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## Pegasus spyware scandal:

### Can Silicon Valley stop government snooping?



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# "In death, Fr. Stan Swamy's voice is even stronger" – Father Noby Ayyaneth

"Living Stan was a nobleman, but the departed Stan is unstoppable and his voice on behalf of the poor and the downtrodden is even stronger and will resonate it throughout history," said Father Noby Ayyaneth of the Malankara Catholic Diocese of North America condoling the death of Father Stan Swamy at a remembrance meeting organized under the banner of Indo-US Democracy Foundation in Floral Park, New York. Jesus Christ was a master humanitarian, and Fr. Stan was following in his master's footsteps. For him, suffering was not a tragedy in the face of injustice and as he could not be a silent spectator".

Mr. George Abraham, Executive Director of the India-US Democracy Foundation, welcomed the gathering and stated 'it is a dark day for democracy in India and Father Stan Swamy's detention, treatment in prison and death is a blot on the nation's consciousness and a travesty of justice. He expressed his disappointment that in today's India, the presumption of innocence is becoming a thing of the past. India is about to celebrate its 75th



Independence Day, and our founding fathers built democratic institutions that stood the test of time and protected democracy, freedom, individual liberty, and equal justice under law. However, these institutions are increasingly under attack and are being diminished. Today, anyone who dares to criticize the authorities is in danger of being termed anti-national. Professor Indrajit Saluja, Publisher of Indian Panorama Newspaper, said Father Stan Swamy was a frail and weak man physically but strong morally and spiritually to carry on with his work on behalf of the weaker sections of society. As Indian Americans, we must demand our politicians to speak out when authorities target the poor and downtrodden in India. UAPA is a draconian law that the

Supreme Court should have reviewed, and it is a shame that an innocent man had to pay with his life this way.

Dr. Anna George, President of the Indian Nurses' Association in New York, called Father Stan Swamy's imprisonment and death cruel and unusual punishment. She asked for raising our collective voices to stop this from happening again. Mr. Koshy Thomas, who ran for the NYC Council from District 23, expressed his sorrow, and asked authorities to protect activists such as Father Stan while respecting the human rights of every citizen in India regardless of their religion or caste.

Mr. John Joseph, the Vice-President of the Indian overseas Congress, urged not to be silent on these ongoing atrocities by



the authorities. Is India a real democracy? He asked the participants to be more vigilant in guarding against these Human Rights abuses. Mr. Shaji Karackal, National news coordinator, Harvest TV

said 'forgive us father, I am guilty and many of us are for not seeing the truth on time to come to your defense'. Father Stan Swamy will be remembered as a nobleman who stood up for the poor and marginalized.

## Two Indians Charged With Cheating Singaporean Firms

Singapore: Two Indian nationals on Thursday were each charged with six counts of "conspiring to cheat" Singapore-based companies, according to a media report. Hussain Naina Mohamed, 46, allegedly duped two companies into paying more than Singapore Dollar (SGD) 4 million to two other firms -- one of which he was a partner at, The Straits Times reported. He was also accused of conspiring with the director of a fifth company to trick the victim companies into paying more than SGD 400,000 to it. Also charged in the cheating case with Mr Hussain was 66-year-old Eldo Thottungal Mathai, a company director. Both men are Indian nationals

and have the "permanent residents" status in Singapore. Mr Hussain faces another 20 charges of which 18 are of cheating and two of money laundering, according to the daily. He was an assistant shipping manager of engineering firm Utracon Structural Systems at the time of the alleged offences between June 24, 2009 and January 2, 2019. Mr Hussain allegedly concealed that he was the registered partner of Al Rahman Enterprises and Trading, when recommending to Utracon Structural Systems and another related firm, Utracon Overseas, that freight-forwarding and marine insurance jobs be awarded to his company.

## Indian-Origin Fraudster Posing As Car Salesman Jailed For 9 Years In UK

London: An Indian-origin fraudster posing as a car salesman has been jailed for nine years by a UK court for defrauding over 200 unsuspecting car buyers out of more than 1 million pounds. Ravinder Singh Randhawa, 30, was imprisoned for 22 offences of fraud and one offence of money laundering at Exeter Crown Court in south-west England last Friday. According to the UK's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Randhawa was the leader of the fake car selling operation, posing as a legitimate salesman to persuade his victims to pay large sums of money for second-hand vehicles. "Randhawa is a prolific and serial offender, preying on trusting members of the public simply wishing to buy second-hand cars.

His crimes were sophisticated," said Sarah Melo, Specialist Prosecutor for the CPS Specialist Fraud Division. "He often used identities obtained from previous victims, hijacked the identity of garages and genuine vehicles for sale, so that his victims did not suspect his scam," Melo said. Hundreds of people have suffered at the hands of Randhawa and lost money which they could ill-afford. His crimes have had a profound impact on so many of their lives, she said. "Many described the severe effect on their mental and physical health, their family relationships and overall financial stability. For many of his victims this happened at a time when their lives were badly affected by the pandemic," she said.



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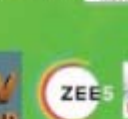
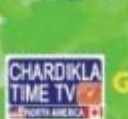
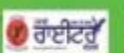
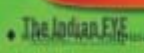
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## Amarinder Singh likely to speed up investigation in cases against Congress MLAs siding with Navjot Singh Sidhu



mining. In December 2020, a notice was sent to Darshan Brar on behalf of the mining department regarding the matter and a fine of Rs 1.65 crore was imposed. Since then, Darshan Brar has been putting pressure on Amarinder Singh to waive the fine and get the notice revoked, according to sources.

(News Agencies)- But when the Punjab Chief Minister did not do so, Darshan Brar openly came in support of Navjot Singh Sidhu in the cricketer-turned-politician's rebellion against Amarinder Singh. Now once again, Captain Amarinder Singh is believed to have decided to reopen Brar's case. According to sources, in the coming days, pressure could be put on Brar from the mining department, which can also proceed with legal action against him.

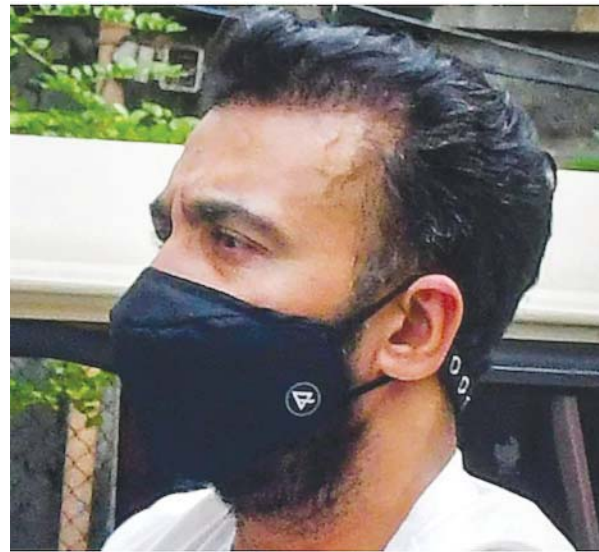
## Mumbai Police seizes server allegedly used for uploading porn from Raj Kundra's office

(News Agencies)-Mumbai Police on Wednesday seized a server from the office of Raj Kundra, who was arrested earlier on Monday for allegedly creating and publishing pornographic films.

The police authorities suspected that the server was used by Kundra to upload pornographic content on apps and other platforms. The investigators have sought the help of IT professionals to probe the matter further.

Kundra, who is Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty's husband, was arrested in a case that was registered under the sections of the Indian Penal Code, Information Technology Act, and Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act at the Malwani police station on February 4, 2021. According to the Mumbai Police, Kundra appeared to be the key conspirator in this case. The businessman will be in judicial custody till July 23. At the heart of the matter are some

WhatsApp chats and a streaming application called "Hot Shots" linked to the businessman. However, this is not the first time Kundra, husband of actor Shilpa Shetty, has found himself in the middle of a controversy. Kundra was also involved in a controversy in 2013 when



IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals, in which he owns 12 per cent stake, was found to be involved in a spot-fixing scandal. Kundra was questioned by Delhi Police following charges against him of betting on cricket matches.

During the probe, he admitted that he had placed bets on cricket matches, claiming that he had bet through

bookie and his business partner-friend Umesh Goenka. However, Kundra claimed that he did not fix any matches.

In 2015, a panel of the Supreme Court banned Rajasthan Royals from participating in the IPL for two years and Kundra was banned for life from IPL and related activities.

## 2 TMC workers shot dead on way back from party's '21st July' virtual event

(News Agencies)-Two TMC activists were shot dead by miscreants on their way back from the virtual meeting on the occasion of the party's annual martyr's day event on Wednesday.

The incident took place in Tangramari village of Mohanpur panchayat in the North 24 Parganas

Minakhan assembly constituency. The virtual meeting on the occasion of TMC's '21st July' annual programme, where West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was the chief speaker, was being broadcast in Tangramari Media Para of Bachhra Mohanpur Panchayat.

WATCH: Mamata makes 2024 poll pitch: Will Opposition stand behind Didi?

As per local sources, the miscreants fired shots and hurled bombs at the returning TMC workers after a brawl. Both sides are believed to be involved in the conflict. At least 12 people were injured in the violence. They were taken to Haroa Hospital. Five people have been shifted to Kolkata as their condition turned critical. A huge police force has been deployed in the village.

Tapan Roy, a Trinamool leader from Mohanpur village in Bachhra, said, "On this day, a virtual meeting of our leader, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was arranged at the initiative of the Tangramari Booth Committee." "On the way back after hearing that meeting, a group of notorious miscreants from the area near Mediyapara insulted our party workers. When he protested, they started firing," Roy added.



district's Minakhan. One of the dead workers was a woman, police said. At least 12 others were injured in the bombings.

The deceased were identified as Laxmibala Mandal, 62, and Sannyasi Sardar, 28. The incident took place around 3 pm. Tensions are running high following the shooting in the village. According to police and local sources, the area belongs to the Haroa police station under

## Three more Rafale jets arrive in India from France



squadron will start operations by July-end at Hashimara Air Force Base in West Bengal, with the Rafale aircraft that

(News Agencies)-In a major boost for the Indian Air Force (IAF), three more Rafale fighter jets arrived in India after flying non-stop from France on Wednesday.

The aircraft were provided mid-air refuelling by the air force of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the IAF said. "Three Rafale aircraft arrived in India a short while ago, after a direct ferry from Istres Air Base, France. IAF deeply appreciates the support by UAE Air Force for in-flight refuelling during the non-stop ferry," the IAF said in a tweet. The new batch of the aircraft will be part of the IAF's second squadron of the Rafale jets. The second

have already arrived in Ambala flying there from next week, government sources told India Today TV.

The first Rafale squadron is based in the Ambala air force station. It had already started patrolling the borders with China in eastern Ladakh and other areas. The squadron in Hashimara would give a major boost to air preparedness against the Chinese Air Force as it will bring a number of Chinese airfields in close range of the Indian aircraft. In 2016, India signed an inter-governmental agreement with France to procure 36 Rafale jets at a cost Rs 59,000 crore.



# TMC-BJP hit out at each other over Pegasus spyware row

**While Dilip Ghosh said the West Bengal government used Pegasus against the BJP, Mamata Banerjee launched a ferocious attack on the Centre over the spyware issue.**

(News Agencies)-On a day when the Trinamool Congress (TMC) launched a scathing attack on the central government over the Pegasus spyware issue, Bengal BJP leader Dilip Ghosh alleged that it was Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who had been snooping on the saffron camp. Addressing the BJP workers in West Bengal through video conferencing, the party's state president stated that Mamata Banerjee had a habit of tapping phones and accused her government of using Pegasus.

"Mamata Banerjee has a habit of phone tapping. Mamata uses Pegasus. It is Congress' culture to tap phones. Indira Gandhi did so and so does Mamata," said Ghosh, the Medinipur MP, from Delhi on Wednesday. Ghosh's comments came simultaneously as Mamata Banerjee was making similar allegations against the BJP-led central government during TMC's annual martyr's day event on Wednesday. The West Bengal CM claimed that her phone was being tapped as well by the

"dangerous and ferocious" Pegasus spyware. She went on to show that she had "plastered" her phone to prevent snooping. Taking a dig at her comments, Ghosh claimed that no Trinamool leader or minister speaks on a normal call but through WhatsApp. He stated that Mamata Banerjee not only snoops at her rivals but also her own party leaders. "TMC leaders don't communicate except for messaging on WhatsApp, as they know that Mamata Banerjee herself taps their phones," said Ghosh. He also



said that Mukul Roy, who switched back to the TMC after joining BJP in 2017, had moved the Supreme Court, alleging that his phone was being tapped by the Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government in 2018. Meanwhile, Mamata Banerjee appealed to the apex court to take suo motu cognizance of the alleged snooping by the Israeli spyware Pegasus. "I have plastered my phone because they tap everything, be it video or audio," said Mamata Banerjee as she showed her mobile camera covered with tape. The Bengal CM also claimed that she is unable to speak with her counterparts in Delhi and Odisha. "Pegasus is dangerous.

# India successfully tests 'fire and forget' anti-tank missile

**The Defence Research & Development Organisation on Wednesday successfully tested indigenously developed low weight, fire and forget man portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile.**



(News Agencies)-India successfully tested Portale Antitank Guided Missile (MPATGM) on

Wednesday. The announcement was made by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). It said the move would prove to be a major boost to Indian Army and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision. The missile was launched from a man-portable launcher integrated with thermal site and the target was mimicking a

tank. The missile hit the target in direct attack mode and destroyed it with precision. The test has validated the minimum range successfully, the DRDO said. The DRDO said, "All the mission objectives were met. The missile has already been successfully flight tested for the maximum range." "The missile is incorporated

with state-of-the-art Miniaturized Infrared Imaging Seeker along with advanced avionics. The test brings the development of indigenous 3rd generation man portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile close to completion," the DRDO said in a statement. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO for the successful test.

# Sidhu to invite Amarinder to event where he will take charge as Punjab Congress chief on Friday

Amid the ongoing rift within the Punjab unit of the Congress party, Navjot Singh Sidhu is all set to invite Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh to an event on Friday where he (Sidhu) will formally assume charge as president of the Punjab Congress. This comes a day after Captain Amarinder Singh's media advisor Raveen Thukral tweeted that the chief minister won't meet Sidhu unless he tenders a public apology for his derogatory attacks against him on social media. Sources say, besides Navjot Singh Sidhu, the four new working presidents of the Punjab Congress have also invited the chief minister. "The invitation letter has been drafted and signed by Sidhu and other



leaders, including current Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar. It will soon be sent to Captain Amarinder Singh," said a source privy to the development. On Tuesday evening, Captain Amarinder Singh's media advisor Raveen Thukral refuted reports suggesting Navjot Singh Sidhu has

sought time to meet the chief minister. "Reports of @sherryontop seeking time to meet @capt\_amarinder are totally false. No time has been sought whatsoever," Thukral tweeted. He added there is no change in Captain Amarinder Singh's stance. "CM won't meet Navjot Singh Sidhu till he publicly apologises for his personally derogatory social media attacks against him." Meanwhile, on Wednesday, in an apparent show of strength, nearly 60 Congress MLAs gathered at Navjot Singh Sidhu's residence in Amritsar. The Congress

has 80 MLAs in the Punjab Assembly. Sidhu and Amarinder Singh have been at loggerheads for the past some time, with Sidhu recently attacking the CM over the desecration cases. The chief minister was also averse to his appointment as the state Congress chief. Among the ministers who were present at Sidhu's residence were Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa, Charanjit Singh Channi and Sukhbinder Singh Sarkaria, besides outgoing state unit chief Sunil Jakhar. The MLAs joined by Sidhu boarded luxury buses and went to pay obeisance at the Golden Temple, where a large number of Congress supporters gathered.



# Delhi Police ups security as state govt gives farmers permission to protest at Jantar Mantar

**As the state government on Wednesday granted permission to the farmers to protest at Jantar Mantar during the monsoon session, the Delhi Police has tightened the security arrangements across the city.**

(News Agencies)-The Delhi government on Wednesday granted permission to the farmers to protest at Jantar Mantar on the condition that the demonstrators would travel from the Singhu border in buses with police escort. In view of the development, the Delhi Police has tightened the security arrangements across the city. The protest comes during the ongoing monsoon session of Parliament, which started on Monday and is scheduled to conclude on August 13. However, the farmers have received permission to protest till August 9. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) issued an official statement on Wednesday, granting farmers permission to hold protests. The statement, signed by Additional CEO Rajesh Goyal, DDMA said that the protesting farmers will

have to strictly adhere to Covid-appropriate behaviours and comply to "all other guidelines/instructions/SOPs issued by the Government of the NCT of Delhi from time to time in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic."

"After multiple rounds of negotiations with Farmers bodies 'Sanyukt Kisan Morcha' (SKM) and Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC), and on being assured in writing that they would remain peaceful and with the approval of DDMA, they have been permitted to protest at Jantar Mantar with limited numbers not exceeding 200 persons for SKM and 06 persons for KMSC from 1100 hrs upto 1700 hrs daily. They would be escorted to the designated location from Singhu border in buses," the Delhi Police said.

"They have been advised to observe Covid appropriate

behaviour and social distancing. They have also been advised not to take out any March in view of Covid restrictions. Delhi Police has put in place extensive arrangements to ensure that the protest programme remains peaceful," it added.

On Tuesday, farmers' unions had said they will hold a 'Kisan Parliament' at Jantar Mantar during the monsoon session and 200 protesters from the Singhu border will attend it every day from July 22.

After a meeting with Delhi Police officials, a farm union leader said they will hold peaceful demonstrations at Jantar Mantar demanding scrapping of the agri laws and no protester will go to Parliament. "Beginning tomorrow, a group of 200 protesting farmers will organise the 'Kisan Parliament' at Jantar Mantar on every working day of



the monsoon session till its last day," said Sanyukt Kisan Morcha in a press release.

The SKM also informed that more farmers are expected to join them in Delhi after they begin their demonstration at Jantar Mantar.

A tractor parade in Delhi on January 26, that was to highlight the demands of farmer unions to repeal three agriculture laws, had dissolved into anarchy on the streets of the national capital as thousands of protesters broke through barriers, fought with the police, overturned

vehicles and hoisted a religious flag from the ramparts of the iconic Red Fort.

Thousands of farmers from across the country have been agitating at the Delhi borders against the three farm laws that they claim will do away with the Minimum Support Price system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporations.

Over 10 rounds of talks with the government, which has been projecting the laws at major agricultural reforms, have failed to break the deadlock between the two parties.

## DMK mounts pressure on Centre to make Chengalpet Integrated Vaccine Complex operational



**Tamil Nadu Health Minister Ma Subramanian has demanded that the Centre should make Integrated Vaccine Complex at Chengalpet operational.**

(News Agencies)-Asserting that Tamil Nadu has infrastructural strength to administer 2 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines in a month, Health Minister Ma Subramanian demanded that the Centre should make Integrated Vaccine Complex (IVC) at Chengalpet operational.

Subramanian said that if 12 crore more vaccines were provided, then the 6 crore eligible population would be vaccinated in five months.

He also talked about the urgent need to start operations

at the HLL Biotech Ltd's Integrated Vaccine Complex (IVC) at Chengalpet.

Subramanian said, "HLL which was installed at Chengalpet at a cost of Rs 700 crore and Pasteur Institute of India in Coonoor are both in ready condition and if given Centre's nod then they can be immediately put to use."

"CM MK Stalin has requested the Centre to give a permit to generate vaccines in these two manufacturing units. But we are yet to receive any approvals."

"If we are given permission then we have the infrastructure to

produce vaccines for the state and for the entire country in a span of two to three months."

Integrated Vaccine Complex Facility (IVC) a high-level facility which was set up in a 100 acre land in Tamil Nadu's Chengalpet has been lying unutilised at a time when the country as a whole is facing vaccine deficiency, he said. There has been a roadblock with the Union government's plan to revive the IVC, he said. The central government which had floated a tender in the last week of March did not get any response. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin had earlier requested the Centre to lease the IVC facility so that the government could manufacture vaccines in Tamil Nadu.

In a reply on June 30 to VCK MP Ravikumar, former Union

Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan said no bid was received in response to the tender for using the IVC facility. Vardhan had said, "On March 27, HLL published the tender on the central public procurement portal inviting bids for selection of IVC facility user on 'as is where is basis' through competitive bidding with April 14 as the last date for submission of technical bid and initial price offer. "As per the tender, the successful bidder shall be allowed to use the IVC facility for the manufacture of vaccines. However, HLL/HBL did not receive any bid within the original due date of April 14. Hence, the bid submission date was extended repeatedly, and finally till May 21," he added.

"However, despite these extensions, no bid was received

in response to the tender for using IVC facility till the extended due date and thus the tender expired on May 21," he said.

The central government has maintained that it is trying to explore different possibilities to start operations in the HLL facility. Tiruchi Siva of the DMK raised the issue in Parliament on Tuesday.

Siva said, "Very less population in this hugely populated country has been vaccinated so far. I have a suggestion to the health minister, there is a modern and high-capacity vaccine manufacturing facility in Chengalpet.

"It was established by HLL biotech under the ministry of health with an investment of Rs 700 crore.



# China heightens activity along LAC in Uttarakhand, Indian Army on alert

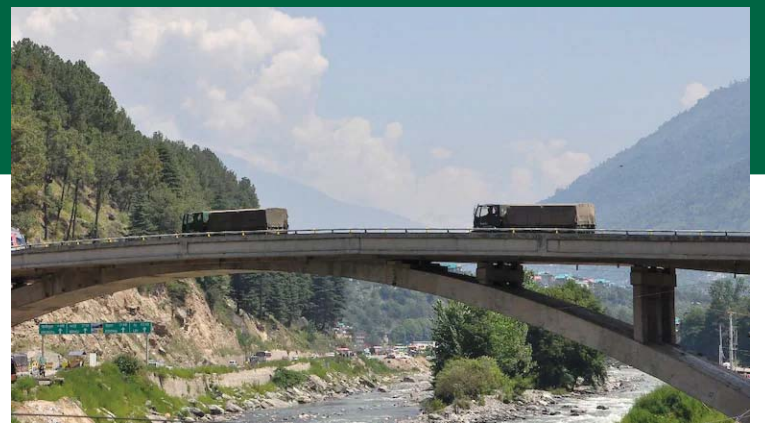
*The Indian Army is on alert in the central sector after around 40 soldiers of the People's Liberation Army were seen patrolling the area along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) near Barahoti area in Uttarakhand.*

(News Agencies)-The Chinese military has increased its activities along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Barahoti area of Uttarakhand. The movement on the Chinese side in the area has reportedly been seen after a gap of over six months.

As per government sources, around 40 troops of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were recently spotted patrolling the area along the LAC in Barahoti. "Around 40 Chinese

Army troops came to the area along the LAC in Barahoti. PLA troops were seen in the area after a long time," the sources said. In light of the recent developments along the LAC, the central sector may see heightened Chinese activity in the near future but all preparations have been made to deal with the situation, sources added. China has also heightened activity at its air base near Barahoti where a number of drones and

helicopters have been operating, the sources said. The Indian forces reportedly moved and deployed its troops in the sector in Uttarakhand last year to avoid a Ladakh-like scenario. India has positioned additional troops in the central sector and rear formations have gone ahead there, the sources said. Barahoti has seen several transgressions in the past and is claimed by the Chinese as part of their territory. Recently, Chief of Defence Staff General



Bipin Rawat and Central Army Commander Lt-General Y Dimri reviewed the security situation in the central sector, which included areas along the LAC in Uttarakhand. India and China have been locked in a military standoff at multiple friction

points in eastern Ladakh since early May last year. The two sides completed the withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of Pangong lake in February following a series of military and diplomatic talks.

