



## The America COMPETES Act and how it could improve opportunities for Indians in the US

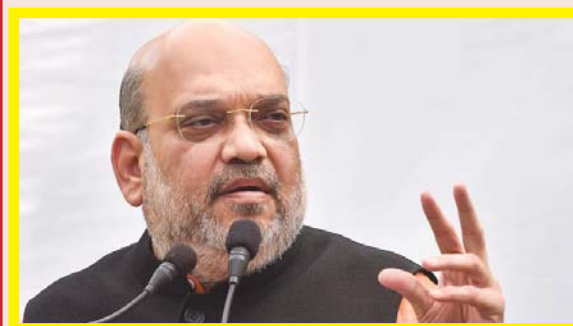


the world with a new start-up visa. What is the COMPETES Act of 2022 about? President Joe Biden, who supports the legislation, said the America Competes Act, 2022 is an important step forward to advance legislation that will strengthen supply chains and reinvigorate the innovation engine of the country's economy to benefit China and the rest of the world to surpass the world for decades to come. The bill provides \$52 billion to boost U.S. semiconductor production and \$45 billion in grants and loans to improve supply chain resilience and manufacturing, among other things.

(SAI Bureau)-The United States House of Representatives on Tuesday unveiled the ambitious America Creating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength Act of 2022, or the America COMPETES Act of 2022 which proposes to open new perspectives to talents from all over

(Contd on page 31)

## 'You think of farmers' interests and so does BJP': Amit Shah meets Jat leaders ahead of UP polls



(SAI Bureau)-Ahead of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, BJP leader Amit Shah met leaders and influencers from the Jat community of western Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. The meeting reportedly took place at BJP MP Parvesh Verma's residence in New Delhi. It was attended by Union minister Sanjeev Balyan, state minister Bhupendra Chaudhary and other senior leaders. According to sources, Amit Shah said at the meeting, "Jats don't think for themselves but for others, like BJP does for the nation."

(Contd on page 32)

## UN chief urges major Afghan aid increase, unfreezing assets



(SAI Bureau)-The UN chief urged nations Wednesday to greatly boost humanitarian aid for millions of Afghans living in "a frozen hell" and release nearly \$9 billion in frozen assets to pull Afghanistan's economy back from the brink of a collapse that could set off a mass exodus of people fleeing the country.

(Contd on page 33)

## As tensions rise on Ukraine's border with Russia, here's all that you need to know



(SAI Bureau)- Russia has placed more than 100,000 troops near Ukraine's border and ratcheted up war games in the region. Moscow denies it is planning an assault, but the United States and its NATO allies fear that Russia is planning for war - and are making preparations of their own.

Here are things to know about the international tensions over Ukraine, a crisis reminiscent of the Cold War. THE US SAYS NO The US has made no concessions to the main Russian demands over Ukraine and NATO

(Contd on page 34)

## Astronomers discover mysterious object in space that releases giant bursts of energy three times an hour



(SAI Bureau)-While team mapping radio waves in the universe, astronomers have come across a mysterious object that is releasing giant bursts of energy three times an hour, as per a study published on Wednesday (January 26) in the journal Nature.

(Contd on page 34)



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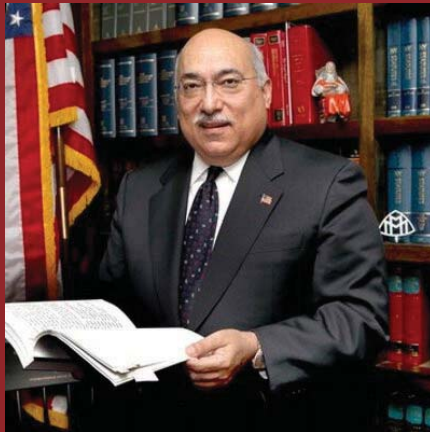
# Republic Day 2022: Democracy Is Free India's Happy Tryst with Destiny

**Ranju joins me in sending our warmest wishes to The South Asian Insider.**

(Insider Bureau)- Dr. Ambedkar may have studied law in Columbia Law School right here in New York, but it was Pandit Nehru's singular gift to India: appointing him to be India's Thomas Jefferson, and to draft India's Constitution, albeit, a parliamentary system of governance, he was able to graft the updated-American Exceptionalism, enhanced by our Supreme Court precedents, into India. Dr. Ambedkar's Constitution is what every one of over a billion Indians takes as her his birthright, and

unyieldingly asks of their Government to honor Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Covenant: a Government for the people!

On September 25, 2021, Ranju and I extended, in-person, our warmest congratulations to P.M. Narendra Modi, soaked with bilateral pride - a feeling he



warmly joined in and expressed with a Covid-modified elbow hug during the UNGA -as he, as India's P.M.: had secured a Bilateral Oval Office Meeting on the same day that our President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., was convening "The Quad," to help ensure a free Indo-Pacific and

Freedom of Navigation, as United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea mandates. I would be remiss, if we didn't celebrate the lightening fast construction of the Central Vista and the inauguration of the hologram statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at India Gate-under the cupola where the statue of British monarch King George V once stood - by India's indomitable P.M. Narendra Modi, aided by an ambition-less loyal patriot, and who is so dear to us, Minister Hardeep Singh Puri.

## Celebration of India's 73rd Republic Day in New York

**73rd Republic Day of India was celebrated in Consulate General of India, New York with a flag-hoisting ceremony on January 26th 2022**



General of India for celebration of the Republic Day. Several dignitaries including State Senators Mr. Kevin Thomas (New York), Mr. Vin Gopal (New Jersey), Ms. Kesha Ram (Vermont), Mr. Neeraj Antani (Ohio); and members of State Assemblies Mr. Raj Mukherjee (New Jersey), Ms. Latha Mangipudi (New Hampshire), Mr.

Harry Arora (Connecticut) and Ms. Jennifer Rajkumar (New York) participated in the event. Other community and cultural organizations such as the International Center for Cultural Integration (ICCI), Long Island; the Tri City India Association, Albany; the Indian Association of Buffalo (IAB); the Indian Cultural Heritage & Arts Awareness Club,

New York; the Indian Association of Greater Boston (IAGB); the Indian American Community in Northern America, New Jersey; The Council of Indian Organizations (CIO) in Pennsylvania; and the Hindu Temple of North America, Queens NY are scheduled to hold their respective events in the coming days.

## Indian-Origin Cop Shoots Gunman In US While Investigating Domestic Violence Call

(Insider Bureau)- A 27-year-old Indian-origin "super rookie" NYPD officer is being hailed as a hero after he shot a convicted felon who killed his colleague and seriously injured another while investigating a domestic-violence call in the Harlem neighbourhood of New York City. Sumit Sulan is still struggling to deal with Friday's deadly ambush and "his brain is stuck on the situation", his mother told the New York Post newspaper.

According to the police, 47-year-old crazed career criminal Lawshawn McNeil on Friday ambushed the three policemen -- Sulan, Jason Rivera, 22 and Wilbert Mora, 27, who visited the Harlem address to investigate a domestic-violence call. McNeil opened fire and killed Rivera while critically injuring Mora. Officer Sulan fired back at McNeil and wounded him

during the deadly mayhem. Accused McNeil, a convicted felon, is currently hospitalised in a critical condition. Speaking to the Post, the Indian-origin NYPD officer's mother Dalvir Sulan, 60, said that her son is "shaken" and cannot get what



happened out of his head. "I'm proud. Everyone says he did good," she said. "I feel bad for the other (officer). He died. We really feel bad.

We're sorry. We're hurt. The other guy is critical and we're hurt," she said from her Queens home. A law-enforcement source described Sulan as a "super rookie," noting that he has been on the job since April and at Harlem's 32nd Precinct for only two months. "He did a great job," Sulan's mother said of her son, who emigrated from India about 15 years ago. "We're proud of him, but we're sorry for both of (the other officers)," she added. The New York Daily News, citing a source, said that the call to the Harlem apartment appeared to be a routine run until things went sideways once the officers arrived. The expectation, he explained, was the situation could be resolved without an arrest after a chat with accused McNeil.

(Insider Bureau)- Consul General Randhir Jaiswal unfurled the national flag after which the national anthem was sung. Consul General then read out the address of the President of India. A video congratulatory message received from Governor of New York Ms. Kathy Hochul was played at the event. A short cultural program was presented by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, which included singing of patriotic songs and poetry recitation. Due to the pandemic, the number of participants attending the event was restricted. However, the event was telecast LIVE through the Consulate's social media platforms, so that a larger audience could participate. Local community and cultural organizations too are celebrating the Republic Day with much fanfare in virtual mode. Federation of Indian Associations

(FIA), New England held a colorful virtual celebration supported by the Consulate General of India in New York on January 25th 2022 at the iconic Worcester Union Station in Worcester, Massachusetts. Dignitaries including State Senator (Massachusetts) Mr. Michael Moore, former US Congressman Mr. Joe Kennedy III and former Rhode Island Assemblyman Mr. Robert Lancia participated in the event. Federation of Indian Associations Ohio held a Flag Hoisting ceremony at the Ohio State House, Columbus on January 26th 2022. Ohio State Senator Mr. Niraj Antani and prominent members of the Indian community were present at the event. The programme was live-streamed. Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) held a virtual event on January 26th 2022 in association with the Consulate





## Two Gujarat Families Who Became "Untraceable" In Turkey Found: Police

(Insider Bureau)-Amid reports that six members of two families from a village in Gujarat's Gandhinagar district were kidnapped in Istanbul by traffickers, police on Wednesday cited their parents saying they are found and currently staying at a hotel in Turkey and will return in the next two-three days.

Police also denied any kidnapping angle citing their relatives.

The six members became untraceable after reaching Turkey on the visitor visa earlier this month, a senior police officer said.

Though there were reports that the two families, comprising two couples and two children, were kidnapped in Istanbul by human

traffickers, their parents back here denied the kidnapping angle, said a senior police officer of the Ahmedabad crime branch who had questioned the agent through whom the two families had acquired visitor visas.

"These two families have already been found. They are staying at a hotel in Turkey and are coming back in the next two-three days. They went to Turkey on a valid visitor visa with the help of an agent," the officer said.

"Once they land here, we will talk to them and find out what exactly happened to them and what were their plans after landing in Turkey," said the officer when asked if these two families were trying to migrate illegally to any foreign country.

The matter came to light after the crime branch launched the preliminary probe into the alleged involvement of local agents following the death of four members of a family who died due to extreme cold while attempting to cross into the US through the US-Canada border illegally a week back.

While it is yet to be known which agent was involved in sending the four to Canada, the crime branch, during the investigation, learnt about these two families who had become untraceable after landing in Turkey.

"When we contacted the relatives of the families back here for further investigation, they told us that all the six members were already found and are in touch with them. We don't

know what their plans were after reaching Turkey," said the officer and ruled out any connection between the two incidents (Canada and Turkey). Following reports that a family of four from a village in Kalol taluka of Gandhinagar froze to death on the Canadian side of the US-Canada border, Gujarat DGP Ashish Bhatia had on Monday asked the state CID to probe the role of agents involved in illegal immigration and human trafficking.

On Tuesday, the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the Gujarat CID said it had written to the immigration authorities to find out whether the fateful family of four reached Canada through a legal tourist visa or any illegal means.

## Indian-Origin Singaporean Jailed For 12-Weeks For Abusing Officials: Report



(Insider Bureau)- An Indian-origin Singaporean man on Monday was sentenced to 12 weeks of imprisonment and a fine of SGD 2,000 imposed on him for verbally abusing public servants, a similar crime for which he was jailed last year also.

On three separate occasions between September and November last year, 54-year-old Chandrasegaran Raman yelled vulgarities at an auxiliary police officer, a Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) sergeant and an SBS Transit station master. He also hurled a racial slur at the sergeant, The Straits Times reported. Raman pleaded guilty to six charges for offences, including three counts of harassment -- offences he committed after serving three weeks' jail last April for verbally abusing a public servant, it said.

## Indians abroad celebrate Republic Day; greetings pour in from leaders across the world

(Insider Bureau)- The Indian diaspora on Wednesday celebrated the 73rd Republic Day amid COVID-19 restrictions, as several world leaders, including Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, extended their greetings on the occasion, highlighting their strong friendship with India.

