



The South Asian



# INSIDER

**A lot can  
happen in  
20 years**

**It's celebration time!  
It's a remarkable  
week to rejoice!**

(Contd on page 02)

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\$ 1

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## Russia moves troops into Ukraine, signs treaties to build military bases



**Full Story  
on Page  
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### White House begins referring to Russia action in Ukraine as "invasion"

(News Agencies) The White House has begun referring to Russian troop deployments in eastern Ukraine as an "invasion" after initially hesitating to use the term - a red line that President Joe Biden has said would result in the US levying severe sanctions against Moscow. Jon Finer, the principal deputy national security adviser, said Tuesday: "We think this is, yes, the beginning of an invasion, Russia's latest invasion into Ukraine." The White House has begun referring to Russian troop deployments in eastern Ukraine as an "invasion" after initially hesitating to use the term

(Contd on page 29-30)

### I would love to debate with Narendra Modi, says Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan



(News Agencies) Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has said he wants a TV debate with Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. "I would love to debate with Narendra Modi on TV," Khan told Russia Today in an interview, adding that it would be beneficial for the billion people in the subcontinent if differences could be resolved through debate. The nuclear-powered rivals have shared antagonistic relations since gaining independence 75 years ago and have fought three wars with each other.

(Contd on page 28)

### Remains of world's largest pterosaur from Jurassic period found in Scotland, leaving scientists astounded

The remains of the largest pterosaur on record from the Jurassic period with a wingspan of more than 8 feet and a mouth full of sharp teeth was unearthed in Scotland. The flying reptile—



dating between 201.3 million and 145 million years ago—was found in Isle of Skye, Scotland, in 2017. Its skeleton was embedded in limestone. A PhD student, Amelia Penny, spotted its sharp-toothed jaw protruding from an ancient limestone on Skye's coast. A detailed examination was

undertaken following its discovery in 2017, and the study was recently published in the journal, Current Biology. According to the studies, the winged lizard had a 2.5m (8ft) wingspan— around the size of the largest flying birds today, such as the wandering albatross.

(Contd. on page 28)

### 'Suisse Secrets':

Switzerland based bank denies  
wrongdoing after massive data  
leak shows trails of dirty money



(News Agencies) Multiple media outlets have published results of investigations into a leak of data on thousands of accounts held there in previous decades. The documents termed "Suisse Secrets" have been published by Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). It is an international investigation into one of the world's wealthiest and most important banks.

(Contd on page 28)



**Solid like a Rock**

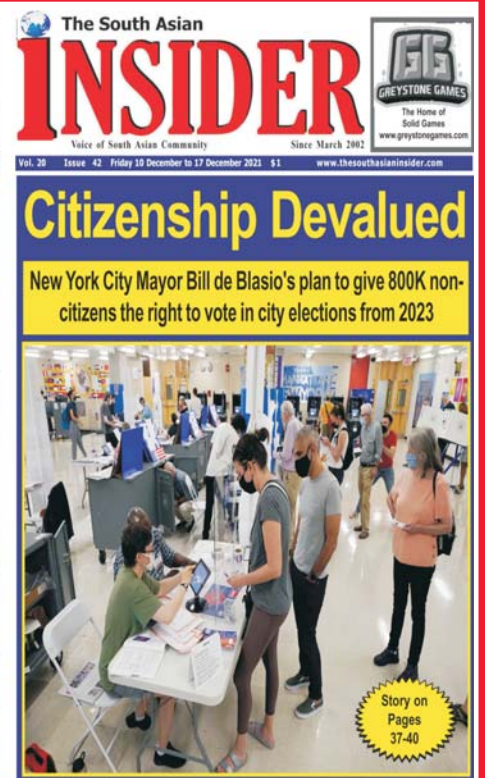
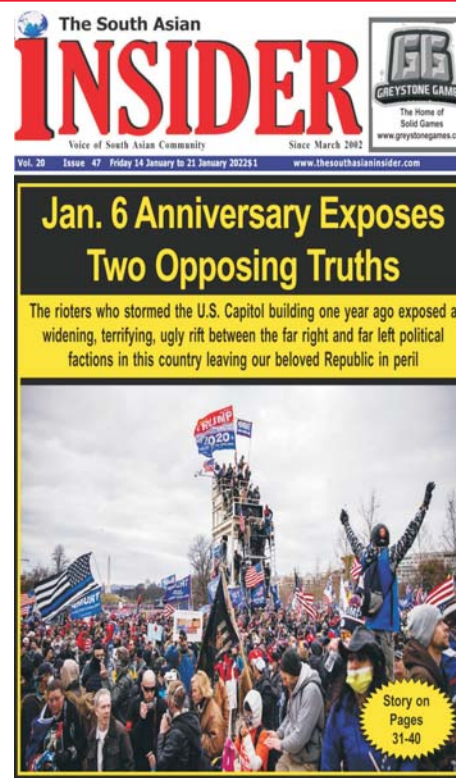
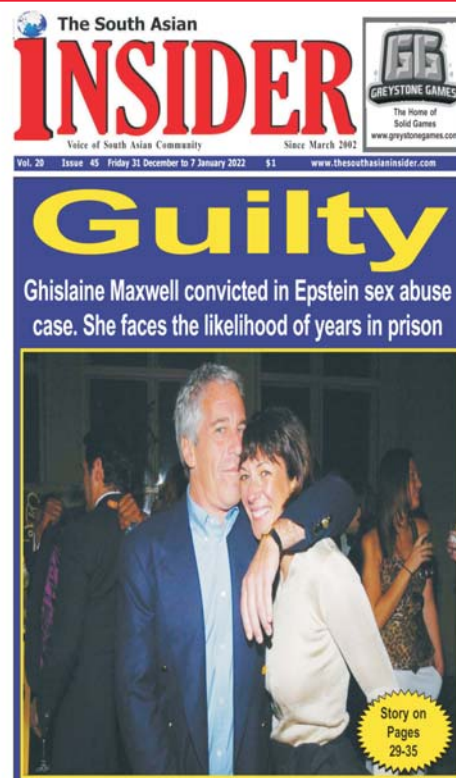
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# A lot can happen in 20 years

## It's celebration time! It's a remarkable week to rejoice!



The South Asian Insider Weekly, one of the most respected US newspapers in North America, published from New York has completed successful journey of long twenty years. The entire team is proud to be the first Indian American weekly to start an epaper way back in 2005, when the word 'epaper' was anonymous in the mainstream.

In our 20th year publishing, The South Asian Insider is available only in digital format as an ePaper, online on [www.thesouthasianinsider.com](http://www.thesouthasianinsider.com) and in audio visual format on most social media platforms.



**Sharanjit Singh Thind**  
Editor in Chief & Publisher

We embraced change and went digital, not responded to it as a necessity. This was painful in the beginning as expected but has paid off handsomely eventually.

In 2007 when the whole world was going through vigorous financial crunch, various other leading South Asian newspapers simply faded away, we did experienced hardship too, but we could even then prove our integrity and emerged stronger without hassles.

Today South Asian Insider reaches more than half a million readers & viewers through a combination of Print, Video, epaper, Social Media, web Edition and events. The South Asian Insider has in the past and now, have had many veteran and talented professionals who worked in different Editors' positions.

Incidentally, our present Managing Editor, Susmita Ghosh is connected with us since inception. She has worked as our Honorary News Editor, in New York in 2005 and thereafter returned to Delhi as our India Bureau Chief. She comes in with a vast professional experience,

starting career from The Times of India, Delhi and resided and worked in UAE as Senior Sub Editor in Gulf Today newspaper and as Middle East Editor for a Dubai based travel magazine for 10 years. Many interesting professional involvements came on her way, hence could extensively travel to US, UK, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia and SAARC countries.

In recent decades, the USA has re-established its dominance as the world leader across the socio-political and economic sectors as well. Even though a period of turbulence of external and internal affairs, the country has shown the strength of character to stand strong with a sheer force of willpower and perfect execution of strategies and collaboration with its allies globally. Even today, the USA is leading and ensuring the change in every sector, from tech to social, geopolitical to renewable energy implementation, chronicled by us.

To look henceforth, our plan is to go 'Beyond Digital' bringing the whole world in one podium through INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM.

It will give in depth depiction, analysing and deducing the true potential and essence of the story without depending on the traditional method of basic or generic news sources.

We thank our readers, viewers, supporters in many ways and promise to deliver unbiased, news, that matters and accessible to you on any device of your choice, at the time of your convenience, all this without burden of running a commercial news organization.

**By Editorial Team**  
**The South Asian Insider**  
**Weekly**



**Susmita Ghosh**  
Managing Editor





## Indian Man Jailed In Singapore For Pouring Soil Into Company Vehicle's Engine

**On March 21, 2020, Seeni Paramasivam drank two cans of beer in his dorm room while mulling over the dispute. Feeling frustrated and thinking that the company was not listening to him, he decided to "do something to gain the company's attention"**

(SAI Bureau) Singapore: An Indian driver in Singapore was sentenced to 12 weeks in prison on Friday for damaging a company vehicle by pouring soil into its engine compartment, following a work-related dispute with his employer.

Seeni Paramasivam, 40, was jailed for one count of committing mischief.

In March 2020, Mr Paramasivam, who worked as a driver for Integrated Infrastructure and stayed in the company's

dormitory in Sungei Kadut (an industrial area in the Northern region of Singapore), became embroiled in a work-related dispute with his company, Channel News Asia reported. Details of the dispute were not revealed in the court documents. He earned Singapore dollars 465 (USD 346) in basic salary, and his monthly net salary was about Singapore dollars 1,000 (USD 744) after taking into account overtime pay, allowances and other deductions.

On March 21, 2020, Mr Paramasivam drank two cans of beer in his dorm room while mulling over the dispute. Feeling frustrated and thinking that the company was not listening to him, he decided to "do something to gain the company's attention", the prosecutor said. At about 3 am that day, he walked towards the company vehicle parked outside, opened the engine compartment and poured some soil into it. As an experienced

driver, Mr Paramasivam knew that his actions would damage the vehicle, but he wanted the company to incur the losses by diminishing the lorry's utility. The assigned driver of the vehicle reported the next day that smoke was coming from the engine of the vehicle. It was taken to a workshop, where the crime was uncovered.

Mr Paramasivam was caught on closed-circuit television footage walking towards the lorry at the time

of the offence. He has made restitution of Singapore dollars 254.9 (USD 189) via salary deduction, the report said. The company spent Singapore dollars 24,931 (USD 18,569) repairing the vehicle. The prosecutor sought three months' jail and did not ask for a compensation order, "bearing in mind the accused's income". For mischief, the Indian national could have been jailed up to two years, fined, or both.

## S Jaishankar Meets Indians In Germany, Says Its "Heart Warming"

**The Foreign Minister also shared the "confident national mood" with the community members and underlined the strong momentum of India-Germany relations**

(SAI Bureau) Munich: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar expressed his happiness on meeting the Indian community in Munich on Sunday morning and said that their feelings for the country were so "heart warming". The Foreign Minister also shared the "confident national mood" with the community members and underlined the strong momentum of India-Germany relations.

"Wonderful to see the community turnout on a cold Sunday Munich morning. Their feelings for India were so heart warming. Shared with them the confident national mood. And underlined the strong momentum of India-Germany relations," Mr Jaishankar tweeted today. Mr Jaishankar is in Munich to participate in a security conference. He has held a series of meeting with ministers from Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world

during his visit to Germany. In a meeting with Singapore Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen, Mr Jaishankar discussed bilateral and ASEAN-related defence cooperation. They also shared assessments of regional hotspots.

Mr Jaishankar also

met with members of the European Parliament and held discussions on transparency, reliable supply chains, and the world order. Separately, the minister held a meeting with his Mongolian counterpart Battsetseg Batmunkh and discussed



cooperation in energy, IT, and coal. "Partnership with our spiritual neighbour continues to strengthen," he said. Mr Jaishankar also met Sweden Foreign Minister Ann Linde where he noted the progress in bilateral cooperation.



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# Congress slams KCR's anti-BJP front after meeting with NCP

**Telangana Congress chief Revanth Reddy hit out at Telangana CM K Chandrashekar Rao, calling him a liar and a member of PM Modi's 'supari' gang. This comes a day after KCR's meeting in Mumbai with Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar**

(SAI Bureau) The Congress party, on Monday, February 21, reacted to Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) chief and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao's anti-BJP front. Telangana Congress chief and MP Revanth Reddy hit out at KCR, saying that he couldn't be trusted. He said, "KCR is a liar. He is a member of the Modi 'supari' gang." The Telangana Chief Minister flew to Mumbai on Sunday to meet with

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar. In this context, MP Revanth Reddy hit out at the Telangana CM and said, "He is only targeting the parties which are already United Progressive Alliance

(UPA) partners. He is trying to break the UPA to weaken Congress and strengthen the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and Modi.



MP Revanth Reddy slammed KCR and said, "He is not talking to those leaders who are not part of the NDA or UPA like Kejriwal, Jagan Mohan Reddy, Samajwadi etc. Uddhav, Stalin, Mamta Devegowda all are with Congress and he is approaching them."

## Biological E's Corbevax gets emergency approval for 12-18 age group

(SAI Bureau) Biological E Ltd, showed "greater action," a Hyderabad-based according to the NTAGI chief. pharmaceutical business, According to sources, the Indian government has made an order announced on Monday that its coronavirus vaccine, Corbevax, has acquired emergency use approval in India for children aged 12 to 18. Corbevax is India's third homegrown vaccine. The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), Dr. V. G. Somani, granted the approval for Corbevax. So far, only children aged 15 and up have been vaccinated in India so far.

More than 76 million children aged 15 to 17 have been vaccinated, mostly with Covaxin, according to government estimates. According to Dr. NK Arora, Chairman of India's COVID-19 Working Group of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI), the vaccine is safe and has higher immunogenicity and antibody levels than some other vector vaccines. In compared to Omicron, the vaccine has

showed "greater action," according to the NTAGI chief. According to sources, the Indian government has made an order with Biological E for five crore doses of the 'Corbevax' COVID-19 vaccine, each costing Rs 145. Corbevax in late December was given emergency use approval for use in adults, but it has yet to be included in the national immunisation program. On August 21, last year, the Centre placed an order for 300 million Corbevax medicines. So far, India's vaccination programme has employed almost 1.76 billion vaccine doses, with roughly 84 per cent of those being a domestic version of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 shot made by the Serum Institute of India. The third wave of COVID-19 infections in India, caused by the Omicron coronavirus variety, has largely subsided, with the government reporting 16,051 infections on Monday, down from over 300,000 in late January.



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# Red sandalwood smuggling case: ED files charge sheet against kingpin Badshah Malik

The ED initiated a money-laundering investigation against Badshah Majid Malik and others based on a prosecution complaint filed by DRI following the seizure of red sanders worth Rs 3.16 crores in 2015



(Staff Reporter) The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a charge sheet against Badshah Majid Malik and three others before the Special PMLA court in Mumbai, on charges of money laundering under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

The charge sheet was filed on February 15 and the court took cognizance of the matter on February 18. The ED initiated a money-laundering investigation against Badshah Majid Malik and others based on a prosecution complaint filed by DRI in the case relating to the seizure of red sanders worth Rs 3.16 crores in 2015. Subsequent investigations by DRI established that Badshah Majid Malik was the kingpin of the syndicate involved in the smuggling of red sanders. During the investigation, the ED conducted searches at eight locations in Mumbai and Thane on December 20 last year, resulting in the seizure of incriminating documents and the arrest of Badshah on December 21, 2021. The investigation further established that Badshah Majid Malik and others had laundered the proceeds of crime generated by his illegal activities in the guise of a share subscription premium in a company that had been incorporated by him and his associates. The laundered money was subsequently transferred to the accounts of the promoters of the company, including Badshah Majid Malik, and was used for purchasing properties, luxury cars and paying off loans.

## India and France agree on Roadmap on Blue Economy and Ocean Governance



(Staff Reporter) India and France have agreed on a Roadmap on Blue Economy and Ocean Governance with the aim to contribute to scientific knowledge and ocean conservation and ensure that the ocean remains a global common, based on the rule of law. This agreement came during External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's three-day visit to France. The scope of the roadmap will encompass maritime trade, the naval industry, fisheries, marine technology and scientific research, integrated coastal management, marine eco-tourism, inland waterways, and cooperation between competent administrations on civil maritime issues. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a statement said that both nations plan to organise an annual bilateral dialogue on the blue economy and ocean governance to exchange views on their priorities, share their best practices and support ongoing and future cooperation. "India and France intend to make blue economy a driver of progress of their respective societies while respecting the environment and coastal and marine biodiversity," the MEA said in a joint document.

India and France underscored

that fisheries are a vital economic sector and play a decisive role in food security and livelihood security, particularly for coastal populations. They also highlighted that demographic, economic and societal factors have led to an increased global demand for marine products and growing stress on global fish stocks. According to the statement, India and France will make the blue economy a priority in the development of their economic exchanges. "They will facilitate contacts between economic actors, business heads organisations, technopoles and maritime clusters of the two countries, cross investments, as well as visa issuance to entrepreneurs active in the blue economy," the MEA said. Earlier today, Jaishankar held wide-ranging and productive talks in Paris with France Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and both sides discussed cooperation, the Ukraine situation and Indo-Pacific. Jaishankar on Sunday began his visit to France. He will attend the EU Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, amid China's assertiveness in the region, on February 22, an initiative of the French Presidency of the European Council.



# Vedanta makes oil discovery in Rajasthan's Barmer, notifies Indian government

(Staff Reporter) On February 21, Cairn Oil & Gas, a Vedanta group company, stated that it had discovered oil in an exploration well in Rajasthan's Barmer area. The company stated it has alerted the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) and the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas about the oil discovery in a block it was given under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy, according to a regulatory filing (OALP). The Management Committee, the block monitoring panel, has also been informed of the discovery uncovered in the OALP block, according to Vedanta. "The company has notified the Management Committee, DGH and Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on February 21, 2022 of an oil discovery (named 'Durga') in its exploratory well WM-Basal DD Fan-1 drilled in OALP Block RJ-ONHP-2017/1 in Barmer District of Rajasthan,"



Vedanta said. 'Durga' is the name given to the find. According to the corporation, the consent of the block monitoring panel, known as the Management Committee, has also been requested. In October 2018, the company secured 41 areas in the first phase of the open acreage licencing policy (OALP) bid round. Cairn Oil & Gas, a subsidiary of Mumbai-listed Vedanta Ltd., owns the entire block. "Durga-1 (earlier WM-Basal DD Fan-1) is the second well drilled in Block RJ-ONHP-2017/1 to a depth of 2615 meters," the firm said. This is the third hydrocarbon discovery notified by the company under the OALP portfolio. "During the drilling of the well, four hydrocarbon

zones were encountered in the Dharvi Dungar (DD) formation of the Late Paleocene to Early Eocene age," it said. The RJ-ONHP-2017/1 Block is located in the Gudamalani and Chohtan Tehsils of Rajasthan's Barmer district.

The block is close to the highly productive Rajasthan block, which produces roughly 150,000

barrels of oil and gas per day. Separately, the firm stated that by 2050, it intends to achieve net-zero carbon emissions. "The company is committed to investing USD 4 billion over 3-4 years to double its production, and the newly announced ESG (environmental, social, and corporate governance) roadmap will enable the company to achieve this vision sustainably," it said in a statement. Vedanta founder and chairman Anil Agarwal said, "Our oil and gas business is today well-positioned to meet India's energy needs and growth aspirations." "Guided by the philosophy of 'zero harm, zero waste, zero discharge', we have formulated robust ESG targets for our operations which will help India's energy sector become more efficient and enable the country's journey towards aatmanirbharta," he added.

## Srinagar-Leh National Highway likely to reopen for traffic this year



(Staff Reporter) The strategic 434 kilometre Srinagar-Leh Highway, the only road connecting the Ladakh region with the rest of Jammu and Kashmir, is likely to open early this year, mostly because of less snowfall as compared to previous years. The officials said that the men and machinery are working in full swing even as currently the snow clearance work is being carried out at the upper alignment of the Zojila Pass, which always remains a tough spot due to it being prone to avalanches. The administration of Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are ensuring that connectivity is restored that will subsequently benefit the people besides the movement of security forces. The highway was closed on January 5 this year following heavy snowfall after remaining open for a record time despite inclement weather.

## Marital rape: 'Executive must bite bullet', Delhi HC asks Centre to take a stand

**Delhi HC has refused to grant more time to the Centre to take a stand on the pleas to criminalise marital rape**

(Staff Reporter) The Delhi High Court on Monday reserved its judgment on various pleas seeking criminalisation of marital rape. The HC also refused to give more time to the Centre to clear its stand on the issue.

During the hearing, the Centre submitted that it would take a stand only after consulting with the states. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the central government, said that a communication has been sent to all states and Union territories asking for their comments on the issue. He urged the court that the proceedings be adjourned till such time as the inputs are received.

"The issue impacts different aspects - social life, family life etc. There are very few cases where such broad implications are found by the Centre. We would be able to put our stand only after consultation and do not find it prudent to say anything without

consulting with the stakeholders," Tushar Mehta said.

A bench of Justices Rajiv Shakdher and C Hari Shankar said it was not possible to adjourn an ongoing



matter as there is no terminal date by when the Centre's consultations will be over on the issue.

The bench said that someone needed to take a call on the matter. "Everyone has their views on the matter. It is your job to give your opinion. The burden lies on the executive. You have to bite the bullet. You have to make a decision. Right now you're not either here or there," the bench told the Centre. A decisive executive has

to say yes or no. Nobody stops the executive from changing its stand," the HC bench said.

"We are closing it then," the bench said, adding, "judgement reserved. List for directions on March 2. In the meantime, counsel for parties may file their written submissions and compliations."

The court was dealing with a batch of petitions seeking to strike down the exception granted to husbands under the Indian rape law.

On February 7, the high court had granted two weeks' time to the Centre to state its stand on the petitions seeking criminalization of marital rape. The Centre had filed an affidavit urging the court to defer hearing on the petitions, stating that criminalising marital rape has very far-reaching socio-legal implications in the country and a meaningful consultative process with various stakeholders including the state governments is needed.



# Hijab row: Section 144 around schools, colleges in Bengaluru extended till March 8

**Prohibitory orders around schools, colleges and educational institutions in Bengaluru have been extended till March 8 in light of the possibility of pro-hijab and anti-hijab protests**

(Staff Reporter) Bengaluru police have extended prohibitory orders around schools and colleges in the city till March 8. Restrictions under Section 144 of the CrPC were imposed in Bengaluru to prevent any untoward incident in the wake of pro-hijab and anti-hijab protests. Bengaluru Police Commissioner Kamal Pant, in an order dated February 21, wrote that such protests "disturbed public peace and order".

"Whereas, since the [Hijab] issue is still alive and possibility of holding protests, for and against the same in Bengaluru city cannot be ruled out, it is considered appropriate to extend the aforementioned prohibitory order issued u/s 144(1) of CrPC of 1973, for another two weeks



to restrict any gathering, agitation or protest of any type around the schools, PU colleges, degree colleges or other similar education institutions in Bengaluru city," the order stated. As per the order,

gatherings, agitations or protests of any kind are prohibited within a 200 metre radius of the gate of a school, college or educational institution in Bengaluru.

On Saturday, the Dakshina Kannada district administration

also extended prohibitory orders around the schools and colleges of the district till February 26. A three-judge bench of the Karnataka High Court is set to resume hearing petitions challenging the state

government's new uniform rule, which prevents the wearing of hijab (headscarves) inside schools or colleges. Arguing on behalf of the Karnataka government, Advocate General Prabhuling Navadgi told the court on Monday that for protection under Article 25 of the Constitution, the practice (hijab) has to be essential to the religion itself. The Karnataka government, in an order dated February 5, made it mandatory for all students to adhere to a uniform code in the state's schools and colleges. This move sparked protests by students and various outfits in parts of the state, as well as the country. Groups of students then approached the Karnataka High Court to challenge the state government's order

## You can't commit murder and get away: BJP's Khushbu Sundar on Bajrang Dal activist's murder

Khushbu Sundar said, "Let's fight for the right till justice prevails. You cannot commit a murder and get away with it. No religion or politics can divide our unity

(News Agencies) Reacting to the murder of a Bajrang Dal activist in Karnataka, BJP leader Khushbu Sundar on Monday said one cannot commit a murder and get away with it. Taking to Twitter, Khushbu Sundar said, "Let's fight for the right till justice prevails. You cannot commit a murder and get away with it. No religion or politics can divide our unity. Enough of the country being divided n biruficated. Together we stand, together we will. Now n forever." The murder led to a political furore in Karnataka. State minister and BJP leader KS Eshwarappa alleged that "Muslim goons" were involved in the murder. He also accused Congress leader DK Shivakumar of "provocating the Muslim goons". Shivakumar condemned his

statement and demanded the sacking of Eshwarappa. "He [Eshwarappa] doesn't have common sense. he has already violated the Indian Flag Code. A case must be registered against him and



he must be sacked. He has brought shame to the country and the national flag," he said. Meanwhile, section 144 has been imposed in the Shivamogga district and additional police force has been stationed to control the law and order situation.

## Maharashtra women's panel asks police to submit report on Narayan Rane's remark on Disha Salian

**The Maharashtra State Commission for Woman has sought a report on Union minister Narayan Rane's allegations about Disha Salian's death**

(News Agencies) The Maharashtra State Commission for Women has asked the Mumbai Police's Malvani police station to submit a report on Union minister Narayan Rane's allegations about Disha Salian within 48 hours. In a press conference on Saturday, Narayan Rane had repeated his allegations that

Sushant Singh Rajput's manager Disha Salian was gang-raped and murdered.