# After BSP, now BJP plans Brahmin outreach ahead of UP polls

*In the battle for the crucial Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, after the BSP, the BJP is now seeking the support of Brahmins.*



(News Agencies)-The battle is on for securing Brahmin votes ahead of the crucial Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. After Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), now Bhartiya Janata

Party (BJP) is also trying to woo the Brahmin camp.

Earlier, BSP president Mayawati had announced that the party would hold Brahmin conventions across Uttar

Pradesh. Now, BJP ministers, MPs, MLAs, and office bearers will visit temples to seek the blessings of saints and religious leaders. In a meeting of the UP BJP's working committee, it was decided that on Guru Purnima on July 24, BJP leaders and people posted in corporations would visit all the monasteries and temples. UP minister Brijesh Pathak told India Today TV, "BJP has always respected gurus and through this, we wish

to convey our regards to the community." He added that those who politicise the issue should rethink. For BJP, saints are of utter importance. "Taking a jibe at Mayawati, BJP spokesperson Ashok Pandey said the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister tried to woo the Brahmins earlier also but have only used them for political accomplishments. He said Brahmins know where to stay and who can preserve their

benefits. Raising doubts over Brahmin politics, Samajwadi Party leader Anurag Bhadauria said if BJP would have worked in the last four years, then it would not have to meet saints or do any caste-oriented programs now. "People are ready to get Samajwadi Party back in 2022," he added. Amarnath Mishra, president of the 'Brahmin Sansad', said the Brahmin community was not a vote bank but a deciding factor.

# Don't move marine fisheries bill in Parliament, it has 'disturbing clauses': MK Stalin to PM Modi

*In a letter written to PM Modi, Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin has urged him not to move the Indian Marine Fishermen Bill, 2021 during the current session of Parliament, saying that it has many 'disturbing clauses'.*

(News Agencies)-Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to move the Indian Marine Fishermen Bill, 2021 during the ongoing Monsoon session of Parliament, saying that it has many "disturbing clauses."

In a letter written to PM Modi, Stalin said that the issue is of grave concern to Tamil Nadu, particularly among the coastal districts of the state.

"Many provisions in the proposed Bill go against the

interests of the local fishermen' communities and certain clauses infringe upon the rights conferred to the States under the State List of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution of India," he wrote. "Does not address concerns, well-being of Indian fishermen' The chief minister also said that the Centre has proposed to move the Bill without adequately addressing the concerns and well-being of Indian fishermen who are traditionally engaged in this for their livelihood for

generations." "While we understand and appreciate the need to protect and preserve the marine ecosystem, we also consider it equally important that the livelihood and interests of the traditional fishermen are clearly protected," CM Stalin said.

"Proposed Bill has many disturbing clauses" Stalin also claimed that the proposed Bill has many disturbing clauses, such as criminalisation and imprisonment of fishermen, use



of force against fishermen, levy of charges, and levy of huge penalties, which has resulted in widespread protests and disquiet. Urging PM Modi not to move the Bill and also put it across for wider debate and discussions, Stalin wrote, "After obtaining the views of the stakeholders on the

Bill in its present form, a decision on moving a fresh Bill that addresses the concerns of the fishermen's communities, may be taken. Considering the above, I once again urge you not to proceed with the moving of the Indian Marine Fishermen Bill, 2021."



## Top LeT commander among 2 terrorists killed in encounter in J&K's Sopore



(News Agencies)-Two terrorists including a top commander of proscribed terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were killed during an encounter in Warpora area of Sopore in Jammu and Kashmir on the intervening night of July 22-23. The night-long operation at Warpora was initiated following an input by the Sopore Police, according to sources. The Kashmir Police said that one of the terrorists who was

killed in the encounter has been identified as Fayaz War, who was involved in several terror attacks and killing of civilians and security forces personnel. The Kashmir Police have recovered incriminating materials including arms and ammunition from the site. The operation concluded in the morning without any collateral damage and the situation at the encounter site is under control now, the Kashmir Police said.

## Jammu and Kashmir Police shoots down drone in Akhnoor, recovers 5 kg IED



(News Agencies) - The Jammu and Kashmir Police on Friday shot down a hexacopter drone in Akhnoor area of Jammu district. The drone was shot down around 8 km inside the International Border (IB). Police also recovered 5 kg of improvised explosive device (IED) which was to be assembled and to be used by

terrorists, police said. Agencies are probing whether terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is behind the drone activity and using this modus operandi for a terror attack as in previous cases. This is not the first time a drone was spotted in Jammu or near the International Borders. Since the twin blasts at the Jammu airbase on June 27, several drones

were spotted in the last one month on multiple locations in Jammu, raising threat of a drone attack. Amid the heightened drone activity, Jammu and Kashmir DGP Dilbag Singh recently directed officers to remain extra alert as terror outfits are continuously trying to use drones for terrorist activities.

## Ganesh Godiyal appointed Uttarakhand Congress chief, Pritam Singh made CLP leader

(News Agencies)- The Congress on Thursday appointed Ganesh Godiyal as president of the Pradesh Congress Committee in Uttarakhand, replacing Pritam Singh who has been made the new CLP leader.

Former chief minister Harish Rawat has been made the Campaign Committee chief for Uttarakhand, where assembly elections will be held early next year, a party statement said. Congress president Sonia Gandhi also appointed four working presidents for the Uttarakhand party unit - Jeet Ram, Bhuwan Kapri, Tilak Raj Behar and Ranjit Rawat. "Congress president has appointed Ganesh Godiyal as the new president of Uttarakhand PCC. Pritam Singh has been appointed as the new Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader. Jeet Ram, Bhuwan Kapri, Tilak Raj Behar and Ranjit Rawat have been appointed as new working presidents of Uttarakhand Congress," the statement said. Gandhi also appointed

new chairmen of the Campaign Committee, Coordination Committee, Manifesto Committee and Core Committee for the Uttarakhand Congress.



members, including newly-appointed state party chief Ganesh Godiyal, Pritam Singh and Harish Rawat. Former Uttarakhand PCC chief Kishore Upadhyay has been appointed chairman of the Uttarakhand

Coordination Committee of the Congress, while former minister Navprabhat will be chairman of the Manifesto Committee. Former MP Mahendra Pal will be its vice chairman.

"Former AICC secretary Prakash Joshi has been appointed as the new chairman of Uttarakhand PCC Election Management Committee

and Rajinder Bhandari its vice chairman. Sumit Hridayesh has been appointed chairman of the Publicity Committee and Sarojani Kainthura as its vice chairperson," it said. Uttarakhand PCC vice president Dharendra Pratap Singh has been made the chairman of Outreach Committee, while Vijay Saraswat will be the new chairman of the Training Programme Committee, the statement added.

While Harish Rawat will be the Campaign Committee chairman, Rajya Sabha member Pradeep Tamta will be the vice chairman and Dinesh Aggarwal the convener. Aryendra Sharma has been appointed as the new treasurer of the Uttarakhand unit of the party, the statement noted. The Uttarakhand Congress Core Committee will be chaired by AICC in-charge Devendra Yadav, and will have 16

## After months of protests, Rajasthan government agrees to recruit computer graduates on regular basis

(News Agencies) After months of protests, the Ashok Gehlot-led Rajasthan government has agreed to recruit computer graduates on regular basis in the state. The decision was announced after a state cabinet meeting on Thursday. Hundreds of computer graduates had been protesting in Rajasthan for months demanding regular and not contractual jobs. They opposed the state government's decision to employ

party office there. Computer graduates have said that Priyanka Gandhi had criticised the Uttar Pradesh government, saying the recruitment of graduates on a contractual basis was an "insult" to them. But in



them on a contractual basis. The change in the Rajasthan government's stance came after several computer graduates from Rajasthan, who had reached Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh to meet Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi, were allegedly assaulted at a

Rajasthan, they said, the Congress government wanted to do the same. Last month, scores of protesting Computer graduates from Rajasthan had also staged a dharna outside the AICC office on Akbar Road in New Delhi, lashing out at the Ashok Gehlot government. The graduates believe that recruitment on a contractual basis would make them vulnerable to being sacked in the future without any reason being ascribed.



# Bombay HC asks Maha govt if escort charges for poor prisoners can be waived off

**The Bombay High Court asked if there was any provision that exempted escort charges to convicts on parole while hearing a plea filed by the Mumbai 2006 train blast convicts.**

(News Agencies)-The Bombay High Court on Wednesday asked the Maharashtra government to inform the court about any provision which permitted exemption of escort charges to convicts on parole.

A Bench of Justice SS Shinde and Justice NJ Jamadar was hearing a plea filed by the Mumbai 2006 train blast convicts seeking waiver of escort charges.

During the hearing, Justice Jamadar said, "If someone has been in prison for 10-12 years and if one lakh a day or 70,000 per day is needed for providing escort, from where would he pay? A lakh per day for the prisoners is not possible for 95% of the population."

The bench noted that the security escort is given to a convict to make sure that the person is secure and also to make sure that he does not indulge in any wrongful activity. Justice Jamadar further said, "The authority should decide while looking at a person's economic condition, whether he or she will be able to pay or not." Advocate Kritika Agarwal appearing for the two convicts, Mohammed Ali Alam Shaikh and Muzammil Attaur Rehman Shaikh told the Court that both had been in custody for 14 long years. She informed that in both cases, the escort charges sought for release on parole were exorbitant and beyond the financial capacity of the convicts.

Chief Public Prosecutor Aruna Pai informed the court that a Government Resolution (GR) had been issued in May 2019 which provided a formula for calculating the police escort charges required to be paid by the prisoner before being released on parole.

When Agarwal raised grievances against the GR too, the Court asked her to amend the petition to incorporate prayer and grounds challenging the GR. The Bombay High Court also appointed Senior Advocate Mihir Desai as an amicus curiae in the matter to assist the court in coming to a logical conclusion.

Mohammed, who was lodged in the Nagpur Central Prison, was convicted under the



Maharashtra Control of Crimes Act (MCOCA) and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for life. He had sought a 14-day parole to solemnise his daughter's marriage.

He then challenged the exorbitant escort fees saying that the expenses of police escort required to be borne by

the prisoner himself, prior to his release on parole, was ultra-vires to the fundamental rights under the Constitution of India. Muzammil, a co-convict under MCOCA, was lodged in Nashik Central Prison. He sought emergency parole as his widowed mother was admitted to the hospital and was all alone.

## Mumbai International Airport headquarters to remain in Mumbai, not shifting to Ahmedabad: Adani group



Congress leader Sachin Sawant had said that the move to shift the Mumbai airport headquarters to Ahmedabad is being done to lower the importance of

(News Agencies)-Refuting rumours of shifting Mumbai airport headquarters to Ahmedabad, the Adani Group has clarified that Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL) would remain headquartered in the megapolis.

Taking to Twitter, the Adani group said, "In light of rumours that the Mumbai HQ will be moving to Ahmedabad, we unambiguously state that both MIAL and NMIAL Airports will remain headquartered in Mumbai. We reiterate our commitment to make Mumbai proud and create thousands of jobs through our airport ecosystem."

The news of the shifting of the headquarters and the dandiya dance performed at the airport has created a lot of controversy of late. Earlier,

Mumbai. This is a message from PM Modi to the people of Maharashtra. The dandiya dance performed at the airport says a lot. This exercise started 7 years ago when the International Financial Service Center was taken away from Mumbai and shifted to Gujarat. Maharashtra did not discriminate against any industry or entrepreneur. Many entrepreneurs came to Maharashtra and became a part of the state. Mumbai Airport was previously owned by GVK, an Andhra Pradesh company. GVK did not move its Mumbai airport headquarters to Andhra Pradesh or organise Kuchipudi dance at the airport," he said. The traditional Gujrati dance performed at the airport some days back too has gone viral, triggering a lot of social media debate.

**Josh**  
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## Tobacco companies are beating governments' efforts to stop smoking worldwide

It is no secret that adolescents are easily addicted to cigarettes. But recent research published in the Lancet provides a stark reminder: a majority of the more than 1 billion smokers globally became addicted by the end of their teenage years. Over the past two decades, one out of every five smokers globally became addicted to nicotine by age 15.

Smoking rates and trends vary globally. Per the World Health Organization, more than 80% of smokers live in low- and middle-income countries, which tend to have fewer tobacco control measures in place and higher rates of tobacco-related death and disease. By contrast, wealthier nations have stronger tobacco control measures in place that have led to declines in smoking rates in those places. Smoking rates tend to vary by gender as well, with far higher rates among men compared with women in a number of countries.

Notwithstanding differences by geography, GDP, and gender, smoking rates remain too high everywhere. And while it may be tempting to point the finger at the individual smoker, it is our institutions that are to blame: governments have been too slow to pass policies that we know protect people from the tobacco industry's relentless push to addict new generations of children.

Tobacco companies worldwide use the same business model: hook children on their addictive products from a young age, which makes it more likely that they will become tobacco users for life.

A report from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids that examined tobacco company operations in 23 countries found that "the world's largest tobacco companies are targeting kids with advertising, promotions, and product placements around primary and secondary schools." These tactics include kid-friendly flavors, appealing eye-level advertisements and easy availability at a wide variety of accessible vendors.

There are effective, proven strategies that governments can proactively adopt to protect kids from the dangers of tobacco products and the exploitive tactics used by tobacco companies -- but countries are moving far too slowly to adopt them. The WHO has identified six specific tobacco-control measures that are proven to effectively reduce and prevent tobacco use: tobacco-use monitoring, which includes data collection efforts on smoking rates and trends among kids and adults; smoke-free air laws, which prohibit smoking in public places; tobacco cessation programs, including medication-assisted quitting programs covered by public or

private insurance; large pictorial warning labels; bans on marketing and advertising; and higher taxes. Every country should adopt all six measures, but most have not, and nearly 60 countries haven't adopted any measures at all. The tobacco industry, of course, fights tooth and nail against such policies. This is not to say we have not seen any progress. Between 2007 and 2019, the number of people worldwide covered by at least one of the WHO's recommended tobacco control policies rose from 1 billion to 5 billion. In Brazil, for example, the government adopted the entire suite of tobacco control policies recommended by the WHO. As a result, smoking rates in Brazil among 15-to-24-year-olds have dropped by nearly 75% since 1990.

But the number of smokers around the world continues to rise along with population growth. To take one example: the WHO has identified higher tobacco taxes as one of the most cost-effective policies to reduce cigarette smoking. Research finds that, on average, a 10% price increase in tobacco products will reduce consumption by as much as 8% in low- and middle-income countries and about 4% in high-income countries, with one study estimating that a 50% price increase in 13 selected middle-income countries would lead to 67 million male smokers quitting. Nevertheless, only 14% of the world's population lives in countries where tobacco taxes are high enough to reduce use. And the tobacco industry often adjusts prices to mitigate the effectiveness of taxes that are on the books. Similar to taxation, governments have been too slow to adopt the WHO's other recommended tobacco control policies. Of the six, there is only one -- pictorial warning labels -- that reaches more than half (52%) of the world's population, according to a 2019 report from the WHO. Thirty-eight percent of the world population lives in countries that conduct youth and adult surveys once every five years to monitor tobacco use, while about a third has access to tobacco cessation programs at "best practice" levels. The numbers are even lower for smoke-free air laws (22%) and bans on marketing and advertising (18%). In a time when the dangers of tobacco products have never been clearer, and the tactics of tobacco companies have never been more exposed, governments simply have not done enough. The United States provides a compelling case study as well. Our progress is undeniable. Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that, between 1964 and 2012, tobacco control policies in the US averted nearly 8 million premature deaths and increased life expectancy.

## Chinese continues aggressive expansion, another enclave in Sri Lanka

By Susmita Ghosh

Colombo Port City (CPC) is facing another major act of Chinese expansion as a part of its aggressive foreign policy. China is building another enclave in CPC, help strengthen its hold. Even amidst an uproar among the locals, as well as the international nods of disapproval, Sri Lanka has to shrink down in front of this development as they are trapped in Chinese debt with no breathing space. China used Sri Lanka as their entry point to the Indian subcontinent when they occupied the Hambantota port for a lease of ninety-nine years. Still, their pursuit of further occupation continues in Sri Lanka with this new development. As the International Forum for Rights and Security stated, this development clearly indicates that China is focusing on the southern part of India now, which is just a few hundred kilometres from there.

Around 269 hectares of land are reclaimed from the Indian Ocean to form the country's first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) for the development in Colombo Port City. Out of this, 125 hectares belong to Sri Lanka, while the remaining 88 hectares belong to China in a lease. With this enclave, China can now gain a massive edge to their Maritime Silk Road project. Arguably, it is an expanded part of the 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) initiative, which has given enough importance now. This development also holds the Chinese 'String of Pearls' policy well, where they encircle potential political rivals like India and control the trade routes for

economic supremacy. Sri Lanka is yet another victim of Chinese global expansion policy after various African countries and Pakistan. The Sri Lankan parliament passed the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill on May 20, 2021. It describes the Colombo Port City administrative framework where China can control it like a Chinese sovereign territory, free from Sri Lankan legal setup.

The expansion act was a long time plan as China influenced the political leadership of Sri Lanka. In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping came to Colombo and met the Rajapaksa brothers. Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Prime Minister and Gotabaya Rajapaksa have maintained a close relationship with the Chinese due to their help since 2009 to control the civil conflict. In 2018, it was alleged that the Chinese had paid the Rajapaksa brothers to move forward with Colombo Port City project. When the Rajapaksa brothers came back in power in 2019, the project development began at a fast pace to make up the lost time.

This Chinese act of expansion can have a long-term impact both locally and internationally as well. On the one hand, it will affect the local livelihood and the Srilankan traditional way of living, with an increase in the Chinese population and cultural injection. Conversely, it will have a huge environmental impact and compromise the sovereignty of Sri Lanka as well. Besides, Colombo is a seat of power in the Southern Indian Subcontinent, it is dangerously close to the southernmost tip of India.



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# PM Modi pays tributes to freedom fighters Tilak, Azad on their birth anniversary

**Taking to Twitter, Modi said Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a firm believer in Indian values and ethos, adding his views on education and women empowerment continued to motivate people.**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday paid tributes to freedom fighters Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Chandra Shekhar Azad on their birth anniversary and recalled their contributions towards India's freedom struggle. Taking to Twitter, Modi said Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a firm believer in Indian values and ethos, adding his views on education and women empowerment continued to motivate people. "I bow to the great Lokmanya Tilak on his Jayanti. His thoughts and principles are more relevant than ever before in the present

circumstances, when 130 crore Indians have decided to build an Aatmanirbhar Bharat that is economically prosperous and socially progressive," he wrote on the microblogging site. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a teacher, independence activist and social thinker, was the first leader of India's independence movement. Regarded as the "Maker of Modern India" by Mahatma Gandhi and "The father of the Indian unrest" by the British, Tilak was one of the strongest advocates of Swaraj or self-rule and is seen as the

first political leader who appreciated the importance of identity issues. One of his most famous quotes is "Swarajya is my birthright and I shall have it!". While paying tributes to the revolutionary Chandra Shekhar Azad, Prime Minister Modi said he was a futuristic thinker and dreamt of a strong and just India. "Remembering the valiant son of Bharat Mata, the remarkable Chandra Shekhar Azad on his Jayanti. During the prime of his youth he immersed himself in freeing India from the clutches of imperialism. He was also a futuristic thinker, and



dreamt of a strong and just India," PM Modi tweeted.

Born in 1906, Chandra Shekhar Azad, was a part of Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. Associated with a string of revolutionary incidents to target the colonial British

regime, he vowed never to be captured by the police and remain "azad" (free). In 1931, Azad died at a young age of 24 as he shot himself after being surrounded by the police in Uttar Pradesh's Allahabad, now known as Prayagraj.

# Lack of preparedness greatest failure of our collective ecosystem: US scientist



**In a recent op-ed, he wrote that although the Covid-19 pandemic has been a human and healthcare disaster, by scientific measures the world was lucky this time.**

Describing Covid-19 as the worst health crisis in the recent memory, an American scientist leading the research wing of one of the top 20 largest pharmaceutical companies in the world has said that lack of preparedness has been the "greatest failure" of the collective ecosystem. "I don't want to point a finger at anyone. In some ways it's a collective failure of our system. (While) it's the greatest success in our ecosystem our response to Covid-19 you might argue, it's also perhaps the greatest failure of our collective ecosystem, which was our lack of preparedness," Dr Andrew Plump, president of R&D, Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited, told PTI in an interview.

"Covid-19 is the worst health crisis of our generation or the generation before us. It has been a travesty. It's horrible what's happened across the world," said Dr Plump ahead of

the 15th annual India-US Biopharma and Healthcare Summit on June 22, being organised by Boston-based USA India Chambers of Commerce (USAIC).

However, there are silver linings and there are certainly learnings that can be taken forward, he noted.

"I think the most important learning is: Let's not get fooled again by history. History predicted this. We knew we were going to have a pandemic and in fact, we got lucky this time in some ways. Despite the massive losses it could have been, it could have been much worse," Dr Plump said.

In a recent op-ed, he wrote that although the Covid-19 pandemic has been a human and healthcare disaster, by scientific measures the world was lucky this time.

"Covid-19 was far less lethal than its predecessors, less contagious than previous pandemic viruses, and we were

able to quickly develop a cadre of effective vaccines. But luck is not a strategy," he wrote in an op-ed at STAT.

A co-founder of the Covid R&D Alliance, which was established last year, Dr Plump argued that a pandemic needs to be given the same importance and priority by the government as they give to defense.

"The challenge with pandemics is that we think we can't see the enemy, so we don't even know where to start and so we don't do anything. But that's a fallacy. We know the enemy," he said, adding that science has advanced so much that eight or nine times out of 10 and they can project out.

"With 80-90 per cent confidence, we can guess what this virus is going to look like. Is it going to come from fluid, or it's going to come from coronavirus. So, we do know the enemy," he said.

There are now enough analytical capabilities where they can survey viruses that exist in animals and can use advanced analytics, machine learning and artificial intelligence to even make better predictions.

"So we're not just basing what's likely to come from what's

coming in the past, but we're actually basing our ability to protect ourselves against future pandemics by knowing specifically what's likely to come easy with these advanced analytics," Dr Plump said. Observing that there is a great scope for collaboration between pharma companies of the two countries, and in particular platforms like that of the USA India Chambers of Commerce, he said that first and foremost, innovation and science need to be the cornerstone.

"Secondly, we need to have an infrastructure, we need to have a focus, we need to have collaboration beyond the walls of science that include governments and policymakers and not for profit organisations and that's something else that the USA India Chamber of Commerce has done," he said. Referring to this year's theme of the conference "From N of one to N of a billion" Dr Plump said, "The theme is meant to symbolise the fact that we have become so innovative in health sciences that we're today able to make therapies drugs that can be tailored to a single individual."

"But we recognise that if we don't make drugs that are also

treating the billions of patients that live across the world, we're not serving our purpose," he said and suggested that the USA India Chamber of Commerce can elevate the dialogue of healthcare innovation and bring it ensure that it's focused as much on innovation as it is on access.

He opposed the move to grant TRIPS waiver to certain Covid-19 vaccines at the World Trade Organization (WTO), as being proposed by India and South Africa and supported by the United States.

"It's horrible, because the issue is all of us want to create solutions that enable rapid resolution of a global pandemic. That's not where the gap is. The gap is in the supply chain. It's in manufacturing. It's in access," he said.

"You even saw in India, recently, how you rolled out a vaccination program. Here the government made a decision to decentralise a lot of the work and it backfired. Vaccines ended up going to the wrong people. Costs were driven up. It's not about IP. It's really an operational challenge that we're facing right now; it's not an intellectual property challenge," Dr Plump said.