Charge d'affaires of the Indian Embassy in Beijing Dr. Acquino Vimal hoisted the tricolour at the embassy premises and read

President Ram Nath Kovind's address which was followed by cultural events.

The ceremony was restricted to only officials of the embassy in view of the prevailing COVID-19 situation in the Chinese capital.

This is the third time the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Republic Day celebrations in Beijing. It was cancelled in 2020 due to a lockdown announced by China after the coronavirus broke

out in Wuhan. In 2021, it was restricted to staff and their families in view of the prevailing COVID-19 infections.

In Singapore, the Indian High Commission virtually celebrated the Republic Day.

Acting High Commissioner Siddhartha Nath read the president's message to the Indian community through social media. Performance of students from Indian schools in Singapore was also

shared through social media.

In his message on Twitter, Australian Prime Minister Morrison extended his greetings, also in Hindi, to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

"Australia and India enjoy a wonderful friendship. While we celebrate #AustraliaDay today, I also extend my very best wishes to my good friend @narendramodi and all Indians on #RepublicDayIndia," Morrison

tweeted. Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, in his message to Modi, expressed confidence that the bilateral relations would continue to grow stronger. Deuba commended India's remarkable achievements in socio-economic development and impressive advancement in technologies and innovation, according to a statement issued by Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



**The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday that a cold wave is likely to hit Northwest India over the next three to four days.**

## Cold wave likely to hit Northwest India over next 3-4 days, says IMD

(News Agencies)-Cold wave conditions are likely to hit Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi, north Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Chhattisgarh over the next three to four days, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday.

A "severe" cold wave is when the minimum temperature dips to 2°C or the departure from normal is more than 6.4°C.

Cold day to severe cold day conditions are also very likely over Madhya Pradesh during the



next 2 days and gradually abate thereafter.

The IMD also predicted cold day conditions in isolated pockets throughout Himachal Pradesh,

Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh during the next 24 hours.

According to the IMD, a "cold

day" is when the minimum temperature is less than 10°C and the maximum is at least 4.5°C below normal.

A "severe" cold day is when the

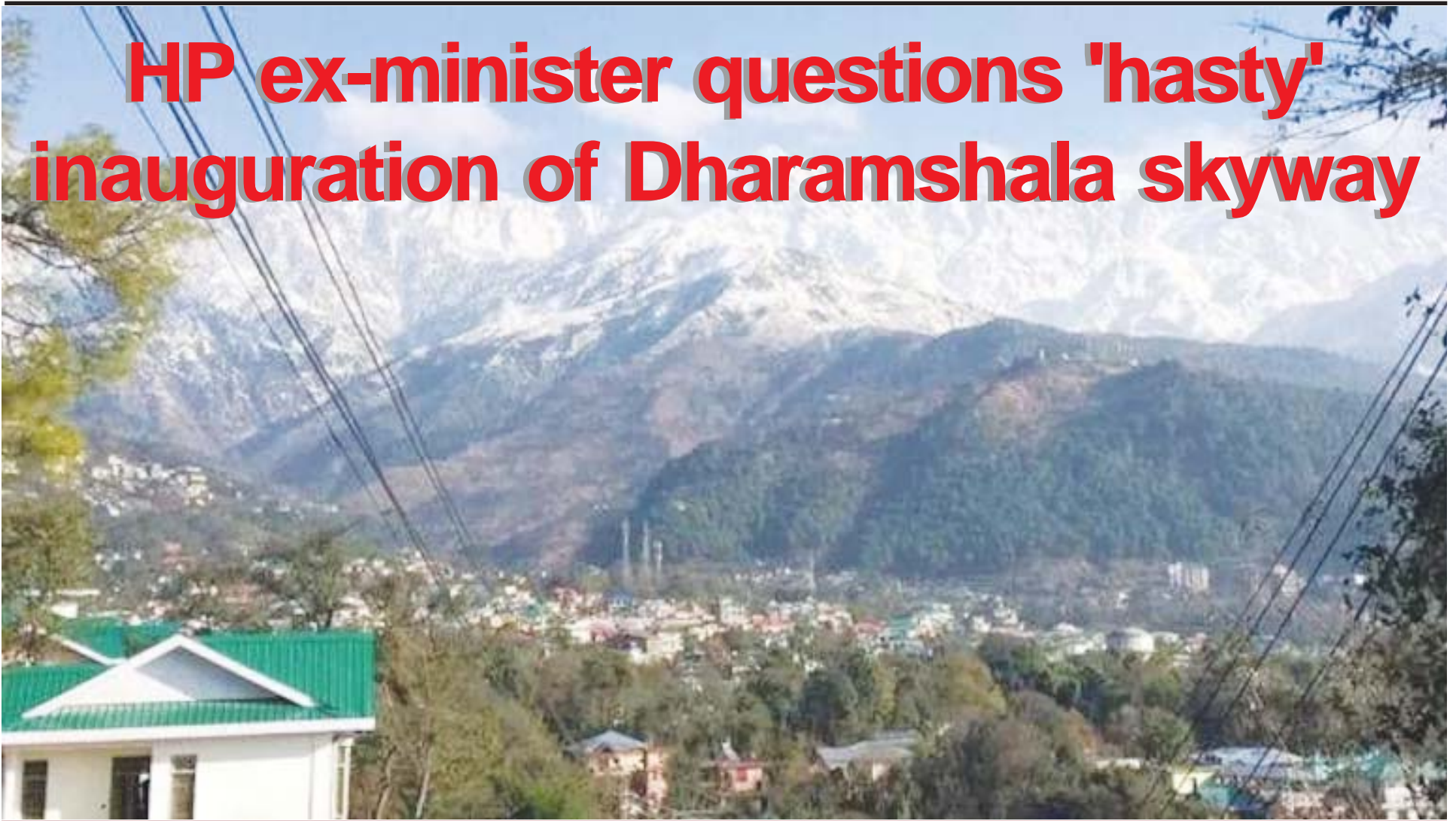
maximum temperature is at least 6.5 notches below normal. Isolated dense or very dense fog conditions in the night or morning hours in isolated pockets are very likely to continue to prevail over Punjab, Haryana and West Uttar Pradesh during the next 24 hours.

Meanwhile, dense fog conditions are very likely over Himachal Pradesh, West Madhya Pradesh and Odisha during the next 24 hours and over East Uttar Pradesh during the next 2 days. Sub-Himalayan West Bengal-Sikkim will also witness dense fog conditions between January 28 to 30. When visibility due to fog is reduced to the range of 0 to 50 metres, it is categorised as "very dense" fog, between 51 and 200 metres, it is "dense" fog, between 201 and 500 metres "moderate", and it is categorised as "shallow" if the visibility is between 501 and 1,000 metres.





# HP ex-minister questions 'hasty' inauguration of Dharamshala skyway



**Following the suspension of the Dharamshala-Mcleodganj ropeway operation six days after its inauguration, former Himachal minister Sudhir Sharma on Wednesday questioned the entire episode, alleging that it endangered peoples' lives**

(News Agencies)- Following the suspension of the Dharamshala-Mcleodganj ropeway operation six days after its inauguration, former Himachal minister Sudhir Sharma on Wednesday questioned the entire episode, alleging that it endangered peoples' lives. Sharma questioned the Tata group firm Dharamshala Ropeway Limited, operating the ropeway and the Himachal Pradesh government for

allegedly failing to ensure safety norms of the project, inaugurated by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur. Also known as Dharamshala Skyway, the 1.7-km ropeway project between Dharamshala bus stand and Mcloedganj Temple Road, covering a 45-minute drive in 10 minutes and built at Rs 207 crore, was inaugurated on January 19 but its operation was suspended on January 25.

Sharma said now that its operation has been suspended, it is clear that the ropeway was not 100 per cent fit for traffic. "It was running at low capacity and had failed the test which was mostly kept hidden," alleged Sharma, a national secretary of the Congress party. "When the ropeway was not fully ready, why were the people's lives put in danger by inaugurating it? Why did Tata's local management not accept

the words of the engineer of the Leitner Ropeways company?" he asked. "Is it not true that the same engineer had put red marks on the main rope at two points before the inauguration, warning the vulnerability of the ropeway? Who issued the technical clearance and fitness certificate before the inauguration?" Sharma further asked. He said the Tata group firm operating the ropeway, Dharamshala Ropeway Limited

better known as Dharamshala Skyways, knew that it would have to be closed to fix the rope joint, which they had kept a secret. The firm had earlier said in a press note that it was undertaking a planned maintenance shutdown from January 25 to February 1 during which the ropeway will not be available for passengers. "A team of international experts will carry out the planned maintenance," it had said.

## Ghulam Nabi Azad's Padma award: Some Congress leaders congratulate, party high command maintains silence

The Padma award for senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad has once again brought the split in the Congress party to the fore. Several leaders of the grand old party hailed Azad's Padma award but the Congress high command has maintained a stoic silence in the matter. Senior leader and member of the group of 23 who wanted organisational reforms in the party, Kapil Sibal, pointed out that it was ironic that the Congress does not need the

services of Ghulam Nabi Azad when the nation recognises his contributions. Kapil Sibal said, "Ghulam Nabi Azad conferred Padma Bhushan. Congratulations bhaijan. Ironical that the Congress doesn't need his services when the nation recognises his contributions to public life." Meanwhile, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor congratulated Ghulam Nabi Azad on being conferred with Padma.

While in contrast, another senior Congress leader, Jairam Ramesh, took a jibe at Azad's name figured on the list of Padma awardees. Ramesh compared the development with



that of former Bengal CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee rejecting the Padma Bhushan award. In the tweet, Jairam Ramesh said: "Right thing to do. He wants to be Azad not Ghulam". Former West Bengal CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee refused to accept the Padma Bhushan award. In a statement, the veteran CPI(M) leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, said: "I know

nothing about this award. No one has told me anything about it. If they have decided to offer Padma Bhushan to me, I refuse to accept it." The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on January 25 shared a list with the names of personalities who will be conferred with the Padma awards this year. As many as 128 personalities from different fields will be honoured with the Padma Awards. The list comprises four Padma Vibhushan, 17 Padma Bhushan and 107 Padma Shri awards.



# Punjab drugs case

## 'Never absconded', says Bikram Singh Majithia after police raids

**Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia said: "I was never on the run... First, the HC granted me bail and then allowed me to file my case in the Supreme Court"**

(News Agencies)- Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia on Wednesday said that he had never "absconded". The statement from Majithia comes a day after the Punjab Police conducted raids at possible "hideouts" of Bikram Singh Majithia, who was said to be on



the run once again. The raids were conducted after his interim bail was rejected by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on Monday. Majithia on Wednesday said: "I was never on the run. I had also signed the surrender appeal

before the court in December. The honourable court exempted me. First, it granted me bail and then allowed me to file my case in the Supreme Court." In an application to the Mohali magistrate on Monday, he had sought

permission to surrender.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court, on Tuesday, granted protection to Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Bikram Singh Majithia against arrest for three days. The court made it clear

that the time was given to Majithia to approach the Supreme Court to challenge its order dismissing his anticipatory bail plea on Monday. Earlier this week, Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi said that SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia was behind the illegal sand trade in the state. "The STF report mentioned that there is enough evidence against Bikram Majithia. Later, we converted that report into an FIR," he told reporters, ruling out any political vendetta. Channi added that the drug racket had come to the fore in 2013 when the SAD-BJP government was in power in the state. The Ministry of Home Affairs had issued a lookout circular against Shiromani Akali Dal leader and NDPS Act-accused Bikram Singh Majithia in December 2021 to prevent him from fleeing abroad.



**Geeta Sexena**  
Bureau Chief (Punjab))

**Gagandeep Singh**  
Deputy News Editor

**Sharanjit Singh Thind**  
Editor in Chief

**Susmita Ghosh**  
Deputy Managing Editor







# Bengal increases traffic violation fines ten times to up to Rs 10,000

***The West Bengal government has decided to increase traffic violation fines as per the Motor Vehicles Act to curb road accidents***

The West Bengal government has finally decided to hike traffic violation fines to reduce the number of road accidents as per the Motor Vehicles (MV) Act. The commuters may have to end up paying Rs 5,000 if they are caught using mobile phones while driving or if they jump a traffic light. The traffic fines in the state may increase by ten times following the amendment to the MV Act.

