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Is mystery yacht in Italy Putin's pleasure boat?

**Is Scheherazade, the mystery yacht in Italy's
Massa, Russian President Putin's pleasure boat?**



**Full Story
on Page
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**All about Lapsus\$, the hacker
group that has targeted Microsoft,
Samsung, Okta, Nvidia**

Lapsus\$ is a hacker group that has
targeted Microsoft, Samsung, Okta and
Nvidia. How has it carried out these attacks?
Here's everything you need to know



(News agency) Microsoft on Wednesday published
a detailed cybersecurity blog confirming that its
systems were breached by the hacker group
Lapsus\$. The post also states that Microsoft has
observed a common thread of tactics being deployed
to hack into the computer systems and networks of
multiple organisations. **(Contd on page 29)**

**Transplantation of organs from
deceased COVID-19 patients is
safe and possible. Here's how**



**Full Story
on Page
28**

**President Ram Nath Kovind confers Padma
Awards to 54 distinguished personalities**

**President Ram Nath Kovind conferred Padma Awards to 54
distinguished individuals at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Monday**



(News agency) India's
first Chief of Defence
Staff, General Bipin
Rawat, who died in a
chopper crash last
December, the late
Radheshyam Khemka,
former chairman of Gita
Press that publishes
Hindu religious books,
and Congress leader
Ghulam Nabi Azad
were

(Contd on page 29)

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Chief Justice Of India NV Ramana Visits Gurdwara In Dubai

The CJI was accompanied by his spouse Shivamala and Supreme Court judges Justices L Nageswara Rao and Hima Kohli during the visit to the Guru Nanak Darbar in the Gulf country



(News agency) New Delhi: Chief Justice of India (CJI) NV Ramana on Friday visited a Gurudwara in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and paid obeisance. The CJI was accompanied by his spouse Shivamala and Supreme Court judges Justices L Nageswara Rao and Hima Kohli during the visit to the Guru Nanak Darbar in the Gulf country. On Thursday, the CJI visited the Union Supreme Court of the UAE in Abu Dhabi at the invitation of Mohammad

Hamad Al Badi, the chief justice of the top court of the nation. Justice Ramana has also attended a felicitation function organised by the Indian community in Abu Dhabi at the India Social and Cultural Centre, Abu Dhabi. In his speech, CJI Ramana on Thursday suggested that the organisations of the Indians in the Gulf country could think about creating a legal assistance centre to help those in need of such assistance in India.

Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna Named To US National Security Commission On Biotech

Ro Khanna represents California's 17th Congressional District, located in the heart of Silicon Valley, and is serving a third term. He sits on the House Armed Services, Agriculture and Oversight and Reform committees, where he chairs the Environmental Subcommittee

(News agency) Washington: Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna was on Thursday named to the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology.

The 12-member National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology, established as per the National Defense Authorization Act 2022, will conduct a thorough review of how advances in emerging biotechnology and related technologies will shape current and future activities of the Department of Defense.

It has been tasked to provide an interim report to the President of the United States and the Armed Services Committees within a year and submit a final unclassified report within two years to the president and the committees, including recommendations for action by

Congress and the federal government. The announcement in this regard was made by the bipartisan leadership of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, Congressmen Adam Smith and Mike Rogers, Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee, and Senators Jack Reed and Jim Inhofe, Chairman and Ranking Member of Senate Armed Services Committee.

Congressman Ro Khanna has been selected to the committee by Adam Smith, a media release said.

Ro Khanna represents California's 17th Congressional District, located in the heart of Silicon Valley, and is serving a third term. He sits on the House Armed Services, Agriculture and Oversight and Reform committees, where he chairs the Environmental

Subcommittee. Additionally, Rep. Khanna is the Deputy Whip of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, serves as an Assistant Whip for the Democratic Caucus, and is the Democratic Vice Chair of the House Caucus on India and Indian-Americans. "Ro Khanna is committed to representing the people and ideas rooted in Silicon Valley to the nation and throughout the world," a media release said.

Other members of the commission include Senator Alex Padilla, the first Latino to represent California in the US Senate; Dov S Zakheim is Senior Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Senior Fellow at the CNA Corporation, Paul Arcangeli; Senator Todd Young. Alongside them Dr. Alexander Titus, a Product Strategy & Operations Lead at Google Research



where he focuses on driving alignment between research priorities and Google's product priorities; Congressman Stephanie Bice and Jason Kelly, co-founder and CEO of Ginkgo Bioworks are also its members.

Heartiest wishes from Congressman for the 'Festival of Colors'

"HOLI Mubarak to all celebrating on Long Island, in New York and all around the world," wishes Congressman Tom Suozzi (D-Long Island, Queens). "Over the years, I have had the chance to be a part of many Holi celebrations to honor this great festival. It is always a wonderful time filled with amazing food and the company of good friends. To all my friends in the Indian American community and others who are celebrating, I wish you a happy Holi!", he further stated.



IALI celebrates Holi 2022



The India Association of Long Island (IALI) recently celebrated the festival of Holi in Hicksville, Long Island, New York. 11801. Among others, Bina Sabapaty President of IALI and New York State Senator, Kevin Thomas were also present to enjoy the festival.



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Gujarat govt withdraws 10 cases linked to 2015 Patidar quota stir

The Gujarat government on Monday dropped ten cases related to the 2015 Patidar quota controversy

(Staff Reporter) The Gujarat government has withdrawn ten cases filed in connection with the 2015 Patidar quota stir in the run-up to the Assembly elections later this year. Several cases were lodged against participants of the stir in different parts of the state at the time, including against spearhead Hardik Patel, who later joined the Congress. Applications were submitted in different courts for withdrawal of cases as per directions given

by the state government to collectors, said Public Prosecutor Sudhir Brahmhatt. While a sessions court allowed the withdrawal of seven cases, the city's Metropolitan Magistrate court allowed the withdrawal of three more cases, dealing with sections 143, 144 (unlawful assembly armed with deadly weapons), and 332 (voluntarily causing hurt), among other sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), said Brahmhatt. Apart from a

sedition case against Hardik Patel, no case relating to the Patidar reservation agitation is currently pending in Ahmedabad's sessions court, he added. He stated that a metropolitan court is expected to issue an order on April 15 ordering the withdrawal of a criminal case against Patel and others registered in Ahmedabad's Ramol police station.

Meanwhile, Patel stated that the BJP government must drop



all agitation-related cases and provide relief to Patidar youth, or the Congress would start an agitation. The withdrawal of the cases comes amid a call by the Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS), which led the agitation in 2015, to relaunch the agitation if the cases are not withdrawn.

G-23 Congress and Rahul Gandhi have asked for the same thing. What is the problem then?

The demands made by the G-23 group have several similarities with those expressed by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Why then, is it hard for the two sides to reconcile?

(Staff Reporter) G-23, the Congress group that first raised an organised demand for reform in party leadership, is now officially in patch-up talks with the party's leadership of the Gandhis. The process of reconciliation began last week after top Congress leader Rahul Gandhi reached out to some of the G-23 members in the aftermath of the recent electoral losses in five assembly polls. The dissident group, called G-23 for the original 23 signatories to a letter demanding organisational change in the Congress in August 2020, has been a pressure group within the party. Their number has not remained fixed as some of the members resigned. Now, their number is said to have swelled after the Congress failed to register a win in a single state poll.

G-23 IN CONGRESS

When G-23 leaders stirred the Congress's leadership pot about two years ago, their main demands were holding elections to fill posts in the organisation, and a visible and relentless leadership by one of the Gandhis or else somebody from outside the family. However, the G-23 Congress leaders were targeted by Gandhi family loyalists for suggesting that the party could find a president outside the



family. Congress leaders such as Adhir Ranjan Choudhary and Ajay Maken launched frontal attacks on G-23 leaders. The attacks by Gandhi family loyalists on G-23 leaders have remained unexplained given that this band of Congress leaders have not demanded anything different from what Rahul Gandhi said in his resignation letter after 2019 party's second consecutive rout in the Lok Sabha polls.

WHAT RAHUL SAID

Rahul Gandhi had said three key things in his letter. First, he laid down a condition that a non-Gandhi should become the Congress president. That is, neither Sonia Gandhi nor Priyanka Gandhi Vadra should

be considered for the top post after his resignation.

Second, Rahul Gandhi said he found himself fighting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alone. His attack was directed at party leaders at national and state levels. But his complaint also conversely came as an admission that a Gandhi as Congress president was not inspiring enough for Congress workers and leaders. So, someone from the outside should lead the party.

Third, Rahul Gandhi said some of the senior leaders of the party were more concerned about their sons and daughters' victory in the election. His complaint conversely also meant that the senior Congress

leaders did not have enough faith in the party organisation and the Gandhis' leadership for victory in the polls. So, an organisational overhauling of the party was required.

SPOTTING DIFFERENCE

The G-23 Congress leaders have not demanded anything different from this. Their focus has been on making the Congress leadership at all levels more committed, responsible and accountable. Their original letter said, "We have witnessed a steady decline of the Congress party reflected in successive electoral verdicts in state and general elections in 2014 and 2019. Reasons are manifold and need to be immediately identified.

Otherwise, the Congress will find itself marginalised, both in the states, which is already apparent, as well as the national level."

"Even after 14 months of the 2019 electoral verdict [they wrote in August 2020], the Congress has not undertaken any honest introspection to analyse the reasons for its continued decline." The uncertainty over the leadership and the drift has demoralised the Congress workers and further weakened the party. There has been an erosion of the support base with leaders and functionaries leaving the party in a number of states."

G-23 VALIDATED?

On a trip to the US in March 2021, Rahul Gandhi said G-23 was part of the Congress's "nature". Interacting with a group of university students in the US, Rahul Gandhi asked, "Do you think they could exist in the BJP, BSP or the Trinamool Congress?" However, despite the G-23 essentially making the same demand as Rahul Gandhi and despite the de facto boss of the Congress presenting the dissenting group as party's democratic strength, the two sides did not go for reconciliation. Communication between the G-23 and the Gandhis had reportedly stopped completely.

Nirmala Sitharaman, Priyanka Chaturvedi spar during discussion on Appropriation Bills

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Shiv Sena's Priyanka Chaturvedi exchanged barbs during a Rajya Sabha debate on Appropriation Bills on Monday



opposing the Bills.

With treasury benches objecting to the data shared by her, Chaturvedi stated that she is ready to share the sources of information she had given on the floor of the House. "There is the NSSO survey. Will you deny that as well? You keep on telling lies most of the time and then we are asked to authenticate the facts," she retorted as the treasury benches continued to interrupt her. Interjecting on the matter, Sitharaman said: "I just want to be sure if I heard this right. It is the Appropriation Bill that has come here and in its reference, if I heard it right, 'misappropriation', it is an inappropriate word to say if it was used for this." She noted that if the word misappropriation has been used in the context of the bill, it was not right as the bill deals with excessive demands for

grants based on the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Surendra Singh Nagar, who was in the Chair, said that the word would be examined and, if found unparliamentary, would be removed from the proceedings of the House.

Chaturvedi noted that she did not know that the word misappropriation would turn out to be unparliamentary. "Possible, it would have become now..if in future I use the word miscalculation, then they would also call it unparliamentary," she quipped. Sitharaman then said: "I just asked her a question. I would appreciate it if the member could just explain if she had used it in the context of the Appropriation bill which is in response to the PAC and if it is not used in that context, I have no answers to give. I have no questions to

ask." "It is well in the right of the opposition parties to criticise the government, but usage of word misappropriation in the context of the Appropriation Bill - is it right or wrong, is what I asked for." Chaturvedi, on her part, noted that she did not use the word in the context of the Bill. "Misappropriation in the way policies are handled in this country is pretty obvious from all the headlines I have shared," she stated. Earlier, Binoy Visvam (CPI) also opposed the bill, alleging that every section of society was suffering due to the wrong policies of the government. Fauzia Khan (NCP) said that over three crore youths lost jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic. She also pointed to the "low" allocation to the defence sector in the Budget. K Ravindra Kumar (TDP) and Mahesh Poddar (BJP) also participated in the discussion.

(Staff Reporter) Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Shiv Sena member Priyanka Chaturvedi traded barbs on the use of word misappropriation during a discussion in Rajya Sabha on Monday. Taking part in the discussion on Appropriation Bills in the Upper House, Chaturvedi cited various newspaper headlines to attack the government on issues like low employment rates across states and the lowest EPFO

rate in 40 years.

She also pointed to the slide in the value of the rupee and "lack of government support" for the MSME sector.

"The kind of budgets which have been presented have restricted the level of growth... these are headlines from the last two months and from this, you would come to know whether it is appropriation or misappropriation. I would not like to go into details regarding this," Chaturvedi noted while



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Congress in two minds over cooperating with CPM; Tharoor, Thomas asked not to attend Kerala event

The All India Congress Committee has asked Shashi Tharoor and KV Thomas not to take part in the CPI(M) meet to be held in April in Kerala's Kannur. Tharoor said that he respects the party leadership's wishes and will not attend the event

(Staff Reporter) The All India Congress Committee (AICC) has asked senior leaders KV Thomas and Shashi Tharoor not to take part in the CPI(M) party congress scheduled to be held in April in Kerala's Kannur. This comes at a time when Tharoor had said that the party had not forbidden him from attending and that he would discuss the issue with party chief Sonia Gandhi. Responding to the party directive, Tharoor said that he had welcomed the invitation on the grounds that the event is a national one and the highest forum of the CPM, organised by its Central Committee, and formulates its national policy. "Nationally, we have a cooperative relationship with the CPM. The topic for the seminar does not involve any matter of sensitivity in Kerala but is on 'Centre-state relations', where there is no real

difference of opinion between our parties; The event sets a fine example of intellectual exchange on policy issues among 'anti-BJP opposition parties', which should in principle be encouraged," he said. He added that he respects the wishes of the Congress leadership and has therefore conveyed his inability to attend the event to the organisers. Earlier, Tharoor had said that there needs to



be more dialogue between opposition parties in a workers cannot see leaders mingling with the opposition party in their events. However, KPCC president K Sudhakaran has

Muslim family donates land worth Rs. 2.5 crore to build world's largest Hindu temple in Bihar

A Muslim family has donated land worth Rs 2.5 crore for the construction of the world's largest Hindu temple in Bihar's East Champaran district



(Staff Reporter) A Muslim family of the world's largest Hindu temple - Virat Ramayan Mandir - in the Kaithwalia area of East Champaran district in Bihar. Ishtiyah

donated the land, is a businessman from East Champaran based in Guwahati. Acharya Kishore Kunal, chief of the Patna-based Mahavir Mandir Trust that has undertaken the project, said, "He recently completed all formalities pertaining to the donation of land belonging to his family for the construction of the temple at the registrar office of the Kesharia sub-division." He added that the donation by Khan and his family was a great example of social harmony and brotherhood between two communities. Without the help of Muslims, it would have been difficult to realise this dream project, he added. On the donation, Ishtiyah Ahmad Khan said, "The temple needed this land. The construction of the temple would not have been possible without this land." **VIRAT RAMAYAN MANDIR** The Mahavir Mandir Trust has so far obtained 125 acres of land for construction of the temple. The trust will soon obtain another 25 acres of land in the area. The Virat Ramayan Mandir is slated to be taller than the world-famous 12th century Angkor Wat complex in Cambodia, which is 215 feet high. The complex in East Champaran will comprise 18 temples with high spires and its largest Shivling.

Chennai man arrested for sexual assault on women by luring them on Instagram

Mohamed Sayed, a model from Chennai, was arrested by police for extorting, cheating and sexually assaulting women. He lured them with his workout videos on Instagram, had sexual relations with them and extorted them by threatening to upload private videos

(News agency) A 26-year-old male model was arrested by Chennai Police for sexually assaulting several women. Mohamed Sayed from Kilpauk worked as a male model, an actor, and was also involved in the distribution of tea. A woman registered a complaint against him at Kilpauk police station stating that Mohamed Sayed cheated her by saying that he would marry her. When Kilpauk Deputy Commissioner, Karthikeyan, began investigating the case, several discoveries were made. Mohamed Sayed had the habit of uploading workout videos on Instagram, which he would use to lure women. He then sexually assaulted them under the pretext of marrying them. The woman who filed the complaint against Mohamed Sayed was one such victim who stated that she became suspicious of Mohamed Sayed's behaviour. When he was drunk, she had used his fingerprint to unlock his phone and was

shocked to find videos and pics of him being intimate with several women. As she underwent depression because of this, she had filed a complaint. Police sources also stated that Mohamed Sayed had extorted money from several women, threatening to release their videos on social media platforms. Kilpauk Police have filed a case against Mohamed Sayed and have arrested him under sections of sexual assault, cheating, money extortion.



Most farmer bodies wanted 3 farm laws to stay: SC-appointed panel member

(News agency) According to Anil Ghanwat, member of the Supreme Court-appointed panel on farm laws, said a majority of the farmers' organisations wanted the 3 farm laws to continue and that it was a "political mistake" to repeal them.

The Supreme Court-appointed committee on Farm laws had advised against the repealing of the three contentious farm laws that were rolled back by the Centre last year. Member of the panel, Anil Ghanwat, said: "Had the Supreme Court published the Committee's Report upon receipt, it could have educated protesting farmers about the benefits of the farm laws and potentially prevented the repeal of these laws." The three laws were — The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

The committee report had



remained in a sealed cover before the Supreme Court so far. Ghanwat said: "The committee's report notes that a repeal or a long suspension of these farm laws would be unfair to the silent majority who support the legislations." Ghanwat also said that out of 73 farmer organisations that made submissions to the committee, 61, representing 3.3 crore farmers, had fully

supported the new farm laws. "Most agitating farmers came from Punjab and north India where minimum support price (MSP) plays a significant role. These farmers were misled by socialist and communist leaders who lied about MSP being under threat. The laws said nothing about MSP."

REPORT HAS EDUCATIONAL VALUE

With regard to the Supreme Court-appointed committee's

report, Ghanwat said that "although it has been overtaken by events, it has educational value for farmers and for policymakers". "Farmers, mainly from north India, who protested against these laws and got them repealed, will now realise that they have harmed themselves and lost an opportunity to increase their incomes," he said.

According to Ghanwat, it was

a great political mistake on part of the Modi government to repeal these laws. "The poor performance of BJP in Punjab shows that the repeal did not make any political difference," he said.

The broad recommendations by the three-member committee mentioned that states may be allowed some flexibility in the implementation and design of the laws, with approval of the Centre. It also suggested alternative mechanisms for dispute settlement via civil courts or arbitration mechanisms, such as farmer courts.

FARMERS DIED DUE TO POLITICAL DECISIONS

"If 750 farmers lost their lives, it was due to political decisions," Ghanwat said. "PM Narendra Modi apologised because it was a political decision. He didn't want to lose Uttar Pradesh and Punjab [elections]," Ghanwat said. "The three laws should not come back. They were not totally perfect. But we welcome the agricultural policies," he said.

Have no data on mob lynchings, govt says in Parliament

(News agency) Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai said that the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) does not maintain separate data for cases of mob lynching. His statement was in response to a four-part question on mob lynchings by Lok Sabha member from Kerala Hibi Eden. Rai said that all crime data from all the states and union territories are reported by the NCRB under "Crime in India" with no separate data for mob lynching. Rai also said that the government intends to comprehensively review existing criminal laws and make them relevant to contemporary law and order situations. This will accelerate the process of providing justice to the victims. He said that the government plans to create a legal structure that is citizen centric and has initiated the process of comprehensive amendments to criminal law in consultation with the stakeholders concerned. The exchange took place as a part of the ongoing Lok Sabha session on Tuesday. Eden's question raised the issue of the requirement of a special law to deal with offences like mob lynching.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav resigns from Lok Sabha after being elected as UP MLA

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav resigned from membership of the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. This comes after he was elected as the Karhal MLA in the UP election

(News agency) Akhilesh Yadav, leader of the Samajwadi Party, went to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla's office on Tuesday to resign from his membership of the House. This comes after he was elected as an MLA from Karhal in the recently concluded Uttar Pradesh Assembly election.

Akhilesh Yadav, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, was elected to the Lok Sabha from Azamgarh constituency in 2019. He defeated the BJP's SP Singh Baghel in Karhal during the recently held Uttar Pradesh Assembly election by more than 60,000 votes to become the MLA from the constituency.

UP ELECTION RESULT

In the Uttar Pradesh election of



2022, the BJP won 255 seats while the Samajwadi Party won 111. Hence, the BJP won a majority and has retained power in the state. In

the 2017 election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies had won 312 of the state's 403 Assembly constituencies.

Assam: Cop thrashes 14-year-old boy for stealing biscuits, suspended

An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) was suspended after he allegedly thrashed a 14-year-old boy on theft charges in Assam's Morigaon district. The boy was beaten after he allegedly stole biscuits from a parked vehicle

(Staff Reporter) An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) posted at Laharighat police station in Morigaon district of Assam was suspended for allegedly physically assaulting a minor boy. A video of the incident has now gone viral on social media. Though the incident happened on March 9, action against the police officer was taken after the video of the incident surfaced online and started making rounds on social media. In the purported video, the police officer, dressed in civil uniform, can be seen thrashing a 14-year-old boy and the minor keeps pleading and asking him to stop.

BOY BEATEN ON THEFT CHARGE

The boy was beaten up after he was allegedly caught stealing biscuits from a seized vehicle parked inside the premises of the police station. Confirming the incident, Morigaon

Superintendent of Police Aparna N termed it as 'unfortunate' and said that an enquiry has been launched and action will be taken against other police personnel if found guilty. The victim has not been able to come out of trauma after the assault and police officers are leaving no stone unturned through counselling to help him. Notably, the alleged assault on the minor boy comes days after a traffic police constable was suspended on March 18 for physically assaulting a bike rider with his family in Guwahati.

Ex-J&K Guv Jagmohan put Kashmiri Pandits in buses, said they'd be brought back in 2 months: Farooq Abdullah

Former Jammu and Kashmir CM Farooq Abdullah said on Tuesday that late Jagmohan Malhotra, Governor of J&K in 1990, had put Kashmiri Pandits in buses and told them they would be brought back in two months. However, that did not happen, he said

(Staff Reporter) Speaking on the Kashmiri Pandit exodus of 1990, former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah said then Governor Jagmohan Malhotra had put Kashmiri Hindus in buses and told them they would be brought back in two months. However, 32 years have passed and his promise remains unfulfilled, Farooq Abdullah said. In an exclusive interview with India Today's Raj Chengappa, Farooq Abdullah said, "We cannot forget the then Governor [Jagmohan Malhotra] who put the Pandits in buses and said, 'We will bring you back in two months because I have to use force on these people [insurgents] and the retaliation might impact you'. It has

been 32 years. Where are the Kashmiri Pandits?"

Further, he said, "I was not ruling then [during exodus]. The minute Jagmohan came, I gave up. I said, try and save the situation. You don't trust me, trust him. On the very first day [of his rule], 50 people lost their lives. He was the man in charge. Was he able to save the situation?"

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

Farooq Abdullah said he does not believe he was responsible for the

exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990.

He said, "I don't think I am responsible. If people want to know the bitter truth, they should talk to the Intelligence Bureau chief of the time or Kerala governor Arif Mohammad Khan who was a

central minister at the time." "The truth will come out when you put an honest judge or committee in place. You will come to know who's responsible. If Farooq Abdullah is responsible, Farooq Abdullah is ready to be hanged

anywhere in the country. I'm ready to stand that trial but don't blame people who aren't responsible," he added.

The Kashmiri Pandit exodus of 1990 has been at the centre of public discourse since the film 'The Kashmir Files' released earlier this month.