# Open schools, with a focus on early grades

*Media and policy attention during the pandemic understandably focused on the immediate tasks of saving lives by procuring beds and oxygen. Yet, the greatest long-term cost of the pandemic may be borne by our children. As the second wave of Covid-19 recedes, and we slowly try to restore a semblance of normality, one of our top priorities as a country should be to open schools safely.*

Even before the pandemic, India faced a severe learning crisis - with nearly 50% of class 5 students in rural India unable to read at even class 2 level. The pandemic and 16 months of school closures have almost certainly made the situation worse. A recent study by the Azim Premji University estimates that 92% of children in classes 2-6 have lost their language skills and that 82% have lost math skills. The costs of these 16 months of school closures are likely to be long-lasting and could potentially scar an entire generation of Indians. For instance, in a recent study on the consequences of the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, economist Jishnu Das and colleagues found that just four months of school closures led to learning losses of nearly two entire grade levels over time. How could four months of school closure lead to two years of learning loss? One possibility

is that teachers continued with regular grade-level instruction and children who had fallen behind could no longer keep up. In other words, missing even four months of school not only hurt the level of learning, but may have permanently reduced the rate of learning in school, leading to a much larger cumulative learning losses over time.

Another key insight was that learning losses were highly unequal; children with educated mothers were able to make up for school closures but children with uneducated mothers were particularly badly affected. Thus, the trade-off between increased infection risk from opening schools and loss of learning from keeping them closed is likely to vary sharply by socio-economic status. For educated parents with access to technology at home (who dominate the public discourse), it may have made sense to teach their children at home.

But, for tens of millions of children with uneducated parents and limited access to technology, the costs of school closures are likely to have been much higher.

Thus, the single most important task for the new education minister is to ensure rapid but safe opening of schools. The minister has stated that implementing the new National Education Policy (NEP) is his top goal, and NEP correctly identifies that the highest priority for our education system should be to deliver universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). However, this goal will be stillborn if schools remain closed.

Fortunately, we now know enough about Covid-19 to be able to open schools safely. Entities such as Unicef, Unesco, the World Bank, and the India Task Force of the Lancet COVID-19 Commission have all put out detailed recommendations to guide



school reopening efforts while minimising infection risk. In reopening schools, we should aim to implement these recommendations and minimise health risks. In addition, I outline six key principles to ensure that school reopening can mitigate learning losses.

First, consistent with school education being a state subject, the decision on opening schools and the modalities for doing so should continue to be left to the states. However, the central government should provide guidelines, technical support, and financial resources to make it easier for states to do so. Second, while the instinct

of many officials is to first open classes 9-12 because of board exams, the bigger priority should be opening classes 1-5 to ensure universal mastery of foundational skills as prioritised by NEP. A large body of evidence highlights the importance of early years in the formation of human capital and our school opening priorities should reflect this. Further, while older children can still absorb content online, through self-study, and virtual groups, in-person interactions with teachers are much more important at younger ages.

## Intelligence agencies need greater scrutiny

**The Pegasus controversy must spark reforms: Subject IB, R&AW and NTRO to legislative oversight, and bring in a data protection law**

L'affaire Pegasus has once again focused attention on the unbridled power that intelligence structures in India possess and deploy. They have enormous budgets that are not subject to legislative scrutiny and have minimal executive oversight. These intelligence structures, in the name of operational secrecy, make every attempt to keep the political and bureaucratic executive out of the loop. Unfortunately, misuse of intelligence agencies and the police for political purposes is rampant. It is far too tempting not to do so when untrammelled powers of intrusion into the personal lives of people are available at the click of a button. The dividing

line separating national security imperatives from plain snooping on political opponents, inconvenient journalists and civil society actors is a Rubicon that is crossed with impunity on a daily basis.

Even before the advent of modern technology there were sleuths who would physically stalk people and surveil their homes. Then came the ubiquitous telephone. The Government of India (GOI) incessantly contested initiatives to put robust authorisation procedures in place to intercept phone conversations. The Supreme Court (SC) finally intervened decisively in PUCL vs Union of India (1997) and put a legal architecture in place that now must be followed before a

telephone tête-à-tête can be lawfully intercepted.

The political trigger for this judgment sprung from an allegation made by former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar in the spring of 1990. He accused the then VP Singh-led government of illicitly tapping the telephones of 27 politicians, including his own. The allegation led to a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry. The investigation exposed just how omnipresent, routine illegal telephone tapping was.

The CBI report opened a Pandora's Box. It delineated how tardy the legal framework was. It itemised the procedural lapses that made such misuse of power possible. Phone



tapping was recurrently carried out without proper sanction. It persevered for far lengthier periods than was legally permissible. It was often based on false premises. The PUCL judgment asserted that telephone tapping transgressed the fundamental right to privacy. It fashioned protections against capriciousness in the exercise of the State's surveillance practices. Even though the court had

constructed PUCL guidelines as a provisional answer, pending remedial action by the central government against the abuse of its surveillance powers, these guidelines attempted to firewall Indian surveillance paradigms. Even in the cyber age, the Information Technology Act and the rules therein governing internet surveillance derive their legal jurisprudence from these PUCL truisms.





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# An opportunity for a reset in Nepal-India ties

**The perception in Kathmandu that New Delhi was backing KP Oli till the very end eroded India's image. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to Sher Bahadur Deuba after he won the confidence vote shows that Delhi is willing to cooperate with the new government**



(SC) reinstated the House. In May, President Bidya Devi Bhandari once again dissolved the House, despite Mr Deuba having a list of the majority of parliamentarians backing him in a bid to become Prime Minister (PM). The SC once again ordered the restoration of the House. Mr Deuba was sworn-in, and with the support of his own party, the Prachanda-led Maoist force, a communist faction led by Madhav Kumar Nepal and a Tarai-based party, is now expected to take the country to elections next year.

Besides the restoration of democracy and an end to strongman rule in Nepal, this is an opportunity to reset India-Nepal ties. The perception in Kathmandu that New Delhi was backing Mr Oli till the very end eroded India's image. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to Mr Deuba on Monday after he won the confidence vote and private diplomatic outreach to Mr Prachanda - the key architect of the alliance - shows that Delhi is willing to cooperate with the new government. Instead of allowing

intermediaries on either side to destabilise ties by undermining the government, or allowing ideological factors such as the desire to restore Nepal's Hindu status to prevail, India must focus on cementing State-to-State ties, assisting Nepal with vaccines, backing a federal democratic secular republican framework, and working with the government. Political goodwill through support for democracy and delivery of promises and projects are key to pushing back China's influence in Nepal.

## Covid-19: The battle ahead

**More Indians have some protection now. But a rough extrapolation of the findings suggests 400 million people are still vulnerable - this number alone is higher than the population of the United States. The government rightly underlined this fact several times on Tuesday to appeal to people to remain careful and avoid any sort of gathering, whether social, religious or political.**

The latest nationwide survey for Covid-19 antibodies suggests that two out of three Indians may have some form of protection from the coronavirus. The government's senior experts said on Tuesday that the sample size of close to 29,000 people included people who did and did not receive a vaccine. Among the unvaccinated group, the prevalence of antibodies was 62%. Overall, including vaccine recipients, it was 67.6%. In

contrast, in the last such study, from the same 70 districts, the prevalence rate was 24.1%. The jump is unsurprising since the earlier study was held prior to the devastating second wave of Covid-19 infections. Such studies, known as seroprevalence surveys, carry several important caveats. First, can the study be extrapolated to estimate the overall spread of the virus in India? Both Balram Bhargava, the head of the Indian Council

of Medical Research, and Niti Aayog member VK Paul cautioned that these numbers cannot be taken to fit a particular city or village - the study, they said, gives mostly an overall picture across the country. Second, does simply testing positive for antibodies mean protection? The answer is yes; antibodies do mean protection. Third, the longevity of antibodies, especially among those who were infected, is likely to wane in the next few



months. But there is another way of looking at the number. A rough extrapolation of the findings suggests 400 million people are still vulnerable - this number alone is higher than the population of the United States. The government rightly

underlined this fact several times on Tuesday to appeal to people to remain careful and avoid any sort of gathering, whether social, religious or political. States that recently went ahead with allowing people to observe some festivities, or those that attempted to but were stopped by the Supreme Court, must pay particular attention. It is also crucial for authorities engaged in surveillance to keep a close watch on any changes in outbreak patterns. At present, many regions of the country are logging numbers last seen in February. That is when India became complacent. It must not make the same mistake again since this time, if it is able to drive up vaccination rates, the country may well be in the home stretch of the war against Covid-19.

## Climate goals: India's strides and challenges

India reduced support to the fossil fuel industry by 4% between 2015 and 2019 while countries in the G20 forum are failing to meet their commitments, a new report by BloombergNEF and Bloomberg Philanthropies released on Tuesday said. The G20 provided \$636 billion in direct support for fossil fuels in 2019, which is 10% less than that in 2015. The report, however, also noted that India has 66 coal power plants in the pipeline,

second only to China's 247. The report is not a review of India's official commitment (Nationally Determined Contributions), but what the country needs to do if it has to meet the net-zero target by (2050) and the 1.5 degree criteria under the Paris Climate Agreement. India has not committed to a net-zero target and, therefore, the metric doesn't apply. But it is on course to meet the NDC pledges. While it is true that India is the world's third-largest carbon

emitter after China and the United States, the country needs cheap and reliable power to meet three development challenges: First, India has to provide clean cooking energy to 800 million people and electricity access to 200 million; second, it has to create jobs and that cannot happen without more and better power; and third, the urban transition will entail huge energy needs. In addition, the energy transition has to be just because of

livelihood implications. While it is imperative to build domestic multi-level and multi-actor alliances to facilitate the transition, India needs and is entitled to financial and technological support from the developed world to increase the pace of changeover. Clean energy investments in emerging and developing economies need to be multiplied by more than seven - from less than \$150 billion last year to over \$1 trillion annually by 2030 to meet climate goals.



# The increasing threat of lightning strikes

**Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning strikes (usually in the pre-monsoon and monsoon months) are the single largest killers among natural disasters in India, according to the National Disaster Management Authority**



In 2020, India recorded a nearly 23% increase in lightning episodes compared to 2019, says a report by Earth Networks, a private firm specialising in weather intelligence data. The report, released on Monday, shows its network detected 39.55 million lightning pulses in India. Nearly 13.03 million were dangerous "cloud-to-ground" strikes, which make lives and property vulnerable. Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning

strikes (usually in the pre-monsoon and monsoon months) are the single largest killers among natural disasters in India, according to the National Disaster Management Authority. Lightning strikes have killed at least 2,000 people every year in India since 2004, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in June. The increasing number of lighting-related episodes is now being linked to the climate crisis. This is because surface

temperature and moisture levels have increased significantly in recent years. The increasing moisture level provides favourable condition for the development of thunder clouds and collision of ice particles leads to charging and lightning strikes.

It is crucial that states relay the benefits of improved forecasting to the people, and install lightning arresters in rural areas. Odisha has reduced lightning

deaths by installing arresters. The early warning messages must be in local languages and all communication mediums must be used. States should undertake lightning micro-zoning for regions, depending on their geography, to handle disaster and death risks better.

With temperatures rising due to global warming, India is certain to see a spike in lightning mortalities in the future, and so states must put in place adequate systems and channels that disseminate information effectively to save lives and property.

## Acknowledge the brutality of the second wave

***Passing the blame and writing a revisionist history of the summer - either by the Centre or states - is an affront to citizens who lived through the crisis and lost loved ones***

First we felt we were mere numbers; now we feel we are not even numbers," Ruchika Gupta, told me, all the way from the Netherlands, from where she has mobilised a support group for families whose relatives died from a shortage of oxygen at Delhi's Jaipur Golden Hospital in April. Like everyone else, Gupta, whose father was among the 21 patients who died within a few hours at the hospital because the oxygen supply to the intensive care unit (ICU) was stalled, is horrified at the callousness of the government's response in Parliament. Passing the buck to the states and Union Territories, the health minister argued in the Rajya Sabha that no oxygen-related deaths had been officially reported to them. Even a perfunctory acknowledgment of the pain and suffering of thousands of Indians was not made on the floor of the House. Instead, the central government took refuge behind a technicality. And while the Opposition attacked the Narendra Modi government for its lack of empathy, non-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) states have done no better in computing the deaths that took place in their hospitals from a



shortage of oxygen. At the very least, the government could have, in its reply in Parliament, displayed greater empathy in expressing compassion and regret over the lives lost. One cannot underscore enough that these were not natural deaths that took place during a pandemic; these deaths, running into the thousands, were a consequence of the failure of State institutions. "Even the man on the street knows that there was an oxygen shortage in hospitals across India," Dr SC Gupta of the Capital's Batra Hospital tells me. Twelve people died in his

hospital's ICU, including a doctor colleague.

So how did oxygen deaths get erased from all official records? There is a trail of evidence should anyone want to investigate where and what went wrong. Hospitals took to social media to plead for oxygen. There are videos of doctors breaking down on camera as they make plaintive appeals for oxygen supply. Doctors have chronicled the helplessness they felt while dealing with the shortfall and watching patients die. And then, of course, there are those of us who have documented the

countless tragedies on camera, chronicling not just the deaths that took place inside hospital wards in the absence of high-flow oxygen; but also out on the streets, in the backs of cars and auto-rickshaws, and even right at the closed gates of hospitals because they did not have the requisite supply of oxygen to take them in. Every Indian who was refused a hospital bed because of the absence of oxygen should also be acknowledged and counted. Instead, governments, both states and central, have fallen back on what the discharge

summaries and release papers in hospital records documented. And this is where the process of sanitising the evidence begins.

At Jaipur Golden Hospital, for example, the medical superintendent confirmed the shortage of oxygen in a brief statement to the media. But the paperwork provided to families, while releasing the bodies for cremations, only mentioned "respiratory failure," enabling the hospital to claim in court that there was no oxygen shortage. "With their silence on how these deaths were classified, doctors are breaking their Hippocratic oath," says Prachi Awasthi, whose mother, Seema, was among those who died at the hospital when the oxygen ran out. "I have been robbed, first robbed of the chance at saving my mother's life and now robbed of the chance to give her dignity and acknowledgment in death." Awasthi says she respects the sacrifices made by countless doctors at the Covid-19 frontline but believes, as fellow-sufferers and victims, it is time for them to speak out against the official invisibilisation of these deaths. Shalu Kataria, a mother to two young children, was widowed by the oxygen shortage at the same hospital.



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# Respond to Pegasus with responsibility, remedy, and reform

In his interviews with David Frost after he was forced out of office due to the Watergate Scandal, Richard Nixon famously said, in the context of revelations regarding spying on domestic critics, "... when the president does it, that means that it is not illegal". This mindset around the executive branch being beyond the law or any form of ethical reproach is now what the Indian Republic has to grapple with and confront in our pervasively digital present.

There have now been multiple rounds of revelations regarding the widespread use of the foreign spyware firm NSO Technologies' Pegasus hacking suite in India - from initial disturbing information around its possible use to target lawyers, activists and those who dissent to it being used target those holding public office in all branches of our government, bureaucrats, Opposition leaders, scientists, whistleblowers and horrifically, their families and loved ones. The range of those who have been sought to be targeted or actively pursued using the Pegasus spyware suite's hacking capabilities is shocking. The breadth of this in itself constitutes a surveillance scandal shaking our democracy to its core.

There is now, without question, a crisis of complete impunity with regards to surveillance and digital intrusion in India. These

***The mindset around the executive branch being beyond the law or any form of ethical reproach is now what the Indian Republic has to grapple with and confront in our pervasively digital present***



recent spyware revelations should not be read in isolation. There is a wider digital authoritarian trend in our country. This is demonstrated by the massive number of secret censorship and surveillance orders directed to tech firms during the farmers' protests and, later, during criticism of the government during the second wave of Covid-19. It is also demonstrated by the issuance of the information technology (IT) Rules, with its Orwellian mandates requiring the retention of personal data and undermining of encrypted

messaging. The Indian government's possible and suspected use of NSO's Pegasus spyware paints a picture of lawlessness and State-commissioned cyber destabilisation. Indian law is clear; the deliberate intrusion into digital systems with harmful intent constitute the crime of hacking under the Information Technology Act. There is no "carve-out" provided to the executive branch under the law. All hacking, including government hacking, is a crime in India.

Private firms who aid government actors in India in

hacking have no shield from prosecution or legal liability. NSO has repeatedly stressed that it sells its hack-for-hire services only to governments. And lest we doubt the importance of NSO's stated words, we need look no further than the government's own words to Parliament.

In his remarks this week, newly appointed Union minister for electronics and IT, Ashwini Vaishnaw (himself now revealed to have been a potential target for Pegasus use) relied extensively on the public relations statements and corporate documents of NSO to

justify the government's evasive position.

In his Independence Day address in 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the importance of protecting Digital India's information, communication and technology systems and promised that the government would publish and implement a new National Cybersecurity Strategy to better secure all Indians online. It has nearly been a year. And not only is there no sign of this cybersecurity strategy, we instead see our Union government possibly relying on a global spyware industry that relies on the exploitation of digital security vulnerabilities, putting all digital users at risk, and defending the actions of a hack-for-hire company. And if they have had no dealings, let there be a clear denial - which, strikingly, has been missing.

The people of India now need three things addressed expeditiously - responsibility, remedy and reform.

There needs to be a clear, honest government statement on what interactions Indian government agencies have had with NSO and a disclosure of the officials responsible for that. The government and ruling party should not seek to frustrate the enquiries of Parliament's Standing Committee on IT or other bodies investigating this issue.

Those directly victimised by NSO malware on their devices or otherwise subjected to being on these targeting lists must receive justice. Officials and NSO representatives must be prosecuted. As investigation and legal proceedings kick off, officials must not be shielded using colonial era sanction-for-prosecution powers. Judgments and relief must be made in favour of these victims, and the data hacked from them must be destroyed after proper accounting. Crucially, this must never happen again. India has far too often catapulted from one surveillance scandal to another, without fixing the larger problem. Rather than a watered down, government-friendly data protection bill as currently before Parliament, what we deserve is a strong privacy code that includes meaningful reform and controls over surveillance.

## Starting Gun: In a dark time, the Great Symbol to the rescue

Great symbols are ubiquitous, instantly recognisable, and their origins, though often hard to trace, are accompanied by legendary stories. The cross, the pentacle star, the swastika, the rainbow flag. Silver arrows, and golden arches. The swoosh, and the bitten apple. They encapsulate religions, ideologies, ideals, ideas. They build nations, and create corporations, transcending time and place, until one glance is enough to spark a string of memories or a chain of emotions. What is perhaps the greatest of the symbols was devised by a French aristocrat who had

fulfilled his dream of recreating Ancient Olympia by managing to convince the world that sport, at the turn of the 20th century, would cement the bond between nations, some newly formed and newly evolved, that were not always in league with one another. Having organised the first modern Olympics in Athens in 1896, then four more in Paris, St Louis, London, and Stockholm, by 1913, he needed something that would capture and inspire this movement. A symbol that would put a stamp on his philosophy that the struggle was more important than the triumph, that it wasn't about winning and losing but

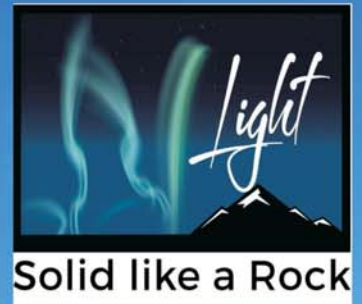
about playing the game. So, in a moment of inspiration, Baron Pierre de Coubertin did the simplest of things. He drew overlapping circles, interlaced them like Venn diagrams, shaded them in colours from national flags around the world, and gave birth to what has come to be known, literally, as the Great Symbol. Those five rings can mean only one thing - the Olympic Games - but they signify much more. Fuelled by the words "Citius, Altius, Fortius", they are rings of glory, hope, aspiration, and excellence; rings that make you a part of something larger than yourself -- a unifying celebration

of human achievement. The Great Symbol faces its greatest test in Tokyo over the next two weeks. The challenge is tougher than when it was put in abeyance during the second World War, and when it seemed for a while that it may be lost forever. That was a solely manmade hurdle. The path to overcoming it would always lie with the better judgment of humanity about what kind of world it wanted to live in.

This time, the world faces a contagion that can get anyone, at any time, that can overrun cities, derail the best laid plans, and the extent of whose power we may still not be aware of.



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# The Kabul dilemma

*The good guys are losing. The bad guys are winning. And India stares at a crisis. Between the right side and winning side, India will have to strike a balance to protect its core national interests and citizens.*

The civil war in Afghanistan came home on Friday, with the formidable Indian photojournalist, Danish Siddiqui of Reuters, who was embedded with Afghan security forces, killed by the Taliban in Kandahar. Siddiqui's tragic death has led to an outpouring of grief globally, but it is the latest symbol of the tragedy that is unfolding in Afghanistan. The Taliban remains a monstrous force, committed to a medieval form of an Islamic Emirate, but it is winning. The Afghan government remains determined to preserve the Republic, with its democratic values, but is struggling to hold on to power. The international community (read the United States and its western allies) is still holding on to the fiction of a peace process and political settlement, but can't wait to flee after having ravaged the country for 20 years and left it without any sustainable and resilient institutions to defend democracy. And India is stuck, caught between its values and principles it holds dear and immediate strategic interests and imperatives. Distilled to the core, at the cost of being simplistic, here is a 20-year history of Afghanistan. Wounded by the 9/11 terror attacks, the United States (US) decided it was time to invade Afghanistan to kill Osama bin Laden, dismantle al Qaeda and oust the Taliban, which had provided State support and sanctuary to the terror outfit. The last objective was met fairly quickly, and a new interim authority led by Hamid Karzai would go back home. Uncomfortable with a democratic regime in Kabul which wanted to reorient Afghanistan's domestic and external trajectory and have balanced ties with other South Asian countries, particularly India, Pakistan harboured, supported, funded, and armed the Taliban and other proxies - even as it pretended to be with



took office. But it took the US 10 years to find and kill bin Laden; al Qaeda changed its form and its ideology and leaders also found a home in other terror outfits; and the Taliban went to Pakistan and waited. Islamabad and Rawalpindi, compelled to take part in the US-led "war on terror", figured that eventually the Americans the US in cracking down on terrorism. Washington, first distracted by the flawed invasion of Iraq and then war fatigue back home, vacillated between the objectives of merely defeating terror and nation-building. It achieved neither successfully. And as the politics of nationalism intensified in the US, Washington began looking for

an exit. Pakistan then pretended to be the good guy facilitating peace, and a staggering degree of spin about how there is a good Taliban and bad Taliban began doing the rounds. The US special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, in a desperate bid to emerge as peace-maker irrespective of the terms of the peace, appeased the Taliban, even as the Afghan government got weaker every day. And so now there is a descent into chaos, to use Ahmed Rashid's evocative title of a book on Afghanistan-Pakistan. The Taliban is officially participating in a peace process, but is on a military offensive. In two months, it has taken over one-third of the country's districts; captured crucial border posts; penetrated Kandahar; and caused massive civilian suffering in terms of death and displacement. Ashraf Ghani, the Republic's president, in an interview with The Hindu, put up a brave front and said while the Taliban has won battles, the Republic will win the war while still pointing to the need for a political settlement. The US has recognised any forceful capture of power, but the Taliban intends to change the balance of power irreversibly, leaving little choice. The West is slowly reconciling itself to a Taliban-dominated regime in return for guarantees on security; China, Russia and even Iran seem to have cut bilateral deals with the Taliban; and despite sporadic differences with the Taliban, Pakistan seems to be smiling all the way to Kabul. India is in a tough spot. Delhi recognises the threat the Taliban poses to not just its security but modernity. But it has little leverage to influence the outcome. It is unhappy with the manner of the US exit, but can't change that either. To secure its political, diplomatic and developmental investment in Afghanistan, it wants to support the Afghan government, which is indeed putting up a fight, but also knows that there is little choice but to deal with the Taliban, a force that it so dislikes for the right reasons. Between the right side and winning side, India will have to strike a balance to protect its core national interests and citizens.