The Mamata Banerjee-led government had not imposed the fine then hiked by the Central government in 2019, citing the 'difficulties faced by the common man'. According to the notification, fines have been increased for a total of 26 traffic violations.

Fines for traffic rule violation

1. What will happen if you drive recklessly?

-A PTI report revealed that one has to pay a fine up to Rs 4,000 for reckless driving, which was Rs 400 earlier. The notification in this regard was issued by the state Transport department. A driver can be fined up to Rs 10,000 in case of dangerous rash driving if the person is caught committing the same crime within three years of the initial fine, the Times of India (TOI) reported.

2. What is the fine for violating driving rules on the road? A person has to pay a fine between Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 for violating driving rules on the road and Rs 5,000 will be fined for racing on the road.

3. How much fine will a car without a license will attract?

As per the PTI report, a person driving a car without a licence will have to shell out Rs 5,000, up from the previous fine of Rs 500.

4. What is the fine if any vehicle plies sans road permit?

A fine of Rs 10,000 will be slapped on the violators if any vehicle plies sans road permit. As per the

amended rules, Rs 1,000 will be fined if a biker is spotted without a helmet. The offender will also be disqualified for holding a driver's license for three months.

5. What happens if you honk in a silent zone?

One will be fined between Rs 2,000 and Rs 4,000 for honking in a silent zone. As per the notifications, Rs 2,000 will be slapped for lapsed car insurance.

6. What is the fine for not carrying a PUC certificate? If a person fails to carry a valid pollution under control (PUC) certificate, then he/she will have to pay a fine of Rs 10,000 and the driving license will be confiscated for three months.

7. What are the other fines for traffic violations?

- If a driver is caught with a suspended license, they will be fined Rs 10,000, TOI reported and unauthorised alterations to one's vehicles will attract a fine of Rs 1 lakh. -The police will also fine Rs 500 for taxi refusal,

which is a major problem faced by commuters these days.

Citation app to be updated

DC (traffic) Arijit Sinha was quoted by TOI as saying that the traffic police would update the citation app with the newly compounded fines before implementing the enhanced penalties.

In the backdrop of the rise in accidents and to make up for revenue loss in the state, the transport officials have decided to enforce the implementation of the amended act. A transport official told TOI that with the sharp rise in vehicles, such negligence cannot be accepted on the road.

"The new guidelines will come into effect soon. Traffic police personnel and motor vehicle inspectors can collect the fines. The hike will on one hand increase revenue of the government, and on the other, lead people to follow rules," an officer told PTI.

## Tamil Nadu Badagas protest in front of Gandhi statue in Nilgiris seeking ST status for community

A group of Badagas, who predominantly live in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday placed a memorandum at the feet of a Mahatma Gandhi statue here to get their community into the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list.

Presently, the Badagas are classified as a backward class by the Tamil Nadu government. The community leaders have been petitioning the governments and higher courts for many years seeking ST status.

A petition placed in front of the Gandhi statue here on the 72nd Republic Day said more than 150 people from the Badaga community had participated in the Indian freedom struggle along with Gandhi, including

the famous Salt March to Dandi in Gujarat.

A group of Badaga people, led by Baduga Desa Party president Manjai Mohan, squatted at the statue on a hunger strike "requesting Gandhi to prevail upon the powers that be" to include the community in the ST list.

Former chief ministers of Tamil Nadu had made representations to the Centre for including the community in the list but to no avail so far, Mohan said.

Later, police detained Mohan and 14 others for attempting to stage a hunger strike without valid permission.





# Seven die after consuming spurious liquor in Uttar Pradesh village, probe underway

**Seven people lost their lives and 30 others have fallen ill after consuming spurious liquor in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Raebareli district. A case has been registered against the local liquor shop owner who went missing after the incident**

(News Agencies)-As many as seven people died after consuming spurious liquor in Paharpur village of Uttar Pradesh's Raebareli district. More than 30 people have been admitted to the district hospital with severe health issues. According to villagers, late on Tuesday, January 25 people drank liquor during a programme and condition of a dozen people deteriorated soon

after. A total of six people remain critical. The shop that sold spurious liquor was seized by the police and the owner went missing when the deaths were reported. Many senior officials, including the District Magistrate reached the village. Speaking to India Today, Raebareli DM Vaibhav Srivastava said that seven people, including a woman died

after consuming liquor. The police are probing the incident and the postmortem of the deceased is currently underway. An investigation is underway to nab the supplier of spurious liquor. Raebareli SP Shlok Kumar said, "Supplier has sold two particular brands of liquor out of which one brand has been found to be the cause of these deaths. The samples

were collected and the statements of family members were recorded. The investigation is being intensified." The daughter of 55-year-old Sukhrani Devi who lost her life after consuming liquor, said that around 50 people had gathered for a programme when the liquor was distributed. After consuming alcohol her mother felt dizzy and later her condition deteriorated.

Satyam, the 22-year-old son of another deceased said that liquor was purchased from the same shop outside the village and many people later suffered severe health issues. Three of his family members had lost their life and he demanded the arrest of the accused Virendra Pratap Singh, the owner of the shop. Narendra, the cousin brother of the accused told India Today that Virendra was associated with the Congress party and had been an active member at Panchayat level but he had no idea about any mixing of chemicals or spurious liquor being sold at the shop.

## 'Shallow thought': Priyanka Chaturvedi on Jairam Ramesh's Azad-Ghulam tweet

(News Agencies)-Congress leader and former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad's name on the list of Padma Awards has sparked a political debate. Rajya Sabha MP from Maharashtra and Shiv Sena leader Priyanka Chaturvedi also joined the debate on Wednesday. Without naming anyone, Priyanka Chaturvedi slammed the jibes at Ghulam Nabi Azad for accepting the Padma award. In a tweet, Priyanka Chaturvedi said, "Calling someone Azad for declining a national honour and Ghulam for accepting

it, shows how shallow one's thought is towards a national honour. This isn't the first nor the last time that opposition leaders will be acknowledged for their work, please maintain that spirit and dignity". Calling someone Azad for declining a national honour&Ghulam for accepting it, shows how shallow one's thought is towards a national honour. This isn't the first nor the last time that opposition leaders will be acknowledged for their



work, please maintain that spirit&dignity - Priyanka Chaturvedi (@priyankac19) January 26, 2022 Earlier, Jairam Ramesh, in a tweet, compared Azad's name on the list of Padma Awards with former Bengal CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee rejecting the Padma Bhushan award. In the tweet, Jairam Ramesh said, "Right thing to do. He wants to be Azad not Ghulam". Right thing to do. He wants to be Azad

not Ghulam. <https://t.co/iMWF00S9Ib> - Jairam Ramesh (@Jairam\_Ramesh) January 25, 2022 However, Chaturvedi did not mention Jairam Ramesh in her tweet. The Padma award for Ghulam Nabi Azad has once again brought the split in the Congress party to the fore. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on January 25 shared a list with the names of personalities who will be conferred with the Padma awards this year. As many as 128 personalities from different fields will be honoured with the Padma Awards.





## We are supporting India's vaccination drive, the largest in the world: UN spokesperson

**To date, we and our partners have reached some 600 million people in India with Covid prevention and mitigation messages. We are supporting India's vaccination drive, which is the world's largest, said UN spokesperson**

The United Nations is supporting India's vaccination drive, which is the largest in the world, and the global body and its partners have reached some 600 million people in the country with Covid prevention and mitigation messages, spokesperson for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has said.

Stephane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, at the daily press briefing on Tuesday said the UN team in India led by Resident Coordinator Shombi Sharp continues to support authorities to curb the spread of the virus.

"To date, we and our partners have reached some 600 million people in India with Covid prevention and mitigation messages. We are supporting India's vaccination drive, which is the world's largest," Dujarric said.

"This includes developing robust surveillance and monitoring measures, boosting lab capacity, developing response plans, procuring and distributing personal protective equipment, training health care workers, and disseminating life-saving information," Dujarric said.

He said the UN team has worked to develop a comprehensive Risk Communication and Community Engagement strategy,

training over 1.3 million healthcare workers in risk communications.

The cumulative Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in India crossed 163.49 crore on Tuesday, the Union Health Ministry said.

Over 93 lakh precaution doses have been given to healthcare workers, frontline workers and citizens aged 60 and above with comorbidities so far.

The countrywide vaccination drive, the largest in the world, was rolled out on January 16 last year with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase. The vaccination of frontline workers started from February 2021. The country launched vaccination for all people aged 45 years and above from April. From January 3 this year, Covid-19 vaccination for adolescents in the age group of 15-18 years in India commenced. India began administering precaution dose of Covid-19 vaccine to healthcare workers, frontline workers including personnel deployed for election duty and those aged 60 and above with comorbidities from January 10 amid the country witnessing a spike in Covid-19 cases fuelled by Omicron variant.

## Terrorists enjoy free pass in Pakistan: Indian diplomat Madhu Sudan at UNSC



The remarks from diplomat R Madhu Sudan came after Pakistan raked up the Kashmir issue at the council during a debate on 'protection of civilians in urban settings' India slammed Pakistan at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), highlighting how "terrorists enjoy free pass" in the country while the lives of "ordinary people, especially those belonging to the minority communities, are turned upside down."

The remarks from India's Permanent Mission to the UN, R Madhu Sudan, came after Pakistan raked up the Kashmir issue at the council during a debate on "protection of civilians in urban settings".

"Member states are aware that Pakistan has an established history and policy of harbouring, aiding and actively supporting terrorists", he said on Monday. Adding, "This is a country which has been globally recognised as one openly supporting, training, financing and arming terrorists as a matter of state policy."

There have been a number of terror attacks in India-from the 2008 Mumbai terror attack to Uri and Pulwana attacks of 2016 and 2019-where the links with the Pakistan based terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Muhammad have been established.

Other than India, there have been other international terror attacks, including the recent Texas attack, that have had links with Pakistan.

The main perpetrator of the Texas hostage incident was identified as Malik Faisal, a UK resident of Pakistani origin.





**China to release missing Arunachal youth, suggests place: Kiren Rijju**



Union Minister of Law and Justice Kiren Rijju said China has indicated the release of the 17-year-old boy, who went missing from Arunachal Pradesh and will soon share the date and time. He said China has also suggested a place of release and the delay was due to bad weather conditions on their side. He said, "Hotline exchanged on Republic Day by Indian Army with Chinese PLA. PLA responded positively indicating handing over of our national and suggested a place of release. They are likely to intimate date and time soon. Delay attributed to bad weather conditions on their side."

Hotline exchanged on Republic Day by Indian Army with Chinese PLA. PLA responded positively indicating handing over of our national and suggested a place of release. They are likely to intimate date and time soon. Delay attributed to bad weather conditions on their side. <https://t.co/CX7pu2jIRV>

- Kiren Rijju (@KirenRijju) January 26, 2022

Earlier, he had said the Indian Army shared identity, personal details and a picture of the missing youth with the Chinese side.

The youth, Miram Taron, who is a resident of Jido Village in the Upper Siang district, went missing on January 18, 2022, from Shiyung La in Bishing Area. Taron's friend Johny Yaifying, who managed to escape, informed the authorities about the kidnapping by the PLA, state MP Tapir Gao had said.

The MP said the incident took place near the place where Tsangpo river enters India in Arunachal Pradesh.

Tsangpo is called as Siang in Arunachal Pradesh and Brahmaputra in Assam.

## Rail minister calls for calm after protesting exam aspirants burn train in Bihar, promises fair results

**Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has urged students who are protesting RRB NTPC exam in Bihar to calm down and submit their demands formally. The Union minister has assured protestors that the matter will be examined fairly**

As the protest against the Railway Recruitment Board's two-tier exam for Non-Technical Popular Categories (NTPC) took a violent turn in Bihar on Tuesday, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw urged the protesting students to remain calm.

The Union minister urged the aspirants to not indulge in violence. "I request students that railway is your property, please do not destroy it. We will solve your problems. The results of the exams will be transparent and fair," Ashwini Vaishnaw said. The minister's statement came shortly after a group of protestors set fire to a train at the Gaya railway station in Bihar. The protestors also vandalised the station.

Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the ministry has formed a committee that will examine the grievances of those who have passed the exams under

different railway recruitment boards and those who have failed.

After listening to both the parties, the committee will submit a report to the railway ministry by March 4, he said.

"We have to find a solution in such a way that those who have been shortlisted do not suffer, but those who have grievances should also be addressed," the minister said.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the aspirants must not take law and order in their hand. Reacting to the reports of police action against protestors, the minister said that the law and order was a state subject. But the ministry was in constant touch with states to ensure that the matter is resolved soon, he said.

"Police administration is acting based on law and order, no one should vandalised public property," Railway Minister

Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

The minister said that students at many protest sites had already agreed to talks. He urged the students to present their demands formally. "We will look into it," he said.

Protests against RRB NTPC test Several protests broke out against the test on Monday as protestors blocked train routes in Patna. On Wednesday, the protests spread to several towns in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh disrupting train services on the route. In Gaya, protestors allegedly set a train on fire and pelted stones on the station.

The job aspirants are protesting against the two-tier exam as they claim RRB notification issued in 2019 mentioned only one exam. They accused the officials of playing with the future of the students. The issue was highlighted when the results were declared on January 15. At that time, the Ministry of Railways had

issued a clarification in which it said that second stage exam was clearly mentioned in the notification.

Violent protestors to be debarred for life

The Railway Ministry, in a statement, said that those who are found indulging in violence will be debarred from obtaining a job in the Railway.

The ministry's official notice with regard to NTPC protests said those candidates found indulging in unlawful activities or vandalism will be rendered 'unsuitable' for railway/government jobs. RRB NTPC protest videos will now be examined by the ministry with the help of specialised agencies.

Upon proper examination, those found indulging in any of the mentioned activities, will be penalised accordingly. They will be liable to both police action as well as lifetime debarment from a Railway job, said the statement.



# After Sandhya Mukherjee, tabla maestro Anindya Chatterjee declines Padma offer

(News Agencies)- Eminent tabla player Pandit Anindya Chatterjee has become the second Bengali music artist, after singing legend Sandhya Mukherjee, to refuse the Padma honour. The eminent percussionist, who has done 'jugal bandis' (duets) with classical maestros like Pandit Ravi Shankar, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, has refused to accept the Padma Sri honour offered by the central government.

Pandit Anindya Chatterjee on Wednesday said that he had received a phone call from Delhi on Tuesday seeking his consent to accepting the honour.

"However I politely declined. I said thank you but I am not ready to receive Padma Shri at this phase of my career. I have passed that phase," Chatterjee who received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 2002 said. Chatterjee said he would have accepted the honour with gratitude had it been conferred on him 10 years back. "Many of my contemporaries and juniors

**Pandit Anindya Chatterjee, eminent tabla player, has declined the offer of Padma Sri honour. He is the second person from Bengal's music industry, after singing legend Sandhya Mukherjee, who refused Padma honour**



were given Padma Shri years ago. Anyway, I said with all humbleness, that I am sorry, but I cannot accept it (award) now."

Singing legend Sandhya Mukherjee similarly turned down the offer of the Padma Shri Award offered to her by the Centre on Tuesday evening.

Speaking to India Today TV, Soumi Sengupta, the venerated artiste's daughter, said that her mother declined the honour

because, "To confer a Padma Shri to a legend like her at the age of 90 is extremely demeaning".

Soumi Sengupta categorically stated that Mukherjee's decision to turn down the Padma Shri

was not politically motivated.

"There is no politics in it. She is far beyond any politics. Please don't try to find out any political reasons in it. She felt insulted, that's all," said Soumi Sengupta. Sandhya Mukherjee was

considered one of the sweetest voices of the 60s and 70s. She has sung playback in thousands of songs in Bengali and nearly a dozen other languages. Even now, her duets with Hemanta Mukherjee are fondly remembered by music lovers.

In 2011, Sandhya Mukherjee received the Banga Bibhusan, the highest civilian honour given by the West Bengal government. She was also conferred the National Film Award for best female playback singer in 1970 for 'Jay Jayanti', the Bengali remake of the Hollywood classic 'Sound of Music'.

Besides Mukherjee and Chatterjee, CPI(M) leader and former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee also turned down an offer to award him Padma Bhushan on Tuesday.

## Aviation ministry's tableau debuts at R-Day parade, showcases impact of Udan



(News Agencies)-The aviation ministry's tableau debuted at the Republic Day parade on Wednesday and showcased the impact of regional air connectivity scheme Udan across the country. Under this scheme, financial incentives from the aviation ministry, state governments and airport operators are extended to selected airlines to encourage operations from unserved and underserved airports and to keep airfares affordable. The front part of the aircraft-

shaped tableau showcased women pilots depicting women power in India's aviation -- India has among the highest number of female pilots globally.

Proud moment for MOCA. Its tableau made maiden appearance at #73rd Republic Day Parade in front of Sh @JM\_Scindia Ms @ushapadhee1996 and other snr. officials. The concept of UDAN-UdeDeshKaAamNagrik was depicted through song and performance of artists accompanying the tableau.

## FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

### BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

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



Photograph taken April 2015

#### DESCRIPTION

Alias: Bhadreshkumar C. Patel

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

Hair: Brown

Height: 5'9"

Sex: Male

Nationality: Indian

Place of Birth: Kantrodi Ta Viramgam, Gujarat, India

Eyes: Brown

Weight: 165 pounds

Occupation: Employee of donut shop

#### REWARD

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

#### REMARKS

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

#### CAUTION

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

#### SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

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

Field Office: Baltimore



## NSP in Pakistan: Potential game-changer in South Asian power axis

By Susmita Ghosh

Pakistan has released the National Security Policy (NSP), the first-ever for the nation or for any other South Asian countries. According to the listing, economic security is the top priority, followed by military security. The country plans to have a better relationship with the neighbouring countries in the near future, along with an improvement in regional trade with efficient US cooperation.

The NSP, released on January 14, 2022, was framed through an

caught up with two major wars on its western border too. In the '80s, the Soviet approach to Afghanistan damaged the country, which was followed by the US troops after 9/11 in 2001. The continuous war efforts left the country's economy dented to the core. Only the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bail outs are keeping Pakistan stable and they want the reverse condition with NSP by making the country a trade hub with proper foreign investment.

NSP talks about improving the bond with India, while it maintains that

**If NSP becomes a reality, it can lead to social upliftment on a major scale, else the main economic crisis is on the horizon for Pakistan in the impending eras**

unrestricted seven years of analysis and development. The major focus was, of course, on the relationship development with the nuclear-powered neighbour, India. The consultation was led by the National Security Division to frame out the policy. The primary imperative of the NSP was to deter war and defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty using all the national resources.

The original NSP, which is a 110-page version will remain classified to protect Pakistan's national interest, but a 62-page version will be published for everybody. All eyes, be it in the country, or from the international spectators will be on its release, as it will provide a compressed insight on the vision and direction of Pakistan's national security.

A basic analysis of the NSP guidelines shows that Pakistan plans to deter war unless it is for self-defence in case of an imposed war. The country plans to better utilize the national resources for the economic development while maintaining an adaptive military force. The overall cost-effective approach will be dependent on modernization and optimization of force structures.

Besides, the border combat with India, which is a regular affair for the last few decades, Pakistan was

resolving Kashmir issue is a priority point through bilateral relationships only. It offers an insight into the traditional concept of security and policies which are needed to assess and process threats to ensure the defence and territorial integrity of Pakistan. The NSP highlights the recent development in the neighbouring countries. It includes the growth of regressive ideology gripping the collective conscience. It may refer to both the eastern and the western neighbours. It also talks about nuclear restriction, which can play an effective role in the overall equilibrium in South Asia.

The NSP release timing this year is quite

vital, as the country is suffering from an economic crisis due to poor fiscal policies and resource management. The country's mismanagement and alleged association with militants are what keeping the foreign investors away from the country. The policy development will clear a path to the goal of economic development and a good relationship with India may play a key role. Even though the policy has a number of aspirations with good intentions, the fulfilment of the goal remains a doubtful one, and that too, for five years like from 2022 to 2026. It demands radical changes which are in stark contrast to the ground reality. In a country where the army often has a finger in the pie of power, it remains to be seen if the changes are allowed to happen. If NSP becomes a reality, it can lead to social upliftment on a major scale, else, the main economic crisis is on the horizon for Pakistan in the impending eras.

## Why demands for Bhullar's release have come up this election season in Punjab?

**In jail since 1994, Bhullar's request for permanent release has been pending with the AAP-run Delhi government**

With Punjab heading into a crucial election, Sikh bodies and activists have been submitting memorandums to AAP candidates, asking questions on their long-pending demand for the permanent release of Davinder Pal Singh Bhullar, a death convict in the 1993 Delhi bomb blasts case. In jail since 1994, Bhullar's request for permanent release has been pending with the AAP-run Delhi government. Death sentence to life term

In March 2002, the Supreme Court had dismissed Bhullar's appeal against the death sentence awarded by a trial court and endorsed by the Delhi HC. The following year, the apex court rejected Bhullar's curative petition, following which he filed a mercy plea before the President. With then president Pratibha Patil rejecting his mercy petition in May 2011, Bhullar's family again moved the Supreme Court seeking commutation of his death sentence to life imprisonment on grounds of delay in rejection of his mercy plea. The Supreme Court again rejected the plea in 2013. Finally, on March 31, 2014, the Supreme Court, while reviewing its 2013 order, commuted Bhullar's death sentence to life on grounds of inordinate delay in deciding his mercy petition.

### Political 'untouchable' to rallying point

In August 2009, Bhullar's lawyer Navkiran Singh filed an application with the Home departments of Delhi and Punjab, requesting Bhullar be shifted to his home state as he was suffering from depression, hypertension and arthritis. However, the then Akali Dal-BJP government in Punjab had refused to accommodate Bhullar in

Punjab jails. The government also filed an affidavit in the SC calling Bhullar "hardened and experienced criminal, with well-organized international support, and a terrorist."

However, as a campaign run by Bhullar's family and Sikh bodies to commute the death sentence started gaining popular support, in 2013, former Punjab CM and Akali veteran Parkash Singh Badal asked then PM Manmohan Singh to commute the death sentence of Bhullar. Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal also won praise from Sikh bodies for supporting clemency for Bhullar.

Finally, after the SC commuted Bhullar's death sentence to life term, in 2015, while the Congress objected, the SAD-BJP government in Punjab and the AAP government in Delhi coordinated to transfer Bhullar from Tihar jail to Amritsar Central jail. After 23 years, Bhullar got his first parole in April 2016 and has since frequently come out on parole.

### Demand for permanent release

In October 2019, the Centre had issued a communique, on the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, for release of eight Sikh prisoners, including Bhullar. The Centre had asked the respective state governments/ UTs to carry out the remission in consultation with the Centre. However, in 2020, the Sentence Review Board of the Delhi government thrice rejected the permanent release request of Bhullar. Recently, however, AAP's Bhagwant Mann had claimed that Bhullar's file for permanent release was pending with Delhi LG. He, however, later said the Delhi government would decide "once the legal process gets over".



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**Editor in Chief & Publisher :**

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**Editor (Political Affairs-India) :**

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**Susmita Ghosh**

**(Legal Columnist) Anusha Syed**

**Special Correspondents:**

**Gagandeep Singh (India)**

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**Chief Photographer : Vijay Shah**

**Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind**

**Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh**

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**Phone: 917 612 3158**

**editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com**

**www.thesouthasianinsider.com**

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# Why the Personal Data Protection Bill is bad news for business ?

**It imposes regulatory burden on businesses and can have unintended but deleterious consequences**

The Joint Committee of Parliament has recently presented its recommendations on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019. The Bill principally seeks to regulate the use of our data and to foster a privacy protection framework in the country. However, in many respects, it fails to strike the balance between privacy rights and ease of doing business.