Shiv Sena leader and Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar lodged a complaint against the minister over his statement. "It is unfortunate that Disha is being defamed even after her death. Even the CBI has investigated the matter and this despite the post-mortem report stating that Disha was neither raped nor was she pregnant," Pednekar said in her complaint. The mayor claimed that even Disha's parents had said the same thing accepting the post-mortem



report. Taking cognisance of the complaint, Maharashtra State Women's Commission chairperson Rupali Chakankar tweeted the directions. "The Maharashtra State Women's Commission has directed the Senior Inspector of Police, Malvani Police Station to submit a report in this regard within 48

hours," she said in a tweet. Narayan Rane made the allegations a day after he got a notice from the Shiv Sena-ruled Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for inspecting his bungalow in Juhu for alleged violations. On Monday, BMC officials inspected Rane's bungalow for alleged violations. The Union Environment Ministry too issued a notice to Rane's seaside bungalow in Malvan for alleged violations of the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ). Rane had alleged the action by the state government as vendetta politics.



# Congress continues protest in Karnataka Assembly, Speaker objects to slogans against RSS

## Congress continued its protest in Karnataka Assembly against Panchayat Raj Minister KS Eshwarappa's remark on the national flag



(News Agencies) Protests by the Congress, who are demanding the sacking of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister KS Eshwarappa and that he be booked for sedition over a statement on the national flag, continued to rock the Assembly proceedings in Karnataka for the fourth consecutive day on Monday. The Assembly also saw passage of four bills amidst the din, and Speaker Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri took strong exception to Congress members "unnecessarily" bringing in RSS'

name during their protest in the well of the House.

The 'day-and-night' protests by the legislators whereby they spend the night inside the Assembly began on Thursday demanding Eshwarappa's dismissal. Recently, Eshwarappa had claimed 'Bhagwa dhvaj' (saffron flag) may become the national flag some time in the future and the same may be hoisted on the Red Fort then. He, however, had said the tricolour is the national flag now, and it should be

respected by everyone. As the House met for the day, Congress members trooped into the well of the House and started shouting slogans demanding action against Eshwarappa. Slogans like - "Down, down BJP", "Suspend Eshwarappa", "Eshwarappa desha drohi (traitor)", "Down Down desha drohi BJP government", "Speaker give justice", "This government is RSS' puppet", "We want constitution, not Manuvada" - among others marred the proceedings. Despite protest,

Speaker Kageri took up the question hour with no Congress legislator taking part in it.

Then, amidst the din, the assembly also passed four bills - The Karnataka Civil Services (Validation of Selection and Appointment of 2011 batch Gazetted Probationers) Bill, 2022; The Karnataka Stamp (Amendment) Bill, 2022; The Karnataka Stamp (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022; The Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance, 1944, (Karnataka Amendment) Bill, 2022 - without any discussions. After the passage of bills, the Speaker asked former chief minister and Leader of Opposition Siddaramaiah to participate in the discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, and called on Congress members to go back to their seats, which went unheard by the principal opposition party members, who in turn demanded "justice" from him. The Speaker said several attempts have been made by him for the smooth conduct of the proceedings of the house, by calling a meeting of the Leader of the House (CM Basavaraj Bommai) and Leader of Opposition, along with other senior leaders, but it has failed.

"Difference of opinion is common in a democracy, but we are duty bound to conduct the proceedings of this House. If the government has not agreed to your demands, protest outside and cooperate to run the House. We have to discuss developmental issues, issues of the people here," he said. JD(S) deputy leader Bandeppa Kashempur said his party has 31 members and wants to raise several key issues concerning the people of the state and farmers, and they should be given an opportunity. Meanwhile, when Congress members raised slogans taking the RSS' name, Speaker Kageri took strong exception to this. "I want to say to Congress members very strongly - unnecessarily, why are you bringing in the RSS' name. How is RSS responsible for this? Don't repeatedly bring RSS' name unnecessarily," he said. "RSS is an organisation with a nationalist ideology, they are working towards uniting Hindus. You have to cooperate in their efforts. Don't bring RSS name, if you have political differences, set it right," Kageri added. As chaos continued, the Speaker then adjourned the House for Tuesday.

## Kerala records 4,069 fresh Covid-19 cases, 128 deaths in last 24 hours

**A total of 63,49,057 people have been recovered so far in Kerala and the active cases dropped to 58,932, says a govt release**

(News Agencies) Continuing with the downward trend in daily coronavirus cases, Kerala on Monday recorded 4,069 fresh infections which raised the total caseload to 64,73,059 in the state. On Sunday, 5,427 people contracted the virus in the southern state. Kerala, on Monday, also reported 128 deaths, which raised the total fatalities to 64,273,



according to a government release. Of the deaths, 11 were reported in the last 24 hours, 76 were those which occurred in the last few days but were not recorded due to late receipt of documents and 41 were designated as Covid-19 deaths after receiving appeals based on the new guidelines of the Centre and the directions of the Supreme Court, the release said. With

11,026 more people recovering from the virus since Sunday, the total recoveries in the state reached 63,49,057 and the active cases dropped to 58,932, the release said. As many as 42,700 samples were tested in the last 24 hours. Among the 14 districts, Ernakulam recorded the highest with 647 cases, followed by

Thiruvananthapuram 531 and Kottayam 414, the release said. Of the new cases, 32 were health workers, 18 from outside the state and 3,775 infected through contact with the source of it not being clear in 244, the release said. There are currently 1,57,090 people under surveillance in various districts, of whom 1,53,490 are in home or institutional quarantine and 3,600 in hospitals, the release said.

## Body of Rishiganga tragedy victim found after over a year

**The body of a Rishiganga tragedy victim was found Monday, over a year after the incident**

(News Agencies) More than a year after the Rishiganga flash flood, the body of yet another victim was recovered on Monday from a tunnel at the NTPC's hydel project site in Tapovan. The body was found when the debris inside the tunnel was being cleared at the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project, an official at the site said. The body is that of Rohit Bhandari, an employee of the NTPC's subsidiary company Ritwik who happened to be at work inside the tunnel when the tragedy struck, he said.

A total of 140 people had gone missing at the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project site when the disaster caused by a glacial burst struck on February 7 last year. The

bodies of 36 people have been found so far while 104 are still missing. One body had been found in the tunnel on February 15. The Rishiganga hydel project had been totally demolished in the tragedy which had also caused extensive damage to the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydel project where many people happened to be at work when the glacial disaster caught them unawares. Altogether over 200 people from the Rishiganga project site at Raini and the Tapovan-Vishnugad project site at Tapovan had gone missing in the tragedy. The bodies of more than 80 victims have been found, while dozens of them are still missing.



# Sameer Wankhede moves HC for quashing of FIR, seeks restoration of cancelled liquor license

**Wankhede, who is a 2008-batch IRS officer, has stated that the action taken against him is out of malice and vindictive as he, during his tenure as NCB's zonal director for Mumbai, had arrested Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik's son-in-law in a drugs case**

(News Agencies) Former Mumbai NCB zonal director Sameer Wankhede on Monday filed two separate petitions in the Bombay High Court urging quashing of the FIR registered against him by Thane police for obtaining a liquor license for a hotel by alleged forgery and also sought restoration of the cancelled license. Wankhede claimed that actions initiated against him were vindictive as he had arrested Maharashtra cabinet minister Nawab Malik's son-in-law in a drugs case when he was heading the Mumbai Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) unit. The plea for quashing of the FIR will be heard by a division bench headed by Justice S S Shinde on Tuesday. The civil petition seeking restoration of the license will be heard by a division bench headed by Justice G S Patel on Tuesday. In the quashing petition, Wankhede has sought interim

protection from arrest. In both of the pleas, Wankhede, who is a 2008-batch IRS officer, has stated that the action taken against him is out of malice and vindictive as he, during his tenure as NCB's zonal director for Mumbai, had arrested Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik's son-in-law in a drugs case. Wankhede's

advocate Vishal Thadani said the action was taken against the NCB officer by the state Excise Department and the police under political pressure. "Hence, Mr Malik has vengeance against Wankhede and has been making false and defamatory statements against the

applicant (Wankhede)," the pleas said. The FIR was registered against Wankhede by the state excise



department in Thane's Kopri police station. As per the complaint, the documents submitted in 1997 for procuring the license for selling liquor in a restaurant and bar, in Wankhede's name, were forged. Wankhede was a minor (17-year-old) when the liquor

license was procured in his name, the complaint said. In his petition seeking restoration of the cancelled license filed through advocate Vishal Thadani, Wankhede said that the rules in India do not specify the age for the grant of liquor license. "The license was granted in October 1997 and has been renewed time and again till the year 2021. Then after my client (Wankhede) arrested minister Nawab Malik's son-in-law in a drugs case, the minister wrote a letter in November 2021 to the Thane excise Collector raising questions on the license," Thadani said. Pursuant to the letter, an inquiry was initiated and three show-cause notices were issued to Wankhede. "Hearing was given and then the license was cancelled. Hence, he (Wankhede) has moved the high court challenging the cancellation and seeking restoration of the license," Thadani said.

## Karnataka activist's murder: BJP MLA gives financial assistance of Rs 2 lakh to victim's family

**The 23-year-old Bajrang Dal activist was stabbed in Karnataka's Shivamogga on Sunday night. Three persons have been arrested in the case so far – Remove on Sunday night**

(News Agencies) A financial assistance of Rs 2 lakh has been paid by CM's political secretary and Honnali MLA MP Renukacharya to the family of the Bajrang Dal activist killed on Sunday. "It feels like I lost my own son. I stand with Harsha's family. Giving them Rs 2 lakh as financial assistance," said Renukacharya. The 23-year-old Bajrang Dal activist, was stabbed in Karnataka's Shivamogga on Sunday night. A resident of Seegehatti, Harsha was rushed to the McGann Hospital where he succumbed to injuries. Karnataka Police have arrested three individuals in connection with the stabbing that took place in Bharati Colony area. Speaking to the



media on Monday, Karnataka Home minister Araga Jnanendra said police suspect the role of five individuals in Harsha's murder. On Monday, protests in Shivamogga over Harsha's death took a violent turn as protesters began to pelt stones, brandish weapons and even set vehicles ablaze. To ensure that the situation did not get out of hand, police had to resort to using tear gas to disperse the crowd. Harsha's body was taken to the cremation ground under the strict eye of the Rapid Action Force. Karnataka minister Eshwarappa, the local MLA and Shivamogga MP B Y Raghavendra, were among those who took part in Harsha's funeral procession.

## Facebook page under police scanner for defamatory post on murdered Bajrang Dal activist

**A probe has been initiated against a Facebook page titled 'Mangalore Muslims' for posting derogatory content about the 23-year-old Bajrang Dal activist killed in Karnataka's Shivamogga**

(Staff Reporter) Karnataka police have taken note of a Facebook page used for posting derogatory content about the 23-year-old Bajrang Dal activist killed in Shivamogga on Sunday night. Harsha, a resident of Seegehatti, was stabbed by unidentified men in Shivamogga's Bharati Colony area around 9.30 pm. A suo motu case has now been registered at the Cyber, Economic and Narcotics Offences police station against the administrators of the Facebook page on the basis of a complaint by head constable Raja M of the social media division.

In his complaint, the head constable stated that a Facebook page titled 'Mangalore Muslims' had on Monday uploaded a post referring to Harsha in abusive terms. The post went further to allege that Harsha had insulted the Prophet in 2015 and that he was killed for mocking the Prophet. The complainant goes on to say, "The post further implied that anyone who insults the Prophet, such as Ajit Hanamakkanavar, will not be forgotten by 'Mangalore Muslims' page." "Mangalore Muslims page will give a clue to today's murder to police

and the government. The post claimed that 'to know the truth, arrest Eshwarappa and investigate him and make him confess that he gave contract to Muslims to kill Harsha.' The complainant further stated that the Facebook page is "supporting" Harsha's murder, "issuing threats to Ajit Hanamakkanavar" and "spreading false rumours" about Karnataka minister K Eshwarappa. "It [Facebook page] also repeatedly uploads defamatory posts about Hindu



organizations and Hindu political leaders. The post [on Monday] has been uploaded on Facebook with an intention to create Hindu-Muslim enmity and provoke communal riots," read the complaint. In addition, the complaint also mentions another Facebook page titled 'Nanna Dhwani'. This page, as per the complaint, is being used to spread fake news such as "BJP workers themselves kill Sangh Parivar activists". The complainant has sought stringent action against 'Mangalore Muslims' Facebook page and other fake social media accounts being used to spread hate among communities.



# Former AIADMK minister arrested for attacking DMK cadre during urban local body election

**Former AIADMK minister Jayakumar has been arrested by the Chennai Police for allegedly attacking a DMK worker during the urban local body election**

(News Agencies) Former AIADMK minister Jayakumar was on Monday arrested by the Chennai Police based on a complaint filed by DMK cadre Naresh. In his complaint, Naresh stated that he was surrounded by Jayakumar and several other AIADMK cadres when he went to vote during the urban local body election on Saturday. Jayakumar and a few other AIADMK cadres did surround Naresh while he was on his way to vote. They had accused him of trying to vote in someone else's name. A video of Naresh being attacked and Jayakumar ordering him to remove his shirt has also gone. Naresh was also paraded without a shirt by the AIADMK workers. Jayakumar and others later conducted a road roko, alleging DMK was involved in booth capturing. Naresh had then given an explanation stating that he went to the wrong booth. He later filed a complaint with police against the AIADMK workers and Jayakumar.



## K'taka activist's murder: It was a complete failure of law and order, says HD Kumaraswamy

**The former Karnataka CM lashed out at the BJP over "not taking action even after knowing that there was a threat to Harsha's life"**



(Staff Reporter) The killing of Karnataka activist Harsha in Shivamogga was a complete failure of law and order, intelligence and the ability to maintain peace, said JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy on Monday. As per reports, Bajrang Dal activist Harsha was stabbed to death on Sunday evening. He was taken to Mc Gann district hospital where he succumbed to his injury. Harsha's family and relatives said that there had been a threat to his life for the last two years. They even alleged that there was a Rs 10 lakh reward for killing him.

"Why was protection not provided even after knowing that there was a threat to his life? Were you not aware of the threat? Why is it that your party failed to save the life of a person who belonged to your organisation? When you can not save the life of a person of your own organisation, how can you protect the people of Karnataka?," Kumaraswamy asked the BJP. Congress destabilised peace: HD Kumaraswamy on K'taka activist's murder "I have started doubting if there is any police intelligence wing in the government," the JD(S) leader said. Parties killing poor children for political goals' Former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy alleged that national political parties are killing children of poor families for their selfish political goals. "The incident of Harsha's murder in Shivamogga is a glaring example of the failure of the state intelligence and the inability of the government to maintain peace, law and order," he stated.

Speaking to media persons at Vidhana Soudha, Kumaraswamy said, "When Hijab and Saffron shawl issues

were spread in a planned manner across the state, it was quite evident that the national parties had been playing with the lives of innocent children. The murder of the youth in Shivamogga is also a part of the larger conspiracy." The former CM alleged that instead of fighting for development issues,

national parties are fighting for disturbing communal harmony and encouraging those indulging in communal dissensions. "For the next few days, these leaders will pay visits to the family of the youth who lost his life. But there will be none to ask about the wellbeing of Harsha's parents," Kumaraswamy said. When there

was information two years back about the incident, the government should have taken appropriate action instead of blaming KPCC president DK Shivakumar for instigating it. "Does your government have no power to prevent instigation? If so, why did you keep quiet even after knowing everything? the former CM asked.

## India rejects allegations of harassment of journalist Rana Ayyub as 'baseless, unwarranted'

**India has strongly refuted the allegations by the UN's mission in Geneva of "judicial harassment" against journalist Rana Ayyub**

(Staff Reporter) Reacting strongly, India on Monday dubbed as "baseless and unwarranted" the allegations by the United Nation's mission in Geneva of "judicial harassment" against journalist Rana Ayyub, and asserted that the country upholds the rule of law and no one is above it. India's permanent mission in Geneva, in a tweet, said advancing a "misleading narrative" only "tarnishes" the reputation of the UN mission. "Allegations of so-called judicial harassment are baseless & unwarranted. India upholds the rule of law but is equally clear that no one is above the law. We expect SRs to be objective &



accurately informed. Advancing a misleading narrative only tarnishes @UNGeneva's reputation," it said. Official sources in New Delhi said the matter will be followed up by a note verbale from the Indian mission in Geneva. "They will also take it up with the UN office in Geneva," a source said. Earlier, the UN in Geneva tweeted about "relentless misogynistic and sectarian attacks online" against journalist Ayyub and said they must be promptly and thoroughly investigated by the Indian authorities and the "judicial harassment against her brought to an end."



# Climate forecasters warn of a 'global wildfire crisis'

A landmark United Nations report has concluded that the risk of devastating wildfires around the world will surge in coming decades as climate change further intensifies what the report described as a "global wildfire crisis."

The scientific assessment is the first by the organization's environmental authority to evaluate wildfire risks worldwide. It was inspired by a string of deadly blazes around the globe in recent years, burning the American West, vast stretches of Australia and even the Arctic.

The images from those fires — cities glowing under orange skies, smoke billowing around tourist havens and heritage sites, woodland animals badly injured and killed — have become grim icons of this era of unsettled relations between humankind and nature.

"The heating of the planet is turning landscapes into tinderboxes," said the report, which was published Wednesday by the U.N. Environment Program.

The report, produced by more than 50 researchers from six continents, estimated that the risk worldwide of highly devastating fires could increase by up to 57% by the end of the century, primarily because of climate change. The risks will not be distributed equally: Some regions are likely to see more fire activity, while others may experience less.

It is a stark warning about the increased heat and dryness that human-caused global warming is bringing about. Nations and localities need to prepare better for the dangers, the report's authors said.

"There isn't the right attention to fire from governments," said Glynis Humphrey, a fire expert at the University of Cape Town and an author of the new report. More societies worldwide are learning the value of prescribed burns and other methods of preventing wildfires from raging out of control, she said. Yet public spending in developed nations is still heavily skewed toward firefighting instead of forest management.

In some regions with long histories of brush fires, such as eastern Australia and the western United States and Canada, they have become more intense over the past decade and are ravaging larger areas, the report found. But uncontrolled burning is also starting to occur in places where it had not been common before, such as Russia, northern India and Tibet. In parts of the savannas of sub-Saharan Africa, by contrast, fire activity has declined over the past two decades, partly because drought has killed off more grass. While climate change is giving rise to more of the record warmth and dryness that have contributed to recent episodes of severe burning, the overall effect on fire risks is complex and can vary from place to place.

Researchers have determined that the extreme heat wave in the Pacific Northwest last year almost certainly would not have occurred without planetary warming caused by greenhouse-gas emissions. Scientists

have also found the fingerprints of climate change on brush fires in Australia and extreme heat and burning in Siberia. But hot weather and weak rainfall can also decrease the amount of vegetation that is available to feed fires. In other places, the decreased humidity can make vegetation more flammable, helping fires spread more easily. After taking all these factors into account, the report still forecasts a significant increase in the global risk of extraordinary wildfires, even if nations manage to limit emissions of heat-trapping gases. In a moderate scenario for global warming, the likelihood of extreme, catastrophic fires could increase by up to one-third by 2050 and up to 52% by 2100, the report estimates. If emissions are not curbed and the planet heats up more, wildfire risks

could rise by up to 57% by the end of the century. The increase in burning is projected to be especially large in places including the Arctic, said Douglas I. Kelley, a researcher at the UK Centre for

Ecology & Hydrology who conducted the data analysis for the report. The northern reaches of Russia and North America are already warming much more quickly than the rest of the globe. The intense Arctic fires of 2020 released more polluting gases into the atmosphere that June than in any other month in 18 years of data collection. In more temperate regions of the United States and Asia, Kelley said, wildfires could increase as emissions rise because the higher amount of carbon dioxide in the air helps plants grow, resulting in more vegetation to fuel blazes.

The prolonged drought in the American West — the region's worst, scientists say, in at least 1,200 years — has helped to spark wildfires earlier in the year. Forecasters are expecting the warmth and dryness to continue into this spring and beyond. The U.N. report urges governments to become more proactive about fire hazards. Of every dollar spent in the United States on managing wildfires, almost 60 cents goes toward immediate firefighting responses, according to research cited in the report. Much less is spent on reducing fire risks in advance and helping communities recover in ways that could make them more resilient.

Peter Moore, a fire management consultant with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and an author of the report, said more countries could learn from Portugal, which drew up an ambitious national fire plan after two blazes killed more than 100 people in 2017. Decades of economic development there had caused a decrease in farmland and an expansion of poorly managed forests, making the landscape highly flammable. "So when the wrong weather turned up, and then a series of ignitions happened, they had a series of dramatic and catastrophic fire events," Moore said. In eastern Australia, western North America, Chile and elsewhere, he said, "those same conditions are starting to occur."

**In some regions with long histories of brush fires, such as eastern Australia and the western United States and Canada, they have become more intense over the past decade and are ravaging larger areas**

# Will history be kind to Vladimir Putin?

Amid tensions between Russia and Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin has recognised the independence of two separatist regions in Ukraine and ordered deployment of troops there. It remains to be seen how this crisis will play out and whether history will be kind to Putin.

History has a strong role to play in what Russia's President Vladimir Putin plans as his government's policy. Putin's order to Russian forces to march into Ukrainian territories that he recognised as independent comes from his interpretation of history. Observers are already saying that Vladimir Putin is rewriting history as flowing from World War-II.

The question is, borrowing India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's famous statement: will history be kind in judging Putin's action?

## AGGRESSIVE MOVES IN UKRAINE

Since 2014, Putin has changed the sovereign territorial map in East Europe with his aggressive moves in Ukraine. He annexed the Crimean peninsula of Ukraine in 2014 claiming to correct a historical wrong. Putin has been actively keeping Russian supplies to separatist rebels in South and East Ukraine. Earlier this week, Putin declared independence of two regions held by the rebels in East Ukraine bordering Russia.

Russia has been issuing passports to Ukrainian in rebel-controlled regions since 2019 when Putin signed a decree to the effect. When criticised, Putin defiantly asked what wrong he committed if he took

care of Russians living in those areas. In recent weeks, Putin sent Russian forces to Belarus, an ally sharing border with Ukraine. This move is strategic given that Belarus border is not very far from Ukraine's capital Kyiv. There's fear in Ukraine and its Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)

allies that in the event of full-blown war, Putin would go for Russian occupation of capital Kyiv. That could be the end game for Ukraine

as a sovereign nation that emerged after the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991.

## DEFENDING SOVIET UNION

Putin, a former Soviet Union spy has been sensitive to comments, particularly those blaming his country for historical events. Europe, however, has pricked him a few times recently. One such episode happened in 2019. The European Union parliament in September 2019 adopted a resolution talking about "the Future of Europe". The European resolution blamed Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler's Germany for starting World War-II. It also accused Putin's Russia of "whitewash[ing] crimes committed by the Soviet totalitarian regime". Putin gave his response three months later in December 2019 at a CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose successor of Soviet Union) summit. At that informal summit, Putin rejected the charge that Soviet Union kicked off the war and blamed Poland for it. He said Poland brought World War-II for "pursuing their mercenary and exorbitantly overgrown ambitions" in Europe.



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# Now is the time for compassion towards students

**As children return to classrooms, governments, schools, teachers and parents must give them a vocabulary to talk about their emotions and experience of pandemic loss, find ways to repair and heal**

Since schools closed, students have been through a lot of changes. Not only have they aged, they have become different people, having lived through a pandemic at such a young age. So, what should schools expect when children return, and how can they prepare to support their emotional adjustment and safeguard their development beyond academic achievement? As a society, we have always struggled to accept that school is about more than academic achievement. School is where children make friends, encounter bullies, face anxieties, experiment with identities, have secret adventures, live independent lives, and learn who they are away from their parents. If their home environment is unstable for any reason, they have the chance to live a different life where they can feel like they have a higher degree of freedom and control. That this is essential to their psychosocial development is beyond debate. Being home for the larger part of two years has denied them these necessary developmental opportunities. Undoubtedly, children will have missed their friends, and the routine of going to school can have induced grief and listlessness. Beyond this, though, several children will have experienced Covid-induced health anxieties, the loss of loved ones, varying textures of violence, financial crises and several other issues.

The symptom grabbing everyone's attention seems to be an increase in screen time. Less attention has been paid to "nuisance" symptoms such as disrupted sleep or eating patterns, lack of focus and motivation to study, sullen behaviour and temper tantrums. Older children have been taken to doctors for anything from mild mood and anxiety disorders to instances of addiction and self-harm. Despite our intention to support our children, it seems we have instead decided to "manage" them and place the burden of coping — academically and emotionally — on them alone. It is one of the great privileges of adulthood to develop an amnesia about how we would have liked to be treated when we were children and

adolescents.

Children do not always communicate directly, and often go unheard when they try. Nor do they have (read: are not given) an emotional vocabulary to explain the complexity of emotions they might be going through (neither do adults, if I'm being honest). Instead, they withdraw, get angry, stop studying or lose focus.

Our instinct, unthinkingly, is to respond by telling them to engage, stop feeling angry, study harder and focus more. Unsurprisingly, such advice never works. These are expressions of their feelings. Withdrawing into their phones, for instance, can well be an expression of loneliness, despair and a feeling of being unmoored. Children are alive to everything around them. Holding it inside, trying to make sense of it, can be a lot to carry. Shutting down — receding into technology — might be a protective response that offers stimulation and engagement on their terms. Other responses to this felt helplessness, no less extreme, could be addictions of various kinds and attempts at self-harm.

It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect children to return to "normal" just by virtue of them attending school again. Students may struggle to reassimilate with friends, while others may not know how to study in a classroom. Schools need to be prepared for hundreds of students, each carrying the burden of the past two years, coming together under one roof. This is a moment to think beyond labelling students as those "falling behind" or "depressed" or exhibiting "conduct disorders" and sending them for behavioural interventions or calling their parents to reprimand them. It is an opportunity to move from a punitive to a compassionate, supportive stance. The aim, now, is not to graduate them from one class to the next but to help them mourn what was lost, recover and feel safe again.