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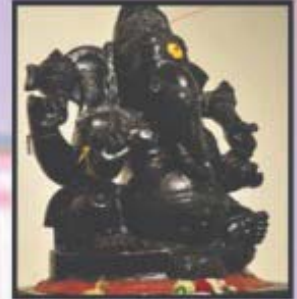
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# The Congress in Punjab

***Imposing a power-sharing formula, despite chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh's concerns, is a risky strategy***

To resolve the impasse in the Punjab Congress, where there was an outright battle between the chief minister (CM), Captain Amarinder Singh, and cricketer-turned-satirist-turned-Bharatiya Janata Party leader-turned-Congress minister-turned rebel, Navjot Singh Sidhu, the Congress high command has implemented a power-sharing formula. Mr Singh will remain the party's face for the state assembly elections while Mr Sidhu has been appointed the state unit chief. Whether this formula cements party unity, paves the way for a smooth generational



transition, and improves electoral prospects, or adds to internal factionalism, erodes its prospects, and even creates conditions for a splinter is the key question - and the answer to that question will determine more than just Punjab politics. The

Congress high command is pleased at what it thinks is a reasonable solution and establishes the authority of the Gandhi family, for it is an open secret that Mr Sidhu's sources of strength were Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. The

CM is upset at the manner in which he has been treated, and now forced to deal with a state chief he doesn't particularly like, despite having won the state elections and subsequent local elections over the past five years. Mr Sidhu is happy that he

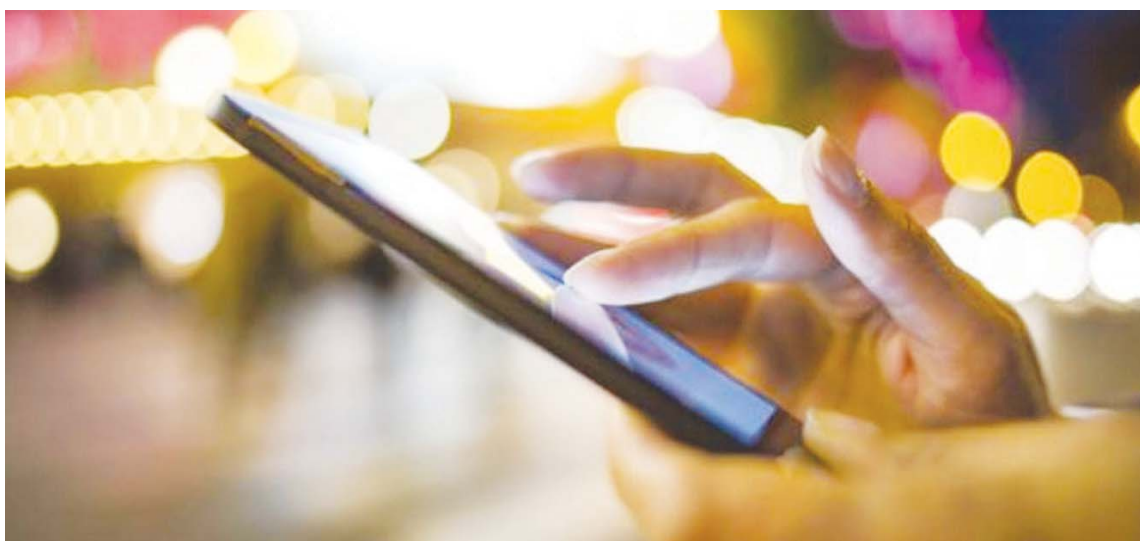
has been able to take on the CM and get away with it, becoming the chief of a party he joined four years ago as a step towards his ambition of becoming CM. The rest of the Opposition in the state suddenly sees an opportunity due to the infighting in the ruling

party. And the rest of the Congress rank and file is observing closely how the battle between the Delhi leadership and a regional satrap plays out. But while the implications will only become clear over time, the manner in which the Congress has dealt with Punjab, the one state in north India it is in power, may be a lesson on what not to do. It has alienated a successful CM, primarily because he was autonomous, though, to be sure, questions were being raised on the CM's governance. It made a public spectacle of internal differences. It imposed a formula which is laced with risks of infighting ahead of and during next year's polls - which will be tested in the ticket distribution exercise. The outcome in Punjab may determine the power balance between Delhi leadership and regional units of the party.

## An attack on citizens

***Pegasus-based surveillance is unacceptable. If the Indian government has done this, it is a betrayal of the constitutional compact with citizens. If another government has done it, it is a cyber attack on India and its citizens. Either way, there must be a truly independent judicial enquiry to get to the truth and hold those responsible for this violation of fundamental rights accountable.***

On Sunday evening, an international network of media organisations, assisted by a network of international civil society organisations, broke a story about State surveillance as a part of a series called The Pegasus Project. In India, The Wire reported that the phone numbers of 40 journalists (including three from this newspaper), two ministers (including the new minister for information technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw), three Opposition figures (including Rahul Gandhi), political consultant-turned-politician Prashant Kishor, officials (including former election commissioner Ashok Lavasa), a Supreme Court judge, and business figures were on a list of potential targets for surveillance at different points in the last four years. The phone devices of some individuals, subjected to



forensic analysis, indicated the presence of an infection or an attempted hack. If the allegations of widespread surveillance are true, they represent an unacceptable and illegal invasion of the right to privacy, right to liberty, and the right to dignity of all those targeted; the series also throw up deeply disturbing questions

about the source of the hack and represents a subversion of India's constitutional democracy. Developed by the Israeli firm NSO, Pegasus is an extraordinarily sophisticated technology that can, once it infects a phone, gain access to calls (including on encrypted platforms), contacts, app passwords, browsing history,

microphone and camera which can capture off-line conversations, and even plant evidence, as alleged in the Bhima Koregaon case. To be sure, the mere presence of a number does not indicate a hack. The list is only of potential targets. Forensic analysis has been limited, and also inconclusive in certain cases.

The Government of India (GOI) has denied allegations of illegal surveillance, and claimed all interceptions are as per law and due process - though it does leave room open to ask if GOI has purchased Pegasus and deployed it. NSO, which maintains that it sells the software only to "vetted governments" for countering terror and crime, termed the allegation baseless, and claimed that the 50,000 listed numbers (internationally) may be for other purposes. But its chief executive, Shalev Hulio also said that allegations of misuse were concerning and if true, violate the relationship of trust with customers, ie governments. The gravity of the allegations and its implications for Indian democracy are enormous. If the Indian government has done this, it is a betrayal of the constitutional compact with citizens.



# Xi Jinping calls in PLA as unprecedented floods hit central China; 1 lakh evacuated

**Chinese President Xi Jinping deploys the Army to rescue people in flood-hit central China. At least 13 people have been killed and over a lakh evacuated in the Henan province due to heavy floods.**

(News Agencies)-At least 13 people were killed and over a lakh evacuated in China's central Henan province hit by the heaviest rainfall in 1,000 years, prompting President Xi Jinping on Wednesday to deploy the Army to rescue those trapped in inundated subways, hotels and public places, amid fears of collapse of a dam posing flood risk to the provincial capital.

The massive floods, described by meteorologists as a once-in-a-lifetime event, has resulted in apocalyptic scenes in the provincial capital Zhengzhou, a metropolis of 12.6 million, with its public avenues and subway tunnels getting submerged with surging waters.

Xi ordered the deployment of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and said that authorities at all levels must give top priority to ensuring people's safety and

property as massive floods ravaged the province and Zhengzhou city.

The People's Liberation Army Central Theatre Command urgently dispatched troops to a county in rain-hit Henan where a dam is under threat of collapse due to serious damage caused by the rains, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The PLA said on its social media account on Sina Weibo, China's Twitter-like social media platform, saying that a 20-meter-long crevasse had appeared in the dam in Yichuan county of Henan Province, and could collapse any time.

Videos posted on the Chinese social media showed petrified passengers trapped in subway trains clinging on to safety bars desperately waiting for help as floodwaters raised up to their necks. It was not immediately known what happened to their

fate. Official media released videos of rescue workers helping people stuck in subway tunnels to safety. Videos showed people trying to wade through floods in the downtown of the city while scores of cars and other vehicles washed away. Some videos also showed people falling into the massive cave-ins of the roads. Rainwater poured into the subway tunnel of the city's Line Five, trapping an unknown number of passengers aboard a subway train. The downtown area of Zhengzhou received an average precipitation of 457.5 mm within 24 hours on Tuesday, the highest daily rainfall since the weather record began, Xinhua news agency reported. Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported 13 deaths in the floods so far while over one lakh people have been evacuated.



Henan province is home to many cultural sites and a major base for industry and agriculture. Reports said that Shaolin Temple, known for its Buddhist monks' mastery of martial arts, was also severely hit by floods.

Heavy waterlogging has led to the virtual paralysis of the city's road traffic. Over 80 bus lines have been suspended, more than 100 temporarily detoured and the subway service has

also been temporarily suspended.

Police officers, firefighters and workers from the local sub-district have arrived at the site for the rescue operation, the report said.

The water level inside the subway carriage is receding, and the passengers are temporarily safe, it said. More than 160 train services were stopped at Zhengzhou Railway Station.

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





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# Over \$157 billion deployed in last 15 months to fight Covid pandemic: World Bank



**The World Bank has deployed over \$157 billion to fight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, economic and social fronts over the last 15 months.**

(News Agencies)-In its largest-ever crisis response, the World Bank has deployed over USD 157 billion to fight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, economic and social fronts over the last 15 months. This represents an increase of more than 60 per cent over the 15-month period prior to the pandemic, the bank said on Monday. "Since the start of the pandemic, the World Bank Group has committed or mobilised a record USD 157 billion in new financing, an unprecedented level of support for an unprecedented crisis," World Bank Group President David Malpass said. "We will continue to provide critical assistance to developing countries through this ongoing pandemic to help achieve a more broad-based economic recovery," he said.

The Bank Group has proven to be a rapid, innovative, and effective platform to support developing countries as they respond to the pandemic and strengthen resilience for future shocks, Malpass said. "But we must still do more," he said, adding that he remains deeply concerned about the limited availability of vaccines, which are critical to saving lives and livelihoods, for developing countries. According to a press release, support to countries from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development totalled USD 45.6 billion, including drawing down IBRD's USD 10 billion crisis buffer in addition to the board-approved sustainable annual lending limits. Grants and zero or low-interest loans to the world's poorest countries from the International Development Association (IDA) amounted to USD 53.3 billion. To meet increased financing needs, the World Bank fully used all the remaining IDA18 resources in fiscal 2020 and frontloaded about half of all the three-year envelope of IDA19 resources in FY21, it said. In February 2021, IDA donor and borrower country representatives agreed to advance IDA20 by 12 months to enable continued surge financing in the coming years, it added. Over the same 15 months, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank Group's private sector development arm, reached a record high of USD 42.7 billion in financing, including short-term finance (USD 10.4 billion) and mobilisation (USD 14.9 billion), 37 per cent of which was in low-income and fragile and conflict-affected states, the release said. The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), whose mandate is to drive impactful foreign direct investment to developing countries, issued USD 7.6 billion in new guarantees over the same 15-month period since the onset of the pandemic, of which 19 per cent supported projects in IDA countries and fragile settings, it said.

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# China reports spike in new COVID cases on border with Myanmar

**Surge at China border comes as UN warns that Myanmar could be at risk of becoming a 'super-spreader state'.**

(News Agencies)-China has reported its highest daily increase in new confirmed COVID-19 cases since January, driven by an outbreak in Yunnan province, which shares a border with Myanmar, where the coronavirus is surging due to the spread of the Delta variant.

Mainland China recorded 65 new confirmed cases for July 19, compared with 31 a day earlier, the National Health Commission said in a statement. That was the most since January 30, when 92 new cases were reported.

Imported infections accounted for most of the new cases, with Yunnan reporting 41 new cases originating from abroad, all of which involved Chinese nationals who had recently returned from Myanmar.

The current bout of cases in Yunnan started on July 4, and has been concentrated in Ruili and Longchuan, two small cities on China's border with Myanmar.

Ruili, battling its fourth outbreak since the pandemic started, reported seven new locally transmitted cases for July 19, while Longchuan had one.

Ruili is a key overland transit point for Yunnan, which has a 4,000-kilometre (2,485-mile) border with Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The Yunnan outbreak marks the second cluster of infections in China involving the highly contagious Delta strain, following an outbreak in southern Guangdong province in May and June.

'Fortress of iron'

Yunnan vice-governor Zong Guoying promised on Sunday to establish a "fortress of iron" to stop further transmissions as he visited Ruili. In the prefecture of Xishuangbanna, which also shares a long and porous border with Myanmar, police have set up checkpoints on all roads to inspect incoming and outgoing

traffic. Travel outside of Xishuangbanna's urban centre of Jinghong was discouraged, and special permits were also required to enter neighbouring cities of Lincang and Puer, as well as Ruili, police told the Reuters news agency during a recent visit.

For mainland China, 19 asymptomatic coronavirus cases were detected on July 19, compared with 17 a day earlier. China does not count asymptomatic infections as confirmed cases. China's total of COVID-19 cases has now reached 92,342, with deaths unchanged at 4,636. 'Dead body carrier'

In Myanmar, medical volunteers are reportedly going house-to-house to collect the fast-rising number of victims dying in their homes, including in Yangon, the commercial capital.

Every day "my team is collecting between 30-40 dead bodies ... I



think other teams will be the same like us," Than Than Soe, one of the volunteers, told the AFP news agency. "Sometimes, there are two dead bodies in one house." Hospitals around the country are largely empty of both doctors and patients because of a long-running strike against the military generals that seized power in February.

Widespread anger at the coup - and fear of being seen to cooperate with the military - are also keeping many people away from military-run hospitals, leaving volunteers to source oxygen and bring

the dead for cremation. Medical workers who were at the forefront of Myanmar's COVID-19 response before the coup have been attacked after leading early mass protests against the generals. As of the latest count, the country had reported some 230,000 COVID-19 cases and at least 5,000 deaths but analysts say the true toll is probably much higher. Last week, the military called for doctors and nurses to volunteer for the COVID-19 effort, admitting it was facing "difficulties" in controlling the surge.

## 'Financially Strained,' Mizoram CM Brings up Myanmar Refugee Crisis in Meeting With PM



(News Agencies)-After rejecting the Centre's directive to deport Myanmar nationals who took shelter in parts of Mizoram, chief minister Zoramthanga has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's help to solve the humanitarian crisis of the refugees.

During a virtual meeting with the prime minister on July 16 on the COVID-19 situation, Zoramthanga said that the influx of Myanmar nationals amid the second wave has strained the state's financial condition. "...[T]he military junta overthrew

the democratically elected government of Myanmar in February 2021. Thousands of Mizos who lived in Myanmar sought refuge and shelter in Mizoram and crossed over. Mizos across the border in Myanmar are our brethren with whom we share close cultural and family ties, with many having close family connections, hence it was not possible for Mizoram to refuse shelter to our own brethren who fled Myanmar fearing for their lives," Zoramthanga said. He said that soon after this, the second wave

**Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga has said that the influx of Myanmar nationals amid the second wave of the COVID-19 has strained the state's financial condition.**

of the pandemic manifested and Mizoram not only had to fight with its limited resources but also had to look after refugees from Myanmar and provide them with food, shelter and medicines.

"This has strained the financial resources of the state," he said in the meeting.

The influx Since February more than 10,000 Myanmar nationals, including a former chief minister and around 20 MPs belonging to Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), and some police personnel, have taken shelter in at least 10 districts of Mizoram, following the crackdown against pro-democracy protests by the junta. After the arrival of Myanmar nationals, the state government, along with the local communities provided protection, including

shelter and food. As the Myanmar military reportedly intensified the crackdown against pro-democracy protesters, including NLD supporters, Salai Lian Luai, chief minister of Chin state, crossed over to Mizoram's Champhai district and sought refuge.

Mizoram shares a 510 km-long international border with Myanmar. Myanmar shares an over 1,600 km long unfenced and porous land border with India. Four north-eastern states - Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram - share the international boundary with Myanmar.

Centre's alert

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued directives on March 10 to the chief secretary of Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur

and the Director General of Assam Rifles stating that the state governments have no power to grant refugee status to any foreigners. The directive says that in 2018, MHA had advised sensitising law enforcement and intelligence agencies to take appropriate steps for identifying "illegal migrants," their restrictions to specific locations as per provisions of law, capturing their biographic and biometric particulars, cancellation of fake Indian documents and initiating legal proceedings including deportation proceedings as per provisions of the law.

"...[S]tate governments and UT administrations have no powers to grant "refugee" status to any foreigner and India is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 protocol.



# Senior US diplomat to visit China amid growing tensions

**Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman's trip comes amid nearly daily new rifts between the two powers including over human rights and cybersecurity.**

(News Agencies)- Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman will travel to China this weekend on a visit that comes as tensions between Washington and Beijing soar on multiple fronts, the State Department said. Sherman will meet Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and others in the northeastern city of Tianjin on Sunday as part of her current trip to Asia, which also is taking her to Japan, South Korea and Mongolia. She will later visit Oman.

"These discussions are part of ongoing US efforts to hold candid exchanges with PRC officials to advance US interests and values and to responsibly manage the relationship," a State Department statement said on Wednesday, referring to the People's Republic of China.

"The deputy secretary will discuss areas where we have serious concerns about PRC actions, as well as areas where our interests align," it said.

Sherman will be the highest-ranking US official to visit China since President Joe Biden took office, although Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met Wang and veteran Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi in Anchorage, Alaska, in March for what proved to be a contentious first exchange.

Sherman's visit to China follows a significant deterioration in already badly strained US-China ties in just the past two weeks. Senior US officials would not confirm suggestions that the Chinese had initially offered only lower-level officials for Sherman to meet.

But they said the Biden administration would not have agreed to the visit unless they were assured Sherman would be able to see top-ranking officials in person.

The officials were not authorised to preview the trip publicly before Wednesday's formal announcement and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The officials said Sherman's agenda would be wide-ranging and cover areas of contention, as well as a smaller set of areas of convergence, such as a mutual desire to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table for nuclear talks.

Hacking allegations

The US on Monday publicly accused Beijing of carrying out the massive hack in March of Microsoft Exchange and issued a business advisory warning of



risks in Hong Kong. China denounced what it called a "fabricated" campaign by the US which rallied allies including NATO for a rare joint condemnation on purported cyberattacks. Last week, the US issued separate stark warnings against transactions with entities that operate in China's western Xinjiang region, where China is accused of repressing Uighur Muslims and other minorities. The administration also advised American firms of the deteriorating investment and commercial environment in

Hong Kong, where China has been cracking down on democratic freedoms it had pledged to respect in the former British colony.

At the same time, the administration reaffirmed a Trump-era policy shift that rejects nearly all of China's significant maritime claims in the South China Sea and reminded Beijing that any military move against the Philippines in disputed areas would trigger a response under a US-Philippines mutual defence treaty.

## 'India is welcome to join China-South Asia grouping'

**Bangladesh denies the group was meant to exclude India.**

India can join the China-led South Asian initiative for COVID-19 vaccines and poverty alleviation too if it so desires, said Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen, denying that a six-nation grouping launched earlier this month was meant to exclude India. The creation of the China-South Asian Countries Emergency Supplies Reserve, and a Poverty Alleviation and Cooperative Development Centre set up in China on July 8, the outcome of a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of China, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in April, had raised eyebrows in New Delhi, as it appeared to leave out only India, Bhutan and the Maldives.

**In dire need of vaccines**

"The Chinese approached us at a time we were in dire need of vaccines," Mr. Momen told The Hindu in an interaction on the sidelines of the connectivity conference in Tashkent last week, explaining that India's decision to suspend vaccine exports, including to Bangladesh, who had contracted and made advance payments for 5 million doses of Covishield per month, had become a "big issue" in the country, particularly as many had taken the first dose of the vaccine and had no access to the second.

Mr. Momen said that after Bangladesh requested vaccines from China, Foreign Minister Wang Yi decided to convene the six-nation China-South Asia meeting, where he suggested setting up a poverty alleviation centre to deal with economic issues arising in South Asia due to COVID, an e-commerce economic



cooperation forum and an emergency storage facility for vaccines.

"We asked, how about India, and the Chinese [government] said this forum is open to India and India is welcome. In fact, even at the Foreign Minister's meeting which included Pakistan, they said India would be welcome to join," Mr. Momen said, stressing that the issues involved in the forum are common to all South Asian countries battling COVID and its impact on GDPs in the region.

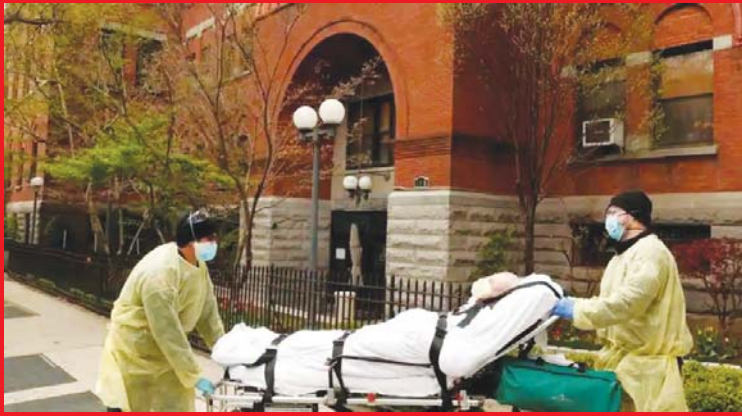
**Aggression on LAC**

The Ministry of External Affairs did not respond to a question on whether India had been invited to the forum

or would consider joining the China-South Asia centre, now being established in the Southern Chinese city of Chongqing, in the future. However, given continuing tensions over Chinese PLA aggression at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh, and New Delhi's firm stand that other bilateral relations cannot move ahead without a resolution of the boundary stand-off, it is understood that India would be unlikely to consider a new grouping involving China, especially one that could be seen to dilute its role in the SAARC region. The absence of India from the grouping as well as from a series of consultations on COVID relief between the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister and different combinations of all SAARC member countries (other than India and Bhutan) led some experts to suggest this was meant to be a "Minus India" initiative. India is the only country of all eight SAARC nations that has not requested or accepted Chinese COVID vaccines. Last week, Bhutan announced that it had been sent 50,000 doses of Sinopharm from the Chinese government, (along with 500,000 doses from the U.S. and another 350,000 from the EU) after the Indian decision to suspend its Vaccine Maitri programme after the second wave of the pandemic had left it in the lurch for second doses. Mr. Momen said the pending Indian deliveries for Bangladesh had also come up for discussion during his meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Tashkent last Thursday, and although India has promised to export the vaccines as soon as production levels are sufficient, no firm timeline has been given yet. Meanwhile, Bangladesh is managing with vaccines received from China, U.S., Europe and Japan.



## Life expectancy in US fell drastically due to coronavirus: Study



and diabetes have also seen an increase in the US.

Deaths from heart disease and stroke have seen a decline in women, and a similar decrease was spotted in male patients of influenza, pneumonia and Alzheimer's.

Studying the data with respect to racial groups showed that there was a decrease of 3 years of life expectancy in the Hispanic population and 3.9 in Black people. However, the white population saw a decline from 78.8 to 77.6 years only. "Among the causes contributing negatively to the change in life expectancy, COVID-19 contributed 90 percent for the Hispanic population, 67.9 percent for the non-Hispanic white population and 59.3 percent for the non-Hispanic black population," the report said. This report shows an alarming fall and reminds everyone of the era after World War II.