The prime minister has recently said that "innovation, aspiration and application of technology" will fuel the country to become a \$5-trillion economy. The government has also indicated that technology and electronics manufacturing will be the foundation of the \$5-trillion economy. Its stated goal is to grow the technology and electronics manufacturing sector to \$300 billion by 2025. However, the Bill as it stands imposes regulatory burdens on businesses without securing proportional gains in privacy protection. It perpetuates an uncertain and onerous regulatory environment. The proposals are certain to undo the gains made in recent years by progressive policies of the government. It could result in the largest expansion of the regulatory state in India since economic liberalisation in 1991. The burden of onerous

regulation will be fatal to new entrants, while the costs will be absorbed by established incumbents. The Bill, if adopted, will ensure that the start-up ideas of today that could become unicorns of tomorrow are stillborn. There are several areas of concern. First, the framework under the Bill is premised on a centralised Data Protection Authority with a wide discretionary remit to formulate regulation. Second, the Bill has broad-based restrictions on the transfer of data overseas that are likely to splinter our market from the global digital economy. Third, it seeks to impose onerous compliance obligations that have little to do with data protection. Fourth, it sets forth an inflexible framework that is bereft of any formal consultative rule-making process. Lastly, substantial portions of the Bill are out of sync with international data protection practices, which could blunt India's competitive advantage as a digital market. These aspects of the Bill require substantial changes for it to not only achieve its objective of privacy protection, but to also avoid stunting the growth of our digital economy.

The Bill imposes restrictions on the transfer of sensitive personal data outside India. The authority's prior approval would be needed for any such transfer. Further, a narrower category of

personal data that is considered "critical" would be entirely prohibited from transfer outside India. It is the authority who is to define "critical data" without even an indicative hint of its scope in the Bill. These requirements destroy the basic value of the digital economy - connectivity beyond physical barriers. It is these steps that are certain to deprive India of the full fruits of the global digital market without any enhancement in user protection. This is completely out of step with the capitalist digital market and places us in the same category as protectionist China.

The Bill also requires large players to have data protection officers physically located within India. These officers are required to be key managerial personnel. The outside world is likely to see these measures as less about protection and more about protectionism.

The JPC has recommended that all hardware must be monitored, tested, and certified by an authorised agency to ensure its "integrity and trustworthiness". This does not augur well for our goal for electronics manufacturing. This is an all-encompassing requirement alien to any data protection law in the world, including the EU's GDPR. The avowed objective is

to ensure against "malicious insertion of software that may cause data breach". In making this recommendation, the JPC has ignored the existing testing requirements under the Bureau of Indian Standards and the mandatory testing of telecom equipment regimes. This proposal is a clear duplication of existing requirements. It constitutes an unfair burden on a sector that holds promise for Indian champions who are already struggling because of the onslaught of Chinese mobile companies in India. This change will impose a testing requirement on hardware as diverse as computers and cars including over 50 million internet enabled connected devices that are likely to blossom across the country over the next decade. This is certain to result in delays and disruption in supply chains. The premise of this requirement of a continuing liability on manufacturers after the sale of hardware products to ensure against "malicious software" is divorced from reality. The Bill ignores the real threat posed by the insertion of such software clandestinely post the sale of hardware through other means. The JPC report provides an insubstantial explanation of these means having even a chance of protecting users.

## Normandy Format talks and how it can ease Russia-Ukraine crisis



Political advisors from France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine are set to meet today (Wednesday) in Paris to resume the so-called Normandy Format talks on the future of Ukraine. It is the first time that the talks-which will take place in an advisory capacity-will be held since 2019 under the Normandy format.

The renewed diplomatic effort comes in the wake of Russia reportedly amassing thousands of troops near Ukraine borders amid allegations of invasion by US and NATO allies. The four-way Normandy format peace talks are aimed at helping end a long-running conflict in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists.

The Normandy format was conceived in July 2014 when four nations met in Normandy, France, to discuss about the future of Ukraine, following an armed conflict in eastern Ukraine that led to the annexation of Crimea by the troops of Russian Federation.

The negotiations and talks were stalled from 2016 until autumn 2019.

It operates mainly through telephone calls between the leaders and their respective ministers of foreign affairs.

Which countries are taking part in the meeting?

Representatives of all four nations, Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France will be meeting in Paris. It is being reported that these nations would be meeting on January 26.

The Normandy Format has sometimes been expanded to include Belarus, Italy and the United Kingdom. What will be discussed in Paris?

The meeting is said to focus on humanitarian efforts and the possibility of formal talks on the status of the Donbas region-where Russia-backed separatists control the territory.





# Why India must engage with Myanmar

Doing so is critical for economic development and security of the Northeast

The military takeover in Myanmar last February, just days before the newly elected democratic government was to be sworn in, stymied the country's tenuous transition to democracy, for which a beginning had been made in 2015. The purported reason for the coup d'état was that the elections were rigged, in which the National League for Democracy, under the stewardship of Aung San Suu Kyi had secured a majority for another term. However, the motivations were most likely the dissonances that existed between the democratic polity and the Myanmar army, as well as China's covert incitement of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who was to shortly retire. The Myanmar army is the most important stakeholder in the country and has a proverbial finger in every pie in the country. The growing popularity of Suu Kyi raised its worst fears about losing legitimacy.

Notwithstanding the unfortunate developments since the Tatmadaw took over, India should implement an unbiased and proactive "Neighbourhood First" strategy that facilitates the Act East policy crucial for India's long-term security and economic interests. A recalibration

exercise for developing a robust relationship with Naypyidaw is the need of the hour. Such a policy should take into account the measures that China has taken to arm the Tatmadaw. India, in all its wisdom, should find ways to support Naypyidaw for its critical requirements of systems and platforms like UAVs, surveillance systems and communication equipment. In addition, there is a need for dynamic economic engagement with Myanmar, to expedite the completion of the earlier agreement on the operationalisation of the Sittwe port, the establishment of an oil refinery and joint vaccine production facilities at a cost of \$6 billion. Myanmar - regardless of who governs its polity - is not only the decisive linchpin for India's Act East policy but critical for the economic development and security of India's Northeast. The latter aspect has become even more imperative as earlier operations that were conducted against Indian insurgent groups (IIGs) have experienced a

reversal, with many valley-based insurgent groups of Manipur forging an agreement with the Myanmar army. The putsch triggered the current political crisis, setting off spontaneous riots within the country. This has since metamorphosed into a large-scale civil disobedience movement and is being brutally suppressed by the security forces. The unfolding tragedy has been criticised globally and has tarnished the image of the Tatmadaw. The visit by India's Foreign Secretary to Myanmar in the last week of December 2021 was significant. It conveyed the message that India, notwithstanding its commitment to democracy, is amenable to conduct business with the country, regardless of who

is in the seat of power. It was also the first visit by a senior official from the liberal world and to that end, it has set the stage for rapprochement and dialogue with the junta. India has the singular advantage of acceptability from both factions in Myanmar and it is, therefore, imperative that it takes the lead in engaging with the ruling military leadership, to stop the highhandedness that is being exhibited by security forces against the civilian population and also kick-start the process of peace and stability in the country. India also needs to proactively employ the existing "people-to-people" goodwill and proximate ties between the two armies. The joint operations that were undertaken by the security forces to flush out the IIGs billeted in Myanmar's Sagaing division attest to the fact. Reports that suggest that the military junta has entered an accord with these insurgent groups, in order to use them to quell the internal strife, are disturbing. Although the agreement seems to be a marriage

of convenience, it seems to have emboldened the IIGs. The attack on the Assam Rifles in Manipur's Churachandpur, could in all probability be a manifestation of such a development. The humiliation which China faced in Eastern Ladakh has driven it to adopt a different modus operandi. To that end, active Chinese interest seems to be gearing itself towards fuelling insurgency in the Northeast. Indeed, an inimical China could, in collusion with its all-weather ally, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, sow seeds of discord in a milieu that is gradually transforming itself into India's growth engine. Ill-fated episodes, such as the killings of civilians in Mon, Nagaland, could be raked up in order to retard the integration process that is actively underway in the region. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance for India to positively engage Naypyidaw and stave off attempts to exploit Myanmar by countries inimical to India's growth. Any ambiguity or delay in India's constructive engagement with Myanmar would only serve the interests of anti-India forces.

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# Helping Indian economy down the road to recovery

**An accommodative stance on public spending in budget holds key to economic revival**

As per the recent GDP estimates, the Indian economy will grow at 9.2 per cent in 2021-22. However, this is lower than the Reserve Bank of India's estimate of 9.5 per cent made in December last year. The nominal GDP is estimated to grow at 17.6 per cent. These GDP estimates published ahead of the Union budget 2022-23 are significant as they will be used for fiscal projections. The economy is expected to recover to its pre-Covid level by the end of this fiscal year. The country's growth trajectory will, however, largely depend on the government's fiscal policy that must account for the limitations of the monetary policy in triggering a recovery. The central bank has adopted a "whatever it takes" stance to deal with the pandemic. The status quo has been maintained on key policy rates over several monetary policy committee (MPC) decisions. Though the RBI has not yet "formally" announced any "normalisation procedure", it is absorbing excess liquidity through raising the cut-off yield rate of VRRR (Variable Rate Reverse Repo) and curtailing the G-sec acquisition programme. As Joseph Stiglitz and Hamid Rashid have pointed out in their article, "Which stimulus works?", the liquidity-related stimulus policies implemented so far have had a low multiplier effect. This also implies that credit-related policies alone cannot lead a country out of the macroeconomic crisis. However, absorbing the excess liquidity that was injected as part of the pandemic response to stimulate the economy is necessary as there is the possibility of an increase in non-performing assets (NPAs). There is mounting pressure on the RBI/MPC to increase the interest rates against the backdrop of taper tantrum and the possible interest rate hikes by the US Fed to prevent a capital flight. Globally, central banks have started increasing interest rates. However, no firm decision has been taken in India as an increase in the rate can affect the recovery. Inflationary pressures are also mounting. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation has risen to a record high of 13.56 per cent in December 2021 as per the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's data. At 5.59 per cent in December 2021, the Consumer Price Index inflation, though within the comfort zone of the inflation-targeting framework of 4 per cent with a band of plus/minus 2 per cent, is closer to the framework's upper threshold. Given these macroeconomic uncertainties, maintaining an accommodative fiscal policy stance in the upcoming Union budget is crucial for a sustainable recovery. The fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP is expected to decline from 9.5 per cent in 2020-21 to 6.8 per cent in 2021-22. The RBI's estimates suggest that revenue deficit pre-empted about 70 per cent of the gross fiscal deficit during the period 2018-19 to 2019-20, which increased further to 79 per cent in 2020-21 (RE) and 76 per cent in 2021-22 (BE). Thus, any attempt at fiscal consolidation at this juncture through compression in capital expenditure can adversely affect economic growth. Public investment in infrastructure is a major growth driver. Bringing down the fiscal deficit to threshold levels can be detrimental to the recovery. The plausible "fiscal risks" arising from mounting public debt and deficits need to be tackled with a medium-term roadmap of fiscal consolidation, as an immediate deficit reduction can affect the recovery process. Considering that the impact of a credit-linked stimulus on the economy is limited, the significance of fiscal dominance cannot be underestimated. An accommodative fiscal stance to nurture recovery is critical at this juncture.





# Why India needs a single agency to guard its borders ?

***A national border guard, reporting to the army, will enhance border security***

For the last few years, along with usurping its neighbours' territories, starting with Doklam and followed by the Galwan crisis, China has escalated armed activities resulting in enhanced cross-border infiltration and armed intrusions. Similarly, the continued Pakistan-backed infiltration of terrorists poses fresh challenges to India.