This is an appeal to the

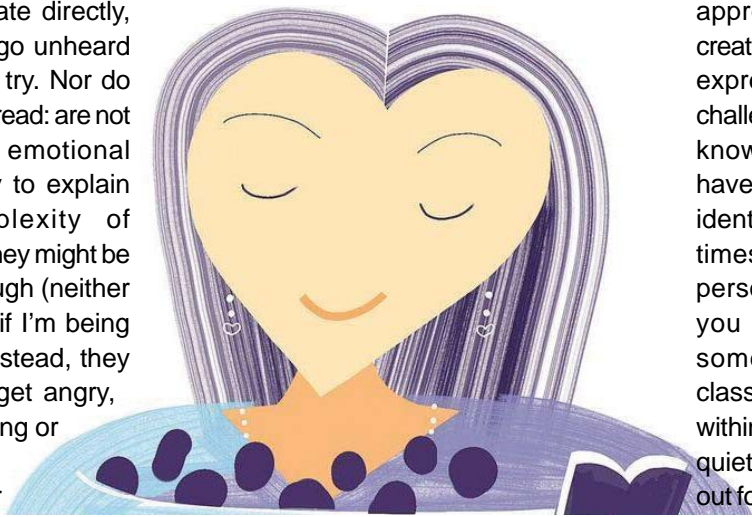
administrations — governments,

schools and PTAs. Be proactive in addressing psychological and behavioural concerns. Help parents understand the "symptoms" as responses to the difficulties their children have been through. Give parents and children a

vocabulary to talk about their concerns. Use age-appropriate language and creative ways to help children express their feelings and challenges. Make an effort to know which children may have faced death and other identifiable crises in these times. Reach out to them personally; let them know you care. Don't ask why someone didn't attend a class; ask what's going on within. Look out for the really quiet or obedient child. Look out for behavioural signs that are completely discordant

from the child you knew. Don't be afraid to ask children what's going on with them — often, they are hoping someone will notice them and ask. You don't have to have all the answers — just hear them out. Be proactive in addressing psychological and behavioural

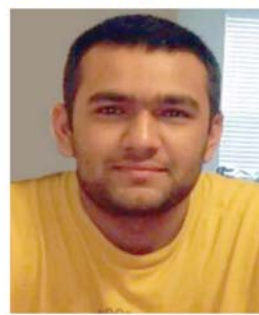
concerns. Help parents understand the "symptoms" as responses to the difficulties their children have been through. Give parents and children a vocabulary to talk about their concerns. Use age-appropriate language and creative ways to help children express their feelings and challenges. Make an effort to know which children may have faced death and other identifiable crises in these times. Reach out to them personally; let them know you care. Don't ask why someone didn't attend a class; ask what's going on within. Look out for the really quiet or obedient child. Look out for behavioural signs that are completely discordant from the child you knew. Don't be afraid to ask children what's going on with them — often, they are hoping someone will notice them and ask. You don't have to have all the answers — just hear them out.



## FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

### BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

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



Photograph taken April 2015

#### DESCRIPTION

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

#### REWARD

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

#### REMARKS

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

#### CAUTION

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

#### SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

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

Field Office: Baltimore



# Dealing with Covid beyond the pandemic

**Public health systems and policymaking should focus on dealing with the disease in its less virulent form and addressing the scars it has inflicted in the past two years**

The Omicron-led surge in India — popularly, the Third Wave — saw a rise in new Covid-19 cases beginning end-December for about four weeks. The decline was dramatic, in about three weeks. This phase was marked by less hospitalisations, fewer complications and reduced mortality compared to the Delta-driven second wave. India's experience replicates that of South Africa. Some of the increase in death counts in recent weeks can be attributed to the "reconciliation" of deaths across states in the light of the Supreme Court's directive on compensation.

Omicron is the dominant variant currently, globally and India. It is likely to shape the state of the pandemic for some time. The Alpha variant had nine mutations

in its S gene and Delta had between nine and 13 mutations. Contrast these with the staggering 50 mutations in Omicron, including 32 mutations in the S gene. A French study found Omicron to be 105 per cent more transmissible than Delta and a Danish study found the variant's capacity to infect 2-7-3.7 times more than its predecessor. Delta was 100 per cent more transmissible than the parent strain. The WHO had, therefore, warned of a tsunami of Omicron cases overwhelming hospital services despite the virus being less virulent. Indian has, however, weathered this ongoing phase reasonably well.

The Omicron variant comprises three sub-lineages: B.1.1.529 or BA.1, BA.2 and BA.3. As of February 10, India was among

the 10 countries that reported a predominance of BA.2 sub-lineage. Emerging evidence suggests that BA.2 is 30 per cent more transmissible than BA.1. However, current evidence from the US, UK, South Africa and Nepal also confirms continued "decoupling" — low hospitalisation and fatalities amidst rising new cases. At the same time, mortality due to Omicron does remain a matter of concern in patients above 75 years, those with comorbidities and importantly, the unvaccinated.

Re-infection, people testing Covid positive 90 days after their last infection, is an emerging concern. The most obvious reason for this is Omicron's uniquely abundant mutations that make the variant extremely

efficient to escape pre-existing immunity. Immunity also wanes since the last vaccination. That's why boosters are important. Evidence from countries with rollout and high coverage of vaccines, Israel and the UK, confirm protection from hospitalisation or death. The UK's Office for National Statistics estimates that the rate of re-infection has increased 15-fold in the Omicron phase: Re-infections account about 10 per cent of current infections in England, in contrast to 1 per cent during November 2021. Re-infections with Alpha were symptomatic in 20 per cent cases. In contrast, Delta re-infections caused symptoms in 44 per cent cases and Omicron in 46 per cent. In general, re-infections boost immunity. But such re-infections

do not confer 100 per cent immunity.

Analyses from UK confirm protection against mild disease 20 weeks after a two-dose schedule. A booster dose increases it by 65 to 70 per cent. That declines to 45 to 50 per cent after 10 weeks. Protection against hospitalisation after a booster dose, however, is a lot higher — it's estimated at 92 per cent and remains high at 83 per cent after 10 weeks. The current lot of Covid vaccines provide substantial protection against systemic disease in the lungs and other organs, but do not generate strong mucosal immunity that would be effective against the mild but the early infectious stage that affects the patient's nose and throat.

**(Contd on page 27)**

## India-US partnership for post-pandemic world

**The two nations can spearhead a sustainable and inclusive abundance agenda through our trade partnership, making the case for democracy through our shared prosperity**

Democracy is under strain. We see social tensions within open societies intensify as citizens question whether their system can deliver for them during this pandemic. Our competitors sense discord and the opportunity to challenge the relevance of democratic nations on the world stage. The prospect of global conflict is rising, and strategic competition is heating up; the free world feels beset.

I am, however, an optimist. Throughout my 28-year career as an American diplomat, including my time serving as Chargé d'Affaires to India, I have engaged with governments, citizens, and civil society to pursue shared interests and advance a positive vision of a freer and safer world predicated on fundamental human rights. For these efforts to succeed, we must demonstrate to our people and the world that democracy can secure their well-being and dignity, create a fair and innovative marketplace, and deliver economic growth and



good jobs.

We find ourselves at a critical moment of geostrategic and geoeconomic convergence that demands the US and India embrace closer economic cooperation. I believe our two democracies can demonstrate to the world that we can, proverbially, deliver the goods for our people. Through the pandemic, the US and India have shown the remarkable things we

can accomplish when we work together. Delhi and Washington came to each other's assistance at moments of crisis, and we cooperated to airlift hundreds of millions of free doses of vaccines to low-income countries — generosity that reflects the values and compassion of our people.

This pandemic recovery, however, presents new trials. Inflation and supply chain woes

are shrinking consumers' buying power, leading them to question the direction of our economic policies. Americans are seeing a dire workforce shortage, shipping delays, and in some cases, empty store shelves. At the same time, Indians are seeing the prices of essential commodities like fuel, cooking oil, and produce skyrocket. Some of this is temporary, as the Omicron wave results in many

sick workers in crucial fields. Other root causes, however, are structural and require our urgent attention.

To prove that democracies can lead in the post-pandemic world, the US and India must work together to increase supply, bring prices down, and improve economic confidence. Delhi and Washington need to work together to remove unnecessary barriers to trade and seize the vast opportunities of our commercial relationship — aspiring to achieve \$500 billion in bilateral trade in goods and services. As strategically aligned partners facing shared challenges, the US and India can work to make the free world's supply chains more robust and resilient through closer cooperation across a range of sectors — including defence, energy, healthcare, and agriculture. This cooperative approach could lead to widespread and impactful benefits for our citizens.

**(Contd on page 27)**



# DMK's landslide victory in urban local body polls

The party won all 21 city corporations in the state, including Chennai. In Chennai city corporation, the party won 153 seats against AIADMK's 15 seats in the 200-member city urban council

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu registered a landslide victory in the urban local body elections, winning all 21 city corporations in the state. Hardly a year since they came to power, urban local body poll results mean a lot for the DMK and its allies, including Congress, Left, Dalit and minority parties.

## DMK victory

The party won all 21 city corporations in the state, including Chennai. In Chennai city corporation, the party won 153 seats against AIADMK's 15 seats in the 200-member city urban council. Even the DMK ally Congress managed 13 seats while others such as CPI(M) (4) and Dalit party VCK (4), too, have ensured an impressive presence. In Kanyakumari district, at the southern tip of the state, Nagercoil municipality was a tough battle for the DMK, for none other than the BJP had a solid vote base here. But the DMK won 24 of the 52 seats against BJP's 11 seats, while AIADMK was pushed to the



third position with just seven seats.

In western Tamil Nadu, and more importantly, Coimbatore, Salem and Tirupur – traditional strongholds of the AIADMK with a significant vote base for BJP, the DMK captured most of the seats. Even the area, where former chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami resided in Salem, voted for the DMK. Salem was a prestigious place

for the AIADMK where the party had focused on maximum infrastructure projects during the previous regime. Even the Coimbatore corporation, where people voted for the AIADMK in the last assembly polls, was captured by the DMK. A months-long campaign led by top DMK leaders ensured its victory in the Thondamuthur Town Panchayat in Coimbatore, a bastion of former AIADMK

minister S P Velumani, who is known for his money and muscle power. After delivering an impressive victory for the DMK in the nearby Karur in the last assembly polls, the state electricity minister Senthil Balaji's strategies worked in capturing Coimbatore this time. Of 100 seats there, the DMK won 74 seats while the AIADMK was reduced to a distant fourth position, and the Congress won

nine seats. The CPI and the CPI(M) won four seats each. The DMK won 159 municipalities against the AIADMK's 22 seats of a total of 198.

## AIADMK a distant second

Two sweeping victories of the DMK in Periyakulam and Edappadi Municipalities reveal the magnitude of the AIADMK's defeat in the polls. Both were prestigious strongholds of AIADMK; Periyakulam, the native of former deputy chief minister O Panneerselvam and Edappadi, the native of former CM Palaniswami. When the DMK won all 21 city corporations, it was again a sweeping victory as the AIADMK got only 164 seats (of 1374 seats) against the DMK's 952. While the AIADMK won just 638 seats out of 3843 municipality seats, the DMK alone won 2360 besides their allies bagging over 200 seats more. Of 7,620 town panchayat seats, the AIADMK won just 1,206 against DMK's 4388 seats, and DMK allies won 500 more seats.

(Contd on page 26)

## Emerging axes, new equations: Pak-Russia dynamics in a changing world

Imran Khan is visiting Russia on the Kremlin's invitation, and Pakistani officials have said the visit was scheduled well ahead of current developments. In an interview to Russia's state-controlled RT channel on Tuesday, Imran said the visit would focus on Pakistan's relations with Russia

The two-day visit to Moscow by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan beginning on Wednesday (February 23) comes at a time when President Vladimir Putin is the bad boy of the world for his actions against Ukraine. Imran will become the first foreign leader to visit Russia after Putin recognised two breakaway regions of Ukraine as independent republics, and the first Prime Minister of Pakistan to travel to that country since the landmark visit by Nawaz Sharif in 1999.

Imran is visiting Russia on the Kremlin's invitation, and Pakistani officials have said the visit was scheduled well ahead of current developments. In an interview to Russia's state-controlled RT channel on Tuesday, Imran said the visit would focus on Pakistan's relations with Russia.

"This [Ukraine crisis] does not concern us. We have a bilateral relationship with Russia, and we really

want to strengthen it," Imran said, adding that Pakistan wanted trade relations with "all countries". "I do not believe that military conflicts solve problems. The countries that rely on a military conflict have not

**While Imran's visit reflects the greatly improved ties between Pakistan and Russia, their mutual partnership with China that has grown in recent years signals the undeniable development of a new axis in South Asia and Central Asia**

studied history properly," he said. "The developing world really wishes that there is not another Cold War. ... Now, what we want to do is not become part of any bloc." While Imran's visit reflects the greatly improved ties between Pakistan and Russia, their mutual partnership with China that has grown in recent years signals the undeniable development of a new axis in South Asia and Central Asia. The relations of each of these countries with the United States have worsened over the last two years. This and their

overlapping stakes and interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the Belt and Road Initiative, have seen these three countries take the lead in projecting the Taliban as the rightful claimants to

power in Kabul.

## Cold War is history

Pakistan's relations with Russia have come a long way since the time it was a willing ally and treaty partner of the US bloc against the Soviet Union. It had helped the US repair its relations with China, which sent Beijing and Moscow further apart. In response, India and USSR solidified their ties with a defence pact, and increased economic and people-to-people exchanges. Pakistan saw itself as a frontline state against the

spread of communism, and actively aided and assisted in the defeat of the Red Army in the first Afghan war, with the US and Saudi Arabia using the Pak Army to funnel funds and weapons to the mujahideen. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to major shifts in international relations. From their vantage points, Pakistan and Russia watched the US and post-economic-reforms India draw closer. Towards the end of the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, Nawaz Sharif became the first Pakistani leader to visit Moscow. But it was only in the next decade that Putin's Russia, looking for new markets for its military hardware, as well as new international partners, began building ties with Pakistan. By then, serious rifts had emerged between the Obama Administration and Pakistan, with the killing of Osama bin Laden in a stealth raid by US marines in Pakistan's

(Contd on page 26)



# J&K Delimitation Panel granted extension of two months

**The Delimitation Commission, tasked to carve out new constituencies in Jammu & Kashmir, has been given an extension of two months to complete its exercise as the term of the panel is set to end in March**

The Delimitation Commission, tasked to carve out new constituencies in Jammu & Kashmir, has been given an extension of two months to complete its exercise as the term of the panel is set to end in March, according to a notification issued by the Union ministry of law and justice. The panel, which was formed in 2020, was granted a year's extension last year for the exercise. Last month, the commission sought a two-month extension in its tenure ending March 5, to conclude the delimitation process, which will pave the way for the much awaited assembly elections in the Union territory.

"In exercise of powers conferred by section 3 of the delimitation act 2002 (33 of 2002) the central government hereby makes the further amendment of two months in the notification of government of India in the



ministry of Law and Justice (Legislative department no So-1015(e) dated 6th March 2020. In the notification in paragraph two for the words 'two years' the words 'two years and two months' shall be substituted," said, Diwakar Singh, joint secretary in the ministry of law

and justice, in the notification. Headed by former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, the commission has so far presented two draft proposals. In its first draft, the panel proposed adding six assembly seats in Jammu region and one in Kashmir. In the

second one, fresh seats were carved out in the Union territory, many old assembly seats were omitted and some were renamed. The two proposals have evoked strong opposition from local parties, with the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) describing

them as "anti-people". PAGD is also scheduled to hold a meeting in Srinagar on Saturday in this regard. Last week, National Conference MPs Farooq Abdullah, Hasnain Masoodi and Akbar Lone, who are associate members of the commission, submitted an objection report with the commission in New Delhi, rejecting the second draft proposal. The MPs alleged that the plan was against the mandate of the commission as it ignored historical aspects, population ratio of assembly segments and geography of the region. Other associate members of the commission are Bharatiya Janata Party MPs Jugal Kishor and Union minister Jitendra Singh. Besides J&K, the commission is also tasked with redrawing the Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland.

## Out of breath: Population boom and its impact on air pollution

Air is important for the survival of all beings. The quality of life we live depends a great deal on the quality of the air we breathe in; while we can survive days without food or water, we cannot survive for more than a few minutes without air. However, air pollution has become one of the largest threats to environmental and human health, making access to clean air a global issue. A rapid increase in the human population, industrialisation, deforestation, economic growth, and vehicular emissions have been attributed as major drivers for the continuous deterioration of air quality.

The ever-growing global population accelerates greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in a negative impact on air quality. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that globally, around 7 million people die every year from indoor and outdoor air pollution. Around 92 per cent of the world's



population breathes air with high levels of pollutants exceeding WHO guidelines. Effects of air pollution on human health are serious. Diseases like asthma, lung cancer, pulmonary illnesses, and heart diseases can all be associated with air pollution and the poor air quality we inhale.

### Pollution and Children

Children, however, are most vulnerable to the adverse effects

of air pollution due to their developing lungs and their high activity levels. Nearly 6,00,000 children globally died from acute lower respiratory infections caused by air pollution in 2016, according to a WHO report. The World Health Organization reports that 93 per cent of children worldwide under the age of 15 breathe in air that is so toxic that it severely impacts their health. There is some evidence

that polluted air can even harm a baby while they are still in the womb. As a result of air pollution exposure during pregnancy, children can be born with defects in the respiratory system, and brain and spinal defects as well.

### Air pollution in India

By 2027, India will overtake China as the most populous country with almost 1.39 billion people. The impact of the country's

growing population on air quality is evident, the country is ranked third on the global pollution index. India has 22 of the 30 most polluted cities in the world according to the 'World Air Report, 2020'; Delhi tops the list. With so much smog covering Delhi, curbing air pollution has proven to be a challenge. The latest statistics from the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR) indicate that the levels of Particulate Matter 10 (PM 10) and Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM 2.5) have reached 876 and 680 micrograms per cubic metres, compared to the safe limits of 100 and 60 micrograms per cubic metres respectively. Emissions from vehicles, industries, and power plants, dust from heavy constructions, increased deforestation, waste burning, and seasonal activities like stubble burning during harvest seasons and Diwali fireworks are the major drivers of the poor air quality in the National Capital Region.

(Contd on page 27)



# Bicycles in bombings: A short history

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during an election speech in Uttar Pradesh, appeared to suggest a connection between the 2008 Ahmedabad blasts and the Samajwadi Party due to its election symbol, the bicycle. A look at how bicycles have been used as carriers of bombs**

During an election speech in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appeared to suggest a connection between the 2008 Ahmedabad blasts and the Samajwadi Party (SP), wondering why the terrorists had chosen to plant bombs on bicycles, which is the SP's election symbol.

The Election Commission of India (EC) allotted the bicycle symbol to the SP after Mulayam Singh Yadav split from the Janata Dal to form his own party in October 1992. Under the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, the EC is empowered to recognise political parties and to allot them symbols. Bicycles were first used as carriers of bombs in the 2006 Malegaon blasts, in which a Hindutva group led by former RSS pracharak Sunil Joshi was

accused of targeting the Muslim-dominated town in Maharashtra. According to the NIA's chargesheet, the perpetrators of the blast strapped two bombs on different bicycles and placed them in the town on September 8, 2006. On November 23, 2007, a series of blasts occurred between 1 pm and 1.30 pm near courts in Varanasi, Lucknow, and Faizabad. The five bombs in these blasts that killed 15 people, were strapped to bicycles. Investigators later claimed the the Indian Mujahideen (IM) was behind the attacks.

Earlier that year, on May 22, 2007, three bombs kept on bicycles had gone off in Gorakhpur, injuring three persons. In December 2020, a local court convicted alleged HuJI operative Mohammad Tariq Qasmi and sentenced him to life



in prison for the attacks.

On May 13, 2008, nine bombs strapped to bicycles went off at eight locations in Jaipur, killing 71 people. This was the first blast where the IM took responsibility by sending emails to various media houses.

On July 26, 2008, 22 bombs killed 56 people in Ahmedabad. Several of these bombs were found to have been fitted on bicycles. The IM claimed responsibility, and its alleged members were sentenced to death by a trial court on

Friday. On August 1, 2012, blast by adding jagged metal bicycles were used as bomb carriers in Pune. One person was injured in the four low-intensity blasts, and suspected IM operatives were arrested.

Less than a year later, the IM used two cycles to plant bombs at Hyderabad's Dilsukhnagar market on February 21, 2013. Eighteen people were killed. Terrorist groups have long used bicycles to plant bombs. They are easy and cheap to procure anywhere in the world, and increase the impact of the

of a bicycle bomb goes back to 1939, when the Irish Republican Army left a bomb in the basket of a bicycle that exploded, killing five people in Coventry in the United Kingdom.

Thereafter, bicycle bombs were used in the 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s in the UK, and Germany, and throughout the 21st century in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia and Spain, among other countries.

## Supreme Court reserves verdict on challenge to OROP

**The OROP policy was challenged by a group of military veterans on the ground that there was a sharp difference between the policy on paper and policy in action**

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved orders on a petition challenging the implementation of the one-rank-one-pension (OROP) announced by the Centre in November 2015. The policy was challenged by a group of military veterans under the banner of the All India Ex-servicemen Movement in 2016 on the ground that there was a sharp difference between the policy on paper and policy in action, which resulted in one rank, many pensions. A bench of justices Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, Surya Kant and Vikram Nath, before reserving orders, heard the final leg of arguments by additional solicitor general (ASG) N Venkatraman and senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi appearing for the petitioner.

The Centre told the court that OROP was made applicable to those who retire from the military before July 1, 2014, after careful examination to ensure there was no discrimination within ranks. "The core parameter of

OROP is same rank and same length of service," ASG said, adding that originally OROP was intended to involve a financial implication of ₹5,200 crore annually but on implementation, the actual payout for 2013-14 came to ₹7,123 crore. With the clearing of backlog (arrears), this amount increased to over ₹10,000 crore. The policy as it stands involves periodic review of pension after every five years with the pension

being fixed based on 2013 salaries. In their petition, military veterans demanded 2014 salary to be taken as the base year and relied on a 2011 report presented by a Rajya Sabha committee headed by veteran BJP leader Bhagat Singh Koshiyari (known as Koshiyari Committee) which defined OROP as uniform pension for all armed forces personnel retiring in the same rank and

with same years of service irrespective of their date of retirement. Demanding an annual revision, the petitioner told the court that the Centre has been shifting



stands. Referring to the statement made during the Budget speech in Parliament in February 2014 and the actual formulation of policy in November 2015, senior lawyer Huzefa Ahmadi said, "In the affidavit, the Centre admits that the statement made in the Budget speech on February 17, 2014, did not have Cabinet approval. The Union has been shifting its stands. The entire argument

of uniformity is a red herring. They do not want annual revision as they do not want to do it even for five years." The ASG explained there was no "dichotomy" as assured career progression (ACP) available in certain ranks, in operation since 2003, and modified ACP or MACP, in operation since 2006 on completion of 8 years, 16 years and 24 years of service, was accounted for while ensuring uniform pensions. However, the petitioner contended that linking MACP with OROP was unnecessary and a guise to explain differential pension within the same rank. The court said that they will determine the validity of the policy based on broad principles put forth by the petitioner without determining the actual rollout. On February 16, the court had asked the Centre to show how OROP practically benefited Army personnel. The bench even asked the Centre to produce the relevant documents that weighed with the Centre in arriving at the present policy.



## Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's first visit to Russia from Feb 23

Pakistan PM Imran Khan will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, including members of the Cabinet, on his two-day visit to Russia

(News Agencies) Prime Minister Imran Khan will travel to Russia on Wednesday on a two-day visit - the first by a Pakistani premier in over two decades during which he will hold talks with President Vladimir Putin and review the bilateral ties including energy cooperation besides exchanging views on major regional and international issues. Prime Minister Khan will pay an official visit to Russia on February 23-24 at the invitation of President Putin, the Foreign Office said in a statement on Monday. He will be accompanied by a high-level delegation including members of the Cabinet, it said. It said that the bilateral summit between President Putin and Prime Minister Khan will be the highlight of the visit. "During the Summit meeting, the two leaders will review the entire array of bilateral relations including energy cooperation. They will also have a wide-ranging exchange of views on major regional and international issues, including Islamophobia and the situation in Afghanistan," the FO said. Khan's visit to Russia comes weeks after he visited China where he attended the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics and held talks with top Chinese leadership including President Xi Jinping despite a diplomatic boycott by the US, European Union and several western countries of the mega event. President Putin also attended the event.



## 'SwissLeaks': Former Pakistan top spy's name features in leaked list of Credit Suisse account holders

The name of General Akhtar Abdur Rehman Khan, Pakistan's former top spy, has featured in a leaked list of high-profile Pakistanis with accounts in Swiss bank Credit Suisse

(News Agencies) Pakistan's former top spy, General Akhtar Abdur Rehman Khan's name, has featured in a list of high-profile Pakistanis with Swiss bank accounts. The list was accessed by German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung as part of 'SwissLeaks' - a massive leak from Credit Suisse, one of the world's largest private banks. While the leaks cover Swiss bank accounts operational between the 1940s and 2010, it does not cover the current operations of Credit Suisse.

The leak has reportedly revealed information about 600 Swiss bank accounts linked to 1,400 Pakistani citizens. Among those featured in the list is General Akhtar Abdur Rehman Khan, the closest aide of former Pakistani dictator Zia-ul-Haq. Both Khan and Haq died in a plane crash in 1988. General Akhtar Abdur Rehman Khan helped funnel billions of dollars in cash and aid from the United States and other countries, as per a report by the New York Times. This money was then used to support Afghan mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet Union. The report also reveals that an account was opened in Credit Suisse in the name of three of General Akhtar's sons in 1985. "Years later,

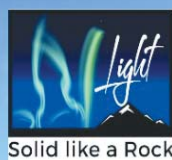
the account would grow to hold USD 3.7 million, the leaked records show," it says, adding that the account was worth at least five million Swiss francs (USD 3.7 million) by 2003.