'PROPAGANDA FILM'

Farooq Abdullah said the Vivek Agnihotri-directed film 'The Kashmir Files' was a "propaganda movie". "It is a propaganda movie. It has raked up a tragedy that affected every soul of the state, Hindus and Muslims alike. My heart still bleeds over the tragedy," he said.



Annamalai, TN BJP chief: Shocked that DMK cadres are involved in Virudhunagar gangrape case

TN BJP president, Annamalai, said he was shocked over DMK cadres being involved in the 6-month gangrape and blackmail of a 22-year-old dalit woman in Virudhunagar. He also expressed that the overall policing under DMK did not inspire confidence among the common people

(Staff Reporter) Tamil Nadu BJP chief, Annamalai, on Tuesday, March 22 said that he was shocked and saddened to learn about the blackmail and gangrape incident in Virudhunagar involving a 22-year-old woman, minor boys and DMK youth wing cadres. Taking to Twitter, the Tamil Nadu BJP President said, "Shocked & Saddened to learn about the gang rape of a 22-year-old woman in Virudhunagar by a group of men by allegedly blackmailing her over a video." "What is more shocking is the involvement of a local DMK functionary

in this shameful act with impunity," said Annamalai. The former IPS officer said that the overall policing under the DMK government is currently not giving confidence to the common people. "Arresting these criminals is one thing, but it is equally important to improve the overall policing under this DMK Government," said Annamalai. He questioned whether, "The Tamilnadu CM will insulate local police from his party men's tentacle hold?"

WOMAN'S TRAGIC ORDEAL ENDS

A 22-year-old dalit woman in Tamil Nadu's

Virudhunagar was sexually assaulted by eight people, including school students and DMK youth wing cadres. Initially, Hariharan approached her and, under the pretext of being in love with her, he sexually assaulted her and filmed videos of it. He then shared it with two friends and four school students. Together, they blackmailed her, saying they would upload private videos to social media platforms. Under this threat, they continued to sexually abuse her for six months. Unable to bear the torture, the victim approached her friend, Madasami,

seeking a solution. However, in a tragic turn of events, he also proceeded to sexually abuse her after obtaining the video on his phone. Unable to stand the continued torture, she filed a complaint with Virudhunagar Police, who, after investigation, detained all eight accused. Among the 8 people arrested in the case, four are minors between the ages of 15 and 16. A case was filed against them under the appropriate sections and they were sent to the juvenile detention centre in Madurai.

Coimbatore police arrests school teacher for kidnapping a minor, 19-year-old girl

Manimaran went missing in July 2021 with a 16-year-old. While investigating, police found out that he had kidnapped a 19-year-old girl in Kanyakumari too. The 19-year-old called a friend and informed her about her plight. The friend informed the police, who traced them to Tirupati, rescued the two girls and arrested him



(Staff Reporter) Coimbatore Police arrested a school teacher from Tirupati for kidnapping and restraining two girls. One of the girls is a 19-year-old while the other one is a 16-year-old he was tutoring. The school teacher, identified as Manimaran, was arrested in Tirupati. The minor and the 19-year-old girl were rescued. Manimaran, who was working as a dance teacher in Coimbatore, went untraceable in

July 2021 with a 16-year-old girl he was tutoring. Coimbatore's Saravanampatti police booked a case under 4 sections and were searching for him. In the course of the investigation, it came to light that Manimaran had also kidnapped another 19-year-old girl from Kanyakumari and that the Kanyakumari police were searching for him in this case. In a breakthrough in the case, the 19-

year-old girl dialled one of her friends and informed the friend that she was being restrained by Manimaran in Tirupati. The friend of the 19-year-old immediately passed this information to the police and the victim's parents. Based on the cellphone location, Coimbatore police located Manimaran in Tirupati and arrested him. They also secured the 16-year-old minor and the 19-year-old girl.

PM Modi to inaugurate Biplobi Bharat Gallery in Kolkata on March 23

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Biplobi Bharat Gallery at Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata on March 23 via video conferencing on the occasion of Shaheed Diwas



(Staff Reporter) On the occasion of Shaheed Diwas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate Biplobi Bharat Gallery at Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata on 23rd March at 6 pm via video conferencing. The Prime Minister will also address the gathering during the event. The Gallery displays the contribution of the Revolutionaries in the freedom struggle and their armed resistance to British colonial rule. This aspect has often not been given its due place in the mainstream narrative of the freedom movement. The purpose of this new gallery is to provide a holistic view of the events that led up to 1947 and highlight

the important role played by the Revolutionaries. Biplobi Bharat Gallery depicts the political and intellectual backdrop that triggered the Revolutionary movement. It showcases the birth of the revolutionary movement, formation of significant associations by revolutionary leaders, spread of the movement, formation of Indian National Army, contribution of Naval Mutiny, among others.



The Kashmir Files a propaganda movie; my heart still bleeds over the tragedy: Former J&K CM Farooq Abdullah

(Staff Reporter) Former Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday, March 22, slammed the Vivek Agnihotri directorial — 'The Kashmir Files' — calling it a "propaganda movie". "It is a propaganda movie. It has raked up a tragedy that affected every soul of the state, Hindus and Muslims alike. My heart still bleeds over the tragedy. There was an element of political parties that were interested in ethnic cleansing," he said, in an exclusive interaction with India Today Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa. The Kashmir Files tells the true story of brutal sufferings endured by Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, during the Kashmir insurgency. He dismissed allegations of inaction at the time. "If people want to know the truth, they can talk to the people who can

tell them, like Musar Raza, who was my chief secretary, or Arif Muhammad Khan who was a central minister at that time," he said. Speaking about the 1989 kidnapping of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's daughter Rubaiyya by the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, Farooq Abdullah said, "When they [Centre] wanted to release five people whom we had caught, I refused. The Government of India was being led by VP Singh supported by the BJP." "It feels wrong to be talking about a dead person this way, but we must remember that it was the governor of that time who put the Kashmiri Pandits on buses. He had said 'I will bring you back in two months. I have to use force on these people and the retaliation may fall on you'."

SIT to probe death of 7 people set on fire in Bengal's Birbhum

The West Bengal government has sprung into action and formed an SIT, comprising senior police officers, to probe the murder of seven persons in Birbhum district

(Staff Reporter) The Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government has formed a three-member special investigation team to probe the death of seven people who were allegedly set on fire to avenge the death of a Trinamool leader. The incident occurred early on Tuesday, March 22, in the Rampurhat area of Birbhum district. A group of miscreants allegedly locked up five houses with the residents inside and set them on fire. Local sources said they were set on fire to avenge the murder of a Trinamool Congress leader.

TMC's panchayat leader, Bhadu Pradhan, was killed in Birbhum's Rampurhat



on Monday when some investigation team, comprising miscreants hurled a crude senior officers Gyanwant Singh, bomb at him. Taking Miraj Khalid, and Sanjay Singh. cognisance of the incident the The officer in charge of state government has formed Rampurhat Police Station and a three-member special the SDPO have been suspended.

Madras HC grants interim bail to ex-ABVP national president, says arrest made in erroneous manner

The Madras HC granted interim bail to ex-ABVP national president, Subbiah Shanmugam in the case of harassing his female neighbour. The lawyer argued that the arrest was made in an erroneous way on a public holiday. He further alleged that the arrest error was committed with an ulterior motive



Paul Kanakaraj, who appeared for Dr Subbiah, stated that the bail was moved as an urgent petition as there is gross violation of fundamental rights and abuse of power. The counsel for Dr Subbiah also claimed that he was arrested on a public holiday with the intention of detaining him for more than 48 hours and thereby invoking the Conduct Rules to place him under suspension.

THE INCIDENT

Former Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) national president Dr Subbiah Shanmugam was arrested by the

Chennai police for allegedly harassing an elderly woman neighbour by urinating near the entrance of her home and throwing rubbish outside her house. The alleged incident took place in July 2020, following a disagreement between Subbiah and the woman over a parking lot. The victim, who is a widow living alone, in her complaint stated that following the argument, she would often find garbage dumped outside her place. Her family installed CCTV to capture the culprit.

JUDGE'S ORDERS

In his order, Justice Jayachandran

stated that there were errors in the arrest which led to violation of fundamental rights. He alleged that the error was committed with an ulterior motive to take departmental action and place Dr Subbiah under suspension. "It is further added that since the arrest itself is apparently and erroneously made, the arrest will not give any ground for taking departmental action against the petitioner," stated Justice Jayachandran while granting interim bail with an execution bond of Rs 25,000. The court also granted the Additional Public Prosecutor time till March 24 to file a counter.

(SAI Bureau) The Madras High Court on Monday, March 21, granted interim bail to former Justice Jayachandran granted Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) national president, Dr Subbiah on Saturday, March 19, 2022.

Chandigarh airport to start flight services directly to Indore, Chennai from March 27

Chandigarh International Airport will start flight services from Chandigarh to Indore and Chennai from March 27. The detailed schedule of the flights' arrival and departure timings will be released in a few days



(SAI Bureau) Chandigarh International Airport will start flight services from Chandigarh to Indore and Chennai from March 27. Though no new international flight has been added to the schedule, the Dubai flight, which was suspended amid the rise in Covid-19 cases, will also resume from March 27, as scheduled commercial international passenger services reopen across the country. Arriving at 4.25 pm and departing at 5.40 pm, the IndiGo flight will ply daily and have a one-side fare of around Rs 10,000. Apart from this, Air India Express already operates an international flight to Sharjah on Tuesday and Friday. The airport authorities have also resumed the Patna flight and increased the total number of flights from 40 to 60, including 12 to Delhi and 10 to Mumbai. The detailed scheduled with the flights' arrival and departure timings will be released in a few days. With the airport having 24x7 operations, some domestic flights will continue to arrive till 12.30 am, while one will take off at 1.15 am.

Dalit woman in TN sexually abused for 6 months; 8 held, including DMK youth wing cadres

Virudhunagar Police detained 8 people, including school students and DMK youth wing cadres for sexually abusing and threatening a 22-year-old Dalit woman for 6 months. Four adults have been arrested while cases have been filed against 4 minors and they were sent to the Juvenile detention centre

(SAI Bureau) A 22-year-old dalit woman in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar was subjected to sexual assault by eight people, including school students, who had threatened to publicise intimate videos of her. They blackmailed and sexually abused her for almost six months before police arrested them. DMK MP Kanimozhi reacted to the incident and tweeted saying that she was relieved to hear that the perpetrators were arrested and they should be strictly punished, no matter who they are. The woman who was working in a garment factory was approached by Hariharan, who told her that he loved her. As they began to have a relationship, Hariharan took the survivor to a medical warehouse on August 20, 2021.

He then proceeded to sexually assault her and also recorded the crime on his cellphone. Hariharan then shared the video with his friends Praveen, Junaid Ahmed and four school students between the ages of 15 to 16.

All seven accused had threatened the survivor several times claiming that they would release the video on social media. Under this blackmail threat, they sexually assaulted her multiple times in the course of six months. The survivor had approached her well wisher, Madasami, who worked as a driver, seeking help against the seven

men. Madasami obtained the video from her phone and, in a tragic turn of events, used it to sexually assault her as well. He threatened her that if she didn't abide by his wishes, he would show the video to her mother. Unable to bear the torture, the victim filed a complaint with Virudhunagar Police, who, after investigation, detained all eight accused. Hariharan and Junaid are DMK Youth

Wing cadres. A case was filed against them, Praveen and Madasami, under sections 376 (2) (n), 354 (c), 354 (D) of IPC, 66 (E) of the IT Act and 3 (1) (w) (1), 3 (2) (v) of SC/ST POA Act. Meanwhile, a case has been filed against four minor school students between the ages of 15 to 16 and they were sent to the Juvenile detention centre. Further investigations are underway.

KCR demands national policy for procurement of food grains across country

(Staff Reporter) Telangana chief minister (CM) K Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) has demanded a national policy for the procurement of food grains in the country. The Telangana CM has written a letter to PM Narendra Modi "strongly" recommending a meeting with agricultural experts and CMs to discuss and debate over formulating a suitable National Procurement Policy. He also requested the PM to direct the Union Ministry of Food and Public Distribution to procure the entire paddy from Telangana. "I am constrained to remind you that there is no uniform national-level food grains procurement policy," his letter read. He said that while the Union government procures an entire marketable surplus of paddy and wheat in states like Punjab and Haryana, it is

not being done in Telangana. "There should not be different policies of the Union government for different states within the country," he said. The Telangana CM said that "inconsistent and uncertain policies of the Indian government are causing a high degree of frustration and dissatisfaction among the farmers." He also reminded how the country "witnessed the fury of farmers in the last two years" when the Union government enacted anti-farmer laws. He also said that the overall implementation of the National Food Security Act, enacted by the parliament in 2013, is the responsibility of the government. "The onus is on the government to procure and supply food grains throughout the country," said KCR.

India-Australia virtual summit: Both countries firm up series of initiatives to boost ties

(SAI Bureau) India and Australia on Monday firmed up a series of new initiatives in the areas of critical minerals, clean energy, mobility of students and tax benefits for investments in sovereign funds at a virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison. The Australian side unveiled a total investment of around Rs 1,500 crore in certain key sectors as the two sides vowed to further energise their ties including in the Indo-Pacific region. The two strategic partners decided to set up a young defence officer exchange programme to boost military cooperation and announced the setting up of a task force to examine whether the two sides could recognise the same educational qualifications. The exchange programme has been named after India's first Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat, who was killed in a helicopter crash in December. Underlining the importance of unlocking untapped potential in bilateral trade and investment, Modi and Morrison agreed that the two sides should attempt to conclude the proposed Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) at the earliest.

The two sides also announced establishing a mechanism of annual summits between the two countries that is aimed at creating a structural system

for regular review of the relationship. At a media briefing, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by India's Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) and Australia's Critical Minerals Facilitation Office will facilitate establishing a framework for joint investments in Australian projects to mine critical minerals. "This is an important area for both our countries and this agreement will give us the opportunities to both invest in Australia's critical minerals sector and get Australian expertise in this area," he said. India has been looking at boosting cooperation with Australia in areas of critical minerals with that country having a significant source of lithium, cobalt and vanadium, considered crucial for the manufacturing of critical electronic components.

The two sides also firmed up a letter of intent to work towards a migration and mobility partnership agreement. A separate letter of arrangement was inked for examining the educational qualifications recognition. Another MoU was signed for cooperation and collaboration on broadcasting between Prasar Bharati and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) of Australia. In his opening remarks, Modi said remarkable progress has been made on CECA in a very short time. "I am

confident that the remaining issues will also be agreed upon soon. The early completion of CECA will be crucial for our economic relations, economic revival and economic security," he said.

"There is also good cooperation between us in Quad. Our cooperation reflects our commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Quad's success is very important for regional and global stability," Modi said. Morrison said an "interim" CECA will help to unlock new opportunities and benefits for the countries. "It will bring us closer to a full agreement as soon as I hope we can achieve that." Australian High Commissioner Barry O'Farrell on Sunday said the interim or the early harvest trade pact will be inked by end of this month. Modi said that overall ties witnessed significant progress in the last few years. "Trade and investment, defence and security, education and innovation, science and technology -- we have very close cooperation in all these areas. Our collaboration has grown rapidly in many other areas such as critical minerals, water management, renewable energy, and Covid-19 research," he said.

A statement by the Australian government said the two countries will establish a task force to develop "qualifications recognition arrangements" for Australia and India to enhance two-

way mobility. "The task force, announced by Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, will address the recognition of online and blended learning, joint degrees and offshore campuses," it said. Australia's acting minister for education Stuart Robert said the task force would consult with stakeholders to identify opportunities for the recognition of Australian and Indian higher education qualifications and to make recommendations to improve arrangements based on best principles and practices in recognition. Shringla said the two sides also agreed to increase cooperation between India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund and Australia's Future Fund, which is a sovereign wealth fund. "We are willing to match the tax benefits Australia gives to its sovereign and pension funds once they invest in India," he said.

In his remarks, Modi also welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy in Bengaluru. "It is imperative that we have better cooperation between us in cyber and critical and emerging technologies. It is the responsibility of countries with similar values like us to adopt appropriate global standards in these emerging technologies," he said.

With maritime security in focus, Oman FM to visit India on March 23

(SAI Bureau) With maritime security in focus, Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi will be on a two-day India visit. He will land in New Delhi on March 23.

This is the first ever visit of the Oman FM to India after taking charge. He is expected to hold talks with External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar on Wednesday and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Thursday (March 24). Oman is strategically located straddling the Strait of Hormuz in the north and Bab al-Mandab Strait in the south, and plays an important role in the maritime security of the region.

Oman is the only country in the Gulf region which holds joint exercises with India's all three defence forces. The West Asian country also provides key logistics support to Indian ships and aircraft in the region for anti-piracy and maritime security missions. Badr was appointed as Omani Foreign Minister in August 2020, and had earlier served as Secretary General in Omani Foreign Ministry since 2007. The last Omani foreign minister to visit India was in April 2017, while Jaishankar had visited the



country in December 2019. Badr and Jaishankar had met two times before. First in August 2021 in Tehran on the sidelines of oath-taking ceremony of the new president of Iran, and later in December 2021 in UAE on the sidelines of 5th Indian Ocean Conference. Both also held a virtual meeting in December 2020. Oman is India's key interlocutor in the West Asian region. The country has been playing a constructive role in regional conflicts, including in relations to Yemen and Iran. Recently, Oman played a critical role in the release of

two British citizens of Iranian origin, Anoosheh Ashoori and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe from Iran. Both of them were first brought to Oman from Iran on March 16, 2022, before their departure to the UK. The country's role was widely appreciated by the UK leadership. The visit of Omani foreign minister comes even as this year has seen a number of high-level visits from the country from, especially on the defence side. The Secretary General of Oman's Ministry of Defence Dr Mohammed Al-Zaabi visited India on January 30 this year for

a five-day visit to chair the Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC), co-chaired with the defence secretary. During the visit, he became the first foreign dignitary to embark on India's Indigenous Aircraft Carrier —Vikrant. This was immediately followed by the visit of Commander of Royal Navy of Oman Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser Al Rahbi to India. Last month also saw the latest edition of bilateral air force exercise "Eastern Bridge VI" at Air Force Station in western Jodhpur city. Apart from security and defence ties, Oman is also one of the important trade partners for India. India-Oman trade stood at US\$ 5.443 billion (export – US \$2.35 billion and imports at US \$3.09 billion). In the three quarters of the financial year 2021-22, bilateral trade has increased to the US \$6.5 billion. Excluding the oil and gas sector, India is the largest investor in Oman with over 4,100 Indian enterprises and establishments in Oman with an estimated investment of US\$ 7.5 billion. Amid the Covid pandemic, India became the first country to gift 100,000 doses of Covishield vaccine to Oman in January 2021.

Russian oil sale to India muddles up US's efforts

By Susmita Ghosh

Based on various source reports, India has decided to buy crude oil from Russia due to its relatively economical price. India's soaring oil prices might have been one of the contributing factors behind this decision. However, the US is not very happy about this decision and its stance is justified.

India gets the majority of its crude oil from the Middle East countries, taking even less than 3 percent from Russia. The petroleum minister of India, Hardeep Singh Puri has remarked on this matter saying that "discussions are underway". However, there are many factors that need to be discussed in detail like transportation costs and payment before anything is finalized.

Many political experts have predicted that India's decision

to buy economical crude oil from Russia might spark a negative reaction from the US. As a part of their ongoing sanctions, the US has imposed a ban on importing oil

from Russia. Ami Bera, an Indian – American member of the House of Representatives harshly criticized India's decision. Bera also heads the House of Foreign Affairs Subcommittee in Asia. "If India finalizes its decision to buy low-priced crude oil from Russia, it will be standing in support of Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to attack Ukraine," he said.

The US is viewing the present scenario in a very critical moment in the history of world peace. However, it is important to note that many European countries like Germany have continued to purchase from Russia and yet not faced such harsh criticism.

Despite predictions of a negative reaction, US president Joe Biden's spokesperson Jen Psaki has stated that the US has made the decision of banning oil purchases from Russia. Still not every country in the world has made the same decision and it is understandable. Psaki further added that every country has different economic conditions, hence they have different economic reasoning. It explains why many countries including some in

Europe have continued purchasing energy at a relatively lower cost from Russia. As mentioned by Psaki, by importing crude oil from Russia, India would not violate any of the sanctions imposed by the US. In fact, the US has not put a blanket ban on buying and import of oil, gas, or coal from Russia due to the fact that many US allies from Europe depend upon Russia for a considerable percentage of their energy requirements.

According to the US point of view, the whole world is watching if some countries support Russia in any possible form. For this reason, it is important for countries to cut off petroleum ties with Russia on moral grounds. Under the supervision of Victoria Nuland, Secretary for Political Affairs, the US is sending a senior-level

delegation for a South Asia tour where it will meet Indian Officials for further discussion on the much-debated issue.

The USA, especially the present administration is taking a very strict anti-Russia stance. Which was once only allegations of electoral influence is now an all-out policy and sanction mode, thanks to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The USA, for a very valid reason, expects that their ally countries will honor their sentiment by severing the ties with Russia for that matter. India's stance, in this case, is understandable, yet, an unsavoury development. While the USA is not taking any strict measure against India for this development, neither they are happy about it.

India has managed to stay neutral on the Russia Ukraine conflict by abstaining from voting on three resolutions as of now. Still, it is crucial for India to balance its inclinations towards both the US and Russia to avoid conflict. How India reacts to the Russia Ukraine Conflict has become a central element around which the relationship between US and India is revolving. It is important for Washington to have New Delhi's support to neutralize Beijing. All the while, it is also crucial for New Delhi to maintain the hard-earned political understanding it has with Washington.

'Pandemic is not over': WHO's warning as Covid-19 cases surge globally

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday warned that the world will continue to battle with surging Covid-19 infections and its emerging variants until all countries are covered with high vaccination. "We all want to move on from the pandemic. But no matter how much we wish it away, this pandemic is not over. Until we reach

high vaccination coverage in all countries, we will continue to face the risk of infections surging and new variants emerging that

evade," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The number of new coronavirus cases globally increased by 7 per cent in the last week, driven by rising infections in the Western Pacific, even as reported deaths from Covid-19 fell, the WHO said earlier.

"The global increase in Covid-19 cases continues, driven by large outbreaks in Asia and a fresh wave in Europe. Several countries are now seeing their highest death rates since the beginning of the pandemic. This reflects the speed with which Omicron spreads, and the heightened risk of death for those who are not vaccinated, especially older people," said Ghebreyesus. The UN health agency

head also said the WHO's target remains to vaccinate 70 per cent of the population of every country by the middle of this year, with priority given to healthcare workers, older people and other at-risk groups.

Underlining the vaccine inequality, he said, "Even as some high-income countries propose a second booster dose, 1/3 of

world's population remains unvaccinated." "But there are some promising signs of progress. In Nigeria, for example, vaccine uptake

was dramatically increased when supply stabilised, and planning was done on how to effectively distribute vaccines," he added. According to the agency, there were more than 12 million new weekly cases and just under 33,000 deaths, a 23 per cent decline in mortality. Confirmed cases of the virus had been falling steadily worldwide since January but rose again last week, due to the more infectious Omicron variant and the suspension of Covid-19 protocols in numerous countries in Europe, North America and elsewhere. Health officials have said repeatedly that Omicron causes milder disease than previous versions of the coronavirus and that vaccination, including a booster, appears highly protective.