(News Agencies)-The coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected our lifestyle, economy, mental and physical health, social life and much more. Now, according to a new study, it has also disturbed the average life expectancy. New data has concluded that average life expectancy in the US fell by 1.5 years in 2020, which was specifically due to COVID-19. Life expectancy at birth for the US population was 78.8 years in 2019, which then declined to 77.3 years. This is the lowest it has been since 2003. In men, there has been a decline of 1.8 years to 74.5 and in women, the decline has been of 1.2 years to 80.2 years. "Mortality due to COVID-19 had, by far, the single greatest effect on the decline in life expectancy at birth between 2019 and 2020," US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s report read. In addition to Covid, deaths from non-Covid reasons such as unintentional injuries, homicides, liver disease

## Either get vaccinated or take weekly Covid tests, orders New York Mayor

(News Agencies)- consider a range of options." Starting from August 2, all public health workers will have to compulsorily get vaccinated against coronavirus or take a weekly Covid test, Mayor announced on Wednesday. The order will apply to nearly 30,000 employees of the city's 11 public hospitals and will be brought into place from August 2. As of now, 58 per cent of the population of New



The decision has been taken after authorities observed an alarming increase in new coronavirus infections in the city. "This is the first step - everyone should do this now to save lives," Mayor Bill de Blasio said. "If we don't see vaccination numbers go up fast enough, if we don't see progress against the variant, we are going to

York City has been vaccinated with the first dose against coronavirus. The Mayor believes he is confident that the majority of the public health workers will choose to get vaccinated instead of opting for weekly Covid tests. "I don't have a doubt in my mind this is going to move people towards vaccination," Bill de Blasio said.

## US says Pakistan has made significant progress on FATF's first action plan



*The US has said that Pakistan has made significant progress on its first action plan of FATF. The US said Pakistan has largely addressing 26 of the 27 action items and asked it to swiftly complete the remaining action item.*

(News Agencies)- Pakistan has made significant progress on its first action plan of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) by largely addressing 26 of the 27 action items, the US has said. It has also urged Pakistan to swiftly complete the remaining action item by demonstrating that terrorism financing, investigations and prosecutions target senior leaders and commanders of UN-designated terror groups. At its virtual plenary meeting last month, the FATF had retained Pakistan on its 'grey list' for failing to check money laundering, leading to terror financing. It had also asked Pakistan to investigate and prosecute UN-designated terrorists based in the country like Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed. The global body against money laundering and terror

financing had also asked Pakistan to work to address its strategically important deficiencies.

At his daily news conference on Monday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said, "We do recognise and we support Pakistan's continued efforts to satisfy those (first action plan) obligations. Pakistan has made significant progress on its first action plan with 26 of 27 action items largely addressed." "We encourage Pakistan to continue working with the FATF and the international community to swiftly complete the remaining action item by demonstrating that terrorism financing, investigations and prosecutions target senior leaders and commanders of UN-designated groups," he said. In response to a question, Price said the US

encourages Pakistan to expeditiously work on its new second action plan.

Pakistan was placed on the 'grey list' by the FATF in June 2018 and was given a plan of action to complete by October 2019. Since then the country continues to be on this list due to its failure to comply with the FATF mandates.

With Pakistan's continuation on the 'grey list', it is increasingly becoming difficult for the country to get financial aid from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the European Union at a time when it faces a precarious financial situation.

Islamabad has managed to avoid the 'black list', for which it needs the support of three countries. China, Turkey and Malaysia have been its consistent supporters.



# Face masks won't be required for Las Vegas tourists, despite COVID delta variant concerns



"We have already been through a shutdown and a start-up," Gibson said. "We cannot afford to have major conventions choose to go elsewhere."

A hastily called and sometimes contentious emergency meeting drew a big audience and about 50 speakers - almost all opposed to mask requirements, vaccinations and business closures and distancing.

"Any decision a person takes involves risks. Vaccines should be up to us," declared speaker Katrin Ivanoff, who was later removed by security officers after a vocal outburst from her seat.

Nevada Resort Association and Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce representatives said they favored a mask mandate and asked for written guidance about enforcement.

?Resorts World Las Vegas:Even the chips have chips at the Strip's newest casino

The commission unanimously decided venues where more than 250 people gather should

submit by next Monday plans about possible next steps to stem the spread of coronavirus. The vote made the mask rule effective at 12:01 a.m. Thursday, to be reviewed Aug. 17.

'Coronavirus fatigue' takes its toll Some said they simply won't comply.

"It will fail to be enforced," speaker Monica Ursua predicted. "We the people say, 'No more.'"

The seven-member commission, all Democrats, acknowledged "coronavirus fatigue" 16 months after Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak mandated masks in March 2020, closed casinos and nonessential businesses, and implemented distancing and other measures. ?COVID-19 precautions at hotels, airlines:Is the travel industry focused on safety or saving money?

On May 13, the governor, a Democrat, following CDC guidelines, dropped the requirement for vaccinated people to wear face coverings in

Nevada. Unvaccinated people were still advised to wear masks. How the delta variant 'changed the game'

In the two months since then, the delta variant has gripped Nevada. The variant was first detected in India but has spread around the world.

It was identified in 76% of samples collected and sequenced from Las Vegas and surrounding Clark County, according to data posted Friday by the Nevada State Public Health Laboratory at the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine.

"The delta variant has changed the game," said Brian Labus, a longtime Southern Nevada Health District epidemiologist who now teaches public health at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He said in an interview the debate about masks re-emerged "because we're still in the middle of a pandemic."

"We know masks reduce your risk, and the risk of spreading the virus to others," Labus said. "We don't want to go back to closures and restrictions in capacity and social distancing."

?In-person gatherings:Do you need a COVID-19 vaccine to go to a concert this year? It depends Labus has advised the governor on pandemic issues and has called for people to get vaccinated. He acknowledged data shows that most people now contracting the virus are not vaccinated.

COVID-19 cases climbing in Las Vegas

The number of new cases of COVID-19 reported Tuesday in Nevada continued to climb, to 1,004, but no new deaths. Nevada has counted 5,761 lives lost in the state to COVID-19 since March 2020. Nationally, nearly 607,000 people have died.

Meanwhile, state vaccination rates have stalled in recent weeks.

Health officials report that 55.4% of Nevada residents 12 years and older have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. About 46.6% are fully vaccinated.

Nationally, the CDC says more than 68% of adults have received at least one dose of vaccine. Labus noted the state tracks Nevada residents, not tourists and visitors.

(News Agencies)- Elected officials in tourism-dependent Las Vegas worried Tuesday about public health and the economic effects of a spike COVID-19 cases - particularly the highly contagious delta variant.

But they decided not to impose a full mask mandate for everyone strolling the Strip and gathering in crowded spaces and casinos.

The Clark County Commission instead voted to make employers require workers to wear masks in indoor public spaces like stores, malls and

clubs, and post signs citing local health district advice that everyone - vaccinated or not - should wear face coverings.

"We've got to do something," Commissioner Jim Gibson said as he raised the specter of crowded hospitals and canceled trade shows. The tourism world, he said, was watching what the elected body with jurisdiction over the Las Vegas Strip would do.

?Las Vegas tourism is picking up:So are COVID-19 cases

?Vegas buffets are back to self-serve:But the 'buffet capital' isn't back to normal

## Lambda variant of COVID-19 identified at Texas hospital. Is it worse than delta?

(News Agencies)-A Houston hospital has its first case of the lambda variant of the coronavirus, but public health experts say it remains too soon to tell whether the variant will rise to the same level of concern as the delta variant currently raging across unvaccinated communities in the U.S.

About 83% of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. are from the delta variant and the vast majority of hospitalizations are among unvaccinated people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The lambda variant, on the other hand, has been identified in less than 700 cases in the U.S. However, the World Health Organization in June called lambda a "variant of interest," meaning it has genetic changes that affect the virus' characteristics and has caused significant community spread or clusters of COVID-19 in multiple countries.Dr. S. Wesley Long, medical director

of diagnostic biology at Houston Methodist, where the case was identified, said while lambda has some mutations that are similar to other variants that have raised



concern, it does not appear to be nearly as transmissible as delta."I know there's great interest in lambda, but I think people really need to be focused on delta," Long said. "Most importantly, regardless of the variant, our best defense against all these variants is vaccination.The fourth wave of COVID-19 cases is here:Will we escape the UK's fate? It's too soon to know.What is the lambda

variant and how is it different from the delta variant? The lambda variant is a specific strain of COVID-19 with specific mutations. It's one of a handful

of variants identified by the WHO as variants of concern or interest. Many other variants have arisen since the outbreak was first detected in late 2019 in central China.The natural trajectory of viruses is that they have a tendency to have mutations, and whenever we have a significant mutation that changes the virus ... we get a new variant," said Dr. Abhijit Duggal, a staff ICU physician and director for critical care

research for the medical ICU at the Cleveland Clinic.

Some of the lambda mutations occur in its spike protein, which is the part of the virus that helps it penetrate cells in the human body and is also what the vaccines are targeting.

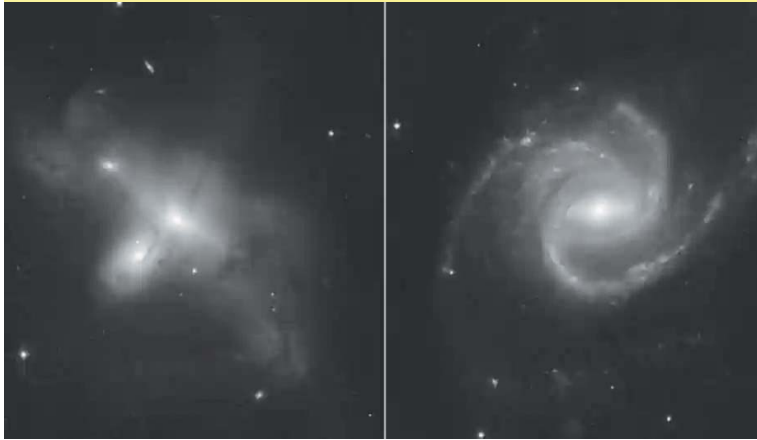
Do you need another shot?:Booster for COVID-19 is not recommended, yet. Here's what to know.

Mutations occurring there and in other parts of lambda are similar to those in variants of concern, like alpha and gamma, Long said. But even gamma, which never took hold in the U.S. to the same level as alpha or delta, has more concerning mutations than lambda, Long said.

Duggal said there hasn't been anything specific with the lambda variant to spark concern about it becoming the dominant variant in the U.S., but "watchful waiting and being cautious is going to be the most important thing at this point."



# NASA's Hubble Space Telescope captures images of two unusual galaxies



payload computer, it automatically placed Hubble's science instruments into safe mode.

NASA released Hubble's images of a pair of interacting galaxies in the southern hemisphere, named ARP-MADORE2115-273 and ARP-MADORE0002-503.

While the former is a rarely observed example of a pair of interacting galaxies in the southern hemisphere. The latter is a large spiral galaxy with unusual, extended spiral arms. While most disk galaxies have an even number of spiral arms, this one has three.

These snapshots, from a program led by Julianne Dalcanton of the University of Washington in Seattle, feature a galaxy with unusual extended spiral arms and the first high-resolution glimpse at an intriguing pair of colliding galaxies.

Other initial targets for Hubble included globular star clusters and aurorae on the giant planet Jupiter.

Hubble has taken more than 600,000 observations, bringing its lifetime total to more than 1.5 million. "I'm thrilled to see that Hubble has its eye back on the universe, once again capturing

the kind of images that have intrigued and inspired us for decades," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson.

"This is a moment to celebrate the success of a team truly dedicated to the mission. Through their efforts, Hubble will continue its 32nd year of discovery, and we will continue to learn from the observatory's transformational vision," he added.

The Hubble was launched in 1990 and has become a crucial tool in space exploration, observing stars and galaxies from its orbit 350 miles (563 km) above Earth.

(News Agencies)-The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has said that the Hubble Space Telescope returned to full science operations and captured images of two unusual galaxies. The telescope's operations had been suspended for a month following a computer anomaly. When the main computer failed to receive a signal from the

# Oil climbs 4% despite rise in US inventories

Oil prices rose more than 4 per cent Wednesday, extending gains from the previous session as improved risk appetite provided support despite data showing an unexpected rise in US oil inventories.

Brent crude futures rose \$2.93, or 4.2 per cent, to \$72.28 a barrel by 12:06 p.m. EDT (1606 GMT). US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose \$3.16, or 4.7 per cent, to \$70.36 a barrel, a 4.7 per cent gain.

Futures are rebounding after dropping around 7 per cent on

Monday, following a deal by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, together known as OPEC+, to boost supply by 400,000 barrels per day from August through December. The sell-off was exacerbated by fears that a rise in cases of the Delta variant of the coronavirus in major markets like the United States, Britain and Japan would affect demand.

The price gains on Wednesday also come despite a rise in US crude stockpiles for the first time since May. Crude inventories rose unexpectedly by 2.1 million

barrels last week to 439.7 million barrels, US Energy Information Administration data showed. Analysts had expected a 4.5 million-barrel drop.

Still, gasoline and distillate inventories posted draws of 121,000 barrels and 1.3 million barrels, respectively.

"That crude oil build was obviously a surprise driven by a surge in imports and a plunge in exports," said John Kilduff, partner at Again Capital in New York. "The only positive aspects of the report remain strong gasoline demand and a rebound in distillate fuels."



JPMorgan analysts said global demand is expected to average 99.6 million barrels per day in August, up by 5.4 mbd from April. But they also said: "We only see 4Q21 demand

recovering another incremental 330,000 vs a normalised 2019 baseline as colder weather sets in for the northern hemisphere and peak travel season is behind us."

# US carried out airstrikes in Afghanistan, says Pentagon

The US carried out airstrikes across Afghanistan in the last several days as part of an effort to support the Afghan security forces fighting Taliban insurgents, the Pentagon has said. The news of US airstrikes in Afghanistan came a day after America's most senior military officer admitted that the Taliban had gained "strategic momentum," with their forces now controlling about half of Afghanistan's more than 400 district centres. The Pentagon, however, refrained from giving any specifics of its airstrikes in Afghanistan. "Without speaking to specifics, I can say that in the last several days, we have acted through airstrikes to support the ANDSF (Afghan National Defense and Security Forces) but I won't get into tactical

details of those strikes," Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby told reporters on Thursday at a news conference here.

"But we continue to be able to and we continue to, as the Secretary said yesterday, conduct airstrikes in support of the ANDSF," he said. The commander of US forces in the region, Central Command's General Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie, would retain the authority to call for airstrikes in support of Afghan forces until the US withdrawal from Afghanistan was complete. According to a defence official, the US military has carried out approximately six or seven strikes in the past 30 days, mostly using drones to launch the strikes, CNN reported.

A US defence official

on Thursday said that the strikes targeted "captured military equipment that the Taliban [were] able to seize from the ANDSF," the Voice of America reported. "There were enemy forces, enemy personnel targeted" alongside the captured equipment, the official added, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the information. The Taliban in recent days swept across Afghanistan, pushing back the Afghan military and taking over significant swaths of territory as the US nears the ends of its withdrawal. US Central Command, which is in charge of Afghanistan, said recently that the withdrawal of US forces is more than 95 per cent complete. President Joe Biden has said the withdrawal would be complete by the end



of August. Approximately 650 troops are set to remain in the country to secure the US diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, including the embassy, and to assist in securing Kabul's international airport, which is a necessary

facility for the movement of diplomats. General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Wednesday that Taliban forces were putting pressure on 17 of Afghanistan's 34 provincial capitals.



# Blue Origin-Jeff Bezos historic flight to space in pictures



youngest and oldest to ever fly in space. Named after America's first astronaut, Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket soared from remote West Texas on the 52nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing, a date chosen by Bezos for its historical significance. Blue Origin's maiden crewed flight on Tuesday involved four people who crossed the Karman line, which separates Earth's atmosphere from space, for the very first time. Jeff Bezos and his brother Mark are best friends. Jeff shared the moment he surprised his sibling, six years his junior, by asking him to join the mission in a video that went viral on Instagram last month. At 82, barrier-breaking

woman aviator Wally Funk became the oldest ever astronaut. The fourth crew member was Oliver Daemen, 18, who became the youngest astronaut. He holds a private pilot's license and is a space enthusiast who will study physics in university this fall. (AP) As Jeff Bezos along with brother Mark, Wally Funk and Oliver Daemen is strapped into the New Shepard spacecraft, communications have been confirmed and the four astronauts are ready to go into space. (AP) The passengers of the Blue Origin walk up the stairs near Van Horn, Texas, Tuesday, July 20, 2021. The recycled rocket and capsule that carried

up Tuesday's passengers were used on the last two space demos, according to company officials. (Blue Origin via AP) New Shepard is all set to launch into space with Blue Origin founder Jeff Bezos and three other crew members. (AP) The passengers had several minutes of weightlessness to float around the spacious white capsule. The window-filled capsule landed under parachutes, with Bezos and his guests briefly experiencing nearly six times the force of gravity, or 6 G's, on the way back. (AP) "Best day ever," Jeff Bezos said after the capsule touched down on the desert floor at the end of the 10-minute flight.





# A fighting chance: EU to lower greenhouse emissions by 55%, target Net Zero by 2050

the EU had already cut emissions by 24 per cent of their 1990 levels. Now it is the Union's "Fit for 55" strategy with the goal being to be fit for 0 or Net Zero by 2050.

The President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said, "Our current fossil fuel economy has reached its limits," adding that "the infernos and hurricanes we have seen over the last few weeks are only a very small window into what our future could look like. But by acting now, when we still have the policy choices, we can do things another way." But as she spoke in Brussels, it wasn't infernos or hurricanes that hit parts of the European Union, it was rainstorms. Belgium and neighbouring Germany, President Ursula von der Leyen's native country, saw flooding on an unprecedented scale that led to the loss of many lives. On July 16, as rescuers struggled to help the besieged, the EU followed up with another big announcement, of a new forest strategy as part of 'Fit for 55'. According to this strategy, three billion trees will be planted across the EU by 2030. That would mean planting some 6.7



trees for every European Union citizen.

With 446 million people the European Union is the third largest political entity in terms of population after China and India, so if China and India were to follow the same percentage of planting trees per citizen then China would have to do 9.45 billion and India would have to find space for 9.25 billion new trees. The concern in the EU has been that the CO2 absorbing capacity of forests across countries had been decreasing over the years. This Forest Strategy, according to a EU

statement, seeks to increase not just the quantity but the quality of forests and increase carbon sequestration through enhanced sinks and stocks as a way to mitigate global warming. Under the various revisions of land use and forestry, Europe is planning to capture 310 million tonnes of carbon by 2030. In comparison, China, which is currently by far the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, has promised to become carbon neutral before 2060. India, which is the third biggest emitter behind China and the US, has pledged a 33-

35 per cent reduction in the emissions intensity of its economy by 2030. But back to the EU where it is not just planning to plant trees to bring down gasses, it is also gearing up to get rid of petrol and diesel vehicles from their roads. The EU that currently accounts for about 8 per cent of Global emissions plans is to wean the continent of fossil fuels and care for the environment through policy design. By 2035, cars powered by fossil fuels will not be sold across Europe. To achieve this, the EU will have to consider finding ways to

soften the impact on its relatively poorer eastern members in the block who unlike the western and Nordic countries are not invested in the costlier technologies supporting electric vehicles.

There are other parts of the legislation that is also bound to create heat as well, the most controversial being the 'Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism'. According to this mechanism, importers would have to pay, for carbon emitted in exporting countries in the production of raw materials like steel, cement, aluminium and fertilizer that is being imported. This would mean that the price of the finished products manufactured in Europe would rise significantly.

The 'Fit for 55' legislation, 13 proposals running into hundreds of pages of detail, will now need to be pushed through the member countries, a process that might take up to two years to complete. But Europe is committed to bat for a cleaner environment by cutting the gas in a planned and gradual manner rather than waiting for the desperation, of an irreversible tipping point, to douse the fire.

# UNESCO chides Australia over Great Barrier Reef proposal

Tian, speaking at the first news conference since the meetings opened last Friday, said the Great Barrier Reef proposal was based on data from Australia and recommendations from an advisory body.

Australian Environment Minister Susan Ley, who is in Europe lobbying UNESCO delegates against supporting the in-danger listing, did not immediately comment on the Chinese criticism. She had held "constructive and cordial discussions" with China's Ambassador to UNESCO Yang Jin, the minister's office said in a statement on Monday. The government looks forward to working with China and all members of the World Heritage Committee in discussions on the draft listing later this week,"



the statement said.

Her office also released a report by the government-funded Australian Institute of Marine Science that indicated widespread recovery of the reef's coral. Monitoring by the institute found coral cover had increased during the respite from severe weather over the last year. "The release of the full report underlines our view that

the World Heritage Committee proposed listing had not been based on the latest information," Ley said.

Australia reacted angrily when the draft was released last month.

"This decision was flawed. Clearly there were politics behind it," Ley said, without mentioning China by name.

Relations between the two

nations have soured in recent years, with Australia blocking Chinese technology and investment in key infrastructure, and China using tariffs and other measures to reduce its imports from Australia.

Australia was warned in 2014 that an in-danger listing was being considered for the Great Barrier Reef, which was designated a world heritage site in 1981.

The draft decision said that Australia's long-term plan for the reef, a network of 2,500 reefs covering 348,000 square kilometers (134,000 square miles), "requires stronger and clearer commitments, in particular towards urgently countering the effects of climate change."

We acknowledge very much the work which has been done in

Australia, but our text in the draft decision ... is a proposal for putting the site on the list of world heritage in danger because of the threats which were identified," said Mechthild Roessler, the UNESCO director of the World Heritage Committee.

Ernesto Ottone Ramírez, the assistant director-general for culture at UNESCO, said that an in-danger listing should be viewed as a collective call for action from all the member states.

"It's something that should be seen as something positive and not, as what we heard from some of the authorities in other countries, as a punishment," he said, joining the news conference from Paris. "It's how we preserve our heritage for future generations."



# Pegasus spyware scandal: Can Silicon Valley stop government snooping?

Pegasus can use SMS, WhatsApp and iMessage to infect a phone and harvest messages, emails, contacts, GPS data, calendars, photos and videos stored on a phone. It can also activate the microphone and camera to surreptitiously record the owner's surroundings.

The case is making fresh headlines following an investigation by The Guardian and Forbidden Stories, which claims to have a leaked list of 50,000 phone numbers based across 45 countries that were selected for surveillance by Pegasus's many users, showing that the tool is being used to monitor journalists, political opponents and campaigners as well as being used for anti-terror or serious crime investigations.

NSO, founded by former Israeli state surveillance operators, has been caught up in similar stories before. Last year, researchers claimed that Pegasus had been used by at least two state agencies to hack the phones of journalists at Al



founder Jeff Bezos's phone. Ron Deibert at the University of Toronto in Canada leads a research group that investigates and publicises the use of surveillance software such as Pegasus. He says that if his small team can uncover details about how NSO customers are using the tool, the company itself should easily be able to do the same.

"Litigation may be one of the most immediate ways to rein in the excesses of the poorly regulated global spyware

says there is vast profit to be made in finding new ways to exploit software weaknesses, packaging them up and selling them as widely as possible. Unfortunately, once the software is in the hands of a state, it can be targeted at anyone the state sees fit with little oversight.

Woodward says that the customers tend to be governments that don't have their own offensive cyber capability and that phone manufacturers and social media companies are

is a "groundbreaking" and complex legal problem with no obvious solution. Even if the lawsuit against NSO Group is successful, it is unlikely that the practice will be stopped because there are several other companies offering similar services.

Italian company Hacking Team itself suffered a data leak in 2015 revealing that its client list for a similar product to Pegasus included the CIA, the Lebanese Armed Forces and even the bank Barclays. Stopping the practice may require legislation, but Deibert says this will prove problematic because many states have a vested interest in allowing the hacking to continue, adding that it is an "epidemic of global proportions".

NSO says that it licenses its products to governments "for the sole purpose of preventing and investigating terror and serious crime". An NSO Group spokesperson said in a prepared statement that the firm denied that its products were being misused but confirmed that the company would investigate all credible claims of misuse and take appropriate action, such as shutting down access to Pegasus by a state customer - something that it has done "multiple times" in the past. It also denied that the leaked list of phone numbers was a list of targets. The company declined to respond to further questions. Spyware sold for

use in anti-terror investigations is being misused to watch journalists, academics and politicians across the world, according to a report by The Guardian and partner organisations.

