it as a "revolutionary bill".

Rijiju said the linking of electoral rolls to Aadhaar number is only voluntary and not compulsory.

OPPN PROTEST AGAINST THE BILL

Meanwhile, the discussion on the bill continued amid protests by opposition members who were all the time in the well, raising slogans. They later staged a walkout as their demand for sending the bill to a select committee was rejected.

Members of the Congress, TMC, CPI-M, CPI, DMK, RJD, Samajwadi Party, AAP and NCP walked out from the House in protest. They earlier opposed the bill, saying it infringes on voters' right to privacy and goes against the Supreme Court judgement.

The opposition parties were demanding a division of votes as they had moved a motion to send the bill to select committee, which was rejected by voice vote.

TMC member Derek O'Brien cited rules for division of votes even as Deputy Chairman Harivansh urged the members to go to their seats to enable the division.

However, opposition members continued to raise slogans in the well. O'Brien threw the rule book on the table where officials sit and staged a walkout.

DEREK O'BRIEN SUSPENDED

Ruling party members strongly condemned his behaviour, with leader of the House Piyush Goyal saying that he insulted not

only the Chair and the House, but the entire country with his act.

O'Brien was later suspended for the remainder of the session for his unruly behaviour, after a motion by the government in this regard was passed unanimously. The Chair also condemned his behaviour.

Members of the BJP, JD(U), YSRCP, AIADMK, BJD, TDP and TMC-M supported the bill, saying it will help in eradicating duplicate and fake voters from electoral rolls, terming it as a far-reaching electoral reform. BJP's Sushil Kumar Modi, A Navaneethakrishana (AIADMK), Ram Nath Thakur (JDU), Sujeet Kumar (BJD), Kanakamedala Ravindra Kumar (TDP), G K Vasan TMC(M), Venkataramana Rao Mopidevi (YSRCP) spoke in favour of the bill, with some expressing their concerns.

'UNDEMOCRATIC MANNER'

However, Amee Yagnik (Congress), Ram Gopal Yadav (SP), V Sivadasan (CPI-M), M Mohamed Abdulla of DMK strongly opposed the bill.

Earlier, Anand Sharma and O'Brien alleged that the bill was being brought in haste and in an undemocratic manner. The TMC leader alleged the bill was being passed in the same manner as the controversial farm laws were.

LAW MINISTER'S DEFENCE

Terming the bill "very good", Rijiju said the legislation will help end fake and bogus voting in the country and make the electoral process credible.

Dismissing apprehensions of the opposition as "baseless", the minister said they were "misinterpreting" the Supreme Court's judgement on personal liberty.

Indian Army set to induct new 'Made in India' landmines at Pak, China borders



(News Agencies)-

Shedding off its vintage weight, the Indian Army will soon welcome a new range of landmines which includes Nipun, Vibhav, Vishal, Prachand and Uluk to blast off enemy troops and terrorists trying to step onto Indian soil at the borders.

"A new range of mines is under development right from anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. This has been necessitated as all our mines were vintage," Army chief Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane said in Pune. "Each type of mine will get inducted as and when it meets user requirements which will be soon," he said.

The Indian Army's Corps of Engineers under Engineer in Chief Lt Gen Harpal Singh is getting a new set of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines which will act as the first line of defence against enemy infantry and armoured columns or terrorists trying to infiltrate into our territory.

The anti-tank and anti-personnel mines are part of a display where the Corps of Engineers are showcasing the indigenous equipment that has been inducted into the Army by it for carrying out operations against the enemy and defending its own areas.

"Indian Army is going to induct 7 lakh indigenously developed 'Nipun' anti-personal mines which carry a potent mix of RDX," an Army officer said. He said the mine has been developed by an Indian firm in partnership with the DRDO.

As a counter to enemy tank regiments, the corps of engineers are carrying out trials of the Vibhav and Vishal - the next generation of Indian-made anti-tank mines. These highly effective mines have been developed for the Indian Army by DRDO, and are at an advanced stage of user trials.

The new anti-tank mines have greater stopping power against enemy tanks due to their advanced design and sensors, Army officials said.

Police continues to be on high alert in Alappuzha, All-party meeting concludes

The all-party meeting was held under the leadership of Fisheries and Cultural minister Saji Cherian and Agricultural minister P Prasad.

(News Agencies)-Police continue to be on high alert in Alappuzha with the tense situation prevailing and the search for the assailants involved in both murders still on.

Meanwhile, representatives at the all-party meeting held on Tuesday decided to ensure peace was maintained in the district.

The all-party meeting was held under the leadership of Fisheries and Cultural minister Saji Cherian and Agricultural minister P Prasad. All representatives of political parties unanimously agreed to the suggestions put forward to maintain peace. The murders of both KS Shan, secretary, SDPI and OBC



Morcha leader Renjith Sreenivasan were condemned. The ministers further assured that all involved in the crime would be brought before justice.

The suggestions put forward include that all

representatives should try to maintain peace and spread messages of unity at their levels and avoid any chances of conflict, bringing any and all complaints to the attention of the district administration or MLAs or Ministers rather

than give in to provocations. They also called for public support to ensure a peaceful atmosphere.

The BJP and SDPI both slammed the police in the all-party meeting. SDPI alleged that the police are making people call 'Vandematharam and Jai Shree Ram'.

BJP president Gopakumar said that if the police can't catch the murderers of the BJP leader, they would take the matter to the centre. They further alleged that the district administration disrespected Ranjith Sreenivasan's body.

MLAs Ramesh Chennithala, H Salam, PP Chitharanjan, Thomas K Thomas and MS Arunkumar, district collector A Alexander, District Police

Chief G Jayadev, ADM J Mobi and sub collector Suraj Shaji were among those who took part in the meeting.

EXTENSIVE RAIDS, COUNCILLOR IN CUSTODY
Extensive raids were conducted in Alappuzha on Tuesday. 260 houses were raided looking for culprits in the murders. The raided places include houses of RSS and SDPI workers. Mannancheri Panchayat member and SDPI leader Nawas Naina was taken into custody.

Meanwhile, the prohibition declared under Section 144 was extended in the wake of the continuing tense political climate in the district. It will now be in effect until December 23.



Income Tax dept detects Rs 86 crore undisclosed income after raids on SP leaders, others in UP, K'taka

The Income Tax Department said it has detected undisclosed income of Rs 86 crore after conducting raids on several Samajwadi Party leaders and others in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

The Income Tax Department said it has detected undisclosed income of Rs 86 crore after conducting raids on several Samajwadi Party leaders and others in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka. The Income Tax Department had initiated a search and seizure operation against various individuals and their business entities on December 18. The individuals concerned are engaged in the businesses of civil construction, real estate and running educational institutes in UP and Karnataka.

The Income Tax raids were carried out on Samajwadi Party functionary Rajeev Rai in Mau, Manoj Yadav in Mainpuri and Jainendra Yadav in Lucknow of Uttar Pradesh, sources said.

"A Kolkata-based entry operator has also been covered in the search operation. The search action covered more than 30 premises spread over various locations including Lucknow, Mainpuri, Mau,

Kolkata, Bengaluru and NCR," read a statement released by the finance ministry.

UNDISCLOSED INCOME, UNEXPLAINED INVESTMENT

The tax officials alleged that a large amount of incriminating evidence, including hard copy documents and digital data were found and seized during the searches. This includes blank bill books, stamps and signed cheque books of bogus suppliers.

On preliminary analysis, it was found that several entities engaged in the business of civil construction were involved in claiming bogus expenditure running into crores of rupees to evade taxes, officials said.

"In case of one company, undisclosed income of over Rs 86 crore of the directors of the company has been detected. Out of the amount, the person concerned has admitted a sum of Rs 68 crore as his

undisclosed income and offered to pay tax thereon. In the case of a proprietary concern, books of accounts relating to its turnover exceeding Rs 150 crore during the last few years could not be produced," the statement further said.

The tax officials said they have detected the use of shell companies to route unexplained income and investments. An alleged unexplained investment to the tune of Rs 12 crore was identified by the search team. "In case of another person, unexplained investment of Rs 11 crore in a shell company and investments in benami properties worth Rs 3.5 crore have been identified," the statement said. According to investigators, a Kolkata-based accommodation entry provider was also covered in connection with providing accommodation entries to the individuals concerned. The officials found that the entry operator formed various shell companies to provide accommodation

entries of bogus share capital to the tune of Rs 408 crore and bogus unsecured loan of Rs 154 crore through these shell companies.

"Substantial amount of digital data evidencing hawala transactions has also been found and seized during the search operation. The entry operator has admitted to the above modus operandi, and also disclosed unaccounted commission income of Rs 5 crore," the statement added.

SP, BJP SPAR OVER I-T RAIDS

Rajiv Rai reportedly told the media that the raids on his residence in Mau were conducted at the behest of the government. Former Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav also slammed the Centre and accused it of misusing central agencies.

In response, Uttar Pradesh CM and BJP leader Yogi Adityanath said at a recent rally, "Chor ki dadhi mei tinka."

Andhra Pradesh to experience drop in temperatures by 2-4 degrees

Andhra Pradesh is set to witness a gripping cold as temperatures are likely to fall below normal levels.

Andhra Pradesh is set to witness a gripping cold as temperatures are likely to fall below normal levels over the next five days.

The minimum temperatures are likely to fall below normal by two to four degrees Celsius till December 25. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has released weather warnings for the next five days as cold conditions prevail in the state.

The mercury dipped to nine degree Celsius at Minumuluru

and to eight degree Celsius at Paderu.

The drop in temperature is because of the dry and cold winds coming from the northern parts of India. Parts of Telangana also experienced intense winter chills as Aliabad recorded a minimum temperature of 7.8 degree Celsius.

Meanwhile, tourist footfall in the hills has increased as they come to witness sunrise. The IMD has forecasted that mist and haze would likely prevail in the morning.





Karunanidhi's longtime aide Shanmuganathan passes away

Late Chief Minister and former DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi's trusted assistant and secretary K Shanmuganathan passed away

a wreath over his body. MDMK chief Vaiko was among others who laid a wreath.

Shanmuganathan, who began his career in the state government as a 'shorthand reporter' in the police department, was handpicked later by Karunanidhi in 1969 to assist him when he became the Chief Minister for the first time.

From then onwards, Shanmuganathan was associated with Karunanidhi, who died in 2018.

PMK founder leader S Ramadoss and MDMK chief Vaiko were among those who condoled Shanmuganathan's death.

(News Agencies)-Late Chief Minister and former DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi's trusted assistant and secretary K Shanmuganathan died here on Tuesday. He was 80 years old and passed away at a hospital following an illness.

Expressing grief, DMK president and Chief Minister M Stalin hailed Shanmuganathan for his dedicated services as an assistant and secretary to Karunanidhi for about 50

years. Conveying his condolences to the bereaved family, Stalin described Shanmuganathan as 'Kalaingar's Nizhal' (shadow) to indicate the close association of the former assistant with Karunanidhi for

decades. Addressing Shanmuganathan as elder brother, the Chief Minister said he was the symbol of hard work, truth, loyalty and dedication. Stalin, along with senior leader Duraimurugan, placed



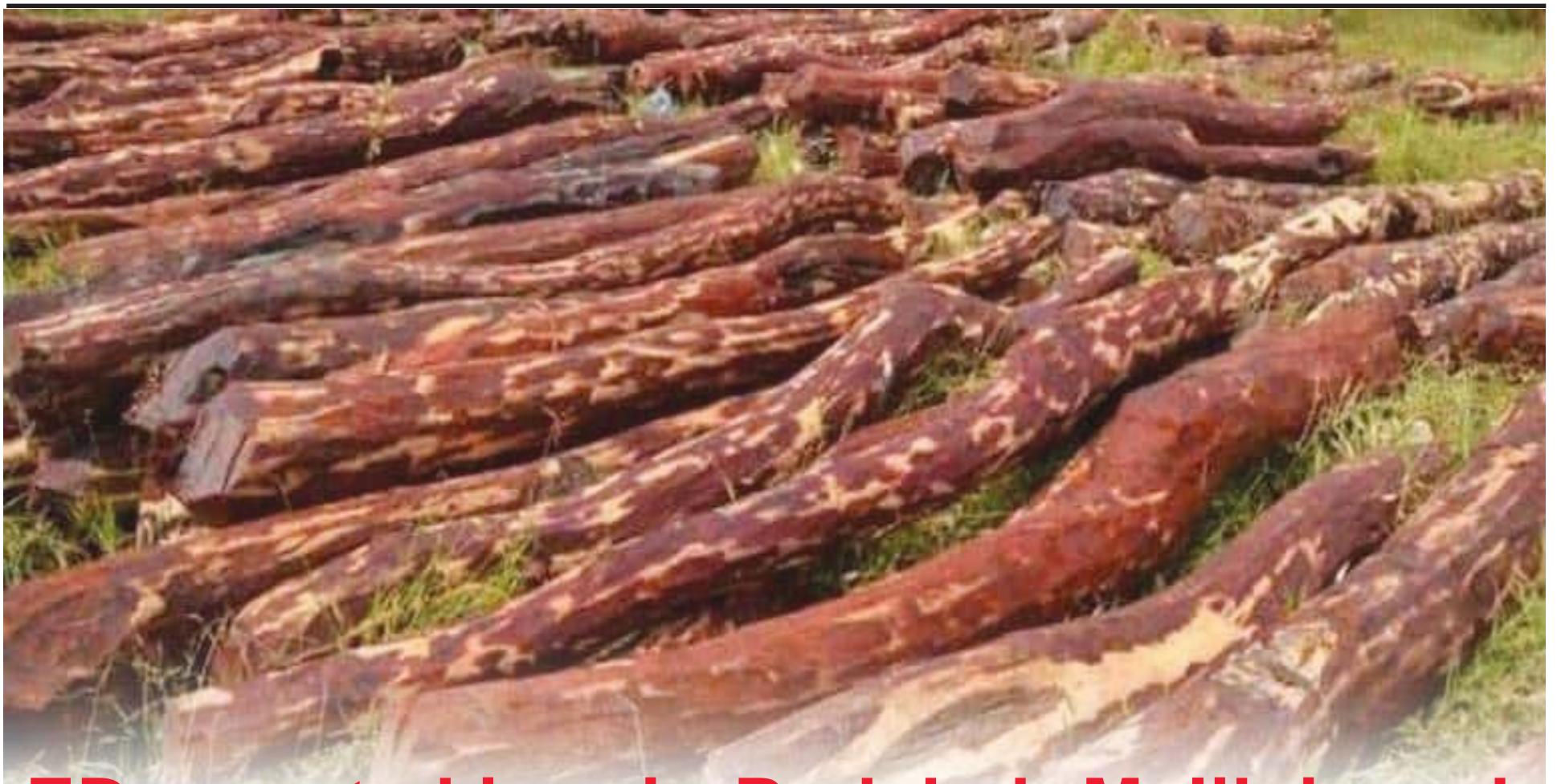
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ED arrests kingpin Badshah Malik in red sandalwood smuggling case

The Enforcement Directorate arrested kingpin Badshah Malik in connection with red sandalwood smuggling case

(News Agencies)-The Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested kingpin Badshah Malik in connection with a case related to the smuggling of red sanders, also called red sandalwood. Badshah Malik was questioned by the ED team on Monday in connection with a red sanders smuggling case registered by DRI (Directorate of Revenue Intelligence) in 2015, in which Malik was one of the prime accused. On Monday, ED officials conducted searches at multiple locations across Mumbai in connection with the case. The ED searches were on the basis of an ECIR registered by the agency following a DRI case against red sanders smugglers Badshah Malik and Vijay Poojary.

In 2015, DRI unearthed an international smuggling

racket where rare and precious wood like red sanders was being smuggled outside the country, exporting it in freight containers. Over 7800 metric tonnes of red sanders was being smuggled to Middle Eastern countries through a Mumbai-based shipping company. The containers were intercepted at Nhava Shava export terminal by DRI officials and further investigation led them to Malik, Hegde, and Poojary. Malik is said to be an old hand in red sanders smuggling where he helps with documents related to export by misdeclaring it as 'teak wood'. Poojary has several cases of smuggling against him and smuggles the wood from jungles of Rayalseema.

Red sanders have very high value in China, Japan, Europe, and America. Furniture and artefacts are

made out using the rare wood said to be found only in India in jungles of Rayalseema. A tonne of red sanders costs anywhere between Rs 15 lakhs to Rs 30 lakhs in the black market. The agency suspects that both Malik and Poojary have links to the underworld and work with them for safe supply of the smuggled wood through ports of Middle East. Malik, after being brought to ED office on Monday evening, was questioned for several hours and was then placed under arrest on Tuesday. The agency suspects that Malik and his accomplices were involved in laundering of proceeds earned from smuggling of red sanders. Badshah Malik will be produced in the PMLA court as the agency seeks custodial remand.

Karnataka CM Bommai calls Congress an 'irresponsible' opposition

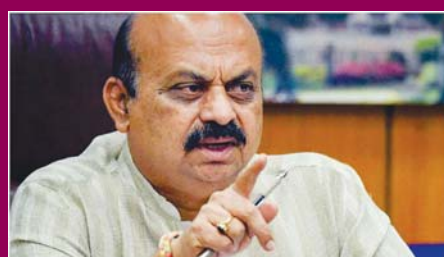
Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said that Congress is an irresponsible opposition party after they staged a walkout during the introduction of anti-conversion bill

Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said that Congress is an irresponsible opposition party after they staged a walkout during the introduction of the anti-conversion bill. Bommai said Congress has failed to take up pro-people issues in the state.

Congress is not bothered about the development of northern Karnataka. They have come to the Belagavi session to deliver speeches and hold dharna in the house. They have failed to take up pro-people issues and seek a reply, Bommai said. Referring to the anti-conversion bill, Bommai said it is the right of an elected government, as the voice of the people, to decide on laws that need to be

brought.

"It is the duty of the opposition to be present. They have shown their irresponsibility by staying away. This state has the most irresponsible opposition party," Bommai alleged.



After the bill was tabled, Karnataka Congress president DK Shivakumar tore the bill on the floor of the House and MLAs staged a walkout. Congress

has been opposing the bill in the state.

The adverse impact of religious conversions on innumerable families is a known fact. It should be prevented. We are working under legal and constitutional provisions in this regard. Congress has the opportunity to discuss it. We are ready to make amends if there are any mistakes in the bill, Bommai said. Speaking to media, Bommai said the opposition leaders do not want farmers to get compensation for their crop losses.

We have raised the compensation, the state cabinet has taken a slew of decisions for development of northern Karnataka. We are ready for discussion on any development projects, the chief minister said.

No mass gatherings;

restaurants, bars to work at 50% capacity:

Karnataka issues curbs on New Year celebrations



The Karnataka government imposed restrictions on public celebrations of new year, prohibiting mass gatherings across the state from December 30 to January 2

(News Agencies)-In view of the Covid-19 situation in the state and the rising number of Omicron cases, the Karnataka government imposed restrictions on public celebrations of new year. On Tuesday, Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai announced that no parties or mass gatherings

would be permitted in the state from December 30 to January 2. "We have restricted public celebration of new year, however, celebrations are permitted in clubs and restaurants with 50 per cent seating capacity without any special event like DJ," Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said.

"We had a meeting with experts through video conference regarding the new year celebrations, keeping in mind the Covid-19 and Omicron related cases," Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai told reporters. On the recommendation of experts, the state government decided to ban mass gatherings

across the state.

"We are banning mass gatherings at open places. This is across the state from December 30 to January 2," CM Bommai said. He added that no parties or events like having Disc Jockeys at clubs and restaurants would be allowed. "The clubs and restaurants will be allowed to have only 50 per cent of the

capacity, but there is a ban on organising parties and Disc Jockeys," Bommai said. Similarly in apartments too, there will be no parties or DJs. The residents' associations have been asked to ensure that the rules are not violated. Detailed guidelines on Covid restrictions during new year will be released soon

TMC's Derek O'Brien suspended from Parliament for throwing rule book at chair

On Tuesday, All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Derek O'Brien was suspended from the Rajya Sabha for the remaining part of the Winter Session after he allegedly threw the rule book at the chair. The incident occurred during the passage of the electoral reforms bill in the House, after which Derek O'Brien staged a walkout. The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021, passed in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday and in the Lok Sabha on Monday, seeks to link electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem. The bill was opposed by Opposition parties. Derek O'Brien spoke for



two minutes on the bill before he walked out of the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

In response to his suspension from the House, the TMC Member of Parliament tweeted,

"The last time I got suspended from the Rajya Sabha was when the government was bulldozing the farm laws. We all know what happened after that. Today, suspended while protesting

against BJP making a mockery of Parliament and bulldozing Election Laws Bill, 2021. Hope this Bill too will be repealed soon."

The last time I got suspended from RS was when govt. was BULLDOZING #FarmLaws We all know what happened after that.

Today, suspended while protesting against BJP making a mockery of #Parliament and B U L L D O Z I N G #ElectionLawsBill2021

Hope this Bill too will be repealed soon

ELECTION LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2021 IN

RAJYA SABHA

The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to weed out fake voters from electoral rolls. It will link electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem.

In Parliament, the opposition parties were demanding a division of votes as they had moved a motion to send the bill to a select committee, which was rejected by voice vote. The Opposition was of the opinion that the bill infringes on voters' right to privacy. When the bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha, members of Congress, TMC, Left parties, DMK and NCP walked out in protest.



Sabarimala temple raises daily limit of pilgrims to 60,000

In the wake of declining Covid cases, the state government has increased the number of devotees to be allowed at the hill shrine from 45,000 per day to 60,000 per day

(News Agencies)-Announcing more relaxations in the Sabarimala temple, the state government has increased the daily number of devotees to be allowed at the hill shrine from 45,000 per day to 60,000. This decision has been taken in the wake of declining Covid cases in the state. However, the virtual queue system will continue to be in place even if the number of worshippers has been increased. Devotees at Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa

temple will be allowed to perform neyyabhishekam offering between 7 AM and noon, said Devaswom Minister K Radhakrishnan's Office.

According to a report published in the Times of India (TOI), the government has also decided to open a 500 room facility for devotees that was readied in Sannidhanam. However, only one person will be allowed in each room.

Strict Covid-19 protocols are being

followed in Sabarimala, including a vaccine certificate or providing an RT-PCR negative certificate, taken within 72 hours prior to reaching Sabarimala.

Meanwhile, the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) has been asked to conduct sanitization in each of the rooms as per the Covid-19 protocols.

Moreover, the traditional route from Pamba, passing through Neelimala, Appachimedu and Marakkootam will be

opened for devotees.