Media outlets with access to 'Swiss Leaks'



data reportedly identified 30,000 Credit Suisse clients across the world. Swiss bank accounts in the names of these clients hold an estimated 100bn Swiss francs. "We can reveal how Credit Suisse repeatedly either opened or maintained bank accounts for a panoramic array of high-risk clients across the world," The Guardian said in a report. The report goes on to add, "The huge trove of banking data was leaked by an anonymous whistleblower to the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung."

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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.





# China refutes Australia's ship laser 'intimidation' claim

China on Monday denied that one of its naval vessels shone a laser at Australian military aircraft. The incident was termed an 'act of intimidation' by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison



and Australia have nosedived in recent years after Morrison called for an independent investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic, which first emerged globally in the Chinese city of Wuhan. China

responded by placing tariffs on Australian goods worth billions of dollars, dragging both countries into a protracted trade standoff. Beijing also reacted with fury last year when Canberra joined a trilateral

defence pact with the United States and Britain that would allow it to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, to counter China's growing military might in the Asia-Pacific region.

## To support births, Chinese capital Beijing adds fertility services to insurance coverage

(News Agencies) Beijing will include more than a dozen fertility services in a government-backed medical insurance scheme for the Chinese capital, state media reported on Monday, supporting those seeking to have babies with China's birth rate at a record low. A total of 16 medical services using assisted reproductive technologies (ART) will be covered by the city's state insurance effective from March 26, in a move to "take proactive fertility support measures", according to the Beijing Daily. The new reproductive coverage could help lower out-of-pocket costs and benefit couples in lower-income brackets seeking to have babies and those with little or no access to private medical insurance. Official data showed China's birth rate dropped to a record low in 2021, extending a downward trend

that led the national government last year to begin allowing couples to have up to three children. China will work towards achieving an "appropriate" birth rate, Premier Li Keqiang said at the start of the annual parliamentary meeting in March last year. China faces what experts call a "demographic time-bomb" as its elderly population increases while its workforce gets smaller due to decreasing births, partly due to a one-child policy in place for about four decades before being scrapped in 2016. China will raise the statutory retirement age "in a phased manner", Li said last year. The eastern province of Jiangsu said last month that starting from March, employees eligible for state pensions will be able to apply for delayed retirement for no less than one year from the statutory retirement age.

(News Agencies) A Chinese ship sailing off Australia's northern coast last week illuminated the plane, Canberra's defence department said Sunday, adding that the act had "the potential to endanger lives." Beijing said that the laser accusation was "not true". It defended movement of the Chinese ship as "normal navigation ... in line with relevant international law." "We urge Australia to respect the legitimate rights of Chinese ships in relevant sea areas in accordance with international law and stop spreading false information related to China," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a routine press briefing. "I think the Chinese government is hoping that nobody talks about these aggressive bullying acts," Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton said previously, calling the incident "very aggressive". China also was accused of targeting Australian aircraft using military-grade lasers in 2019, when Australian Defence Force helicopters were illuminated over the South China Sea. Relations between China

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## ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

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

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਨਵੇਂ ਸਾਲ ਮੌਕੇ ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੰਗੀ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ

ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਲਿਬਰੇਸ਼ਨ ਫੌਜ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਈ

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# Pakistan: PTI, JUI-F united by misogyny as they oppose 'Aurat March'



study of history or sociology but merely look at a few recent incidents to understand why the status quo is unacceptable, as it is patently unjust, the Dawn reported. Qandeel Baloch's murder for creating a persona on social media that challenged the honour of her brother who killed her demonstrates the direction of verbal, physical, and psychological abuse in the vast majority of cases in Pakistan, that is, from man to woman. In another horrific incident demonstrating the plight of women in Pakistan, two young women were kidnapped, raped and stripped before being paraded in their village because a man from their tribe and a woman from their tormentors' tribe, eloped and got married of their own choice, according to the local newspaper. The Aurat March, which was first held in the city of Karachi in 2018, is now organised every year to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8. The march highlights the issues women face in Pakistan.

## 19-year-old student's legs, fingers amputated after eating leftover Chinese food

(News Agencies) A 19-year-old student had his legs and fingers amputated after eating leftover Chinese takeout food from a restaurant in Boston, US. According to reports, the college student, identified as JC, developed sepsis and gangrene after eating contaminated leftovers. The teen's case was reported in the New England Journal of Medicine, which detailed how he was admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital as he was suffering from "shock, multiple organ failure, skin mottling, and a rapidly progressive reticular rash." "The patient had been well until 20 hours before this admission, when diffuse abdominal pain and nausea developed after he ate rice, chicken, and lo mein leftovers from a

restaurant meal," the outlet said. The person was a part-time worker at the restaurant. After eating the leftovers from the unnamed Chinese outlet, he immediately started throwing up, New York Post reported. This was followed by chills, shortness of breath, headache, blurry vision, and chest pain. A friend of the patient said that his skin had started to turn "purple". "Multiple episodes of emesis [vomiting] occurred, with vomitus that was either bilious or red-brown. The abdominal pain and vomiting were followed by the development of chills, generalized weakness, progressively worsening diffuse myalgias [muscle pains], chest pain, shortness of breath, headache, neck stiffness, and blurry vision," the journal said.

(News Agencies) The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and the opposition Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), which are always at loggerheads, have come together to oppose the Aurat March in Pakistan, local media reported. However, this rare display of unity reeks of deep-seated misogyny and patriarchy in the country. Ahead of the Aurat March that coincides with International Women's Day, the federal religious affairs minister and a leading light of the JUI-F have both termed it "un-Islamic," reported the Dawn newspaper. The two staunch rivals also cite "our culture and tradition" to justify their opposition to it. "If any attempts are made for obscenity on March 8 in Islamabad, we will condemn it," Abdul Majeed Hazarvi, the chief of JUI-F Islamabad wing, had warned earlier. Their argument would have weight if backed by logic, knowledge, or even plain common sense, but their driver appears to have preconceived, archaic notions about a woman's place in society and outright misogyny, reported the Pakistani newspaper. Anyone questioning the legitimacy of the women's rights movement needs not embark on a deep

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# How has China used the Winter Olympics to shape its image?

**Experts say China has used the Olympics to reinforce political ties and influence its global and domestic reputation. Beijing says it is the boycott that has politicized the games**

(SAI Bureau) After athletes from around the world spent two weeks competing in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, many believe the event offered an opportunity for China to try and reshape its international image. Earlier this month, the US initiated a diplomatic boycott of the game with other democratic countries and human rights organizations, accusing Beijing of "sportswashing" its controversial human rights record.

It didn't take long for the Chinese government to unleash its own countermeasures. During the opening ceremony, China appointed Nordic-combined athlete Zhao Jiawen and Uyghur cross-country skier Dinigeer Yilamujiang to light the Olympic cauldron, in a move that received widespread condemnation from human rights activists and foreign governments.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, described Beijing's choice as an attempt to distract the international community from China's human rights abuses. However, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said they viewed the move as "a lovely concept" and denied considering Yilamujiang's ethnicity when approving the proposal.

Apart from appointing a Uyghur athlete as a torchbearer, another athlete that has caught the world's attention is Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai, whose wellbeing has been the focus of global concern since last November. Her sudden disappearance from the public eye triggered a diplomatic boycott by several democratic countries.

However, during the Winter Olympics, Peng not only held a private meeting with IOC President Thomas Bach, but also carried out her first interview with a Western media outlet since she allegedly accused former Chinese vice-premier Zhang Gaoli of sexually assaulting her. In the interview, however, Peng denied making sexual assault allegations against Zhang, and said she had never disappeared.

Following her public appearance at a few Olympic competitions, the outside world still remains unconvinced of her safety, as some activists described the interview as another "forced confession" while the French journalist who interviewed Peng said it's impossible to determine if Peng was safe or not. Yangyang Cheng, a Fellow at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center, said there is a degree of "clumsiness" in the Chinese



government's approach to publicity during the Winter Olympics. "Parading a Uyghur athlete or Peng Shuai is like checking a box without any sincerity of intention or real effort to address the serious issues of human rights," she told DW.

However, the blunt approach serves its purpose: it betrays an arrogance, which Beijing might call 'confidence,' in being comfortably at the center and in a position of power, and treating issues like ethnic oppression and sexual violence like minor nuisances," she added.

Tobias Zuser, a lecturer at the Global Studies Program at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), said that instead of gaining recognition, China is trying to show its confidence to the international community through the Winter Olympics. "[They are] doubling down on their perspective of controversial issues instead of avoiding criticism altogether," he told DW.

## **'Politicizing' the Olympics**

Prior to the start of the Winter Olympics, the Chinese government had repeatedly criticized the diplomatic boycott as a move to "politicize" the Winter Olympics. It reportedly warned foreign athletes not to make speeches that were against the Olympic spirit. The IOC had also warned that politicization could set a "dangerous precedent" and threaten the future of the games. However, on February 17, a spokeswoman for the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) made comments about China's stance on Taiwan, while also describing allegations made against China's persecution of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang as "lies." The IOC

immediately called a meeting with the Chinese organizers following the comments, with IOC President Bach reiterating that both the BOCOG and the IOC were committed to remaining politically neutral.

According to the Olympic Charter, no kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted on any

"[Since] few [heads of states] are traveling in the Covid era and even fewer are traveling to China, it's no surprise that the CCP government used the visits of a few foreign VIPs to the Olympics to engage in other meetings," said Anne-Marie Brady, an expert on Chinese politics at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. Chinese historian Zhang Lifan says that because China will

**According to the Olympic Charter, no kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted on any Olympic site or venue. However, some experts believe it to be wishful thinking to separate politics from the Olympics**

Olympic site or venue. However, some experts believe it to be wishful thinking to separate politics from the Olympics. "It's basically impossible to keep them apart," said Tobias Zuser from CUHK.

"Different host countries may set different agendas, and when national identity is put in the foreground then we would usually also see the inclusion of more nationalistic elements," Zuser told DW. Apart from the controversial comments made by the BOCOG spokeswoman, other experts say the Chinese government has also used the Olympics as an occasion to host political meetings. Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Russian President Vladimir Putin prior to the opening ceremony, during which Putin hailed the "unprecedented ties" between the two countries at a time when Moscow is facing growing tension with the West over the Ukrainian crisis. Meanwhile, Xi also used his meeting with Argentinian President Alberto Fernandez to confirm that the South American country would take part in China's Belt and Road Initiative, according to China's state broadcaster CCTV.

be putting billions of dollars into the project in Argentina, it's hard to measure the effect of these diplomatic meetings. "All in all, a lot of money is put into the project, but it's hard to gauge the results," he told DW.

## **Eileen Gu as a national symbol?**

Another athlete that has become the center of attention during the Winter Olympics is Chinese-American freestyle ski star Eileen Gu, whose success of winning three medals during the Winter Olympics has been widely reported by both Chinese and foreign media outlets.

When she won her first gold medal on February 8, China's state-run tabloid, the Global Times, described the achievement as "historic." Then when the question about her nationality became the focus of foreign media reporting and online discussions, the tabloid came to defend Gu by describing coverage about her in American media outlets as "negative."

The outpouring of admiration and support for Gu from Chinese state media has drawn some cautious reminders from domestic observers. Hu Xijin, the retired editor-in-chief of Global Times, cautioned Chinese

media to avoid overhyping their praise for Gu, as it remains unclear which country she might prefer to be associated with when she becomes older.

While nationalists continue to express their admiration for Gu and her achievements at the Winter Olympics, other Chinese netizens say they find it hard to relate to her rather privileged upbringing. Despite mixed reception, Gu remains overwhelmingly popular on the Chinese internet.

Yangyang Cheng from Yale says that Gu's example helps build the narrative of a Chinese nation that is defined by genetics and not bound by borders. However, she also says it's important for the Chinese public not to over-hype the appeal of Gu beyond individual excellence and aesthetic appeal. "Few, if any Chinese people in China can relate to Gu's upbringing, so she remains an aspirational figure," she told DW. "In this case, her proximity to whiteness, her American father and American upbringing, helps maintain this fantasy."

## **Olympics as a domestic spectacle**

The media coverage of Gu also reflects the contrast between the Chinese media and foreign media's coverage of the Winter Olympics. The New York Times published a piece last week, describing how questions presented by foreign media outlets and Chinese media outlets reflect the "parallel approach of reporting" that they adopt during the Winter Olympics. Brady from the University of Canterbury told DW that because Chinese state media is described as "the tongue and throat of the Party," its job is to promote a positive narrative of the Chinese government and its initiatives. "Their coverage of the Beijing Olympics can only be skewed one way, which is promoting a positive narrative and ignoring any negative aspects," she said. Cheng thinks the stark contrast and Chinese media's positive coverage of the games help Beijing make the case to the domestic audience that Western media and the West are biased against China. "I don't think Chinese state media cares about its reception in the West very much in this case," said Cheng. With the IOC claiming that almost 600 million people have watched the Winter Olympics in China, Zuser says this may prove that the game is still being relatively well-received domestically.



# Afghanistan: Members of Jogi minority demand basic necessities, rights

The members of the Jogi ethnic minority group living in Kabul have complained of the dearth of basic living necessities amid deprivation of national identity, local media reported

(SAI Bureau) The Jogi are an ethnic minority group whose roots are from the Central Asian states. They do not have national identity cards and are deprived of access to education and other basic rights, including property, Tolo News reported citing the members of the group. Mohammad Sabir, who was working as the representative of the Jogi ethnic group in Kabul before the Taliban takeover of the government, said that he was dismissed after the Islamic Emirate came into power. "I was appointed as representative of the people (Jogi). This is my ID. My documents are legal. I started working as representative of Jogi. If they want me to share my documents, I will. I was active in the former government, but I was dismissed after the Islamic Emirate swept into power," he said, according to the Afghan



news agency. However, Nimatullah Barakzai, a spokesman of Kabul municipality, claimed that Sabir was fired because he was not qualified for the position. "The person that you have asked about was disqualified as a local representative. This person has no property, which

is one of the conditions to be a representative. He is not educated," the media outlet quoted him as saying. Taliban said that there is no exact information about the number of people with Jogi ethnicity living in Afghanistan. "Due to lack of national identity cards, the Jogi lack access to education," Tolo News quoted the group as saying. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's swift ascension to power occurred in mid-August, triggering an economic disarray and food shortages that push the country to the brink of a humanitarian crisis, reported Sputnik.

## Arrest of Mongolian activist and outspoken critic of China sparks outrage

(SAI Bureau) A prominent activist who has been an outspoken critic of China was arrested in Mongolia for "engaging in illegal activities", local media reported. The arrest sparked outrage in the landlocked country, with many supporters viewing it as a part of a wider effort to "clean up" China's critics in the country. Munkhbayar Chuluundorj was arrested Friday in Ulaanbaatar on suspicion of "receiving instructions and funds from a foreign intelligence group", the country's spy agency, the General Intelligence Agency, said, without giving further details.

Supporters of Chuluundorj suspects that his remark on China had brought him under official scrutiny. In Facebook posts, he recently called for the Mongolian prime minister to resign over his close relationship with Beijing, saying "our nation's independence will be lost and all citizens of Mongolia will become slaves of China", reports AFP. Footage of the arrest

published by Mongolian outlet Eguur News showed Chuluundorj being led away by armed police down a shop-lined road.

According to local media reports, a closed-door trial is underway and the visits from relatives are being denied, the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Centre, an overseas NGO that advocates for ethnic Mongols, quoted his brother Munkh-erdene as saying. The NGO said Munkhbayar is "one of the most vocal critics of the Mongolian government's cosy relationship with China". Inner Mongolian activists in Mongolia say they have faced threats and intimidation from authorities after a widespread protest movement against Chinese-language curriculum reforms across the border was met with a harsh police crackdown. Activists also say China has pressured Mongolia to deport Inner Mongolian political refugees back to the country.



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# US plans to cut ties with targeted Russian banks if Ukraine is invaded: Sources

(SAI Bureau) President Joe Biden's administration has prepared an initial package of sanctions against Russia that includes barring U.S. financial institutions from processing transactions for major Russian banks, three people familiar with the matter said. The measures, which would only be implemented if Russia invades Ukraine, aim to hurt the Russian economy by cutting the "correspondent" banking relationships between targeted Russian banks and US banks that enable international payments. While US authorities have said banking restrictions would be part of a package of possible sanctions, the administration's plan to cut correspondent banking ties - which underpin global money flows - has not previously been reported.

The United States will also wield its most powerful sanctioning tool against certain Russian individuals and companies by placing them on the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list, effectively kicking them out of the U.S. banking system, banning their trade with Americans and freezing their U.S. assets, the same sources said. The White House and Treasury

Department declined to comment. The sources said the package could change up to the last minute and it was unclear who the targets would be. However, they believe top Russian financial institutions including VTB Bank, Sberbank, VEB, and Gazprombank are possible targets.

Experts consulted by Reuters said that while the correspondent banking tool lacks the punch of an SDN designation, which freezes a bank's assets, they could still deal a meaningful blow to the target banks by making it difficult to transact in US dollars, the global reserve currency. Much of global trade is transacted in dollars. It is unclear whether Russian banks would be added to the SDN list, but both types of sanctions could hit Russia hard. "Since a significant number of global trade transactions are in U.S. dollars this is a sanction with bite, but without the more complicated and deadly sanction of being placed on the SDN list and having all assets in the U.S. or in the hands of U.S. persons frozen," said Washington

lawyer Kay Georgi, who specializes in international trade. Sources noted that the administration could exempt certain transactions from the restrictions if deemed necessary.



## 'UPFRONT COSTS'

The Biden administration has been threatening tough banking sanctions against Russia for weeks in a bid to deter Russian President Vladimir Putin from invading Ukraine. Moscow has amassed upwards of 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders, but Putin has denied plans to launch an attack. Peter Harrell, who sits on the National Security Council, said last month that "heavy hitting financial sanctions" were part of a strategy to hurt Russia's economy but spare its citizens. "The goal of the financial sanctions is really to have short

term upfront costs on Russia, to trigger capital flight, to trigger inflation, to make the Russian central bank provide bailouts to its banks," he said in a speech late last month. The tough warnings have put some U.S. financial firms on edge. Members of the financial services and payment industries have been in touch in recent days with the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which administers sanctions, sources said. Tensions grew over the weekend as Russia extended military drills in Belarus, heightening fears among Western powers of an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine. Biden and Putin on Sunday agreed in principle to a summit, France said, offering hope conflict could be avoided.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the United States and Britain would cut off Russian companies' access to U.S. dollars and British pounds if the Kremlin orders an invasion. The Biden administration has been similarly aggressive in its rhetoric. In a briefing on Friday, Deputy National Security advisor Daleep Singh told reporters that the cost to Russia of an invasion would be "immense, both to its economy and its strategic position in the world."

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## Trump's Truth Social app tops download chart on Apple's App Store

(SAI Bureau) Former US president Donald Trump's now social media app, Truth Social was launched on Apple store late on Sunday (ET). The app may mark Trump's return to social media after he was banned from popular platforms like Facebook, Twitter etc last year. The platforms had taken action against Trump over January 6, 2021 attack on US Capitol.

The app was available shortly before midnight ET and was the top free app available on the App Store early Monday. Truth Social was automatically downloaded to Apple Inc devices belonging to users who had pre-ordered the app. Many users reported either having trouble registering

for an account or were added to a waitlist with a message: "Due to massive demand, we have placed you on our waitlist."

The app has been available for people invited to use it during its test phase, Reuters previously reported.

Trump was banned from Twitter Inc, Facebook and Alphabet Inc's YouTube following the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by his supporters, after he was accused of posting messages inciting violence.

Led by former Republican U.S. Representative Devin Nunes, Trump Media & Technology Group (TMTG), the venture behind Truth Social, joins a growing portfolio of technology

companies that are positioning themselves as champions of free speech and hope to draw users who feel their views are suppressed on more established platforms.

So far none of the newer companies, which include Twitter competitors Gettr and Parler and video site Rumble, have come close to matching the popularity of their mainstream counterparts. "This week we will begin to roll out on the Apple App Store. That's going to be awesome, because we're going to get so many more people that are going to be on the platform," Nunes said in a Sunday appearance on Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures with Maria Bartiromo".

## Biden blocks trade, investment in parts of Ukraine recognised as independent by Russia

**The Executive Order signed by Biden prohibits new investment, trade and financing by US persons to, from, or in the "so-called DNR and LNR regions" of Ukraine, she said**

(SAI Bureau) US President Joe Biden on Monday signed an executive order blocking trade and investment in parts of Ukraine that have been recognised as independent by his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The White House, which described the Russian actions as blatant violation of Moscow's international commitments, said that economic sanctions are in the pipeline. The move came as Putin escalated the Ukrainian crisis by recognising two Russian separatist-held regions in Ukraine as independent. "We have anticipated a move like this from Russia and are ready to respond immediately," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. The Executive Order signed by Biden prohibits new investment, trade and financing by US persons to, from, or in the "so-called DNR and LNR regions" of Ukraine, she said. The executive order also provides authority to impose sanctions on any person determined to operate in those areas of Ukraine.

"To be clear: these measures are separate from and would be in addition to the swift and severe economic measures we have been preparing in coordination with allies and partners should Russia further invade Ukraine," she said, adding

that the US is continuing to closely consult with allies and partners, including Ukraine, on next steps and on Russia's ongoing escalation along the border with Ukraine. Biden on Monday spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz about Russia's ongoing escalation along the borders of Ukraine. "The leaders strongly condemned President Putin's decision to recognise the so-called DNR and LNR regions of Ukraine as 'independent'." They discussed how they will continue to coordinate their response on next steps," the White House said. Soon thereafter, Biden also spoke with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"Biden strongly condemned Russian President Putin's decision to purportedly recognise the 'independence' of the so-called DNR and LNR regions of Ukraine. He updated President Zelenskyy on the United States' response, including our plan to issue sanctions," the White House said. "Biden reiterated that the United States would respond swiftly and decisively, in lock-step

with its allies and partners, to further Russian aggression against Ukraine," it added. In a joint statement, House Foreign Affairs Committee Lead Republican Michael McCaul and House Armed Services Committee Lead Republican Mike Rogers demanded that the US must immediately impose real costs for this blatant act of aggression and flagrant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. "Unfortunately, the sanctions previewed by the White House thus far are the definition of impotence. With reports that Putin is now sending



troops into the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk under the guise of 'peacekeepers,' now is not the time for symbolic pinpricks that will serve only to embolden Putin and endanger our friends in Ukraine," they said. "Now is the time for

President Biden to impose sanctions that strike at the heart of the Russian economy, and permanently end Nord Stream 2 once and for all, as he promised the world he would do," the two Republicans said.

## Flight tracker highlights US spy plane over empty Ukrainian airspace

(SAI Bureau) While Ukraine's airspace has been largely empty amid the crisis with Russia, a remotely piloted US military vehicle called the RQ-4 Global Hawk has flown over the country in circles for hours at a time. Over the past month, two of the spy planes have travelled on regular missions from the

Mediterranean Sea to Ukraine, where they have navigated in repeated loops in the north and the east, according to Flightradar24. The drones' high-altitude, long-distance flights have coincided with a military build-up by Russia along the Ukrainian

border and a flurry of diplomacy among leaders of the United States, Europe and Russia to avert war.



At times, the two planes - under the call signs Forte10, Forte11 and Forte12 - have been the only active aircraft publicly visible over eastern Ukraine. Aviation watchers have

taken note, speculating that the United States is making its presence known in a show of force. "With these types of flights, leaving the transponder on is a conscious decision," said Ian Petchenik, communications director at Flightradar24.



# Emerging axes, new equations: Pak-Russia dynamics in a changing world

Abbottabad being the turning point.

## Russia-Pakistan-China

In 2011, to New Delhi's shock, Russia lifted its four-decade-old arms embargo on Pakistan — and within four years, would sell Pakistan its first MiG attack helicopters. As a US defeat in Afghanistan began to look certain, both countries made

common cause on Afghanistan, again to India's dismay. In September 2016, after the Jaish-e-Mohammed attack in Uri, Russia went ahead with a joint military exercise with Pakistan, ignoring New Delhi's appeal against it. In 2017, with Indo-Pak relations at their lowest, Russia sold more helicopters to Pakistan. And after its 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russia found a friend in China, the long-time friend of Pakistan, triangulating the relationship.

Both Pakistan and Russia are participants in China's Belt and Road Initiative. After the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the world has seen the three take common positions and in tacit acknowledgment of each other's interests in that country.

## New Delhi and Moscow

However, Russia is hardly starry-eyed about its relations with Pakistan. As its support for the designation of Pakistan-based terrorist groups, including those targeting India such as the Jaish and its leader, and the Lashkar-e-Taiba, have shown, Russia has clear views against Pakistan's patronage of terrorists. And even while it is supportive of the Taliban regime, Russia is concerned about Islamist extremism emanating from Afghanistan appearing in the Central Asian republics and on the margins of its own territory. Also, even though the Russia-India relationship is not what it used to be in the Soviet days, both sides recognise its continued mutual benefits.

Russia remains India's biggest arms supplier, and India took the risk of being sanctioned by the US when it bought the Russian S 400 missile defence system. And New Delhi has not yet allowed its close ties with the US to tilt its delicate balance on the Ukraine issue.

## Imran and Putin

Imran will meet Putin on Thursday. It will be an opportunity for the two sides to convey their own messages to the West about building partnerships in a changing world — even though they may steer clear of discussing the conflict directly, and focus more on economic ties. Imran is accompanied by a delegation of cabinet ministers and key advisers.

Pakistan wants Russia to invest in, and construct a \$2.5 billion gas pipeline from the seaport in Karachi to Kasur in the Punjab hinterland, even though this pipeline is unlikely to transport Russian gas. Moscow, however, appears to be more interested in the possibility of building the 1,800-km Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline — something that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said last July. Despite publicly stated opposition to normalising relations with India over Kashmir, Pakistani officials too have been talking about the potential of TAPI — while also pushing with the Russians another plan for a Kazakhstan-Pakistan pipeline.