NSO Group, based in Israel, is thought to sell the spyware to multiple countries, including Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, India and the United Arab Emirates. It allows a user to read data from smartphones and spy via their microphones and cameras. The software, called Pegasus, uses vulnerabilities in smartphone and social media source code.

Technology firms that make these phones and social media platforms are now embroiled in a long-running legal battle with NSO to prevent the hacking of their platforms - but can unmonitored, unregulated state surveillance be stopped?

WhatsApp and Facebook, its parent company, first filed a lawsuit in California in 2019 alleging that NSO had hacked into its servers to infect 1400 phones belonging to WhatsApp users, arguing that it was a violation of the US Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA). NSO said that it should have "sovereign immunity" because it sells to non-US governments, an argument that was dismissed in December 2020 and that the firm is appealing.

WhatsApp now wants a permanent injunction stopping NSO from attempting to gain access to its systems. The success of the case rests on whether NSO is considered to be hacking into systems or if that is being done by the users of its software. Taking legal action against governments would be a far more difficult proposition. Microsoft, Cisco, GitHub, Google, LinkedIn, VMware and the Internet Association have now all joined the court case.



Jazeera and Al Araby TV. In 2018, Amnesty International claimed that NSO software had been used to target its staff. And in 2017, it emerged that Mexico had been using the software to target journalists and their families. Its use was also suspected in the hacking of Amazon

marketplace," he says. "Should litigation succeed and bring real financial penalties to companies like NSO, then the industry as a whole may be incentivised to better control to whom they are selling and how it is being deployed." Alan Woodward at the University of Surrey, UK,

engaged in a cat-and-mouse game in which exploits are found but then patched. Often these exploits will continue to be useful for some targets because owners don't update their software with the new patches.

Neil Brown at UK law firm decoded.legal says the issue



# Explained: What makes semiconductors critical to multiple industries

***The widespread global chip shortage resulting from the COVID-19 crisis has thrown up vulnerabilities in the global semiconductor supply chain and many technologies and products essential to our daily lives have been put at risk.***

In February 2019, a year before the pandemic struck, the SIA (Semiconductor Industry Association) announced that in 2018 alone, a record-breaking 'more than one trillion chips' were sold. A more recent Wall Street Journal report tables that semiconductors rank as the world's fourth most-traded product (imports and exports, counted), after crude oil, refined oil and cars.

This, followed by US President Biden's statement which categorically terms chips as "infrastructure", confirms that there is no ambiguity around the fact the much-in-demand semiconductor chip is the new universal currency. Their ability to perform millions of complex operations and their energy efficiency make semiconductors a critical component of almost every sector, driving the global economy.

**WHAT ARE SEMICONDUCTOR CHIPS?**

Integrated into complex, microelectronic circuits, semiconductors enable functions such as high-computing, operations control, data processing, storage, input and output management, sensing, wireless connectivity, improved efficiency and power management - all this at a viable cost. Rapid innovation has enabled the semiconductor industry to produce exponentially more advanced products at a lower cost - a principle referred to as Moore's law.

These tiny integrated circuits, packing billions of electronic components in a few square millimetres bestow 'state-of-the-art' status to everyday electronic devices, ranging from electronics & automotive to life-saving pharmaceutical devices, household appliances, smartphones, ATMs, eCommerce, clean energy products and equipment, among countless other applications.

In fact, a single smartphone today has far more computing power than the computers used

by NASA in 1969, to land man on the moon. What is more, almost all emerging technologies such as AI, cloud computing, quantum computing, advanced wireless networks, blockchain applications, bitcoin mining, 5G, IoT, self-driving vehicles, drones, robotics, gaming and wearables are all powered by these discrete, yet highly sophisticated semi-conductors.

According to Juniper Research's latest report, the number of IoT devices alone, by the end of 2021 will reach 46 billion. Each one of these devices will be powered by semiconductors. Semiconductors are critical for high-computing applications in the electronics and manufacturing industries, agriculture, healthcare, infrastructure, entertainment, telecommunications, transportation, energy management, military systems and space to name just a few.

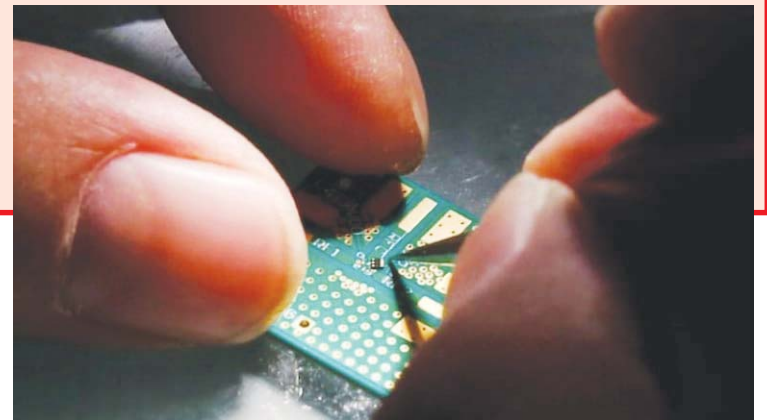
**BACKBONE OF MULTIPLE INDUSTRIES**

Starting with healthcare which is top-of-mind - semiconductors are integral to applications in clinical diagnostics, treatment

and post-recovery interventions. Semiconductor-enabled equipment such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines, pacemakers, blood pressure monitors, blood gas analysers, wireless patient monitors and ventilators are saving lives every day. Several surgery procedures are being revolutionized through the use of chip-enabled robotic surgical systems.

For Covid-care alone, testing equipment, oxygen monitors and almost every life-support system is reliant on semiconductors. In addition, the disbursal of vaccines across countries, receiving app-based certifications, drone-delivery of life-supporting medicines, a steady flow of data to the Covid war rooms - these are all riding on silicon wafers.

Market research predictions indicate that web-integrated wireless healthcare devices, wearables and 3D printing of organs and medical devices that ride on semiconductors will be key factors that ensure new and creative ways of providing healthcare in the future. The global automotive semiconductor market, valued



at USD 48.13 billion in 2020, is expected to reach a value of USD 129.17 billion by 2026.

Auto manufacturers are incorporating vehicle electrical systems that require power diodes and voltage regulators of exceptional reliability. Automotive semiconductor ICs with different functionalities are used in various automotive offerings - like navigation control, infotainment systems, and collision detection systems. A modern connected, autonomous car can easily have more than 3,000 latest technology-featured chips. In the case of the present pandemic enforced 'remote everything' - be it business, learning, entertainment or catching up with friends and family, semiconductors underpin the technology infrastructure necessary for maintaining communication networks, outside the traditional brick and mortar setting. During this pandemic, organisations

have been able to smoothly move their operations online and allow individuals to work remotely and safely without interruption, thanks to digital, semiconductor powered devices and technologies. This digital transformation has opened up a new world full of opportunities for the semiconductor industry

**FUTURE RIDES ON THESE CHIPS**

Emerging technologies, especially, IoT, artificial intelligence, augmented and extended reality and blockchain are gaining prominence across industries. With these applications gaining traction across sectors, the need for specialised sensors, integrated circuits, improved memory, and enhanced processors is increasing. Many smart cities around the world are committed to vastly improving city services and critical civic infrastructure for its citizens.

## Domestic shares end lower as banking, metal stocks slide

Indian shares closed lower on Tuesday, led by losses in banking and metal stocks amid a selloff in global markets sparked by a surge in the Delta variant of coronavirus.

The NSE Nifty 50 index fell 0.76% to 15,632.10 and the S&P BSE Sensex closed down 0.68% at 52,198.51.

The Nifty Bank Index was a major drag, down 1.89%, with HDFC Bank, IndusInd, ICICI Bank, and AU Small Finance Bank among the losers. Metal and realty also ended down at 2.34% and 2.53%, respectively.



Asian Paints closed at a record high after the company's quarterly net profit more than doubled to 5.69 billion rupees (\$76.29 mln), ahead of analysts' expectations of 5.21 billion rupees.

The broader Nifty Smallcap100 and Midcap100 indexes fell 1.4% each, their sharpest intraday fall in a month. European shares bounced back from their worst day of the year on Tuesday, but Asian stocks were down, as the fast-spreading Delta variant raised fears that further lockdowns could upend global economic recovery.



# 'Not really nervous': Billionaire Bezos girds for inaugural space flight

**Jeff Bezos and his brother Mark will be joined in the all-civilian crew by 82-year-old pioneering female aviator Wally Funk and 18-year-old Oliver Daemen.**

American billionaire businessman Jeff Bezos said on Monday he is excited and curious but not very nervous on the eve of taking part in his company Blue Origin's inaugural suborbital flight alongside the oldest and youngest people ever bound for space.

The world's richest person and three crewmates are due to fly from a desert site in West Texas on an 11-minute trip to the edge of space aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard, a 60-foot-tall (18.3 meters) and fully autonomous rocket-and-capsule combo. The flight represents an important milestone in the establishment of the space

tourism industry.

Bezos did a round of televised interviews ahead of the launch, set for around 8 a.m. CDT (1300 GMT) from Blue Origin's Launch Site One facility some 20 miles (32 km) outside the rural Texas town of Van Horn.

"People keep asking if I'm nervous. I'm not really nervous, I'm excited. I'm curious. I want to know what we're going to learn," Bezos, founder of Amazon.com Inc (AMZN.O), told the "CBS This Morning" program.

"We've been training. This vehicle is ready. This crew is ready. This team is amazing," Bezos said. "We just feel really

good about it." Bezos and his brother Mark Bezos will be joined in the all-civilian crew by 82-year-old pioneering female aviator Wally Funk and 18-year-old Oliver Daemen, a recent high school graduate set to attend the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands to study physics and innovation management in September. Daemen is the company's first paying customer. His father heads investment management firm Somerset Capital Partners. The flight comes nine days after rival Richard Branson, the British billionaire businessman, was aboard his company Virgin Galactic's rocket plane for its



pioneering suborbital flight from New Mexico. Bezos sought to downplay any rivalry with Branson. "There's one person who was the first person in space. His name was Yuri Gagarin. And that happened a long time ago," Bezos said on the NBC's program "Today," referring to the Soviet cosmonaut who reached space in 1961. "I think I'm going to be

number 570 or something. That's where we're going to be in this list. So this isn't a competition. This is about building a road to space so that future generations can do incredible things in space," Bezos said. Funk was one of the so-called Mercury 13 group of women who trained to become astronauts for the first U.S. human spaceflight program in the early 1960s.

## Stadium-sized asteroid to whizz past Earth on July 24, Nasa puts it in dangerous category



**The orbit of 2008Go20, which is close to Earth, has been classified as Apollo, that holds the most dangerous asteroids.**

A huge asteroid, about the size of a stadium, is hurtling towards Earth at a very high speed. Named '2008Go20', the asteroid will whizz past Earth on July 24.

The asteroid is cruising at over 8 kilometres per second, which is around 28,800 km/hour, a speed so high that anything

coming in its way will suffer extreme catastrophe. The near-Earth object (NEO) is 20 meters wide and will be zooming by at a distance of 28,70,847,607 km, eight times the distance between Earth and the Moon.

While the asteroid will safely move past Earth, its orbit close

to the planet has been classified as Apollo, which holds the most dangerous asteroids. Nasa is continuously monitoring the object.

Earlier in June, 2021KT1, an asteroid the size of the Eiffel Tower came close to the planet. Classified as "potentially hazardous", 2021KT1 made a close approach to Earth at a distance of 4.5 million km. Any object closer than 4.6 million km, is considered a potentially hazardous object.

**WHAT ARE ASTEROIDS?**

Asteroids are rocky fragments left over from the formation of the solar system about 4.6

billion years ago. According to the Nasa Joint Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), which tracks asteroid movement, an asteroid is classified as a near-Earth object when its distance from our planet is less than 1.3 times the distance from Earth to the Sun (the Earth-Sun distance is about 93 million miles).

The orbital paths of asteroids are at times influenced by the gravitational pull of planets, which cause their paths to alter. Nasa tracks over 26,000 near-Earth asteroids and over 1,000 of these are considered potentially hazardous. The

agency tracks the movement of the asteroid around Sun to establish its location, computing an elliptical path that best fits the available observations of the object.

Meanwhile, researchers at China's National Space Science Center found in simulations that 23 Long March 5 rockets hitting simultaneously could deflect a large asteroid from its original path by a distance of 1.4 times the Earth's radius. Their calculations are based on an asteroid dubbed Bennu, orbiting the Sun, which is as tall as the Empire State Building of New York.

## US warns SpaceX: New Texas launch site tower yet to clear environmental review'

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has warned Elon Musk's space company SpaceX that its environmental review of a new tower at its Boca Chica launch site in Texas is incomplete and the agency could order SpaceX to take down the tower.

An FAA spokesman said on Wednesday that the agency's environmental review underway of SpaceX's

proposed rocket assembly "integration tower" is "underway," and added that "the company is building the tower at its own risk."

A May 6 letter from the FAA to SpaceX seen by Reuters said recent construction activity on one of the two proposed towers "may complicate the ongoing environmental review process for the Starship/Super Heavy Launch Vehicle Program." The

FAA letter said the tower could be as high as 480 feet.

Based on the environmental review, the FAA could order SpaceX to take down the tower. "It is possible that changes would have to be made at the launch site, including to the integration towers to mitigate significant impacts," the May 6 letter said, adding the FAA learned of the tower's construction "based on publicly

available video footage." SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment but Musk has repeatedly criticized the FAA and the U.S. regulatory system. SpaceX told the FAA in May that it did not believe the review was necessary because it only intends to use the "integration tower for production, research, and development purposes and not for FAA-licensed or -permitted

launches," the FAA said. But the agency said description in documents "indicates otherwise." The FAA cited a SpaceX document that the towers would be used to integrate the Starship/Super Heavy launch vehicle. "Super Heavy would be mated to the launch mount, followed by Starship mated to Super Heavy," the FAA letter said quoting SpaceX's May 5 submission.



# Let's go to explore a magical place

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# Home vaccination to begin in Mumbai from August 1: Maharashtra govt tells Bombay HC

**Door-to-door vaccination against coronavirus in Mumbai to begin from August 1, the Maharashtra government and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) told the Bombay High Court on Tuesday.**

The Maharashtra government and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Tuesday informed the Bombay High Court that home vaccination against Covid-19 in Mumbai will begin from August 1.

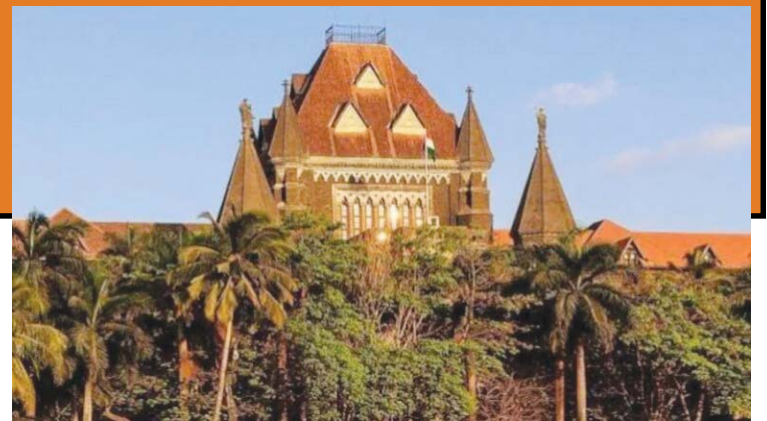
The government said the door-to-door vaccination policy was formed on an experimental basis for the elderly, differently abled and those who are bedridden.

This comes after the Maharashtra government conducted a survey in which over 3,500 patients within the jurisdiction of BMC expressed their interest to be vaccinated at

home. Earlier, the Maharashtra government had planned to begin home inoculation exercise on an experimental basis from Pune. The Uddhav Thackeray government told the high court that it would now begin the vaccination drive in Mumbai and then proceed to other regions.

Senior counsel Anil Sakhare appearing for the BMC told the high court that although the civic body was fully equipped to begin the drive, they would utilise the time available till August 1 to organise and mobilise their resources. The bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice GS Kulkarni

directed the civic authorities to submit a report on the progress of the vaccination drive. "The report should contain details like, the number of 'post-immunisation effects' cases and how the vaccinators managed to tackle such issues," the HC said. For the past few months, the high court has been hearing a plea seeking door-to-door anti-coronavirus vaccination for senior citizens and those who are differently abled or bedridden. It was filed by advocate Dhruti Kapadia and Kunal Tiwari, seeking direction to the Centre to implement this policy on an urgent basis. During the previous hearing, the



Bombay High Court bench had observed that there was no prohibition imposed by the Centre on states from conducting home vaccinations. Earlier, petitioner Dhruti Kapadia had informed the Bombay High Court that several state governments in India and municipal corporations in Maharashtra had initiated door-to-door vaccination for the local people without waiting for a policy from the Centre. It was

after this that the Maharashtra government informed the high court that they would not seek the Centre's approval for conducting home vaccination. As the government informed the court about its door-to-door vaccination drive in Maharashtra, Chief Justice Dipankar Datta said, "The Union of India did not rise to the occasion. However, the State showed the light at the end of the tunnel."

## Ground Report from Afghanistan: Kandahar focus of Afghan forces as Taliban surround city

**Afghan forces are now fighting to save Kandahar after the Taliban surrounded the city and took over police posts and checkpoints. A ground report from Afghanistan.**



Insecurity has been growing in Afghanistan as Taliban insurgents launch major offensives, taking districts and border crossings. Kandahar, the second-largest city after Kabul in Afghanistan, with a population of over 62 lakh, is surrounded by Taliban from all sides.

More than a dozen police posts and checkpoints have been taken over by the Taliban. The focus of the Afghanistan Army is now to defend the historic city of Kandahar.

Speaking to India Today, Saifullah, a local, said, "People are leaving for Kabul and foreign countries for their safety and the security of their families."

On the southern side of the city, the Afghan Army is fighting the Taliban as the watchtower of the main jail in Kandahar remains under attack. A number of armoured vehicles can be seen around Kandahar jail as the Taliban are pressuring Afghan authorities to release all those

jailed from the Taliban. "We have 600 political prisoners currently in Kandahar jail and the Taliban are firing on our vehicles and watchtower from the nearby mountain top," Mohammed Aslam, an Afghan soldier guarding Kandahar jail,

told India Today TV. He added that some Taliban prisoners were moved to Kabul last month.

Amid infighting, India has pulled out staff from the Kandahar consulate. Meanwhile, villagers from surrounding villages who

have arrived in Kandahar claim that the number of Taliban insurgents is high and they are slowly taking over control.

Afghans claim most of these Taliban insurgents have crossed over from Pakistan via Chamam crossing.





# How to get married during the pandemic

***With life slowly returning to normal after the second wave, here's how to make the great Indian wedding work responsibly***

With the second wave of Covid-19 on the wane and lockdown restrictions gradually being eased across the country, life appears to be returning to normal one step at a time. However, it's not certain that the worst is over; things could easily go back to the way they were during the worst of the pandemic. Safety protocols such as mask-wearing and social distancing still need to be followed, and getting vaccinated remains essential.

Society is now divided between pre-Covid and post-Covid lifestyles; do's and don'ts will define how celebrations are held. So, where does all this leave weddings? Quite a few were postponed when the severe second wave hit the country in April this year. With the wedding season up ahead in a few months, what's in store for to-be couples, families and friends?

**Making it meaningful**

After being cooped up at home for several months, people are ready to celebrate and start enjoying life again. As a result,

there will be a greater sense of joy and less of a sense of obligation around attending weddings this year, feels Sanna Vohra, founder and CEO, The Wedding Brigade, an online wedding platform. "Some wedding trends from the pandemic will continue, such as keeping the guest list small so that the bride and groom can spend time with each guest and enjoy themselves," she says. From choosing sustainable options for decor and fashion and making sure that every part of the wedding is meaningful-what traditions to include and exclude and how the wedding represents the couple-these are some key shifts that will be seen.

**Minimal maximalism**

There will be celebrations, but people will be doing so a bit more responsibly this year. Guest lists will be downsized, and celebrations for those special guests will continue as previously, instead of home weddings. According to Mehak Sagar, co-founder, WedMeGood, a wedding

planning app, "We anticipate a return to staycations or 'residential weddings', in which all guests can be accommodated on a single property with tighter health and security controls, creating a safe bubble for a few days. Given the nature of Covid-19, we anticipate that open-air venues will be popular, ensuring social distancing."

Indian weddings have traditionally been big, ostentatious, multi-event affairs. All that seems to have been left by the wayside, at least for the near future. From six to seven events leading to the wedding itself, the new normal is to have as few as two functions. From extended guest lists and walk-ins, weddings might change to 'by invite only' affairs. As Kanika Subbiah, founder, WeddingWishlist.com, a hybrid wedding planning platform, says, "This won't be a bad thing as weddings were mostly unorganised. RSVPs were just a formality earlier; now they will be essential for headcounts, tracking guests' vaccination



status, meal preferences, and to manage safety." In the past two weeks, Subbiah has got requests from couples for the use of the RSVP Manager app, as part of the overall wedding planning. The app, which Subbiah's company makes use for planning can be customised, and couples can use to track vaccination proof and other information.

**A shot in the arm**

Vaccinations will be made mandatory by most families for guests and vendors. In the event that someone is not vaccinated, a negative RT-PCR test will be needed to attend. Says Vohra, "I definitely think proof of vaccination or a negative test will be needed. During the pandemic, members of the family or the wedding planners collected the negative test reports. I believe they will collect vaccination proofs and

accordingly give the guest list to the venue."

Another projection is that people will lean towards getting married in the countries they live in as international travel guidelines are still rapidly changing.

When it comes to hiring vendors, vaccinations will definitely be mandatory. For example, WedMeGood will now display vendors' vaccination status on their cards. "In terms of guests and families, especially for destination weddings, we expect that proof of vaccination will be required prior to boarding flights. For local weddings, we will have to see how this pans out-whether it's a gentle nudge on the wedding card asking people to be responsible and safe and vaccinated, or whether there's an actual entry barrier that asks for vaccination proof," explains Sagar.

## After bus blast, Chinese workers in Pakistan seen carrying AK-47 rifles

***After the attack on a bus carrying Chinese engineers in Pakistan, photographs have emerged showing Chinese workers going around with AK-47 rifles.***

Days after an alleged attack on a bus carrying Chinese engineers in Pakistan, photographs have emerged showing Chinese workers armed to defend themselves at project sites. Photographs show Chinese workers armed with AK-47 rifles while carrying out maintenance tasks at various CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) projects in Pakistan.

In an incident, which was initially reported as a blast before Pakistan attributed it to a technical failure in the engine of the bus carrying Chinese engineers, 13 people had lost their lives on July 14.

Some reports said the incident was a terror attack and the Chinese were the target. Later, China sent its own team of investigators to probe the bus blast, in a clear signal that it did not believe Pakistan's version of the incident.

The incident took place as the bus was transporting Chinese engineers to the Dasu dam site in Upper Kohistan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Nine of those killed were engineers from China. China has invested massive sums of money into creating, training and equipping two Special Security Divisions (SSDs), the 34 and 44 Light Infantry Divisions with 15,000

troops each. While the 34 Light Division was created in September 2016, the 44 Light Division was created in 2020. The Pakistan Army had asked for and received money for equipping these divisions. However, they have failed to carry out their duties and have been at the receiving end of insurgent attacks.