On the other hand, the revenue (Devaswom) department has also issued an order stating that all the relaxations will be withdrawn at once if any Omicron cases are detected among devotees or officials on duty in Sabarimala, TOI revealed in its report.

Meanwhile, the ongoing Mandalam-Makaravilakku season will continue till January 20, 2022.

Wife of murdered Kerala RSS worker demands CBI probe

Murdered RSS worker Sanjith's wife Arshika has moved the Kerala High Court, demanding a CBI investigation into her husband's death

Murdered RSS worker Sanjith's wife Arshika has moved the Kerala High Court, demanding a CBI investigation into her husband's death. Sanjith was murdered in front of his wife by a group of assailants in Palakkad.

Arshika alleged that the investigation was not going in the right direction and demanded a CBI probe to bring out the conspiracy behind the murder.

The five people who were identified to have allegedly killed Sanjith are

Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) workers. Her petition also points out that the culprits behind the murder are still at large.

"The SDPI and Popular Front of India (PFI) have their reach across India and abroad. There are national and international ramifications in the larger conspiracy to commit the gruesome murder. The SDPI and PFI activists committed murders in various parts of India in their fights against the RSS," the petition read. It is also alleged that the murder was

a result of interference by the RSS worker in the 'religious propagation activity' of SDPI and PFI. According to the petitioner, a national agency like the CBI has to investigate the crime to bring out the truth.

The incident happened on November 15 when 27-year-old Sanjith was driving his wife Arshika to work. The assailants allegedly hit the bike with a car and hacked him to death. At the time of the murder, Sanjith was the Bouthik Shikshan Pramukh of the Thenari region.





After Ayodhya and Kashi, grand temple should be built in Mathura': MP Hema Malini

On Monday, Lok Sabha MP Hema Malini said that a "grand temple of Shri Krishna" should be built in her constituency, Mathura, in Uttar Pradesh

(News Agencies)-Actress Hema Malini, Lok Sabha MP from Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, said on Monday that a "grand temple of Shri Krishna" should be built in her constituency. Speaking to the media outside Parliament on Monday, she said, "It is very good that the Ram mandir is being constructed in Ayodhya and a grand corridor has been inaugurated in Varanasi. Now, a grand temple of Lord Shri Krishna should also be built in Mathura, my parliamentary constituency."

On her arrival in Mathura on Tuesday, she reiterated her demand for a Krishna temple in Mathura.

"It will be Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who will decide how the temple of Shri Krishna will be built in Mathura. But all I have to say is that it should be made with love," Hema Malini said.

MAIN ELECTION ISSUE? Earlier, Deputy Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Keshav Prasad Maurya had also advocated for the construction of a grand

temple in Mathura. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, too, has made several visits to Mathura in the recent past.

A senior BJP leader said, "Mathura, Kashi and Ayodhya have been on the BJP's agenda since the beginning. We are considering the construction of the Shri Krishna temple as the main issue in this Assembly election."

Reacting to these developments, Bharatiya Muslim Vikas Parishad chief Sami Aghai said, "The main issue of the

government should be development and control of inflation. Keeping these issues on the back burner, religious and Hindutva-related issues are being put forward. This is not good for the country's progress." Similarly, Vishal Sharma, vice-chairman of Hindustani Biradari, said, "Today, the government is focused only on religion while paying no attention to the public. The government should focus on the upliftment of people, not only on religion because religion and building temples are not a government's job."

Gujarat panchayat polls: Candidate with 12 voters in family gets just 1 vote, his own



A candidate from Gujarat's Vapi district was heartbroken after getting only a single vote, his own, in the rural local body elections. The candidate's loss was even more embarrassing as he had a total of twelve members in his family, none of whom voted for him.

The candidate, Santosh, had thrown in his nomination for the post of Sarpanch in Vapi district's Chharwala village. He expected that at least his family, which had a total of 12 voters, would vote in his favour.

However, after the votes were counted, Santosh found out that he had managed to get only one vote, that too his own. He broke down near the counting centre and said that even his own family did not vote for him.

The results of over 8,600 gram panchayats are to be declared on Tuesday as counting of votes in the gram panchayat elections is underway in various centres in Gujarat.

Khalistani remark case: Kangana to not appear before police for now, actor says probe officer incommunicado

(News Agencies)-Pursuant to the Bombay High Court order, actor Kangana Ranaut was to appear before the Khar Police station on Wednesday in connection with the FIR registered against her for her Instagram posts about the Sikh community and the Khalistani movement. However, Ranaut will not be making her appearance at the suburban police station. Last month, Ranaut was

booked by the Khar Police under IPC section 295A (Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs).

Ranaut was supposed to appear before the Khar police station after her lawyer Ankita Chatterjee had made a statement that she would be appearing before the police station on December 22.

Ranaut had approached the high court seeking quashing of the case registered against her for her objectionable Instagram posts.

During the hearing of Ranaut's plea on December 13, the lawyer of the complainant had sought time to file a reply and that is why the court had asked police if they would make a statement of not taking any coercive steps against the actor. The investigating officer

had agreed while requesting the court to ask Ranaut to appear before them and cooperate in the investigation.

Advocate Rizwan Siddiquee representing Ranaut said, "Going by the spirit, aim and intent of the high court order, we requested the investigation officer for an earlier date and wanted to expedite the process before the next court hearing. However, the IO was not willing to accommodate us. He neither

responded to my messages or calls nor did he revert to the letter which was served to him immediately after the order." He added, "Now my client will appear before him on the earliest date as may be available. If the IO does not accommodate us, then we will leave it for the high court to decide the matter on merits." The high court will be hearing the case next on January 25.



Linking Aadhaar card with voter ID will help remove duplicate, spurious voters: Former CEC Hari Shankar Brahma

Former Chief Election Commissioner Hari Shankar Brahma said that linking Aadhaar cards with voter cards will help detect and remove a huge number of duplicate and bogus voters on the electoral rolls.

(News Agencies)-Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Hari Shankar Brahma said that linking Aadhaar cards with voter cards will help detect and remove a huge number of duplicate and bogus voters in the electoral rolls and will help purify the election database.

Hari Shankar Brahma spoke to Aajtak/India Today over a phone call and welcomed the decision taken by the Centre to introduce the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 which was passed in the Parliament.

"It is a very good idea. Linking a voter ID card with an Aadhaar card is best in the country and after that, you can detect and remove duplicate, bogus voter ID cards and purify the electoral rolls and election database. In earlier elections there were many allegations that many spurious names, non-Indian people's names appeared in the electoral roll. In Assam, non-Indian people's names have appeared in the voter list and linking Aadhaar with voter ID cards will help to remove the spurious voters from the list," Brahma said.

He also said that it will facilitate the enrollment of new voters.

"Linking Aadhaar with voter cards

will help people when they shift cities and want to cast their vote there. It will become an easy process to change the voting address when people shift to a new city or place," Hari Shankar Brahma said.

Further, he said linking Aadhaar with voter cards will easily verify the identity of any person. It will help to smoothly conduct elections.

In 2012, Hari Shankar Brahma gave a proposal to link voter ID cards with Aadhaar cards so as to remove duplicate, spurious voter cards. Talking about the updation process of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, the former Chief Election Commissioner said the NRC should also be linked with Aadhaar.

"I will support Aadhaar linkage with the NRC, Aadhaar linkage with the voter card. It will also help to stop manipulation at lower levels," Hari Shankar Brahma said.

The NRC updation process is going on in Assam under the supervision of the Supreme Court. The NRC list was published on August 31, 2019 and around 19.06 lakh people were left out from the list.

A total of 3,11,21,004 names were included in the updated NRC out of 3,30,27,661 applicants.

The Assam government had filed a petition before the Supreme Court seeking 20 percent re-verification in the bordering districts and 10 percent in other districts.

Abhijit Sarma, president of Assam Public Works (APW) said the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 will help to detect and remove duplicate voters. Sarma's July 2009 writ petition in the Supreme Court led to the exercise of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC). "In the NRC context, we also want Aadhaar to be linked with the NRC. Aadhaar is not a document of citizenship. Many illegal Bangladeshis' names have appeared in the NRC list which was published on August 31, 2019. In Assam, a large number of illegal Bangladeshis have accessed the voter and Aadhaar cards and their names were also included in the NRC list. We also demand re-verification of the NRC. We don't think Aadhaar linkage with voter cards will affect the NRC updation process in Assam," Abhijit Sarma said.

No justification for mob lynching: Amarinder Singh condemns killing of men accused of 'sacrilege'



Former Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh expressed concern over the recent incidents of lynching reported in Amritsar and Kapurthala. Condemning the attacks that shook the state on Saturday and Sunday, Amarinder Singh said that there is no justification for mob lynching.

"There is no justification for mob lynching whatsoever, and it is condemnable," Captain Amarinder said in Rajpura on Tuesday.

He condemned the killing of the two persons accused of 'sacrilege', and said the accused should have been handed over to the police.

ON FIR AGAINST BIKRAM MAJITHIA

Meanwhile, reacting to the registration of FIR against Bikram Majithia, Amarinder Singh said, "The case

registered against Majithia will not stand legal scrutiny as the government had not followed due process of law."

Former Punjab minister and senior Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Bikram Singh Majithia was booked in a drugs case. The FIR against Majithia was registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act at Mohali on Monday.

He further questioned on what basis the government had registered the case against the SAD leader, since the report on drug trafficking was still lying with the Punjab and Haryana High Court in a sealed cover.

"After all, there is a law in the country and I am sure it will not stand legal scrutiny in the court of law", he said, while adding, "just because you don't like someone, you can't put him behind bars".

Woman arrested for killing her son for 'becoming' transperson in Salem

The Tamil Nadu police have arrested a woman for killing her son. The accused killed her 19-year-old son for 'becoming' a transperson, the police said.

The incident took place in Salem. The police arrested five others in connection with the murder. Umadevi, a resident of Ammapalayam allegedly killed her son Naveen Kumar for coming out as a transperson. Umadevi was separated from her husband and lived alone.

Her son was coming to terms with her gender identity during this period, the police said. Naveen

Kumar changed his name to Akshita identifying self as a transwoman and stayed with transgender community members in Bengaluru. Naveen Kumar used to visit his mother, who was living alone. In his recent trip, Umadevi is said to have tried convincing Naveen Kumar to come out of his gender norms. Having failed to convince Naveen Kumar, Umadevi and five others allegedly attacked him. Naveen Kumar was admitted to a government hospital with severe injuries last week. Naveen Kumar succumbed to his injuries.

Meeting between India and Central Asian Republics underscores shared concerns on Afghanistan



A COMMON GROUND

The meeting of the foreign ministers of India and five Central Asian countries for the third edition of their dialogue in Delhi has underscored the consensus for peace and stability in Afghanistan. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share land borders with Afghanistan, and instability in that country affects them directly, as it has already done. Ethnic Tajik, Turk and Uzbek are significant minorities in Afghanistan, and the first to be impacted by Taliban's exclusionary ideology. Including Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, the Central Asian Republics fear the impact of the export of radical Islam, terrorism and drugs into their own territories. India shares these worries. A meeting of national security advisers hosted by India a month ago had also drawn attention to these shared concerns. The joint statement by the foreign ministers called on the Taliban to form an inclusive and representative government, respect women and minority rights, combat terrorism and drug trafficking, and also urged immediate humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. But different countries in the region are still formulating their own positions on a Taliban regime in Kabul. Not evident in the joint statement are the differences between the CARs on how to proceed on Afghanistan. Russia has been balancing its relations with the Taliban through these republics. Tajikistan, which has strong ties with Russia, for instance, has a different, more confrontational approach to the Taliban than Uzbekistan's conciliatory attitude, because of cross-border links with the mostly-Tajik Northern Alliance.

Moreover, all central Asian countries remain in discussions with Pakistan over the developments in Afghanistan. That the CAR foreign ministers skipped an Organisation of Islamic Co-operation meeting in Islamabad to attend the Delhi meeting is a reaffirmation of India's long-standing relationship with these countries since the time they were part of the USSR. But it is also true that as India wooed the US and China, it paid less attention to these post-Soviet independent states until some 10 years ago, even as their strategic importance as hubs of energy and trade corridors was growing. While Moscow remains influential in the CAR, Beijing has recently built deep economic ties, including trade, which is valued at \$100 bn, apart from big investments in the region. The CAR are enthusiastic supporters of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The Delhi joint statement sought to emphasise the difference between India and China by committing to connectivity initiatives on the basis of "principles of transparency, broad participation, local priorities, financial sustainability and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity". It may be due to lack of connectivity that trade between India and the CAR is a poor \$2 bn. Chabahar in Iran may help to improve this. But it is time India stopped looking at these countries through an over-securitised lens, or as a contest with China. The invitation to the leaders of these five countries as chief guests at the 2022 Republic Day celebration should be the opportunity to make a fresh start.

Xi Jinping's way of handling country's capitalists, result in China's economic troubles

By Susmita Ghosh

China has a tumultuous financial year 2021 with several businesses being damaged. None other than the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping is getting the blame for this financial fiasco. His vendetta against the businesses which tried to come out of the ruling party's control, led to this situation. A year back, his stance was to reign in the private businesses and eminent personalities that did not follow the ruling party line to a tee. Consequently, there were country-wide crackdowns and regulations against the big corporations along with their leaders. Among them, the most well-known personality is Jack Ma, the co-founder of Alibaba. Besides, tech giants like Baidu, Tencent and Bytedance, who owns TikTok, also faced several regulatory steps. While the policy of Xi Jinping offered a short term comfort and calmness, the fallout out of it was catastrophic. Without the leader taking a prominent stand to lead, the larger corporations are deviating from a clear path ahead. Therefore, they are facing a huge loss in their annual earning, hence the country's economy is hurting severely. The Alibaba Group had to change its plans to make a part of the company public. They are way down from the predicted growth rate for the year as well. The earning per share of the company fell sharply, resulting a massive loss of wealth, hindering the progress. There have been layoffs in almost every segment of industries, which are in any way related to tech and real estate. One of the major losses of fortune happened with the Evergrande group who lost US\$17 billion alone, whereas the combined loss in the

industry was around US\$46 billion. The overall decline across tech and related sectors, has resulted in a demand crunch around every sectors. However, the real estate sector has faced the most severe end of it. The rising unemployment numbers, a decline in Chinese stocks and currency value, along with a steady deflation rate, are adding more fuel to it. Highest possibility of a severe drop is there in the housing market, which may even end up affecting the global market. In the Xi Jinping regime, he is gradually trying to portray himself as the supreme leader in the country. Evidently in various steps taken by him against the eminent figures. Jack Ma is yet to be seen in a public appearance recently. It is bringing down the morale in Alibaba Company and the share price too. China has always been restrictive when it comes to free growth. In every aspects of life, be it economic prowess or liberal life-view, the country-sponsored ways were prevalent. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the country has prospered a lot. However, of late there is micro-management in every step, which hinders progress. The state tends to control major aspects of trade in every country around the globe. In the case of China, the government is down to petty vengeance. In short term, it may work well but in the long term, it damages the character and economic spine of the country. Xi Jinping is putting distance between himself and all the chaos, blaming it on the others. While he is trying to clean his image, it is to be seen how severe is the damage done by the steps conferring his administrative policy.



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A 'Lakshman rekha' was breached at opening of Kashi-Vishwanath Corridor

PM's use of religion for political gains is a matter of great concern. But of greater concern is the more difficult battle of the 2024 general elections

The recent inauguration of a municipal road in Kashi, the Lok Sabha constituency of the prime minister, was converted by him into a grand show of devotion to the Hindu religion - like the inauguration or foundation-laying functions of earlier projects at Ayodhya, Badrinath, Kedarnath and other Hindu religious places, all at a considerable cost to the government exchequer. These events have raised many questions of propriety in a secular democracy. In an earlier article, I had talked about the crossing of the "Lakshman rekha" by the PM, when I noticed that he was freely using government functions organised at government cost to lambast his political opponents, especially in Uttar Pradesh. That is a fine line of democratic behaviour that many of our worthies in politics have often violated but I was shocked when it came from no less a person than the PM. But that is nothing compared to the recent show at Kashi, all dedicated to the glory of

the Hindu religion, spread over two days and covered live by all media channels and comprehensively by the entire print media. "Is India a secular democracy anymore?" is a question on many people's lips, while the majority celebrate it as the final revenge of history taken by the present prime minister for all the wrongs done by the Muslim invaders in the past. As I understand it, India is still a secular state, which means that the state has no religion and is bound by the Constitution to treat all religions as equal and make no distinction between the followers of one as compared to the other. I have been in positions of power and authority myself, first in administration and later in politics, almost all my life. Nobody taught me to be secular but I was secular naturally and, therefore, had no difficulty in treating the followers of all faiths equally. I was and continue to be a devout Hindu. Apart from doing my prayers on a daily basis, going to temples and the places of

pilgrimage, I have walked barefoot a hundred kilometres from Sultanganj in Bihar to Baba Dham (Deoghar) now in Jharkhand, carrying a 'Kanwar' with the holy Ganga water to be offered to Lord Shiva for five years running. But it was always a personal pursuit, as it should be. I even persuaded the great socialist leader Karpooori Thakur, who was chief minister of Bihar then, to create adequate facilities for the pilgrims on the 100 km route, like clean dharamshalas, drinking water facilities, toilets, etc. at government cost. I still remember the lively debate we had in the largely socialist Bihar cabinet then about whether the government should spend money on a purpose like this. The issue was settled in favour of doing so on the grounds that it served a larger public purpose. But neither Karpooori Thakur nor any of his cabinet colleagues, who included representatives of the then Jan Sangh, made a song and dance about it. There

were no grand foundation-laying or inaugural functions. I shudder to imagine what would have happened if such a project had been undertaken today. Milking religion, caste, language, region or any other identity for personal and political gain is not unknown in electoral politics in our country, as indeed the world over. But it has been muted and not done as openly and shamelessly as it is being done today. The present prime minister is not the first BJP prime minister of India. Atal Bihari Vajpayee had preceded him in that post and while I shall not judge Narendra Modi by the standards of Jawaharlal Nehru, I am well within my rights to judge him by the standards set by Vajpayee. And knowing him as I do, I have no hesitation in saying that Vajpayee would never have done any of those hundreds of things Modi has done to violate the spirit of the Constitution, including the grand show in Kashi the other day. "Raj Dharma" can be consigned to the dustbin.

J&K Delimitation Commission must set out rationale behind its proposals

The Commission has invited the views of the public and political parties until December 31. For its own credibility, and in the larger interest, it must set out in detail the rationale behind its proposals.

The act of redrawing electoral boundaries is disruptive by definition and politicians are always wary of being short-changed by the process. In Muslim-majority Jammu & Kashmir, where the demand for delimitation has emanated from Jammu and is seen as reflecting the communal polarisation along regional lines in the erstwhile state, the redrawing of



constituencies was always going to be a fraught exercise. The draft proposals of the J&K Delimitation Commission, set up in March 2020, seem to have confirmed the fears of the regional parties that the exercise was aimed solely at increasing the number of seats in

Hindu-majority Jammu, to benefit the BJP. The five associate members - three parliamentarians from the National Conference and two from the BJP - have been told that its findings support an increase of six seats for the Jammu region, and one in the

Muslim-majority Valley. This takes the seats in Jammu from 37 to 43, and in Kashmir, from 46 to 47. In the last Assembly election held in 2014, the BJP's 25 seats were all won in Jammu. Delimitation is thought to have one criterion - population. On the basis of the last census conducted in 2011, according to which the population of Kashmir is 6,888,475 and that of Jammu 5,350,811, the proposal presents an anomaly - a population of 1,46,563 in Kashmir per constituency, and 1,24,437 in Jammu. But the Commission seems to have taken other factors into consideration, including

voters' lists, geographical and communication contiguity, and a margin of plus or minus 10 per cent population in each constituency. It has also proposed the first-time reservation of nine seats for Scheduled Tribes, in addition to seven seats for Scheduled Castes. All the regional parties, including NC, PDP, and People's Conference, have criticised the proposal as a move to disempower Kashmir further after the 2019 reorganisation of the state that bifurcated it into two Union Territories, and stripped it of its special status.

Pakistan has opened a fake news factory to target India

On Tuesday, India banned 20 YouTube channels for dispensing fake news and promoting anti-India propaganda. Media Explored what content these channels were publishing and who they were being run by. Here's what we found



On Tuesday, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting banned twenty YouTube channels and two websites for dispensing fake news and promoting anti-India propaganda.

"The channels and websites belong to a coordinated disinformation network operating from Pakistan and spreading fake news about various sensitive subjects related to India. The channels were used to post divisive content in a coordinated manner on topics like Kashmir, Indian Army, minority communities in India, Ram Mandir, General Bipin Rawat and others," a source said.

India Today took a deep dive into what content these YouTube channels were publishing, how many subscribers they had and who they were being operated by. Here's what we found.

WHO'S OPERATING THE CHANNELS?

Of the twenty YouTube channels banned by the Government of India, at least 15 were being operated by the same group, 'Naya Pakistan Group'.

Naya Pakistan Group (NGP) used Pakistani news anchors and artists to promote fake stories on YouTube. The group, according to Indian intelligence sources, is being funded by Pakistani agencies in a bid to create a rift within communities and target the youth in India.

The twenty banned YouTube channels have a total subscriber base of 35 lakh people. Of these, 31 lakh subscribers belong to the fifteen YouTube channels being run by or having links to NPG.

WHAT CONTENT DO THEY PUBLISH?

Some of the stories that were run on these channels include "Turkish Army Enters In New Dehli", "300 Indian Spy Hang By Afghaan Talebans And Give Clear Message To Modi And Yogi" and "Joe Biden And Erdogan Going To Enter Troops In Kashmir As Modi Dismissed Article 370".

The YouTube channels were given neutral names such as Punjab Viral and Historical Facts, probably to mislead viewers into believing the content published by them.

Apart from using fake pictures, the YouTube channels also used hashtags of Indian origin to maximise their reach in India.