## DMK's landslide victory in urban local body polls

BJP's claims and the result The party's claims were taller even as rivals never expected the BJP to do wonders when they contest alone. But not only that, it was reduced to a single-district party; of the total 308 seats they won, 200 were from the Kanyakumari district alone.

They seem to have also gone wrong in calculations they made in Coimbatore and other western regions, where the state party leadership headed by state chief K Annamalai and the former state chief L Murugan invested a lot of time and resources to build the party in recent years.

Still, BJP leaders can boast of their presence in municipalities and town panchayats in 28 districts, including an account they opened in Greater Chennai Corporation by defeating Congress.

The victory of DMK allies DMK supremo M K Stalin said on Tuesday that the credit for his victory goes to the larger secular alliance. When everything fell in place, and people chose to back DMK again after four previous polls, Congress, CPI, CPI(M), Dalit party VCK and even Vaiko's MDMK were all beneficiaries of the victory. The Indian National Congress in the DMK alliance won 592 seats, including 73 seats in city corporation seats, 151 in municipalities and 368 in town panchayats. DMK allies CPI had 58 seats, CPI(M) won 166 seats, and Vaiko's DMDK bagged 35 seats.

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# Dealing with Covid beyond the pandemic

Mucosal vaccines administered through a nasal spray can correct this significantly but these will quite likely require to be administered repeatedly as the duration of the immunity it confers is relatively short. Bharat Biotech's intranasal vaccine, BBV154, has received regulatory approval for phase 3 clinical trials for use as booster dose (third dose) for those who have received a primary schedule of Covaxin. If it passes the final regulatory test, the vaccine can be a potential game changer.

The performance of the Covid vaccination programme, so far, provides ample testimony to vaccine confidence — trust in the effectiveness and safety of the vaccine, the system that delivers, including the reliability and competence of the health services and professionals

and the perceived motivations of the policy-makers making decisions on the vaccine. In the journey ahead, two key challenges will require to be addressed. One, as perceived risks decline, there could be a rise in vaccine complacency with inoculation not being seen as necessary preventive action. Public messaging must ensure that such complacency does not arise. Two, the drive to make vaccines available and accessible must not flag.

The WHO foresees the acute phase of the pandemic to end by the middle of this year if 70 per cent of the global population is vaccinated — this will limit the emergence of newer variants. The goal of vaccine equity — an ethical imperative as well — has been bedevilled by vaccine shortages and funding and infrastructural

inadequacies. Founded on the principles of human well-being, equal respect, national equity, reciprocity and legitimacy, the WHO's Values Framework considers Covid vaccines as a public good. By and large, however, this message did not receive adequate traction, both across and within countries. We could witness increased cases over relatively shorter periods, outbreaks of smaller scale and the emergence of new variants. Covid-related restrictions are being relaxed in all states. Isolation guidelines and contact management protocols are changing as well. The core principles of prevention continue to be relevant though: Mask-wearing, hand hygiene and vaccination. This is the time to test risk communication strategies. There needs

to more investment in research on social and behavioural aspects of disease management. In fact, dealing with long-Covid will require far greater systemic response than what is being undertaken currently. In its acute phase in the past two years, the Covid-19 response framework was seen through the lens of a disaster. It focused, almost exclusively, on the mortality and morbidity aspects of disease. Revoking the National Disaster Management Act that framed this response ecosystem should now be seriously considered. A switch to a "slow disaster" framework, instead, will enable re-profiling strategies over the next few years to deal with crises that could be long and complex — the resumption of economic activities and education and removing the trauma and scars of the pandemic.

## India-US partnership for post-pandemic world

We could see lifesaving medical innovations reach patients faster and at a better price point by protecting innovation and avoiding unnecessary regulatory divergence. We could better secure our borders through a stronger defence partnership and accelerate the energy transition. In the immediate future, we could ensure more affordable and reliable access to the goods our people need every day, stretching paycheques for our 1.7 billion consumers and citizens. With a reinvigorated Quad and a reopened Trade Policy Forum, we have the government channels to pursue these goals. Now is the time for both governments to begin the hard work of removing the stumbling stones in the commercial relationship and prepare the way for a bilateral trade agreement. That road will be long, and some will call the goal unrealistic. As a diplomat, I heard the doubters make the same arguments before we sealed the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement. It was a seemingly impossible undertaking, with a thousand nay-sayers and unworkable obstacles, until leaders on both sides decided it must be done to serve the security interests of both countries. A bipartisan majority in each country ensured the passage of that agreement, which supported India's rise in global affairs and facilitated strategic convergence between Delhi and Washington. Our

leaders can likewise embrace the goal of a bilateral trade agreement as a powerful tool to deliver greater prosperity and opportunity that improves citizens' lives and proves the case for democracy around the world. As we encounter an increasingly competitive and risky geopolitical arena in the 21st century, the US and India

can spearhead a sustainable and inclusive abundance agenda through our trade partnership, making the case for democracy through our shared prosperity. This includes relaxing India's trade barriers, lowering America's talent barriers, ensuring sound and aligned regulatory practices, securing the free world's supply chain, and promoting investment

across the corridor. As we face the challenges to democracy together, our prosperity is our strength, and our commercial relations are essential to enduring and meaningful cooperation. The remarkable history of our nations demonstrates that democracies can secure the liberty, safety, and dignity of their people. Combined with free enterprise, these

commitments can build a more prosperous and exciting future for the world. Our politicians, bureaucrats, and companies must work together to prove that democracies continue to deliver and show that the free people of America and India can lead the 21st-century world to even greater opportunities for the pursuit of happiness.

## Out of breath: Population boom and its impact on air pollution

Delhi's hazardous air pollution puts children at greater risk of developing diseases at a very young age. A recent health survey conducted by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) on 413 children aged between 14 years to 17 years in the city suggests that 75 per cent of the children complained about breathlessness, 24.2 per cent of children face issues of itchy eyes, 22.3 per cent of children complained about runny nose and sneezing, and 20.9 per cent of children complained about coughing in the morning. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the country just adds to the ill effects of polluted air. According to a Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health report from 2020, people living in highly polluted cities are more likely to suffer respiratory and heart diseases and to develop COVID-19 symptoms. In November, the Air Quality Index of Delhi remained in a severe category and as per

the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR), stubble burning contributed 36 per cent to the city's air pollution this year.



increased migration of people just adds to the city's already growing population, resulting in more construction, industries, and energy production, as well as more vehicular emissions. Authorities have taken numerous steps to curb air pollution and improve the quality of air in the country, such as the odd-even traffic rationing scheme, the

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna for cleaner fuels, or the use of Compressed Natural Gas as an alternate fuel for vehicles.

However, considering the alarming levels of PM 2.5 and PM 10, clearly, these measures are failing to tackle the crisis.

### Battle against air pollution

The poorest air quality is often found in cities with high population densities - population density plays a large role in air pollution. The most basic solution to air pollution is to replace fossil fuels with alternative energies such as solar and wind power. However, it is equally imperative to reduce our energy consumption - this can be accomplished by adopting more responsible habits, including sustainable farming practices to prevent the burning of stubble and stabilising human population growth. Air pollution is a silent killer, but it can be curbed with a strong commitment and effective planning.



# I would love to debate with Narendra Modi, says Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan

Meanwhile, Abdul Razak Dawood, adviser to Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on commerce, has backed the resumption of trade with India, which was suspended by Islamabad in August 2019 after New Delhi revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. "As far as the ministry of commerce is concerned, its position is to do trade with India. And my stance is that we should do trade with India and it should be opened now," said Dawood, who also serves as the Prime Minister's Adviser on Textile, Industry, Production, and Investment. "Trade with India is very beneficial to all, especially Pakistan. And I support it,"

he added, according to the Dawn News report. Reiterating his views Khan said Pakistan's regional trading options were already limited, with Iran, its southwestern neighbour, under US sanctions and Afghanistan, to the west, involved in decades of war. Pakistan shares strong economic ties with its northern neighbour, China, which has committed billions of dollars for infrastructure and other projects under its Belt and Road Initiative.

Khan's interview came on the eve of a visit to Moscow, where he will meet President Vladimir Putin, the first visit by a Pakistani leader to Russia in two decades. The two-day visit for

talks on economic cooperation was planned before the current crisis over Ukraine. "This doesn't concern us, we have a bilateral relation with Russia and we really want to strength it," Khan said of the Ukraine crisis. In March, 2021, Pakistan's Economic Coordination Committee had lifted a ban on the import of sugar and cotton from India. However, the decision was withdrawn quickly as it emerged that the major move was taken by Pakistan's Finance Ministry without taking all stakeholders on board, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. India's move to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir

in 2019 outraged Pakistan, which downgraded diplomatic ties and expelled the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad. Pakistan also snapped all air and land links with India and suspended trade and railway services. India has said that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility, and violence. India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility. India has also told Pakistan that "talks and terror" cannot go together and has asked Islamabad to take demonstrable steps against terror groups responsible for launching various attacks on India.

## 'Suisse Secrets': Switzerland based bank denies wrongdoing after massive data leak shows trails of dirty money

Credit Suisse, which is a global investment bank and financial services firm based in Switzerland, on Sunday (February 20) said that it "strongly rejects" allegations of wrongdoing. Credit Suisse is apparently Switzerland's second-largest lender.

Multiple media outlets have published results of investigations into a leak of data on thousands of accounts held there in previous decades. The documents termed "Suisse Secrets" have been published by Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). It is an international investigation into one of the world's wealthiest and most important banks.

The documents have been compiled after more than 163 journalists from 48 media outlets in 39 countries across the world spent months analysing bank account information leaked from Credit Suisse.

OCCRP stated that the leak included more than 18,000 accounts that held in excess of \$100 billion at their peak. It is the only known leak of a major Swiss bank's client data to journalists. The reports mentioned that the leaked data was provided to the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung by an anonymous source more than a year ago and the data includes information about more than 18,000 Credit Suisse accounts and 30,000 account holders. The investigative report, as published by several media out

claims to have found evidence that some of the accounts show trails of involvement in serious crimes such as money laundering or drug trafficking.

The report states that the Suisse Secrets project investigates these account holders, whose exploitation of Swiss banking secrecy is a "prime example of how the international financial industry enables theft and corruption".

"Given Credit Suisse's numerous pledges to reform its due diligence practices over the years, the project highlights the need for increased accountability in this sector," a part of the OCCRP report noted. Meanwhile, the Swiss bank has rejected the allegations. In a statement, it said, "The matters presented are predominantly historical, in some cases dating back as far as the 1940s, and

the accounts of these matters are based on partial, inaccurate, or selective information taken out of context." Credit Suisse further said that it had reviewed accounts that were likely related to the investigative report. "Approximately 90% of the reviewed accounts are today closed or were in the process of closure prior to receipt of the press inquiries, of which over 60% were closed before 2015,"

it said. Credit Suisse also said that it was "deeply aware of its responsibility to clients and the financial system as a whole to ensure that the highest standards of conduct are upheld". It said, "These media allegations appear to be a concerted effort to discredit not only the bank but the Swiss financial market-place as a whole, which has undergone significant changes over the last several years."

## Remains of world's largest pterosaur from Jurassic period found in Scotland, leaving scientists astounded

The research, led by PhD student Natalia Jagielska, also revealed that the creature was a species new to science. It has now been given Scottish Gaelic name Dearnach sgiathanach (jark ski-an-ach), a double meaning of "winged reptile" and "reptile from Skye." "Dearnach is the biggest pterosaur we know from the Jurassic period, and that tells us that pterosaurs got larger much earlier than we thought, long before the Cretaceous period, when they were competing with birds — and that's hugely significant," study senior researcher Steve Brusatte, a professor and personal chair of paleontology and evolution at the University of Edinburgh, said in a statement.

Pterosaurs, which are not dinosaurs, are the first known vertebrates to have evolved powered flight — a feat they accomplished about 50 million years before birds did. The oldest pterosaurs on the record date to about 230 million years ago, during the Triassic period, and it was previously thought that they didn't reach huge sizes until the very late Jurassic or the Cretaceous period (145 million to 66 million years ago). However, to fly, pterosaurs needed lightweight, delicate bones — a feature that means their remains rarely fossilized well. "To achieve flight, pterosaurs had hollow bones with thin bone walls, making their remains incredibly fragile and unfit to preserving for millions of years," study lead researcher Natalia Jagielska, a doctoral candidate of paleontology at the University of Edinburgh, said in the statement. "And yet our skeleton, about 160 million years on since its death, remains in almost pristine condition, articulated [the bones are in anatomical order] and almost complete. Its sharp fish-snatching teeth still retaining a shiny enamel cover as if he were alive mere weeks ago."





# White House begins referring to Russia action in Ukraine as "invasion"

The White House decided to begin referring to Russia's actions as an "invasion" because of the situation on the ground, according to a US official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations

A red line that President Joe Biden has said would result in the US levying severe sanctions against Moscow. Jon Finer, the principal deputy national security adviser, said Tuesday: "We think this is, yes, the beginning of an invasion, Russia's latest invasion into Ukraine." He said "latest" was important - "an invasion is an invasion and that is what is under way." The White House decided to begin referring to Russia's actions as an "invasion" because of the situation on the ground, according to a US official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The administration resisted initially calling the deployment of troops because the White House wanted to see what Russia was actually going to do. The official added that, after assessing Russian troop movements, it became clear it was a new invasion.

**Budapest:** Hungary's defense minister says the military will deploy soldiers and equipment to the region near the Ukrainian border to prepare for potential humanitarian and border protection operations. Defense Minister Tibor Benko said Prime Minister Viktor Orban ordered the military to mobilise along the country's eastern border to prevent armed groups from potentially entering Hungarian territory, Hungarian state news agency MTI reported. Benko said that he believed further escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine could bring armed activity all the way to Ukraine's western border. He said Hungarian soldiers would need to be prepared for the possible arrival of Ukrainian refugees in the wake of a greater conflict.

**Brussels:** Top European Union officials say the bloc is set to impose sanctions on several Russian officials as well as banks financing the Russian armed forces. It also intends to limit Moscow's access to EU capital and financial markets. A statement Tuesday said the move would "target those who were involved in the illegal decision" to recognise two rebel-held areas in eastern Ukraine. It didn't identify them. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU Council President Charles



Michel said it would also "target trade from the two breakaway regions to and from the EU." They said the restrictive measures would aim to limit "the ability of the Russian state and government to access the EU's capital and financial markets and services, to limit the financing of escalatory and aggressive policies." EU foreign ministers are meeting later Tuesday to discuss the measures. The two leaders said that "the EU has prepared and stands ready to adopt additional measures at a later stage if needed in the light of further developments."

**Belvoir Castle:** Latvia's defense minister has urged world leaders to act now to stop Russian aggression in Ukraine, arguing that sanctions must be swift and punishing or it would be too late to protect international security. Defense Minister Artis Pabriks told The Associated Press on Tuesday that it was time for European countries and their allies to impose sanctions on Russia. He said that "if we do fail to stop Mr. Putin now - to stop his aggression - and if we are not managing to force him to de-escalate now, then our global values will decrease and everybody will think that they can play around with the Europeans - they can play around also with Americans."

**Helsinki:** Finland's president says that, despite Russia's actions in Ukraine, he hasn't seen an increase in Russian military

activity in the Baltic Sea, where many countries are suspicious of Moscow's intentions. President Sauli Niinisto said Tuesday that "strangely enough, the situation in the entire Baltic Sea area seems very calm and the number of Russian military equipment dispatched in the area is on the

decline." He said he doesn't currently see Finland, which is a member of the European Union but not NATO, facing a military threat from Russia. The two countries share a long border. But he stressed that Finland will pay close attention to Moscow's future actions outside Ukraine. Niinisto said he didn't know why Russia has "now simply decided to settle the Ukraine situation that has been going on for some seven, eight years." He said one reason may be Russia has noticed "that Ukraine has been strengthening year-by-year and is continuing to do so."

**The administration resisted initially calling the deployment of troops because the White House wanted to see what Russia was actually going to do. The official added that, after assessing Russian troop movements, it became clear it was a new invasion**

**Berlin:** German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says Russian President Vladimir Putin may be looking for a pretext to occupy the whole of Ukraine. Scholz said Tuesday that his and other countries made clear at a UN Security Council meeting that Moscow "has no support in the world" for its decision to recognise the independence of rebel-held regions in eastern

Ukraine. He said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy "deserves our highest respect for his country not letting itself be provoked by Russia, because the Russian president is waiting for just that to have a pretext possibly to occupy all of Ukraine." Scholz

made the comment during an appearance in Berlin at which he announced the suspension of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany. **Berlin:** Chancellor Olaf Scholz says Germany has taken steps to halt the process of certifying the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia. Scholz told reporters in Berlin on Tuesday that his government was taking the measure in response to Moscow's actions in Ukraine. The pipeline bringing natural gas from Russia to Germany has long been criticized by the United States and some European countries, who argue that it increases Europe's reliance on Russian energy supplies. Scholz said that the government had decided to "reassess" the certification of the pipeline, which hasn't begun operating yet. "That will certainly take time, if I may say so," he said.

**Moscow:** Russia says its recog-

nition of independence for areas in eastern Ukraine extends to territory currently held by Ukrainian forces. The statement Tuesday further raises the stakes amid Western fears that Moscow could follow up on Monday's recognition of rebel regions with a full-fledged invasion of Ukraine. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russia has recognized the rebel regions' independence "in borders that existed when they proclaimed" their independence in 2014. Ukrainian forces later reclaimed control of large parts of both regions during a nearly eight-year conflict that has killed over 14,000 people.

**Damascus:** Syria's foreign minister has praised Russia's recognition of the independence of rebel regions in eastern Ukraine, describing it as a step "toward defending world peace." Faisal Mekdad spoke during a visit to Moscow. He said that "we have been cooperating with the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk for a long time, and we believe that these current conditions will help increase this cooperation," Syria's state news agency SANA reported. Also Tuesday, President Bashar Assad's office released a statement saying that the Syrian president received in December a delegation of Russian legislators, including representatives from the Donetsk region, and told them at the time that Damascus "is ready to recognize the Republic of Donetsk and an agreement was reached to start relations with it." Russia has been a main backer of Assad's government during the Arab country's decade-old conflict. Russian military intervention since September 2015 has helped tip the balance of power in Assad's favor.

**Belgrade:** Most of the leaders in the war-scarred Balkans condemned Russia's decision to recognize two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, while Serbia's president said he fears pressure to join Western sanctions against his Kremlin allies. "There are now many challenges (for Serbia) of political, security and economic nature," Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said. "The political pressures will be greater than ever."

(Contd.)



# Russia moves troops into Ukraine, signs treaties to build military bases

Russia on Monday moved its troops to eastern Ukraine and signed treaties with the two rebel regions-Donetsk and Luhansk that it recognised as independent earlier. The treaties granted Russia rights to set up military installations in the two regions

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered his troops to march into eastern Ukraine, a move that could prove warnings of an invasion by the West. Russia's move came soon after it recognised Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine.

Here are the top developments around the Russia-Ukraine crisis:

1. After days of escalation of tensions along the Russia-Ukraine border, with both sides conducting military drills, Russia on Monday recognised two breakaway states in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine as Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic.



2. Immediately after recognising the two regions, Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to march into eastern

Ukraine. Russia termed the move a necessity to "keep the peace".

3. Russia moved swiftly to sign

two identical friendship treaties that granted it the right to build bases in the separatist regions and they, on paper, can do the

same in Russia.

4. Russia's actions were slammed by the West, with the US imposing trade and investment sanctions on the two regions and the UK threatening to impose additional sanctions on Russia. The United States, however, will continue to pursue diplomacy with Russia until a further invasion into Ukraine, a White House official said.

5. The United Nations convened an emergency meeting of its Security Council where India voiced its concerns over the safety of its citizens in Ukraine. India called for the cessation of hostilities and the promotion of peaceful dialogues to end the crisis.

6. Ukraine and Russia locked horns at the UNSC as each blamed the other for the crisis. While Ukraine called Russia's actions "a virus spread by Kremlin", Russia said that the rights of the people in Donbas must be protected. Russia also said that Ukraine had been taking advantage of Moscow and subjected it to economic "blackmail".

7. The United States is coordinating with its allies and will announce new sanctions against Russia on Tuesday after Moscow recognised two breakaway regions in Ukraine as independent entities and sent "peacekeeping" forces there, US officials have said.

8. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said that his nation is not afraid of anything or anyone. "We are on our own land. We are not afraid of anything or anyone," he said after Russia ordered its troops into eastern Ukraine.

9. Ukraine on February 20 reported that two of its soldiers were killed in separatist shelling.

10. Over 2,000 ceasefire violations have been recorded along the Russia-Ukraine border in the last few days.

## White House begins referring to Russia action in Ukraine as "invasion"

Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic, who led the small Adriatic state to NATO membership in 2017 despite strong opposition from Russia, gave his support to Ukraine. "Montenegro confirms its unanimous support of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders," said Djukanovic. Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic also slammed Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision, as did Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa.

**Athens:** Greece's government says it is drawing up plans to assist some 100,000 ethnic Greeks who live in eastern Ukraine. Andreas Katsaniotis, a deputy foreign minister for Greek communities abroad, said consular services had been enhanced in the Ukrainian port of Mariupol, where the ethnic Greek community is based. Plans to assist members of that community were the subject of an emergency meeting convened Tuesday by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis with top defense, energy and foreign policy officials. Asked if there was a plan to evacuate ethnic

Greeks from the region, Katsaniotis told state television: "Of course, but we still haven't reached that situation."

**Vienna:** Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer says his country has summoned the Russian ambassador to protest Moscow's breach of Ukraine's sovereignty. Nehammer said Austria supports the EU's approach of imposing sanctions against Russia step by step, starting with a formal decision Tuesday afternoon by the bloc's foreign ministers. "There is a variety of sanctions options that now need to be used in a targeted way because we have to assume that we haven't yet reached the peak of the escalation," he told reporters in Vienna.

Nehammer also assured Austrians that even if Russia were to stop delivering natural gas immediately, "the energy supply is secure." Authorities in Vienna are also stepping up surveillance of potential cyberthreats to Austrian government institutions. The country's foreign ministry was targeted in a cyberattack two years ago that was traced to Russia. Ankara, Turkey: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says

Russia's decision to recognize two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine is "unacceptable" and is calling for a respect of international laws. Speaking to Turkish journalists during a three-nation tour of Africa, Erdogan said the decision was a clear violation of Ukraine's political unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"We consider this decision by Russia as being unacceptable," Erdogan said. "We reiterate our call to the parties to respect common sense and international law." His comments were reported by Hurriyet newspaper and other media.

**Helsinki:** The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have strongly condemned Russia's decision to recognize the separatist regions of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent states.

Estonian President Alar Karis said that "Russia tore the Minsk agreements into pieces," referring to a 2015 peace deal. He said "this shows that Moscow's aim is to deepen the conflict, not to solve it." In Baltic neighbour Latvia, President Egils Levits, Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins and the country's Parliament re-

leased a joint statement condemning Moscow's actions.

The statement said that "in a gross violation of international law, under a fabricated pretext, and by spreading false information, Russia seeks to induce a change in Ukraine's political leadership and foreign policy course by violent means." Lithuania's Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte tweeted that Russian President Vladimir "Putin just put Kafka & Orwell to shame: no limits to a dictator's imagination, no lows too low, no lies too blatant, no red lines too red to cross." She added: "What we witnessed (Monday evening) might seem surreal for democratic world. But the way we respond will define us for the generations to come."

**Brussels:** European Union foreign ministers will meet Tuesday to decide what sanctions to impose over Russia's decision to recognise two separatist regions in southeast Ukraine, the EU's top diplomat said. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the meeting in Paris "will take the political decisions vis-à-vis the European response." "Clearly, that response will be in the form of sanctions," Borrell said.



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# Ukraine Crisis Kicks Off New Superpower Struggle Among U.S., Russia and China

(By Michael R. Gordon, as seen on WSJ.com)

Russia's audacious military mobilization in and around Ukraine is the first major skirmish of a new order in international politics, with three major powers jostling for position in ways that threaten America's primacy.

The challenges are different than those the U.S. and its network of alliances faced in the Cold War. Russia and China have built a thriving partnership based in part on a shared interest in diminishing U.S. power. Unlike the Sino-Soviet bloc of the 1950s, Russia is a critical gas supplier to Europe, while China isn't an impoverished, war-ravaged partner but the world's manufacturing powerhouse with an expanding military.

In deploying a huge force against Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin is demanding that the West rewrite the post-Cold War security arrangements for Europe and demonstrated that Russia has the military capability to impose its will despite Western objections and economic sanctions.

To do this, Mr. Putin shifted military units from Russia's border with China, showing confidence in his relations with Beijing. The two powers, in effect, are coordinating to reshape the global order to their advantage, though their ties stop short of a formal alliance.

This emerging order leaves the U.S. contending with two adversaries at once in geographically disparate parts of the world where America has close partners and deep economic and political interests. The Biden administration now faces big decisions on whether to regear its priorities, step up military spending, de-

mand allies contribute more, station additional forces abroad and develop more diverse energy sources to reduce Europe's dependence on Moscow.

"We all thought we were looking at a Europe whole, free and at peace indefinitely," said Michele Flournoy, who served as the Pentagon's top policy official during the Obama administration. "We knew that Russia would conduct gray zone operations and that Putin would use his KGB

**As the globe's sole superpower, the U.S. pushed to promote democracy around the world and expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the key Cold War military alliance in Europe, to include former members of the Kremlin-dominated Warsaw Pact and some former Soviet republics**

playbook to create instability on his periphery. But a wholesale invasion of a sovereign country to reorient its government is a different moment."

"And we're seeing that while Beijing doesn't really like Putin's tactics, they're willing to band together as authoritarian states against the Western democracies," Ms. Flournoy added. "We are going to see more and more of that in the future."