The global increase in Covid-19 cases continues, driven by large outbreaks in Asia and a fresh wave in Europe. Several countries are now seeing their highest death rates since the beginning of the pandemic

Despite predictions of negative reaction, spokesperson Jen Psaki stated that, by importing crude oil from Russia, India would not violate any of the sanctions imposed by the US

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India sets \$400 billion export record: Its significance and key drivers of growth

India has achieved the target of \$400 billion in exports in FY2022. What is the significance of this? What areas have been the key drivers of India's export growth?

(SAI Bureau) Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday said that India had achieved the target of \$400 billion in exports in FY2022 and complemented farmers, weavers, MSMEs, manufacturers, exporters for the achievement.

"India set an ambitious target of \$400 billion of goods exports & achieved this target for the first time ever. I congratulate our farmers, weavers, MSMEs, manufacturers, exporters for this success. This is a key milestone in our Atmanirbhar Bharat journey," Modi tweeted on Wednesday.

What is the significance of India achieving \$400 billion in merchandise exports in the fiscal?

The achievement of \$400 billion in merchandise exports represents a growth of over 21 per cent in exports compared to the previous record high of \$330 billion achieved in FY2019 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Experts have noted that one of the key factors driving the surge in exports is pent up demand that was not met during major waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. Expansionary monetary policy by developed economies in response to the



economic impact of the pandemic has also boosted demand for Indian exports.

What areas have been the key drivers of India's export growth?

Areas that have been key drivers of India's export growth include engineering goods which have seen a growth of 49.7 per cent in the first 11 months of the fiscal, electronics goods exports which have grown by 42.8 per cent and gems and jewellery exports which have grown by 57.3 per cent. Export of petroleum products have grown by 147.6 per cent driven by a steady increase in crude oil prices.

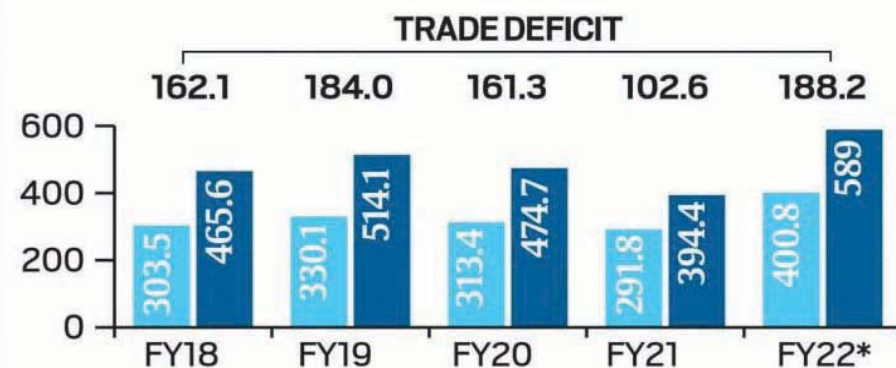
What has been the increase in

imports?

While exports have grown sharply India's merchandise imports have grown even faster reaching \$550 billion in the first 11 months of the fiscal through sharp growth in imports of crude oil, coal, gold, electronics and chemicals. Rising prices of commodities including crude oil and coal have played a significant role in adding to India's import bill and taking the trade deficit for the first 11 months to a record high of \$176 billion.

INDIA'S MERCHANDISE TRADE (In \$ billion)

Exports Imports



Note: Data for FY22 updated till March 21, 2022

Source: Department of Commerce

Why Russia and Japan never officially declared peace after WWII

Japan and Russia have had a complicated relationship for over a century. But one of the lowest points in Russia-Japan relations played out during the final days of the Second World War, right before Japan's Emperor Hirohito announced his country's surrender

(SAI Bureau) On September 2, 1945, the allied forces accepted Japan's formal surrender, marking the end of the most destructive global conflict of all time — World War II. But nearly eight decades later, Japan and Russia technically remain at war.

The two countries are yet to formally sign a peace treaty to end World War II hostilities. At the heart of the conflict is a group of tiny islands located just off Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido. Now peace talks between the two countries have hit yet another stumbling block — Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After Japan joined the West in imposing hefty sanctions on Moscow,

the Russian foreign ministry announced that it was withdrawing from treaty discussions, accusing Japan of "consciously choosing an anti-Russian course".

Moscow further announced that it was halting all joint-economic programs between the two countries.

Why has Moscow halted peace talks?

After Russia invaded Ukraine, Japan announced that it was revoking 'most-favoured nation' (MFN) trade status as part of its economic sanctions against the country. MFN status is a key principle of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It ensures non-

discriminatory trade between all partner countries of the WTO.

Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's decision came soon after similar announcements were made by the US, the EU, and the United Kingdom. But since Tokyo and Moscow aren't major trading partners, the move is unlikely to have too much of an adverse impact on Russia, according to a report by Japan Times. Kishida further announced that Japan was expanding the scope of asset freezes against Russia and banning the imports of certain products, Reuters reported. Apart from a wide range of luxury products, Japan has banned the export

of about 300 semiconductors, computers and communications devices to Russia and Belarus, according to Japan Times. Soon after Japan's announcement, Russia asserted that it would not be continuing talks with Japan. "The Russian side, in the current conditions, does not intend to continue talks with Japan on the peace treaty," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It said this was "due to the impossibility of discussing the core document on bilateral relations with a country that has taken an openly hostile position and is striving to cause harm to the interests of our country".

(Contd on page 31)

The pandemic's income inequality surprise

As social mobility rose, income inequality fell below pre-pandemic level

India's population has been ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic. As per official statistics, millions have been infected, while around half a million have died. But the indirect evidence suggests a far larger impact, with over 65 per cent of the population having been infected, with perhaps five million excess deaths.

While the country's health has suffered greatly, economic data paints a more complex story. India's economic experience has two parts — during the national lockdown and after it. At a macro level, it is well known that GDP fell sharply during the lockdown. After the lockdown, there has been a largely V-shaped recovery, even though the main waves of the pandemic occurred well after India's lockdown. But what happened at the micro-level? How did the very poor fare? Did inequality rise? We used monthly data of roughly 2,00,000 households with one million members from the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS) to examine these questions. The answers are somewhat surprising.

During the lockdown, poverty and inequality spiked as economic activity ground (almost) to a halt. The fraction of the population in extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank as those with income below \$1.90, rose from 7.6 per cent in November 2019 to 50.5 per cent in April 2020. While both the rich and the poor suffered, the poor were hit harder. In 2019, the average monthly household income of the top and bottom quartiles of the income distribution were approximately Rs 45,000 and Rs 8,000 in urban areas respectively and Rs 22,500 and Rs 7,500 in rural areas. During the lockdown, in urban areas, incomes of the top quartile fell by roughly 35 per cent and the bottom quartile by 55 per cent. The rural numbers were 35 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Overall, income inequality, measured by the ratio of the average income in the top quartile and in the bottom quartile, spiked by almost 25 per cent and 15 per cent in urban and rural areas respectively.

After the lockdown, poverty began to decline but did not return to the pre-pandemic levels. As of

July 2021, 11.7 per cent of households remained in extreme poverty, about 4 percentage points higher than before Covid-19.

The surprising finding, however, is that income inequality declined after the lockdown to below pre-pandemic levels. Pre-pandemic, the top quartile earned on average four times that of the bottom quartile in urban areas, and three times in rural areas. Now, it earns three times more in urban areas, and twice in rural areas. Even more remarkably, the higher the income was at nearly every point in the income distribution, the economic harm from the pandemic has been worse: The 95th percentile households were hurt more than the 90th percentile, and the 10th percentile more than the 5th percentile.

This decline in inequality was driven largely by an increase in social mobility. The change in a person's income has two parts: The change in her income percentile and the change in income for that percentile. The first change is called social

mobility, while the second change is related to the Gini coefficient which measures the fraction of income attributable to different percentiles of the income distribution. India had a relatively high Gini coefficient of 0.4 before the pandemic. Unfortunately, it returned to that level after the lockdown. However, the probability that a household fell from the top or rose from the bottom quartile jumped by roughly 10 percentage points.

No data is perfect, and the CPHS — the data we employ — is no exception. For example, the response rates in CPHS fell sharply during the lockdown. Our analysis suggests, however, that the non-response was almost random, so CPHS remained representative. More importantly, CPHS is still the "best game in town" for understanding the pandemic. Government microdata will not be available for some years.

Some economists have questioned whether the CPHS adequately represents poor communities. In our opinion, the jury is still out. But, even if CPHS

is not fully representative of the very poor in rural areas, that would not alter our conclusions. Our evidence shows that the negative effects of the pandemic fell with each lower percentile, even below the 10th percentile. If CPHS sampled those percentiles more, we would find that inequality fell even more than what we suggest above. One might object that our analysis does not pass the eyeball test. Urban residents, especially in the top 1 per cent, might argue that the ultra-rich saw their stock portfolios grow even as they worked safely from home. We do not disagree. Almost no data, including the CPHS, captures the top 0.1 or even the top 1 per cent of income in cities. These individuals do not respond to such surveys. Yet the top 0.1 per cent are not the only measure of inequality. The top 0.1 per cent may be quite visible to the top 1 per cent, but they are still only 0.1 per cent of the population. The 75th percentile is far more visible to the 25th percentile than is the top 0.1 per cent. It is important to clarify what our

analysis does not show. First, it does not dispute that there is substantial inequality in India. As of July 2021, the top quartile average household income was still Rs 15,000-20,000/month greater than the bottom quartile. Second, we do not show what will happen when the pandemic ends. While there were some signs that inequality was falling before the pandemic, we cannot be sure that the pattern will return after the pandemic. Most importantly, while one might view the reduction in inequality as a positive, we would not call it a silver lining. The pandemic was overwhelmingly a disaster for the country. But our findings suggest that it could have been worse — inequality could also have spiked. Fortunately, after the lockdown was lifted, it did not. If there is a deeper lesson, it is that there is no clear pattern between growth or poverty on the one hand, and inequality on the other. Personally, we believe that policies should focus on growth and poverty. While inequality is problematic, it is a more elusive target.

The Pegasus row in Andhra Pradesh, in the context of a wider TDP-YSRCP tussle

The Andhra Pradesh Assembly has passed a resolution to set up a committee to probe the use of controversial Israeli spyware Pegasus in the state. What is the ruling party, the YSRCP, alleging? Are there wider political issues involved?

The Andhra Pradesh Assembly on Monday (March 21) passed a resolution to set up a committee to find out if the previous Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government had bought and used the controversial Israeli spyware, Pegasus.

What is the controversy regarding Pegasus in Andhra Pradesh?

The ruling YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh on Monday discussed statements made by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the West Bengal Assembly and the state secretariat recently that the

Israeli NSO Group had offered to sell their spyware Pegasus, but her government had refused. Banerjee was quoted by PTI as having said in the Assembly that Andhra Pradesh "had it (Pegasus) during Chandrababu's (Naidu) time (2014-19)". Referring to her statement, Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister B Rajendranath, who led

the discussion in the state Assembly on Monday, said that it needed to be investigated whether the previous TDP



regime led by N Chandrababu Naidu had purchased the Pegasus spyware. It was "quite possible", Rajendranath told the House. "A senior leader and CM like Mamata Banerjee will not say it just like that."

So what exactly is the ruling YSRCP alleging?

YSRCP is alleging that then CM N Chandrababu Naidu may have purchased the Pegasus spyware to keep tabs on rival political leaders including (now Chief Minister) Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy. Rajendranath accused Naidu of adopting nefarious methods to watch his rivals. He said that the TDP government may have illegally tapped phones of political leaders and that of a large number of voters to gauge their mood.

However, he stopped short of making a specific allegation — he said no "evidence" was available, and that the government was only "assuming".

"Naidu used all kinds of tactics against his political opponents. It is possible the spyware was used to keep a tab on the 5 crore people of AP. We cannot present any evidence because such mischievous and illegal work is done illegally and is kept under wraps without leaving any evidence.

(Contd on Page 30)

What is OIC and what are its relations with India?

The 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) opened in Islamabad on Tuesday. What is OIC, and what are its relations with India?



The 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) opened in Islamabad on Tuesday (March 22). In his keynote address at the inaugural session of the meeting, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan offered a despondent assessment of the OIC's failures in Kashmir and Palestine, and regretted that the West did not take the grouping seriously.

"We have failed both the Palestinians and the people of Kashmir. I am sad to say that we have been able to make no impact at all," the Pakistani newspaper Dawn quoted Imran as saying. "We are a divided house and those (Western) powers know it... We (Muslims) are 1.5 billion people and yet our voice to stop this blatant injustice is insignificant," he said.

'Voice of Muslims'

The OIC, which was known as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference until 2011, is the second largest inter-governmental organisation in the world after the United Nations, with a membership of 57 countries spread across four continents. The OIC describes itself as "the collective voice of the Muslim world", and its stated objective is "to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world". The OIC has reserved its membership for

Muslim-majority countries. The Central African Republic, Russia, Thailand, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and the unrecognised Turkish Cypriot "state" have Observer status. The Organisation of the

Islamic Conference was established by the First Islamic Summit Conference held in Rabat, Morocco, in September 1969, to marshal the Islamic world after an act of arson at the

Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem that year. The incident had plunged the Middle East into its worst crisis after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

In 1970 the first meeting of the

Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) was held in Jeddah, which decided to establish a permanent secretariat in that city,

(Contd on page 30)

Why is it so hot in March?

Parts of north India have been reporting heatwaves. Why is it so hot over north and northwest India in March?

New Delhi (Sardarjung) recorded a temperature of over 38 degrees Celsius on Sunday, the hottest for March so far for the national capital. Jammu and Uttarakhand reported heatwaves for a brief period last week. Rajasthan is reeling under a heatwave for nearly a week now. Why is it so hot over north and northwest India in March?

Heatwave Climatology

As winter transitions to spring with the northward march of the Sun post the winter solstice, maximum temperatures in India show a rising trend, starting from southern parts followed by central and northern India. March is the beginning of the summer season over India. During this month, the maximum heating zone runs along central India regions between Odisha and Gujarat. Here, hotter conditions start building up in March.

The maximum temperatures peak in April and May and the India Meteorological Department (IMD) identifies the core heatwave zone spanning Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, West Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odhisha, Vidarbha in Maharashtra, parts of Gangetic West Bengal, Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Hot winds from the deserts of northwest India also contribute to the soaring temperatures

in central India regions.

Many places in the northwest and cities along the southeastern coast report up to eight heatwave days per season. However, the regions in the extreme north, northeast and southwestern India are lesser prone to heatwaves.

March heatwave

This year, the geographical expanse of the latest heatwave spell was unusually large. North and northwest India including Jammu, Kutch-Saurashtra, Rajasthan along with parts Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand experienced heatwave last week. In addition to such a large area being under the influence of heatwaves, the latest spell was a prolonged one too. It later spread to Gujarat, north Maharashtra and extended all the way to interior Odisha. "During the past few days, the southerly winds from Gujarat, south Pakistan took the heat to southern and southwest Rajasthan. There were no active western disturbances, which otherwise brings colder winds. As a result, temperatures in Jammu, Rajasthan and neighbourhood areas remained higher than normal," said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general, IMD. Missing rain and thunderstorms Along with seasonal transition, the lack of pre-monsoon showers has contributed to the overall heating.

"There has not been significant thunderstorm activity and associated rainfall over most parts of the country in March," said Dr Mohapatra. The cumulative effect is an all India March (till March 21) rain deficit at 83 per cent. So far, surplus rain was recorded only over Kerala (14 per cent) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands (599 per cent), all other states and Union Territories have remained dry. The Andamans are presently bracing for Cyclone Asani and high rainfall is mainly associated with the storm.

Heatwave in Antarctica

On March 18, surface air temperature recorded along eastern Antarctica were historic — up to 40 degrees Celsius above normal. Normally, the temperatures around this time of the year should have been around minus 45 to minus 50 degrees Celsius. However, the southern pole recorded somewhere between minus 18 and minus 12 degrees, which climate scientists are terming unprecedented. Last week, Concordia, a station located on the Antarctica plateau and at a distance of 1,670 km from the Geographic South, reported temperatures 50 degrees above normal. The situation has arisen due to warm westerly winds surpassing the Southern Ocean and reaching the interior parts of Antarctica.

What are hypersonic missiles and why is Russia using them in Ukraine?

The Russian Ministry of Defence announced that it had used a hypersonic missile for the first time in the war with Ukraine. What are the dynamics of a hypersonic missile and the weapon system used by Russia?

The Russian Ministry of Defence announced last Sunday that it had used a hypersonic missile for the first time in the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. "The Kinzhal aviation missile system with hypersonic aeroballistic missiles destroyed a large underground warehouse containing missiles and aviation ammunition in the village of Deliatyn in the Ivano-Frankivsk region," defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov had said.

What is a hypersonic missile?

A hypersonic missile is a weapon system which flies at least at the speed of Mach 5 i.e. five times the speed of sound and is manoeuvrable.

The manoeuvrability of the hypersonic missile is what sets it apart from a ballistic missile as the latter follows a set course or a ballistic trajectory. Thus, unlike ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles do not follow a ballistic trajectory and can be manoeuvred to the



intended target. The two types of hypersonic weapons systems are Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV) and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles. The HGV are launched from a rocket before gliding to the intended target while the hypersonic cruise missile is powered by air breathing high speed engines or 'scramjets' after

acquiring their target.

What are the advantages of hypersonic missiles?

According to a former Commander of US Strategic Command, General John Hyten, hypersonic weapons can enable responsive, long range strike options against distant, defended or time critical threats (such as

road mobile missiles) when other forces are unavailable, denied access or not preferred. He made this statement while testifying before the US Congressional Committee on armed services. Conventional hypersonic weapons use only kinetic energy i.e. energy derived from motion, to destroy unhardened targets or

even underground facilities.

Are hypersonic missiles detectable in flight?

A Congressional Research Service report on hypersonic missiles released in October 2021 states that hypersonic weapons could challenge detection and defence due to their speed, manoeuvrability and low altitude of flight. The report states that ground based radars or terrestrial radars cannot detect hypersonic missiles until late in the flight of the weapon. This delayed detection makes it difficult for the responders to the missile attack to assess their options and to attempt to intercept the missile.

The Congressional report notes that some analysts have stated that the United State of America's current command and control model for missile defence would be incapable of processing data quickly enough to respond to and neutralize an incoming hypersonic missile.

(Contd on page 30)

Fuel prices need to be brought in line with market conditions. Elevated inflation will further restrict RBI's room for manoeuvre

The decision to keep retail prices on hold, despite surging global crude oil prices, and leaving oil marketing companies to absorb the losses does suggest that fuel pricing decisions continue to be driven not by commercial considerations, but by political compulsions

After keeping prices on hold since November last year, retail prices of petrol and diesel were raised on Wednesday by Rs 0.80 for the second straight day. However, considering that global crude oil prices have surged over the past few months — according to the Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell, the price of the Indian crude oil basket stood at \$113 in the third week of March, up from \$80.64 in November — retail fuel prices will need to be hiked considerably to bring them in line with global market prices. As per Crisil, with crude oil having averaged around \$100 in the ongoing quarter, retail prices of petrol and diesel would need to be increased by Rs 9-12 to ensure a full pass through. The decision to keep retail prices on hold, despite surging global crude oil prices, and leaving oil marketing companies to absorb the



losses does suggest that fuel pricing decisions continue to be driven not by commercial considerations, but by political compulsions. After all, retail prices were kept on hold till the conclusion of elections in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Manipur and Uttarakhand. To limit the impact on the end consumers, governments, at both the central and state level, could have offset some part of the price hikes by cutting the taxes imposed on petrol

and diesel — in Delhi, for instance, on March 16, the excise duty and VAT levied on petrol was around Rs 43.4 per litre.

Higher crude oil prices, even if partially passed through, will be inflationary. The decision of oil marketing companies to increase the price of bulk diesel by Rs 25 per litre, even as it distorts the market, will also end up being inflationary, as prominent buyers of bulk diesel include transportation companies

and the Indian Railways. Considering this scenario, the Reserve Bank of India will have to revise its outlook on inflation in the next monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting. In the last MPC meeting, held just days after the Union budget was presented, the central bank had projected inflation at 5.7 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2021-22, trending downwards thereafter to 4.5 per cent in 2022-23. However, with the consumer price index having already breached the upper limit of the RBI's inflation targeting framework in both January and February, it is now unlikely to mirror the trajectory laid out by the central bank. Elevated inflation will further restrict the RBI's room to manoeuvre. The longer the conflict between Russia and Ukraine persists, the longer crude oil prices remain elevated, the more challenging the policy environment will be.

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A 'potentially hazardous' asteroid is coming near Earth on Thursday: NASA

A 'potentially hazardous' asteroid is on its way to come near Earth. The asteroid isn't exactly small. It is comparable to Empire State Building. If this asteroid hits the Earth, it packs more than enough punch to cause widespread destruction. Asteroid 2013 BO76, as it has been named is 450 metres (Nearly a half kilometre) across. The size may seem small but the high speed with which it is travelling gives it enough potential to cause major damage on Earth if it hits. The asteroid is flying at a staggering speed of 49,513.45 kilometres per hour. NASA has categorised the



Hi. In 2013, it zoomed past the Earth at a distance of 78,88,295 kilometres. NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) has said that after Thursday's flyby, the same asteroid will visit Earth on July 14, 2033. At that time, it is expected to be at a distance of 1,91,85,926 kilometres from the Earth. NASA's JPL has also orbital parameters of the asteroid along with its orbital diagram around Earth. The intersecting orbits of the planets and the asteroid can clearly be seen in the picture above. Earth's orbit is visible in light blue colour while that of the asteroid has been depicted in white.

asteroid to be 'potentially Earth at a distance of (March 24). This is not the first hazardous'. It is then perhaps 51,11,759 kilometres. It will time this asteroid has come zoom past Earth on Thursday into our neighbourhood to say

What are black boxes and why are they important in a crash investigation

The China Eastern Airlines Boeing 737-800 virtually fell out of the sky on March 21 afternoon, plunging almost vertically from 29,100 feet to 7,850 feet in just over a minute, according to FlightRadar24 data

China's aviation authority announced on Wednesday (March 23) that a flight recorder, commonly known as "black box", "from China Eastern MU5735 was found", bringing the first hope of understanding what caused the country's worst airline disaster in years. The China Eastern Airlines Boeing 737-800 virtually fell out of the sky on March 21 afternoon, plunging almost vertically from 29,100 feet to 7,850 feet in just over a minute, according to FlightRadar24 data. These are two large metallic boxes containing recorders that are required to be kept on most aircraft, one in the front and the other in the rear. The recorders record the information about a flight, and help reconstruct the events leading to an aircraft accident. The cockpit voice recorder (CVR) records radio transmissions and other sounds in the cockpit, such as conversations between the pilots, and engine noises. The flight data recorder (FDR) records more than 80 different types of information such as altitude, airspeed, flight heading, vertical acceleration, pitch,



roll, autopilot status, etc. Black boxes are mandatory on commercial flights. Their purpose on aircraft is not to establish legal liability, but to identify the causes of a mishap and, therefore, help to prevent adverse incidents in the future.

Orange, not black

Black boxes are a blazing, high-visibility orange in colour, so that crews looking for them at a crash site have the best chance of finding them. It is not certain how they got their nickname, but recorders are today the holy grail that investigators seek in their quest for answers whenever there is an airline

accident. The use of black boxes dates back to the early 1950s, when, following plane crashes, investigators were unable to arrive at a conclusive cause for the accidents. An Australian scientist named David Warren is often credited with their invention.