LIST OF CHANNELS

Here's a list of YouTube channels found to be operated by NPG:

1. Fictional

Subscribers: 3 lakh

Example of published story: 7 Arab Countries Ready To Cut The Oil Supply Of India

2. Historical Facts

Subscribers: 9.44 lakh

Example of published story: Turk Army Enter Ayodhya Ram Mandir To Takes Revenge

3. Punjab Viral

Subscribers: N/A

Example of published story: PM Modi concedes defeat in Kashmir

4. Naya Pakistan Global

Subscribers: 7.76 lakh

Example of published story: North Korea Leader Kim Jong Un Send His Army In Ayodhya

5. The Punch Line

Subscribers: 1.16 lakh

Example of published story: 20 Indian Army Generals Neutralized In Training Center Of Kashmir Targeted By Kashmir Mujaheddin

6. Cover Story

Subscribers: N/A

Example of published story: United Nations Takes Historic Decision Against RSS Chief Amid Muslims Genocide In India

7. Go Globale Commerce

Subscribers: 12, 200

Example of published story: Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh Accepted Defeat Against Pakistan, China

8. Junaid Heleem Official

Subscribers: N/A

Example of published story: 1000 Assam Muslims Reach To Afghaan Talebans To Take Help

9. Tayyab Hanif

Subscribers: N/A

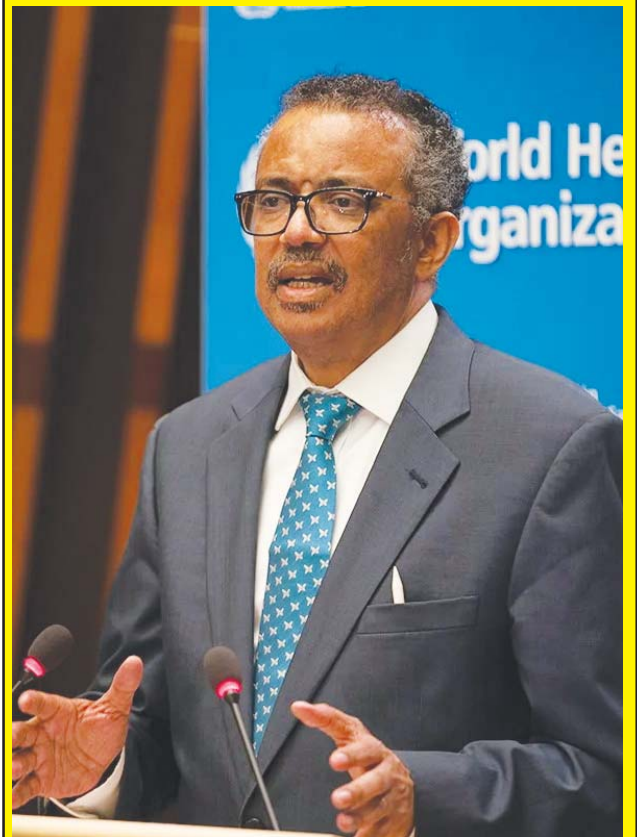
Example of published story: America Imposed Sanctions On Rajnath Singh, Bipan Rawat, Naravane

10. Zain Ali Official

Subscribers: 1.39 lakh

Example of published story:

We must end Covid pandemic in 2022': WHO chief's stern warning, urges world to pull together



As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continue to wreak havoc across the world after the emergence of new variants, the World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Monday (December 20) opined about taking strict measures to end it.

He urged the world to pull together and make difficult decisions needed within the next year as he said that "2022 must be the year we end the pandemic."

Ahead of the end-of-year festivities, he told the reporters in Geneva that it's better to cancel events "now and celebrate later than to celebrate now and grieve later" and urged the countries to avoid crowd gatherings as it would be a "perfect platform" for Omicron to spread.

"An event cancelled is better than a life cancelled," he said.

WHO on Omicron threat

It's almost been a month since the first case of Omicron was detected. The early evidence suggested that the variant has a large number of mutations.

It has already started fueling new waves of COVID-19 in a few countries like the United Kingdom. Since it was first reported in South Africa in November, Omicron has been identified in dozens of countries.

The scientists have said that there's a possible increased risk of reinfection. However, the indications are mere speculations as experts are probing the immune escape potential of the Omicron variant.

The WHO has said the heavily mutated variant is spreading at an unprecedented rate. "There is now consistent evidence that Omicron is spreading significantly faster than the Delta variant," Tedros said, warning that an increase in the number of cases... may overwhelm the health system and more people could die.

More than 5.3 million people have died since the start of the pandemic, though the true toll is believed to be several times higher.

WHO chief also highlighted the point that there should be equity across the world as many vulnerable people are still waiting for a first vaccine dose.

"If we are to end the pandemic in the coming year, we must end inequity," Tedros said.



What you need to know about Omicron today

Germany's health minister Karl Lauterbach ruled out a Christmas lockdown amid warnings of a fifth Covid-19 wave

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday urged the Centre to allow for booster dosage for people in Delhi who have taken both shots of Covid-19 vaccines. Raising alarms over the Omicron variant, the chief minister said that 99 per cent of people in Delhi have been inoculated with at least a single dose of the vaccine as the national capital recorded 107 new Covid-19 cases on Sunday, its highest daily rise in nearly six months.

The statement comes in the backdrop of India's Omicron tally crossing the 160 mark after Maharashtra reported six and Gujarat logged four more cases of the new variant of coronavirus. Omicron cases have been detected in 12 states and union territories -- Maharashtra (54), Delhi (24), Rajasthan (17) and Karnataka (14), Telangana (20), Gujarat (11), Kerala (15), Andhra Pradesh (1), Chandigarh (1), Tamil Nadu (1) and West Bengal (1).

WHAT ARE STATES DOING?

In a bid to tackle the Omicron variant, which is speculated to likely fuel another wave of coronavirus, the Delhi government has decided that samples of all Covid-positive patients will be sent for genome sequencing henceforth. So far, genome sequencing was only done for incoming travelers from at-risk countries. "Given the rise in cases for some days, now all positive cases in Delhi will be sent for genome sequencing for Omicron," said Kejriwal.

Telangana health authorities have started stopping passengers coming from non-risk countries until their RT-PCR test reports come clean. Earlier, only 2 per cent of passengers coming from non-risk countries were stopped for random RT-PCR tests (as per central guidelines) while they were allowed to proceed further without awaiting results.

Meanwhile, the Indian Council of Medical Research

(ICMR) has designed a diagnostic kit for the detection of the Omicron variant of coronavirus. The novel technology has been developed by ICMR-Regional Medical Research Centre in Dibrugarh. The health body has invited an Expression of Interest from in vitro diagnostics (IVD) kit manufacturers for undertaking transfer of technology for its development and commercialisation.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ACROSS THE WORLD OVER OMICRON?

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said that the country is going through a fifth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the Omicron variant. In a live televised address, Bennett said Israel had gained a reprieve by moving fast to limit travel to Omicron-hit countries last month, but that this was waning. He predicted a surge of sicknesses within a few weeks.

Germany's health minister Karl Lauterbach ruled out a Christmas lockdown amid warnings of a fifth Covid-19 wave. Backing vaccination, he said, "There will not be a lockdown before Christmas here. But we will get the

fifth wave - we have crossed a critical number of Omicron infections. This wave can no longer be completely stopped." In France, Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer said that the government has no plans to extend the Christmas school holidays because of the rapid spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant. French conservative presidential candidate Valerie Pécresse has called for an extension of them in order to help ensure any

infections caught over year-end holidays are discovered before children return to school.

WHAT IS THE LATEST SCIENCE ON OMICRON?

According to a study in the UK, scientists found that there is "no evidence" that Omicron has a lower severity than the Delta strain. They also observed that the new variant of coronavirus largely evades immunity from past infection or two vaccine doses. The study by researchers from Imperial College London in the UK estimates that the risk of reinfection with the Omicron variant is 5.4 times greater than that of the Delta variant.

Meanwhile, White House's top medical adviser Anthony Fauci on Sunday said that the Covid-19 omicron variant is "just raging around the world," and that the US President is planning to give "a stark warning of what the winter will look" for unvaccinated Americans. "The real problem for the US hospital system is that we have so many people in this country who are eligible to be vaccinated who have not yet been vaccinated," Fauci said.





India cannot take a black-and-white approach to Myanmar

Given the regional complexities, as well as India's own concerns, a more nuanced approach is needed

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla was in Myanmar this week to assess the ground situation and to nudge various sides to seek mutually acceptable solutions to the multiple crises marring one of India's most important neighbours. New Delhi, of course, has vital interests in Myanmar that it would like to protect and enhance. While the West has made democracy the sole prism of its Myanmar policy, India doesn't have that luxury. Much like most other immediate neighbours of Myanmar, India has been keen to push back against the Myanmar military's authoritarian tendencies even as its multiple interests have ensured that it keeps its channels of communication open with all stakeholders.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since February when the military seized control of the country in a coup and detained Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD). India had been categorical from the very beginning that the gains made by Myanmar over the

last decades on the path towards democracy should not be undermined. Earlier this month, after Suu Kyi was sentenced to four years (later reduced to two years) in jail for provoking dissent against the military and breaching Covid-19 rules, New Delhi responded by expressing its "deep concern" over "any development that undermines these processes and accentuates differences" and expressed its hope that "keeping their nation's future in mind, efforts would be made by all sides to advance the path of dialogue." But for India, challenges emanating from Myanmar and adjoining areas do not cease depending upon the complexion of the government. And direct engagement with the State Administration Council (SAC) and other stakeholders can no longer be put on hold. Last month's deadly attack on an Assam Rifles convoy near the Myanmar border in Manipur was a reminder about the proclivity of China for creating trouble in the Northeast, especially at a time when border tensions along the

LAC remain high. The Covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact because of the porous border between India and Myanmar. For India, a humanitarian crisis as a result of the pandemic-induced economic

The role of Myanmar's army would be key to the unfolding of any democratic transition there, so an active engagement would be needed

crisis in Myanmar would be a lose-lose situation and it should be prevented with the utmost urgency. India as the only major democratic country bordering Myanmar, should insist on demonstrable progress on the road to democratic transition, but being a neighbour, it is also aware that Myanmar has never responded well to international pressures. The role of Myanmar's army would be key to the unfolding of any democratic transition there, so an active engagement would be needed. Even as it continues to call for a

restoration of the democratic process, both bilaterally and at various multilateral fora, New Delhi has to engage with the army in Myanmar to address Indian concerns as well as to make it a stakeholder that can deliver on the democratic front, including the release of political prisoners. Marginalising the army will only push it into China's arms, which only has its economic and defence interests to secure from Naypyidaw. Ever since the coup, China's economic grip over Myanmar has only become tighter with a special focus on projects critical for the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. While the West continues to condemn and sanction, China is investing and pulling Myanmar into its orbit. The US has continued to use the overused threat of ever more sanctions, though to little avail. Myanmar's army seems to have ceased bothering about the rhetoric from the West. It is the neighbouring countries that have to shape the behaviour of the military junta in a constructive manner. It is not surprising that

countries like Japan, South Korea and most ASEAN members have all moved forward with engaging the military junta in Myanmar. The Cambodian prime minister, the incoming chair of the ASEAN, is scheduled to visit Myanmar next month and is likely to set new terms of engagement. It is, therefore, imperative that New Delhi too reaches out and shapes its own trajectory in Myanmar. The foreign secretary's visit will allow him to meet the main political parties to understand their expectations from the world's largest democracy even as he works with the military authorities to ensure that the democratic process get off the ground at the earliest. In international relations, black and white binaries never really work. The complexity of India's regional security and neighbourhood demands that India adopt a more nuanced position on Myanmar. New Delhi should not lose its essential pragmatism in engaging Myanmar.



Political murders are not new to Kerala. But who's to blame?

Only holding the current government responsible won't stop this. There's a need to build civic consciousness to combat political violence

Two gruesome political murders took place in Alappuzha district, Kerala, on December 18 and 19. Both incidents cast a shadow on the state government. The murdered were prominent workers of two political parties, the BJP and SDPI. Political murders are not new to Kerala. In the past two decades, more than 40 political murders have been reported. The aftermath of the murders is also frightening. Section 144 has been imposed in Alappuzha. The public sphere in Kerala is lying low out of fear.

Among the questions that plague one's mind, two stand out: What are the reasons for singling out some people as victims? What are the gains and losses of such atrocious acts? Both questions take us back to the notorious murder of T P Chandrasekharan, a CPM worker who later left the party. Chandrasekharan was murdered by an organised group, some of whom had links

with organised Marxist structures. Though widely criticised and condemned, Chandrasekharan's murder is still a deep wound on Kerala's political psyche. The murder showed the acumen of the powerful: They can justify almost any act within a set of beliefs and then direct party henchmen according to their wishes.

The recent murders in Alappuzha are, undeniably, motivated to ignite communalism. The communal forces that work within most political parties in India are a dangerous virus that disturbs social harmony. However, what can one do to prevent communalism? From Gandhi to Medha Patkar, we have been seriously debating this question. The sheer emphasis of communalism as the bedrock of our political system implies the non-democratic and autocratic nature of our democracy. The masses can be driven by promises. Ideological texts can be misread and misrepresented by the powerful and the crooked. Once the organised cadre of a

major political party slips into action, they can't be held back by any appeal to ideology. Political violence is based, fundamentally, on ideas of singularity and extermination. Violence - in the form of arson, looting or murder - produces deep cleavages in the public. It questions even the basic notions of existence. This is the realm in which the idea of extermination operates. Political violence ultimately aims to exterminate the opponent and the dissident. Fear of the Self is the main reason for this. To have faith in a political party is to have your identity constituted in and by a set of practices in which understanding, believing and commitment emerge together. In other words, political parties are not free from threats that are looming large in our society. The recent murders have sparked a lot of empathy. What is the source of empathy? Do we really empathise with the families of the murdered? Here, we are forced to offer a critique

of ideology. When a set of ideas that prompts people to have faith in a party or a system collapses, it is the individual who is shattered. A disillusioned individual, thus, can either become an outcast or a rebel. Yet another possibility is she/he can become a tool for other dangerous factions. Given these possibilities, the coming together of many faiths can be a distorting process. One may be forced to embrace several faiths as one loses faith in ideology. This does not mean the death of ideology; or the emergence of a new system of beliefs. Our surroundings never question the root cause of violence. Petition after petition is dismissed by our courts. The so-called empathy stems from what we see in the media. Tears of the deceased and gloomy faces that surround the murdered generate empathy. Empathy generated in this manner never translates into a plan of action to stop political violence in our society.

Solely blaming the current government in Kerala will not stop the seamless continuity of political murders. There is an underbelly in public life that aims to spread communal violence. The need of our time is not a revision of political parties or ideologies. It is a thorough civic consciousness that will make those who are on the verge of committing the murder rethink. Political murder is inevitably the conclusion of a tapestry of actions. We need to ask what makes some actions a spectacle. The issue is not whether the "majority" or "minority" are involved in murders, but that they are happening more often. Next to civic consciousness, we need an urgent platform of democratic and liberal assembly. The idea of "secular" requires a more sensible understanding. Notions of secularism should not sink into impatience. As Henry James said, "the whole of anything is never told".

The largest and oldest cryptocurrency, Bitcoin is making headlines, ranging from analyses of the digital currency's future to people focusing on its massive electric power requirements and volatility.

2021 was a record-breaking year for Bitcoin, breaking its previous all-time high and adding roughly \$545 billion to its market capitalisation. With crypto assets reaching new market price highs-the total crypto market capitalisation reached a record \$3 trillion after recrossing \$1 trillion in January and \$2 trillion in May, according to a research by The Block.

As we near the end of the, here we list all the important events that made Bitcoin the most popular asset globally.

Elon Musk's \$1.5 billion investment

2021 kicked off with electric car maker Tesla CEO Elon Musk announcing that the company invested \$1.5 billion in Bitcoin, making it the biggest investment by a mainstream corporation into the most popular cryptocurrency. In addition, the company also noted in a filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that going ahead, it plans to start accepting the digital currency as a payment option for its products. Soon after Tesla's announcement, the rate of Bitcoin skyrocketed to an all-time high, breaching the \$44,000-mark for the first time.

The announcement of Tesla investing in Bitcoin even raised red-flags about Musk's social media activity on cryptocurrencies. The moves raised immediate questions around CEO Musk's behavior on Twitter, where he has been credited for increasing the prices of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and dogecoin by posting positive messages that have encouraged more people to buy the digital currencies.

Musk claims to be a posterchild of low-carbon technology. The electric carmaker's backing of Bitcoin raised questions about his decision, as the annual carbon footprint of Bitcoins is almost equivalent to that of Mumbai, or to put it to a global perspective, as high as the carbon footprint of Slovakia.

Tesla immediately suspended the use of Bitcoin to purchase its vehicles because of climate concerns. Musk informed in a tweet reversing the company's stance in the face of an outcry from some environmentalists and investors. Bitcoin, the world's biggest digital currency, fell more than 7 per cent after the tweet and was trading at \$52,669. Musk added that Tesla would not sell any Bitcoin, and intends to use Bitcoin for transactions as



Here's what made Bitcoin the most popular cryptocurrency in 2021

soon as mining transitions to more sustainable energy.

Global companies add Bitcoin to their reserves

After Tesla announced a \$1.5 billion investment in Bitcoin, financial services companies such as payments player Mastercard and US-based lender Bank of New York Mellon also announced their intention of validating digital assets.

Nasdaq-listed Marathon Patent Group started the year off with a splash, buying \$150 million worth of Bitcoin as part of the company's treasury reserves in January.

Tesla aside, the first half of 2021 saw many companies make initial Bitcoin purchases. Mastercard and BNY Mellon, microblogging site Twitter also added Bitcoin to its company reserves. Throughout the year, a number of well known companies purchased Bitcoin, including Square, which allocated roughly 5 per cent of its assets to Bitcoin.

Additionally, WeWork, Substack and insurance giant, AXA, began accepting payments in Bitcoin.

China's crypto clampdown 2021 has proven to be an unusual year for Bitcoin mining. China's central bank in September said all cryptocurrency-related transactions are illegal and must be banned, sending the strongest signal yet on its determination to crack down on the industry.

To understand China's crypto clampdown, here's a quick timeline of events.

On May 21, the Chinese central government published a memo that mentioned Bitcoin trading and mining crackdown. By June

9, power supplies for industrial-scale Bitcoin mining farms in Xinjiang's Zhundong economic zone were ordered to shut down. Qinghai followed the lead and did the same. From June 18 to 26 bitcoin mining firms in Sichuan were ordered to shut down.

Chinese authorities believe

As we near the end of this big year for cryptocurrencies, here we list all the important events that made Bitcoin the most popular asset globally

cryptocurrencies disrupt economic order, and facilitate illegal asset transfers and money laundering. The authorities also blame cryptocurrency miners for energy waste to deadly coal mining accidents, and a potential threat to the country's efforts to reduce carbon emission. The country aims to become carbon neutral by 2060.

It should be noted that Bitcoin mining requires high-powered computers that are competing to solve complex mathematical puzzles, in a process that makes intensive use of electricity. Interestingly, prices of mining rigs also tumbled after China imposed a ban-one crypto mining machine which sold around 4,000 yuan (\$620) in April and May, could now be bought for as low as 700-800 yuan, as per a Reuters report.

China's crypto crackdown, also affected the Bitcoin ecosystem as well as miners. Due to the cheap energy, low overhead cost and the proximity to major manufacturers, Bitcoin mining

has been an activity dominated by investors in China-accounting for more than 75 per cent of Bitcoin mining, according to research published by the peer-reviewed journal Nature Communications in April. The country went from controlling up to 75 per cent of all Bitcoin mining in the world in April to not contributing to the industry at all as of July 2021.

As a result, Bitcoin's hashrate significantly dropped making it difficult for miners to mine any Bitcoins. For the uninitiated, hashrate is a measure of the computational power required per second when mining cryptocurrency. To put it simply, it is the speed of mining. In the case of Bitcoin, the more mining is going on, the higher the hash rate. It should be noted that when the hash rate is faster, the chances of mining more Bitcoins per second increase.

According to Cambridge Bitcoin Electricity Consumption Index (CBECI), China's global hashrate share was around 34.2 per cent in May of this year. And in 2019, the country accounted for about 75 per cent of the average monthly hashrate share - a significant portion of the world's Bitcoin mining.

In October, the United States officially became the largest hub for Bitcoin mining operations and businesses. China's crackdown created an opportunity for overseas bitcoin mining operations and has already led to an infrastructure boom in North America, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

Regulators scrutinise Bitcoin
Regulators globally have been very active this year, with countries

including China and Egypt, Iraq, Algeria banning Bitcoin, and regional financial regulators examining crypto-business with greater scrutiny in 2021.

This is also due to a potential fundraiser frenzy. According to a research by The Block, during the second half of 2021, at least 12 public and private mining companies went on a fundraiser frenzy, with each raising anywhere between \$50 million to \$650 million.

Another reason for an increased scrutiny was the amount of profits generated by Bitcoin miners. A total of \$15.3 billion in revenue, representing a year-on-year increase of 206 per cent, as per ETC group. The increase can be attributed to the skyrocketing price of Bitcoin in 2021, reaching new highs.

Several banks in the US started accepting Bitcoin. Customers of some US banks are now able to buy, hold and sell Bitcoin through their existing accounts, according to crypto custody firm NYDIG. Banks are asking for Bitcoin because they can see their customers sending dollars to Coinbase and other crypto exchanges, according to Yan Zhao, president of NYDIG.

Meanwhile, In India, the government is set to introduce the Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 in the winter session of Parliament. The 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.



Mystery behind Rajasthan's Churu recording coldest and hottest temperatures

Rajasthan's district Churu, which is close to the Thar desert, has recorded -4.6 degrees Celcius in winters, while 50 degrees Celcius in summers. Here's what experts have to say about this mysterious place

Churu, a district in Rajasthan, is known for its abrupt temperatures over the years. Although Churu is located close to the Thar desert, one of the hottest regions in India, it recorded 1.1 degrees Celcius on Saturday, December 18, 2021. Last year the region recorded minus 1.5 degrees, the lowest in December in 46 years. Earlier, the lowest temperature in Churu had gone down to as low as minus 4.6 degrees on December 28, 1973, and. In 2011, the town recorded a minimum temperature

of minus 1.4 degrees. Even ice has been noticed in this area during December and January. On the contrary, the area is equally ahead in recording the hottest temperatures. Churu touched 50.8 degrees Celsius on 1 and 2 June 2019.

Although Rajasthan is known for its hot weather, let's know what leads to this temperature.

Why is the climate changing in Churu?

According to the report published by the United Nations Development Programme, here's

why the climate is changing in Churu.

Environmental pollution, says Prof. Isran, as does Madhav Sharma. That traps heat, alters weather patterns. "The heat is more because of global warming and because of concretisation. Forests have decreased, vehicles have increased," says

Ramswaroop Saharan, farmer and former school principal in Bhaleri village of Tarangar tehsil.

"Industry is growing, air-conditioner use is growing, cars are growing," says Narayan

Bareth, a senior journalist based in Jaipur. "The environment is polluted. All this adds to global warming."