One such attack was carried out in Ormara on October 15, 2020, when 14 Pakistani security personnel were dragged out of a bus and killed by Baloch militants. The new photos show Chinese workers and engineers in Pakistan being protected 24x7 by armed guards. This has



also created a number of near-riot situations wherein fistfights have turned ugly. In the recent past, Pakistan has faced troubles arising out of alleged Chinese involvement in its internal affairs. Officers of SSD have earlier been implicated in

various embezzlement schemes of Chinese money. The latest blast is not the first attack against the Chinese whose presence along the projects of the CPEC are said to have unsettled locals in many areas of Pakistan.





# ***Deadlock on farm laws continues but production and procurement go up***

***With the Parliament in session, the Farmers' union has started their own parallel parliament at Jantar-Mantar. But even though the deadlock over farm laws is on, there is a significant rise in production and procurement.***

With Parliament in session, the Farmers' union has started their own parallel parliament at Jantar-Mantar under strict protocol provided to them by Delhi Police. Here, a pertinent question arises -- is there an end to this dark tunnel? Politics intensified again and parliament, too, got disrupted on Thursday, but going by the approach from both sides, it seems that there is no immediate solution in sight. On Day 1 of their protest at Jantar-Mantar, the unions are threatening political fallout if the government does not concede to their demand.

## **MATTER STILL PENDING IN SC & LAW IS ON HOLD**

The important part is that even the SC appointed three-member committee have submitted their report on 19th March. It is important to recollect how the top court formed a committee on 11th January that comprised agricultural economists -- Anil Ghanvat, Ashok Gulati, and Pramod Joshi. Bhupinder Singh Mann, president, Bharatiya Kisan Union, and All India Kisan Coordination Committee, was also part of the committee initially, but they all resigned later. The SC panel, in its report, said that around 85 farmer organisations have been consulted in the case. The report

has been submitted to the Supreme Court in a sealed covered envelope and till a final decision on it, all these farm laws are on hold. But how long and when SC will take cognizance of that report is still unclear.

**DEADLOCK CONTINUE DESPITE 11 ROUNDS OF TALK** Farmers' protests have been continuing for the last 13 months since the ordinance was passed by the government and from the last 8 months different farmers' unions are sitting at three Delhi borders, demanding complete withdrawal of these three laws. The government stand is that they have engaged itself actively and constantly with the agitating farmers' unions to end the protests and so far, 11 rounds of discussions/talks were held between the government and agitating farmers' unions to resolve the issues. Multiple offers have been given to them to discuss clause by clause to understand their problem and concern, but unions are sticking to one-point agenda to repeal all three laws first. On Thursday also, Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, said: "We are ready to discuss their concern, but they are not pointing out the flaws in these laws. Rather, they are confined to one-point demand. There may be some differences in certain

clauses, but the entire law can't be termed detrimental."

The government also proposed to constitute a small group comprising representatives of farmers' unions, which can deliberate on farm laws clause-wise in a time-bound manner and can also consider other issues related to farmers, which representatives of farmers' unions have not agreed to.

Farmer's Unions and opposition parties alleged that no consultation was done during or before the drafting of this bill, whereas the government's claim is that the draft of the Ordinances had been circulated to various ministries/departments, NITI Aayog etc. for their comments. State governments were also consulted through Video Conferencing (VC) on May 21, 2020, which was attended by the officials of 13 States/ UTs, to obtain feedback on a new legal framework facilitating barrier-free inter-state and intra-state trade in agricultural produce to provide choice for farmers. Government of India has undertaken efforts on a series of extended activities through webinars, online conferences, workshops, teleconferencing, social media, print media, electronic media with the stakeholders on the three aforementioned

Ordinances and thereafter on respective Acts.

## **DESPITE AGITATION, PROCUREMENT GONE UP**

There was some apprehension that agitation was going to affect the agriculture sector badly, especially the rabi & kharif crops. But the data suggests otherwise and denies the theory that the ongoing protests are harming agricultural output in the country. As per agriculture ministry data, normally Rabi sowing starts from the month of October and the total area sown in Rabi season by the end of the January 21 was 684.59 lakh hectares as compared to last year's area sown of 665.59 lakh hectares, thereby indicating an increase of 19.01 lakh hectare area sown for the current year as compared to last year. Government of India announces Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for 22 major agricultural commodities of Fair Average Quality (FAQ) each year in both the crop seasons after taking into account the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACAP). The government also extends remunerative prices to farmers through its various intervention schemes. The procurement at

MSP is being done by Central and state agencies under various government schemes. This apart, the overall market also responds to the declaration of MSP and government's procurement operations, resulting in an increase in prices of the various notified crops.

As per ministry data, procurement of wheat in the ongoing Rabi Marketing season (RMS) 2021-22 is continuing smoothly in the procuring states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir at MSP, as it was done in previous seasons. Till now, (up to 24.05.2021), a quantity of over 390.68 LMT of wheat has been procured against the last year corresponding purchase of 344.94 LMT. About 40.81 Lakh farmers have already been benefitted from the ongoing RMS procurement operations with MSP value of Rs 77,159.58 Crore. Similarly, paddy procurement in the ongoing season Kharif 2020-21 is continuing smoothly in the procuring States with purchase of over 772.92 LMTs of paddy (includes Kharif Crop 706.43 LMT and Rabi Crop 66.49 LMT) upto May 24, 2021 against the last year corresponding purchase of 711.90 LMT.



# DRDO develops high strength Titanium alloy for aerospace industry

**The Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) has identified over 15 steel components that may be replaced by Metastable Beta Titanium alloy.**

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has indigenously developed a High Strength Metastable Beta Titanium Alloy that can be used in forging aerospace structures. The metal contains Vanadium, Iron and Aluminium. These alloys are already being used by many developed nations in recent times as a beneficial substitute for the relatively heavier traditional Nickel-Chromium-Molybdenum structural steels to achieve weight savings. The forgeability of high strength-to-weight ratio Ti-10V-2Fe-3Al alloy facilitates the manufacture of components for aerospace applications.

According to DRDO, the high strength beta titanium alloys are unique due to their higher



strength, ductility, fatigue, and fracture toughness making them increasingly attractive for aircraft structural applications. The Defence Metallurgical

Research Laboratory (DMRL) has carried out raw material selection, alloy melting, thermo-mechanical processing, ultrasonics-based

Destructive Evaluation (NDE), heat treatment, mechanical characterisation. "Their relatively lower lifetime cost, owing to superior corrosion

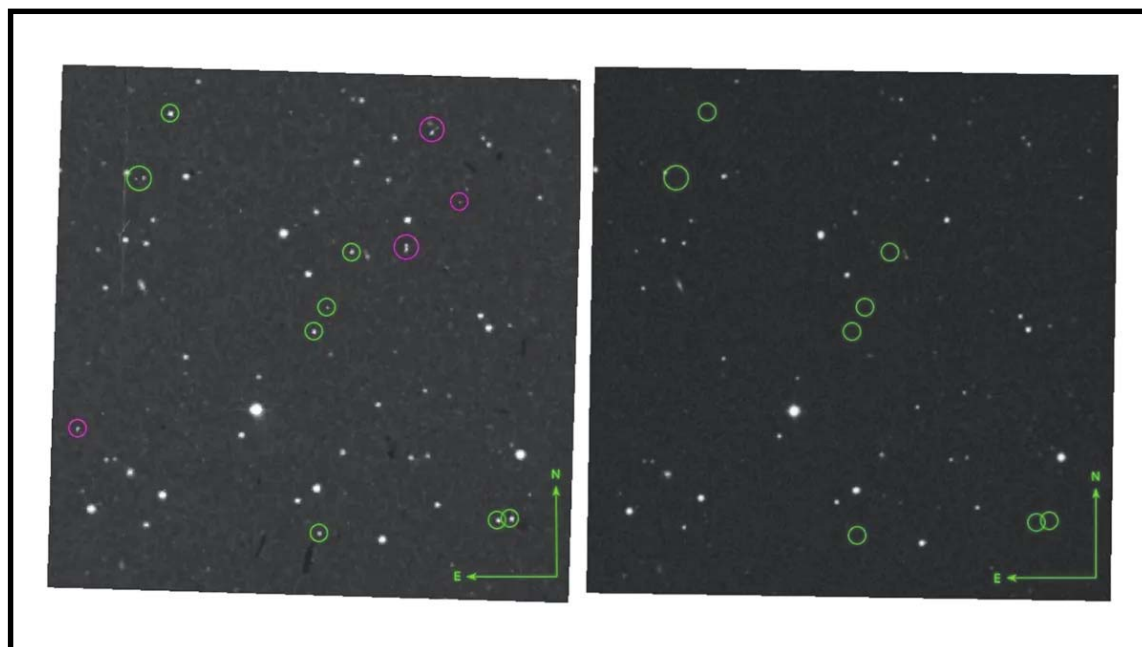
resistance in comparison to steels, is an effective trade-off to justify the use of this expensive material in India," DRDO said in a statement. Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) has identified over 15 steel components that may be replaced by Metastable Beta Titanium alloy forgings in the near future with a potential of 40 per cent weight savings. The landing gear drop link is the first component forged successfully by ADA at HAL, Bengaluru with DMRL's involvement and duly certified for airworthiness. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated DRDO and the industry for the indigenous development of the high strength alloy, which will be useful for the aerospace industry.

## First you see them, then you don't: Nine stars mysteriously disappear within 30 minutes

An international collaboration of astronomers have observed a mysterious development in the night sky when a group of stars disappeared within half an hour of being captured. The curious occurrence of nine stars like objects appearing and disappearing was captured on an old photographic plate.

The development was noticed as astronomers compared photographs of the same region of the sky to track vanishing and appearing celestial objects, and register unnatural phenomena in a bid to observe changes in the universe. The research published in Nature's Scientific Reports, states that through these surveys, tens of thousands of variable or flaring stars, supernovae, asteroids and variable Active Galactic Nuclei (AGN) have been found. Scientists from Sweden, Spain, the US, Ukraine, and India collaborated in the study. The image was captured on April 12, 1950, from the Palomar Observatory in California, which

**Palomar Observatory in California detected these transient stars in 1950, which were not to be found in photographs half an hour later and have not been traced since then.**



detected these transient stars which were not to be found in photographs half an hour later and have not been traced since then. Such a group of objects appearing and disappearing at the same time have been detected for the first time in the

history of astronomy. Baffled by the observation, scientists are yet to understand the reason behind this occurrence. Dr Alok C Gupta, a scientist from Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), who was part of the

study said, "The only thing we can say with certainty is that these images contain star-like objects that should not be there. We do not know why they are there." The astronomers have not found any explanation in well-established astrophysical

phenomena like gravitational lensing, fast radio bursts, or any variable star that could be responsible for this cluster of fast changes in the sky.

Led by Dr Beatriz Villarroel of the Nordic Institute of Theoretical Physics, the team used the 10.4 m Gran Telescopio Canarias (the largest optical telescope around the world) at the Canary Islands in Spain to do deep observations of the same region of the sky. The team hoped to find a counterpart at the position of every object that had appeared and vanished on the plate. Meanwhile, they are also accounting for human contamination of the plate. "One possible explanation is that the plates have been subjected to an unknown type of contamination producing mainly point sources with of varying intensities along with some mechanism of concentration," the paper said. They are now exploring the possibility of looking for images from the First Palomar Sky Survey to find these mysterious stars.



# Meet Hayley Arceneaux, Youngest American going to space at age 29, St. Jude pediatric cancer survivor and current St. Jude physician assistant

By our staff reporter (MEMPHIS, Tenn. )- Inspiration4 crew member Hayley Arceneaux she will be the first pediatric cancer survivor and youngest American to go to space in September, all to raise awareness and support for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®. Inspiration4 is the world's first all-civilian mission to space led by commander Jared Isaacman. The 38-year-old founder and chief executive officer of Shift4 Payments [NYSE: FOUR] donated two of the four seats to St. Jude, with the goal of raising \$200 million by 2022 for research and treatment of childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Isaacman has committed \$100 million to accelerate developments and save more children worldwide. Isaacman will occupy the mission seat that stands for Leadership. He donated two seats to St. Jude: The mission seat called Hope to Arceneaux and the Generosity seat to Christopher Sembroski, a



41-year-old aerospace industry employee at Lockheed Martin and United States Air Force veteran. The Prosperity seat will be occupied by Dr. Sian Proctor, a 51-year-old entrepreneur, educator, trained pilot and active voice in the space exploration community. Arceneaux will serve as the crew's medical officer. The 29-year-old is a physician

assistant at St. Jude, where she was treated for osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer, at age 10. "I remember pretending to be angry as we arrived [at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital], but in reality, I was just so scared. At the time, cancer to me seemed like a death sentence because everyone I had known who had it passed away. As soon I entered the doors of St. Jude, however, everything changed. I felt hope, a sense of optimism that I could get through this," Arceneaux recalled in a St. Jude Inspire blog post. In 1962, the same year an American orbited the Earth for the first time, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital committed to a different kind of uncharted territory: Finding cures. Saving children.® Nearly 60 years later,

treatments invented at St. Jude have helped push the overall childhood cancer survival rate from 20 percent to more than 80 percent. St. Jude won't stop until no child dies from cancer. This mission is a cause for humanity to help children here on Earth and will be the first time civilians go to orbit as part of a mission, unaffiliated with any government space agency. The Dragon spacecraft plans

to travel into space and orbit the planet for a few days before its water landing. St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is leading the way the world understands, treats and defeats childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Its purpose is clear: Finding cures. Saving children.® It is the only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center devoted solely to children. Treatments invented at St. Jude have helped push the overall childhood cancer survival rate from 20 percent to more than 80 percent since the hospital opened more than 50 years ago. St. Jude won't stop until no child dies from cancer. St. Jude freely shares the discoveries it makes, and every child saved at St. Jude means doctors and scientists worldwide can use that knowledge to save thousands more children. Families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food - because all a family should worry about is helping their child live. Visit St. Jude Inspire to discover powerful St. Jude stories of hope, strength, love and kindness. Join the St. Jude mission by visiting [stjude.org](https://stjude.org), liking St. Jude on Facebook, following St. Jude on Twitter, Instagram and TikTok, and subscribing to its YouTube channel.




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**Finding cures. Saving children.**

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# Pegasus scandal shows we cannot take privacy for granted

**As a citizenry, we are at a tipping point, witnessing the slow erosion of democracy: If they are targeting those with power, what of 'us' with quieter voices?**

It's quite James Bondesque; allegations of governments spying on their own people, questions being parried by prevarications, and the hyperbolic self-aggrandisement by a private company. What the NSO-Pegasus exposé has made amply clear, in case there was still any doubt, is that in the 21st century, it's not merely about money or ammunition, but rather the real weapon, one of limitless potential and even greater propensity for harm - information. Information is power.

There has not been an outright denial from either the Indian government or NSO that the Indian government is a client or uses the Pegasus software. The NSO has stated that only governments, specifically law enforcement and intelligence organisations, are its customers, and not private entities. But the software is designed to be insidious. It does not use the earlier spear-phishing attack, which required a potential target to click on a malicious link to download infected code. Instead, it uses a "zero-click" attack which allows the device to be taken over remotely by exploiting software and hardware vulnerabilities.

Those who were supposedly targeted range from the uppermost echelons of the judiciary, Opposition party leaders, activists and journalists. Potential voices of dissent.

Confined to our homes for the better part of a year, it seems that we are now faced with a high possibility of loss of personal liberty. The Constitution guarantees citizens of India the freedom of thought, speech, expression, and recently the Supreme Court declared the right to privacy a fundamental right. These are vital for a nation to be able to identify itself as a democracy. However, the stifling of voices of bearers of information, of dissent and of opinions, has made the buzzing murmur now a deafening din - toe the line.



The Israeli Defence Ministry's statement, that Pegasus and other cyber products are exported "exclusively to government entities" and are "only for the purpose of preventing and investigating crime and counter terrorism", leads one to think about the

seemingly to clamp down on the impunity with which social media platforms operate, led to the now famous Twitter debacle. Both these notifications are currently under challenge before the Supreme Court.

As a citizenry, we are at a tipping point, witnessing the slow

grounds are being taken by the government before the Supreme Court to defend its stance. "History shows that it is always subtle and insidious encroachments made ostensibly for a good cause that imperceptibly but surely corrode the foundations of liberty"

(Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India, 1978).

Let's make no bones about it - Pegasus has been used to illegally hack into people's lives and to obtain private information outside the boundaries of the law. Having seen the mendacious propaganda in the build-up to the state elections last year, the treatment of farmers and students protesting the citizenship law, the lack of public outcry can only signal that the dangerous forces at work are succeeding.

Freedom of thought, speech, expression and privacy are something that we have to protect, because at this bleak hour there is no one else. These rights go hand in hand with each other. The alleged use of Pegasus to illegally hack into persons' lives, listen in on private conversations, to thereafter use this private

information against said persons in hope of gaining undue advantage, are all outside the boundaries of the law. Political espionage at this level shows the insidious conduct and intent. If the allegations of the government using Pegasus are found to be correct, then what are the safeguards to protect our rights?

Sections 43 and 66 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 criminalise hacking. Should it be proved that the Indian government used the Pegasus software to hack into the phones of its citizens, without any reasonable cause, it would be a watershed moment, akin to Watergate.

A person has the basic fundamental rights of liberty, privacy, speech and expression amongst others. The government barging into closed doors and private conversations is deplorable. The effect is that a person does not have the freedom to think, to speak or even be in the privacy of their own homes. Instead of being able to take constructive criticism, hearing the voice of the people on their problems and using that to course correct, the government prefers to simply silence dissent and the minority.

The Data Protection Bill (yet to be passed by Parliament) offers no protection in respect of surveillance. A government whose surveillance policy is opaque and covert offers no remedies and actual recourse. These policies have a chilling effect.

The majority is not always right. A democracy has the indelible right to question, to demand answers and explanations. State surveillance and a police state are oppressive. Surveillance on this level would have the effect of instilling fear and directly hampering a person's ability to freely make their own decisions and pander to the majority. It would lead to people craving the anonymity offered by protection of the majority at the cost of free speech.



recent past. In December 2018, the government authorised 10 security and intelligence agencies to intercept, monitor and decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource. This February, the notification of the Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Rules,

erosion of democracy: If they are targeting those with power, what of "us" with quieter voices? The earlier notifications issued by the government had some conceivable checks and balances; for example, authorisation is required before any of the 10 notified agencies can intercept, monitor or decrypt any information. This and other





# Third Covid wave upends fragile South Africa, a warning for developing world

(News agencies) Sello Kgoale watched his neighbours shuttling back and forth with looted liquor, refrigerators and flat-screen televisions. There were no police at a nearby mall, they told him, so the 46-year-old father of three joined the thousands-strong mob ransacking the shopping centre and filled three bags with rice, cooking oil and paraffin for his family's cooking stove.

"I've never done anything like this before. I'm ashamed," he said last week, sitting in his corrugated-iron shack. "But we just keep getting hit."

Sixteen months ago, Mr. Kgoale lived in a rented two-bedroom house and had a steady cleaning job, while his wife worked in a call centre. South Africa's first wave of Covid-19 infections took the lives of his mother-in-law and grandmother. The second cost him his job and then his home. The third destroyed his efforts to start a new business. "I came to Johannesburg 21 years ago from the north, full of hope," he said. "Now we have nothing left but anger."

Wave after wave of coronavirus is pummeling South Africa's fragile economy and its largely unvaccinated population, creating a spiral of death, lockdowns and anger that has fuelled the country's worst rioting since the collapse of white minority rule in 1994. At least 215 people died in the violence across South Africa's two most populous provinces, and more than 3,400 have been arrested. While the looting had quieted by Monday, the situation remains tense in parts of the country.

The violence was initially sparked by the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma earlier this month, and has exacerbated a power struggle within the African National Congress, South Africa's ruling party since Nelson Mandela's election as the country's first Black president 27 years ago. President Cyril Ramaphosa has said the unrest was an attempted insurrection against South Africa's democracy and intended to sabotage its economy.

The political protest quickly devolved, becoming an outlet for the frustrations of an impoverished majority long shut out of the country's economy. South Africa is struggling to emerge from a record contraction of 7% last year. Each surge of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns are putting more pressure on the divided nation, where 43% of workers were without a job at the end of March. "We were sitting

on a dormant volcano here, where all of us might perish if it erupts," said Xolani Dube, a political analyst with the Xubera Institute for Research and Development, a nonpartisan think tank in the southeastern city of Durban. "Now the volcano has erupted."

The human and economic dislocation in South Africa, where just 2.8% of people have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19, shows how difficult it will be for many emerging economies to recover from the pandemic. The violence in South Africa—as well as in countries including Colombia and Sudan—offers a stark example of how diminishing incomes and the rising cost of food are adding to more than a year of pandemic suffering, exacerbating political instability.

The World Bank estimates that more than 160 million people will have been pushed into poverty as a result of Covid by the end of 2021, widening the gap between the world's richest and poorest nations. The pandemic has led 41 million people to the brink of famine, according to the World Food Program.

In South Africa, Mr. Ramaphosa called in army reservists to restore law and order, while the country's overcrowded hospitals and first responders fought the country's third, and highest, surge in Covid-19 infections.

When the pandemic arrived, South Africa was already, by some measurements, the most inequitable country on earth. Nearly two-thirds of Black South Africans, who make up around 80% of the country's population, lived in poverty, according to the national statistics office. The mean monthly income of white South Africans was more than three times that of their Black compatriots.

Dr. Ramaphosa, elected on a pledge to clean up the country's corruption-riddled politics and revive a moribund economy, imposed one of the world's strictest lockdowns in response to Covid-19.

In the economic downturn that followed, low-income earners, many of whom are Black or members of other racial groups disadvantaged under apartheid, were nearly four times as likely to lose their jobs as high-income earners, the World Bank said in a report this month. Some 13 million South Africans, including three million children, live in households that no longer have enough money to afford food, a recent, nationally representative survey found.

South Africa has lost more than 190,000 of its 60 million citizens—about one in 300—to the coronavirus since May 2020, according to a tally of excess deaths by the government-funded South African Medical Research Council. A nationwide study of donated blood determined that by May this year, 47% of South Africans have already had Covid-19, with Black donors more than three times more likely to have antibodies to the virus than white donors.

As the third virus wave arrived, powered by the more transmissible Delta variant, South Africa's Constitutional Court on June 29 made what appeared to be a decisive ruling in a long-running battle within the ruling party: convicting Mr. Zuma.

The former president had resigned in 2018 under pressure from Mr. Ramaphosa. The court sentenced the 79-year-old Mr. Zuma to 15 months in jail for contempt of court after he refused to testify at a government commission investigating allegations of rampant government corruption. Mr. Zuma, a former ANC spy chief who spent 10 years in the notorious Robben Island prison during the anti-apartheid struggle, has denied wrong doing.

Mr. Ramaphosa said Friday that some rioters targeted critical infrastructure, including telecommunications towers, oil refineries, the largest maker of HIV/AIDS drugs and the Durban port—the largest in sub-Saharan Africa—suggesting a coordinated operation to dislodge South Africa's constitutional order. The highway between Durban and Johannesburg, a key route for imports, exports and domestic trade, was blocked for five days. Fears of shortages of food and other essentials prompted panic buying.

Government officials said Monday that six alleged unnamed instigators have been arrested and charged with inciting public violence, and that more arrests were expected.

"The JZ incident was just a spark for what had been brewing over the years," said Bob Mhlana, a former intelligence officer under Mr. Zuma who is now in private security, using the former president's initials. "We will face another revolt if we don't address socioeconomic issues."

The unrest was yet another threat to reckon with for the nation's first responders in South Africa's coronavirus emergency. The team at Saaberie Chishty, an ambulance service run by a Muslim charity

in southern Johannesburg, had already been running triage in patients' homes. Hospital beds often only opened up when someone died.

"This third wave is the worst," said Farah Williams, a paramedic who had six of her close colleagues die from the virus within a span of three months. After weeks of back-to-back calls from patients, the phones suddenly went quiet last week. "Everybody is fearful...to seek attention or care," she said. When she did venture out, it was often to declare another death amid mounting fears for her own safety.