Surviving the crash

In the initial days of the black box, a limited amount of data were recorded on wire or foil. Thereafter magnetic tape was used, and modern models contain solid state memory chips. The recording devices, each weighing about 4.5 kg, are stored inside a unit that is generally made out of strong

substances such as steel or titanium, and are insulated from extreme heat, cold or wetness. The FDR is located towards the tail end of the aircraft because that is usually where the impact of a crash is the least.

To make black boxes discoverable under water, they are equipped with a beacon that sends out ultrasound signals for 30 days.

Retrieving the data

It usually takes 10-15 days to analyse the data recovered from the black boxes. Meanwhile investigators look for other clues such as taking accounts from air traffic control personnel and recordings of the conversation between ATC and the pilots' moments before the crash. This helps investigators understand if pilots were aware that they were in a situation that was headed to such an eventuality and if so, whether they had reported any problems regarding controlling the aircraft. Interim reports are published after about a month, but they are often thin on information. Deeper investigations take longer, perhaps a year or more.

Technology can make policing better and also more dangerous

Marginalised communities risk coming under undue surveillance and suspicion

On March 11, speaking at the NCRB Foundation Day, the Union Home Minister remarked that the second phase of the Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), a Rs 3,500 crore project, is set to be completed by 2026 with increased use of artificial intelligence, fingerprint systems and other tools of predictive policing. The minister noted that one crore fingerprints had already been uploaded and if these were available to all police stations as part of the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), there would no longer be any need to pursue criminals.

Recently, the Indore Police Commissioner unveiled a "fingerprint-based criminal record data fetching system" developed by Citizen Cop Foundation to control crime in the state. The small thumb impression machine can be added to a phone to capture fingerprints at checking points, public spaces, etc. If the fingerprint recorded matches with the police database, all information about a person's criminal record will be pulled up. The system is being lauded as it circumvents the long



waiting period in fingerprint analysis as part of investigations. The

commissioner noted that existing fingerprints of those externed from a district, drug peddlers, those who escaped from jails and those who have committed theft of vehicles are being added. But the enthusiasm for generating and cross-referencing data to make policing more efficient ignores privacy concerns and structural faults of policing. The Supreme Court in K.S Puttaswamy declared a fundamental right to informational privacy as paramount and noted that any measure that sought to collect information or surveil must be legal, necessary, and proportionate. State surveillance for policing needs to be re-evaluated in this light, given that policing replicates existing casteist

notions of who criminals are, and how they are to be controlled.

The existing systems of ICJS and CCTNS empower the state to cross-reference data between different pillars of the criminal justice system in the name of creating efficient police infrastructure. Beyond this, integrating "fingerprint-based criminal record data fetching system" to the list of predictive policing practices will give birth to mass surveillance, particularly of certain oppressed caste communities, based on little evidence.

Nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes were ascribed "criminality by birth" and considered as "hereditary criminals addicted to systematic commission of non-bailable offences" under the colonial Criminal Tribes

Act, 1871. It has been replaced with the murky Habitual Offenders (HO) provisions, which have acted as a tool for police to continue to attribute criminality to Vimukta communities, by mandating their surveillance through regular check-ins at police stations, signing of bond undertakings for "security and for keeping the peace" through local police stations. The police maintain dossiers of habitual offenders, which includes extensive demographic details, personal information and "evidence" of criminality: Details of their habits, their method of committing crimes, property, particulars of their associates, places they frequent, etc. With the introduction of the commissionerate system in Bhopal and Indore, members of Vimukta and Adivasi

communities are being summoned by the police to get their records updated with copies of their Aadhaar cards and photographs as part of "Operation clean". Data related to work, family members, fingerprints etc are being collected through vague notices that make no mention of the law under which they have been invoked or include any cogent reasons for the summoning of an individual. This effectively means that even after being acquitted by the courts, a person continues to be an object of policing. Mere suspicion or FIRs filed against an individual are sufficient to trigger the discretionary powers of the police. Those subject to policing rarely include dominant caste persons with resources, who may have even been convicted of a crime. This has an all-encompassing impact on the lives and livelihood of these oppressed communities. They are forced to live in informal settlements in urban spaces which are heavily surveilled. With the interlinking of policing data, across different jurisdictions and centralised through the ICJS, this targeting runs the risk of being replicated as a pan-India phenomenon.

Pentagon says Russia more of a burden to China after Ukraine invasion

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has increased the strategic burden on China, according to a senior Pentagon official, because Russian troops have been on the offensive in Ukraine for the better part of the month-long war. "I do think that there's a degree to which what Putin has done in Ukraine makes Russia much more of a strategic burden for Beijing than it was six weeks ago or six months ago," Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl said. China's government has swung toward Russia, voicing support for Moscow's complaints about Nato expansion while hesitating to label its activities as an invasion. However, while Beijing's censors are working hard to keep any criticism of that viewpoint out of the public eye, the disagreement has sparked passionate debate among Chinese policy specialists and the



general public. Analysts say the argument demonstrates the tensions created by a confrontation between Chinese diplomatic values and alignment with Russia, as Beijing tries to assess how the war would effect its interests. Following standoffs over Ukraine and Taiwan, China and Russia declared a "no limits" alliance in February, promising to work together more against the West. According to a senior US defence official, Ukrainian army pushed Russian forces positioned outside the capital city of Kyiv for weeks as far as 15 miles further back in a massive counteroffensive on Wednesday. To provide a battlefield update, the official spoke on the condition of anonymity. Russian forces have advanced nearly 40 kilometres from the capital.

Sri Lanka deploys troops to petrol stations as fuel shortage sparks protests

The Sri Lankan government deployed troops to petrol stations as angry crowds blocked a main artery in Colombo and held up traffic for hours as the country grapples with fuel shortages

(SAI Bureau) Sri Lanka ordered troops to petrol stations Tuesday as sporadic protests erupted among the thousands of motorists queuing up daily for scarce fuel. The South Asian island nation is grappling with its worst economic meltdown in over seven decades, with rolling electricity blackouts and essential goods such as food and cooking gas also in short supply. Soldiers were deployed after angry crowds blocked a main artery in Colombo and held up traffic for hours because they were unable to buy kerosene oil on Monday, government spokesman Ramesh Pathirana said.

Footage of the incident shared on social media showed a group of angry women blockading a tourist coach to protest shortages of kerosene needed for cooking stoves. "We saw tourists being held up, we are also hearing that some people may be hoarding oil and that is why the government decided to deploy the military," Pathirana told reporters in the



capital. The troop call also follows the stabbing murder of a motorcyclist by another driver after a dispute over his place in a long queue for fuel outside Colombo. "Temperatures are getting frayed as queues get longer," a top defence official told AFP on condition of anonymity. "A decision was made last night to call out soldiers to

reinforce the police. This is to discourage any unrest."

Three elderly people have dropped dead at fuel queues since Saturday, police said, adding that numerous petrol stations saw people camping overnight to wait for diesel and gasoline purchases. Military officials said soldiers were deployed at

pumping stations of the state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corp, which accounts for two-thirds of the fuel retail business in the nation of 22 million people. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office announced a summit of all political parties on Wednesday to discuss the economic crisis, but opposition groups said they planned to boycott the meeting.

Sri Lanka's financial crisis stems from a critical shortfall of foreign currency, leaving traders unable to finance imports. The Covid-19 pandemic throttled the island's tourism sector — a key foreign exchange earner — and remittances from Sri Lankans working overseas have also declined sharply. Rajapaksa announced last week that the country will seek a bailout from the IMF, which says the government's foreign debt burden of \$51 billion is unsustainable. The government announced Tuesday that it was seeking to restructure this debt and was looking for an international law firm to advise on the legal implications.

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OIC foreign ministers meet in Islamabad, Pakistan

PM Imran Khan to deliver keynote address

The inaugural session of the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) began on Tuesday in Islamabad to discuss challenges faced by the Muslim world. This will be a two-day meeting

(SAI Bureau) A two-day meeting of the Council of the Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) began in Pakistan's capital on Tuesday to discuss challenges faced by the Muslim world. The 48th session of the CFM of the 57-member body of Muslim countries is being held here under the theme of 'Building Partnerships for Unity, Justice, and Development'. About 46 member states are being represented at the ministerial level in the meeting. The rest will be represented by senior officials. The meeting is being chaired by Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Prime Minister Imran Khan will deliver a keynote address at the inaugural session which will highlight Pakistan's role and contribution towards OIC and deliberate on the



challenges faced by the Muslim world. China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi is attending the OIC session as a Special Guest at the invitation of his Pakistani counterpart, Qureshi. The Islamabad Ministerial will consider and adopt over 100 resolutions

on a broad range of issues, including peace and security; economic development; cultural and scientific cooperation; and humanitarian, legal, administrative and financial matters, according to the Foreign Office. The agenda of the meeting covers a review of the developments affecting the Muslim world since the last CFM held in Niamey in 2020 and efforts undertaken by the secretariat for the implementation of resolutions adopted in previous sessions, especially on Palestine and Al Quds (Jerusalem). The agenda includes Islamophobia and issues related to international terrorism and cooperation in economic, cultural, social, humanitarian, and scientific domains. The OIC is a 57-member grouping of Muslim majority nations, including Pakistan.

US says Myanmar repression of Muslim Rohingya is genocide

The United States has declared Myanmar's repression of Muslim Rohingya to be genocide

(SAI Bureau) Violent repression of the largely Muslim Rohingya population in Myanmar amounts to genocide, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday, a declaration intended to both generate international pressure and lay the groundwork for potential legal action. Authorities made the determination based on confirmed accounts of mass atrocities on civilians by Myanmar's military in a widespread and systematic campaign against the ethnic minority, Blinken said in a speech at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. It is the eighth time since the Holocaust that the U.S. has concluded a genocide has occurred. The secretary of state noted the importance of calling attention to inhumanity even as horrific attacks occur elsewhere in the world, including Ukraine.

"Yes, we stand with the people of Ukraine," he said. "And we must also stand with people who are suffering atrocities in other places." The government of Myanmar, also known as Burma, is already under multiple layers of U.S. sanctions since a military coup ousted the democratically elected government in February 2021. Thousands of civilians throughout the country have been killed and imprisoned as part of ongoing repression of anyone opposed to the ruling junta. The



determination that a genocide has occurred could lead other nations to increase pressure on the government, which is already facing accusations of genocide at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. "As we lay the foundation for future accountability, we're also working to stop the military's ongoing atrocities, and support the people of Burma as they strive to put the country back on the path to democracy," Blinken said. More than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled from Buddhist-majority Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh since August 2017, when Myanmar's military launched an operation aimed at clearing them from the country following attacks by a rebel group. The status of the plight

of the Rohingya had been under extended review by U.S. government legal experts since the Trump administration, given potential legal ramifications of such a finding. The delay in the determination had drawn criticism from both inside and outside the government, which has been accused through successive administrations of being too slow in making such decisions on this and in other cases, most notable in Sudan's Darfur region in the early 2000s. Human rights groups and members of Congress welcomed the announcement despite the delay in a determination that has already been made by other countries, including Canada, France and Turkey. "The U.S. determination of the crime of genocide

against us is a momentous moment and must lead to concrete action to hold the Burmese military accountable for their crimes," said Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK.

Human Rights Watch said the U.S. and other governments should seek justice for crimes carried out by the military and impose stronger sanctions against its leadership. "The U.S. government should couple its condemnations of Myanmar's military with action," said John Sifton, the group's Asia advocacy director. "For too long, the U.S. and other countries have allowed Myanmar's generals to commit atrocities with few real consequences." A 2018 State Department report documented instances of Myanmar's military razing villages and carrying out rapes, tortures and mass killings of civilians since at least 2016. Blinken said evidence showed the violence wasn't isolated, but part of a systematic program that amounts to crimes against humanity.

"The evidence also points to a clear intent behind these mass atrocities, the intent to destroy Rohingya, in whole or in part, through killings, rape, and torture," he said. Previous determinations of genocide by the U.S. include campaigns against Uyghurs and other largely Muslim minorities in China as well as in Bosnia, Rwanda, Iraq and Darfur.

China continues to break Covid case record, officials face the brunt for 'laxity'

(SAI Bureau) As a resurgent COVID-19 wreaks havoc in China, more than 70 officials have been let go as a "punishment" in the past one month for failing to control the virus. China has been witnessing a spurt in Covid cases owing to the more contagious Omicron variant. According to South China Morning Post, top leaders have warned officials that strict action would be taken if they fail to act swiftly.

The warning comes even as health officials have acknowledged that most of the infections showed little or no symptoms making their detection difficult, the newspaper reported. The newspaper claimed that at least 74 officials have been sacked or reprimanded for failing to do their duty during the current wave. Meanwhile, China reported over 4,700 new infections on Tuesday,



with the bulk of cases being recorded from the northeastern province of Jilin, where more than 9 million people have been placed under lockdown. Jilin has mostly banned trips both outside the province and from region to region within the

province, and residents who have to travel must notify the police. The number of local symptomatic cases in Jilin's provincial capital of Changchun has increased for five days in a row and hit a record on March 21.

In Shenyang, an

industrial base home to factories including carmaker BMW, 47 new cases were reported on Tuesday as authorities put all housing compounds under "closed management" and barred residents from leaving without a 48-hour negative test result.

In China's financial hub Shanghai, 865 domestically transmitted asymptomatic infections were reported on Monday, an increase from 734 a day earlier, reports Reuters citing the official data. Although small compared with the number of infections in many outbreaks overseas, the rise is significant as Shanghai redoubles its efforts to implement China's "dynamic clearance" policy designed to curb each flare-up. The city is pressing ahead with a block by block testing scheme after already completing more than 30 million tests. The southern tech powerhouse of Shenzhen on Monday announced it would lift its week-long lockdown "in an orderly manner", after having partially eased measures on Friday to minimise the impact of virus shutdowns on factories and ports.

Ukraine conflict creates 'noodle crisis' in Indonesia

(SAI Bureau) War oftentimes does not remain limited to warring parties. It creates a domino effect that causes a variety of problems across the world, even in countries far removed from the actual fighting. Ukraine conflict has created a state of alert in Europe but its effects in terms of rising oil prices are being felt across the world.



Another effect Ukraine conflict has had is the 'noodle crisis' in Indonesia, a country half a world away from the actual battle zone. Ukraine conflict has caused a shortage of the iconic and heavily popular 'Indomie' noodles in Indonesia. A researcher quoted by Al Jazeera said that there were indications that wheat supply to Indonesia was under strain. "When Russia invaded Ukraine, activities at Ukrainian ports stopped," said Lestary J Barany, a research assistant at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). "Many granaries were located in the east, close to areas occupied by Russian troops. Thus, the threat from the supply side for these materials is becoming more real."

someone wanting to have a quick snack, these noodles are the solution.

Media reports suggest that stores in the country are rapidly

running out of fresh packs and prices of remaining stocks have risen.

According to Indonesia's National Statistics Bureau, Ukraine exported 3 million tonnes of wheat to Indonesia in the year 2020 alone. A researcher quoted by Al Jazeera said that there were indications that wheat supply to Indonesia was under strain.

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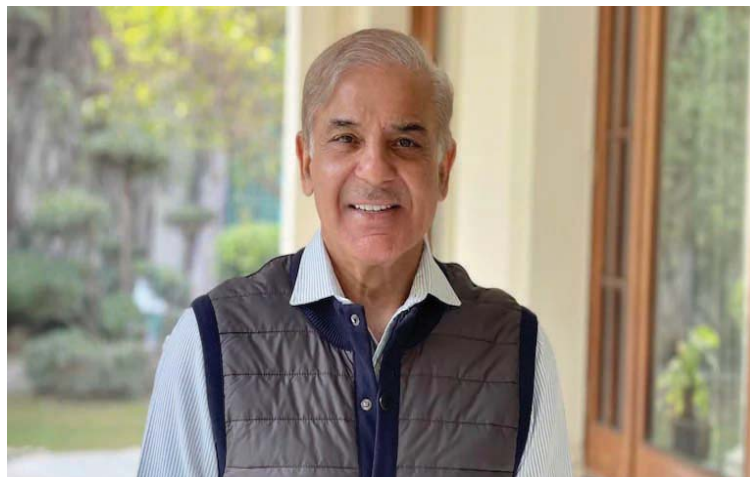
Hindu girl shot dead for resisting abduction in Pakistan's Sindh

A Hindu girl was reportedly shot dead in Pakistan's Sindh province during a failed abduction bid

(SAI Bureau) An 18-year-old Hindu girl was reportedly shot dead during a failed abduction attempt in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, according to a media report on Monday. Pooja Oad was said to have been shot in the middle of the street after she put up resistance to the attackers in Rohi, Sukkur. The Friday Times newspaper reported. Every year, several women belonging to minority communities, especially Hindus in Sindh, are abducted and forcibly converted by religious extremists, it said. Pakistan's minority communities have long faced the issue of forced marriages and conversions, the report said. According to the Peoples Commission for Minorities' Rights and the Centre for Social Justice, 156 incidents of forced conversions took place between 2013 and 2019, it said. In 2019, the Sindh government attempted to outlaw forced conversions and marriages for the second time, but certain religious protestors contested the bill, the report said. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reports the overall population of the Hindu community in Pakistan at 1.60 per cent, and 6.51 per cent in Sindh respectively, it said. Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan. According to official estimates, 75 lakh Hindus live in Pakistan. However, according to the community, over 90 lakh Hindus are living in the country. The majority of Pakistan's Hindu population is settled in Sindh province where they share culture, traditions and language with Muslim residents. They often complain of harassment by extremists.

'Imran Khan, your game is over': Pakistan Oppn party PML-N to nominate Shehbaz Sharif for PM post

Maryam Nawaz, vice-president of Pakistan opposition party PML-N, said on Monday that Shehbaz Sharif would be the party's candidate for the post of prime minister if the no-trust motion against PM Imran Khan is passed



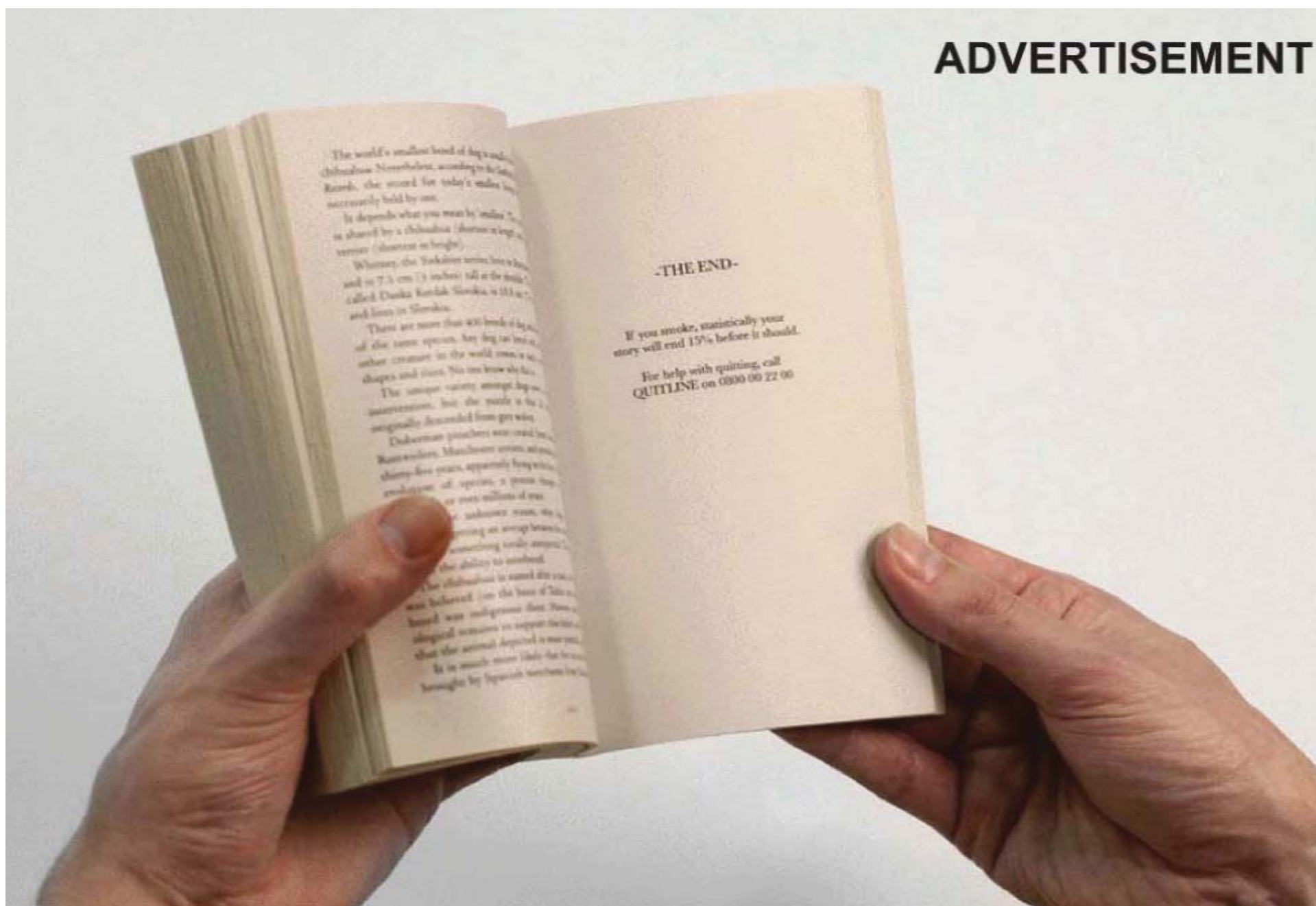
Tribune. At a press conference outside the Islamabad High Court, Maryam Nawaz said, "Imran Khan believes there to be an international conspiracy against him, but he conspires against himself. Had he fulfilled his duty, there would be no reason to mobilise one million people."

NO-TRUST VOTE

Pakistan's National Assembly will convene on Friday to take up a no-trust motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan. Around 100 lawmakers from the PML-N and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) submitted the no-confidence motion before the National Assembly Secretariat on March 8, alleging that the PTI government led by Khan was responsible for the economic crisis and the spiralling inflation in the country.

(SAI Bureau) In the event that the no-trust motion against Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan is passed, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) will put forward party chief Shehbaz Sharif as its candidate for the post of prime minister. PML-N vice-president Maryam Nawaz said on Monday that the Opposition in Pakistan would "sit and decide" on the appointment of the next candidate for prime minister but the PML-N would nominate Shehbaz Sharif. "Imran Khan! Your game is over," Maryam Nawaz said, adding that the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had officially broken up. "The PM is aware that no one will come to his rescue now that he has lost the game," she said, as per Pakistani daily The Express

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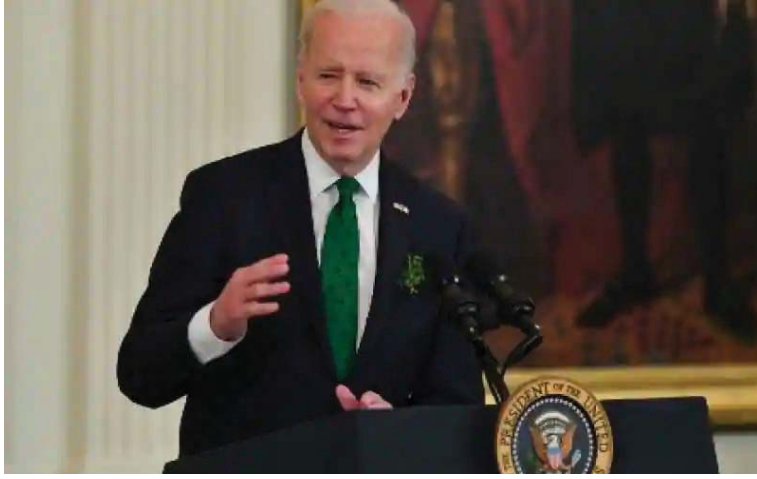
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U.S. sends anti-missile interceptors to Saudi Arabia, fulfills urgent request



nations. According to Washington Street Journal, the US officials said that the emergency request from Saudi Arabia was made in order to bolster their defensive munitions that is extremely important for them to fend off drone and missile attacks by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in neighbouring Yemen.