Churu, called the 'gateway to the Thar desert' in some accounts, is of course just one link in a larger global chain of climate change. The Rajasthan State Action Plan on Climate Change discusses the growth of greenhouse gas emissions globally after 1970. It focuses on nationwide factors, beyond just Rajasthan, that feed into the larger scale GHG-driven

changes. Many of these arise in greater activity in the energy sector, increased use of fossil fuels, emissions in the agriculture sector, growing industrial processes, and due to 'land-use, land-use change and forestry'. All these are ever-shifting links in the complex web of climate change. In Churu's villages, people may not speak of GHGs, but they are living through the effects. "In the past, even without fans and coolers, we could handle the heat. But now we cannot live without them," says Hardayalji.

Chennai Apollo Hospitals to fully cooperate in Jayalalithaa death case investigation

Apollo Hospitals has reiterated its cooperation in the investigation into former Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalithaa's death. The hospital's statement comes after the Supreme Court (SC) directed AIIMS to nominate a panel of doctors and constitute a medical board to assist the Justice A Arumughaswamy Commission leading the investigation.

In a statement, Apollo Hospitals said its intention was not to

disband the Arumughaswamy Commission but only to seek an expert panel to assist them in the inquiry.

Jayalalithaa suffered from a complex matrix of cases and was treated by doctors from Apollo Hospitals and other experts in India and overseas. An analysis of the medical treatment and recording of medical evidence should be undertaken only by equally qualified peers, the statement read.

Earlier, the hospital moved the Madras High Court challenging the proceedings of the commission in finding and recording of evidence into the correctness, adequacy and inadequacy of medical treatment extended to Jayalalithaa.

According to the SC order, Apollo Hospitals may also cross-examine/recall any witness and lead. Besides, the commission has to furnish all records of proceedings to the medical board

and Apollo Hospitals.

The hospital said that they have fully cooperated with the examination and will continue to do so. A total of 56 Apollo doctors, 22 paramedical and support staffers have appeared before the commission and submitted their statements. Meanwhile, the DMK government in July had informed the SC that the Arumughaswamy Commission had completed 90 per cent of the investigation. The state also informed that Rs

4,26,462 is paid by the government as salary for the staff of the inquiry commission.

Arumughaswamy commission. A commission led by Justice A Arumughaswamy was appointed by the Tamil Nadu government to investigate the causes that eventually led to AIADMK leader Jayalalithaa's death. She was hospitalised for 75 days and her demise had created a lot of speculation over the cause of death.

Monthly payments of 'tea': How Sri Lanka plans to settle \$251 million oil import dues to Iran

Sri Lanka has decided to settle oil import dues to Iran by sending \$5 million worth of tea each month

(News Agencies)-Sri Lanka plans to settle \$251 million in oil import dues owed to Iran by bartering tea, a Sri Lankan minister said on Wednesday, amid dwindling foreign reserves. Plantations Minister Ramesh Pathirana told Reuters he aimed to start sending tea to Iran from January. "We hope to send \$5 million worth of tea each month to repay Iran for oil purchases pending since the last four years," he said. Sri Lanka has to meet about \$4.5 billion in debt repayments next year, starting with a \$500 million international sovereign bond in January, but the country's foreign reserves had dwindled to \$1.6 bln at the end of November, latest data from the central bank showed. Central Bank Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal said earlier this month Sri Lanka is confident of being



able to "seamlessly" repay all sovereign debt that comes due in 2022. But Fitch Ratings this month downgraded Sri Lanka's sovereign rating to "CC" from "CCC", citing a growing risk of debt default in 2022, despite repeated assurances from the central bank. Sri Lanka has

foreign currency debt service payments of \$6.9 billion in 2022, equivalent to nearly 430% of official gross international reserves as of November 2021, Fitch said in a statement. A senior member of the country's tea board said it was the first time it had been able to use tea

supplies for a barter arrangement to settle foreign debt. The Plantation Ministry said in a statement this barter with Iran "will not violate any UN or U.S. sanctions since tea has been categorized as a food item under humanitarian grounds while none of the blacklisted Iranian banks will

be involved in the equation." "The recommended scheme will save Sri Lanka much-needed foreign currency since the settlement to Iran would be made in Sri Lankan rupees through the sale of Ceylon Tea," it added. Sri Lanka produces about 340 million kilogrammes of tea annually. Last year it exported 265.5 million kg of tea, making it the largest forex-earning crop, with earnings of \$1.24 billion in 2020. A spokesperson for the Planters Association, which includes all the major plantation companies in Sri Lanka, said this mode of transaction was a "(sticking) plaster solution by the government". "It doesn't necessarily benefit exporters as we will be paid in rupees, circumventing the free market, and provides no real value to us," said Roshan Rajadurai.

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

[illegible]

Pakistan: Hindu temple desecrated, idols destroyed in Karachi

(News Agencies)-The statues of deities at a Hindu temple in this Pakistani city have been destroyed, the police said on Tuesday.

The statues of deities at a Hindu temple in this Pakistani city have been destroyed, the police said on Tuesday, the latest incident of vandalism against the places of worship of the minority community in this country.

The incident took place at the Narayan Mandir in Karachi's old city of Narainpura on Monday evening, they said. A man, identified as Muhammad Waleed Shabbir, has been arrested for damaging the statues of the deities, a senior police officer official, Sarfaraz Nawaz, said.

"He was arrested on the complaint of a Hindu man, Mukesh Kumar, who with his wife was at the Narayan Mandir for prayers when they saw this man damaging the statues of Hindu deities with a hammer," he said. An eyewitness said that angry Hindus, who were at the temple, caught hold of the miscreant and handed him over to the police.



Later, the Hindu residents of the area staged a protest outside the police station, demanding the government to provide security to Hindus.

They also raised slogans and protested that they were feeling insecure in the area after the incident. The area is mostly inhabited by poor and low-

income Hindu families who have been living in Narainpura for decades.

The police and Pakistani Rangers reached the spot and cordoned off the area. Sindh's Minister for Minority Affairs Gyanchand Israni said that a case should be registered. He said that such incidents create unrest in the society.

"We condemn such attacks," he said. Another Hindu resident said that there were lots of Hindu families in the area and they had never seen such an incident and there had never been any incident of Hindu-Muslim tension in the area.

"We are labourers and very poor people. We do not harm anyone and always pray people will respect our worship places too," he said. The police official said that they were investigating the motive behind the incident. The videos of broken holy statues were seen circulating on social media. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Member of National Assembly Kheal Das Kohistani

condemned incident, saying that one out of two attackers has been held by the police. "No religion allows such kinds of acts," he said.

There have been incidents of Hindu temples being vandalised in other parts of the country as well. In October, a historical Hindu temple located at the bank of Indus River in Kotri city was desecrated by unidentified people.

In August, the Ganesh temple in Punjab's Rahim Yar Khan district was vandalised by a mob of over 200 people. In March, a group of unidentified people attacked an over 100-year-old Hindu temple in Rawalpindi. In December last year, century-old Shri Param Hans Ji Maharaj temple in Teri village in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district was vandalised and demolished by a mob led by some local clerics. Last month, it was opened to devotees by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed who had ordered authorities to reconstruct it. Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan.

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China set to pass stringent law protecting women's rights amid criticism of suppressing #MeToo movement



China is all set to pass a new stringent law to 'protect the rights' of women.

(News Agencies)-China is all set to pass a new stringent law to protect the rights of women - eliminating discrimination against them at all levels - amid growing cases of domestic violence, sexual harassment and suppression of the #MeToo movement.

The draft revision to the 'Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women' was submitted for its first reading on Monday to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislature. The legislative move is another major revision to the law which was enacted nearly 30 years ago, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Often criticised as a rubber stamp Parliament for routinely endorsing the ruling Communist Party of China's proposals, the NPC is expected to pass the draft bill soon. The draft outlaws the use of superstitious and "mind-control" practices on women and bans employers from asking female applicants

about their marital or pregnancy status under proposed changes to its existing women's law.

Employers would not be able to turn away women applicants because of their pregnancy or marital status under the draft law, which also protects salary and benefits for those who are pregnant or on maternity leave.

The Communist Party-owned newspaper, Beijing News reported that one example of practices deemed to be mentally manipulative: "female morality classes" was expected to be banned under the revised law. In the past, such classes were a frequent occurrence and aimed to use brainwashing methods to control women and make them feel inferior to their partners.

Common rhetoric used included "don't fight back when beaten" and "don't talk back when scolded". Women attending these classes were also told they needed to stay pure, "as promiscuous women get gangrene". They do not; gangrene,

the death of tissue due to a lack of blood supply, is usually caused by injury or infection, not sexual contact, Hong Kong based South China Morning Post reported.

The draft also includes provisions on safeguarding women's safety and human dignity. Pestering or harassing women under the pretext of being in a relationship, or after the end of cohabitation or divorce, are prohibited by the draft, as well as divulging or disseminating women's private personal information. The draft also clarifies the joint duties of both husband and wife in the family life. Women shall, at the time of divorce, have the right to request the husband to make compensation if the wife has been shouldering more duties in respect of bringing up the child, taking care of the old and assisting the husband in work, among others, the Xinhua report said.

The revised law comes amid greater discussion of domestic violence in

China. The past few years have also seen more debate on sexual harassment amid the #MeToo movement" that began in China in 2018 when Luo Xixi, a former Shanghai University of Finance and Economics student, accused a professor of sexually harassing her. He was fired by the university and since then, many other women from universities, NGOs, tech companies and the entertainment industry have come forward with complaints, the Post reported.

The latest #MeToo case involved Chinese tennis pro-Peng Shuai who went missing after she alleged on China's social media platform, WeChat, on November 17 that she was forced into a sexual relationship by China's former Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli, 75, after his retirement from power in 2017. Her explosive allegation was scrubbed out of the social media site by Chinese censors within minutes. Subsequently, she appeared in official media videos amid international furore.

1 dead, at least 70 missing after landslide at Myanmar jade mine

At least 70 people were missing and one confirmed dead on Wednesday following a landslide at a jade mine in northern Myanmar, a member of the rescue team told AFP. "About 70-100 people are missing in a landslide that happened around 4:00 am" at Hpakant mine in Kachin state, said rescue team member Ko

Nyi. "We've sent 25 injured people to hospital while we've found one dead." Around 200 rescuers were searching to recover bodies, and some were using boats to search for the dead in a nearby lake, he added. Dozens die each year while working in Myanmar's highly

lucrative but poorly regulated jade industry, which uses low-paid migrant workers to scrape out a



northern Kachin state -- that entombed nearly 300 miners. A February military coup also effectively extinguished any chance of reforms to the dangerous and unregulated industry started by ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government, watchdog Global Witness said in a report this year.

The fight to control the mines and the revenues frequently traps local civilians in the middle, with a rampant drug and arms trade further curdling the conflict. Last year heavy rainfall triggered a massive landslide in Hpakant -- the heart of Myanmar's jade trade in



Pakistan's main opposition party demands PM Imran Khan's resignation

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Marriyum Aurangzeb was referring to an interview of PM Imran Khan in which he had blamed his political rivals from the powerful Bhutto and Sharif families for promoting corruption and destroying the country.

(News Agencies)-Pakistan's main opposition party has demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan for allegedly defaming the country and its political parties only to hide his own corruption at a time when foreign dignitaries were in the capital to attend a high-profile international summit.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) information secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb said that Khan-led government had already completed more than three years of its term, but it seemed that he had been suffering from "Sharif family phobia" as he kept on mentioning their names all the time, instead of highlighting his own achievements, Dawn newspaper reported on Monday.

She was referring to the prime minister's interview with Al Jazeera on Friday in which he had once again hit out at his political rivals from the powerful Bhutto and Sharif families, blaming them for promoting corruption and destroying the country.

Khan, heading the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, slammed former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's PML-N and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of slain leader Benazir Bhutto, saying these were not parties but dynasties "responsible for corruption and the current problems faced by the country". He had stated that fighting with the two family-led political parties including the PML-N and

PPP was like fighting a mafia and alleged that both the parties used state resources as well as the media against him.

Former prime minister Sharif, currently in London for medical treatment, is facing corruption charges in Pakistan. Former Pakistan president, Asif Ali Zardari, also husband of late prime minister Benazir Bhutto, is also facing a slew of corruption charges.

Marriyum questioned the timing of, what she called, the political interview and alleged that it was an attempt to sabotage and damage the country's image at a time when the foreign ministers of the Muslim countries were arriving in Pakistan for the meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Afghanistan. She alleged that Khan had committed the same act when the Chinese president was to visit the country in 2014 during the PML-N government's time. The visit was postponed due to law and order situation in the wake of sit-in and protests by Khan's party workers.

She said it seemed that the prime minister did not possess the mental capacity to understand the sensitivity and importance of the OIC gathering and how he should present a positive image of the country to the leaders of the Muslim world in Pakistan.

This, she said, was because Khan knew nothing other than persecuting and victimising the opposition and blaming them for his failures. She alleged that Khan was bringing a bad

name to Pakistan only to hide his own incompetence.

She asked Prime Minister Khan to step down from the office, if he really wanted to provide relief to the masses.

Marriyum, who had served as information minister during the previous PML-N government, said that despite keeping Leader of the Opposition Shehbaz Sharif in jail for over a year on "fictitious charges", imprisoning PML-N leaders in death row cells, abusing power and weaponising and misusing the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) and every national institution, Khan could not prove a single penny of corruption on the PML-N leadership. She said the PTI government and its "rented touts" had already been embarrassed by the courts because they had never produced any evidence to back their false cases.

"Imran Khan and his mafias usurped trillions of rupees in corruption but none of them were held accountable under this government that pledged to be the so-called flag-bearer of anti-corruption," she said, alleging that the prime minister was helping these mafias and cartels because they were running his home and everyday expenses.

The former minister alleged that Khan, a cricketer-turned-politician, was clearly and directly involved in every single one of the corruption acts that robbed the nation.

Former Afghan President Karzai asks Pak PM Imran Khan to 'stop speaking on behalf of Afghans'



(News Agencies)-Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai asked Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to refrain from propaganda and to stop speaking on behalf of the Afghans.

In a series of tweets, the former president of the war-torn country said, "Pakistan's threat from Afghanistan is a clear propaganda infact, the issue is quite the opposite and the ISIS threat is directed from Pakistan to Afghanistan," he said.

In response to Imran Khan's address at the OIC, the former president advised Pakistan to refrain from propaganda against Afghanistan and called it "our internal affairs".

AFGHANISTAN WILL BECOME 'BIGGEST MAN-MADE CRISIS': IMRAN KHAN AT OIC SUMMIT On Sunday, Khan in his address at the 17th extraordinary session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), warned that Afghanistan could potentially become the "biggest man-made crisis" if the world failed to act in a timely manner.

Khan highlighted the collapse of education, health and medical sectors. "If the world doesn't act, this will be the biggest man-made crisis which is unfolding in front of us," Khan was quoted by PTI. Meanwhile, Turkey Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşolu at the OIC meeting on Afghanistan, said "working with the Taliban is necessary" to achieve stability. Afghanistan's economy is facing a major crisis after the Taliban seized power in Kabul amid a chaotic US and NATO troop withdrawal from the country.

Four killed in expressway bridge collapse in China's Hubei province



(News Agencies)-Four people were killed and another eight injured on Saturday when part of a bridge ramp collapsed in Ezhou City, in China's central Hubei province, the official Xinhua news agency reported. The bridge collapsed over an expressway, causing three trucks to fall while a car was crushed underneath, Xinhua reported, adding an investigation is under way.

Work was being carried out on the bridge when the incident occurred, the report said.

May 'lose out' JF-17 deal with Argentina, says Pak embassy in Insta post; later claims account 'hacked'

The Pakistani embassy in an Instagram post on Wednesday said that the country might 'lose out' on the JF-17 deal with Argentina, adding that 'political substitution in Islamabad may lead' to Pakistan's revival.

(News Agencies)-Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was left red-faced when an Instagram post from the account of the country's embassy in Argentina went viral on Wednesday. The post said that Pakistan "may lose out" on the JF-17 deal with Argentina. Developed jointly by Pakistan and China, the JF-17 fighter jets have been commissioned into service for the Pakistani Air Force. Myanmar, Nigeria, Azerbaijan and Sri Lanka have reportedly ordered the JF-17 jets from Pakistan. In September of this year, the Argentine Defence Ministry issued a statement denying the purchase of "supersonic aircraft of any origin". The Instagram post on Wednesday by the Pakistani



embassy in Argentina went further to say, "The political substitution in Islamabad may lead to the revival of Pakistan's reliability &

credibility. Diplomats can't be 'la raison' for failures." The post was later taken down followed by tweets from both the Pakistani embassy

in Argentina and Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs claiming that the "Instagram account of the Embassy of

Pakistan in Argentina was hacked". "Please note that all messages posted through this account in last one hour were not from the Embassy of Pakistan in Argentina," the tweet added. Interestingly, this 'hacking incident' happened days after a tweet by the Pakistani embassy in Serbia caused great embarrassment to the Imran Khan government. "With inflation breaking all previous records, how long do you expect @ImranKhanPTI that we government official will remain silent and keep working for you without been paid for past three months and our children been forced out of school due to non-payment of fees. Is this #NayaPakistan," said the tweet which was later deleted.

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US reports 1st Omicron-related death as unvaccinated man dies

The United States reported its first death related to the Omicron variant. The man was unvaccinated and had previously been infected with Covid-19.

(News Agencies)-The US has reported its first death due to the new Omicron variant of coronavirus with an unvaccinated man in his 50s succumbing to the fast-spreading disease in Texas, according to health officials.

The news of the first death in the US due to Omicron came on a day when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said that Omicron has raced ahead of other variants and is now the dominant version of the coronavirus in the country, accounting for 73 per cent of new infections last week.

The man, who was not identified, was unvaccinated and had previously been infected with Covid-19, according to a release from Harris County Public Health.

The case is the first known confirmed Omicron-related death in the United States, CNN and other US media outlets reported.

"The individual was at higher risk of severe complications from Covid-19 due to his unvaccinated status and had underlying health conditions," the release said.

County Judge Lina Hidalgo announced the death on Monday at a press conference.

Omicron cases LIVE updates

Hidalgo said that the patient was not vaccinated and had an underlying health condition.

She said that those vaccinated and boosted are much less likely to end up in the hospital.

"My phone was ringing, I'm sure you

guys noticed, and it was our public health director telling me we just had our first omicron-related death," she made the announcement during a news conference.

"I know, for folks in Harris County, this feels like whiplash. It follows a downward trend in hospitalisations and cases, only to see things trend back up, and it is so frustrating," Hidalgo said.

Houston Methodist said on Monday that 82 per cent of its new cases are omicron after just three weeks of testing for it. It took Delta three months to reach that point, Houston's leading local news website Khou.com reported.

Texas Children's Hospital is also seeing hospitalisations and cases doubling and tripling over the last week.

"An upward trajectory that is steeper

than anything we've seen previously during this pandemic," Dr Jim Versalovic with Texas Children's Hospital said. Hidalgo said that Omicron is spreading incredibly quickly.

"First, we know that an increasing number of cases in Harris county are related to omicron. It's more transmissible. The amount of time it takes for the number of omicron cases to double has been very worrisome. Early data shows its doubling in two to three days, according to the CDC. Just to give a point of comparison, the delta variant doubles every eleven days," she said. Earlier on Monday, Harris county raised the Covid alert threat back to orange. The county's threat level scale advises residents to "minimise all contact unless vaccinated."

US man charged with cannibalism believed eating flesh would cure his brain



(News Agencies)- A 39-year-old man arrested in the United States

A man from Idaho, US, arrested for the murder of an elderly allegedly ate parts of his victim believing that it would cure him.

his brain". The murder accused, James David Russell from Idaho, was charged with cannibalism after his alleged statement. This may be the first cannibalism charge in Idaho.

Russell was arrested in September for murdering a 70-year-old man, David Flaget. Russell was charged with first-degree murder after authorities

found the Flaget's remains in a vehicle outside of Russell's home. The deceased's hands were tied with duct tape and some of his body parts were missing, reported Daily Beast.

When cops came by Russell's house, he had a short argument with them. Later, when he surrendered, he said: "It's private property and we don't like non-

family on it." The cops reportedly found a 'blood-soaked microwave, glass bowl, duffel bag and knife during their search of Russell's home. Bonner County Detective Phillip Stella said: "When dealing with death and carnage, it's a shock to our conscience." Stella added that Russell's cannibalism charge may be the first in the state of Idaho.



US warns that only 'some weeks' left to revive Iran nuclear deal

US negotiator Rob Malley said Tuesday that there may only be "some weeks" left to revive the nuclear deal with Iran if the country continues its nuclear activities at its current pace.

(News Agencies)- Speaking during an interview with CNN, Malley warned of a "period of escalating crisis" if diplomacy failed to restore the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers. After a five-month hiatus, negotiations restarted in November, to try to restore the deal with Iran. The United States had withdrawn from this

agreement under former president Donald Trump in 2018. Now, the US is an indirect party to the talks.

While the Iran talks have been suspended, Malley said that he hopes the indirect talks will resume "relatively soon."

Recently, Washington has also warned that it may soon be too late to revive the agreement.

"It really depends on the pace of their nuclear process," said

Malley, the US special envoy for Iran. "If they halt the nuclear advances, we have more time."

"If they continue at their current pace, we have some weeks left but not much more than that, at which point the conclusion will be there's no deal to be revived," he said. "At some point in a not-so-distant future we will have to conclude the JCPOA is no more and we would have to negotiate a wholly different deal and we

would go through a period of escalating crisis," he added.

The Iranian government claims it only wants to develop a civilian nuclear capability, but Western powers say its stockpile of uranium enriched goes far beyond that and could be used to develop a nuclear weapon.

In a statement on Tuesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that no deadline would be set for the negotiations.

"I'm not going to put a time limit on it," Blinken told reporters, but the remaining runway for a deal is "getting very, very, very short." "We continue to have a strong interest in seeing if we can put the nuclear program back into the box that it was in," he said. "But if we can't do that, because Iran will not engage in good faith, then we are actively looking at alternatives and options."

'No magic button' to release Afghan funds: Senior US official

A senior US official said on Monday that there was 'no magic button' to release Afghan funds which are frozen in America. He was speaking in Islamabad a day after Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit. The summit was focussed on situation in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been going through an economic crisis ever since the Taliban captured power in August this year. The country's funds in the US have been frozen. Even after 100 days in power, Taliban government has not been able to gain worldwide recognition. International Monetary Fund (IMF) has suspended ties with the country. There are demands, especially



from Afghanistan's neighbour Pakistan to address the situation. Though he indicated that total unfreeze of Afghan funds was unlikely in near future, the senior US official said that US has worked quietly to ensure that

cash flows into Afghanistan with a view to ease humanitarian situation. He said that about 200 million dollars were shifted via UN to private banks.