The U.S. predicament in part grew out of moves by Washington at the end of the Cold War. As the globe's sole superpower, the U.S. pushed to promote democracy around the world and expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the key Cold War military alliance in Europe, to include former members of the Kremlin-dominated Warsaw Pact and some former Soviet republics. That responded to the decades-old yearnings

of East European nations to be free of Moscow's dominion.

Mr. Putin, however, saw his rivalry with the West as a zero-sum game and set about moving Russia toward its Soviet-era prominence, with greater say over the nations on its periphery.

China's Communist Party leadership also saw pro-democracy protest movements in former Soviet republics as U.S.-engineered plots that could ultimately be

used against Beijing. In response, China's leadership tightened controls at home while redoubling a military buildup—trends that accelerated when Xi Jinping took charge a decade ago. When pro-democracy protesters rose up in Hong Kong, Mr. Xi imposed harsh security laws, brushing off agreements his predecessors made giving autonomy to the former British colony and international financial center.

For much of the past decade, the U.S. security establishment began taking note of what the Pentagon in 2015 called the "re-emergence of great power competition" and shifted from its emphasis of counterterrorism operations in the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

In setting priorities as the Pentagon seeks to retool for future conflicts, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has repeatedly cast China as the "pacing challenge"

while Russia was seen as the lesser longer-term danger.

The projection matched President Biden's priorities even as he pledged to buttress the world's democracies. He took office wanting to focus on the pandemic, the economy and other domestic issues, promising a "middle class" foreign policy that would deliver returns for Americans after costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Managing relations with Moscow would help the administration concentrate on the military, economic and technological competition with Beijing.

Toward this end, Mr. Biden held a summit meeting in June with Mr. Putin to forge what the White House called a "stable, predictable" relationship. To put guardrails on relations with Moscow, Mr. Biden agreed to a five-year extension of the New START treaty limiting long-range U.S. and Russian nuclear arms. The White House also directed the Pentagon to explore using Russian bases in Central Asia to prevent the re-emergence of a terrorist threat in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Mr. Putin, however, tried to take advantage of Washington's focus elsewhere to pursue his agenda of bringing Belarus and Ukraine into Moscow's sphere of influence, most notably with Russia's major military buildup on the doorstep of the U.S.'s European allies.

Even with annual defense budgets that soared over \$700 billion, coping with an urgent Russian-generated crisis while preparing for a Chinese threat whose peak is still years away presents an enormous challenge for the Pentagon.

"The United States is particularly at risk



# Ukraine Crisis Kicks Off.....

of being overwhelmed should its military be forced to fight on two or more fronts simultaneously," said a Congressionally mandated study of the Pentagon's strategy that was issued in 2018 by former military officers and defense officials. One of them, Kathleen Hicks, is now President Biden's deputy defense secretary directing the agency's programs and plans.

The crisis is already leading the U.S. to move more troops to Europe and will likely prompt it to rethink defense spending levels and perhaps even the size of its armed forces. The era of nuclear reductions may come to an end as the U.S. military establishment argues for a large enough nuclear arsenal to deter both Russia's formidable nuclear weaponry and China's rapidly growing nuclear forces, which aren't limited by any arms-control agreement.

Having to counter both Russia and China will also lead the Biden administration to lean more heavily on the alliances the U.S. has used to augment its global power. When Messrs. Putin and Xi held a summit in Beijing earlier this month, a 5,300-word statement they released afterward took aim at NATO as well as U.S. alliances with Australia and others in Asia for seeking "unilateral military advantages to the detriment of the security of others."

China has reinforced military outposts in the South China Sea, a vital global sea lane. It is also constructing a nascent network of bases around the world that could be used by its rapidly expanding navy, piggybacking on port facilities being built as part of its Belt-and-Road infrastructure initiative. The U.S. is trying to prevent the Chinese navy from gaining its first foothold on the Atlantic, pressuring Equatorial Guinea to spurn Beijing's advances.

"The United States is going to have to get used again to operating in multiple theaters simultaneously—not just militarily, but in terms of psychology and foreign-policy making," said Eliot Cohen, a military historian at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank.

Russia Hit With Sanctions

Over Ukraine: What It Means for Putin

Western countries imposed sanctions on Russia as President Biden said Moscow had begun its invasion of Ukraine. The measures are expected to have limited impact on Russia's economy, but the U.S. and its allies say they send a strong signal. Photo Composite: Emily Siu

As the administration tries to sort through the new challenges, the Pentagon has delayed the release of its national defense strategy intended to spell out plans to deter the U.S.'s great power rivals and its new review of what nuclear weapons to develop and the range of threats they should deter. Already, debates are emerging among U.S. defense experts on whether the Pentagon should give equal weight to the twin challenges from Beijing and Moscow or focus more on the Pacific.

Beyond the military, the new confrontation with Moscow might also accelerate a further fracturing of economic globalization. China and the U.S. are trying to unravel supply chains for critical technologies. Should the West impose crippling sanctions on Russian banks and major companies, Moscow is likely to become more reliant on Beijing, which has issued a digital currency and is building a payments system separate from the West's.

Energy is also likely to become an even greater focal point for national security, owing to Europe's dependence on supplies of natural gas from Russia, which accounted for 29% of Europe's natural gas market last year.

"It is already ending the amnesia about the importance of energy security," said Daniel Yergin, vice chairman of research firm IHS Markit. "It means a new emphasis on diversification of energy sources for Europe and a new look at U.S. domestic and international energy policies."

Advocates of using energy as a geopolitical tool say Washington should promote investment in U.S. oil and natural gas and approve new LNG export terminals

and pipelines in the United States.

In Europe, the crisis has already rocked NATO, with its secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, saying the alliance needs to reconfigure itself to deal with a "new normal in European security." At a security conference in Munich over the weekend, Vice President Kamala Harris and other leaders cited the unity that the U.S. and its European partners have displayed in the face of Russia's actions.

In the short run, NATO officials say, that may mean sending new battle groups to southeastern Europe and beefing up allied forces in Poland and the Baltic States on NATO's eastern flank. The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act precludes the alliance from permanently stationing

additional substantial combat forces on the territory of its new Eastern and Central European members, but could now be repealed. A recent poll by the European Council on Foreign Relations noted most Europeans see the Ukraine crisis as a broader threat to Europe. Some current and former officials, however, worry that the alliance's solidarity could fray in the years ahead as it debates the need for greater military spending and wrestles whether its military ties with Georgia might stir new confrontations with Moscow. In June, NATO is planning to adopt its new "strategic concept" at a summit meeting in Madrid, which will outline the broad principles of how the alli-

ance plans to deal with security challenges in the decade ahead. It will come as a report by the Alphen Group by former officials and other experts urges that European members of the alliance and Canada provide for 50% of NATO's minimum military requirements by 2030 so the U.S. can focus more on deterring China.

"Everybody's unified right now and outraged about what the Russians are doing," said Alexander Vershbow, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO who also served as the alliance's deputy secretary-general from 2012 to 2016. "But when we get down to making longer-term commitments to strengthen NATO's defense posture and potentially revisit nuclear issues, it could become very divisive

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# Indian students in Ukraine plan return home as crisis escalates

## India has issued an advisory to its citizens in Ukraine, asking them to return home in the shadow of the worsening crisis

A mid escalating tensions in Ukraine as Russia continues to move troops and weapons to the borders, India has joined other countries in issuing an advisory for its citizens, asking them to return home. India Today TV spoke with some Indian students in Kyiv who shared their thoughts on the ongoing crisis and their plans for returning to India. "I have seen the advisory," a student tells India Today TV, adding, "But as of now there are no problems here. So I won't go back." "I am planning to move back to India in the first week of March. We have some formalities to complete and that will take some time," another says. "We are not panicking and are not scared. There is no shortage



of food or anything here," says a third student. India is taking several measures to ensure the safety of its students in Ukraine. Background work is

underway to prepare an air bridge to airlift students from Kyiv to the nearest country and keep ferrying them back and forth and then from there to India should

the need arise. The crisis, seen by many as one of the worst in the post-Cold War times, and the uncertainty have prompted countries to recall their citizens

from Ukraine. The US has shut its Embassy in Kyiv and moved to Leviev, which is closer to the Polish border. Russia invading Ukraine has triggered a global alarm, with the West warning Russia of unprecedented sanctions if it does not relent. Countries have come together to find a solution through diplomatic channels to prevent an all-out war from breaking out in the region. President Joe Biden is prepared to engage with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to prevent war, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Sunday as he asserted that everything leading up to the actual invasion of Ukraine appears to be taking place, reported news agency PTI.

# India-UAE trade agreement and why it is significant

**India and the UAE have signed an agreement to increase bilateral merchandise trade to \$100 billion by 2030. Why is this trade agreement significant? How will the agreement boost bilateral trade? What are some of the goods excluded from the deal**

India and the UAE have signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the aim of increasing bilateral merchandise trade to \$100 billion by 2030.

**Why is this trade agreement significant?**

The India-UAE CEPA marks the first trade agreement India has made with a major trading partner in over a decade. The last major FTA India signed was with Japan in 2011. The agreement is the first in a series of FTAs that India is pursuing to boost exports sharply to 1 trillion dollars each in merchandise and services by 2030. India is also pursuing FTAs with Australia, UK, Canada, Israel and the EU. Commerce minister Piyush Goyal also said that India could conclude an FTA with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) group of countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) by the end of the year.

**How will the agreement boost bilateral trade?**

Under the agreement, the UAE is set to eliminate duties on 80 per cent of its tariff lines which account for 90 per cent of India's exports to the UAE by value. This is



particularly important for exports in highly competitive areas such as textiles and garments where India exporters have thus far been facing a competitive disadvantage in import tariffs. Commerce secretary BVR Subrahmanyam noted that currently Indian textile and leather exports face a 5 per cent duty in the UAE while the products of competitors in Vietnam and Bangladesh have zero duty access. The zero duty access for Indian products to the UAE is set to expand over 5-10 years to 97 per cent of UAE tariff lines corresponding to 99 per cent of India's exports by value.

Key domestic sectors that are set to benefit include, gems and jewellery, textiles, leather, footwear, sports goods, engineering goods, automobiles and pharmaceuticals. The agreement which is expected

to come into effect in the first week of May is expected to generate "an additional 10 lakh jobs" in India.

**What are some of the goods excluded from the deal?**

India has excluded certain goods from the agreement through a "sensitive list" of products amounting to 10 per cent of tariff lines that are excluded completely from the agreement.

Dairy, fruits, vegetables, cereals, tea, coffee, sugar, food preparations, tobacco, toys, plastics, scrap of aluminium, and copper are among the products that are excluded from the pact. Certain other areas such as those that have seen sharp growth in domestic production or areas where the government is incentivising manufacturing through production-linked incentive schemes have also been excluded from the agreement.



What are key mechanisms to prevent misuse of the trade agreement through re-exports?

The government has emphasised that this agreement contains strict rules of origin to prevent other countries from using the agreement to reroute their exports through UAE to benefit from lower tariffs. Most products require a value addition of 40 per cent in the exporting country under the new agreement to qualify for lower tariffs under the agreement. Sources at the commerce ministry said that aluminium and auto components would require value addition of 45 per cent to qualify as having originating in India or UAE under the agreement. The agreement also requires that any raw agricultural products and oilseeds be "wholly obtained" or "produced entirely in the exporting country" to ensure

that no third party products in these categories can be exported under the agreement.

The agreement also has safeguard mechanisms that would be triggered if there was a significant surge in imports of a specific product in either country.

What are other key new developments?

The India-UAE CEPA marked the first time India had included a chapter on digital trade in an FTA indicating India's willingness to discuss this topic in bilateral agreements. India has previously refused to enter discussions on e-commerce at the WTO over concerns that e-commerce rules being proposed at the WTO could harm domestic trade. The digital trade chapter of the agreement is applicable on a "best endeavours basis" and is not subject to the dispute settlement mechanism under the agreement. The chapter deals with paperless trading, consumer protection, unsolicited commercial electronic messages, personal data protection, cross border flow of information and cooperation on digital products and electronic payments, according to government officials.



# Why Ukraine matters

## What to know about the crisis with Russia



### On the edge of Europe and thousands of miles from the United States, the relevance of Ukraine extends far beyond its borders

First and foremost, a Russian invasion would upend the lives of 44 million Ukrainians. But its fate has huge implications for the rest of Europe, the health of the global economy and America's place in the world. It would increase fears over the security of other former Soviet countries in Eastern Europe. It would heighten fears over the strength of the post-1989 international order and America's ability to influence it. And it would risk raising fuel prices across the world. Here's how Ukraine ended up at the centre of a global crisis.

Why do Russia, the U.S. and Europe care so much about Ukraine? Both Russia and the West see Ukraine as a potential buffer against each other.

Russia considers Ukraine within its natural sphere of influence. Most of it was for centuries part of the Russian Empire, many Ukrainians are native Russian speakers and the country was part of the Soviet Union until winning independence in 1991.

Russia was unnerved when an uprising in 2014 replaced Ukraine's Russia-friendly president with an unequivocally Western-facing government.

Most former Soviet republics and allies in Europe had already joined the European Union or NATO. Ukraine's lurch away from Russian influence felt like the final death knell for Russian power in Eastern Europe.

To Europe and the United States, Ukraine matters in part because they see it as a bellwether for their own influence, and for Russian intentions in the rest of Europe. Ukraine is not part of the European Union or NATO. But it receives considerable financial and military support from Europe and the United States. If Russia invades, it suggests that Moscow might feel

empowered to raise tensions with other former Soviet republics that are now members of the Western alliance, like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Any Russian incursion would also further threaten U.S. dominance over world affairs. By winning the Cold War, the United States established great influence over the international order, but that influence has waned in the past decade, and a Russian invasion might accelerate that process. By reinvigorating NATO, the United States may hope to slow that process down, or even reverse it.

Ukraine was often in the news during the Trump administration. Why? Ukraine was central to the impeachment of former President Donald Trump in 2020.

Several months before impeachment proceedings, Trump had blocked \$391 million in military aid to Ukraine. Soon after, Trump asked the newly elected Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to investigate discredited corruption allegations involving Joe Biden, then the likeliest Democratic challenger to Trump.

As a result, Trump was accused of illegally asking a foreign entity — Ukraine — to intervene in the U.S. political system, and of changing state policy to help him personally. The impeachment vote narrowly failed.

Ukraine was also at the heart of a scandal involving Trump's former campaign manager, Paul Manafort. In 2018, Manafort was jailed for concealing more than \$30 million worth of consultancy fees he received from

Ukrainian oligarchs and government officials to promote the political fortunes of Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian Ukrainian president ousted in the 2014 uprising. Manafort advised Yanukovich between 2006 and 2014, before the latter fled to Russia, and before Manafort began working for Trump.

**Though given money and arms by the West, Ukraine is not actually a NATO member and so cannot count on the direct U.S. military support and of U.S. allies. Its military, though the recipient of hundreds of millions of dollars in Western aid in recent years, is still no match for Russia's**

**Didn't Russia already invade parts of Ukraine?**

Yes. After the uprising in 2014, Russian troops wearing unmarked uniforms invaded Crimea, a strategically important peninsula on the Black Sea. In a referendum condemned as illegal by most of the world, the region then voted by an overwhelming majority to join Russia.

Later in 2014, pro-Russian separatists backed by Russian troops and military hardware captured parts of eastern Ukraine, setting up two rebel republics — in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions — that remain unrecognized by any other state.

Fighting continues today between the Ukrainian state and the separatists. To many Ukrainians, the threat of a broader Russian intervention in Ukraine is therefore merely the latest episode of an unfinished eight-year war. And that war is likely to continue, whether Russia invades in the coming days or not.

**What do Ukrainians want?**

The threat of another Russian invasion has consolidated a growing sense of national pride and unity

among Ukrainians, even among those who grew up speaking Russian. As recently as 2001, opinion polls suggested that roughly half of Ukrainians supported the country's departure from the Soviet Union. Today, more than 80% support Ukraine's independence, and more than half back joining NATO. Though

anxiety courses through the country, life continues more or less as normal in most of it. Both civilians and government leaders say that they remain calm amid foreign reports of an imminent invasion, and some even say they doubt that Russia will actually invade. But at the same time, many civilians have increasingly joined volunteer defense units and signed up for first-aid courses.

**How might Ukraine and its supporters stop another Russian invasion?**

Ukraine could promise to abandon any effort to join NATO, or carry out a never-enforced pair of peace agreements signed in 2014 and 2015 that were considered favorable to Russia. Under the agreements, known as the Minsk Accords, the two separatist territories would rejoin Ukraine — but only in a federal system that could give the territories a veto over Ukrainian foreign policy. But the Ukrainian government's hands are tied, at least in the short term. Abandoning NATO aspirations would contravene the Ukrainian Constitution. And a poll in December found that three-quarters

of Ukrainians either entirely reject carrying out the Minsk Accords, or want them amended. The United States and Europe have more cards up their sleeve. Washington could cut off Russia's largest financial institutions from the global financial system, crippling the Russian economy. Germany could halt the implementation of Nord Stream 2, a major new pipeline transporting Russian gas to Europe. The United Kingdom may place restrictions on Russian oligarchs with property and assets in Britain. And then there is the diplomatic path: The Kremlin insists this crisis is not just about Ukraine but also about the NATO military presence in Eastern Europe, which President Vladimir Putin of Russia describes as an existential threat to Russia's security. He wants NATO to pull back from the region and guarantee that neither Ukraine nor any other countries there will ever join the alliance. President Joe Biden insists that the United States is ready to keep talking, but that it will remain committed to the idea that every country should be free to choose its own alliances.

**Why is Ukraine so vulnerable?**

Though given money and arms by the West, Ukraine is not actually a NATO member and so cannot count on the direct U.S. military support and of U.S. allies. Its military, though the recipient of hundreds of millions of dollars in Western aid in recent years, is still no match for Russia's. It is also surrounded by Russian allies and proxies — and by Russia itself. Russian troops are massed not only along Ukraine's eastern border with Russia but also along the Belarusian border, just over 50 miles north of Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital.



# What is endemic stage of a pandemic, and how far is India from getting there?

**The UK has eased restrictions while new measures in California approach Covid-19 as being endemic. What does endemic stage mean, how far is India from getting there, and what changes in control measures?**

People with Covid-19 will no longer legally need to isolate in United Kingdom and the tests are likely to be scaled back as part of a plan to live with Covid-19. California too has announced a shift to an endemic approach to Covid-19 that will focus on watching out for new variants and reacting quickly to outbreaks rather than issuing mandates for masking indoors.

A look at what an endemic stage of Covid-19 will look like, how the world will reach there, and what it will mean for control measures such as masking, social distancing in India and vaccination globally:

## **What does endemic stage mean, and are we there yet?**

An infection becomes endemic when the rates become static in a given geographical location, meaning that the pathogen causing the disease — SARS-CoV-2 in this case — is likely to remain in circulation without causing large outbreaks as witnessed over the last two years. Although the number of infections in India is consistently declining, experts say they cannot give a deadline on when the disease will become endemic. It will depend on the number of susceptible people in the population, vaccination rates, and emergence of new variants that are able to evade the immune response. “Endemic means that the virus will continue circulating in the population and there will be periodic ups and downs when the conditions are favourable to the virus and less favourable to humans. Take, for example, flu which goes up in the winters and when the season is changing because of lower immunity in people or dengue which goes up after monsoons because of the availability of vectors. Covid-19 also may become seasonal and cause disease in the vulnerable,” said Dr Pramod Garg, director, Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI)-Faridabad. An important determinant for whether we can

“technically” say that the disease is endemic would be a representative sero-survey (population-level survey of antibodies against SARS-CoV-2) and laboratory susceptibility studies, said Dr Amit Singh, associate professor, Centre for Infectious Disease at the Indian Institute of Science-Bangalore.

“We can say that the disease is endemic only after we see that a majority of the people have immunity against the infection either through previous exposure or vaccination. If a representative sero-survey shows over 90% positivity, we can assume that. But we also need to see whether these antibodies can effectively protect against the current variants and a neutralisation study would tell us that,” Dr Singh said.

## **Does it mean we are safer?**

A disease becoming endemic does not mean it is harmless. In an editorial in Nature, Oxford University professor on viral evolution Dr Aris Katzourakis argued, “A disease can be endemic and both widespread and deadly. Malaria killed more than 600,000 people in 2020. Ten million fell ill with tuberculosis that same year and 1.5 million died.

Endemic certainly does not mean that evolution has somehow tamed a pathogen so that life simply returns to normal.” He added, “Nor does it suggest guaranteed stability: there can still be disruptive waves from endemic infections, as seen with the US measles outbreak in 2019.” Researchers are also wary of new variants emerging. Another Nature article on the virus’s future course said, “The sky-high circulation of the Delta variant and the rise of Omicron — aided by inequitable vaccine roll-outs to lower-income countries and minimal control measures in some wealthy countries such as the United States and the United



Kingdom — offer fertile ground for SARS-CoV-2 to take additional surprising evolutionary leaps.”

## **How will control measures change if the disease becomes endemic?**

Although experts have pushed for easing of restrictions, they say that there is a need to maintain high levels of testing and good genomic surveillance. “We need to maintain high levels of testing and ensure that the cases get

said, “It is not always about the numbers. During the peak of a wave, a lot of sequencing makes no sense. It is more important in a period of lull. That is the time to not relax.”

The best way to find new variants, he said, was to “One, conduct a general survey; sequence probably 1% or 2% of the positive cases. Two, wherever there are more cases from an area, we should sequence

new normal, we will be protecting the economy as well. We don’t know when a new variant might emerge. If we look at omicron, it did not cause severe disease in India but in the US it led to high rates of hospitalisations and deaths. US is a smaller country, it is a richer country. We cannot afford to do what they did. We have all suffered, let us not fall into the ditch of a new variant,” he said. Other experts agreed that the precautions should remain in place. Another concern with officially declaring Covid-19 endemic would be fewer resources being made available for measures such as vaccination. “There is a vaccine inequity; not all countries are vaccinated. If the disease is declared endemic, then the 10% vaccination rate in some countries will remain 10%’ nobody will take care of that,” said Dr Singh. “The more a virus replicates, the greater the chance that problematic variants will arise, most probably where spread is highest. The Alpha variant was first identified in the United Kingdom, Delta was first found in India and Omicron in southern Africa — all places where spread was rampant,” Dr Katzourakis wrote in the Nature editorial.

**An infection becomes endemic when the rates become static in a given geographical location, meaning that the pathogen causing the disease — SARS-CoV-2 in this case — is likely to remain in circulation without causing large outbreaks**

reported. Testing is quite less in smaller cities and villages and with home testing becoming available even in bigger cities like Delhi, people are not reporting if they test positive. Testing can tell us whether infections are going up or down,” said Dr Singh. He also insisted on good genomic surveillance. Talking about genomic surveillance when the disease becomes endemic, Dr Rakesh Mishra, former director of Centre For Cellular And Molecular Biology-Hyderabad which is one of the ten central labs of India’s genomic surveillance consortium,

immediately. Third, we need to keep a very close eye on hospitalised cases. The sample of any person admitted to the hospital with positive Covid-19 should be certainly sequenced. If they needed to come to the hospital with severe symptoms, it may be because of a new variant.”

## **Should we continue to mask up?**

“There is no real benefit in declaring that the disease is now endemic,” Dr Mishra said. “What is the hurry to remove restrictions? If we live with the



# Apple, Google privacy moves: boost to user agency, data concentration

**Decisions made recently by Apple and Google to give users greater control over the use of the data they generate online can be seen both as a boost to user privacy and as a step towards consolidating further the position of these companies**

For years, the business model of Internet giants that provided “free” services hinged on collecting user data and monetising the information in the form of advertisements. The global spotlighting of data privacy issues has, however, forced the companies to change their ways of working. At the same time, the big tech firms — Facebook, Apple, Google, Amazon — have come under increasingly intense antitrust scrutiny for attempts to monopolise their businesses.

Decisions made recently by Apple and Google to give users greater control over the use of the data they generate online can be seen both as a boost to user privacy and as a step towards consolidating further the position of these companies.

## What have Apple and Google done?

Last year, Apple added the app tracking transparency (ATT) feature to iPhones and iPads, which requires apps to seek users’ permission to track their activity across other apps and websites. This impacted companies who were dependent on advertising as a revenue model, because the ATT feature cut their access to the data of iPhone users, which they harvested and used for targeted advertising. Meta, Facebook’s parent, said the financial hit from Apple’s move could be “in the order of \$10 billion” for 2022.

Earlier this month, Google announced that it would bring the Privacy Sandbox — the privacy solution that it is building for the web — to Android devices. The new solution would “limit” the sharing of user data with third parties, and operate without cross-app identifiers, including advertising IDs. The advertising ID is a unique, user-resettable ID for advertising provided by Google Play services.

The Privacy Sandbox on Android could go live in two years.

## But what is the Privacy Sandbox?



In the context of the web, Google has said that the Privacy Sandbox will phase out third-party cookies and limit covert tracking. A ‘cookie’ is a small piece of data stored in the browser when a user visits a website.

Third-party cookies are stored by a service that operates across multiple sites. For example, an ad platform might store a cookie when you visit a news site. First-party cookies are stored by the website itself.

So, if the news site is storing a cookie, it will use it to offer curated news items the user is more likely to read. But if an ad platform like Facebook stores a cookie when one visits a news site, it is likely to use that information and categorise the user in certain buckets based on preferences, and will offer advertisers the ability to target the user with specific ads. This can also be used for political advertisements.

## How do cookies work, in plain terms?

Imagine you are flying with a friend, and you have a check-in bag each. Imagine that before putting the bags in the aircraft belly, airline personnel go through their contents. They find a bottle of Chanel perfume and Tommy Hilfiger clothes in your bag, and put a red sticker on it. In your friend’s bag they find a camera tripod and books on photography, and put a blue sticker. (These

stickers are cookies.)

At the destination, the driver of your cab notes the stickers, and hands you separate advertisement flyers: to you for Hermes bags, and to your friend for Canon DSLRs. Brands and local businesses

especially damaging.