Saudi military has been requesting for the interceptors since last year and according to the report, they were running low on supplies. As a result, the

request became a bone of contention between Riyadh and the Biden administration. However, with the transfer of the interceptors, it is being reported that the two nations may return to amicable terms and it will be a big help for the Saudi military. The interceptors and other munitions sent to Saudi Arabia were taken from U.S. stockpiles elsewhere in the Middle East, one of the officials said according to the WSJ report. The US government hopes that the arms transfer will lead to Saudi Arabia

pumping more oil in order to mitigate the soaring crude prices and rebuild the trade relations between the two countries. Earlier, Biden has also criticized Saudi Arabia for their war in Yemen and it was speculated that the US are looking to cut off the flow of some weapons Riyadh could use to target Houthis. The president also reversed a move by Donald Trump that put the Houthis on the U.S.'s official list of global terrorist groups, a move that Saudi leaders saw as a support for the Yemeni leaders.

(SAI Bureau) The United States government transferred a number of Patriot antimissile interceptors to Saudi Arabia in order to fulfil an urgent request from Riyadh amid tensions between the two

Ready to make 'difficult decisions' on Iran's nuclear programme: US

For the United States, he said the main issues remain Iran committing to verifiable limits on its nuclear activities, in return for an easing of punishing sanctions placed on the country

(SAI Bureau) A deal to restore the pact limiting Iran's nuclear program is not imminent, but Washington is prepared to take "difficult decisions" to make it happen, State Department Spokesman Ned Price said Monday. Price told journalists he could not discuss the specifics of the final remaining issues in the 11 month-old negotiations over restoring the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which aims at preventing Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

"We are not in the practice of negotiating in public,"

Price said, amid reports that a deal is close. "We are prepared to make difficult decisions to return Iran's nuclear program to



its JCPOA limits," he said. For the United States, he said the main issues remain Iran committing to verifiable limits on

its nuclear activities, in return for an easing of punishing sanctions placed on the country.

According to sources

close to the talks, Iran is insisting on "economic guarantees" in case a future US administration changes its stance and

abrogates the agreement, as president Donald Trump did in 2018; and that Washington remove its official terror group designation on Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards. "We're not going to respond to specific claims about what sanctions we may or may not be prepared to lift as part of a potential mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA," Price said. He said the key US negotiator, Rob Malley, has not returned to Vienna to resume the most recent round of negotiations. "I want to be clear that an agreement is neither imminent nor is it certain," he said. "In fact we are preparing equally for scenarios with and without a mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA."

US gunmaker donates abandoned rifles worth \$200,000 to Ukrainian forces

An abandoned order of rifles, which are worth \$200,000, is being donated to Ukraine by a weapons manufacturing plant in Florida

(SAI Bureau) The Keltec, which is based in Cocoa, Florida, had earlier got an order for 400 9mm carbine rifles from a client in Odesa, Ukraine. By the time the gun manufacturer could finalise the order after completion of the bureaucratic process of sending the weapons, Odesa was under siege. The client had also become unreachable. It prompted the firm to send the weapons to the Ukrainian military. Industrial Production Director Adrian Kellgren on Friday said, "This is just right to get them over there so they do what they were designed to do — defend their home and state." In a Facebook post on Friday, the company said that it didn't intend to announce the donation. But the media had picked up the story through its filing to the Justice Department to be registered as foreign agents to help the shipment reach Ukraine's army. The guns will first be shipped to an unknown NATO country and then arrive in Ukraine. The weapons may prove helpful to Ukrainian armed forces, who are fighting invading Russian troops.



US contingency plans in place in case Russia uses its most powerful weapons

The US has created contingency plans in case Russia uses chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons in Ukraine

(Staff Reporter) After Russia did not rule out the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, the US created contingency plans in case Moscow uses its more powerful weapons amid the war. The team of national security officials, known as the Tiger Team, is also considering responses if Russia attacks convoys in NATO territories bringing weapons and aid to Ukraine, according to officials involved in the process, the New York Times reported. These contingencies will be central in an upcoming NATO meeting between the leaders of all member states on March 24, the report added. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday said Russia would only use nuclear weapons in the context of the Ukraine conflict if it were facing an 'existential threat'. "We have a concept of domestic security, and it's public. You can read all the reasons for nuclear arms to be used," Peskov said. "So if it is an existential threat for

our country, then it can be used in accordance with our concept." Peskov's comment came when he was asked whether he was "convinced or confident" that President Vladimir Putin would not use the nuclear option in the Ukrainian context. Russia maintains the world's largest stockpile of nuclear warheads and has earned minimal support around the world for its attack on its ex-Soviet neighbour. Western defence officials said following Putin's February announcement that they had not seen any significant sign of mobilization of Russia's nuclear forces -- its strategic bombers, missiles and submarines. But Moscow has also warned that if the United States and NATO allies supplied Ukraine with fighter jets, it could escalate and expand the war, potentially putting Russia in direct confrontation with nuclear-armed rivals in the West.



Four Russians indicted in US for energy sector hacks

(Staff Reporter) Four Russian agents have been indicted in the United States for hacking attacks targeting the energy sector around the world, including a US nuclear power operator and a Saudi petrochemical facility. The Russian hackers targeted thousands of computers at hundreds of companies in 135 countries between 2012 and 2018, the Justice Department said Thursday. "Russian state-sponsored hackers pose a serious and persistent threat to critical infrastructure both in the United States and around the world," Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said in a statement. "Alongside our partners here at home and abroad, the Department of Justice is committed to exposing and holding accountable state-sponsored hackers who threaten our critical infrastructure with cyber-attacks." **EMPLOYED BY RUSSIA'S FSB** According to the Justice Department, the Russians were employed by a Russian Ministry

of Defense research institute and Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). The unsealing of the indictments came three days after President Joe Biden warned of a growing Russian cyber threat against US businesses in response to Western sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. The four Russians were the subject of two separate indictments, both pre-dating the Russian invasion. The first indictment, from June 2021, charges Evgeny Viktorovich Gladikh, 36, a computer programmer with a Russian Ministry of Defense institute, and unnamed conspirators of seeking to hack industrial control systems at global energy facilities. The hack of a foreign refinery was "designed to enable future physical damage with potentially catastrophic effects," the Justice Department said. The malware used, called "Triton" or "Trisis," has been identified previously as being used to hack a Saudi petrochemical facility in 2017.



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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.



First black woman eyed for US supreme court vows to uphold democracy, be independent, if confirmed



(SAI Bureau) Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson on Monday emphasized "my duty to be independent" if confirmed as the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, as Republican senators almost immediately began previewing attack lines accusing her of being lenient on crime. On the first day of her confirmation hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Jackson sat mostly in silence listening to 22 senators talk at length about what they wanted in a nominee. Race was not always an unspoken subtext, as

over these past 246 years," Jackson, who currently serves on the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, said in opening remarks that lasted about 13 minutes. "I have been a judge for nearly a decade now, and I take that responsibility and my duty to be independent very seriously," she said. "I decide cases from a neutral posture. I evaluate the facts, and I interpret and apply the law to the facts of the case before me without fear or favor, consistent with my judicial oath." As the day began, some Democrats in the room were celebrating her nomination.

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas, who had no formal role in the proceedings, held up her phone to record as Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey spoke about the sheer joy he felt at a moment that he called, simply, "not a normal day for America." Among the Republicans, there were early flashes of gentility: Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the

committee's senior Republican, pulled out a chair for Jackson just before the hearing began. But that tone quickly receded as Republicans stressed that they would not personally attack Jackson, while in the same breath accusing her of being lenient on child sex abuse defendants and sex offenders. Several also suggested, without evidence, that she was aligned with progressive groups that are interested in adding justices to the Supreme Court. Democrats saw the offensive coming and tried to preempt the criticism in their prepared remarks. "These baseless charges are unfair," said Sen. Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the committee's chairman, adding, "They fly in the face of pledges my colleagues made that they would approach your nomination with civility and respect." Jackson's approval by the Senate would not change the ideological balance of the court. She is a former clerk for Justice

Stephen Breyer, whose spot she would take in the court's three-member liberal wing when he retires at the end of the current term. A review of a substantial sample of Jackson's roughly 500 judicial opinions suggests that she would be about as liberal as Breyer. With Jackson likely to be confirmed, either with one or two Republican swing votes or with solely Democratic votes, Republicans are expected to use the hearings to direct the public's attention to cultural issues that are likely to be flashpoints in the midterm elections. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., forecast an effort by her party to use the hearings as a venue to attack Jackson and Democrats on such issues. At one point, Blackburn spoke of "so-called white privilege" before wondering aloud to Jackson whether it was her hidden agenda to incorporate critical race theory into the legal system.

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Is mystery yacht in Italy Putin's pleasure boat?

In a dry dock in the Tuscan seaside town of Massa stands the "Scheherazade", the most infamous yacht in Italy today due to speculation it could belong to Vladimir Putin. With its bow facing the Mediterranean, the 140-metre craft worth an estimated \$700 million is the subject of a probe into its ownership by Italy's financial police.

Several yachts belonging to Russian oligarchs have already been seized in Europe since Moscow invaded Ukraine last month. The seizure of the "Scheherazade", however, would be the most spectacular were its provenance indeed traced to the Russian president. For several months, it has been parked for maintenance work at The Italian Sea Group's shipyard at the Marina di Carrara, within the western seaside town of Massa not far from Tuscany's famous marble quarries of Carrara.

On Wednesday, an AFPTV journalist witnessed no obvious signs of activity on board, although some men were working nearby.

A source close to the ongoing probe by Italy's financial police told AFP that the

investigation could be wrapped up within days. "We are in a phase of delving deeper and it's generally more complicated," said the source. "It's not always easy to attribute ownership." Built by Germany's Lurssen in 2020, the yacht features two helipads, a swimming pool and a movie theatre, according to the SuperYachtFan website, which researches yachts and their owners.

News reports say the "Scheherazade", which flies the Cayman Islands flag, is owned by a company registered in the Marshall Islands. Its captain is British, but the rest of the crew is Russian, according to researchers at the anti-corruption foundation of Russian dissident Alexei Navalny, which on Monday posted a video on YouTube attributing the yacht to Putin. Researchers cited a crew list in their possession that included several members of Russia's federal protective service, which is charged with Putin's security.

But on Wednesday Paolo Gozzani, the head of the local CGIL union, which includes shipyard workers,

said the crew of the "Scheherazade" had suddenly changed in recent days. "The crew was exclusively made up of Russian personnel," Gozzani told AFP. "And then suddenly all the staff was changed with a British crew, and the reasons are still not clear." The New York Times has reported that US authorities have collected evidence linking Putin to the luxury ship, which made two trips, in 2020 and 2021, to the Black Sea resort of Sochi. The Italian Sea Group said in a statement the yacht was "not attributable to the property of Russian President Vladimir Putin". Its assessment was based on "the documentation in its possession and following the findings of the checks carried out by the relevant authorities", said the shipyard's owner.

SEIZE THEM ALL

Interviewed by the New York Times earlier this month, the British captain of the "Scheherazade" said Putin was not the owner of the ship and that the Russian president had never set foot on board. Refusing to give the owner's name, the captain said it was no one facing current sanctions. In an

address to the Italian parliament on Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Italy, a popular Russian resort destination, to seize all financial and real estate assets of the oligarchs, including yachts, "from the Scheherazade to the smallest".

Since Moscow's February 24 invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing European Union sanctions, Italian authorities have seized over 800 million euros (\$877 million) of assets belonging to Russian oligarchs, Prime Minister Mario Draghi said Tuesday. That includes the "Sailing Yacht A", the 530-million-euro sailing-assisted motor yacht linked to Russian billionaire Andrei Melnichenko, a coal and fertiliser tycoon on the EU's blacklist. Italy also seized the 65-million-euro "Lady M Yacht" belonging to Alexei Mordashov, a Russian steel billionaire reputedly close to Vladimir Putin. The sanctions, said Draghi, "have severely affected the economy and financial markets of Russia, as well as the personal assets of the people closest to President Putin".

Transplantation of organs from deceased COVID-19 patients is safe and possible. Here's how

In a study, it was found that organ donation from dying donors who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 is safe and does not cause COVID-19 in the patient receiving the organ donation. The Covid pandemic resulted in increased organ disposal rates because of unclear risks associated with the use of organs from COVID-19-infected donors, causing the shortage of abdominal organs for donation.

Study approach:

Using organs obtained from deceased donors who tested positive for Covid, researchers at Duke University in the US analysed six abdominal organ transplants performed in four recipients (2 livers, 2 kidneys and pancreas combined).

During the donor evaluation protocol, all four donors were subjected to microscopic and/or macroscopic biopsy reviews to confirm that their organs were suitable for transplant. Organ type, duration and severity of COVID-19 sickness, possible signs of hypercoagulable disease (meaning an increase in clotting in donated organs and vessels) and a careful overall inspection were all factors taken into



account when assessing organ donors.

Furthermore, lung or intestine donations were only considered if the donor had tested positive for Covid more than 20 days ago, in line with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) infection control practices.

The team explained that if the virus was found in the base of the lungs, the lungs would be unsuitable for transplantation, but other organs could still be transplanted safely,

provided the donor wasn't suffering from severe hyperinflammatory COVID-19 or had abnormal clotting patterns.

Are there any other things that need to be taken into consideration?

After passing all these hoops, doctors must still consider a donor's final cause of death to determine whether it may negatively affect organ quality and/or surgical risk, they said.

Additionally, recipients are highly advised to get fully vaccinated with

COVID-19 prior to surgery to reduce transplant risk.

"Being unvaccinated can increase the risk of severe COVID-19 in transplanted patients due to their immunosuppression drugs post-transplant. For that reason, we strongly encourage our patients on the waiting list to get vaccinated. However, being unvaccinated does not take someone off the organ transplant waiting list at our institution at this time," said Dr Emily Eichenberger from the University's School of Medicine.

It is also desirable that the donor be vaccinated, as this may reduce the risk of severe organ inflammation. However, a donor's unknown or negative vaccination status would not preclude the use of otherwise good quality organs from a Covid-19-infected donor. "While limited, our experience to date supports the use of abdominal organs from COVID-19 positive donors as safe and effective, even those actively infected, or with lung disease caused by COVID-19," Eichenberger said. A presentation of the research will be made at this year's European Congress of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, taking place in Lisbon in April.

All about Lapsus\$, the hacker group that has targeted Microsoft, Samsung, Okta, Nvidia

The response comes after other prominent companies such as Nvidia, Samsung, Ubisoft, Okta, etc were believed to have been targeted by the same group. Okta had initially denied a breach, but later released a statement saying it believed that close to 366 of its customers were likely impacted. South America-based Lapsus\$ is known for publicly posting details about their hacks and sharing screenshots of stolen data on platforms such as Telegram and Twitter. Here's a look at what this latest cybersecurity issue is all about.

How was Microsoft hacked?

The Lapsus\$ group claimed this week that it has stolen data from Microsoft, adding that it had accessed source code for core Microsoft products Bing, Cortana, and Bing Maps. Microsoft, however, said that while no customer code or data was involved, their investigation found that a single account was compromised, thus granting limited access to the hackers.

The statement added, "Our cybersecurity response teams quickly engaged to remediate the compromised account and prevent further activity." The company said it does not view the secrecy of source code as a security threat and that viewing it does not mean an increased risk to products.

"Our team was already investigating the compromised account based on threat intelligence when the actor publicly disclosed their intrusion. This public disclosure escalated our action allowing our team to intervene and interrupt the actor mid-operation, limiting broader impact."

Who else has been targeted by Lapsus\$? Why is the attack on Okta in focus?

Microsoft said they've observed Lapsus\$ has targeted several organisations. Lapsus\$ too has been posting about these hacks on their official Telegram channel and other social media accounts. The group does not shy away from taking credit for these attacks, unlike other groups, which prefer to stay under the radar.

According to reports, NVIDIA, Samsung, Ubisoft and Okta are some of the organisations the hackers have targeted. The Okta hack in particular is worrisome because the San Francisco-based company provides online authentication services to several prominent players such as FedEx Corp, T-Mobile, Moody's Corp and Coinbase Global and even cloud services provider Cloudflare.

Okta stated that around 366 of its customers are impacted, though it insisted that the attackers never gained direct access to their overall system. According to Okta's statement, hackers got access via "a machine that was logged into Okta". The attack was detected as part of an unsuccessful attempt to compromise the account of a customer support engineer in Jan 2022, and Okta had alerted those at risk as part of the process at the time.

The statement claims the scenario is equivalent to one "walking away from your computer at a coffee shop, whereby a stranger has (virtually in this case) sat down at your machine and is using the mouse and keyboard."

According to Lotem Finkelstein, Head of Threat Intelligence and Research at Check Point Software, "If true, the breach at Okta may explain how Lapsus\$ has been able to achieve its recent string of successes. Thousands of companies use Okta to secure and manage their identities."

Through private keys retrieved within Okta, the cyber gang may have access to corporate networks and applications. Hence, a breach at Okta could lead to potentially disastrous consequences."

Okta's services are used by other players for Single Sign-On and Multi-factor Authentication to let other users log in to online apps and websites.

Meanwhile, Nvidia has said it is "still working to evaluate the nature and scope of the event." The incident was termed a ransomware attack.

Regarding Samsung, the group had posted screenshots showing it had access to nearly 200GB of data, including source code used by Samsung for encryption and biometric unlocking functions on Galaxy devices.

Samsung's statement had said that no

personal data belonging to employees or customers was stolen, though it said there was a security breach relating to "internal company data". The statement had acknowledged that the breach did involve source code related to the Galaxy devices.

How exactly has Lapsus\$ managed to carry out these attacks?

Microsoft's blog post has given some clues

South America-based Lapsus\$ is publicly known for posting details on their hacks and sharing screenshots of stolen data on platforms like Telegram and Twitter. Here's a look at what this latest cybersecurity issue is all about:

on how these attacks took place, though the group appears to have deployed a wide variety of methods.

The blog post

refers to Lapsus\$ as DEV-0537, and according to Microsoft, the hackers rely on "large-scale social engineering and extortion campaigns against multiple organizations..."

In social engineering attacks, cybercriminals try to lure individuals into revealing critical personal information via phishing attacks. This information can then be used to compromise other accounts. For instance, they might ask one to take a survey revealing personal details such as their mother's maiden name or favourite dish or date of birth, etc. All of this information might be used to either guess passwords or even answers to security questions for an account.

According to Microsoft, the group relies on a "pure extortion and destruction model without deploying ransomware

payloads." It started by targeting organisations in the United Kingdom and South America but has expanded globally. Their targets are across a range of sectors: government, technology telecom, media, retail and healthcare. It is also attacking cryptocurrency exchanges to steal cryptocurrency holdings.

Microsoft states that the group is also relying on some tactics that are less frequently used by other threat actors. These include methods such as "SIM-swapping to take over accounts, accessing personal email accounts of employees at target organisations."

In some cases, it has even paid employees or suppliers at an organisation in order to gain access to privileged networks and systems. Another example talks about the group calling up an organisation's helpdesk to reset a target's credentials. The group used other information gathered about the target in order to trick the helpdesk into giving access.

For now, Microsoft has recommended that businesses rely on Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) to protect themselves from such attacks. It also recommends against weak MFA factors such as text messages, since these are susceptible to SIM swapping. It has also cautioned against simple voice approvals, push notifications, or even "secondary email" based MFA methods. It also recommends increasing awareness among employees and IT help desks around social engineering attacks.

President Ram Nath Kovind confers Padma Awards to 54 distinguished personalities

among 54 prominent personalities who were conferred Padma awards by President Ram Nath Kovind on Monday. While General Rawat and Radheshyam Khemka were given Padma Vibhushan, the country's second-highest civilian award, posthumously, Mr Azad, Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekharan, former CAG Rajiv Mehrishi, founder of Serum Institute of India that made Covid-19 vaccine Covishield Cyrus Poonawalla were among the eight honoured with Padma Bhushan, the country's third-highest civilian award, at a civil investiture ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan. This year, no names were announced for 'Bharat Ratna', India's highest civilian award, which was last awarded in 2019 to former president Pranab Mukherjee, social reformer Nanaji Deshmukh and noted singer Bhupen Hazarika.

The award for General Rawat was received by his daughters, while a close family member received the award for Khemka. Many of those who received the

Padma awards were "unsung heroes", including 125-year-old yoga practitioner Swami Sivananda.

Members of the audience clapped as a bare-footed Swami Sivananda, dressed in a simple white kurta and dhoti, knelt before Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who promptly got up and bowed, touching the ground as he returned the greeting. These awards are given in various disciplines and fields, such as art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc. The Narendra Modi government has been honouring many such "unsung heroes" who have been contributing to society in different ways with Padma awards since 2014, when it came to power for the first time.

Among the dignitaries present on the occasion were Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. 'Padma Vibhushan' is

awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; 'Padma Bhushan' for distinguished service of high order and 'Padma Shri' for distinguished service in any field. The awards are announced on the eve of Republic Day every year and are conferred by the President at ceremonial functions which are held at Rashtrapati Bhawan. This year a total of 128 Padma awards are being conferred, including two duo cases (in a duo case, the award is counted as one). The list of awardees comprises four Padma Vibhushan, 17 Padma Bhushan and 107 Padma Shri awards. As many as 34 of the awardees are women and the list also includes 10 persons from the category of Foreigners, NRI, PIO, OCI and 13 posthumous awardees. The second civil investiture ceremony is scheduled to be held on March 28. Former West Bengal chief minister and CPI-M leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who was among the Padma Bhushan awardees, had refused to accept the honour.

The Pegasus row in Andhra Pradesh, in the context of a wider TDP-YSRCP tussle

We are assuming that not only political leaders but voters of all sections were under surveillance during Naidu's regime," Rajendranath said.

How has the TDP reacted to Mamata Banerjee's statement?

TDP leaders have said that Banerjee could have been misinformed, and have dismissed the allegations on Pegasus. TDP National General Secretary Nara Lokesh, son of N Chandrababu Naidu, who was IT Minister at that time, said that although the Pegasus spyware was offered to the government, they did not purchase it. Lokesh said that his government never purchased any spyware or indulged in phone tapping.

TDP leaders said that it is now nearly three years since the YSRCP came to power, and if there was any evidence for the purchase of Pegasus, they would have found it by now.

The controversy is seemingly about Pegasus, but are there wider political issues involved?

YSRCP raised the bogey of Pegasus in the House on Monday after being pinned

down by TDP MLAs for two days over deaths of at least 26 persons in Jangareddygudem in West Godavari district allegedly due to consumption of illicit liquor.

Led by Chandrababu Naidu, TDP leaders attacked the government for failing to rein in illicit liquor manufacturing. Over 15 of the 23 TDP MLAs were suspended for a day for causing ruckus. The TDP leaders also accused the government, which took over all liquor sales in a bid to implement prohibition, of selling cheap liquor brands which they alleged were affecting the health of consumers.