Banking sector in Afghanistan is

on the verge of collapse.

The official expressed 'serious concerns' about Taliban government. The government, formed after collapse of previous one led by Ashraf Ghani, has number of people who are on United Nations' list of

terrorists.

Representatives of the government were given travel exemptions to facilitate their global travel for peace negotiations. The diplomat said that there would be a 'clean roll

over' of these exemptions.

He stressed that the US did not see eye to eye with Taliban over number of issues that included women's rights and free media. During the recently concluded OIC summit in Islamabad, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan made a case for stable Afghanistan arguing that if Taliban government was not supported, it would not be able to take effective counter-terrorism measures and neighbouring countries like Pakistan may suffer from terror spillover.

Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai slammed Pakistani stance as 'propaganda' and said that it was Afghanistan that had suffered due to terror spillover from Pakistan.

'Delmicron' could be driving Covid surge in US, Europe. Know more about it



India has reported 354 cases of the highly transmissible Omicron variant as of Thursday, according to data collated from across the states

about the possibility of a super strain.

Will Delmicron impact India? India has reported 354 cases of the highly transmissible Omicron variant as of Thursday, according to data collated from across the states by HT. So far, experts have said Delta is the variant that has been fuelling Covid-19 cases in India. "At present, Delta derivatives, descendants of Delta, are the main variants in circulation in India.

(News Agencies)-As cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus are being reported in the US and Europe and rising in India, reports about "Delmicron" have emerged over the last few days.

A member of the Covid-19 task force in Maharashtra has said there is a possibility that the West is caught between twin spikes of the Delta and the Omicron variants of the coronavirus.

"Delmicron, the twin spikes of Delta and Omicron, in Europe and US has led to a mini tsunami of cases," Dr Shashank Joshi was quoted as saying by a leading newspaper.

The highly contagious Omicron variant was first detected last month in southern Africa and has now been reported in 89 countries, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

What is Delmicron?

Delmicron is not a new variant of the coronavirus but the Delta and the Omicron strains together fuelling Covid-19 cases. Data shows Omicron is the more dominant variant in the US and accounts for 73 per cent of all new cases, up from less than 1 per cent at the beginning of the month.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said the Delta variant was responsible for more than 99.5 per cent of the Covid-19 infections in the US last month.

Meanwhile, health officials in Texas said on Monday the state

recorded what ABC News reported is believed to be the first known US death related to Omicron. In the United Kingdom, daily cases of Covid-19 surpassed the 100,000-mark for the first time on Wednesday, even as preliminary studies published in the country and South Africa show Omicron is not severe as other variants of the coronavirus.

Experts on Delmicron Doctors say people with a weak immune system, the elderly and ones with comorbidities are at higher risk of getting infected with the Delta and Omicron variants, simultaneously, according to a report. It added that areas with low vaccinations rates are also at risk.

However, health experts are divided on whether the combination of the two variants can lead to a super strain.

Moderna's chief medical officer Dr Paul Burton said it was possible that both the strains can swap genes and trigger a more dangerous variant.

"There's certainly data, there have been some papers published again from South Africa earlier from the pandemic when people - and certainly immunocompromised people - can harbour both viruses," Burton was quoted as saying by the Daily Mail.

Other researchers have also warned that such "recombination events" are extremely rare but possible if conditions are right and there is a coincidence of mostly uncontrollable events.

In an interview with Bloomberg a virologist at the University of earlier this month, Peter White, New South Wales, also warned

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Cruise ship returns to Miami with 48 cases of COVID-19



Royal Caribbean International said in a statement that the ship, the Symphony of the Seas, was carrying more than 6,000 guests and crew members when 48 people onboard tested positive. Dozens of passengers and crew members aboard a Royal Caribbean cruise ship tested positive for COVID-19 last week, according to the cruise line. Royal Caribbean International said in a statement that the ship, the Symphony of the Seas, was carrying more than 6,000 guests and crew members when 48 people onboard tested positive.

The ship departed Dec. 11 for a seven-night Caribbean cruise and returned to port in Miami on Saturday, the company said. The cases were identified because of contact tracing after a guest tested positive, the cruise line said. "Each person quickly went into quarantine," the statement said. "Everyone who tested positive was asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic, and we continuously monitored their health." The cruise line said that the ship sailed with 95% of its guests aboard fully vaccinated and that

98% of the people who tested positive were fully vaccinated. It was not immediately clear whether any of the people who tested positive had received a booster shot of a COVID-19 vaccine. Royal Caribbean requires travelers 12 and older to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and test negative before boarding the ship. Children who are not yet vaccinated must provide a negative PCR test result before sailing and test negative at the terminal before boarding. The company said that all its crew members were full

vaccinated against COVID-19 and were tested weekly. During the early days of the pandemic in 2020, outbreaks on cruise ships sickened hundreds of people and upended the tourism industry, as officials and companies struggled to keep crews and passengers safe. For months, cruise ships were barred from sailing to many ports. Even after vaccinations became more widely available in the United States in April, allowing much of the travel industry to ramp up again, cruise ships remained docked in ports, costing the industry billions of

dollars each month. The cruise industry rebounded in the summer, with many companies reporting an increase in bookings and a better handle on COVID-19 protocols. But a recent spike in COVID cases in parts of the United States and Europe and growing concerns over the omicron variant may hinder that momentum. This month, at least 17 coronavirus cases were identified on a Norwegian Breakaway cruise ship that docked in New Orleans, including a case of the new omicron variant.

Omicron threat: US clears use of Merck's Covid pill

Three doses of Sinovac's CoronaVac vaccine do not produce adequate levels of antibodies to fight the Omicron variant: HK Study

(News Agencies)-The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Thursday authorised Merck's Covid pill for high risk adults amid a winter surge of cases driven by the highly infectious Omicron variant. The decision to grant an emergency use authorisation came a day after the agency gave a green light to a similar but more effective pill developed by Pfizer. "Today's authorisation provides an additional treatment option against the Covid-19 virus in the form of a pill that can be taken orally," said FDA scientist Patrizia Cavazzoni. The White House is grateful that former US president Donald Trump received and promoted getting the Covid-19 vaccine booster shot, press



secretary Jen Psaki said on Thursday. The Republican former president recently said in an interview that he received a booster shot, and called the Covid-19 vaccines "one of the greatest achievements of mankind". Sinovac's booster weaker against Omicron: Study Three doses of Sinovac's

CoronaVac Covid-19 vaccine do not produce adequate levels of antibodies to fight the Omicron variant, researchers from Hong Kong said. Their analysis revealed Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was more effective, as a third dose of the shot administered after two doses of the same or China's Sinovac vaccine provided "protective levels" of antibody

against Omicron. Italy, UK cases hit record Italy recorded the highest number of cases since the beginning of the pandemic. The first country in Europe to move into lockdown last year reported 44,595 cases on Thursday, up from 36,293 a day earlier. UK cases surged to a new record for a second day, piling pressure on Prime Minister Boris Johnson as he considers whether to tighten pandemic regulations after Christmas. A total of 119,789 new cases were logged on Thursday. That's more than double the rate seen at the start of the month, and an increase of more than 10,000 on Wednesday's caseload - which had been a daily record. Meanwhile, France reported around 88,000 new confirmed Covid-19 cases on

Thursday, health ministry data showed, the highest in the country since the pandemic began. "Today's figures are not good," French health minister Olivier Veran said. Six members of Trudeau Cabinet test positive Six members of Justin Trudeau's team tested for positive for Covid-19, the Canadian Prime Minister revealed on Wednesday, even as the country reported a record number of fresh infections. Canadian researchers on Wednesday revealed, what they say, is the first molecular structural analysis of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 in the country which has shown that it has three to five times more mutations in its spike protein than any previous variant.

No evidence Omicron has lower severity than Delta variant: study

This implies that the protection against reinfection by Omicron afforded by past infection may be as low as 19 per cent, the researchers said.

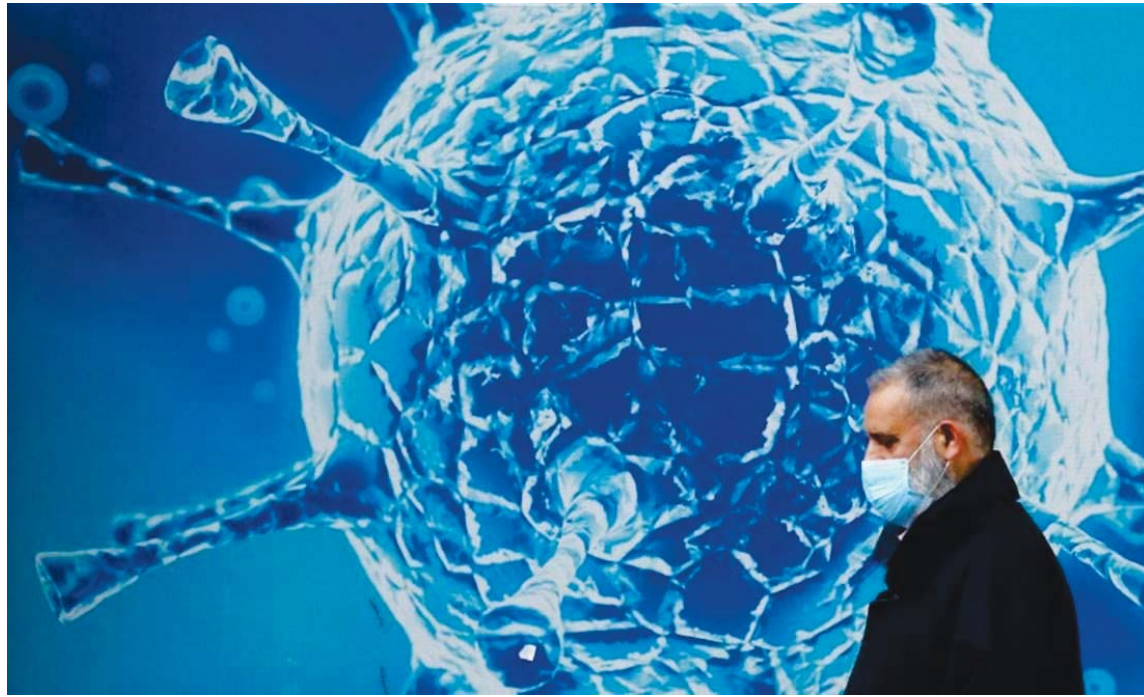
"The study finds no evidence of Omicron having lower severity than Delta, judged by either the proportion of people testing positive who report symptoms, or by the proportion of cases seeking hospital care after infection, the authors of the study said.

"However, hospitalisation data remains very limited at this time," they added.

The yet-to-be-published study used data for all PCR-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 cases in England who had taken a COVID-19 test between November 29 and December 11, 2021.

The research included people identified as having Omicron infection due to an S gene target failure (SGTF), as well as people with genotype data that confirmed Omicron infection.

Overall, 196,463 people without S gene target failure - those likely to be infected with another variant - and 11,329 cases with it were included in the analysis, as well as 122,063 Delta and 1,846 Omicron cases in the genotype analysis.



The results suggest that the proportion of Omicron among all COVID cases was doubling every two days up to December 11, the researchers said.

They estimate that the reproduction number (R) - the number of cases directly caused by an infected individual - of Omicron was above 3 over the period studied.

"This study provides further evidence of the very substantial extent to which Omicron can evade prior immunity given by both infection or vaccination," said Neil Ferguson, a professor

at Imperial College London.

"This level of immune evasion means that Omicron poses a major, imminent threat to public health," Ferguson said in a statement.

Controlling for vaccine status,

age, sex, ethnicity, asymptomatic status, region and specimen date, Omicron was associated with a 5.40 fold higher risk of reinfection compared with Delta, the study found.

The reinfection risk estimated in the current study suggests this protection has fallen to 19 per cent against an Omicron infection, according to the researchers.

They found a significantly increased risk of developing a symptomatic Omicron case compared to Delta for those who were two or more weeks past their second vaccine dose, and two or more weeks past their booster dose for AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines.

"Depending on the estimates used for vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic infection from the Delta variant, this translates into vaccine effectiveness estimates against symptomatic Omicron infection of between 0 per cent and 20 per cent after two doses, and between 55 per cent and 80 per cent after a booster dose," the researchers added.

SpaceX launches Christmas presents, supplies to International Space Station



at the space station Wednesday: Christmas presents from the astronauts' families, as well as smoked fish and turkey, green beans and fruitcake for a holiday feast. NASA's space station program manager Joel Montalbano wouldn't divulge anything else. "I won't get in front of Santa Claus and tell you what's going to be sent up," he told reporters

on the eve of launch.

The delivery also includes a laundry detergent experiment. Station astronauts currently trash their dirty clothes; Procter & Gamble Co. is developing a fully degradable detergent for eventual use at the station, on the moon and beyond.

SpaceX is ending the year with 31 launches, the most ever by the company.

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Fuel prices in Sri Lanka hiked; govt says talks on with India for LoC

to raise fuel prices since October.

The CPC raised the price of petrol by Rs 20 and diesel by Rs 10. It is now selling petrol at Rs 177 and diesel at Rs 121 a litre. The price of Petrol 95 Octane was raised by Rs 23 to Rs 207 a litre.

Petrol 95 Octane of Lanka IOC (LIOC), the subsidiary of Indian Oil Corporation in Sri Lanka, would be three rupees more expensive than that of the CPC. Sri Lanka is currently facing a

severe foreign exchange crisis with falling reserves.

At the beginning of December, the reserves were sufficient for just a month of imports.

In November, the island nation's only refinery was ordered to be shut due to the dollar crisis.

The government has opted to import finished petroleum products instead.

The government said negotiations are underway with India and Oman to work out credit lines for fuel purchases.

Recently, New-York based rating agency Fitch downgraded Sri Lanka's sovereign rating to 'CC' from 'CCC', saying there is an increased probability of a default in coming months in light of the country's worsening external liquidity position underscored by a drop in foreign exchange reserves.

The rating agency said it will be difficult for the government to meet its external debt obligations in 2022 and 2023 in the absence of new external

financing sources.

Fitch said Sri Lanka's foreign-exchange reserves have declined much faster than it expected, owing to a combination of a higher import bill and foreign-currency intervention by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

Foreign exchange reserves have declined by about USD 2 billion since August, falling to USD 1.6 billion at end-November, equivalent to less than one month of current

external payments (CXP). This represents a drop in foreign-currency reserves of about USD 4 billion since end-2020, it said. The latest Fitch statement came after Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa assured parliament last week that the government was confident of meeting external debt payments when they fall due.

In order to tackle the reserves crisis, Sri Lanka has curtailed imports leading to shortages of essentials

Madagascar minister 'swims 12 hours' to shore after helicopter crash

under president Andry Rajoelina. Rajoelina won Madagascar's presidential elections in 2018.

A search was still ongoing for two other passengers after the crash on Monday.

reached land separately on Tuesday morning. They apparently ejected themselves from the aircraft before swimming to shore, port authority chief Jean-Edmond Randrianantenaina said.



Screengrab from video tweeted by @MDN_Madagascar

The cause of the crash was not immediately clear, according to police.

How did Gelle reach land? Serge Gelle, the country's secretary of state for police, and a fellow police officer

The two missing passengers were also members of Madagascar's police force.

In a video shared the Malagasy defense ministry on Twitter, Gelle appears lying on a deck chair, seemingly resting and still

in a camouflage jumpsuit.

"My time to die hasn't come yet," said Gelle in the video.

Police chief Zafisambatra Ravoavy said that Gelle had used one of the helicopter's seats as a flotation device.

In a Tuesday tweet President Rajoelina praised Gelle for his "dedication" and added Madagascar was fully mobilized to provide any necessary aid to the victims of the helicopter crash and an earlier shipwreck. Where was the helicopter going? The helicopter was flying its passengers to inspect the site of a shipwreck off the northeastern coast of Madagascar.

Rescue workers had recovered 18 more bodies from the wreck, Ravoavy said Tuesday. This brought the death toll up to 39. The boat had 130 passengers on board, of which 45 have been saved.

Ayodhya land deals: Cong seeks top court probe, BSP says cancel sale

officials had bought land parcels in Ayodhya since the November 9, 2019, Supreme Court verdict clearing construction of a temple at the disputed Ram Janmabhoomi site.

Addressing a press conference with Congress communication department head Randeep Surjewala at the AICC headquarters, Vadra said: "Uttar Pradesh said yesterday that they are ordering a probe. Who is conducting the probe? A district-level officer... Now you have the Mayor as a witness on a sale deed... Obviously, you are not expecting an inquiry to take place... A district-level officer cannot hold an inquiry against a mayor. The Ram Mandir Trust was set up on the basis of the orders of the Supreme Court. So, this investigation should be conducted through the Supreme Court." Accusing the Trust of buying land at inflated rates, and

BJP, RSS leaders and government officials of "misusing" the money collected by it, Vadra said a "loot" was on near the Ram temple. "BJP leaders, office-bearers and officials of the Yogi Adityanath government are involved in this loot... Nobody knows how much land is there or how many crores worth of scam is taking place." Speaking to reporters in Lucknow, BSP chief Mayawati demanded that the Supreme Court intervene in the matter. She asked the Centre to direct the state to cancel the land deals.

Mentioning a specific case, Vadra, the Congress general secretary in-charge of UP, said: "There is a clear transaction here where a piece of land which was sold in 2017 to a certain person was then sold by that person in two parts. The first part, which was 10,000 sq m, was sold directly to the Ram Mandir trust for Rs 8 crore.

Delhi air pollution:

Newly-recruited fifty environmental engineers to undergo three-week training module



The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) hired fifty environmental engineers who will undergo a three-week training module on fifty topics. A good chunk of the module is focussed on studies on how to curb air pollution

In an attempt to curb the rising air pollution in the National Capital region (NCR), the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) is taking up certain measures. After setting up a special task force to ensure the enforcement of the pollution norms, the body has deployed new technical expertise in various areas to fight pollution. These newly-hired environmental engineers will be provided with detailed knowledge which can be used to chalk out a plan to curb air pollution for the next winter. The DPCC is an autonomous regulatory body under the Department of Environment Government of NCT of Delhi. Last month, DPCC recruited at least fifty environmental engineers who will be trained on how to combat air pollution, manage waste generated in the national capital, climate change and sourcing data to fight pollution. A report published in the Hindustan Times (HT) reveals that these engineers will undergo a three-week training module developed by IIT Delhi on over fifty topics. The decision to conduct the training module online or in-person mode is yet to be taken. Training module for environmental engineers

The fifty environmental engineers will be given training on a wide range of topics, such as measures to combat air pollution, sourcing accurate data, waste management, climate change, sources of toxic and hazardous pollutants. The officials of DPCC were quoted by HT as saying that twenty one-hour sessions will be conducted and this

training module will serve as a guiding tool for all future recruitments for technical positions. However, all the employees will be given full-fledged training with detailed knowledge before being deployed in key areas. The focus of this module will be air pollution and sessions on electric waste, water quality management, septic tanks, noise pollution, plastic waste management will also be held. Professor Sagnik Dey, associate professor at the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences at IIT-Delhi, was quoted by HT as saying that the majority of the module focusses on pollution and a few more topics are being added. Dey added that the topics are technical and they explain studies and technologies used to fight air pollution. Analyse data from Green Delhi app

The task of the new employees will be to manage and analyse the data from the web portal designed to oversee construction and demolition sites. The DPCC officials said that the new employees would be deputed in the green war room and would be required to analyse data from the Green Delhi app. The Green Delhi app focusses on studies and innovations. The report suggests that out of around ten per cent of 343 sanctioned posts are vacant and nearly 50 per cent are technical posts. Delhi air quality today

On Thursday, the air quality in Delhi remained in the 'very poor' category and the Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 387, the

System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR) said. A shallow fog engulfed the national capital this morning and people resorted to bonfires to keep

themselves warm.

The concentrations of PM 2.5 and PM 10 stood in the 'very poor' category, according to SAFAR. On the other hand, Noida's air quality remains in the 'critical' category.

category with AQI at 525. Noida remained in the 'critical' category for the second consecutive day. Gurugram's air quality index stood at 344 in the 'very poor' category.



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Himalayan glaciers melting at exceptional rate due to global warming, says study

Himalayan glaciers are melting at an "exceptional" rate due to global warming, threatening the water supply of millions of people in Asia, a study has said

Glaciers in the Himalayas are melting at an "exceptional" rate because of global warming, threatening the water supply of millions of people in Asia, according to a study published on Monday.

The researchers found that the Himalayan glaciers have lost ice ten times more quickly over the last few decades than on average since the last major glacier expansion 400-700 years ago, a period known as the Little Ice Age.

The study, published in the journal Scientific Reports, also shows that Himalayan glaciers are shrinking far more rapidly than glaciers in other parts of the world.

A team led by researchers at the University of Leeds, UK, made a reconstruction of the size and ice surfaces of 14,798 Himalayan glaciers during the Little Ice Age.

They calculated that the glaciers have lost around 40 per cent of their area -- shrinking from a peak of 28,000 square

kilometres (km²) to around 19,600 km² today.

During that period they have also lost between 390 cubic kilometres (km³) and 586 km³ of ice, the researchers said.

The water released through that melting has raised sea levels across the world by between 0.92 millimetres (mm) and 1.38 mm, they said.

Our findings clearly show that ice is now being lost from Himalayan glaciers at a rate that is at least ten times higher than the average rate over past centuries," said study corresponding author Jonathan Carrivick, from the University of Leeds.

"This acceleration in the rate of loss has only emerged within the last few decades, and coincides with human-induced climate change," Carrivick said.

The Himalayan mountain range is home to the world's third-largest amount of glacier ice, after Antarctica and the Arctic and is often referred to as 'the Third Pole'. The acceleration of melting of Himalayan glaciers has significant implications for

hundreds of millions of people who depend on Asia's major river systems for food and energy, the researchers said.

These rivers include the Brahmaputra, Ganges and Indus, they said.

The team used satellite images and digital elevation models to produce outlines of the glaciers' extent 400-700 years ago and to 'reconstruct' the ice surface.

The satellite images revealed ridges that mark the former glacier boundaries and the researchers used the geometry of these ridges to estimate the former glacier extent and ice surface elevation.

Comparing the glacier reconstruction to the glacier now, determined the volume and hence mass loss between the Little Ice Age and now.

The Himalayan glaciers are generally losing mass faster in the eastern regions -- taking in east Nepal and Bhutan north of the main divide.

The study suggests this variation is probably due to differences in geographical features on the two sides of

the mountain range and their interaction with the atmosphere -- resulting in different weather patterns.

Himalayan glaciers are also declining faster where they end in lakes, which have several warming effects, rather than where they end on land, the researchers said.