In the riots, two ambulances in the province were torched, another robbed of its equipment. One Saaberie Chishty volunteer who had joined a group defending his community saw a neighbour get shot in the head. "We couldn't get an ambulance to him," Ms. Williams said.

The violence disrupted Covid-19 testing and a vaccination drive that was finally gaining momentum. Government officials and scientists warn that the mass looting and other gatherings are likely to power another rise in infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

Mr. Kgoale had been looking for odd jobs until last week Monday, when he saw residents returning to the squatter camp carrying looted items.

His family had moved there after he was laid off, renting a one-roomed shack made of corrugated iron with a plastic mat laid on the dirt floor. Anger against politicians and lack of economic opportunities seethed in the community, which refused to allow government officials onto the settlement.

"No heating and no water. We've never lived somewhere like this," he said. His oldest son had been due to go to college in January, but the family could no longer afford it.

Using his severance money, Mr. Kgoale started a chicken-breeding business that would deliver birds reared in his home state of Limpopo to stores and food stalls he had already identified in Johannesburg. A June lockdown that banned movement between provinces killed that revenue stream, too.

After arriving in Johannesburg in the early days of democracy, Mr. Kgoale plans to move back to Limpopo, a largely rural community with one of the country's highest unemployment rates. "There's nothing for me there," he said. "I can only hope for my children, but I worry it's too late."



# How the Pandemic Has Changed Our Eating and Shopping Habits

Whether you became a creative sourdough bread baker or you excelled at holding flawless Zoom meetings, a few of your newly acquired pandemic practices may have made their way into your ongoing daily habits. While I'll bet there are also some restrictions you couldn't wait to ditch quicker than you can say "social distance." For better or worse, one thing for certain is that COVID-19 has shaped many of our food-related decisions. What foods to stock at home, how to shop and how to get in and out of stores quickly became the focus of our attention. To help highlight the changes Americans made surrounding their food, nutrition and shopping habits over the past year, the International Food Information Council in Washington, D.C., conducted their 16th annual Food and Health Survey.

**How Habits Have Changed**  
It's no surprise that Americans are excited to emerge and shift toward "normalcy," whatever

that might mean for each of us. IFIC's survey showed in 2020, 85% of people reported a change to eating and food preparation due to COVID, but this year that number dropped to 72%.

Many of us look forward to not having to wear a mask when shopping or when going to a restaurant, not worrying as much about COVID-19 when food shopping and not cooking as much at home. But we do look forward to being able to enjoy worry-free dining in restaurants more often. Some parents are enthusiastic about getting back to date nights, and many of us are even looking forward to getting back to (or starting) healthy diets.

## Buying Food

IFIC found that the overall reasons for why we buy the foods we purchase haven't changed very much: Taste continues to rule at No. 1 (82%), followed by price (66%), healthfulness (58%), convenience (52%) and environmental sustainability (31%). Being familiar with the

food you purchase is key (68%), especially during a time when so much was uncertain and comfort in any arena was welcomed.

## Cooking and Meal Prep

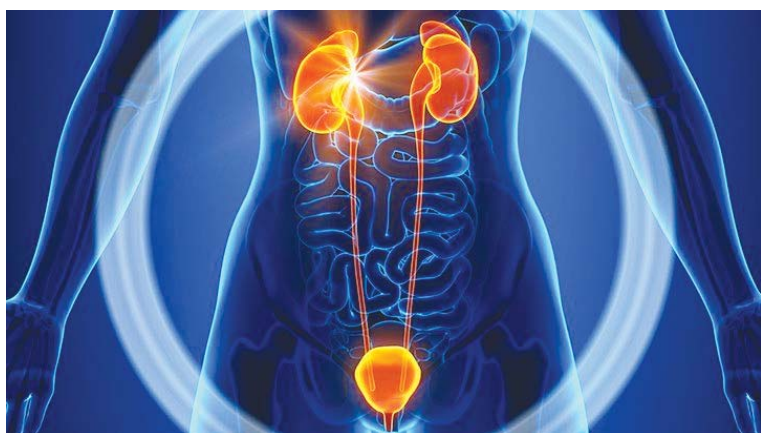
Although I have spent the past 30-something years encouraging families to come together at the table for mealtime, it took a pandemic to actually make this occur regularly, albeit not necessarily voluntarily. But as we emerge - family meals have diminished as well. According to nutritionist Ali Webster, director of research and nutrition communications at IFIC, "Last year, 60% of Americans were cooking at home, and now we see that number shift down below 50%." As cooking fatigue and the demands of running a household, home schooling and holding down a job set in, so did kitchen creativity. Albeit idealistic, I'm hoping that those who rarely cooked at home in the past, picked up some cooking confidence and that they'll continue to connect at the table at least a few days a week.



Produce for Better Health's 2020 State of the Plate: America's Fruit & Vegetable Consumption Trends research showed that fruit and vegetable consumption increases with the frequency of family meals, yet sadly, it was found that the news is not as encouraging as we would hope. America's fruit and vegetable consumption continues to erode over time. Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak, president and CEO of PBH,

encourages us to act now to reverse this downward trend which she calls a "fruit and vegetable consumption crisis in our country." I had hoped that pandemic panic shopping would have prompted people to buy more produce in all forms, including frozen, canned, dried fruits and vegetables, but overall, every age group needs to work on welcoming these foods to their plates more regularly.

# 4 Causes of Bladder Pain: Know the Signs



Bladder pain can signal anything from a minor infection to a serious health condition like cancer. Symptoms may range from discomfort in the lower abdomen area to burning with urination.

The good news is that bladder cancer is rare, and bladder pain is usually not serious. But that doesn't mean you should ignore it when you have pain or pressure in your pelvis or lower abdomen that may be coming from your bladder.

How do you know whether the pain is worrisome or indicates a benign condition? Pay attention

to the other symptoms you have - particularly if you have blood in your urine along with bladder pain, says Nazema Y. Siddiqui, MD, an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, North Carolina. Bladder pain could be due to the conditions listed below. But pain in the bladder area can be caused by pelvic pain due to gynecologic conditions. Certain gastrointestinal issues can also lead to pain in or around the bladder. "When women have bladder pain, they should

seek evaluation," Dr. Siddiqui says.

1. Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs): More Common in Women

Urinary tract infections, sometimes called bladder infections, strike women more often than men, and simple anatomy is the cause.

The female urethra is closer to areas that have natural bacteria, such as the anus and vagina. It's also shorter than a man's urethra, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK).

Bladder pain from UTIs can happen at any age. In young women, it is a common symptom of urinary tract infections, along with frequent and painful urination. Symptoms in older women can vary but typically include muscle aches, abdominal pain, fatigue, and weakness. It's important to see your doctor because treatment with antibiotics like Macrobid (nitrofurantoin) or Bactrim (trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole)

can usually clear up a urinary tract infection, the NIDDK notes. And though the infection may go away without treatment, antibiotics can speed healing and quickly eliminate uncomfortable symptoms. Drinking extra fluids and urinating frequently will also help treat the infection and your discomfort.

2. Interstitial Cystitis: A Severe Form of Bladder Pain Syndrome  
More than three million American women live with pelvic pain related to interstitial cystitis, a condition in which the bladder wall becomes irritated and inflamed, according to the NIDDK. "Interstitial cystitis is a severe form of bladder pain syndrome," Siddiqui says.

Bladder discomfort from interstitial cystitis may range from tenderness to severe pain, according to the institute. Another clue that interstitial cystitis is the culprit: Menstruation tends to worsen bladder pain. Interstitial cystitis is not caused by a urinary tract

infection, although the symptoms may worsen if you have interstitial cystitis and get a UTI. While the cause is not understood, according to the NIDDK, certain events or factors seem to trigger flares in symptoms. These include stress, changes in diet, allergies, and taking certain drugs, among other things.

Treatment options for interstitial cystitis include distending (stretching) the bladder, taking oral medication, physical therapy, and using electrical nerve stimulation to alleviate pain, but there is no known cure. In severe cases, where other treatments haven't worked, sometimes surgery is an option.

3. Changes in Your Reproductive System

Bladder pain in women may also be a result of thinning vaginal skin, says Karl Luber, MD, a urogynecologist and a founder of the female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery fellowship program at UCSD-Kaiser Permanente in San Diego.



# When Bollywood star Salman Khan trolled trolls

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan enjoys one of the biggest fan camps in the country and while people love everything done by Bhai—meaning brother, a moniker given to him by his fans—there are some who find his career moves questionable.

In an upcoming interview with his younger brother Arbaaz Khan—for an episode of the second season of Arbaaz's talk show 'Pinch'-Salman Khan reacts to mean comments trolls have dropped on his posts.

When Arbaaz reads out an especially rude comment to Salman—which read as him being

'well settled' after taking the money of his fans and demanded for a refund—the actor was quick to reply, "I didn't steal any money, I must have stolen hearts."

Commenting on his acting skills, another user had commented "dikhawe wali acting" (showboating), Salman said, "Okay, then you do it too. Even to show off, you need a big heart and courage (sic)." He then went on to add that no matter how good of an actor you are, one cannot conceal their true persona forever. The 'Radhe' actor also revealed during the chat that he doesn't read comments or check likes on his

social media posts once he is done publishing them.

Salman Khan also said that trolls may think that they could get away with anything, but the cybercrime unit (under Cyber Laws of India) can track down even anonymous abusers and bring them to justice.

He also talked about how a celebrity's 'No comment' comment is blown out of proportion by the media. "People make so much ado of that 'no comment' and say that he does not want to speak even though others are willing to talk about it," he was seen as saying.



## Vikrant Massey recalls his 'heart skipped a beat' after seeing Gauahar Khan:

**'It was like a proper trolley shot for me'**



Actor Vikrant Massey has said that his heart 'actually' skipped a beat after he saw actor Gauahar Khan while shooting for their upcoming film 14 Phere. He recalled an incident that took place after nearly a month of their shooting for the movie and called it a 'proper trolley shot' for him. 14 Phere features Vikrant Massey and Kriti Kharbanda in the lead roles. The movie also stars Gauahar Khan and Jameel Khan in pivotal roles. Directed by Devanshu Singh, the film is slated to release on Zee5 on July 23.

Speaking to SpotboyE, Vikrant said, "On the first day of shoot of our film, we were shooting for a train sequence at the

Kamalistan Studios. Gauahar was in the prosthetics for that sequence, so slowly we got used to seeing her in that attire, even though we know she is a young and gorgeous woman. One day, we were shooting in a home at Madh Island for a get together scene and it had been about 20-25 days of shoot already. For that scene, Gauahar wasn't in the get up and she walked on the set as the gorgeous Gauahar Khan that she is.

He continued, "I was just sitting there when she just walked by me from behind and my heart just skipped a beat. My heart actually skipped a beat as my mind had formed that image that she was Mataji, she was

Zubina. But when I saw Gauahar as herself, my heart skipped a beat as she was so pretty. It was like a proper trolley shot for me." In the movie, Gauahar essays the role of Zubina, Vikrant's fake mother. The film follows two lovers, Vikrant and Kriti's characters, who lie to their parents about each other's families to get them to say yes to their marriage. Vikrant was last seen on the Netflix film Haseen Dillruba. His future projects include Shah Rukh Khan's home production movie Love Hostel, Hindi remake of Malayalam film Forensic and Santosh Sivan-directed action-thriller Mumbaikar.

## From teleshopping to sports: Sneak peek into Raj Kundra's business empire

Businessman Raj Kundra was recently arrested by the Mumbai Police Crime Branch in a case involving the creation and publishing of pornographic films through apps. Kundra was described as a key conspirator in the 'porn videos' racket following his arrest.

The 45-year-old businessman has been remanded in police custody till July 23 and has been booked under several sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in connection with the case. As the adult film scandal unfolds, Mumbai Police said there is sufficient evidence against him to prove his involvement.

At the heart of the controversy are some WhatsApp chats and a streaming application called "Hot Shots" linked to the businessman. However, this is not the first time Kundra,

husband of actor Shilpa Shetty, has found himself in the middle of a controversy.

### RAJ KUNDRA'S BUSINESS EMPIRE

Raj Kundra earned name, fame and money from several businesses involving Pashmina shawls, precious

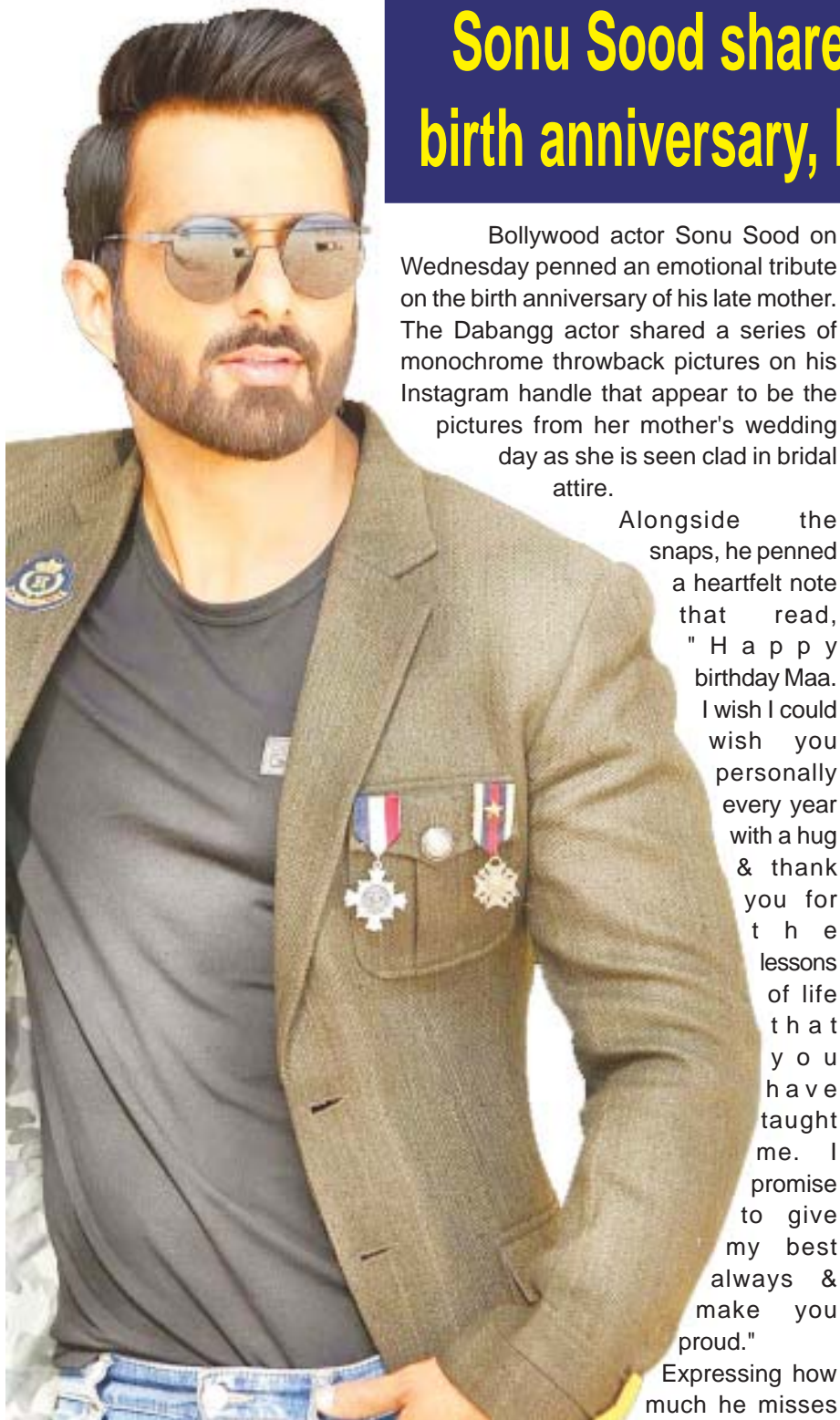
metals, constructions and renewable energy projects. Some of his biggest ventures were linked to his keen interest in sports and

technology. He played a key role in launching an MMA fighting league and a poker game league, according to a BusinessToday.in report. He has even invested in the teleshopping channel Best Deal TV. Kundra has a keen interest in apps as well. Earlier, he had launched the Jaldi Live Stream app that gives individuals a shot at stardom through live-streaming.





## Sonu Sood shares heart-warming note on his mother's birth anniversary, Farah Khan Kunder says: 'Rula diya na'



Bollywood actor Sonu Sood on Wednesday penned an emotional tribute on the birth anniversary of his late mother. The Dabangg actor shared a series of monochrome throwback pictures on his Instagram handle that appear to be the pictures from her mother's wedding day as she is seen clad in bridal attire.

Alongside the snaps, he penned a heartfelt note that read, "Happy birthday Maa. I wish I could wish you personally every year with a hug & thank you for the lessons of life that you have taught me. I promise to give my best always & make you proud."

Expressing how much he misses

his mother, Sonu Sood added, "These messages can never express how much I miss you. The vacuum that has been created in my life without you will always remain the same till I see you again. Stay happy where ever you are and keep guiding me always. Love u maa."



The post on the photo-sharing platform garnered more than 10 lakh likes within a few hours of being posted.

It received likes and comments from celebrity followers including Sunil Shetty, Farah Khan Kunder, Esha Gupta, and many others. Filmmaker Farah Khan Kunder also left a heartfelt comment on the tribute post shared by Sonu. "Rula diya na.. mothers r always with us.. whether physically there or not," she wrote. The actor has been winning hearts with his philanthropic work amid the Covid-19 pandemic. From delivering oxygen

cylinders to helping the needy get proper medical attention to now setting up oxygen plants - Sonu has been doing it all. Sonu, who had received his first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at Apollo Hospital, in Punjab in April, had also launched Sanjeevani - A Shot of Life, an initiative to

encourage people to get vaccinated against the novel coronavirus and for raising awareness about the inoculation drive in the country. Separately, on the film front, Sonu will feature in Chiranjeevi-starrer upcoming Telugu movie Acharya. He also has Prithviraj, co-starring Akshay Kumar, in the pipeline. Also, Sonu recently launched a book recounting his experience of helping migrant workers during the Covid-19 lockdown titled I Am No Messiah. The book is written by the actor himself, revealing the emotional challenges he faced while extending help.

## Sherni actor Sharat Saxena says all good older man roles go to Amitabh Bachchan

Sharat Saxena, who has acted in hit films such as Baghban, Ghulam, and Tumko Na Bhool Payenge, recently opened up on how old actors like him don't get work in the entertainment industry. In an exclusive conversation with Aaj Tak, he revealed why is not able to get work even after spending 40 years in the film industry. He also says how good 'older man roles' goes to Amitabh Bachchan.

"NO ONE WRITES ROLES FOR OLD ACTORS LIKE US" Sharat Saxena revealed how he doesn't get good offers because no roles are written for 'old actors like him,' until unless its Amitabh Bachchan. He said, "In today's time in Bollywood, no one writes

roles for old actors like us. There are options for only a few selected roles. Amitabh

Bachchan, who is a great actor, is everyone's first choice. I have worked with him many times. He is a brilliant personality and I can't compare myself to him."

He added, "Today, the biggest reason for senior actors not getting good work is lack of good

stories. Recently, I worked with Vidya Balan in Sherni. I liked that character very much and I chose it. Like Hollywood films, Bollywood should also make

projects keeping senior actors in mind."



SHARAT SAXENA IS NOT HAPPY EVEN AFTER GIVING 40 YEARS TO THE INDUSTRY Sharat Saxena, who has worked in the film industry for

over 40 years, is not pleased with his journey as an actor. He said, "I have worked very hard

in the film world. I won't say that I did not get to work with good filmmakers or in good films. I have given more than 40 years and 250 films to this industry. I got messed up and I had to bear the brunt. I worked hard with all my dedication but I could not fit into the film industry as much as I should have. Perhaps I was lacking something. I am not very good-looking, my complexion is also not fair and I had no

connections. All these reasons came in my way."

"MY BODY BECAME MY BIGGEST ENEMY"

Sharat Saxena added that it took him a long time to prove himself as an actor. He said, "For the first 25 to 30 years of my film career, I got only small roles. I was made a fighter in films and in the name of dialogue, I would get, 'yes boss', 'okay boss'. People praise me today about my fitness when I am 71. However, there was a time when my body became my enemy. Whichever filmmaker saw me, they wanted to cast me as a villain. These days, actors pay a lot of attention to their body. People still talk about me due to my fitness so it is very important to maintain that."





# UNESCO chides Australia over Great Barrier Reef proposal

(SAI Bureau)- The Chinese host of this year's meeting of the U.N. World Heritage Committee has defended the body's proposal to label the Great Barrier Reef as "in danger" against Australian government suspicion that China influenced the finding for political reasons.



The committee, which is meeting both virtually and in the Chinese city of Fuzhou for the next two weeks, will consider the draft decision on Friday. "Australia, as a member state of the World Heritage Committee,

of education and the president of this year's session, on Sunday. The UNESCO committee will consider adding new sites to the World Heritage list, taking some off and adding others to the in-danger category. A draft decision to put Venice on the in-danger list prompted the Italian government to ban cruise ships from the lagoon city in a bid to avoid the designation. Xuejun, the Chinese vice minister

(Contd on page 33)

A fighting chance: EU to lower greenhouse emissions by 55%, target Net Zero by 2050



(SAI Bureau)- The 27 countries of the European Union (EU) have decided to give the entire world, comprising of 195 countries, a fighting chance to keep breathing in the days to come. It is going to cut to the chase by cutting the harmful gas - CO2. On July 14, the EU announced a slew of sweeping legislation aimed at bringing down their combined greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent (of the 1990 levels) by the end of 2029. By 2019,

(Contd on page 33)

## Rising number of gold auctions signals growing financial distress in India amid Covid-19

(SAI Bureau)- Gold prices reached a peak of US\$2,048 an ounce in early August last year and this has come down to US\$1,815 on Tuesday (July 20).

In India, banks or financial institutions can lend up to 90 per cent of the value of the gold put up as collateral. When the loan period, which can be for as little as three months, is repaid in full, either through instalments or in one lump sum, the gold is returned to the borrower. If not, what has been put up as collateral will be auctioned off. "During the first wave of the pandemic there was no significant uptick in auctions. But auctions increased during the second wave as the lockdown delayed the economic recovery to some extent and impacted small businesses, who are the major borrowers when it comes to gold loans," said Mr Saurabh Kumar, head of gold loans at IIFL Finance, a finance and investment



services company. "Also, a decline in gold prices aligned with the second wave further pushed up auctions. However, we believe this is a transitory phase. We are seeing increased economic activity again and things seem to be getting better for borrowers," he added. Manappuram Finance, a non-banking finance company, said the amount of gold it auctioned off in the past financial year was worth 4.12 billion rupees. In the previous year, the total auctioned off amounted to 1.16 billion rupees.

"We've auctioned a record 1,000kg of pawned gold in the March quarter," Manappuram managing director and chief executive V.P. Nandakumar told the Press Trust of India. Experts believe many people were already struggling before Covid-19 struck. "I think it's very clear the economic slowdown in India for the past three years, aggravated by Covid-19 for 1½ years, led to a huge loss of income especially among households that don't have much savings," said Professor N.R. Bhanumurthy, vice-chancellor of Bengaluru Dr B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics University.

## Blue Origin-Jeff Bezos historic flight to space in pictures



(SAI Bureau)- Amazon founder Jeff Bezos blasted into space Tuesday on his rocket company's first flight with people on board, becoming the second billionaire in just over a week to ride his own spacecraft. The launch and landing lasted for just over 10 minutes as the astronauts experienced zero gravity and weightlessness. Bezos was accompanied by a hand-picked group: his brother, an 18-year-old from the Netherlands and an 82-year-old aviation pioneer from Texas - the

(Contd on page 32)