After the YSRCP's landslide victory in the May 2019 Assembly elections and subsequent sweeps in urban and rural local body polls, the TDP has been reduced to a weak Opposition. The alleged hooch deaths and complaints of poor quality of local brands of liquor have given it an opportunity to make itself heard. The recent HC ruling asking the state government to develop Amaravati as the capital city as envisaged by the TDP regime, came as a shot in the arm for

the party which has stepped up criticism of the YSRCP government. The TDP is also fighting to retain ground from being usurped by the BJP.

What do we know so far about the possibility of Indian governments or state agencies having purchased or used the spyware?

In October 2021, the Supreme Court ordered an investigation headed by a former judge of the court, Justice R V Raveendran, to look into the allegations of unauthorised surveillance using Pegasus.

The terms of reference of the committee included whether Pegasus was acquired by the -Centre or any state government, or any central or state agency for use against the citizens of India, and whether any government agency did indeed use the spyware against citizens, and it so, under what law, rule, guideline, or protocol. The central government has rejected the global media investigation into the use of Pegasus, and has declined to supply any facts in the matter. It has criticised the alleged undermining of

national security considerations by the opposition, but it has not explicitly denied the use of Pegasus.

The Indian Express reported on January 30 that at least two cybersecurity experts had deposed before the committee that there were "strong indicators" pointing to the involvement of "the state, its intelligence and law enforcement agencies" in using the spyware for unauthorised surveillance against individuals.

The panel submitted its interim report to the Supreme Court last month.

In January, The New York Times reported that following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel in 2017, the Indian government had bought Pegasus as part of a \$2-billion package for weapons including a missile system.

Mamata Banerjee's revelation that the NSO Group had approached the West Bengal government "four-five years ago" with an offer to sell Pegasus to the state police for "Rs 25 crore" was the first direct confirmation of the attempted use of the spyware in India.

What is OIC and what are its relations with India?

headed by the secretary general of the organisation. The current secretary general of the OIC is the Chadian diplomat and politician Hissein Brahim Taha, who took over from the Saudi Arabian Dr Yousef Ahmed Al-Othaimeen in November 2020.

The OIC and India

As the country with the world's second largest Muslim community, India had been invited to the founding conference at Rabat in 1969, but was humiliatingly ejected at Pakistan's behest. Then Agriculture Minister Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed was dis-invited upon arrival in Morocco.

Thirty-seven years later, in 2006, with post-reforms India having come to occupy an important position in the world, Saudi Arabia invited New Delhi to join as an

Observer. But India stayed away because of a multiplicity of reasons, not least because as a secular country, it did not want to join an organisation that was founded on the religious identity of nations.

Again, at the 45th session of the Foreign Ministers' Summit in May 2018, Bangladesh, the host country, suggested that India, where more than 10% of the world's Muslims live, should be given Observer status. But Pakistan opposed the proposal. While the OIC is mainly controlled by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, as the only Islamic country with nuclear weapons, has had a powerful say in the organisation from the beginning.

In 2019, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), invited then Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj to

address the Inaugural Plenary of the 46th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in Abu Dhabi as the "Guest of Honour".

OIC's position on Kashmir

The OIC has been generally supportive of Pakistan's stand on Kashmir, and has issued statements criticising the alleged Indian "atrocities" in the state. However, New Delhi has long been used to combating these statements, and has consistently and forcefully put forward its position. Importantly, Pakistan's position in the OIC aside, New Delhi is hardly friendless in the organisation. India has excellent relations individually with almost all member nations — and this is a reason why it can mostly afford to not take the statements issued by the group as a whole seriously.

What are hypersonic missiles and why is Russia using them in Ukraine?

Which countries possess hypersonic weapons or are in process of developing them?

Apart from Russia, which announced its hypersonic missile 'Kinzhal' or Dagger in 2018 and has now used it for the first time in battle conditions in Ukraine, China too is reportedly in possession of this weapon system and has twice used it to circumnavigate the globe before landing near a target in August 2021.

The Russian Kinzhal missile is said to be a modification of its Iskander missile and was test fired from a MiG-31 aircraft in July 2018 striking at a target 500 miles away. As per Russian media reports the Kinzhal has a top speed of Mach 10 with a range up to 1200 miles when launched from a MiG-31. Russia is also said to be using the missile

on Su-34 long range fighter and is working towards mounting it on Tu-22M3 strategic bomber.

China is said to have tested a HGV in August 2021 launched by a Long March rocket. There are reports that China may use this weapon system by mating conventionally armed HGVs with the DF-21 and DF-26 missiles that it possesses. China has also extensively tested the DF-ZF HGV with a range of 1200 miles and is said to have fielded it in 2020. According to US defence officials quoted in the Congressional report, China has also successfully tested Starry Sky-2 (Xing Kong-2), a nuclear capable hypersonic vehicle prototype in August 2018.

In the US, the hypersonic weapons are being developed under its Navy's conventional Prompt Strike Programme as well as through Army, Air

Force and Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). While the US, Russia and China are in advanced stages of hypersonic missile programmes, India, France, Germany, Japan and Australia too are developing hypersonic weapons.

What is known about the Indian hypersonic missile programme?

The Congressional report states that India is also developing an indigenous, dual capable (conventional as well as nuclear) hypersonic cruise missile as part of its Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle programme and has successfully tested a Mach 6 scramjet in June 2019 and September 2020. "India operates approximately 12 hypersonic wind tunnels and is capable of testing speeds upto Mach 13," the report notes.

Why Russia and Japan never officially declared peace after WWII

Russia called off several joint-economic programs and ended a visa-free regime that allowed Japanese people to visit the disputed Kuril islands that were claimed by the Soviet Union towards the fag end of World War II, AFP reported.

Why haven't Japan and Russia declared peace yet?

Japan and Russia have had a complicated relationship for over a century. But one of the lowest points in Russia-Japan relations played out during the final days of the Second World War, right before Japan's Emperor Hirohito announced his country's surrender.

The Soviet Union declared war on Japan and seized a group of islands

located near the coast of Hokkaido. All 17,000 Japanese residents were expelled at the time. The islands — known as the southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan — are at the centre of an ongoing standoff between the two countries.

Since then, while Russia insists that the islands fall under its jurisdiction, Japan maintains that they are an inherent part of its territory and are presently under illegal occupation. The territorial dispute has caused deep rifts between the countries and has kept them from finalising a peace agreement.

After WWII, the Soviet Union refused to sign the formal Treaty of Peace with Japan. Instead, in 1956, the two

countries signed a joint declaration "that would technically "end the state of war". The declaration included an agreement to sign a peace treaty in the future. But this is yet to be achieved.

Why do these islands matter?

Apart from being home to rich fishing grounds, the islands are significant from a strategic perspective. It is here that a large chunk of Russia's pacific fleet is docked. In fact, over the last few years, Russia has been increasing its military presence on the islands.

In 2016, Russian anti-ship and missile defence systems were stationed here, according to a report by ABC. It has also deployed fighter jets to the islands, much to the ire of Japan's Foreign Affairs ministry.

Have Japan and Russia tried to negotiate?

Yes, several times. Between 2012 and 2020, leaders of the two countries have held 25 meetings, according to a report by Bloomberg. Things were starting to look up for Japan in 2018 when Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed that their negotiations should be based on the joint declaration of 1956, which called for the transfer of two of the four islands to Japan. But Russia said Tokyo would first have to acknowledge its sovereignty over the islands. Then in 2020, Russia amended its constitution, making it illegal to hand over any of its territories.

"We Are Americans": Indian-American 'Dreamer' To US Lawmakers

The gap between our country's needs and the realities of our broken immigration system should come as no surprise," Mr Padilla said.

According to the Senator, currently, there's a backlog of 1.4 million people who are eligible for employment-based visas.

"Employment-based visas allow participating immigrants to bring extraordinary skills to our workforce, start new businesses, create new jobs in rural areas, and to help address worker shortages in industries like health care," he said.

"But only 140,000 of these individuals can obtain visas every year. Because the spouses and children who accompany them count against the total, far fewer than 70,000 visas actually go to eligible workers. Hundreds of thousands of others are left in limbo, restricted by a temporary visa, or turned away from their dreams and they're kept from realising their potential," he said.

Ranking Member Senator John Cornyn said the Congressional Research Service recently estimated that without significant changes, the employment-based green card backlog could exceed 2 million by 2030.

Employment-based visas, also known as green cards, allow migrants to gain lawful permanent residence in the US in order to engage in skilled work.

"Indian nationals have been hit especially hard because our system's per-country caps do not allow them to receive more than seven per cent of the available employment-based visas in any given year," he said.

"To make matters worse due to processing inefficiencies attributable

in part to USCIS' paper-based system and to the closures of many of our consulates, we fail to issue as many as 92,000 employment-based visas in the height of the pandemic," he said.

Ms Rajakumar told lawmakers that she got a full-time offer from a major news corporation in Houston, a top 10 market, but the same company who saw her potential withdrew their offer the second they heard about her visa status. "But worst of all, being considered an alien, an outsider in the only place you know to call home is a different kind of pain," she said.

Dip Patel, president of Improve The Dream, in a statement, said that Ms Rajakumar's moving testimony shows the urgent need to update the broken system, including the need to permanently end the problem of aging for children who are raised and educated in the United States.

"For thousands of young people growing up with uncertainty, there is constant anxiety regarding one's future in what we consider our home. Delay in taking action will not only lead to tearing more families apart but also continue the immense emotional turmoil faced by thousands of families who contribute to our country and call America home. We urge Congress to consider this and act fast to pass common-sense immigration reform," he said.

During the hearing, Mr Padilla questioned Ms Rajakumar about her experience as a documented dreamer and how a pathway to citizenship and the enactment of America's Children Act would impact her life.

Ms Rajakumar pointed to the fact that it would mean that she wouldn't

have to be separated from her family and the country she's called her home for the last twenty years. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality

occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.



FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

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



Photograph taken April 2015

DESCRIPTION

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

REWARD

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

REMARKS

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

CAUTION

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

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

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

Field Office: Baltimore

Amazon vs Reliance: Banks to start debt recovery proceedings against Future

Future Retail has been struggling to pay off its debt and is fighting a bitter legal battle with US retail giant Amazon

The corporate rivalry between Amazon and Reliance has taken a new turn as banks are set to initiate debt recovery proceedings against Future Retail, according to a Reuters report. This comes after rival Reliance unexpectedly took over some of the retailer's stores, the report said.

Future Retail has been struggling to pay off its debt and is fighting a bitter legal battle with US retail giant Amazon. That battle has successfully blocked a \$3.4 billion sale of Future's retail assets to India's largest retailer Reliance, citing violation of certain contracts.

FUTURE STORES ARE GONE

Future, however, has denied any wrongdoing. But Reliance Industries suddenly took control of hundreds of Future stores late



last month, citing non-payment of rent, after assuming many of the leases held by cash-strapped Future, Reuters reported.

BANK OF BARODA

State-owned lender Bank of Baroda will be the first to take Future to the Debt Recovery

Tribunal (DRT) and is expected to file the paperwork this week, the Reuters report says.

"We are taking this step as a measure of last resort because we want to protect ourselves in this legal fiasco. Going to DRT will ensure that Reliance can't

pull another sudden move," Reuters quoted one of the bankers directly involved in the matter as saying.

OTHER LENDERS TO FOLLOW

Other lenders are likely to follow suit, the second banker with knowledge of the matter told

Reuters. Future Group as a whole has more than \$4 billion in debt and lenders have already started classifying the loans as non-performing assets (NPA) this quarter.

Lenders are also likely to subsequently file a case in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) that handles corporate insolvency cases, both bankers told Reuters. Future and Amazon are fighting it out at multiple levels, including at India's Supreme Court.

Given the legal complexities in this case, approaching the DRT first is likely to help banks attach, seize and sell Future's assets promptly, instead of going after the entire company at NCLT, Ketan Mukhija, a partner at Link Legal said. "It is a very strategic, tactical call (by the banks)," he said, according to Reuters report.

Ocean warming threatens more frequent bleaching of Great Barrier Reef, report says

If climate change continues unabated, the reef could face bleaching events annually after 2044, the Climate Council said

Waters off Australia face more frequent and severe marine heatwaves that threaten the Great Barrier Reef, a report said on Monday, as a United Nations team began a visit to evaluate whether the World Heritage site should be listed as "in danger".

The reef is at risk of another mass bleaching, following three in the past six years, as sea surface temperatures off the northeast coast of Australia have soared to as much as 2-4 degrees Celsius above average, Australian environmental group Climate Council said in the report.

The government's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority last Friday said most of the marine park off the coast of Queensland state had been hit by "significant heat stress" over the summer, which in the Southern Hemisphere falls between the months of December and February. read more The marine heatwaves are affecting



fisheries, damaging species and hurting tourism.

"It's getting grim and it's getting to the point where we can't even simulate the combination of conditions that the reef is experiencing in a controlled laboratory setting to discern this," said marine biologist Jodie Rummer at James Cook University in Queensland. If climate change continues unabated,

the reef could face bleaching events annually after 2044, the Climate Council said. The report was released the day UNESCO experts were set to begin a 10-day trip to Australia to meet scientists, regulators, policymakers, local communities and indigenous leaders to assess the government's Reef 2050 Plan. The team's main goal is to assess whether the plan

"addresses the threats posed to the Great Barrier Reef by climate change and other factors, and that it determines a pathway for accelerated action," UNESCO said in a statement. The experts' report is expected by early May, and will lead to a recommendation to the World Heritage Committee - due to meet in late June - on whether the site should be listed as "in danger". With heavy lobbying, Canberra averted the embarrassment of an "in danger" listing in 2015 and last year, even as the conservative government resisted raising its 2030 target for cutting carbon emissions, which are considered the main cause of global warming. The Climate Council wants Australia to slash its carbon emissions by 75% below 2005 levels by 2030, nearly three times as much as the government's target.



Delhi most polluted capital city in the world, no country met WHO air quality guidelines in 2021

The World Air Quality Report released by IQAir reveals Delhi to be the most polluted capital city in the world in terms of air quality for the fourth year in a row

New Delhi has emerged as the most polluted capital city in the world for the fourth year in a row in the latest World Air Quality Report for 2021. The report found that no country met the World Health Organization's (WHO) PM2.5 annual air quality guidelines last year as it analysed PM2.5 air pollution measurements from air monitoring stations in 6,475 cities. The data compiled by IQAir, a Swiss pollution technology company that monitors air quality, also reveals that smog even rebounded in some regions after a Covid-related dip. The report, based on the updated annual WHO air quality guideline for PM2.5 released in September last year,

found fine particle pollution, known as PM2.5 is a major contributing factor to health effects such as asthma, stroke, heart and lung diseases.

While air quality dipped in India, the report found that it improved in China as more than half of the cities in China included in the report saw lower levels of air pollution when compared to the previous year. "Pollution levels within the capital city of Beijing continued a five-year trend of improved air quality, driven by emission control and reduction of coal power plant activity and other high emission industries. Central and South Asia had some of the world's worst air quality in 2021 and was home to

46 of the world's 50 most polluted cities," the report said.

SITUATION GRIM IN INDIA

The report found that India's PM2.5 averages have returned to pre-Covid levels. India's annual average PM2.5 levels reached 58.1 µg/m3 in 2021, ending a three-year trend of improving air quality. The report states that India is home to 11 of the 15 most polluted cities in Central and South Asia in 2021 and Delhi saw a 14.6 per cent increase in PM2.5 concentrations. "Air pollution has a massive impact on human health in India. It is the second biggest risk factor for disease, and the economic cost of air pollution is estimated to exceed \$150 billion dollars annually. 38

Major sources of air pollution in India include vehicular emissions, power generation, industrial waste, biomass combustion for cooking, the construction sector, and episodic events like crop burning," the report said.

"We understand better than ever before how air pollution damages our health and economies. This report is a wake-up call, revealing how people worldwide are denied access to clean air. Particulate matter air pollution is produced through burning fuels including coal, oil and fossil gas, unsustainable development, and agricultural activities," Greenpeace India Campaign manager Avinash Chanchal said in a statement.

Key takeaways from the report

- * No country met the latest WHO air quality guideline for PM2.5 in 2021.
- * Only 222 out of 6,475 global cities covered in the report met updated WHO PM2.5 guidelines.
- * Of 1,887 Asian cities, only four (0.2 percent) met updated WHO PM2.5 guidelines.
- * The top five most polluted countries in 2021 were: Bangladesh, Chad, Pakistan, Tajikistan, India.
- * Central and South Asia had some of the world's worst air quality in 2021 and was home to 46 of the world's 50 most polluted cities.
- * Air quality monitoring remains sparse in Africa, South America, and the Middle East, although progress has been made by low-cost air quality sensors.
- * Of the major cities in the United States, Los Angeles was the most polluted.

City	2021	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Delhi	96.4	183.7	142.2	80.5	72.9	47.4	47.1	35.6	36.9	30.2	73.7	224.1	186.4
Kolkata	59	124.3	103.6	72.8	44.2	28.4	29.7	24	27.6	19.6	49.8	81.6	104.7
Mumbai	46.4	98.5	70.7	66	39.5	27.9	22.5	19.6	19.4	15.3	39.9	63.3	74.6
Hyderabad	39.4	64.6	63	56.4	46.9	23.6	16.9	12	16.7	13.6	46.7	45.5	68.4
Bengaluru	29	37.1	43.1	42.6	43.7	21.5	14.7	13.9	16.8	17.1	29.4	27.8	40.8
Chennai	25.2	37.9	37.2	30.9	22.5	13.1	22.7	19.2	20.4	21.1	23.9	20.7	33.5

Two days after teenager's drowning, PMC shuts down Wanowrie swimming pool

On Tuesday, the PMC officially closed the pool and served a show-cause notice to a private contractor demanding an explanation over the alleged negligence

Two days after a 17-year-old boy drowned at a Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC)-run swimming pool at Wanowrie, civic authorities have shut down the facility. Pune Municipal Commissioner Vikram Kumar said the civic administration has ordered an inquiry into the incident.

On Tuesday, the PMC officially closed the pool and served a show-cause notice to a private contractor demanding an explanation over the alleged negligence. Santosh Warule, Deputy Municipal Commissioner, PMC, said that an enquiry has been initiated into the incident and a detailed report will be submitted to the PMC commissioner. PMC operates a total of 25 swimming pools of which 10 continue to be closed for repair work. "We will conduct a survey immediately to check whether norms are being followed by the pool contractors or not," Warule said. The development comes a month since Rear Admiral P D Sharma (retd),



President of Pune-based Rashtriya Life Saving Society (RLSS), India, which has been working to prevent drowning accidents in pools, wrote to the Pune Municipal Commissioner seeking audits to ensure that swimming pool operators put safety systems in place.

Ganesh Patole, 17, died of drowning at the Wanowrie pool on March 20. "Our appeal for a pool safety exercise in the first or second week of March was,

sadly, left unheard," Admiral Sharma said. "The letter was written a month ago as we wanted to express our concern and apprehension of possible drowning deaths in pools in Pune as they were being opened after a gap of two years. Since 2001, the Rashtriya Life Saving Society (India) has been appointed honorary consultants for safer swimming in Pune and had organised regular pool safety audits and workshops where pool

lifeguards, owners and operators were exhorted to pay attention to safety norms and pool rules to ensure safety of users... But we are worried about this summer due to lack of preparation and lifesaving skills," Admiral Sharma has said in his letter to PMC. "Now, the death of a young boy has just confirmed our worst fears," adds Kavita Sharma, Vice President, RLSS-India. As per the tender process, a contractor was appointed in

July 2018 at the PMC-run pool in Wanowrie. However, due to the Covid pandemic, swimming pools remained shut for more than one-and-a-half years. Meanwhile, Patole's family members expressed shock at his drowning despite the pool being overcrowded on Sunday afternoon. While the police have registered a case of accidental death, the family has been trying to file an FIR claiming negligence by the pool operator. "As against the limit of 40 people, there were more than 100 persons in the pool that day," said a relative of Patole. "We have been trying to file a proper complaint for two days now," Patole's uncle Ashok said. "We cannot believe he is no more. Ganesh was enthusiastic about sports, used to run, swim and had even won a medal at a local cricket competition recently. During the lockdown, Ganesh had worked as a delivery boy with a local store to help in the household expenses. Ganesh had secured 90 per cent in Standard X," he added.

SC permits registration of BS-VI light and heavy diesel public utility vehicles

The order was passed after perusing the report of advocate A D N Rao, appointed as amicus curiae, who told the court BS-VI light and heavy diesel vehicles used for public utility and essential services may be permitted to be registered

The Supreme Court on Tuesday permitted registration of BS-VI light and heavy diesel vehicles used for public utility and essential services.

A bench of Justices L Nageswara Rao and B R Gavai directed that the authorities should not insist on production of court orders for the registration of vehicles in this category. "We are of the considered view that the registration can be permitted in respect of BS-VI light and heavy diesel vehicles used for public utility and essential services. The registering authorities are directed not to insist on any order passed by this court to be produced for registration of such vehicles", the bench said. The order was passed after perusing the report of advocate A D N Rao, appointed as amicus



curiae, who told the court BS-VI light and heavy diesel vehicles used for public utility and essential services may be permitted to be registered. The top court also dealt with a plea seeking relaxation for sale of BS-IV vehicles in Jammu and Kashmir on account of the curfew and internet suspension imposed in 2019 following the abrogation of Article 370.

The bench asked the applicant to approach the Jammu and Kashmir High Court for seeking the relief. The order was passed while hearing various pleas including the PIL filed by Environmentalist MC Mehta, seeking permission for registration of BS-VI diesel vehicles.

Cryptoverse: Remember when bitcoin was 'anonymous'?

Monero and Zcash, among the most popular, have respectively gained 7.6% and 46% since March 1, according to CoinMarketCap data, even as bitcoin has lost about 5 per cent



Bitcoin just isn't anonymous enough for a growing cohort of crypto users who are seeking greater seclusion. A volatile class of crypto known as privacy coins, created with the primary aim of masking the identity of users and details of transactions, has quietly been gaining ground this month as maturing bitcoin inches towards mainstream finance. Monero and Zcash, among the most popular, have respectively gained 7.6% and 46% since March 1, according to CoinMarketCap data, even as bitcoin has lost about 5%.

The pair has gained 4.7% and 16% in the past week. An index tracking privacy coins more broadly, compiled by research firm Macro Hive, has risen 4%. This could be a blip in the wild ride of privacy coins, which conceal more information about transaction amounts and parties through differences in their underlying blockchains. In the past five years, Monero's market cap – the total value of all the coin out there – has pinballed from \$100 million to \$6.8 billion to \$3.4 billion now, according to CoinMarketCap data.

Yet the interest in crypto privacy coincides with bitcoin's diminishing function as an anonymous currency. It also comes

against the backdrop of war in Europe, a tightening sanctions dragnet and strong noises from policymakers in the United States, EU and Japan about regulating the crypto market. Aidan Arasasingham and Gerard DiPippo, of the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, note that bitcoin is not truly anonymous, but rather pseudonymous, where coins can be held in wallets opened under alternative or false names. "If a wallet can be linked to an entity or person, the actor can be identified," they wrote in a report in the context of the possibility of crypto being used in Russia and Ukraine to move funds. "Their transactions and wallets can be traced."

Volatility aside, though, there are several obstacles that keep privacy coins from being a top-tier altcoin, or alternative to bitcoin, which has a market cap of around \$776 billion. Some major crypto exchanges do not list privacy coins due to their potential for illicit activity, for example. Daily trading volumes for Monero have mostly been under \$250 million this month while altcoin Ripple sees more than \$1.5 billion changing hands each day. "Privacy coins will probably grow. The challenge is

that you have to do a lot of things to make them anonymous that make for a horrible user experience and adds big transaction costs," said Dave Siemer, CEO at asset management firm Wave Financial in Los Angeles who owns some Monero coins.