The number and size of these lakes are increasing so continued acceleration in mass loss can be expected, they said. Glaciers which have significant amounts of natural debris upon their surfaces are also losing mass more quickly, contributing around 46.5 per cent of total volume loss despite making up only around 7.5 per cent of the total number of glaciers.

"While we must act urgently to reduce and mitigate the impact of human-made climate change on the glaciers and meltwater-fed rivers, the modelling of that impact on glaciers must also take account of the role of factors such as lakes and debris," Carrivick added.

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How to fight climate change: Let's talk about it

According to a study, the key to slowing down global warming lies in coupling climate change models with social learning, or understanding how learning from others affects our opinions or actions

Simply talking to your friends about adopting a more planet-friendly diet or avoiding the use of fossil fuels may help fight climate change, scientists say. Researchers from the University of Guelph and the University of Waterloo in Canada have developed a new mathematical model that accounts for social processes such as social learning in climate predictions. Findings of the study The study, published in PLoS

Computational Biology, shows that including social processes can alter climate change predictions. The findings may help stem or reduce global warming. "Human behaviour affects natural systems including climate, and that climate systems, in turn, affect behaviour," said Madhur Anand, from University of Guelph. "But social processes are often neglected in climate models,"

she said. Study methodology For the study, the researchers combined a common climate prediction model with a new human behaviour model to look at interactions. They found that social learning about mitigation strategies such as hearing that a friend has bought a new hybrid car or adopted a plant-based diet can influence social norms in ways that ultimately affect climate

outcomes. The rate of social learning is key. If that rate is low, with only a few people attempting to mitigate carbon emissions, it will take longer to change social norms and, in turn, to alter climate change predictions," Anand said. The socio-climate model suggests the best approach combines high social learning rates with novel mitigation measures such as government

regulation or technology development. "Our socio-climate model indicates that an increase in social media and other campaigns to raise awareness, such as climate marches and international reports, should ideally be followed by governmental and other incentives to reduce carbon emissions," said Thomas Bury, a graduate student at the University of Waterloo.

Nearly 100 people in US military took part in extremist activity, Pentagon reveals

A new review of the US' Defence Department has revealed that nearly 100 service members actively took part in the Capitol attack that was carried out by Trump supporters on January 6. In February 2021, the Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin had ordered a review of the department's policies on countering extremism within the ranks. This review was initiated after doubts that some members may have had a role in the horrifying Capitol riot that took place in Washington. As per the review, in the past year, nearly 100 active duty or reserve members of the US military took

part in extremist activities which are prohibited to a service member, Pentagon spokesman

"The overwhelming majority of the men and women of the Department of Defense serve this

Austin said in a statement. However, he also added that it is only a few members of the institution who have violated these regulations. "They respect the oath they took to support and defend the Constitution of the United States," Austin said. "We believe only a very few violate this oath by participating in extremist activities." The authorities have not revealed what kind of activities were the defence personnel involved in, but clarified that 'domestic terrorism'

or favouring overthrowing the ruling government were examples of prohibited activities for US military service personnel. Authorities will also start educating and training service members about what constitutes prohibited extremist activity, which acts are not allowed for service members and more. "That includes very specifically, the guidelines for social media, what's permissible and what's not, with respect to extremist prohibited activities," Kirby said. Oddly, this time, the recommendations and guidelines do not list specific extremist groups.



John Kirby revealed.

country with honor and integrity,"



Novavax Covid-19 vaccine could get EU approval next week: Report

Novavax's Covid-19 vaccine is likely to receive approval from Europe's drug regulator next week and subsequently an emergency use listing from the World Health Organization, a report said on Thursday.

Novavax's Covid-19 vaccine could receive approval from Europe's drug regulator next week and subsequently an emergency use listing from the World Health Organization, the Financial Times reported on Thursday, sending shares of the US drugmaker up 7 per cent. A WHO approval could come once the health body issued its own emergency use listing or if the EMA gave it a conditional marketing authorization, the newspaper reported citing people familiar with

the matter.

That could pave the way for the company and its partner, Serum Institute of India, to ship doses to the COVAX program, providing another vaccine to low-income countries.

The WHO said on Thursday that it would reveal its position over the vaccine in the coming days, following an expert group meeting.

The protein-based vaccine by Novavax in June was shown to be more than 90% effective, including against a variety of concerning coronavirus

variants, in a large, late-stage US trial.

Novavax's shot received its first authorization in Indonesia last month and is awaiting approval in Japan, where it would be manufactured and distributed by Takeda Pharmaceutical.

The Maryland-based company has also said it could begin commercial manufacturing of a vaccine tailored to the highly transmissible Omicron coronavirus variant in January.

The drugmaker is currently testing the effectiveness of its existing two-dose vaccine against Omicron.

How Nitish Kumar revived demands for 'special category' status for Bihar

For once, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has chosen not to dispute the finding of the Niti Aayog. Last month, the Centre's public policy think tank released its first 'Multi-dimensional Poverty Index' (MPI) report, which ranked Bihar as the poorest state in India, estimating that nearly 52 per cent of its population did not have access to requisite health, education and living standards. Although the report has a notable shortcoming—its data reference period is 2015-16, which means its assessment is based on five year old data—Nitish chose to accept the results. Going further, he also used the report to revive calls for a long-standing demand, for Bihar to be given 'special category' status.

The Bihar chief minister had first raised this demand in 2006, but found successive governments at the Centre turning a deaf ear. Political watchers say his acceptance of the MPI report's conclusions is a clever strategy to turn up the pressure on the BJP-led government at the Centre by using a report published by its own think tank. This also let him rebut a statement by his own deputy chief minister, the BJP's Renu Devi, who had earlier described his demand for special category status for Bihar as "meaningless". The chief minister turned the tables on her on December 13, saying his deputy did not have detailed information on how justified Bihar's claim was. BJP leaders in Bihar, including Renu Devi, have largely maintained a studied silence since then.

The 'special category' status to a state, first introduced in 1969, allows preferential treatment in the form of Central assistance and tax breaks to disadvantaged states. Initially, three states—Assam, Nagaland and Jammu & Kashmir—were granted special category status. Since then, eight more have been included—Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttarakhand.

AstraZeneca's Covid vaccine immunity declines after 3 months, says Lancet study

A study published by the Lancet has revealed that the immunity offered by the AstraZeneca-Oxford's COVID-19 vaccine wanes three months after receiving two doses, underlining the importance of booster shots.

The findings were based on the data of two million people in Scotland and 42 million people in Brazil who were vaccinated with the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is known as Covishield in India.

While analysing the data from Scotland, the researchers found that there was approximately a five-fold increase in the chance of being hospitalised or dying from COVID-19 nearly five months after being double

vaccinated.

The decline in effectiveness begins to first appear around

The researchers from Scotland and Brazil found that the risk of hospitalisation and death

"Vaccines have been a key tool in fighting the pandemic, but waning in their effectiveness has

between doses -12 weeks -and initial prioritisation of who was vaccinated - people at highest

been a concern for a while," said Professor Aziz Sheikh, from the University of Edinburgh, UK.

"By identifying when waning first starts to occur in the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, it should be possible for governments to design booster programmes that can ensure maximum protection

is maintained," Sheikh said. The team was able to compare data between Scotland and Brazil as they had a similar interval between doses -12 weeks -and initial prioritisation of who was vaccinated - people at highest risk of severe disease and healthcare workers. The dominant variant was different in each country during the study period -Delta in Scotland and Gamma in Brazil. This means the decline in effectiveness is likely because of vaccine waning and the impact of variants, the researchers said. However, the experts warned that these figures should be treated with caution because it is becoming harder to compare non-vaccinated people to those vaccinated with similar characteristics, particularly among older age groups where so many people are now vaccinated.



three months, when the risk of hospitalisation and death is double that of two weeks after the second dose, they said.

increases three-fold just short of four months after the second vaccine dose. Similar numbers were seen for Brazil, they said.

maintained," Sheikh said. The team was able to compare data between Scotland and Brazil as they had a similar interval

What is sacrilege?



Incidents and law in Punjab explained

The law says sacrilege must be considered in terms of the intent of the accused.

Sacrilege literally means treating a religious object or place without the respect that it deserves. But dictionary definitions often cannot fully explain what usually follows sacrilege. Controversies around acts or even alleged attempts of sacrilege are back in Punjab just before the assembly election. While the connection between the two is not yet established, but it is coincidental that sacrilege was one of the dominating issues in the 2017 Punjab Assembly election, when the coalition of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost power.

The Congress benefitted in the last Punjab Assembly polls, and only recently, Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu made it an issue, leading to Captain Amarinder Singh's removal as the chief minister.

Three incidents of alleged sacrilege have been reported in Punjab in one week. Two of them resulted in the lynching of two accused in 24 hours.

THREE INCIDENTS

A man was hacked to death on Sunday in the presence of Punjab police personnel over an alleged disrespect of the Nishan

Sahib, the religious flag of the Sikhs. The incident happened at a gurdwara in Punjab's Kapurthala.

The accused was caught and confined to a room on Saturday-Sunday night. A mob of Sikh youths broke into the room and whacked him to death. Three police officials were also injured in trying to save him. The police, however, said there was no visible

incident.

This was the second incident of sacrilege-related lynching in Punjab in 24 hours.

EARLIER, GOLDEN TEMPLE

On Saturday evening, a mob of angry devotees caught and lynched a man who had jumped the golden grills inside the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The deceased had picked a sword by

Congress picked the issue and built its election campaign for the 2017 polls around it. Now, the party is under pressure as it fights for retaining power in Punjab in the election likely to be held in February-March 2022.

sign of sacrilege in the Kapurthala gurdwara. Everything was intact in the room where the Bir, the physical copy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, was kept.

The police indicated that the trigger appeared to be a theft. The deceased was wearing two jackets which he picked from a room on the ground floor of the gurdwara building.

The Charanjit Singh Channi government in Punjab has ordered a probe by a special investigation team (SIT) into the

jumping the grills and reached near the place where a Sikh priest was reciting the hymns of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

LAST WEEK

Another incident took place on Wednesday last week at the Golden Temple. A man had thrown a copy of Gutka Sahib, the smaller version of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, into the lake. The man, said to be 'mentally disturbed', was arrested and sent to jail.

DURING FARMERS' PROTEST

The twin-lynching in Punjab came close to an incident at the Singhu border of Delhi during the protest against the three farm reforms laws. The incident occurred in mid-October when a Dalit man was mutilated by a group of Nihangs, literally meaning immortals, formed a Sikh order of armed men for the protection of their faith.

A Nihang leader told India Today, "Before the Prakash Prayer [offered around 3 am], he removed the cloth to cover the holy scripture. And insulted the Pothi Sahib [translation book]. He ran away and we chased him." "Whoever indulges in sacrilege, we will treat them in this manner. We won't approach any police, administration."

The Nihang leader said the man was caught and attacked near a private hospital, and the holy book was recovered from him.

WHY SACRILEGE IS LINKED TO ELECTION

Two incidents of sacrilege had become the election issue in the 2017 Punjab Assembly polls. The incidents were from Faridkot district and happened in 2015 first in June when the holy book was taken from a gurdwara, and the second in October, when in a

series of incidents pages of Sri Guru Granth Sahib were found lying on the ground.

Protests rocked many places after the second incident at Bargari village in Faridkot. At two places, Kotkapura and Behbal Kalan, the police resorted to firing. Two protesters died in police firing.

The Congress picked the issue and built its election campaign for the 2017 polls around it. Now, the party is under pressure as it fights for retaining power in Punjab in the election likely to be held in February-March 2022.

THE SACRILEGE LAW

Under pressure from the protesters and the Congress, the then SAD-BJP government brought a bill in 2016 to amend the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to deal with sacrilege crime in Punjab.

States can amend parts of the IPC and the CrPC to suit local practises and circumstances.

The amended laws made "any sacrilege of the holy Guru Granth Sahib" punishable with life imprisonment. However, the Centre objected to the amendment for excluding other religions from its purview.

MapmyIndia makes strong market debut, lists at over 50% premium



MapmyIndia (CE Infosystems Limited) made a strong debut on Dalal Street as the company's stock listed at a premium of over 50 per cent to its issue price of Rs 1,033. However, the shares of the company struggled to hold to the listing momentum. On the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), the stock opened at Rs 1,581 or at a 53 per cent premium to its issue price of Rs 1,033. On the National Stock Exchange (NSE), MapmyIndia shares were listed at Rs 1,565 apiece. While the company saw a strong market debut, it struggled to hold listing gains as its share price fell shortly after. At around 10:10 am, the shares of the company were down to Rs 1,370 on the BSE, with the premium coming down to 32 per cent. On the NSE, too, the shares of the company fell sharply after getting listed. MapmyIndia's Rs 1,039.61 IPO was well positioned to make a bumper stock market debut, but prevailing market conditions held back gains. Even then, the company's IPO had got a strong reception as it was subscribed over 154 times.



ZEE-Sony merger approved: Here's all you need to know about deal

ZEE-Sony merger approved: Sony Pictures Networks India and Zee Entertainment Enterprises have finalised a deal to create a combined entity, which will be publicly listed in India. Here is all you need to know about the deal.

Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited (ZEEL) and Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI) finalised a deal on Wednesday to merge their television channels, assets and streaming platforms to create a combined entity. The merger deal, which was announced on September 22, was signed after the 90-day due diligence period came to an end on December 21. In a stock exchange filing today, the companies announced that they have finalised the deal to create a single entity, aimed at achieving better growth.

As per the regulatory filing, SPNI and ZEE signed definitive agreements for the deal to create a merger entity, which will be publicly listed in India. It is worth mentioning, however, that the closing of the transaction is subject to regulatory, shareholder and third-party approvals.

"The closing of the transaction is subject

to certain customary closing conditions, including regulatory, shareholder, and third-party approvals," the regulatory filing said. **ZEE-SONY MERGER DEAL APPROVED: KEY DETAILS**

The terms of the definitive agreements suggest that SPNI will have a cash balance of \$1.5 billion at closing, including through infusion by the current shareholders of SPNI and the promoters (founders) of ZEEL.

This will enable the combined company to drive sharper content creation across platforms, strengthen its footprint in the rapidly evolving digital ecosystem, bid for media rights in the fast-growing sports landscape and pursue other growth opportunities.

After the closing of the merger deal, Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE) will indirectly hold a majority 50.86 per cent of the combined company, the promoters

(founders) of ZEEL will hold 3.99 per cent, and the other ZEEL shareholders will hold a 45.15 per cent stake.

THE INVESCO HURDLE

While the merger deal between ZEEL and Sony has been finalised, final approval from shareholders will be crucial for closing it. ZEEL's founders will only hold 3.99 per cent in the merged entity, making it necessary for its existing shareholders to back the deal. At least three-fourths of a majority will be required for the deal to close.

One major problem here is the fact that Invesco, which owns 17.88 per cent stake in ZEE, has been engaged in a legal tussle with the company after it had approached the board to conduct an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) for the removal of ZEE MD and CEO Punit Goenka.

Decoded: Transformation of lending space in 2021

In a rapidly evolving world where change is a mainstay, it should come as no surprise that the banking sector has also witnessed tremendous transformation. The aftermath of a global virus in 2020 continues to resonate in 2021, necessitating further changes to traditional banking practices and norms.

One of the most significant and evident transformations is the advent of digital banking. Considering the magnitude of India's population, bankers have always faced a challenge in expanding affordable financial services to the masses. Multiple efforts by the government and



the RBI for financial inclusion piggyback on the access and convenience garnered by digitization.

DIGITAL BANKING ECOSYSTEM

Digital banking has, of course,

addressed the gap in the lending ecosystem and has carefully curated products/services to cater to the rapidly evolving demands of consumers, such as offering personalized and more flexible borrowing experiences. It

provides people with the convenience of acquiring a loan right from the comfort of their homes. Today, a few clicks on one's mobile phone can help them get a loan sanctioned and credited into their accounts while helping them save multiple back-and-forth trips to the bank.

Digitization has also allowed lenders to eliminate long approval processes and endless documentation through the introduction of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to loan disbursement processes. Massive amounts of data can be processed in seconds, enabling virtual screening for loan eligibility and

quick and objective decisions, which have also shown to increase accuracy in approval rates for buyers and lower loss rates for lenders.

RISE OF NBFCs

A major outcome of digital banking is the rise of Non-Banking Financial Companies or NBFCs, with these institutions capitalizing on a huge gap in the Indian lending market. A recent estimate by the RBI shows that Indian MSME's alone have a credit demand of almost \$500 billion but the supply from formal lenders stands at a scarce \$192 billion, leaving a huge credit gap of over \$300 billion.

Indian Oil Corporation to invest Rs 9,028 cr on Mundra-Panipat pipeline



Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the nation's largest oil firm, on Thursday said it will invest Rs 9,028 crore in laying a new crude oil pipeline from Mundra in Gujarat to Panipat in Haryana. The pipeline, which will have a nameplate capacity of 17.5 million tonne per annum, will transport imported crude oil from the Gujarat coast to the firm's refinery in Haryana, the company said.

"Under this project, IOC would also build nine crude oil tanks of 60,000 kilolitres each at Mundra, which, apart from meeting operational requirements, would help in enhancing crude oil storage capacity in the country. The total estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,028 crore," it said adding the Board of the company approved the investment proposal at its meeting on December 20. IOC is implementing a project for capacity expansion of Panipat refinery from 15 million tonne per annum to 25 million tonne along

with the installation of polypropylene unit and Catalytic Dewaxing Unit with targeted completion in second quarter of FY 2024-25.

"The new pipeline system and crude oil tank storage would help in meeting the enhanced need of crude oil requirement due to the expansion of the Panipat refinery. The crude oil pipeline project is expected to be completed in synchronisation with the commissioning of Panipat refinery expansion," it said. - PTI

The pipeline, which will have a nameplate capacity of 17.5 million tonne per annum, will transport imported crude oil from the Gujarat coast to the IndianOil's refinery in Panipat

Under this project, IOC would also build nine crude oil tanks of 60,000 kilolitres each at Mundra, which would help in enhancing crude oil storage capacity in the country

This is India's 'most binged snack' of 2021, as per Swiggy report



The humble samosa is India's "most binged snack" of 2021 with about 50 lakh orders, topping the list of the most ordered food during the year, according to food ordering and delivery platform Swiggy.

Coming a distant second in the top food orders of the year list was pav bhaji and gulab jamun with 21 lakh orders each, as per the sixth annual 'StatEATstics report' by Swiggy.

The love for 'desi samosa' was reflected in the fact that it was ordered "six times more than chicken wings".

"The most binged snack of the year was the Samosa with about 5 million orders on Swiggy..." it said in a statement.

When it came to India's top dishes in 2021, the StatEATstics report found biryani to be the undisputed dish, topping the charts for the sixth year in a row.

"In 2020, 90 Biryani were ordered per minute and in 2021, India ordered 115 Biryani per minute, or 2 Biryani per second," Swiggy said, adding chicken biryani was ordered 4.3 times more than the vegetarian counterpart.

Interestingly, over 4.25 lakh new users made

their Swiggy debut by ordering a chicken biryani, it added.

The StatEATstics report is based on orders received by Swiggy for food delivery, grocery on Instamart, pick up and drop service Swiggy Genie and HealthHub platforms between January and December 2021.

Grocery platform Instamart delivered over 28 million packs of fruits and vegetables alone in 2021.

Tomatoes, bananas, onions, potatoes, and green chilies were the top five fruits and veggies delivered in under 30 minutes, it said.

As far as instant indulgence was concerned, Swiggy said 14 lakh packets of instant noodles, 31 lakh packets of chocolate and 23 lakh tubs of ice creams were delivered.

With covid-19 still around, the war against the virus continued with 1 lakh masks and over 4 lakh soaps and handwashes ordered online during the year, it added.

The year also saw deliveries of over 70,000 packs of band-aid, 55,000 packs of diapers and 3 lakh packs of sanitary napkins in 15-30 minutes, as per the report.

Amazon's plan to buy out Cataraman in Prione violates FDI policy: Traders

Domestic traders' they will not continue their body CAIT on Thursday joint venture Prione claimed e-commerce major Business Services beyond Amazon's plan to acquire May 2022.

Prione Business Services - Amazon has applied to the its joint venture firm with Competition Commission of Catamaran - will be a India (CCI) for approval to violation of foreign direct buy Catamaran Ventures' investment (FDI) policy. 100% stake in Prione Amazon has said it will Business Services Pvt acquire Prione Business Ltd, and if the approval Services, subject to from CCI is given to requisite regulatory Amazon, "it will be a approvals. gross violation of the FDI In August, Amazon and NR policy", Confederation of Narayana Murthy's All India Traders (CAIT) has Catamaran had announced said. -



Perseverance rover drills another window into history of Mars



The rover collected its latest sample from a rock named "Robine" and has commenced its processing to analyse the chemical remnants of the core.

Days after the Perseverance rover revealed that lava once flowed under its wheels in the Jazero crater on Mars, the six-wheeled astrobiologists has collected another sample to be stored and returned to Earth in the future. The rover is trundling on the Martian surface looking for signs of ancient microbial life.

The rover collected its latest sample from a rock named "Robine" and has commenced its processing to study the chemical remnants of the core.

"Got another one! My latest rock core is from this target we are calling "Robine." Still some processing to do to get this one capped and sealed, but so far so good for another round of #SamplingMars," the rover's team said in a tweet. Perseverance had earlier made a two-inch hole in another rock looking for samples from

the inside and named it "Issole".

Scientists with the Perseverance mission have recently discovered that the bedrock their six-wheeled explorer has been driving on since landing in February likely formed from red-hot magma.

The team concluded that rocks in the crater have interacted with water multiple times over the eons and that some contain organic molecules. Scientists have said that the samples, when returned to Earth, will give them an insight into the ancient history of the crater, which is believed to be home to a once ancient lake.

WORK UNDERWAY TO RETURN FIRST SAMPLES FROM MARS

The Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), which is driving the Perseverance rover on Mars, has said that testing has already begun to return first samples from the inhospitable world. However, it maintains that getting those samples into labs on Earth will take at least a

decade and would require new innovation and technological developments.

Out of Perseverance's 43 sample tubes, four have been filled with rock cores and one with the Martian atmosphere. Mars Sample Return seeks to bring select tubes back to Earth. During the return mission, the rover would transfer samples to a lander being developed at JPL that would use a robotic arm (developed by ESA) to pack the samples into a small rocket, called a Mars Ascent Vehicle.