While Privacy Sandbox on Android could have a deeper impact on Meta given the larger global market share of Android devices, even the implementation of the solution on the web could hurt

FLoC put the tracking directly into Google’s hands. Antitrust investigations were opened in the UK and the European Union. Google gave up the FLoC project, and last month announced ‘Topics’, through which the company’s Chrome browser would curate a user’s top interests in a week based on browsing history. A key difference between FLoC and Topics is that the latter will exclude categorisation based on sensitive categories such as race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. A developer trial will launch soon, Google said.

While Topics would give users greater choice to limit the gathering and use of their data by third-party apps, it would still continue to track these users through its bouquet of apps such as Search, Gmail, Google Maps, GPay, YouTube, etc.

Additionally, Apple’s move to limit tracking by apps has tipped the scales in favour of Google as far as online advertising is concerned. Notably, online advertising is Google’s core business, unlike Apple. A report in The Wall Street Journal has pointed out that after Apple introduced its privacy feature last year, the cost of acquiring customers for small businesses advertising on Meta’s platforms Facebook and Instagram went up — and some of these small businesses moved their “whole ad budget” to search ads on Google.

**In the context of the web, Google has said that the Privacy Sandbox will phase out third-party cookies and limit covert tracking. A ‘cookie’ is a small piece of data stored in the browser when a user visits a website**

have paid the cab company to hand over pamphlets to passengers, and your ride is now free.

## How has Meta been hurt?

Having got the choice to opt out of app tracking, many iPhone users have done so for apps such as Facebook, stymieing the primary channel for the company’s online advertising business, according to a report in The New York Times.

With the reduction in the volume of data gathered from users’ online activity such as e-commerce and search engine queries, and other social media activity, it has become more difficult for Facebook to target specific ads, potentially cutting the incentive for advertisers to run promotions on the platform. Online ads targeted at iPhone users typically have higher conversion rates than Android, so these users opting out of app tracking is

Meta. Unlike Google and Amazon, Facebook depends heavily on tracking the third-party activity of users to generate data. In the case of Google or Amazon on the other hand, users help generate first-hand data through their queries.

How could these developments lead to further concentration of data?

Solutions such as the Privacy Sandbox mean the phasing out of cookies, currently the go-to tech for online advertisers.

Google had proposed that cookies should be replaced with FLoC (Federated Learning of Cohorts) — which meant that instead of interest-based advertising that was enabled by cookies, users would be bunched into groups with comparable interests. But privacy advocates argued that rather than stopping the tracking of users’ online activity,



# Turnout still awaited, what went into conducting Punjab's elections?

**The forms are submitted at the collection centres in the Assembly constituencies, where they are scrutinised for inconsistencies, if any. Data recorded in figures are checked against words**

Over 24 hours after polls closed in Punjab at 6 pm on Sunday (February 20), the final data on voter turnouts remain awaited. How do election officials reach a definite figure on what percentage of electors cast their vote? Why is the announcement of official figures delayed?

**What safeguards exist to ensure accurate tabulation of data?**

According to Punjab Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) S Karuna Raju, the primary responsibility of collecting voting data lies with polling stations. Information on polling is filled in several forms, in which numbers are written in both figures and words.

The forms are submitted at the collection centres in the Assembly constituencies, where they are scrutinised for inconsistencies, if any. Data recorded in figures are checked against words.

The constituencies submit the forms to district centres, where they are checked again for errors. Thereafter, the data are sent to the office of the CEO, where they are scrutinised once again before being finally submitted to the Election Commission (EC).

The forms are filled in at the levels of the polling stations and assembly constituencies. "These forms are checked at every level before being sent to the EC. There is data entry of figures, manual entry, and then rechecking is done of all the statutory papers," the CEO said. The entire process involves a lot of documentation, even though the polling itself takes place through electronic voting machines.

**How many people are typically involved in conducting an election like the one that was held in Punjab on Sunday?**

More than 2.5 lakh personnel were involved in the conduct of Assembly polls in the state. "Staff are assigned to polling stations in randomly picked teams. This is done deliberately, so that the polling staff are not in familiar surroundings," Raju said.

Polling staff do not know their



destination until the last minute. Procedures such as collecting or replacing election material are accompanied by elaborate documentation, and a lot of paperwork, he said. Four personnel are assigned to every polling booth — a presiding

officer, an assistant presiding officer, and poll officers 1 and 2. There are security personnel, and ASHA and Anganwadi workers who escort persons with disabilities and senior citizens. "I especially thanked chowkidars, ASHA workers, and Anganwadi workers

after the conclusion of polling. They work at the ground level to make the polling process smooth for the voters," the CEO said.

**But why did Punjab still see a smaller share of the electorate coming out to vote compared to 2017?**

There could be several reasons for the lack of enthusiasm, but the CEO declined to speculate on them. "My only job is to make arrangements for the polling process and to ensure that there is no impediment for the voters," Raju said. "We appeal to the people to come. We try to find out if there are any extraneous events (that discourage people) and try to address those," he said.

**The voting was largely peaceful. How was this achieved?**

The CEO credited people's behaviour and understanding. "This (cooperation of voters) is a major factor in the conduct of any event including elections. Elections are voter-centric. There are 2.14 voters in Punjab and the election staff is much smaller. In a democracy there is no space for violence," he said.

## What are Swiss banks and how do they work?

**Swiss bank accounts are attractive to depositors because they combine low levels of risk with very high levels of privacy**

A whistleblower has leaked information on more than \$100 billion held in 30,000 accounts of Zurich-headquartered Credit Suisse, one of the world's most iconic banks — a lot of which is suspected to be dirty money of human rights abusers, fraudsters, and businesspersons who have been put under international sanctions.

The database was given to the German newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung, which shared it with the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project and 46 other news publications including The New York Times, The Guardian, and Le Monde. The investigation refocused attention on Swiss banks and their famous, century-old culture of secrecy which is under pressure as countries around the world try to get their super-rich to pay legitimate taxes on their wealth.

Since at least the beginning of the 18th century, Geneva had become a favoured destination of French royalty and other European elites seeking discreet havens to stash their wealth, and in 1713, Swiss government authorities announced laws prohibiting bankers from giving out information about their customers. Thus began a powerful culture of silence and secrecy that went on to become the defining feature of Swiss banking.

In 1934, Switzerland passed the Federal Act on Banks and Savings Banks, commonly known as the Banking Law of 1934 or the

Swiss Banking Act. The best known part of the law, Article 47, made it a crime to reveal details or information of customers to almost anyone — including the government — without their consent and in the absence of a criminal complaint. Violators can get five years in prison; Article 47 lies at the heart of some of the most stringent banking secrecy laws anywhere.

As wealth became easily mobile across international borders, the safety and stability of Swiss banks, located in a peaceful, politically neutral country committed to discretion, presented an irresistible attraction for the super rich and others who did not want to answer questions about sources of their wealth. Depictions in films created popular images of long tunnels leading to underground vaults, and bank officials with an unwavering reputation for client confidentiality. James Bond's dialogue in The World is Not Enough (1999) is quoted often: "If you can't trust a Swiss banker, what's the world come to?"

**Safe and easy banking**

Swiss bank accounts are attractive to depositors because they combine low levels of risk with very high levels of privacy. The Swiss economy is extremely stable, and the banks are run at very high levels of professionalism.

Almost any adult in the world can open an account in a Swiss bank. Opening an account is not difficult, and requires not

much more than basic KYC, including a proof of identity such as a passport. A minimum balance is required, which varies with the type of account, and from bank to bank.

The patronage of international clients is critical to Swiss banks and to the Swiss economy as a whole. The Guardian reported that almost half of the 7.9 trillion Swiss francs (\$8.59 trillion) of assets under management in Switzerland belong to foreign clients. The banking industry contributes a tenth of Switzerland's GDP and a similar share of the country's jobs. There are more than 240 banks in the country, but Credit Suisse and UBS control about 50% of all banking assets, The Guardian said.

**Question of 'black money'**

"Black money" allegedly stashed away by Indians in Swiss banks is a political issue in India, and parties and political functionaries have often made promises to "bring it back". Swiss authorities have maintained that they cooperate with the Indian government to fight tax evasion and fraud.

The two countries have had a system of automatic exchange of information in tax matters since 2018, under which detailed financial information on all Indian residents with accounts in Swiss financial institutions was provided for the first time to Indian authorities in September 2019.



# What is Pakistan's 'draconian' media law, and why is it being opposed?

**A new law in Pakistan could jail social media users for up to five years for posting "fake news". What is this law, and why was it brought? Why is it being criticised?**

(SAI Bureau) The Imran Khan-led government in Pakistan has promulgated an ordinance to amend the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (Peca) that could see social media users jailed for up to five years for posting "fake news". The ordinance, viewed by the Opposition as an attempt to shield Pakistan's army and judiciary from criticism, was swiftly adopted into law by President Arif Alvi on Sunday (February 20), a day after it was approved by Khan's cabinet.

## What is the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 or Peca?

The Act was originally legislated by the PML-N government led by prime minister Nawaz Sharif in 2016. The party had used its numerical majority in the National Assembly to push through the controversial bill amid protests by the Opposition and civil society organisations. According to Pakistan-based newspaper Dawn, the Act made it an offence to run a website or send information with a "counterfeit source". Parody or satire-based websites and social media accounts also came under its ambit. It also granted authorisation to Federal officers to unlock any electronic device (mobile phones and computers) to investigate a crime.

## What are the key amendments to Peca?

The incumbent government made Peca even more draconian, according to critics, by widening its ambit to cover state institutions such as the military and judiciary. And those charged under the ordinance cannot be granted bail for six months. The jail term has also been raised from three years to five for defaming any person or institution. "The definition of a

person has been expanded to include any company, association or body of persons whether incorporated or not, institution, organisation, authority or any other body established by the government under any law or otherwise," Dawn reported. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance, 2022 also stipulates that courts will have to expedite trials in six months and submit monthly progress reports of any pending trial to the high court concerned stating reasons for the inability to conclude the matter. Further the complainant doesn't necessarily be the aggrieved person or institution, it can be any member of the public, making the new law open for abuse. The revised



rules, according to Dawn, also include "content against Pakistan's cultural and moral trends" as well as content that could "destroy" the morals and harm the mental and physical development of children. The rules would apply to all social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, Law Minister Barrister Farogh Naseem said. As per

the rules, social media companies would be required to set up offices in Pakistan within three months and appoint a compliance officer and grievance officer to address complaints within seven working days.

## Why is it being opposed?

Pakistan's Human Rights Commission, which called the legislation "undemocratic", said "it will ... inevitably be used to clamp down on dissenters and critics of the government and state institutions." Representatives of media and journalist organisations also called it a blatant attempt to curb freedom of expression, a space that is already shrinking in the country. They walked out from a meeting with officials of the Ministry

of Information and Broadcasting and vowed to challenge the "draconian amendments" in court. PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz, whose party passed the original bill, called it an attempt to "silence the media and the Opposition". "Don't say we didn't warn you," she said. The PTI government, however, insisted that the amended law was primarily for a public figure or a public office holder and it would help curb fake news. Addressing the press, Law Minister Barrister Farogh Naseem said, "Suppose, fake news is spread about a veteran film actor named Nadeem. It's not necessary that Nadeem himself should turn up to lodge a complaint. Instead, anyone can approach a relevant authority with a complaint and the case has to be wrapped up within six months under the law."

## Are there other laws that seek to protect state institutions?

The National Assembly had passed the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2020, that seeks to jail anyone who "ridicules or brings into disrepute or defames the military" for up to two years or impose a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh. The bill was introduced by a PTI lawmaker after Opposition leaders, especially former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, blamed the military for all the problems ailing the country.

# Covid subvariant 'Omicron BA.2' as deadly as Delta, says expert. What makes it worrisome?

(SAI Bureau) Coronavirus pandemic has been troublesome for most parts of the world in last two years. What's more worrisome is the emergence of variants and subvariants.

One subvariant, which can prove to be as deadly as Delta and previously identified Covid variants is Omicron subvariant BA.2. It can also be called as 'stealth Omicron'. The new lab studies have revealed that this subvariant BA.2 can cause severe illnesses. Considering this, epidemiologist Eric Fang has voiced concern and wants it to be upgraded as 'variant of concern'. This subvariant may have features, which can make it capable of causing serious illnesses. It has immune escape properties just like subvariant BA.1. It is resistant to treatments like sotrovimab, the monoclonal antibody. Although the study is yet to be peer-reviewed, it has been posted on the preprint repository, BioRxiv. Although BA.2 is considered



as an Omicron variant, its genomic sequence is heavily different from BA.1, the researchers said. "And, this suggests that the virological

characteristics of BA.2 are different from that of BA.1," they added. In a tweet, Fang said that BA2 is seriously bad news. It's both faster transmission than

BA2 and if it's truly more severe and as evasive against prior immunity including BA1 old Omicron immunity—then it'd be the worse of four worlds.



## Big risk factor you should know before making investment



(SAI Bureau) In the ongoing financial year, that will end on March 31, one in three IPOs have been trading below the price that was offered.

As Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) gears up to launch its mega initial public offering (IPO), it is expected that many people will go for investment in the initial share sale for the first time.

### RISK FACTOR

In the ongoing financial year, that will end on March 31, one in three IPOs have been trading below the price that was offered.

In the current fiscal since April 1, 2021, around 50 companies managed to garner Rs 1,11,156 crore, according to a report by Indian Express.

However, 18 out of those 50 listings on the share market have proved to be loss-making affairs for investors. Out of the remaining 32 companies, around 12 have managed to generate capital gains of up to 15 per cent, the IE report says.

### PAYTM, CARTRADE, ZOMATO, NYKAA

Investors in Paytm (One97 Communications) and CarTrade Tech experienced the maximum losses. While Zomato shares witnessed a correction, Nykaa (FSN E-commerce) shares witnessed a drop.

### LIC IPO

The most prominent upcoming IPOs are LIC, Byju's, Ola and Delhivery.

LIC's IPO is a 100 per cent offer for sale (OFS) by the government of India and no fresh issue of shares will be offered by the insurer. For filing valuation, about 31.6 crore shares are on offer representing 5 per cent equity, Secretary, DIPAM tweeted. LIC has a 66 per cent market share in New Business Premiums with 283 million policies and 1.35 million agents as of March 31, 2021. The embedded value of LIC as of September 30, 2021 is Rs 5,39,686 crore (about INR 5.4 trillion).

## Bitcoin plunges below \$37,000 as global cryptocurrency market crashes

**Bitcoin fell over six per cent, the lowest since February 3, and Ethereum was down by more than seven per cent, the lowest since January 31**

(SAI Bureau) Prices of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies fell as the global crypto market was trading in the red after Russian President Vladimir Putin made a defiant speech amid escalating tensions on the Russia-Ukraine border, according to CoinDesk.

### BITCOIN, ETHEREUM TANK

The world's most popular cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, sank over six per cent to \$36,673 the lowest since February 3. The second largest cryptocurrency, Ethereum, was down by more than seven per cent at \$2,519 the lowest since January 31.

### OTHER CRYPTOCURRENCIES DOWN

XRP was down by 14 per cent, Solana fell by 12.91 per cent, Terra was down by 3.38 per cent, Cardano tanked 14.13 per cent, Avalanche fell by 15.91 per cent, and Stellar fell by 12.13 per cent.

Other alt coins, Polkadot was down by over 8 per cent, Dogecoin fell by more than 10 per cent, Shiba Inu was down by 13 per cent, and Polygon fell by over 13 per cent.

### GLOBAL CRYPTO MARKET TANKS

"The global crypto market volume fell

by nearly 7 per cent, while the trading volume rose by 45 per cent over the past 24 hours. Bitcoin and Ethereum slipped below US\$37,000 and US\$2,600 levels," said Edul Patel, CEO and Co-founder, Mudrex. BTC's lower support price ranges from US\$30,000 to US\$35,000. If the BTC goes below these support levels, it may go back to the trend in 2018. Most altcoins also dipped over the past day after the speech of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The tension between Russia and Ukraine shows the effect on the crypto market," Patel said.

## Share market investors lose Rs 6 lakh crore; why D-Street is bleeding

**The market cap of BSE-listed companies was down by Rs 6.03 lakh crore as investor wealth on Tuesday fell to Rs 251.36 lakh crore from Rs 257.39 lakh crore registered on Monday**

Share market investors on Tuesday lost a staggering Rs 6 lakh crore in early morning trade amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis.

While the Sensex crashed nearly 1,000 points and the Nifty 50 was down below the 17,000-mark.

### LOSS FOR BSE-LISTED FIRMS

The market cap of BSE-listed companies was down by Rs 6.03 lakh crore as investor wealth on Tuesday fell to Rs 251.36 lakh crore from Rs 257.39 lakh crore registered on Monday, according to a Business

Today report.

### MID CAP, SMALL CAP DECLINE

The market sentiment was hit by rapid selling on mid cap and small cap counters. While the BSE mid cap declined 397 points, the small cap was down by 542 points, the Business Today report says.

### SENSEX, NIFTY TANK

The NSE Nifty 50 fell 1.50 per cent to 16,948.80, while the S&P BSE Sensex was down 1.52 per cent or 878.82 points at 56,804.77. This comes after investors dumped

equities across the board on concerns that a fresh escalation in Russia-Ukraine tensions could flare up oil prices and push inflation higher.

### RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS

"The situation is very fluid; if a response from the West is very swift and sharp then it will lead to further problems and rising crude prices is certainly a major headwind for India as it has inflationary consequence," said V K Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services, according to a Reuters report.

## IDFC FIRST Bank MD & CEO gifts shares worth over Rs 3.95 cr to trainer, driver, support staff

**The MD and CEO of IDFC FIRST Bank gifted 9 lakh shares worth over Rs 3.95 crore to five individuals to help them purchase homes.**

(SAI Bureau) IDFC FIRST Bank MD and CEO V Vaidyanathan has gifted 9 lakh shares of the bank held by him, worth over Rs 3.95 crore, to five individuals, including his trainer, househelp and driver, to help them purchase homes. These five people are unrelated to the top official of the private sector bank. Earlier too, he had gifted shares in his personal capacity to some individuals unrelated to him.

V Vaidyanathan, managing director and chief executive officer, has gifted 9,00,000 equity shares of IDFC FIRST Bank held by him on February 21, 2022, the bank said in a regulatory filing on Monday. He has gifted 3 lakh shares to his trainer Ramesh Raju; 2 lakh shares each to househelp Pranjal Narvekar and driver Algarsamy C Munapar; and 1 lakh shares each to office

support staff Deepak Pathare and househelp Santosh Jogale. Calculated at Monday's closing price of Rs 43.90 apiece on BSE, the value of the 9 lakh shares gifted by Vaidyanathan comes out to be Rs 3,95,10,000. In addition, the bank said Rukmani Social Welfare Trust has disposed of 2 lakh equity shares to support social activities.





# Study highlights risks of mental health outcomes in people with COVID-19



(SAI Bureau) ) The economies around the world are looking forward to reopening after facing the repercussions of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the past two years. The pandemic has impacted the world immensely and now a new study tells that it is causing mental health issues among patients. Previous studies have also indicated a similar trend, revealing that high distress and anxiety due to coronavirus has resulted in poor psychological well-being. In the latest study published on Wednesday (February 16) in the journal The BMJ, it has been established risks of incident mental health disorders in survivors of the acute phase of Covid. Researchers from St. Louis analysed the records of 153,848 people from the Veterans Health Administration system in the United States. The study included only those who

had no mental health diagnoses or treatment for at least two years prior to coronavirus infection. The latest research emphasises that the studies to date have been limited by a narrow selection of mental health outcomes and a maximum of six months follow-up. As per the latest study, improving the understanding of the long term risk of mental health disorders in people with Covid can help guide "strategies for care during the post-acute phase". The study has been done after extracting data from the US Department of Veterans Affairs national healthcare databases.

From these data, researchers constructed a cohort of 153 848 US veterans who survived the first 30 days of SARS-CoV-2 infection and two control groups, which were - a contemporary group

consisting of 5 637 840 users with no evidence of infection and a historical control (predating the Covid pandemic) consisting of 5 859 251 users during 2017. The results showed that those with COVID-19 were 39 per cent more likely to have depressive disorders and 35 per cent more likely to show an increased risk of incident anxiety disorders over the months after infection. As per the study, the group with Covid was also 38 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with stress and adjustment disorders. They were also 41 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with sleep disorders. The study also highlighted that the COVID-19 patients were 80 per cent more likely to develop neurocognitive problems.

It was also found that 18 per cent of COVID-19 patients

received a diagnosis or prescription for a neuropsychiatric issue in the following year. The findings suggest that people who survive the acute phase of Covid are at increased risk of an array of incident mental health disorders. The study suggested that tackling mental health disorders among survivors of Covid should be a priority. The authors wrote, "The risk of incident mental health disorders was consistently higher in the COVID-19 group in comparisons of people with covid-19 not admitted to hospital versus those not admitted to hospital for seasonal influenza, admitted to hospital with covid-19 versus admitted to hospital with seasonal influenza, and admitted to hospital with covid-19 versus admitted to hospital for any other cause."

## Asteroid with three moons of its own found for the first time

(News Agencies) We are generally comfortable with the idea of planets revolving around stars or satellites of individual planets. But many of us are yet to wrap our heads around an asteroid having its own moons. But one of the millions of asteroids in our solar system has now got the recognition of being an asteroid with three very own satellites. The asteroid is named 130 Elektra or just Elektra. "Elektra is the first quadruple system ever detected," wrote a team of astronomers led by Anthony Berdeu of the National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand in their paper. "This new detection ... shows that dedicated data reduction and processing algorithms modeling the physics of the instruments can push their contrast limits further." Asteroid Elektra is 260 kilometers (160 miles) across. It was first discovered in 1873. However, its first moon named S/2003 (130) 1 was discovered 130 years later. Its second moon S/2014 (130) 1 was discovered in 2014. Discovery of the third moon has made this an interesting system. Discovering asteroids is a tough task to start with. Asteroids are much much smaller than planets and are dimly illuminated by sunlight. Satellites of asteroids (if any) are harder to detect still as they may appear very tiny specks of light, often outshone by their parent asteroid.

## Scientists find ancient 'mega floods' tilted direction of Earth's crust

**Scientists have found that ancient 'mega floods' tilted direction of Earth's crust as per a new study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.**

(News Agencies) The glacial Lake Missoula outburst floods are among the largest known floods on Earth. Dozens of these floods scoured the landscapes of eastern Washington during the last Ice Age, almost 18 thousand years ago, forming what is known as the Channeled Scabland. In this study, researchers have explored how changes in topography due to the solid Earth's response to ice sheet loading and unloading influenced the history of mega flood routing over the Channeled Scabland. They found that the deformation of the Earth's crust played an important role in directing the erosion of the Channeled Scabland. "We used relatively simple, yet plausible, numerical experiments to test whether glacial isostatic adjustment (GIA) could have had a substantial impact on flood routing and erosion for two major scabland tracts, Cheney-Palouse and Telford-Crab Creek," write the authors of the study. "To this end, we modeled GIA to reconstruct the topography of the Channeled Scabland at different times during the

period of Ice Age flooding." "People have been looking at high water marks and trying to reconstruct the size of these floods, but all of the estimates are based on looking at the present-



day topography," said lead author Tamara Pico, assistant professor of Earth and planetary sciences at UC Santa Cruz. "We used relatively simple, yet plausible, numerical experiments to test whether glacial isostatic adjustment (GIA) could have had a substantial impact on flood routing and erosion for two major scabland tracts, Cheney-Palouse and Telford-Crab Creek," write the authors of the study.

"To this end, we modeled GIA to reconstruct the topography of the Channeled Scabland at different times during the period of Ice Age flooding." "People have been looking at high

water marks and trying to reconstruct the size of these floods, but all of the estimates are based on looking at the present-day topography," said lead author Tamara Pico, assistant professor of Earth and planetary sciences at UC Santa Cruz. "GIA caused crustal deformation in the Channeled Scabland with rates up to 10 millimeters per year, orders of magnitude

above regional tectonic uplift rates and, therefore, may have influenced flood routing," note the authors. "The course of ancient, glacial outburst floods was likely influenced by glacial isostatic adjustment (GIA), and reconstructing these events informs our understanding of how floods shape landscapes on Earth and Mars," they added. "When you are there in person, it's crazy to think about the scale of the floods needed to carve those canyons, which are now dry," says Pico. "Scientists were not the first people to look at this," she says. "People may even have been there to witness these floods."

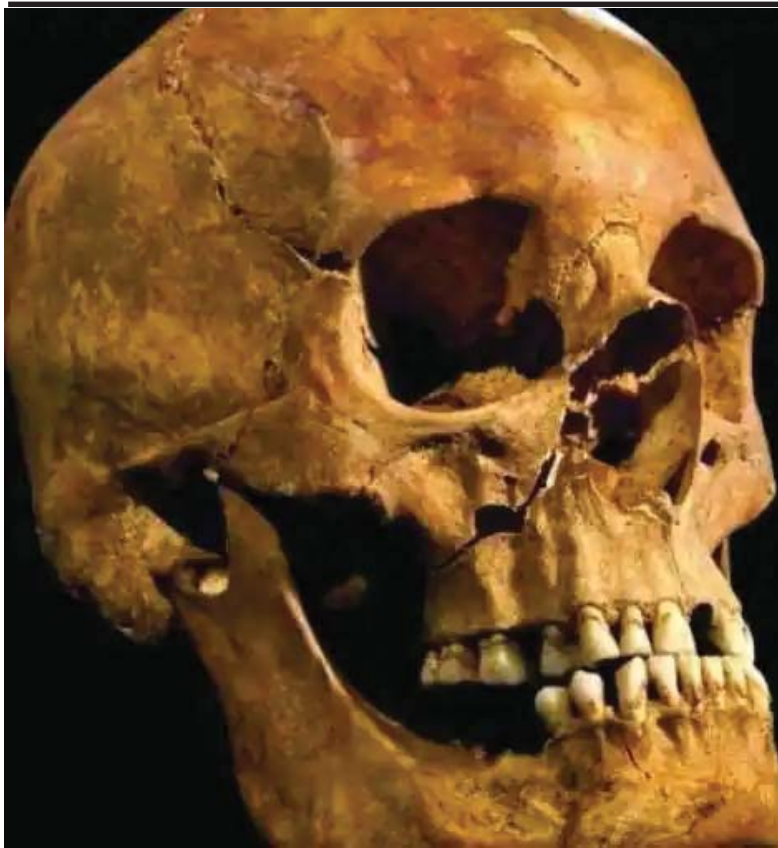


## Evidence of first ear surgery found in 5,300-year-old skull, say archaeologists

(News Agencies) A 5,300-year-old skull has been found in a Spanish tomb by a group of archaeologists. What's special about it is that it seems to be the oldest evidence of ear surgery carried out in the world.