Two recent developments initiated by China have made our borders more vulnerable. China's Land Border Law (LBL) will enhance Beijing's aggressive posture and is aimed at resolving border disputes on its terms. Equally alarming is the move to build 628 "Xiaokang model border defence villages" along the 3,488 km Line of Actual Control (LAC), which is conceived as a tactic to consolidate Chinese claims over

disputed areas and garner local support. Additionally, these villages are capable of acting as forward assembly and administrative areas during hostilities. Two villages have already come up in the disputed area across Arunachal Pradesh. These developments warrant a comprehensive review of border management to ensure the all-weather security of our borders. India shares land borders with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, which stretch approximately 15,106 km. In addition, we have an approximately 3,323 km-long LoC with Pakistan, which further extends to the rechristened 110 km stretch of "Actual Ground Position Line" (AGPL) dividing the Siachen glacier region. Further east, we have the 3,488 km LAC with China. We share maritime boundaries with Sri Lanka,

Maldives, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar and Indonesia; we have a 7,683 km coastline and an approximately 2 million sq km exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This makes India's task more complex than most other countries. This complexity is accentuated by the fact that along with the army, we have multiple other security agencies - the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) and the Paramilitary Forces (PMF) - sharing the responsibility. While the army is deployed along the LoC and AGPL, the Border Security Force (BSF) looks after the international border with Pakistan and Bangladesh. Guarding the LAC has been assigned to the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Assam Rifles. The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) is responsible for guarding the borders with Nepal and Bhutan. The Assam Rifles

looks after our border with Myanmar. In a nutshell, in addition to the army, we have four agencies guarding borders with six neighbours. Conversely, maritime borders are guarded by a single agency - the Coast Guard.

Most countries have raised specialised and dedicated armed bodies for border security. For example, Iran has the Border Guard Command, Italy has the Border Police Service, Russia has created a Border Guard Service, whereas in the US, it is under Homeland Security. Closer home, in China, it is the People's Armed Police, while Pakistan has a Frontier Corps for its western border and the Rangers looking after the Indo-Pak Border. Most of these countries, based on threat perception and for better combat cohesion, have placed these

organisations under the command of the armed forces. In India, we have unwieldy arrangements. As a result, there is a lack of a coherent policy on training, planning and the conduct of guarding operations among various outfits. Overall coordination is also affected. Going by the instances along the western border, our adversary has often escalated violations by resorting to the prolonged use of military resources. Similarly, their modus operandi has also undergone a qualitative change whereby they have buttressed border security by co-opting military battle drills and sub-unit tactics such as sniping, launching raids and ambushes on the LoC/international border by deploying regular troops. Chinese provocations along the LAC are military operations. Clearly, the peace-time scenario is now by and large militarised.

In this scenario, India needs a single security agency adequately equipped, suitably armed and trained in advanced military drills and sub-unit tactics to guard our borders. The manpower and infrastructure should be created by pooling and merging the resources of the CAPF and Assam Rifles. Further, to augment the battle efficiency, a fixed percentage of manpower, including the officer cadre, should be drawn on deputation from the army. The proposed outfit, let's call it the National Border Guard, (NBG), should have the explicit mandate to effectively retaliate against cross-border transgressions and stabilise the situation till the operations are taken over by the armed forces. To ensure the desired training and operational standards, the NBG should be designated as a paramilitary force under the Ministry of Defence and operate under the army. Finally, a collateral spin-off - an opportunity to prune the bulky CAPF into a cohesive, lean and efficient force. The ITBP and the SSB should be fully merged into the new outfit; the BSF and CRPF still have important internal security duties and can be partially merged. The reorganised Assam Rifles too should retain its role of conducting counter-insurgency operations and act as a reserve for the army for conventional operations.





# Lesson from Air India sale: Do more by doing less

***The government's creativity and persistence in divesting the national carrier must be replicated with most of the remaining 360+ central PSUs***

In the 1950s, first-time parliamentarian Atal Bihari Vajpayee asked about the Ashok hotel, then being constructed in Delhi: Why was the government building a five-star hotel and not a hospital? The standard socialist ideological response of inadequate private capacity was inapplicable; Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata had set up Mumbai's magnificent Taj Mahal hotel in 1903. Prime Minister Nehru replied that hospitals would be built from the profits earned by the luxury hotel. But Vajpayee's substantive question was about strategy, the trade-offs that reconcile unlimited aspirations with limited resources. Air India's sale is important for three reasons - priorities, resources, mindset - and is a template for the Indian state to do more by doing less. First, priorities. If corporate strategy is the art of creating unfair legal advantages, no government can run hotels, automotive or steel companies competitively. Public commercial enterprises have unfair disadvantages in human resources. Air India had 12 trade unions, employees per plane

were double global standards, and employee cost was an abnormal 20 per cent of revenues. Also, if commercial activity by the state generated prosperity, then Pakistan or North Korea would be thriving economies. The state's core job - security, primary healthcare and education, research funding, justice delivery, etc - suffered after Independence because scarce public resources were diverted to doing things that the private sector could do better. Air India's sale represents a welcome shift in policy. Second, resources. In 1953, the Hungarian economist Janos Kornai warned that state sector firms indulge in "investment hunger" and don't fear losses because they know they will be bailed out. Around the same time, Air India cost the government only Rs 2.5 crore to buy, but it has incinerated Rs 1.1 lakh crore since 2009 (this could fund 15 years of school mid-day meals or be used to set up 660 medical colleges). Kornai termed this excessive money appetite as "soft" budget constraints. The Supreme Court agreed when it described Air India's 2007 purchase of 111 planes for Rs

67,000 crore as "unnecessary". Air India's nationalisation cost about Rs 20 crore in losses per day and its monopoly caused a 25-year delay in India becoming the third-largest civil aviation market. The government's creativity and persistence in divesting Air India must be replicated with most of the remaining 360-plus central PSUs. In parallel, with state government finances also ravaged by the pandemic, states privatising over 1,500 poorly run state PSUs could ease fiscal woes. Federalism is also about being responsible with public funds provided by taxpayers and devolved by the Union government. And third, the mindset. The 1970s government's belief in its omnipotence is captured by the PMO bureaucrat PN Haksar's response to an application for private scooter capacity expansion - reject it and set up Scooters India (another misadventure). The command, control and conquer mindset of the 1955 Avadi resolution - century-old second-hand ideas of a dead German guy - ignored our folk wisdom of jahaan raja

vyapaari, vahaan praja bhikaari. Who is responsible for Air India's capital bonfire? Politicians, bureaucrats, managers, or workers? Unfortunately, public sector governance mirrors Agatha Christie's Murder On The Orient Express - if everybody did something, then nobody can be held accountable. Counterintuitively, many individuals involved in the Air India disaster went on to greater career heights because of performance feedback mechanisms that value visibility, perception, and silence over tangible outcomes. The "fatal conceit" represented by Air India's seven-decade tragedy suggests we need better role balancing between the three pillars of team India - private, public, and nonprofits. Or what poet Brij Narayan Chakbast called anasir mein zahur-e-tarteel (orderliness among elements). No civil servant running Air India could deliver the "tone from the top" that JRD Tata did. An employee recalls "JRD would walk the aircraft, checking furnishings for stains, toilets for cleanliness, curtains for fraying, and windows for dust".

**Thich Nhat Hanh  
taught us to live  
in the moment**



When we look at a chair, we see the wood, but we fail to observe the tree, the forest, the carpenter, or our own mind. When we meditate on it, we can see the entire universe in all its inter-woven and interdependent relations in the chair."

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Am I capable of invoking Thich Nhat Hanh - the Buddhist monk, who died on January 22, and whose engaged religiosity sought to illumine our consciousness, and inspire us to live with mindfulness and the art of deep listening? I ask this question because I often fear that the age we live in - techno-capitalism with its unlimited greed, militant nationalism with its inherent brute instincts - has made me incapable of living with love, peace and meditative calmness. I never visited Plum Village in France - the illuminating space that used to attract many modernists so that they could heal their wounded selves through his lessons of wisdom. However, over the years, Thich Nhat Hanh's books became my intimate companions. Neither Rene Descartes nor Karl Marx, neither Sigmund Freud nor Jean Paul Sartre could deprive me of the joy of his books. I forgot the "methodology" of social sciences, and I began to sing with him: Breathing in, I know I am alive. Breathing out, I smile at life. Just sitting there and enjoying our in-breath and out-breath is already happiness. We are alive, and that is worthy of celebration. This celebration does by no means indicate that we remain indifferent to the world - the violent world with hunger, malnutrition, war and terrorism. It would not be wrong to say that the monk who felt and experienced the violence of the Vietnam War gave us the lessons of engaged Buddhism - the quest for ending violence and moving towards a compassionate world. He was truly an apostle of peace.





# The consequences of an ill-considered green strategy

**Cheap and reliable energy sources should not be abandoned until the alternatives have been stringently stress tested**

Europe's push for renewable energy at the cost of conventional fuel may end up causing a global food crisis. Since August 2021, Western Europe has faced a problem with renewable energy - the wind doesn't always blow when needed and the sun doesn't always shine. Countries such as UK, Spain and Germany are relying more on natural gas to make up the electricity shortfall, causing a crisis that will be felt worldwide.

What happens when renewable energy doesn't deliver the goods, and rich economies scramble to buy gas to make up the shortfall? The world is discovering now. Commodity markets across the world operate on a balance of demand and supply - even seemingly "small" changes in either side of a few percentage points can push the prices up or down sharply. Europe's sudden appetite for natural gas has pushed up the prices of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), the form in which gas gets traded globally. The LNG price published by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (Australia is one of the leading global LNG exporters) is at US \$30/mmbtu in January 2022 as against a long-term average of \$7-8/mmbtu. Higher gas prices have pushed up energy bills for households and are expected to impact household spending and consumption as well.

The sudden dependence on natural gas during winter has also made European countries wary of upsetting Russia amidst the Ukraine conflict. Some European observers are blaming Russia for the high gas prices and for using its gas supplies as geopolitical leverage - the actual cause of the problem is underinvestment by European governments in reliable energy sources. Natural gas is used to produce urea - if gas prices go up, fertiliser also becomes expensive. Urea prices are about three times the level of where they were a year ago. Expensive fertiliser means more expensive food - that will hurt the world's poor disproportionately. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) food price index is already at a 10-year high. Some poor and middle-income countries are already starting to face problems of fertiliser availability - there are reports from several Indian states as well. The impact of expensive fertiliser will be felt some months down the line as expensive fertiliser and reduced harvests push up food prices. India is relatively less affected as the share of natural gas in the country's energy mix is low but will still face problems due to high food prices. The food inflation will come at a time when the ongoing pandemic has disproportionately hurt lower income groups worldwide. In 2007-

08, when oil prices were high, there was a push to use "biofuels" led by the US and Europe. Land was diverted to cultivate crops that could be converted to ethanol, leaving less for food crops. The effects of the 2008 food price crisis were felt around the world, especially by the poor. High price of food was one of the proximate causes of political unrest in the Arab world in 2011 - Libya and Syria continue to feel its aftereffects.

A blind push to demonise and shut down traditional sources of energy and move to less reliable "clean" energy can have second and third order effects. Europe is rich enough to be able to buy its way out of self-created problems, leaving others to deal with the consequences.

The crisis also holds lessons for India, which has ambitious plans for using renewable technologies but doesn't have the financial cushion available to the European nations. Cheap and reliable energy sources should not be abandoned until the alternatives have been stringently stress tested. India will be especially hard hit if oil prices spike as it imports close to 1.4 billion barrels of oil annually. However, fresh investment in developing new oil and gas reserves has been slowing down globally, in part due to climate action - and crude oil price is at a multi-year high.

**Global, domestic factors lie behind market weakness. US Fed, RBI meeting, Union budget are near-term triggers**



**Looking ahead, the domestic factors that will have a bearing on the trajectory of markets are the upcoming Union budget, and the outcome of the monetary policy committee meeting a few days thereafter.**

After falling sharply during the early hours of trading on Tuesday, the BSE Sensex staged a recovery, ending the day up 0.64 per cent. A day earlier, the Sensex had fallen 2,000 points intraday, recovering marginally thereafter to end the day down 1,546 points. Over the past five days, the Sensex has fallen 4.37 per cent. The broader market is also witnessing considerable weakness. Over the last five days, the BSE mid and small cap indices have fallen 4.87 per cent and 5.37 per cent respectively. The India volatility index, a fear gauge, is up 18.11 per cent over the past five days, indicating heightened fear and uncertainty. Foreign portfolio investors have also been quick on their feet, turning consistent sellers. As reported in this paper, net outflows of FPIs over nine trading sessions, ending on Monday, stood at Rs 15,817 crore. But this weakness in the Indian markets is in line with what is being observed in other countries. Asia-Pacific markets have also been under pressure of late, as have US and European markets. This market volatility is unlikely to dissipate quickly. Global and domestic factors are behind the current bout of volatility. The global factors centre around concerns over the US Federal Reserve's meeting on January 25-26 which is expected to provide some guidance on the trajectory of monetary policy. With inflation in the US having risen faster than expected, there are expectations of a more aggressive tightening of policy, with four rate hikes during the year now being factored in. Also expected is some talk on the options for reducing the Fed's balance sheet. Such expectations of a faster than previously anticipated tightening, and the withdrawal of liquidity, are souring investor sentiment. Then there are also geo-political concerns stemming from the prospects of a confrontation between Russia and Ukraine. Oil prices fell on Monday, amid a wider selloff in risky assets, indicating investor concerns. On the domestic front, the mixed quarterly earnings have weighed down investor sentiment. The new age technology companies have also taken a beating. But broader market valuations remain elevated. The market capitalisation to GDP ratio is higher than its 10-year average, as is the price to earnings ratio.