According to JPL, the rocket would launch from the lander to deliver the sample capsule to an ESA spacecraft orbiting Mars. Inside the orbiter, the capsule would be prepared for delivery to Earth. "This preparation would include sealing the sample capsule within a clean container to trap any Martian material inside, sterilizing the seal, and placing the sealed container into an Earth-entry capsule before the return trip to Earth," JPL said.

Amid strained relations, SpaceX to launch Russia's only female cosmonaut to Space Station in 2022

Amid strained relations over Russia's anti-satellite missile test in orbit, SpaceX is likely to launch a cosmonaut into space in 2022. Nasa and the Russian space agency Roscosmos are working on an agreement to launch the first Russian astronaut on the SpaceX Dragon spacecraft to the International Space Station.

Joel Montalbano the program manager for the Space Station, said that the plan was to launch a cosmonaut on the SpaceX Crew-5 mission, launching in the fall of 2022. Montalbano was speaking to reporters ahead of the launch of the Dragon cargo resupply mission CRS-24 to the flying outpost.

Russia had hinted of similar



plans earlier this month when Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Roscosmos, said he and his US counterparts had discussed the issue, alongside extending Russia's participation in the space station's upkeep beyond 2025.

"The plan is to fly a cosmonaut on the Crew-5 mission next fall

and then launch a Nasa astronaut on an upcoming Soyuz mission. The agency is currently finalizing those plans through government agreements," Montalbano said during the press briefing. Strained relations between Washington and Moscow have extended into space, but Rogozin said the two

agencies planned to finalise the Crew Dragon deal in the first half of 2022 when NASA chief Bill Nelson visited Moscow.

Cosmonaut Anna Kikina to launch with SpaceX

The Russian space agency chief had said that Anna Kikina, the only female cosmonaut at Roscosmos, could be the likely nominee for such a flight. According to officials, she has already started training at SpaceX facilities for the mission. As part of the Crew-5 mission, she will join astronauts Nicole Mann and Josh Cassada.

Both Nicole Mann and Josh Cassada were first assigned to Boeing's maiden crewed mission, but have been reassigned to SpaceX alongside

Japanese astronaut Koichi Wakata. According to reports, in exchange for Kikina's seat, Roscosmos will give a seat on the Soyuz spacecraft to an American astronaut in the future.

It is worth mentioning that the US, which recently developed crew launching and landing capabilities with SpaceX, was earlier dependent on Russia for transporting its astronauts to the Space Station after the Shuttle mission was grounded in the earlier part of the last decade. The relations between US and Russia, while strained on the ground, have remained one of cooperating partners in space until November, when US officials accused Russia of endangering the ISS.



Biogen cuts the price tag on its Alzheimer's drug in half

The drugmaker said that it will cut the wholesale acquisition cost of the drug by about 50% next month

Biogen is slashing the price of its Alzheimer's treatment in half months after it debuted to widespread criticism for an initial cost that could reach \$56,000 annually.

The drugmaker said Monday that it will cut the wholesale acquisition cost of the drug by about 50% next month. That means the annual cost for a person of average weight will amount to \$28,200.

The actual amount that person would pay will depend on factors like insurance coverage.

Biogen CEO Michel Vounatsos said in a prepared statement that too many patients were not being offered the drug due to "financial considerations," and their disease had progressed beyond the point where Aduhelm could help.

Aduhelm is the first in a line of new drugs that promise to do what no other Alzheimer's treatment has managed: slow the progress of the fatal brain-destroying disease, rather than just managing its symptoms.

The drug received FDA approval in June, and the agency later said it was appropriate for patients with mild symptoms or early-stage Alzheimer's.

But Aduhelm's debut has been slowed by concerns over the price and research behind the drug. Some insurers have balked at paying for the drug, while medical centers across the country have been either slow to decide on using the drug or said they weren't planning to prescribe it for now.

Doctors have said concerns over the price were compounded by costs patients also

would face for regular testing and scans needed to monitor their progress on Aduhelm.

Biogen said in June that it would not raise its price on the drug for four years, and the company often touted its financial assistance programs for patients.

RBC Capital Markets analyst Brian Abrahams said he was not surprised by Biogen's price cut. He said in a research

The drug received FDA approval in June, and the agency later said it was appropriate for patients with mild symptoms or early-stage Alzheimer's. But Aduhelm's debut has been slowed by concerns over the price and research behind the drug.

note that the move was probably necessary and should "give Aduhelm its best opportunity for success."

The initial price was a key factor behind planned premium hikes for Medicare, the federal government's coverage program for people ages 65 and older and for the disabled.

Last month, Medicare announced one of the largest increases ever in its "Part B" monthly premium for outpatient care. It said it would raise the premium nearly \$22, from \$148.50 currently to \$170.10 starting in January. The agency said about half of that hike was due to the need for a contingency fund to cover Aduhelm. Medicare is expected to be one main payers for the drug. Aduhelm clears brain plaque thought to play a role in

Alzheimer's disease, and U.S. regulators gave their approval based on study results showing the drug seemed likely to benefit patients. But they've asked for more research. Biogen, which developed Aduhelm with Japan's Eisai Co., said last week the company expects to screen the first patients for their next study in May. Researchers will aim to enroll about 1,300 people with early-stage Alzheimer's and

expects to complete the research about four years after the study begins. Concerns about the research behind the drug were a main reason the European Medicines Agency cited in refusing Aduhelm's marketing authorization last week. Biogen said in October that Aduhelm had brought in only \$300,000 in sales during its first full quarter on the market. The company attributed that figure partly to drug wholesalers drawing down inventory they had purchased the previous quarter.

Biogen also said Monday that it will start some cost-cutting measures that are expected to yield about \$500 million in annual savings, most of which will be realized next year. The company said it was cutting costs in part because the slow debut of Aduhelm was affecting its revenue. Shares of Biogen Inc., based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, slipped \$1.07 to \$236.36 Monday morning while broader indexes fell.

The stock price had soared past \$425 in June after the FDA approval, but shares have since shed nearly half their value.

**The Falcon has landed:
SpaceX aces 100th
successful recovery of its
rocket in Atlantic**



SpaceX on Wednesday achieved a new milestone by successfully recovering its 100th orbital class rocket booster as it launched fresh cargo to the International Space Station. In a picture-perfect separation and landing, the first stage booster that powers the Falcon-9 rocket returned to Just Read the Instructions droneship.

The company led by Elon Musk has pioneered the highly successful reusable rockets that have delivered not just cargo to the space station, but satellites into orbit and humans into space. The 100th successful landing of the rocket happened in the Atlantic as the boosters touched the droneship before shutting down.

The 24th Commercial Resupply Services (CRS-24) to space station lifted off from the Launch Complex 39A (LC-39A) at Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 5:07 am EST. Twelve minutes after liftoff, the Dragon spacecraft separated from the Falcon 9's second stage on its way to autonomously dock to the space station.

The spacecraft will arrive at the flying outpost on Wednesday, docking at its forward-facing port dubbed Harmony module at approximately 4:38 am EST (3:08 pm IST). Nasa astronauts Raja Chari and Thomas Marshburn will monitor the arrival from the Space Station. Nasa has said that the spacecraft is expected to spend about a month attached to the orbiting outpost before it returns to Earth with research and return cargo, splashing down off the coast of Florida.

PIONEER IN REUSING ROCKETS

SpaceX has emerged as the biggest company, which has commercialised space launches. The company has so far conducted 132 launches of its workhorse Falcon-9, conducting 92 landings.

Winter solstice : India experiences shortest day of the year

The winter solstice on December 21 marks the shortest day of the year north of the equator.

The northern hemisphere experienced the shortest day of the year on Tuesday as it remained tilted away from the Sun in its orbit. Since it is tilted away from the sun, it receives less sunlight, making the day shorter and the night longer.

The winter solstice on December 21 marks the shortest day of the year north of the equator and the effect will be seen in places that are farthest from the line dividing the planet into two halves.

It is the December solstice that officially commences the winter season in the northern hemisphere and the start of the summers in the southern part of the planet.

WHEN WILL THE SUN SET ON THE SHORTEST DAY OF THE YEAR?

The sunset time in New Delhi on Tuesday is at 5:29

pm, giving just over 10 hours of daylight. The sunrise on December 21 happened at 7:04 am.

HOW MANY TIMES DOES SOLSTICE OCCUR?

The solstice occurs twice a year. For the Northern Hemisphere, the summer (June) solstice occurs around June 20-21, and the winter (December) solstice happens around Dec. 21-22. According to Nasa, at the solstice, the Sun's path appears farthest north or south, depending on which half of the planet you're on. Seasons change on Earth because the planet is slightly tilted on its axis as it travels around the Sun.

During the June Solstice, the Northern Hemisphere receives the most direct sunlight, causing warmer temperatures, and the Southern Hemisphere receives the most indirect sunlight,

causing cooler temperatures. While the northern hemisphere experiences its shortest day and longest night on December 21, 22, the Southern Hemisphere will experience its longest day and shortest night.

IS THERE A CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE TO SOLSTICE?

Yes, in ancient cultures, the winter solstice was marked as the death and rebirth of the sun. Ancient cultures knew that the sun's path across the sky, length of daylight, and location of the sunrise and sunset all shifted in a regular way throughout the year. To follow the progression of the sun throughout the year, people built monuments, like Stonehenge in England and Torreón in Machu Picchu, Peru.

Is there life on Venus? Scientists suggest it might be hiding in its clouds

While rovers trundle on the surface of Mars, humans have switched their attention to our next-door cosmic neighbour Venus, as scientists suggest the presence of possible lifeforms in the Venusian clouds. In a new theory, scientists have proposed that these lifeforms could be setting off a cascade of chemical reactions that are likely making the environment on Venus much more habitable.

The new hypothesis comes over the long-standing anomalies seen in the planet's upper atmosphere, which has puzzled scientists for a long time. The presence of ammonia, which was first detected in the 1970s has baffled astronomers since there is no evidence of any chemical reaction leading to its generation.



The new study by researchers from Cardiff University, MIT and Cambridge University has been published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The researchers designed models around chemical processes to

show that if ammonia is indeed present in the clouds, the gas would set off a cascade of chemical reactions that would neutralise the surrounding droplets of sulfuric acid. This neutralisation will then increase the pH of the clouds from roughly

-11 to 0.

While the range is still acidic, it could be within the range of acidity that life could tolerate.

"We know that life can grow in acid environments on Earth, but nothing as acid as the clouds of Venus was believed to be. But if something is making ammonia in the clouds, then that will neutralize some of the droplets, making them potentially more habitable," co-author of the study Dr William Bains, from Cardiff University said in a statement.

The team mentioned that there are lifeforms on Earth that produce ammonia to neutralise and make it livable in an otherwise highly acidic environment.

Talking about the ammonia traces seen in the clouds, Professor Sara Seager, from MIT's

Department of Earth said "Ammonia shouldn't be on Venus. It has hydrogen attached to it, and there's very little hydrogen around. Any gas that doesn't belong in the context of its environment is automatically suspicious for being made by life." The team found anomalies in the decades of data received from Venus that had gone unexplained. Apart from ammonia, they also found unexpected levels of water vapour and sulfur dioxide. While they tested the anomalies might be explained by dust arguing that minerals, swept up from Venus' surface and into the clouds, could interact with sulfuric acid to produce some, but not all, of the observed anomalies.



Being Active Throughout the Day Beats Scheduled Exercise for Older Adults

A note for older adults who are looking to stay fit:

A new study^{Trusted Source} says that even daily gym visits don't have the positive impact that day-long regular movement does.

In fact, the study authors say, people who do choose a regular gym activity as their only workout may be less fit than people who are on the move during the day.

"The biggest challenge we see is the tendency to do what we call 'substitution,'" said Jason Fanning, PhD, a professor in the department of health and exercise science at Wake Forest University in North Carolina and the lead author of the study.

Substitution, Dr. Fanning told Healthline, is when a person does a regular gym activity - be it a class or a workout - and then compensates in a negative direction, feeling they've already succeeded in their daily workout and weight-management goals. "When (a short period of) vigorous activity replaces the regular, things like walking the dog and other activities," Fanning said, it can lead to a regaining of weight as well as a loss of muscle mass.

What the study revealed

The study followed older adults who were actively losing weight. Once they did lose weight, the researchers found that people who participated in multiple short-time activities that kept them moving regularly through the day were less apt to regain weight.

People who participated in "structured" exercise such as gym classes didn't fare as well, not because those classes are not healthy, but rather because the older adults tended to only do them.

A person loses muscle with weight, Fanning said, and when people regain it shortly after the loss that muscle

A person loses muscle with weight and when people regain it shortly after the loss that muscle often does not return, leaving older adults less healthy than they may have been before the weight loss

often does not return, leaving older adults less healthy than they may have been before the weight loss.

The study, he said, backs up what has been suspected.

"Physical activity is clearly a powerful medicine," Fanning said. "And by moving all day, we get the dose that is good for us."

Rethinking exercise

So, what's the solution?

Fanning and other movement experts say that rethinking what exercise means and adapting your day to include it is a great plan.

"First," Fanning said, "We need to tone down the idea that if it doesn't hurt or require a gym membership, it doesn't help."

He said older adults as well as other age groups should look at their days and find ways to almost organically

add movement.

Step one? Make it fun.

"The key is to find something you enjoy doing and to find a way to integrate it into your day," Christopher Gagliardi, scientific education content manager at The American Council on Exercise, told Healthline.

Gagliardi said his organization suggests older adults find a way to

fit to complete 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week by identifying activities they enjoy that keep them moving.

Walking with friends, walking a pet, gardening or biking are a few examples.

It's OK to ease into it

If the idea of 150 minutes per week sounds overwhelming, Gagliardi said, people can start from anywhere and add on as they go.

"Even brief bouts of activity such as climbing a few flights of stairs can lead to health benefits," he said. The concept of short bouts of physical activity can be thought of in terms of "activity snacking."

"Just like food snacks eaten throughout the day, activity snacks are small bouts of physical activity that take place throughout the day where a person works to increase their usual level of physical activity to a new level of activity," Gagliardi said.

Kyle Risley, the CEO of LiftVault, a

company that helps people build workout programs that blend into their lives, said starting anywhere is the right move.

"Stretching when they get out of bed in the morning is an excellent place to start," he said. "This, followed by regularly getting up throughout the day to walk around a room can also prevent many ailments caused by a sedentary lifestyle."

The goal, Risley told Healthline, is to establish sustainable habits.

Making your day 'movement-friendly'

Fanning said it's important that older adults find activities that make them happy and don't overwhelm them.

First, he said, this does not mean the gym is a bad idea. Social groups can help some people in the gym scene.

Gagliardi suggested these activities as ways to keep moving in an enjoyable way:

" Move every 1 to 2 hours each day. He suggests setting a timer and when it goes off, walk a bit, rake one section of a garden, shoot 10 free throws. Whatever you like. You can set a timer for every hour.

" Dance during television commercials.

" Do push-ups against a wall or with hands on a countertop after each trip to the bathroom.

" Carry in your groceries one bag at a time.

" Walk or ride your bike to visit a neighbor.

" If downstairs, use the upstairs restroom.

What does a super top-up health insurance policy cost?

Compare premiums



Healthy life is very important for all of us to prevent diseases which can affect our lifestyle. Considering the health emergency and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic concerns, it is natural for us to be vigilant and protect ourselves with extra health care benefits through insurance policies at nominal rates.

Getting additional insurance benefits through an existing health insurance policy means higher premiums. However, there is a smart way to get extra cover without having to empty your bank account. A super top-up plan offers you coverage of medicaid above your chosen deductible limit. This is helpful in covering additional medical expenses in the event when your hospitalisation claim bill crosses your sum insured under any other medicaid policy, according to Bankbazaar.

For example, if you have a super top-up plan for Rs 5 lakh and it has deductible limit of Rs 2 lakh, then the Super Top-Up policy will cover medical expenses over and above Rs 2 lakh. So, you can pay the deductible amount from your existing health plan and the additional expenses can be paid with the help of the super top up plan as per the pre-decided amount.

A super top up plan basically covers costs only above the deductible limit of your current health insurance plan. It means all medical expenses below the deductible limit need to be paid from your own pocket or through a regular medical insurance policy.

Under a super-top plan, multiple claims are permitted and the policy gets lapsed only when the entire amount is exhausted. Some of the super top-up health insurance policy premiums are mentioned below:



Over 96 lakh healthcare workers fully vaccinated against Covid till December 17: Govt

In a written response to a question in the Upper House of Parliament, Minister of State for Health Bharati Pravin Pawar said states and union territories are expected to maintain details of the healthcare workers infected with the virus.

Over 96 lakh healthcare workers out of the 1.05 crore registered with the government's CoWIN portal have been fully vaccinated against coronavirus till December 17, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday. In written response to a question in the Upper House of Parliament, Minister of State for Health Bharati Pravin Pawar said states and union territories are expected to maintain details of the healthcare workers infected with the virus. On the status of their vaccination, she said, "Till December 17, 2021, a total of 1,05,04,137 healthcare workers (HCWs) are registered on CoWIN portal, out of whom 1,03,85,958 have received the first dose of Covid vaccine and 96,29,532 have received both the doses."

Pawar said the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has taken a number of steps to improve the mental wellbeing of healthcare workers managing Covid-19. These actions include according first priority to their vaccination, guidelines on infection prevention and control practices being shared with state governments

to minimise the risk of their infection and advisory to consider quarantine period of healthcare workers as "on duty" and provision of accommodation facilities for their quarantine.

States and union territories have been directed to ensure that salaries of doctors and healthcare workers during Covid-19-related duties are released on time, Pawar said.

Also, the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance was promulgated on April 22, 2020 and notified on September 29,

which provides for the safety and security of healthcare service personnel from acts of violence. Life insurance benefits are provided to them under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP).

An Advisory for Human Resource Management of COVID-19 has been prepared providing guidance to states and UTs on the human resources that can be mobilized for COVID-19 management along with possible role assignments and

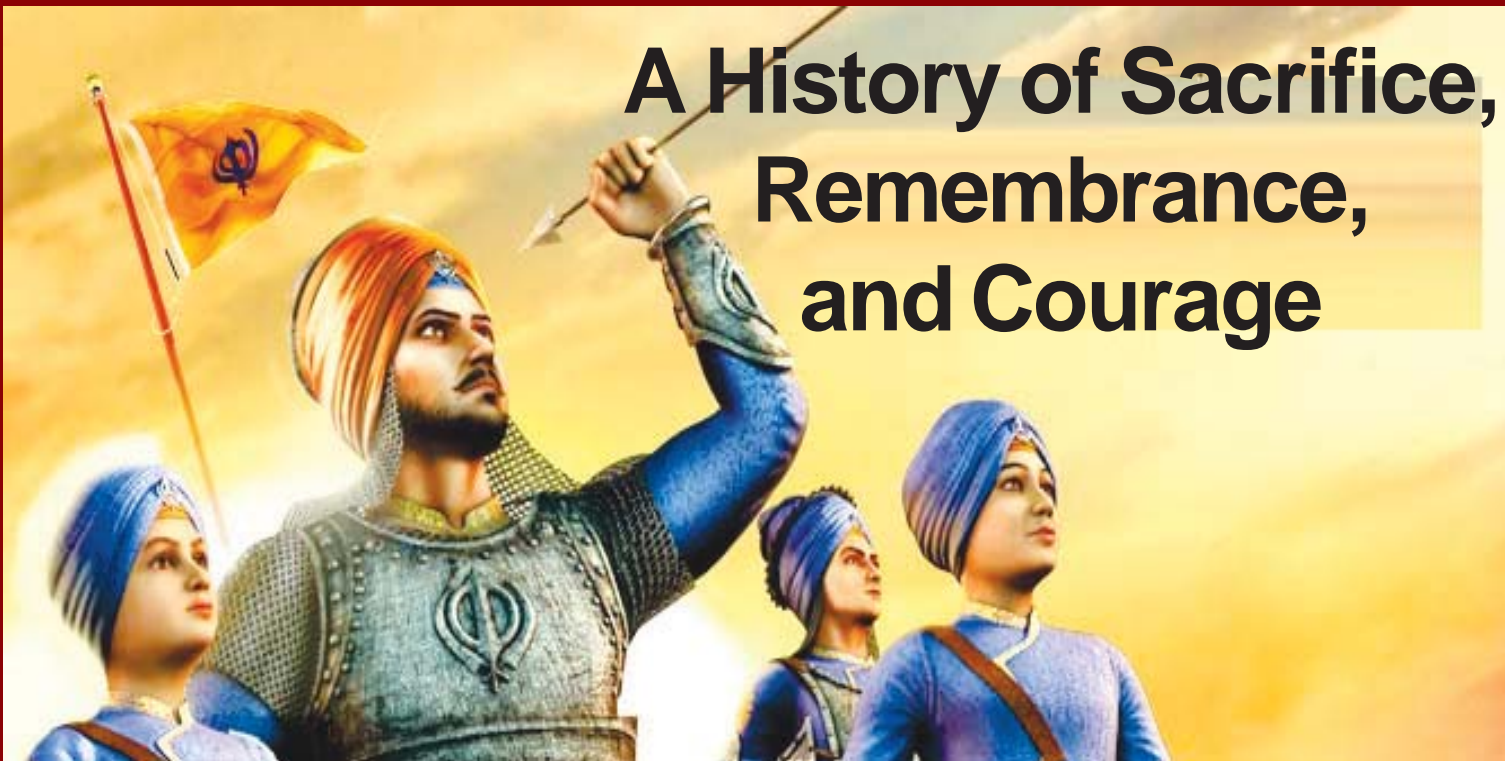
their training requirements.

States have been advised to explore avenues for the utilization of services of medical interns, final-year MBBS students, final-year PG students, senior residents/registrars, final-year GNM or B.Sc (Nursing) students and allied health care professionals in COVID-19 management duties under appropriate supervision to augment human resources. According to the National Medical Commission (NMC) Act, 2019, no person other than a person who is enrolled in the state or national register shall be allowed to practice medicine as a qualified medical practitioner, Pawar said.

The central government has advised states and UTs that medical and nursing interns may also be engaged for COVID-19 management, if necessary. These interns, if engaged, are to work under the supervision of qualified medical practitioners, she added in the written reply.