Tracing the last Satoshi

Privacy coins have evolved in recent years as the ability of authorities to track the blockchain activity for bitcoin and other major cryptocurrencies has become more advanced. "Coins can, with some effort, be traced back to the very last 'satoshi', bitcoin's smallest unit," Teunis Brosens, head economist of digital finance and regulation at ING, said in a note. "Recent reports of ransomware money being recaptured, and arrests made for crypto exchange hacks made years ago, attest to this progress." Large regulators have the crypto market in the sights, with efforts intensified by concerns that Russian oligarchs and other sanctioned people could use bitcoin to clandestinely move money.

U.S. senators have introduced a bill that could give the president power to sanction foreign cryptocurrency firms. The

European Union has also voted in favor of comprehensive digital asset legislation. Japan's Financial Services Agency has said it will punish anyone making unauthorized payments to those targeted by the sanctions.

So.. How's Bitcoin moving?

Bitcoin's movements have been contained in part by the Ukraine conflict and the Federal Reserve's hawkishness. The crypto kingpin has been stuck between \$35,000 and \$45,000 since mid-January, unable to reach the \$50,000 level it held at the end of 2021. A bitcoin long-to-short positions ratio on Binance is at 1.5, the same level it was at on Feb. 24 when Russia invaded. Meanwhile data from Glassnode shows a jump in the proportion of bitcoin supply being absorbed by entities with a low statistical history of spending it. Marcus Sotiriou, analyst at UK-based digital asset broker GlobalBlock, sees this as "suggesting a bullish market structure for the medium-long term." "Bitcoin is consolidating under \$41,000, as the percentage of long-term holders in the market continues to increase," Sotiriou said.

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What are hypersonic missiles and why is Russia using them in Ukraine?

The Russian Ministry of Defence announced that it had used a hypersonic missile for the first time in the war with Ukraine. What are the dynamics of a hypersonic missile and the weapon system used by Russia?

The Russian Ministry of Defence announced last Sunday that it had used a hypersonic missile for the first time in the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. "The Kinzhal aviation missile system with hypersonic aeroballistic missiles destroyed a large underground warehouse containing missiles and aviation ammunition in the village of Deliatyn in the Ivano-Frankivsk region," defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov had said. What are the dynamics of a hypersonic missile and the weapon system used by Russia?

What is a hypersonic missile?

A hypersonic missile is a weapon system which flies at least at the speed of Mach 5 i.e. five times the speed of sound and is manoeuvrable. The manoeuvrability of the hypersonic missile is what sets it apart from a ballistic missile as the latter follows a set course or a ballistic trajectory. Thus, unlike ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles do not follow a ballistic trajectory and can be manoeuvred to the intended target.

What are the advantages of hypersonic missiles?

According to a former Commander of US Strategic Command, General John Hyten, hypersonic weapons can enable responsive, long range strike options against distant, defended or time critical threats (such as road mobile missiles) when other forces are unavailable, denied access or not preferred. He made this statement while testifying before the US

Congressional Committee on armed services. Conventional hypersonic weapons use only kinetic energy i.e. energy derived from motion, to destroy unhardened targets or even underground facilities.

Are hypersonic missiles detectable in flight?

A Congressional Research Service report on hypersonic missiles released in October 2021 states that hypersonic weapons could challenge detection and defence due to their speed, manoeuvrability and low altitude of flight. The report states that ground based radars or terrestrial radars cannot detect hypersonic missiles until late in the flight of the weapon. This delayed detection makes it difficult for the responders to the missile attack to assess their options and to attempt to intercept the missile. The Congressional report notes that some analysts have stated that the United State of America's current command and control model for missile defence would be incapable of processing data quickly enough to respond to and neutralize an incoming hypersonic missile.

Which countries possess hypersonic weapons or are in process of

developing them?

Apart from Russia, which announced its hypersonic missile 'Kinzhal' or Dagger in 2018 and has now used it for the first time in battle conditions in Ukraine, China too is reportedly in possession of this weapon system and has twice used it to circumnavigate the globe before landing near a target in August 2021.

The Russian Kinzhal missile is said to be a modification of its Iskander



missile and was test fired from a MiG-31 aircraft in July 2018 striking at a target 500 miles away. As per Russian media reports the Kinzhal has a top speed of Mach 10 with a range up to 1200 miles when launched from a MiG-31. Russia is also said to be using the missile on Su-34 long range fighter and is working towards mounting it on Tu-22M3 strategic bomber. China is said to have tested a HGV in August 2021 launched by a Long

March rocket. There are reports that China may use this weapon system by mating conventionally armed HGVs with the DF-21 and DF-26 missiles that it possesses. China has also extensively tested the DF-ZF HGV with a range of 1200 miles and is said to have fielded it in 2020. According to US defence officials quoted in the Congressional report, China has also successfully tested Starry Sky-2 (Xing Kong-2), a nuclear capable hypersonic vehicle prototype in August 2018.

In the US, the hypersonic weapons are being developed under its Navy's conventional Prompt Strike Programme as well as through Army, Air Force and Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). While the US, Russia and China are in advanced stages of hypersonic missile programmes, India, France, Germany, Japan and Australia too are developing hypersonic weapons.

What is known about the Indian hypersonic missile programme?

The Congressional report states that India is also developing an indigenous, dual capable (conventional as well as nuclear) hypersonic cruise missile as part of its Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle programme and has successfully tested a Mach 6 scramjet in June 2019 and September 2020. "India operates approximately 12 hypersonic wind tunnels and is capable of testing speeds upto Mach 13," the report notes.

Telegram emerges as frontrunner amid Russia's crackdown on Facebook, Instagram

With Facebook and Instagram being banned, Russians are increasingly turning to Telegram messaging app for mass messaging in a way similar to social media. According to AFP, Telegram app has been downloaded over 150 million times since the beginning of the year, with the official figure of half a billion active users dating back to January last year. An average of 2.5 million new users joined Telegram daily in the last three weeks, the firm said, about a 25 per cent jump from the weeks prior, the firm said. Even though Meta-owned WhatsApp has managed duck from the ban list, Telegram's ability to disseminate information to large groups at a time has made it useful both for independent media and the Kremlin. The trust on Telegram also stems from the fact that its creators,



brothers Pavel and Nikolai Durov, are Russian citizens who left their home country in 2014. Despite Telegram's

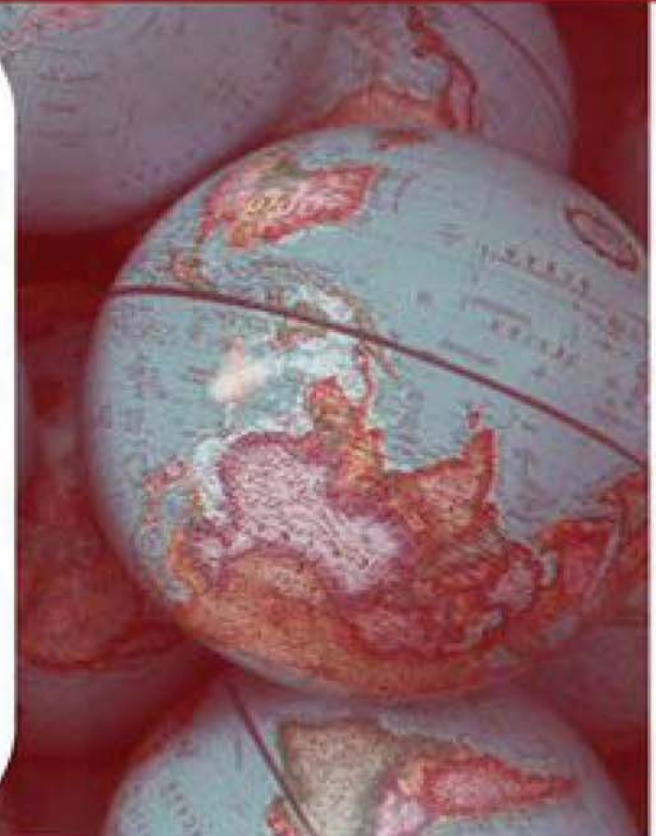
tendonous growth in Russia, concerns over its data security and misinformation still

remain. Telegram's profile has grown enormously in recent weeks, and that has raised the stakes about the impact of misinformation on the platform", Enders Analysis media analyst Jamie MacEwan told AFP. "Meta employs tens of thousands of moderators and huge problems still slip through the net," said MacEwan. "It is unclear how much investment in moderation Telegram can support on its current funding model." Entirely free, Telegram started advertising last year, but with a reduced, highly regulated offering, and guaranteeing that it would not use users' private data for targeting. In April last year, the Russian business daily Vedomosti reported that the company was preparing to go public in 2023, and was aiming for a valuation of between US\$30 billion and US\$50 billion.

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Defining who is 'Assamese': attempts, challenges

State government says definition yet to be arrived at. Why is this definition important, and why has it been difficult to finalise one?

Last week, the Assam government informed the Assembly that nearly 1.44 lakh foreigners had been identified in the state until January 31 this year based on the 1985 Assam Accord, and around 30,000 of them had been deported. It added that definitions of phrases mentioned in the Accord such as 'Axomiya janagan' (Assamese people), 'khilonjia' (indigenous) and 'adi basinda' (original inhabitants) were yet to be determined.

Who is a foreigner under the Accord?

The Assam Accord was signed in 1985 by the Centre and the Assam government with the All Assam Student Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, which had spearheaded the 1979-85 Assam Movement against migration from Bangladesh. It set March 24, 1971 as a cut-off. Anyone who had come to Assam before midnight on that date would be an Indian citizen, while those who had come after would be dealt with as foreigners. The same cut-off was used in updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Why is it important to define 'Assamese people'?

Clause 6 of the Assam Accord promises "constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve



and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people. Clause 6 is important because many felt the 1971 cut-off was inadequate to address the impact of migration. It is seen as a provision that would guarantee certain benefits to the Assamese people to compensate for the 1971 cut-off.

Why is the definition difficult?

Dr Kaustubh Dekha, from the political science faculty at Dibrugarh University, pointed out that 'Axomiya' or 'Assamese' is a contested term and there is no specific universal definition. Many feel people whose ancestors were living in Assam before 1826, when Assam was merged with British

India, are Axomiya. Others feel 'Axomiya' include residents of Assam before 1951, when the first NRC was drawn up. Still others feel anyone speaking any indigenous language is an Axomiya, and many are in favour of extending the definition to include Bengali-speaking residents of Barak Valley, where Bengali is the local language.

Have any definitions been proposed?

Over the years, several committees have been set up to determine a definition, but none adopted. In 2015, then Assembly Speaker Pranab Kumar Gogoi prepared a report proposing that 'Assamese people' mean anyone

belonging to the state, speaking the Assamese language or any tribal dialect of the state, or local language of the region in the case of Cachar district and adjoining areas (Barak Valley), and families living in Assam since 1951 or earlier.

Another key committee came in 2019, when Assam was rocked by protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The government set up the committee to quell the protests. According to its recommendations in 2020, all citizens who are part of the Assamese community, any person of indigenous tribal community of Assam, any other indigenous community of Assam, all other

citizens of India residing in the territory or Assam on or before January 1, 1951 and descendants of these categories would be considered Assamese. No movement has happened on this. According to this committee's recommendations, all citizens who are part of the Assamese community, any person of indigenous tribal community of Assam, any other indigenous community of Assam, all other citizens of India residing in the territory or Assam on or before January 1, 1951 and descendants of these categories would be considered Assamese. In essence, this definition includes not only the indigenous people but also all other Indian citizens, irrespective of mother tongue, as long as their ancestors were staying in Assam before 1951.

What are the other terms for which no definition has been finalised?

Khilonjia refers to indigenous communities. The question is who would be considered indigenous; some are in favour of communities living in Assam before the 1826 annexation with British India. Adi basinda, also undefined, is generally used to describe tribes who have lived for several generations in Assam.

What are hypersonic missiles that Russia is using in Ukraine and why are they hard to intercept?

Hypersonic missiles have emerged as the next potent weapons that have the ability to evade radars as countries rush to develop a system to penetrate these high-speed missiles

With the advent of technology and enhancement of weapon development, countries have moved from nuclear warheads to a new form of missiles — hypersonic. These missiles have emerged as a potent weapon to conduct targeted hits against adversaries, and Russia is doing just that in Ukraine as it claims to have fired two such missiles.

Russia and China have emerged as major players when it comes to hypersonic missiles, as the US catches up and India moves ahead slowly to sharpen the technology. The Russian military says it already deployed hypersonic missiles, claiming on both Saturday and Sunday to have deployed them against targets in Ukraine, marking the weapon's first use in combat.

The US Pentagon has not yet confirmed the claims as experts rush to understand

the impact of these projectiles.

WHAT IS A HYPERSONIC MISSILE?

Hypersonic weapons are defined as anything traveling beyond Mach 5, or five times faster than the speed of sound. That's about 6,100 kilometers per hour. Intercontinental ballistic missiles far exceed that threshold but travel in a predictable path, making it possible to intercept them. Russia says it has ballistic missiles that can deploy hypersonic glide vehicles as well as a hypersonic cruise missile.

The first use comes months after the Russian Navy successfully test-fired a prospective hypersonic missile in November. Admiral Gorshkov frigate in the White Sea launched the Zircon cruise missile, hitting a practice target 400 kilometers away. The launch was the latest in a series of tests of Zircon as President Vladimir Putin said it would be capable of

flying at nine times the speed of sound and have a range of 1,000 kilometres.

Zircon is intended to arm Russian cruisers, frigates, and submarines. It is one of several hypersonic missiles under development in Russia.

WHY ARE HYPERSONIC MISSILES SO DIFFICULT TO INTERCEPT?

With the development of missiles, anti-missile defense systems are also developed, however, when it comes to hypersonic missiles, their extremely high speed gives them a unique advantage of evading radars at times. Two types of hypersonic missiles have been developed over the years: hypersonic cruise missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles. Hypersonic cruise missiles rely on jet engines to reach their target, and one of the biggest components that makes it difficult to intercept is the short time it takes to hit its

target after being fired.

Meanwhile, the hypersonic glide vehicle is most difficult to track since it uses a re-entry vehicle after it is launched into space. The missile is launched in an arching trajectory, where the warhead is released, and it falls back towards the atmosphere at high speed. Unlike traditional Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) that rely on gravity to fall, hypersonic missiles are equipped with a glide vehicle that rides the shockwaves generated by its lift as it breaches the speed of sound.

This speed gives it unique ability to evade existing missile defense systems. Experts also say that at hypersonic speed, plasma bubbles and clouds form on the weapon. These bubbles absorb radio waves, making it a challenging task for radars to track them and lock on to them.

Healthy Food Trucks: Do They Exist?

Whatever your tastes, you're sure to find something to thrill your palate at one of the thousands of food trucks across the country. The majority of food truck offerings are known for being tasty or indulgent. Is there a way to make them healthy, too?

(SAI Bureau) "Most foods you're getting when you go out to eat are not going to have the right balance of nutrients," said Dr. Deborah Cohen, physician scientist at RAND Corporation, speaking with Healthline. "They are going to have too many calories, too much salt, too much sugar, and too much fat." There are some exceptions, of course. Many public health officials would no doubt love to see a few more nutritious food truck options around the country. But they'd probably settle for food trucks offering one or two healthy meals alongside their best sellers. This is what Cohen and her colleagues attempted in Los Angeles, where thousands of food trucks — known as "loncheras" — serve up tasty meals to hungry customers. **The big question is: Would food truck operators bite?** Study encourages healthy food truck ideas Cohen's team found 11 food trucks willing to participate in the study. These few were "a forward-looking group, a progressive group of loncheras," Cohen said. Food truck operators worked with nutritionists to create meals that met MyPlate guidelines for recommended amounts of protein, vegetables, and fruit. Study workers helped the food trucks market these meals to customers, using the name "La Comida Perfecta" — the perfect meal. Food truck operators also received a small subsidy for participating in the study as well as \$2 coupons to encourage customers to buy these healthier meals. Although the healthier meals accounted for only 2 percent of the trucks' overall sales by the end of the study, they were still a hit. Still, even with the extra marketing of the healthier meals, customers tended to stick with "the usual." Given the low number of food truck operators who volunteered for the study, this could require cities and towns to motivate food trucks to offer healthier meals. The study was published online in 2017 in the journal Public Health Nutrition. The frutero outside the school — which competed with nearby ice cream and cotton candy vendors — did a brisk business. On average, the truck sold nearly 18 bags of fruits and vegetables each afternoon in about half an hour. In Philadelphia, food trucks visited local schools with bins filled with growing vegetables that students could try. One goal of the program, which is sponsored by nonprofit Greener Partners, was to teach children about growing and cooking healthy fruits and vegetables. Whether food trucks are selling to eager customers or building an oasis of fresh fruit and vegetables in a food desert, there's potential for them to transform the country's food environment.

Prolonged Grief Disorder: Mental Health Experts Identify the Signs

- **Prolonged grief disorder was added to a key manual used by mental health experts that includes standards for assessing and diagnosing mental health conditions.**
- **The formal recognition of the disorder will help medical professionals be properly reimbursed for providing medical care.**
- **It will also help researchers secure funding to research the condition.**

(SAI Bureau) Prolonged grief disorder is now officially recognized as a mental health condition by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The condition occurs when someone experiences extensive and intense feelings of grief after losing a loved one. In some cases, the grief can persist for more than 1 year and begin to cause disruptions to the person's physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Prolonged grief disorder was added to the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5)", a manual that includes standards for assessing and diagnosing mental health conditions. The formal recognition of the disorder will help medical professionals be properly reimbursed for providing medical care. It will also help researchers secure funding to research the condition. "Because many of us live in a diagnosis-centered society, the addition of prolonged grief will allow those who experience it to feel more validated in their emotions. It will help therapists and mental health professionals because insurance claims can be more easily verified around grief-

related experiences," said Kassondra Glenn, LMSW, a licensed psychotherapist and a consultant with Prosperity Haven Treatment Center.

What is prolonged grief disorder?

Grief is a common, normal human emotion, and a natural reaction to loss. Grief affects everyone differently, said Christina Nolan, LCSW-R, a psychotherapist in New York City who specializes in working with adults experiencing depression, anxiety, and difficult life transitions. "It may be difficult to concentrate, perform normal activities, or sleep may be impaired. There may also be intense waves of different emotions, or feeling intensely overwhelmed," she said. Grief typically resolves within 6 to 12 months, but some people may continue to experience the symptoms of grief and develop prolonged grief disorder. Over time, they may see a decline in physical, emotional, or spiritual health, said Nolan. According to the APA, symptoms of prolonged grief disorder include emotional numbness, intense emotional pain and loneliness, identity disruption, and disbelief about the person's death. "Grief can completely

derail functioning. It is not linear and often shows up in unexpected ways," Glenn said.

How the pandemic affected grief

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a tremendous toll with an estimated 970,000 people dead from COVID-19 in just the United States alone. A study Trusted Source from 2021 estimated that 120,630 children in the United States lost a primary caregiver to COVID-19. That figure is now believed to be more than 200,000. Many people were unable to be with their loved ones when they died or were unable to attend their funeral services due to coronavirus restrictions. In addition, social isolation broke down people's support networks and triggered feelings of loneliness. "These pandemic-related changes may have caused a person's grieving process to be interrupted or prolonged," says Nolan.

Expect more recognition and funding for grief disorders

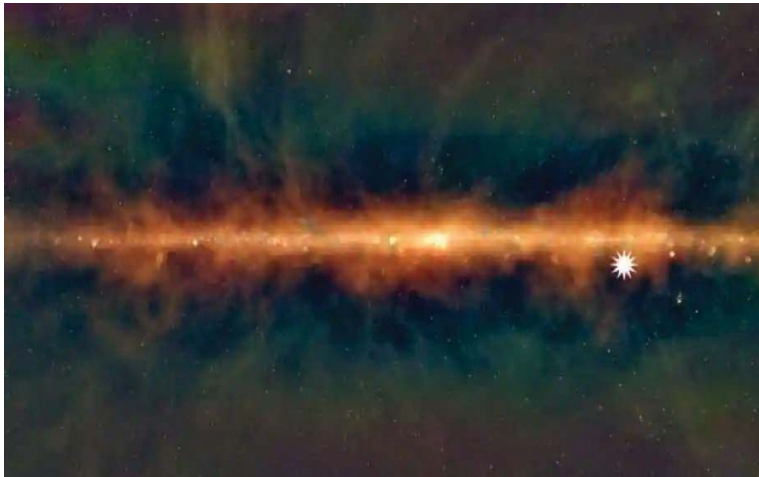
By adding prolonged grief disorder to the DSM-5, the APA has made it easier for doctors treating prolonged grief to be reimbursed for any care they provide related to it. "This would, in theory, allow

people continuing to struggle with grief to receive treatment for it when otherwise they would not have been able to," Nolan said. The addition to the DSM-5 is also expected to help researchers access funding to research the causes, risk factors, and treatment methods for prolonged grief disorder. Glenn thinks the addition could help people experiencing grief, an already complicated and unpredictable emotion, feel more validated in their emotions. "It will allow people to have more accurate language around their grief, and perhaps allow grief to become a more acceptable [and] integrated experience in society," Glenn said.

The bottom line

Prolonged grief disorder is now officially recognized as a mental health condition by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). It occurs when someone experiences extensive and intense feelings of grief after experiencing loss. The disorder was added to the DSM-5, which will help scientists secure more funding to research the condition and allow mental health care professionals to be reimbursed for treating people with the condition.

Mysterious signal coming from Milky Way galaxy could be one of the rarest known objects



Louis, "Since the early days of pulsar astronomy there has been speculation that a rotating magnetic white dwarf might show pulsar-like activity." "The recently discovered periodic radio transient GLEAM-X J162759.5"523504.3 is a candidate for the first true white dwarf pulsar. It has a period of 18.18 minutes (1091 s) and its pulses show low frequency (72–215 MHz) emission with a brightness temperature $< 10^{16}$ K implying coherent emission. It has no binary companion with which to interact. It thus meets the criteria of a classical pulsar, although its period is hundreds of times longer than any of theirs." The low-frequency radio source GLEAM-X J162759.5"523504.3 emits pulsed coherent polarised

emission like that of radio pulsars. Yet its period of 18.18 min is hundreds of times longer than those of confirmed radio pulsars, and if it is a neutron star its mean radiated power exceeds the upper limit on its spin-down power by more than an order of magnitude. This may be explained if it is a white dwarf pulsar, with a moment of inertia several orders of magnitude greater than those of neutron stars. The Lorentz factor of the emitting charge bunches may be bounded from below by the widths of the temporal substructure of their radiation. If the emission is curvature radiation, the radius of curvature may be estimated from the Lorentz factor and the frequencies of emission; it is consistent with a white dwarf's

inner magnetosphere but not a neutron star's. "Nobody expected to directly detect one like this because we didn't expect them to be so bright," astrophysicist Natasha Hurley-Walker of the Curtin University node of the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research (ICRAR) in Australia explained at the time. "Somehow it's converting magnetic energy to radio waves much more effectively than anything we've seen before." "If it were bright enough, optical observations could also determine its magnetic field, spectroscopically or polarimetrically," Katz explained. "The fast-rotating, strongly magnetised, white dwarves would be promising targets for low frequency radio observations to determine if any of them are white dwarf pulsars."