## ISRO's SSLV, a small satellite launcher with big prospects ahead



**ISRO's indigenous new launch rockets, called the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV), is likely to have its much-delayed, maiden development flight this April. Here's what we know about it**

The new chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation Dr S Somanath indicated at a meeting with the minister of state for space Jitendra Singh Tuesday that ISRO's indigenous new launch rockets, called the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV), will have its much-delayed, maiden development flight this April.

The ISRO chairman has mentioned the launch of an "SSLV-D1 Micro SAT in April 2022" the Press Information Bureau said in an official statement on the meeting between the new ISRO chairman and the Space Minister on Tuesday.

The SSLV is intended to cater to a market for the launch of small satellites into low earth orbits which has emerged in recent years on account of the need for developing countries, private corporations, and universities for small satellites. The launch of small satellites has until now been dependent on 'piggy-back' rides with big satellite launches on ISRO's work-horse - the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle which has had over 50 successful launches so far. The launch of small satellites as a consequence has been dependent on the finalising of launch contracts for the larger satellites by ISRO. Somanath himself is credited with the design and development of the

SSLV during his time as director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram since 2018. The launch of the maiden flight of the SSLV was scheduled for July 2019 but has been delayed due to setbacks from the Covid 19 crisis and other issues.

The SSLV can carry satellites weighing up to 500 kg to a low earth orbit while the tried and tested PSLV can launch satellites weighing in the range of 1000 kg.

"The SSLV is the smallest vehicle at 110-ton mass at ISRO. It will take only 72 hours to integrate, unlike the 70 days taken now for a launch vehicle. Only six people will be required to do the job, instead of 60 people. The entire job will be done in a very short time and the cost will be only around Rs 30 crore. It will be an on-demand vehicle," former ISRO chairman K Sivan had stated in 2019 at the ISRO headquarters during an annual press conference.

The former chairman Sivan said in an industry meeting that year that about 15 to 20 SSLVs would be required every year to meet the national demand alone.

The SSLV received a commercial booking in 2019 itself from the US space launch services intermediary Spaceflight Inc. Spaceflight announced on August 8, 2019, that it has clinched a deal with an ISRO commercial arm for using the second developmental flight of

the SSLV rocket to launch a spacecraft for an "undisclosed US-based satellite constellation" customer.

"SSLV is perfectly suited for launching multiple microsatellites at a time and supports multiple orbital drop-offs. We are excited to add SSLV to our launch portfolio and manage many launches together - first to LEO (low earth orbit) mid-inclinations this year and SSO missions starting in the fall of 2020," Spaceflight CEO and president Curt Blake said in 2019.

The development and manufacture of the SSLV are expected to create greater synergy between the space sector and private Indian industries - a key aim of the space ministry. Indian industry has a consortium for the production of PSLV and should come together to produce the SSLV as well once it is tested, ISRO has stated in the past. One of the aims of the newly-created ISRO commercial arm, New Space India Limited (NSIL), is to use research and development carried out by ISRO over the years for commercial purposes through Indian industry partners.

"Manufacturing and production of Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) and Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) through technology transfer," is one of the mandates of the new firm.

## China supplies mounted howitzers to Pak to maintain arms parity with India



In a move that ensures that Pakistan continues to remain locked up in confrontation with India, Islamabad has received first batch of Chinese manufactured vehicle mounted howitzers to counter the Indian K-9 Vajra howitzers. Beijing is also supplying NORINCO AR-1 300 mm multi barrel rocket launchers to Rawalpindi so that the Pakistan Army has a reply to Indian rocket launchers. The total contract worth is around USD 512 million. The supply of conventional weapon systems, fighter aircraft, destroyers and even the inclination to give DF-17 hypersonic missile to counter India's latest acquisition, the S-400 air defence system, are all part of Beijing long strategy to keep Rawalpindi GHQ in a state of permanent confrontation with India. This strategy has paid dividends to Beijing regime in the past as forces India to remain alert on its western border with a power that boxes much above its weight category due to heavy lift from China, be it in international fora or in military or nuclear parity. The role played by Beijing in developing Pakistan into a nuclear state along with the covert supply of delivery systems since 1990s is all well documented. According to reports, Pakistan in 2019 signed a contract with Chinese arms major NORINCO to supply 236 SH-15 155 mm vehicle mounted howitzers apart from AR-1 heavy rocket launchers. In addition to artillery, the contract also includes supply and technology transfer for various ammunition including extended range artillery shells and guided artillery shells with the range of

53 kilometers. Clearly, this supply is to boost the firepower of Pakistan army all along the western border, specially to heat up the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir in case the existing ceasefire breaks down or to send a message on Kashmir. The reported supply of DF-17 mobile, solid fueled medium range ballistic missile by China to Pakistan is to pump up Rawalpindi's ballistic missile system as the hypersonic missile is difficult to track by most existing radars and equally difficult to engage by existing surface to air missile systems including S-400 system. Mounted on a hypersonic glide vehicle, the DF-17 is said to have a combination of maneuverability and high speed that poses significant challenges to conventional missile defence. China has tested the DF-17 missile at least nine times since 2014 and is said to have 1950 km range with a speed of at least five times that of sound or Mach 5. While India also tested its scramjet powered Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Cruise Vehicle (HSTDV) on September 7, 2020 for launch of hypersonic missiles, the Chinese supply will clearly force Defence Research and Development Organization to speed up the indigenous project. Keeping Pakistan under its wing for strategic purposes and reach to Arabian Sea, China has not only supplied arms to Rawalpindi but has played a spoiler to India's entry into Nuclear Suppliers Group and has gone to the extent of trying innocent Indians working in Afghanistan listed as global terrorists before the 1267 committee.



# China restricts social media access of dissidents, activists ahead of Winter Olympics 2022

**Attempting to crack down on dissent ahead of the Winter Olympics, China has reportedly restricted access to messaging and social media apps of several human rights activists and some academics**

(News Agencies)-News agency AFP spoke to some individuals who had restricted access to their WeChat messaging app accounts in recent weeks.

Eight people claimed that since early December they had been unable to use their accounts entirely and were forced to reregister.

"This storm of shuttering WeChat accounts is too strong and unprecedented," AFP quoted



veteran journalist Gao Yu, whose account had features like group chat messaging permanently disabled for the first time on December 20.

Beijing-based writer Zhang Yihe said her WeChat group chat and Moments functions -similar to

Facebook's Wall or Instagram Stories -were restricted on January 8. Tsinghua University sociology professor Guo Yuhua confirmed her account was permanently blocked the same day, while prominent legal scholar He Weifang said he

encountered the same on January 9.

An expert said that the Chinese government wants to ensure that people don't point out flaws in a "perfect Winter Olympic Games". The government now wants to make sure that people don't

cross the line online to poke the facade of a perfect Winter Olympic Games," Yaqiu Wang, senior China researcher at Human Rights Watch, told AFP. The latest restrictions came as the Chinese authorities detained two prominent human-rights activists.

Free-speech advocate Yang Maodong was formally detained in the southern city of Guangzhou on suspicion of inciting subversion on January 12, two days after his wife died of cancer in the US, the Wall Street Journal reported quoting his sister. Yang, who writes under the pen name Guo Feixiong, has been blocked from leaving China for the past year. This is not the first time that China has been clamping down on dissidents ahead of a major event. In the 2008 Summer Olympics, Beijing pressured dissidents and activists, though space remained for some critics.

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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.

**WWF**



# Chinese teenager commits suicide after getting bullied, facing rejection from birth parents

**Known as Liu Xuezhou, the 17-year-old wrote a detailed post of approximately 10,000 words on China's Twitter-like platform, Weibo**

Known as Liu Xuezhou, the 17-year-old wrote a detailed post of approximately 10,000 words on China's Twitter-like platform, Weibo. "There have been people attacking and cursing me on Douyin and Weibo in the past couple of days," he wrote in the suicide note. His emotional post, in which describes how his biological parents deserted him after reunification in December 2021, went viral in China. They had initially sold him to two farmers from Hebei province in north China. But when they died, Liu was forced to live with his relatives. He had launched an online



search campaign for his birth parents on Douyin and was finally able to track them down last month. When he met them, they started fighting with him upon asking for a separate

place to live. His father, Ding Shuangquan said he had asked them to "either rent or buy a place for me because I have been homeless". His mother, surnamed Zhang told Chinese media, "Wouldn't you stay away if he were your child and was being so defensive that he even recorded your conversations? His father has remarried, and so have I. He tried to force us to buy him a home, but we are not well-off enough for that." After reading Liu's online, people reported him missing to the Chinese police who later on found his dead body on a beach in the southern Chinese island province of Hainan.



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# ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

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

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

### ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਸਤਿਕਤਾ ਵਿਚ ਸੋਧੀ ਭੂਮਿਕਾ ਨਿਭਾਉਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਭਾਗਸ਼ਾਲੀ ਦੇ ਸਾਥੀਆਂ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਮੌਤ ਹੋਣ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ।

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ।

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

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# Justice Ayesha Malik takes oath as first woman judge of Pakistan's Supreme Court

Justice Ayesha Malik on Monday took oath as the first woman judge of Pakistan's Supreme Court, in what can be described as a watershed moment in the judicial history of the conservative Muslim-majority country.

Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed administered the oath to 55-year-old Justice Malik in a ceremony held at the ceremonial hall of the Supreme Court, which was attended by a large number of apex court judges, the attorney general, lawyers, officials of the Law and Justice Commission and others.

Talking to reporters after the ceremony, Chief Justice Ahmed said that Justice Malik was competent enough to become a Supreme Court judge and that no one deserves any credit for her elevation.

Information Minister Fawad



Chaudhry congratulated Justice Ayesha on her "landmark elevation."

"A powerful picture symbolises women empowerment in Pakistan," Fawad tweeted alongside the picture of the oath-

taking ceremony, adding that he hopes Justice Ayesha will be an asset to the country's "judicial hierarchy".

Eyebrows were raised when Justice Malik was picked for the top slot despite being fourth on

the seniority list of judges of the Lahore High Court. Her nomination was rejected last year by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP). But the commission earlier this month approved her with a narrow majority of five to four when her name was brought up for the second time for consideration. Reportedly heated discussions preceded the nomination session which lasted nearly three-and-a-half hours.

Chief Justice Ahmed was chairing the meeting of the JCP, the top body which nominated the judges for the top judiciary. After the JCP, her name came up for the approval of the bipartisan Parliamentary Committee on the Appointment of Superior Judiciary which approved the nomination.

The committee while approving

her nomination created an exception by setting aside the seniority principle because Justice Malik, who was on the fourth position on the seniority list of the judges of the Lahore High Court, would be the first woman top judge.

Normally, the seniority of high courts judges is considered while approving their elevation to the Supreme Court and it was precisely the reason her name was rejected by the JCP last year.

On Friday, the Ministry of Law had issued a notification saying Justice Malik's elevation has been approved by President Arif Alvi.

Justice Malik was appointed as a judge of the Lahore High Court in March 2012. She will now work as a Supreme Court judge until her superannuation in June 2031.