A History of Sacrifice, Remembrance, and Courage



This Memorial Day weekend, I spent my time in Wisconsin at the youth camp that I organize biannually (which I previously reflected upon here). Each camp, we engage in a discussion with the counselor team to determine our theme. It is always a fraught conversation as each person has their own

practice our faith and discipline to this day, some of the most inspiring stories come from the *chaar sahibzaade* (four young, beloved ones), the four sons of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. As a young Sikh, the stories of the *chaar sahibzaade* were told to me countless times to inspire bravery and resilience,

suddenly attacked by the Mughals. As they were severely outnumbered, Guru Gobind Singh's two older sons, Ajeet Singh and Jujhar Singh, watched as Sikhs gave their lives to protect those inside. Seeking permission from their father to go into battle, they knew that there was only one possible result. Yet, all the Sikhs with Guru Gobind Singh knew it was in the best interest of the panth to sacrifice themselves for a chance for the Guru to escape and join the rest of the Sikhs. These two gave their lives in battle, fighting against the Mughal army that had tried so hard to end the legacy of the Sikhs, only adding more fuel to the fire with the martyrdom of these young souls.

Having been separated from the rest of the Sikhs earlier, Guru Gobind Singh Ji's mother, Mata Gujar Kaur, and two younger sons, Joraver Singh and Fateh Singh, had put their trust in an old friend, only to be turned over to the Mughals for reward money. While they were held captive in a tower in Sarhand, the local Nawab (Mughal leader) Wazir Khan tasked himself with the duty of converting the younger *sahibzaade* to Islam or otherwise killing them. Only five and eight years old, they looked to their grandmother Mata Gujar Kaur Ji for strength. She reminded them of the legacies of courage from which they were born. Their own grandfather, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji-the ninth Sikh Guru-had given his life to save an entire community of Hindus. She strengthened them with the

recitation of *gurbani* (Sikh hymns) and the remembrance of



the Creator. By reminding them that their sole purpose-what Sikhs believe is the purpose of all Creation-was to reunite with the Creator, they became steadfast in their discipline and unwavering in their commitment to their faith. When Wazir Khan called them into his court, he offered them riches and happiness if they only converted and left their Sikhi behind. Refusing to be scared off by the threats of these tyrants, the *Sahibzaade* remained strong for several days until the Nawab finally decided that martyrdom was the only option. Calling upon his most blood-thirsty executioners (who else would murder such young and innocent children?), he had the younger *Sahibzaade* bricked alive and then their heads chopped off when the bricks did not suffocate them fast enough. Throughout the entire process, the *Sahibzaade* remembered the Creator and sang hymns, bringing tears to the eyes of all who witnessed it. Still locked away in the cold tower alone, Mata Gujar Kaur Ji-now having survived the martyrdom of her husband and four grandchildren-waited for news.

Upon receiving the news of the martyrdom of her youngest grandchildren, she soon joined them, as she was pushed to her death from the tower. A courageous woman who inspired courage in all those who were touched by her faith, she created the sacrifices that inspire Sikh youth and adults to this day. For Sikhs, our history is a long legacy of martyrdom, sacrifice, and hardship; most of all, it is a history of devotion and faith despite the difficulty of it. Even when there was gold offered for our heads and the legacies of children became their death before they even reached adolescence, our faith and discipline came first. The lessons of truthfulness and honesty above all else had been passed down through our Gurus. These lessons remind us that

the same Creator is in all of us, and it is through recognition of that Divine Light that we can find peace among our differences. At that time, many members of the Mughal Empire had perverted this message for their own good, and today we see

other empires, governments, and so-called leaders doing the same with our faith and remembrances. As we continue to see the perversion of religious traditions, of nationalism and patriotism, of war and greed, I look to the strength and sacrifice of these Sikhs to remind me to look for justice and truth in all fights.

By searching for truth and justice for each of us, remembering that we are all children of that same Divine Light, we can move towards a more courageous and humble practice of love and light in this time of darkness and impossible politics. As I remember the *sahibzaade* and Mata Gujar Kaur Ji's sacrifices, I hope to be imbued with the same level of sacrifice, courage, and love.¹ A term which refers to the worldwide Sikh community.² Guru means teacher but literally translates to a person who enlightens others by taking them from dark to light. This was the purpose of the 10 Sikh Gurus-to enlighten others through their higher consciousness.



strong opinions about what the children should learn that camp. This time, a good portion of the counselor team chose to highlight the story of the *Chaar Sahibzaade* and Mata Gujar Kaur, significant stories of martyrdom that they felt would inspire the children to connect with their faith. As they convinced us, the weekend was one of reflection and awe as we engaged with our history of sacrifice.

While *shaheedi* (martyrdom) is a theme that peppers most of Sikh history, highlighted by the remembrance of these sacrifices that allow us to

courage and humility. For, if the other stories of sacrifice seemed great or impossible, what could one say to the stories of children ages five, eight, fourteen, and eighteen giving their lives for the protection of the Sikh panth?¹

The two older *sahibzaade* were with their father at Chamkaur, where a terrible battle was waging between Sikhs and Mughals. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb had put a price on the head of Guru Gobind Singh, hoping to end the existence of Sikhs once and for all if he could kill their Guru.² While resting in a fort in Chamkaur, the Sikhs were

Christmas

2021

History, Significance and all you need to know about this day celebrating Jesus Christ's birth

Christmas 2021: As we get ready to bid goodbye to 2021, we also prepare for the holiday season to begin. It also means that we are all looking forward to one of the most joyous times of the year - the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25, commemorated as Christmas. Around the world, the festival of Christmas marks a religious holiday and a commercial occasion. People celebrate the festive spirit by attending get-togethers with family members, visiting friends and indulging in memorable parties. The celebrations for the festival begins from the evening of December 24, called Christmas Eve. People celebrate Christmas by decorating the houses with colourful lights and other festive ornaments. A Christmas tree is also brought inside the homes and decorated with ornaments, ribbons, twinkling lights, and more. It is an important day for the Christian community around the world. However, it is celebrated with much enthusiasm by non-Christians, too. History of Christmas 2021

The term, Christmas, is of recent origin. It translates as 'mass on Christ's day.' However, different countries around the globe have various names for the festival. It is referred to as Yuletide in Germany, Navidad in Spanish, Natale in Italian, and Noël in French.

Many centuries ago, early Europeans marked both light and birth in the darkest days of winters. They celebrated the winter solstice, as they looked forward to longer days and extended hours of sunlight.



It is believed that Jesus Christ was born in a manger in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph. However, as the Gregorian calendar did not exist back then, there is no proof that he was born on December 25. Bible also does not mention the exact date for his birth. Emperor Constantine - the first Christian Roman emperor - declared December 25 as Christmas.

After a few years, Pope Julius I also announced the day would be marked as the birth of Christ. In the early centuries of Christianity, the celebration of Christ's birth was strongly opposed, as he was considered a martyr for all people. It was commonly believed that saints and martyrs should be honoured on their martyrdom day. Additionally, Easter was the main

holiday and not Christmas. In the fourth century, church officials finally decided to institute the birth of Jesus as a holiday. Significance of Christmas 2021

Christmas holds great significance for the Christian community. They believe that God sent his Son to earth to sacrifice himself. He came to salvage all of humanity and absolve them of their sins. This is why Jesus Christ's crucifixion

symbolises the ultimate sacrifice.

In modern times, Christmas has come to be associated with the mythical figure of Santa Claus, the traditional patron of Christmas in the United States and other countries, bringing gifts to children. He is based on the traditions associated with Saint Nicholas, a 4th Century Saint. It is believed that Santa Claus lives in the North Pole with his many helper elves. Each year, on Christmas Eve, Santa Claus rides on his sleigh from the North Pole to give gifts to children all around the world.

And kids wake up early in the morning to open their presents. To celebrate Christmas, people attend midnight mass at churches on Christmas Eve. Families also prepare an elaborate Christmas feast on this day. People also sing carols at the church. The festival marks the end of the year and symbolises all things heart-warming, blessed and jolly.



Meet the New South Asian Lead Actors in Aladdin on Broadway

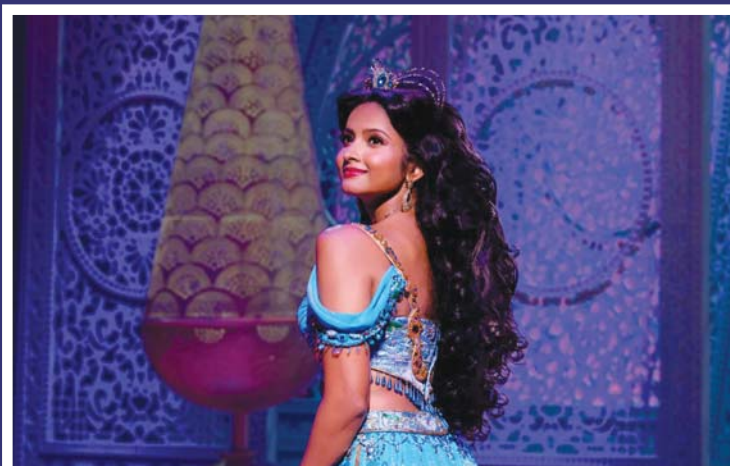
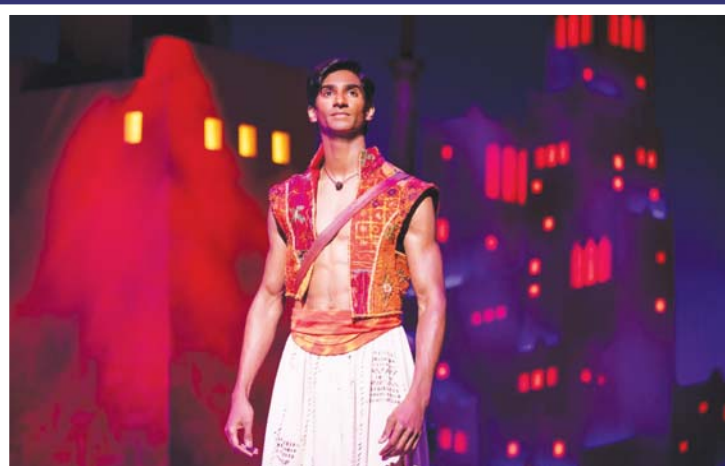


itself as one of the biggest new blockbusters in recent years, breaking 14 New Amsterdam Theatre house records. Worldwide it has welcomed more than 10 million people and grossed over \$1 billion. By the end of 2021, it will be playing in Holland, Germany and Mexico, in addition to Broadway.

Aladdin, adapted from the animated Disney film and centuries-old folktales including "One Thousand and One Nights," is brought to fresh theatrical life in this bold new musical. Aladdin's journey sweeps audiences into an exciting world of daring adventure, classic comedy and timeless romance. This new production features a full score, including the five cherished songs from the Academy Award-winning soundtrack and more written especially for the stage.

The animated film Aladdin was released by Disney in 1992 and was a critical and box office smash, becoming the highest-grossing film of the year. The film won the Oscar for Best Original Score and introduced the hit song "A Whole New World," which won the second of the film's two Academy Awards as Best Original Song. The Peabo Bryson/Regina Belle recording of the tune soared to #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart.

For more information, visit AladdinTheMusical.com.



Aladdin, the hit musical based on the Academy Award®-winning animated film, is back on Broadway. New to the company are South Asian actors Michael Maliakel and Shoba Narayan as Aladdin and Jasmine. Michael Maliakel (Aladdin) made his Broadway debut, having recently toured the country in the 25th anniversary production of The Phantom of the Opera. His stage credits include the national tour of The Phantom of the Opera (Raoul u/s), Anything Can Happen: The Songs of Maury Yeston in New York, Other World at the Bucks County Playhouse; Mira Nair's Monsoon Wedding at Berkeley Rep; She Loves Me at PlayMakers Rep; and Bernstein's MASS at the Ravinia Festival. He also appeared on "Bull" (CBS) and "FBI" (CBS).

Shoba Narayan (Jasmine) made her Broadway debut in 2016 opposite Josh Groban in the 12-time Tony-nominated

musical Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812, notably becoming the first South Asian female in a principal role since Bombay Dreams, which Playbill called "a personal milestone and a key moment on Broadway." Among her numerous stage credits, she starred as Eliza Hamilton in the national tour of the world phenomenon and Broadway smash hit Hamilton from Lin-Manuel Miranda; and most recently appeared on Broadway in 2020 as Nessarose in Wicked. Film and television credits include the award-winning independent feature film Growing Up Smith directed by Frank Lotito, "Quantico" (Mark Gordon / ABC), "Halal In The Family" with Aasif Mandvi, "Gossip Girl" (The CW), Coin Heist (Netflix) and Mistress America directed by Noah Baumbach. Shoba is a Bharatanatyam (South Indian Classical) dancer and teacher, and has performed extensively throughout the US and India, including major prizes at several

international dance competitions. The returning cast of Aladdin features four original company members in principal roles: Michael James Scott as Genie, Tony Award® nominee Jonathan Freeman as Jafar, bringing to the stage the role he indelibly

created in the animated film, Don Darryl Rivera as Iago, and Dennis Stowe as the Jafar/Sultan standby.

Aladdin opened on Broadway to critical acclaim at the New Amsterdam Theatre on March 20, 2014 and quickly established



Sridevi's look a like Dipali Choudhary enacts scenes from Laadla, Sadma; fan says 'kudrat ka karishma'



Late actor Sridevi's fans have discovered online her doppelganger Dipali Choudhary. Dipali calls herself a 'Haryanvi actress' and has over 33.4 k followers on Instagram. She has posted many video clips, lip-syncing to Sridevi's lines and songs from several of her movies. Fans have pointed out her resemblance to the legendary actor and dropped compliments in the comments section on Instagram. In one of the videos, Dipali recreated one of Sridevi's famous scenes from *Laadla* (1994). She also lip-synced to lines from *Sadma* (1983), *Nagina* (1986), *Judaai* (1997), among many other films. Dipali also danced to several of Sridevi's songs including *Tere Mere Hothon Pe* from *Chandni* (1989). Reacting to her videos, her fans lauded her for her ability to imitate Sridevi. A fan said, "Kudrat ka karishma (Nature's wonder)." "Wow same Sridevi ki acting

kiye ho, very nice (same acting like that of Sridevi)," said a person. "Kya acting ki hai (what acting)," commented a user on Instagram.

Another person complimented, "Sridevi ki copy lag rahe ho aap (You're looking like Sridevi's copy)." "Aisa laga *Judaai* movie dekh rahi hu baad m yaad aaya arre baap re ye toh Dipali ji ki reel hai (At first I thought I'm watching *Judaai*... later I realised I'm watching Dipali's reel)," wrote a fan. A person also said, "Same to same Sridevi maam jaise lagre ho aap (Looking same as Sridevi)."

Sridevi featured in many hit movies including *Chandni*, *Lamhe*, *Mr India*, *Chaalbaaz*, *Karma*, *Nazrana*, *Waqt Ki Awaz*, *Khuda Gawah*, *Gumrah*, *English Vinglish*. Her last film was *Mom* (2017), for which she was honoured with the Best Actress National Award posthumously.

Dhanush says Sonam Kapoor was better co-star compared to Sara Ali Khan, she reacts: 'Not offensive at all'



Dhanush and Sara Ali Khan worked together for the first time in *Atrangi Re*. The actor, in a rapid fire round of *Koffee Shots With Karan*, was asked to pick between his first Bollywood co-star Sonam Kapoor and his latest co-star Sara Ali Khan.

Dhanush, in a recent chat with Karan Johar, was asked who he felt was a better actor to work with, with Sara Ali Khan and Sonam Kapoor as his options. The actor, without a second thought, picked Sonam. The actors had worked together on Dhanush's Bollywood debut film *Raanjhanaa*. Directed by Aanand L Rai, *Raanjhanaa* released in 2013 and was one

of the biggest hits of that year. Appearing on *Koffee Shots With Karan*, as part of the promotions for his upcoming movie *Atrangi Re*, Dhanush was asked to pick between the two actors in the rapid fire round. When Dhanush picked Sonam, Sara replied, "Wow, not offensive at all. I'm losing my hamper, I am losing my..." Dhanush then explained that Sonam will be special to him because she was his first co-star in Bollywood. "Not taking away the kindness, sweetness, fun (that) Sara (brought) on the sets of *Atrangi Re*, Sonam because she was very special, she was my first co-star in Hindi films and a guy from the south coming here, and she made me feel very

comfortable and very kind to me. I am very grateful for that," he said. During the episode, Dhanush also confessed he was 'worried' if Sara could play the role of Rinku in *Atrangi Re*. "To be very honest, I was a little worried. It's such a big role and a very difficult character to play. I asked Aanand ji, 'How many films has she done?' He told me 2 or 3 films, at that point of time. I was like, 'Can she pull it off?'" he admitted. However, director Aanand L Rai had reassured Dhanush.

Atrangi Re also stars Akshay Kumar. The film is skipping the theatrical release and streaming directly on Disney+ Hotstar.

Nick Jonas says Priyanka Chopra 'supported' him when his album failed: 'The way she loved me through it, meant a lot'

Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas opened up about their equation with each other and 'building' a marriage together in a recent video. Nick revealed that Priyanka stood by him like a constant pillar of support when his album *Spaceman* failed to take off. The *Matrix Resurrections* actor described Nick in the fondest of words for 'prioritising' them as a couple despite their hectic work schedules. Priyanka and Nick got married in 2018 and have a home together in Los Angeles. Speaking in an episode of *Jonas Brothers: Moments Between The Moments*, Nick talked about falling in love with Priyanka and the common factor they connected over

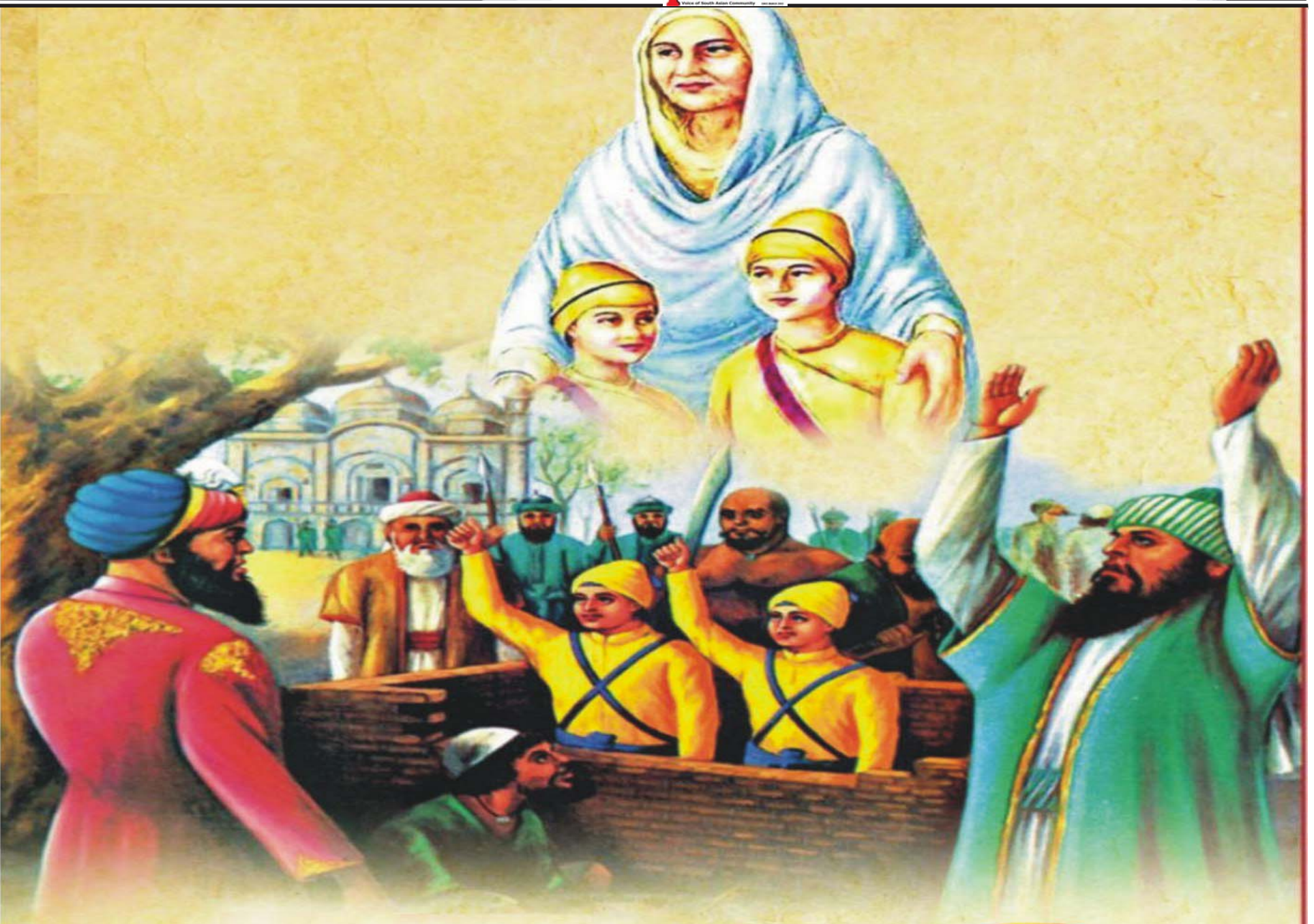


initially: "I used to think that I can just go go go, a million miles a minute. I think the last 18 months have taught me how to slow down a little bit. Actually, enjoy being home. When I met Priyanka and we fell in love, one of the things we connected on early was how ambitious we both were. And focused and driven.

How deeply we care about our work." Priyanka joined in and told Nick: "You and I are building our marriage based on prioritising ourselves together. And it's just really amazing to find a partner that prioritises us. Us time." Nick went on to talk about the time when his album *Spaceman* under-performed and he was

heartbroken: "My wife showed me incredible support and love after *Spaceman* album came out. I am really proud of the album I made. But it didn't quite perform like I wanted it to. Which was really discouraging for me. Because I was like 'man, I put so much effort into this album'. The way she loved me through it and was just proud, meant a lot." Addressing Priyanka, Nick added: "The effort you made to show me that you were proud of this was big because it was the highlight of that kind of chapter and this year." In the video, Priyanka explained how she's also been part of the *Spaceman* journey: "What I think I enjoyed more is that you made this album at home. I saw you work

on it and I could listen to it, and I experienced so many of the songs. I think as an artist, that's the win that your music is so authentic to you and so many people love it. It means so much to so many people." Priyanka Chopra recently called out a news report that referred to her as 'wife of Nick Jonas' and said: "Very interesting that I'm promoting one of the most iconic film franchises of all time, and I'm still referenced as 'the wife of...'. Priyanka stars in the recently released film, *The Matrix Resurrections*. Talking about coming on board the film in an interview with *Grazia UK*, Priyanka said: "My family was very excited about it."



ਸਰਬੰਸਦਾਨੀ ਦਸਮੇਸ਼ ਪਿਤਾ
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ

ਦੇ ਛੋਟੇ ਸਾਹਿਬਜ਼ਾਦਿਆਂ

ਬਾਬਾ ਜ਼ੋਰਾਵਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ

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