(SAI Bureau) Scientists believe that a mysterious signal coming from our galaxy could be one of the rarest known objects. The paper, uploaded to preprint server arXiv, discusses GLEAM-X J16279.5-523504.3 as a White Dwarf Pulsar. The Milky Way began to form relatively soon after the Big Bang explosion that marked the beginning of the universe some 13.8 billion years ago. The sun, located roughly 26,000 light-years from the supermassive black hole residing at the centre of the galaxy, formed about 4.5 billion years ago. According to a paper by astrophysicist Jonathan Katz of Washington University at St.

NASA confirms a 'celestial milestone', 5000 exoplanets confirmed so far

(SAI Bureau) The number of confirmed exoplanets just surpassed 5,000, marking the culmination of a 30-year journey. In a milestone celebration, NASA announced that its space telescopes helped confirm thousands of new exoplanets. In the not-so-distant past, there were only a few known planets. However, a flurry of recent discoveries has marked a scientific high point: more than 5,000 planets are now confirmed to exist beyond our solar system. In March, the NASA Exoplanet Archive added 65 new exoplanets - planets outside our solar system - to the planetary odometer. The archive contains exoplanet discoveries that appeared in peer-reviewed scientific papers and have been confirmed through multiple detection methods or analytical methods. Planets found to date range from small, rocky worlds like Earth to gas giants much larger than Jupiter and "hot Jupiters" that orbit in scorchingly close orbits around their stars. Additionally, there are "super-Earths," giant rocky worlds that might be larger than our

own. As well as "mini-Neptunes" which are smaller versions of our solar system's Neptune. As far as we know, our galaxy likely contains hundreds of billions of such planets. Jessie Christiansen, science lead for the archive and a research scientist at Caltech's NASA Exoplanet Science Institute, explained that it is more than just a number. "Each one of them is a new world, a brand-new planet. I get excited about every one because we don't know anything about them." Alexander Wolszczan, a professor at Penn State who searches for exoplanets, believes we are entering a period of discovery that will go beyond simply adding new planets to the list. To my thinking, it is inevitable that we'll find some kind of life somewhere - most likely of some primitive kind," Wolszczan said. He pointed out the close relationship between the chemistry of life on Earth and chemistry found in the universe, together with widespread organic molecules, makes the discovery of the existence of life elsewhere only a matter of time.

Get over Tesla, Perseverance rover will now self-drive on Mars

The Perseverance rover will put its self-driving abilities to test as it moves around on Mars. The rover has one of the most advanced systems onboard that allows it to think while driving

(SAI Bureau) The Perseverance rover, which has been exploring Mars for over a year now, is set for one of the most challenging treks of its life on the alien world as it begins a record-breaking series of sprints. The rover will put to test its self-driving capabilities to cover more distance in a single month than any rover before it — using Artificial Intelligence.

The rover will traverse through sandpits, craters, and fields of sharp rocks, navigating around on its own, covering a five-kilometer-long journey on the distant world to reach an ancient river delta within Jezero Crater, where a lake existed billions of years ago. Astrobiologists and scientists are highly excited to explore this location using the rover.

According to Nasa, this delta is one of the best locations on Mars for the rover to look for signs of past microscopic life. Scientists will use a drill on the end of Perseverance's robotic arm and a complex sample collection system in its belly to carve rock cores for return to Earth the first



part of the Mars Sample Return campaign. "The delta is so important that we've actually decided to minimize science activities and focus on driving to get there more quickly. We'll be taking lots of images of the delta during that drive. The closer we get, the more impressive those images will be," Ken Farley of Perseverance's project scientist said in a statement.

SELF-DRIVING ON MARS

The rover will rely on the brilliant AutoNav system, which has already set impressive distance records, to reach its new destination. While all Mars rovers have had self-driving

abilities, Perseverance has the most advanced one yet. This system is so advanced that self-driving processes take less than a second on Perseverance, which used to take minutes for Opportunity. "Because autonomous driving is now faster, we can cover more ground than if humans programmed every drive," veteran rover planner and flight software developer Mark Maimone said. The driving commands will be written by a 14-member team of mobility planning experts that will be beamed to Mars using the Deep Space Network.

OneWeb to launch satellites with rival SpaceX after suspending ties with Russian agency

The British satellite firm expects its first launch with SpaceX later this year to add to its constellation of 428 satellites already in low-Earth orbit

(SAI Bureau) Weeks after Moscow forced the 11th-hour cancellation of a rocket launch for British satellite venture OneWeb from Russia's Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, the company said on Monday it has contracted with Elon Musk's SpaceX to send its satellites into orbit. Terms of the deal with California-based SpaceX, a direct competitor of OneWeb in the burgeoning broadband satellite industry, were not disclosed.

Earlier this month, OneWeb called off the scheduled March 4 launch of 36 satellites from Baikonur and suspended ties with Russia's space agency Roscosmos because of last-minute demands imposed on the company by Moscow, including a guarantee that OneWeb's technology would



not be used for military purposes. The OneWeb launch scrub came amid heightened tensions between Russia and NATO governments, including Britain, over economic sanctions imposed against

Moscow by the West in response to Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine. The British government, which holds a stake in OneWeb, also said it was reviewing its participation in further projects

with Russia in light of the Ukraine crisis. The British satellite firm expects its first launch with SpaceX later this year to add to its constellation of 428 satellites already in low-Earth orbit. "With

these launch plans in place, we're on track to finish building out our full fleet of satellites," OneWeb Chief Executive Officer Neil Masterson said. OneWeb, which plans to offer universal broadband through a network that will ultimately consist of 650 satellites, was rescued from bankruptcy by the British government and Indian telecoms giant Bharti Global in 2020. Eutelsat Communications (ETL.PA) and SoftBank Group Corp (9984.T) are among other investors in the firm.

SpaceX's Starlink, one of several ventures in the fast-growing satellite broadband business, including Amazon.com Inc subsidiary Project Kuiper, has put some 1,500 satellites in operation, providing internet access to regions underserved or hard to reach for other services.

What are hypersonic missiles that Russia is using in Ukraine and why are they hard to intercept?

Hypersonic missiles have emerged as the next potent weapons that have the ability to evade radars as countries rush to develop a system to penetrate these high-speed missiles

(SAI Bureau) With the advent of technology and enhancement of weapon development, countries have moved from nuclear warheads to a new form of missiles — hypersonic. These missiles have emerged as a potent weapon to conduct targeted hits against adversaries, and Russia is doing just that in Ukraine as it claims to have fired two such missiles.

Russia and China have emerged as major players when it comes to hypersonic missiles, as the US catches up and India moves ahead slowly to sharpen the technology. The Russian military says it already deployed hypersonic missiles, claiming on both Saturday and Sunday to have deployed them against targets in Ukraine, marking the weapon's first use in combat.

The US Pentagon has not yet confirmed the claims as experts rush to understand the impact of these projectiles.

WHAT IS A HYPERSONIC MISSILE?

Hypersonic weapons are defined as anything traveling beyond Mach 5, or five times faster than the speed of sound.

That's about 6,100 kilometers per hour. Intercontinental ballistic missiles far exceed that threshold but travel in a predictable path, making it possible to intercept them. Russia says it has ballistic missiles that can deploy hypersonic glide vehicles as well as a hypersonic cruise missile. The first use comes months after the Russian Navy successfully test-fired a prospective hypersonic missile in November. Admiral Gorshkov frigate in the White Sea launched the Zircon cruise missile, hitting a practice target 400 kilometers away. The launch was the latest in a series of tests of Zircon as President Vladimir Putin said it would be capable of flying at nine times the speed of sound and have a range of 1,000 kilometres. Zircon is intended to arm Russian cruisers, frigates, and submarines. It is one of several hypersonic missiles under development in Russia.

WHY ARE HYPERSONIC MISSILES SO DIFFICULT TO INTERCEPT?

With the development of missiles, anti-missile defense systems are also

developed, however, when it comes to hypersonic missiles, their extremely high speed gives them a unique advantage of evading radars at times. Two types of hypersonic missiles have been developed over the years: hypersonic cruise missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles. Hypersonic cruise missiles rely on jet engines to reach their target, and one of the biggest components that makes it difficult to intercept is the short time it takes to hit its target after being fired. Meanwhile, the hypersonic glide vehicle is most difficult to track since it uses a re-entry vehicle after it is launched into space. The missile is launched in an arching trajectory, where the warhead is released, and it falls back towards the atmosphere at high speed. Unlike traditional Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) that rely on gravity to fall, hypersonic missiles are equipped with a glide vehicle that rides the shockwaves generated by its lift as it breaches the speed of sound.

This speed gives it unique ability

to evade existing missile defense systems. Experts also say that at hypersonic speed, plasma bubbles and clouds form on the weapon. These bubbles absorb radio waves, making it a challenging task for radars to track them and lock on to them.

CHINA CLAIMS TO HAVE A SYSTEM TO STOP HYPERSONIC MISSILE

While the world speeds up its development of hypersonic missiles, China claims to have succeeded in developing a system that can track hypersonic missiles. Chinese scientists claim that 6G technology could help in tracking these weapons. According to a report in the South China Morning Post, scientists claimed that they have solved communication blackout problems that occur at five times the speed of sound. In a paper published in the Journal of the National University of Defense Technology, scientists said they had achieved a "complete penetration" of the signal-blocking plasma shield around a hypersonic weapon with electromagnetic waves.

How bank on wheels empowering women in rural India

Women need to have access to financial services and in today's highly digitised world, it is imperative that women have access to digital financial services as well

(SAI Bureau) Financial Inclusion should be the norm and not the exception. But it usually doesn't happen this way. Financial inclusion seems a far cry for many living on the outer fringes of society. Economic autonomy is about access to financial services like bank accounts, loans and insurance. It is not only about financial independence and security for individuals, but it also plays an important role for sustainable development efforts in society.

Financial autonomy is desirable for everyone, but it is unequal even today especially, where women are concerned. While the government has been trying to take a lot of steps to improve the situation of women and empower them, it is something that takes time. The simplistic appearing task of pulling women out of this gender inequality and enhancing their economic status, is to empower them financially.

ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SERVICES

Women need to have access to financial services and in



today's highly digitised world, it is imperative that women have access to digital financial services as well. Digital financial services would basically mean having access to financial services such as remittances, payments, savings, loans etc. through digital channels such as mobile phones.

STEPS BY GOVERNMENT

The government has taken many steps to ensure that women in rural and urban India have digital access and are slowly empowered to understand and adopt digital financial services.

All of this has been done in a bid for financial inclusivity. Financial empowerment will enable women to make more crucial choices and better decisions regarding their personal and professional lives and will probably seek to enter the labour force. This will not just help them become financially independent, but rather as a society, we will have improved physical mobility, reduced discrimination and improved safety.

FINANCIAL AUTONOMY

Women who have been taken into the financial autonomy fold

are better equipped to take decisions regarding education and professional training, employment prospects, and have better access to information to enable them to opt for entrepreneurial opportunities.

There has been a significant focus from the government for empowering women in rural India by providing them with financing instruments that will enable them to have access to the financial mainstream.

BharatNet, Startup India, and Saubhagya Yojna (rural electrification), have

contributed to the country digitizing phenomenally today. Startups are also acting as the perfect catalyst to bridge the infrastructural gap in the country. With fortified digital infrastructure and increased mobile penetration in India, more and more women have access to financial services.

BANK ON WHEELS

Mobile Vans or Bank on Wheels travel to the local villages spreading financial and digital literacy apart from allowing the banks' customer and public at large to make bill payments, withdraw cash and perform various basic banking activities at their doorstep. Created by Bengaluru (Bengaluru) based XPay.Life, the mobile van is running successfully in over ten states across many DCCBs at the district level enabling rural digital transactions. By leveraging technology and offering last mile connectivity through mobile vans and local entrepreneurs, these large fintech companies are throwing the limelight on women and giving them the opportunity to access better financial opportunities and services to step up and gain financial independence.

Cryptocurrency price latest: Bitcoin rises over \$43,000, other cryptos in green

Bitcoin was trading 5.19 per cent at \$43,025 after the US central bank Chair made a strict monetary policy statement

(SAI Bureau) Bitcoin rose over \$43,000 and other cryptocurrencies, including Ethereum, were trading in green. The global crypto market was in a stable mode. Bitcoin was trading 5.19 per cent at \$43,025 after the US central bank Chair made a strict monetary policy statement. The second-largest cryptocurrency by market capitalization after bitcoin, Ethereum was trading at \$3,026.



Other cryptocurrencies such as XRP was up by 6.73 per cent, Solana rose 4.41 per cent, Avalanche was up by 4.67 per cent, Cardano was up by 7.79 per cent, and Polkadot rose 6.65 per cent. Other alt coins Stellar was up by 6.10 per cent, Dogecoin rose by 2.44 per cent, Chainlink was up by 8.42 per cent, Polygon rose by

3.55 per cent, and Shiba Inu was up by 4.57 per cent. "The global crypto market cap and trading volume rose over the past day even after the hawkish comments from the U.S central bank. Bitcoin and Ethereum are trading above US\$41,000 and US\$2,900 levels," Edul Patel, CEO and Co-founder, Mudrex said. According to the market cap, most top cryptocurrencies

are also running in green. XRP, Cardano, Avalanche, NEAR Protocol, Chainlink have gained more than decent growth. BTC has been trading flat for the past two days, and pullbacks could be limited towards strong support, which holds at US\$37,000. The buyers could remain active at lower support levels," Patel said.

Zomato faces heat over 10-minute food delivery service, founder clarifies how it will work

(SAI Bureau) Zomato received flak from a section of netizens after its founder Deepinder Goyal had tweeted an announcement regarding the upcoming "10 minute food delivery" plan of the company. On Tuesday, Goyal clarified how the Zomato's 10-minute food delivery mechanism would function.

"Announcement: 10 minute food delivery is coming soon on Zomato. Food quality 10/10. Delivery partner safety 10/10. Delivery time 10 minutes," Goyal tweeted on Monday. Goyal had also provided details on how "Zomato Instant will achieve the impossible while ensuring delivery partner safety."

ZOMATO 10-MINUTE DELIVERY

Zomato in a statement said customers were increasingly demanding quicker answers to their needs. Sorting restaurants by fastest delivery time is one

of the most used features on the Zomato app, the online delivery platform stated. "Innovating and leading from the front is the only way to survive (and therefore thrive) in the tech industry. And here we are with our 10-minute food delivery offering Zomato Instant," the company stated.

ZOMATO INSTANT

Zomato has said that there will be "no compromises" and it narrowed down to eight principles around which Zomato Instant would function. These principles are - (Almost) as affordable as home-cooked food, highest quality of fresh food, world class hygiene practices, minimal use of plastic packaging, convenient packaging for quick/easy consumption, traceable supply chain, delivery partner safety, and deep collaboration with restaurant partners.

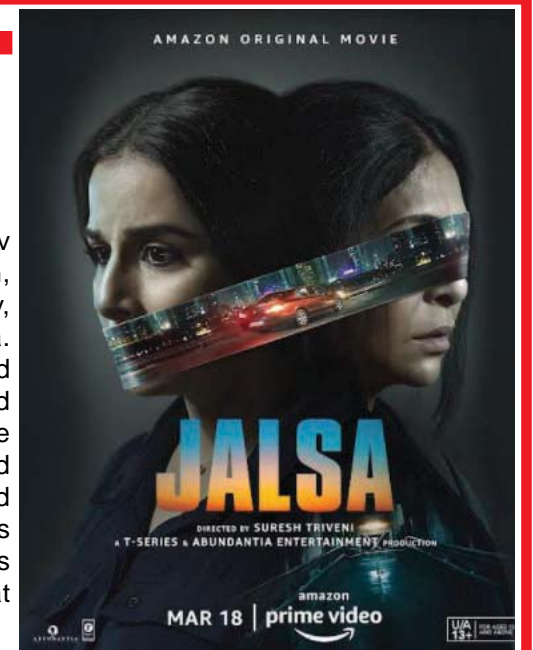
FILM REVIEW

Jalsa: One of the most gripping Drama Thrillers on Amazon Prime Video

(By a Staff Reporter) Jalsa had a highly anticipated global premiere on Amazon Prime Video on March 18 in India and across 240 countries and territories worldwide. Directed by Suresh Triveni, Jalsa tells a tale of conflict through the life of a celebrated journalist Maya, the role played by Vidya Balan while Shefali Shah as Ruksana, a cook at Maya's house. Jointly produced by T-Series and Abundantia Entertainment, it is being dubbed as a "genre bending"

and "authentic" film that is "beyond the conventional norms of cinema." After exciting the audience with first glimpses through announcement and teaser, Amazon Prime Video unveiled an intriguing poster of the film. It shows two women, Maya and Ruksana, one blindfolded and the other's mouth taped with the same fold, hinting to the fact that both are connected to the incident but are bound to either not see or speak about it.

The movie also features Manav Kaul, Rohini Hattangadi, Iqbal Khan, Vidhatri Bandi, Shrikant Mohan Yadav, Shafeen Patel and Surya Kasibhatla. Suresh Triveni has earlier collaborated with Vidya Balan for Tumhari Sulu, and the duo has come now together for the second feature. It also marks the third collaboration between Prime Video and Vidya Balan. Jalsa rightfully deserves to get a global audience as promises to keep you on the edge of your seat and leave you intrigued for more.



John Abraham on Attack

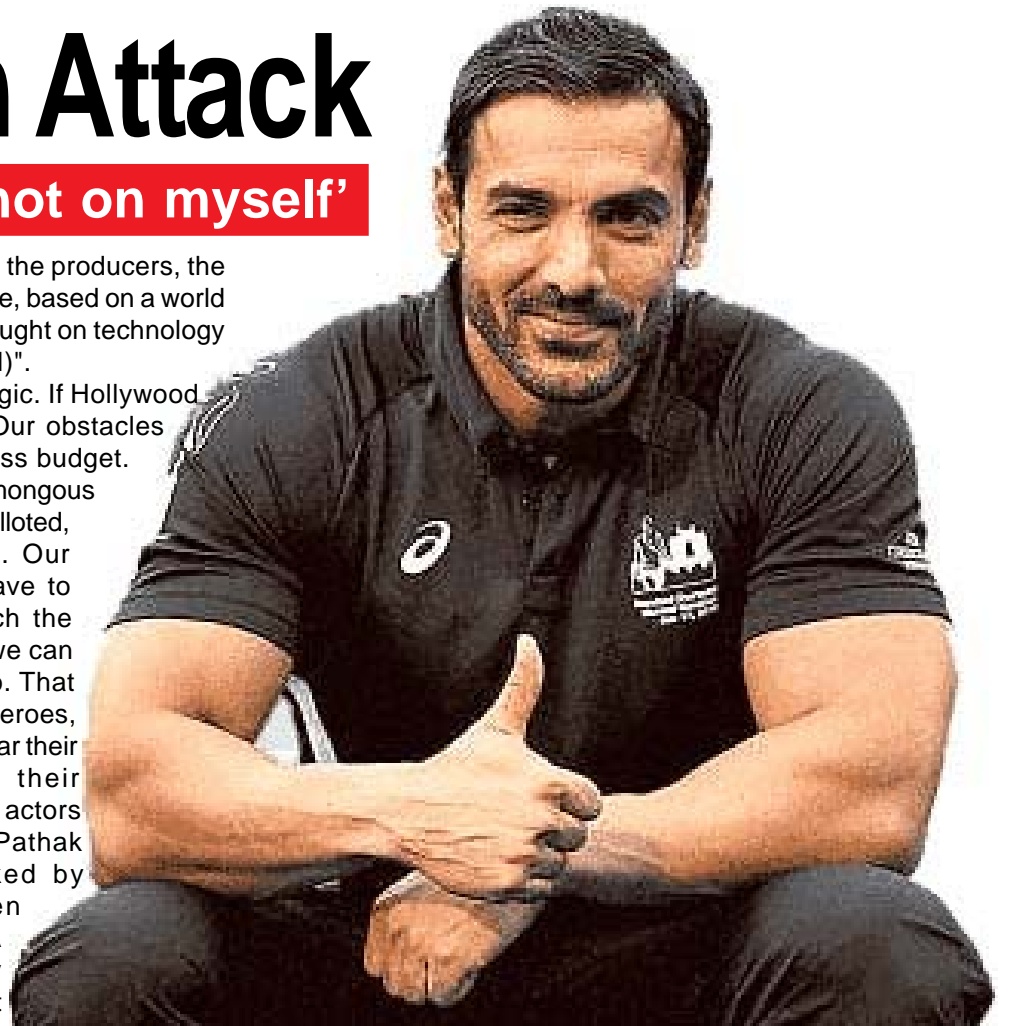
'Spent 30% of the budget on VFX, not on myself'

(SAI Bureau) Actor John Abraham says his upcoming action drama Attack has been mounted on a big scale with a chunk of its budget specially going towards making it visually slick and rich. Directed by Lakshya Raj Anand, Attack features Abraham as a super soldier. The film will also star actors Jacqueline Fernandez and Rakul Preet Singh. In an interview with PTI, John revealed that the film has spent 30% of the budget on VFX. He said, "An actor's fee is usually close to 50%, if not more, of the entire budget. In our case, our VFX was 30 percent of the entire budget. On this film, we have not spent on John Abraham, we have spent on VFX. I'm not in the race of charging the most or the least. When it's your baby, you want the best product out." John said the only way to make a "good film" is to ensure that it's given dedicated budget, so that people come to see something that's worth it. "That's how you build credibility. It's an action film with a difference. Where action, VFX, music, sound design has been done to the highest quality," he added. John said his "inspiration" for Attack was to make a film which will make a mark

internationally. According to the producers, the film is mounted as a franchise, based on a world where "future wars will be fought on technology and artificial intelligence (AI)".

He said, "I have a simple logic. If Hollywood can do it, why can't we? Our obstacles are always that we have less budget.

Even we didn't have that humongous a budget, but what we were allotted, we made a fantastic film. Our inspiration was that we have to make an Indian film, which the world will watch and think we can make movies like these too. That even we have such action heroes, super soldiers, who don't wear their underwear outside their pants." Attack also features actors Prakash Raj and Ratna Pathak Shah. The film is backed by Jayantilal Gada's Pen Studios, Abraham's JA Entertainment and Ajay Kapoor Productions. It is set to release on April 1.



Bobby Deol: I've seen lows in my career as stardom fades easily, but good actors always gets work

Actor Bobby Deol says it is good work, and not fickle popularity, that helps actors last in the film industry

(SAI Bureau) Bobby Deol has no qualms about owning everything that life has brought his way — the highs as well as the lulls in his career. "I have seen my lows, been out of work for almost three years. It's not that people didn't want to work with me, it's just that they lost faith in me.

Somewhere, I think it was my fault," he says. His digital projects — web series Ashram, Class of '83 and the latest web film Love Hostel — gave him a chance to display characters with

different shades, far removed from his loverboy image in the 1990s. And the 53-year-old adds that one's focus should be on becoming an actor, not stardom, as the latter is very fickle. "I want to put in my best and keep working harder to get good work. I also feel that if people start noticing you as an actor, then you have a longer inning. Stardom fades very easily. Very rarely you will come across two-three stars that whatever they do, people will still love them. Not everybody becomes that star," Deol makes it clear. Deol also tells us how finding quality projects is not a

cakewalk and work keeps happening for those who prove their mettle. He explains, "There are people who perform well, they keep getting good work. It's still a fight to find good work. I read so many scripts in the past few months. It's frustrating like, I think to myself, Come on man, isn't there anyone out there who can write good scripts?" And waiting for good work to come around must also bring along with it plenty of nervousness. Deol agrees to this and shares, "Every actor is not working every day nowadays, they are waiting, watching and then choosing.

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