Several cut marks are visible in the skull around the left ear canal, which implies that surgery around the ear may have been done to relieve pain. In an article released in Scientific Reports on Tuesday, the Spanish researchers concluded, "These evidences point to a mastoidectomy, a surgical procedure possibly performed to relieve the pain this prehistoric individual may have

suffered as a result of otitis media and mastoiditis." The skull seems to have belonged to a middle-aged woman, who lived in the Neolithic Age, concluded researchers. It was discovered in a tomb, which is known as the Dolmen de El Pendon. It is located in Burgos, Spain. In 2016, the skull was found by researchers of the University of Valladolid along with remains of nearly 100 others. The skull also showed evidence of two perforations on both sides of the skull near its mastoid bones. It indicates that the surgery was attempted to relieve growing pressure on the ear canal.



## Alcoholic monkeys: New treatment reduces drinking by 50%, could help humans next

**Hundreds of millions of individuals worldwide suffer from alcohol use disorders, and millions die each year as a result of them**

(News Agencies) Although scientists have been working to increase the efficacy of drugs that could help make lifestyle changes last more permanently, most therapy methods include some type of counselling. Scientists have devised a medication that reduces binge drinking in alcoholic vervet monkeys by 50%, perhaps paving the way for a cure for humans with alcoholism. Vervet monkeys are a crucial species for researchers because they share various features, including a preference for alcohol, which they have been known to steal from bar patrons. According to new research, an equivalent of the liver hormone fibroblast growth factor 21 (FGF21) successfully inhibits drinking in vervet monkeys and mice. Scientists from the University of Iowa and the University of Copenhagen have discovered a novel technique to target the brain networks that help mammals regulate their alcohol consumption therapeutically. To

establish their baseline drinking behaviour, twenty male vervet monkeys with this natural predisposition for alcohol were given access to alcohol for four hours a day for four days. Following that, they were divided into two groups, one receiving a placebo and the other receiving the novel FGF21 analogue medication. Dr Kyle Flippo, of the University of Iowa, said: "Our results provide a mechanism for a liver-to-brain endocrine feedback loop that presumably functions to protect



the liver from damage. "The that FGF21 analogues may central molecular and cellular provide a potential treatment effects of FGF21 represent an option for alcohol-use disorder opportunity for future research, and related diagnoses," Dr. Flippo added.

## Breakthrough in Physics': Artificial Intelligence successfully controls plasma in nuclear fusion experiment

**Scientists were successfully able to control plasma in nuclear fusion experiment by using artificial intelligence**

(News Agencies) Nuclear fusion comes from the fusing of two atoms at very high temperatures, which then release energy. In the study, published in Nature, scientists have recreated these extreme conditions by using a tokamak, a doughnut-shaped vacuum surrounded by magnetic coils, that is used to contain a plasma of hydrogen that is hotter than the core of the Sun. However, the plasmas in these machines are inherently unstable, making sustaining the process required

for nuclear fusion a complex challenge. For example, a control system needs to coordinate the tokamak's many magnetic coils and adjust the voltage on them thousands of times per second to ensure the plasma never touches the walls of the vessel, which would result in heat loss and possibly damage. To help solve this problem and as part of DeepMind's mission to advance science, researchers collaborated with the Swiss Plasma Centre at EPFL to develop the

first deep reinforcement learning (RL) system to autonomously discover how to control these coils and successfully contain the plasma in a tokamak, opening new avenues to advance nuclear fusion research.

Using a learning architecture that combines deep RL and a simulated environment, they produced controllers that can both keep the plasma steady and be used to accurately sculpt it into different shapes. This "plasma sculpting" shows the RL system has

successfully controlled the superheated matter and - importantly - allows scientists to investigate how the plasma reacts under different conditions, improving our understanding of fusion reactors. This AI is, in my opinion, the only way forward," said physicist Gianluca Sarri from Queen's University Belfast. "There are so many variables, and a small change in one of them can cause a big change in the final output. If you try to do it manually, it's a very lengthy process.



# What's going on with Covid-19 vaccines for children under 5?

**When the Food and Drug Administration seemed close to authorising two shots for infants and toddlers, their last minute waffling only added to parents' mental fatigue**



(News Agencies) When Dr. Debra Langlois learned last week that federal regulators had delayed the review of Pfizer-BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine for children under 5, her reaction was just as visceral as any parent's. "I was like, 'Are you kidding me?' Every day my daughter can't be vaccinated, she's at risk."

Keeping young children safe has been an exhausting exercise for parents throughout the coronavirus pandemic. And many parents are eager to get their littlest ones vaccinated, said Dr. Langlois, who is a pediatrician at the University of Michigan Health C.S. Mott Children's Hospital and who has two young children, one of whom is under 5.

When the Food and Drug Administration seemed close to authorising two shots for infants and toddlers, their last minute waffling only added to parents' mental fatigue. Here's how to make sense of what happened and what it may mean for your family.

## What is going on

At the beginning of the month, the FDA announced that a panel of independent health experts would convene on Feb. 15 to determine if two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine would be safe and effective for children ages 6 months through 4 years old. But in a highly unusual move, the agency called off this meeting just days before

it was scheduled to occur, explaining that it would now wait to evaluate data from three doses instead of two, which isn't expected until April at the earliest.

This pivot was especially perplexing because the FDA had pressed Pfizer-BioNTech to initiate the review of two doses of the vaccine, despite disappointing clinical trial results from December, which found that two doses did not adequately protect children between 2 and 4 (though they did seem to protect those between 6 months and 2 years old). Pfizer and BioNTech have been saying since December that children under 5 would probably need three vaccine doses, each of which would be just one-tenth of the dose that those 12 and older receive.

FDA regulators may have been hoping that by starting the approval process for two doses before the three-dose trial data was available, they could start vaccinating young children sooner rather than later, said Dr. Sallie Permar, chair of pediatrics at Weill Cornell Medicine. And, if new data collected since December showed that the vaccine had protected children against symptomatic or severe illness through the Omicron surge, that may have given regulators more information to work from in their review of the vaccine for children under 5. But, Dr. Permar said: "It seems from

the announcement on Friday that maybe that data wasn't quite as rosy as they had hoped."

## What this means for families

As disappointing as the delay is, it is important that regulators take their time in ensuring that the vaccine adequately protects young children without compromising safety and effectiveness. "I have tremendous sympathy for parents because this is a very stressful time," said Dr. Ofer Levy, director of the Precision Vaccines Program at Boston Children's Hospital and a member of the FDA's vaccine advisory panel. But it's also important "to have sympathy with the people at FDA. They're in a tough spot. They're simultaneously being criticised for moving too fast and too slow." "You can't rush safety,"

said Dr. Yvonne Maldonado, a pediatric infectious diseases physician who is overseeing the Pfizer-BioNTech trial at Stanford University. Sometimes one dose — or even two doses — is not enough to boost immunity, she said. "It's not that the first dose doesn't work, it's just that you may need more than one or two doses to make sure you get higher levels of protection. And so testing that takes time." It's actually pretty common for young children to need multiple doses of a vaccine to get a big enough benefit, Dr. Maldonado said. The hepatitis B vaccine is given to children as three doses, while the diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTaP) vaccine typically requires five doses.

Some parents have wondered: If a two-dose regimen worked well for kids between 6 months and 2 years of age, why couldn't the FDA approve the vaccine just for that age group? Unfortunately, "it doesn't work like that," Dr. Levy said. "You can't look at the results after the fact and say, 'Oh, you know what? We change our mind about how we're analyzing this. We're just going to separate out a group, and you only need to approve things for this subgroup.'" For similar reasons, parents can't go to their child's pediatrician to request a lower dose of the vaccine before it's approved, Dr. Levy said. Vaccine doses are carefully reviewed and approved

based on the risks and benefits to each age group. The good news is that once the vaccine for kids under 5 is approved, the rollout should be much faster than it was for adults, Dr. Permar said, since pediatricians' offices are already set up to receive and administer vaccinations. "I think we're looking at late spring at this point," she said. And there's still a lot you can do now to protect your family and prepare. If your child is afraid of needles, start getting them ready by teaching them relaxation techniques or reading them relevant books. If you're concerned about how the Covid-19 vaccine will fit into your child's regular shot schedule, or if you have questions about potential side effects, discuss it with your pediatrician, Dr. Langlois said. And continue to follow public health measures like social distancing and masking where possible, as well as getting your older children vaccinated. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 24 percent of 5-to-11-year-olds and 57 percent of 12-to-17-year-olds have been fully vaccinated. The coronavirus is still causing illness in young children and disrupting their lives, Dr. Langlois said, but parents should not give up hope. "We're going to get there," she said. "Parents, including myself, just need to be a little more patient."





# Raw vegetables alone may not protect you from heart diseases

(News Agencies) Eating raw vegetables is always hailed to be a good idea. Vegetables have variety of benefits. Such a diet has even found to be helping reduce risk of cardiovascular diseases. But now scientists are saying that vegetables alone may not be enough to reduce the risk of heart diseases. They made the assertion based on study involving observation of 400,000 people. These people are taking part in UK Biobank study. The scientists say that in addition to consumption of vegetables, reduced risk of heart disease also depended on what else was part of the diet, how much exercise was done, how and where the survey participants lived. Universities of Oxford, Bristol and Chinese University of Hong Kong asked these people to fill a questionnaire about their diet. This included quantity of cooked and raw vegetables they ate each day. Health of these people, possible heart problems leading to hospitalisation or death was monitored. All these factors were tracked for next 12 years. Researchers found that risk of death from cardiovascular diseases was 15 per cent lower for those who had more vegetables in their diet. But the risk also depended on people's lifestyles. This included factors like whether they smoked or consumed alcohol. It also depended on their jobs, incomes and overall diet



## Stop popping painkillers

They can cause obesity and affect sleep



(News Agencies) If you are in the habit of popping over-the-counter painkillers, you may be at double the risk of becoming obese as well as have poor sleep, a study has revealed. Over the past 10 years, there has been an increase in the prescription of medications such as gabapentinoids — gabapentin, pregabalin and opiates — for chronic pain management including migraine, diabetic neuropathy and chronic lower back pain. Previous studies showed that painkillers can increase risks of heart attacks by 50%. The findings showed that people on opiates and cardio-metabolic drugs reported 95% rates of obesity, 82% “very high” waist circumference and 63% hypertension, as opposed to those on cardio-metabolic drugs only. These chronic pain medications should be prescribed for shorter periods of time to limit serious health complications, the researchers suggested. “We already know that opiates are dependency-forming, but this study also found patients taking opiates have the worst health. Obesity rates are much higher and the patients reported sleeping poorly,” said lead author Sophie Cassidy, research associate at the Newcastle University. Opioids act as a sedative which makes patients less active and they have been shown to alter taste perception with a craving for sugar and sweet foods.

## Air pollution from road traffic is affecting health of unborn

**Exhaust fumes, soot and dust spewed out from road traffic may be putting the health of thousands of unborn babies at risk**



(News Agencies) Pregnant women exposed to air pollution from road traffic are more likely to give birth to babies that are underweight or smaller than they should be, a study conducted in the UK warns.

However, when it comes to traffic-related noise, the study of more than half a million infants, published in The BMJ, found no conclusive effect on babies' health.

Cutting the average concentration of fine particle pollution emitted by London's road traffic by just 10 per cent could prevent around 90 babies a year (three per cent of cases) being born with low birth weight.

The findings led by researchers at Imperial College London could be applicable to other cities in the UK and across Europe with comparable levels of road traffic pollution, highlighting the need for environmental health policies to improve air quality in urban areas.

Previous studies have shown a link between air pollution, pregnancy complications and childhood illness, but studies of noise pollution in pregnancy have provided conflicting results.

The latest study looked at the link between exposure to air and noise pollution from road traffic during

pregnancy and the effect on measures of birth weight — both low birth weight (less than 2,500 grammes) and being born small for gestational age.

The study focused on records of more than half a million (540,365) babies born in the Greater London area between 2006 and 2010, along with the mother's home address location. Researchers estimated average monthly concentrations of pollutants related to

road traffic, including nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), and fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) from traffic exhaust and non-exhaust sources, such as brakes or tyre wear, as well as larger particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>).

Average day and night-time road traffic noise levels were also estimated.

They found higher levels of these air pollutants, particularly PM<sub>2.5</sub>, were associated with two per cent to six per cent increased odds of low birth weight and one per cent to three per cent increased odds of being small for gestational age.

## Smartphone addiction is more dangerous than you thought. It causes depression, anxiety

(News Agencies) Prolonged use of smartphones may significantly increase the risk of depression, anxiety and insomnia among teenagers, a study warns. Researchers from the Korea University in South Korea have found an imbalance in the brain chemistry



of young people addicted to smartphones and the internet. They used magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS) to gain unique insight into the brains of smartphone-and internet- addicted teenagers. MRS is a type of MRI that measures the brain's chemical composition. The study, presented at the annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), involved 19 young people diagnosed with internet or smartphone addiction who were paired with healthy people. Twelve of the addicted youth received nine weeks of cognitive behavioural therapy, modified from a cognitive therapy programme for gaming addiction, as part of the study. The researchers used standardised internet and smartphone addiction tests to measure the severity of internet addiction. Questions focused on the extent to which internet and smartphone use affects daily routines, social life, productivity, sleeping patterns and feelings. “The higher the score, the more severe the addiction,” said Hyung Suk Seo, from the Korea University. The researchers reported that the addicted teenagers had significantly higher scores in depression, anxiety, insomnia severity and impulsivity.



## Shoot of Ajay Devgn 'Bholaa' begins



(News Agencies) The shoot of Bollywood star Ajay Devgn-starrer "Bholaa", a remake of 2019's Tamil hit "Kaithi", is underway. The official Twitter account of AjayDevgn FFilms shared the news on Saturday. The Hindi version of "Kaithi" is helmed by Dharmendra Sharma, who has served as an editor on many films of Devgn's like "Son of Sardaar", "Shivaay", and "Bhuj: The Pride of India", among others. The upcoming film also features Tabu. Devgn also recently started shooting for the sequel to the 2015 crime thriller "Drishyam", which will also see Tabu reprising her role.

## Social change happens through fun, family entertainer films: Huma Qureshi on 'Double XL'

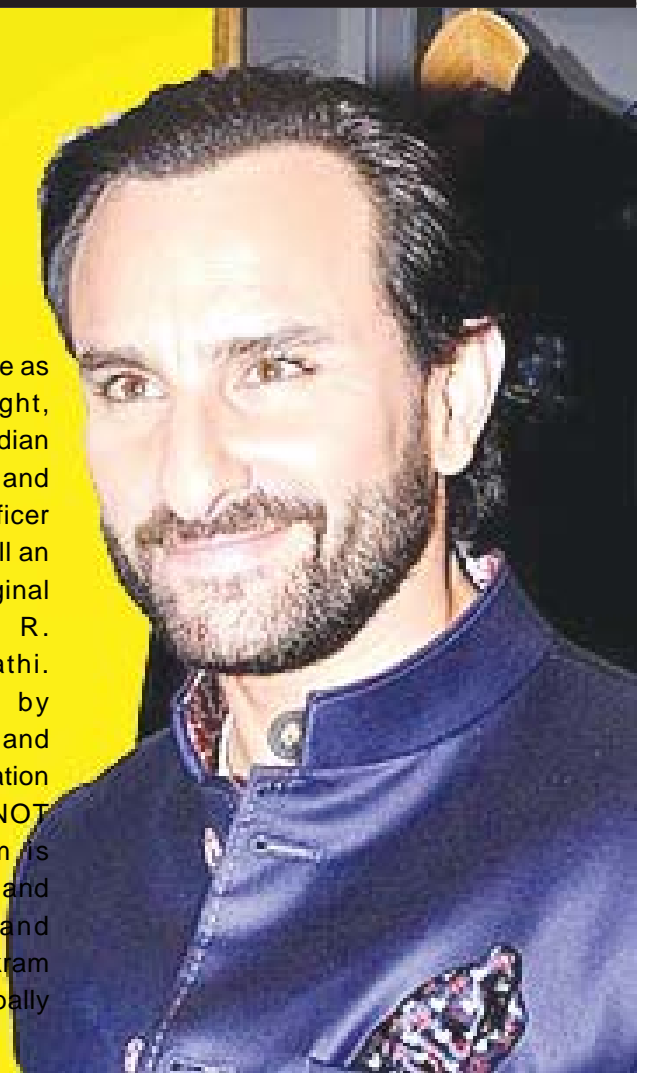


(News Agencies) Actor Huma Qureshi says she decided to do "Double XL", a film about body shaming, as she believes a "fun family entertainer" like the upcoming project can play an important role in bringing about a change in society. Billed as a "slice-of-life comedy" that revolves around body weight stereotypes, the film is directed by "Helmet" fame Satramm Ramani and also stars Sonakshi Sinha. "Double XL" explores the journey of two plus-size women -- Rajshree Trivedi (Qureshi) from Meerut and Saira Khanna (Sinha) from New Delhi as they navigate society's beauty standards.

# Saif turns tough cop for 'Vikram Vedha' first look

(News Agencies) The makers of the upcoming neo-noir thriller film 'Vikram Vedha' on Thursday treated fans with the first look of actor Saif Ali Khan, who will be seen playing a tough cop. Saif's 'Vikram Vedha' co-actor Hrithik Roshan introduced his character on social media. He shared a picture of the actor from the sets of the film and wrote: "Vikram". In the image, Saif looks dapper in a classic combination of a plain white T-Shirt with blue jeans. Saif's macho and buff avatar as police officer Vikram in the film has fans swooning over the actor. The film stars Hrithik and Saif Ali Khan in lead roles, with Radhika Apte in a crucial role. Pushkar and Gayatri, the original writers and directors, are donning the

director's hats for the Hindi remake as well. A cult film in its own right, 'Vikram Vedha' is based on the Indian meta-folktale 'Vikram aur Betaal' and tells the story of a tough police officer who sets out to track down and kill an equally tough gangster. This original Tamil blockbuster starred R. Madhavan and Vijay Sethupathi. 'Vikram Vedha' is presented by Gulshan Kumar, T-Series Films and Reliance Entertainment in association with Friday Filmworks and YNOT Studios Production. The film is directed by Pushkar & Gayatri and produced by S. Sashikanth and produced by Bhushan Kumar. 'Vikram Vedha' will hit the big screens globally on September 30.



# Salman Khan, Katrina Kaif resume shooting for 'Tiger 3' in Delhi



(News Agencies) Bollywood stars Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif have started shooting for a new schedule for the third installment of the 'Tiger' franchise in the national capital. The actors have been pictured during their shoot. Their images have taken social media and fan clubs across platforms have been sharing pictures of the superstar. A fan named @katter\_salmania shared a picture where the 'Dabangg' star and Katrina are seen taking a shot for the film. The two are fully dressed in their spy costumes. It seems they were shooting for an action sequence in the capital. The third instalment in the 'Tiger' franchise, which is directed by Maneesh Sharma, was put on hold due to the global outbreak of Covid-19. The first instalment 'Ek Tha Tiger' directed by Kabir Khan released in 2012. The second 'Tiger Zinda Hai' released in 2017 and was directed by Ali Abbas Zafar.

# Siddhant Chaturvedi says younger brother had a crush on Deepika Padukone, 'kept blushing' when he met her

## Siddhant Chaturvedi said that his younger brother had a crush on Deepika Padukone since he watched Om Shanti Om at the age of three or four

(News Agencies) Siddhant Chaturvedi revealed that his younger brother had a crush on Deepika Padukone since he was a little boy. Siddhant worked with Deepika in Shakun Batra's recently released domestic noir Gehraiyaan, which also starred Ananya Panday and Dhairya Karwa. In an interview, Siddhant said that before working with Deepika, he thought about her earlier co-stars and knew he had to put his best foot forward. Talking to The Times of India, Siddhant said, "My younger brother had a crush on

her. I remember getting him to meet her on one of the days after our film shoot and he kept blushing. He must have been 3 or 4 years old when we saw Om Shanti Om (2007). He has been crushing on her since he was little. He turned 18 on Feb 21 so he can watch Gehraiyaan now (laughs). That is his birthday gift from me!" Siddhant also revealed the thoughts that went through his own head before working with Deepika, who is his senior in the industry. "In my head, I was like, 'Wow, she's Deepika! How

am I going to romance her! She has worked with the likes of Shah Rukh Khan, Ranveer Singh, Ranbir Kapoor. Look at my competition.' It is a romantic film and I didn't want people to say, 'Nahi kar paya (He couldn't do justice to it),' he said. In Gehraiyaan, Siddhant plays a man named Zain who is drawn to his fiancée's cousin Alisha (Deepika) and begins having an affair with her. However, things get complicated when she gets pregnant and his business dealings come under the scanner.



# Who was Gangubai Kathiawadi?

## Why is Alia Bhatt's film on her facing legal troubles?

Alia Bhatt's film on Gangubai Kathiawadi is facing legal trouble, with individuals claiming to be her family members objecting to her portrayal in the film. A look at who Gangubai Kathiawadi was, and why her family is protesting her portrayal in the film

(News Agencies) A film starring actor Alia Bhatt is facing legal trouble after individuals claiming to be family members of the main protagonist, Gangubai Kathiawadi, have objected to her portrayal in the film. A look at who Gangubai Kathiawadi is and why her family is protesting her portrayal in the film.

### Who is Gangubai Kathiawadi?

Ganga Harjeevandas Kathiawadi was a native of Gujarat who earned a name for herself as one of Mumbai's well-known and influential brothel owners in the 50s and 60s. She is said to have been sold to a brothel owner in Kamathipura by her husband. Kamathipura is one of Mumbai's oldest and most notorious red light districts. She gradually ended up operating her own brothel and is known to also have lobbied for the rights of commercial sex workers.

### What is Gangubai Kathiawadi's claim to fame?

There are not many contemporary accounts of Gangubai's life. The book "Mafia Queens of Mumbai", on which the Alia Bhatt movie is based, dwells on some facets of her life. Gangubai is said to have been a proponent of the rights of commercial sex workers and apparently lobbied with politicians on this issue. There are however no contemporary to back these claims.

### Who are people opposing her portrayal in the film?

Gangubai reportedly passed away in the mid 70s and did not have children of her own. There are however several individuals who claim they were adopted by her.

Since the film was announced, a number of them have objected to her portrayal in the film and sought a stay on its release.

Last March, a court in Mumbai had issued summons to director Sanjay Leela Bhansali and actor Alia Bhatt based on a complaint filed by a man claiming to be Gangubai's adopted son. The petitioner claimed the trailer of the film "titled after his mother and a chapter in a book on her, which it is adapted out of", show her as a 'prostitute' and a 'mafia queen'. It claims that after the release of the film's trailer, the women members of his family who live in the redlight areas of Kamathipura have been a victim of objectionable and abusive comments by men, affecting their reputation. Earlier a civil court in Mumbai had dismissed a suit filed by the complainant seeking permanent injunction from the making and telecast of the film. A case seeking a stay on the film is also pending before the Supreme Court.



## Raveena Tandon shares wedding video on 18th anniversary with Anil Thadani. Watch her call for her dad from mandap

Raveena Tandon shared some pictures and videos from her wedding day on the 18th anniversary of her marriage to businessman Anil Thadani

(News Agencies) Raveena Tandon celebrated 18 years of married life with husband Anil Thadani on Tuesday. The actor marked the occasion by sharing some videos and pictures from her wedding day on social media. Taking to Instagram, Raveena shared a carousel of videos and pictures from her wedding in 2004. She captioned the post, "As we get into the 'adulthood' of our married lives, 18 years today, I couldn't have asked for anything more than you. Through our good and bad, thick(me) and thin (u) good times trying times. You are it all."

The videos show Raveena and Anil during their wedding with the actor dressed in a traditional red wedding lehenga and Anil in a golden sherwani. One of the pictures also shows Raveena's parents--Ravi and Veena Tandon--blessing the newlyweds. In one video, she is also seen calling out for her dad from the mandap. Raveena and Anil got married on February 22, 2004. In a recent interaction, the actor had revealed that she had condition that she would only marry a man who would accept her adopted daughters. Raveena had adopted two girls--Pooja and Chhaya--in

1995 at the age of 21.

Speaking to Tweak India last year, Raveena had said, "Yes, there were moments where people always thought that I'm taking on excess baggage because I was not settled well yet but my mantra was always -- if someone had to love me, they had to love me. I come as a package deal -- they have to love me, my girls, my dogs and my family."

Anil and Raveena have two children--daughter Rasha and son Ranbirvardhan. Meanwhile, her adopted daughters Pooja and Chhaya are married and



also have children of their own. Raveena was recently seen in the Netflix web series Aranyak, where she played a police officer. She is set to be seen in Kannada film KGF Chapter 2 this year. The Yash-starrer also features Sanjay Dutt in an important role but Raveena and Sanjay do not share screen space in the film.





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## Ukraine Crisis Kicks Off New Superpower Struggle Among U.S., Russia and China

**Beijing and Moscow now hold a stronger hand in  
confronting the West than during the Cold War**



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