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# No more Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan jails after court orders release of last 56

**A Sri Lankan court ordered the release of 56 Indian fishermen who were detained for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters**

A Sri Lankan court ordered the release of 56 Indian fishermen who were detained for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters on Tuesday, a verdict that sets free all the remaining Indian fisherfolk languishing in the country's jails.

The court in the northern Jaffna peninsula ordered the release of the fishermen who were detained by the Sri Lankan Navy in mid-December in the seas south of Mannar.

"Happy to learn that a Court has ordered the release of 56 #Indian fishermen," Indian High Commission in Colombo said in a tweet.

"Commend the work of High Commissioner Gopal Baglay and his team in securing the

release," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in a tweet. Both Sri Lankan officials and the Indian diplomatic sources confirmed the release and noted that with Tuesday's release there are no more Indian fishermen in the island nation's custody.

The court order for the release of fishermen came as the Indian authorities urged Sri Lanka to release them on humanitarian grounds in the backdrop of economic assistance talks that were going on at the time.

India this month announced an economic relief package to Sri Lanka to help its southern neighbour tackle its worst foreign exchange crisis.

The issue of fishermen had figured in the talks between

Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa and External Affairs Minister Jaishankar early this month.

Last month, India had expressed concern over the detention of 68 of its fishermen from Tamil Nadu by Sri Lankan authorities and said the issue of their "early release" has been taken up with the island nation. The issue of fishermen remains one of the irritants in India and Sri Lanka ties.

There have been several alleged incidents of Sri Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats.

The Palk Strait, which is a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for

fishermen from both countries. The release of fishermen comes on a day when Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin urged the Centre to take up the issue with the Sri Lankan government in a stern manner and also register its disapproval over the island nation's decision to auction boats seized from the Indian fishermen. In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Stalin exhorted the Centre to register its disapproval in the "strongest possible terms at the appropriate level" and also prevail upon the Lankan government to recall the advertisement for auctioning Tamil Nadu fishing boats on which they do not have any legal rights.

In the letter to Modi, Stalin said steps should be taken to ensure

the early release of 75 boats and fishing gear seized after 2018 by the Sri Lankan navy.

He expressed "a deep sense of disappointment" over the move to auction 105 fishing boats belonging to Tamil Nadu fishermen that are in the custody of Sri Lankan authorities.

Stalin said India cannot continue to be seen as a mute spectator as the rights of Indian fishermen are repeatedly trampled upon.

He requested the government of India to take this up with the Sri Lankan government in a "stern manner such that acts of physical assault and robbing or damaging of assets of fishermen does not take place in future."



# Taliban talks in Norway raise new debate about recognition

**Taliban representatives will meet delegations from Western nations and be certain to press their demand that nearly \$10 billion frozen by US and other Western countries be released**

(News Agencies)-A Taliban delegation led by acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on Sunday started three days of talks in Oslo with Western officials and Afghan civil society representatives amid a deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

The closed-door meetings were taking place at a hotel in the snow-capped mountains above the Norwegian capital and are the first time since the Taliban took over in August that their representatives have held official meetings in Europe.

The talks were not without controversy, however, reigniting the debate over whether they legitimize the Taliban government, especially since they were being held in Norway, a NATO country involved in Afghanistan from 2001 until the Taliban take over last summer.

Speaking at the end of the first day of talks, Taliban delegate Shafiullah Azam told The Associated Press that the meetings with Western officials were "a step to legitimize (the) Afghan government," adding that "this type of invitation and communication will help (the) European community, (the) U.S. or many other countries to erase the wrong picture of the Afghan government."

That statement may irk the Taliban's Norwegian hosts. Earlier, Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt stressed that the talks were "not a legitimization or recognition of the Taliban."

On Sunday, 200 protesters gathered on an icy square in front of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry in Oslo to condemn the meetings with the Taliban, which has not received diplomatic recognition from any foreign government.

"The Taliban has not changed as some in the international community like to say," said Ahman Yasir, a Norwegian Afghan living in Norway for around two decades. "They are as brutal as they were in 2001 and before." Taliban leaders met with some women's rights and human rights



activists on Sunday, but there was no official word about those talks.

Starting Monday, Taliban representatives will meet with delegations from Western nations and will be certain to press their demand that nearly \$10 billion frozen by the United States and other Western countries be released as Afghanistan faces a precarious humanitarian situation. "We are requesting them to unfreeze Afghan assets and not punish ordinary Afghans because of the political discourse," said Shafiullah Azam. "Because of the starvation, because of the deadly winter, I think it's time for the international community to support Afghans, not punish them because of their political disputes."

The United Nations has managed to provide some liquidity and allowed the Taliban administration to pay for imports, including electricity. But the U.N. has warned that as many as 1 million Afghan children are in danger of starving and most of the country's 38 million people are living below the poverty line.

Faced with the Taliban's request for funds, Western powers are likely to put the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan high on their agenda, along with the West's recurring demand for the Taliban administration to share power with Afghanistan's minority ethnic and religious groups.

Since sweeping to power in mid-August, the Taliban have imposed widespread restrictions, many of

them directed at women. Women have been banned from many jobs outside the health and education fields, their access to education has been restricted beyond sixth grade and they have been ordered to wear the hijab. The Taliban have, however, stopped short of imposing the burqa, which was compulsory when they previously ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The Taliban have increasingly targeted Afghanistan's beleaguered rights groups, as well as journalists, detaining

and sometimes beating television crews covering demonstrations.

A U.S. delegation, led by Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West, plans to discuss "the formation of a representative political system; responses to the urgent humanitarian and economic crises; security and counterterrorism concerns; and human rights, especially education for girls and women," according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department.



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# Activities of Islamic State in Afghanistan matter of concern, says Indian ambassador to UN

(News Agencies)-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) continued presence and activities in Afghanistan remain a matter of concern as the terrorist group uses "despicable acts" of terror to demonstrate its power and influence in the country and abroad, Chair of the 1988 Taliban Sanctions Committee, Ambassador T S Tirumurti said on Wednesday. Tirumurti, India's Permanent Representative to the UN, in his capacity as Chair of the Taliban Sanctions Committee, briefed the UN Security Council meeting on Afghanistan. He said the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team had noted in its 2021 report that ties between the Taliban - largely through the Haqqani Network - and the Al Qaeda and foreign terrorist fighters remain close and based on ideological alignment and relationships forged through common struggle and intermarriage. "The continued presence of ISIL



(Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and its activities in Afghanistan remain a matter of our concern. Terrorist attacks have become despicable acts used by this terrorist organisation to demonstrate its power and influence in the country and abroad," Tirumurti said. Tirumurti briefed the Council on the work of the 1988 Committee and said that the main goal of the sanctions regime was ultimately to facilitate conditions that promoted dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan government aimed at

ensuring a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. He said the latter half of 2021 saw consequential change in Afghanistan, with the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August, the concurrent collapse of the government of Afghanistan, and the humanitarian crisis that followed as well as the concern over the eroding of human rights and women's rights. "These events occurred at a pace few envisioned or expected," he said. "Although the events of August 2021 do create a new situation, the need for peace and stability in Afghanistan remains a key goal

of this committee," he said. Tirumurti said in an effort to support the goal for peace and stability in Afghanistan, the 1988 Committee extended last month the three-month travel ban exemption for 14 listed Taliban members to continue attending talks in the interest of promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. The exemption to the ban will be until March 22 this year and was accompanied by a decision on this occasion to grant a limited asset freeze exemption for the financing of exempted travel. "The Committee fully supports the travel ban exemption for listed Taliban to attend talks that are in the interest of promoting the prospect for peace and stability in Afghanistan. I would however remind that the travel ban exemption is for this purpose and this purpose only," he said. Further, along with the need for discussions to promote peace and stability also comes the

need for reporting of activities of the Taliban and those individuals and entities listed under the 1988 Sanctions Regime to ensure compliance with sanctions measures, he said. Tirumurti noted that on December 22 last year, the Security Council adopted a resolution concerning the need to facilitate the workings of humanitarian agencies and those institutions involved in supporting the resourcing and financing of critical humanitarian relief efforts in Afghanistan. The Security Council decided that provision of humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan are not a violation of the relevant UNSC resolution and that the processing and payment of funds, other financial assets, economic resources, and provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of such assistance or to support such activities are permitted.

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## I would be more dangerous if forced to step down, Pak PM Imran Khan warns Opposition

Responding to a question about the planned long march by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) on March 23 during live calls by the public, Khan said that the move would fail.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday warned the Opposition parties that he would be more dangerous if they forced him to step down, as he ruled out granting any concession to them. Responding to a question about the planned long march by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) on March 23 during live calls by the public, Khan said that the move would fail.

"If I take to the streets, then you [opposition parties] won't find any place to hide," Khan said, adding that he would be more dangerous if forced to step down.

The PDM an alliance of nearly a dozen opposition parties was formed against the Pakistan Army's interference in politics and installing "puppet" Prime Minister Khan through a "manipulated" election.

PDM President and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl head Maulana Fazlur Rahman has announced that the opposition parties would launch a long march towards Islamabad on March 23 to rid the nation of the "incapable and illegitimate" government of Imran Khan.

Khan also slammed the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Shehbaz Sharif, and refused to have any interaction with him.

"I get called out for not meeting Shehbaz as he is the Leader of the Opposition. [But] I see him as

the nation's criminal," he said.

He accused the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief of evading cases of corruption by not responding to allegation charges. Khan said that the entire Sharif family would end up fleeing to London where Nawaz Sharif and his two sons were already living.

To a question about the possible return of Nawaz Sharif, he said,

"Please come back, we are waiting for you" but added: "He will not come back. He loves money."

Sharif has been living in the UK in self-exile since November 2019.

He had gone to London after the Lahore High Court granted him bail for four-weeks to get his treatment abroad. He was serving a seven-year term at Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail in a corruption case.

Khan said that former military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf committed the "biggest sin" by granting NROs (National Reconciliation Ordinances) to the Opposition.

He said that the Opposition wanted to blackmail the government, but said that it would be a "betrayal" if he ever granted them any concession.

Khan said that his government will complete its current term and also win the next general elections.

Shortly after Khan's address, PML-N leader and daughter of Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, took to Twitter and said that his warnings that if removed from

power he will become more dangerous are nothing but empty threats.

"[Khan] sounds like a person who is not only defeated but has also accepted his defeat. 4 years into the govt & he is still only whining. The 'cartels' you are complaining about are the MAFIAS on your right & left who have fleeced 220 million & who run your kitchen," Maryam tweeted.

She was apparently referring to a recent damning report by the Election Commission which said that Khan's ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf has under-reported an amount of PKR 312 million over a four-year period, between FY 2009-10 and FY 2012-13. The year-wise details reveal that an amount in excess of PKR 145 million was under-reported in FY 2012-13 alone. She said that the corruption cases the Imran Khan government has filed against Sharifs could not be proved.

"The cases you made against Sharifs and PML-N were false & fabricated and were bound to meet the fate they have met. Now that your reality has dawned on the world, do not blame the judiciary. You have only your vindictiveness & revengefulness to blame," she wrote.

"Every word that Imran Khan uttered today reeks of failure,

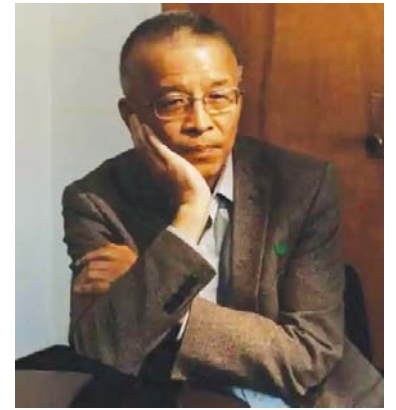
dashed hopes and no faith in his or PTI's future. This was inevitable, man," she said.

In his programme, Khan also said that the rising commodity prices in the country were robbing him of peaceful night slumber.

"It is the only issue that keeps me awake at night," he said when asked by a caller about the skyrocketing inflation, but hastened to add that the rise in prices was a global phenomenon and even the UK and EU were facing this issue.

He dwelt at length on the issue of prices and his efforts to fix economic problems, including inflation, which his government had been trying to address through a raft of measures. "My government also spent \$8 billion on the welfare of the people to offset the impact of the coronavirus," he said, but added that the money spent was little compared to rich countries and said that the US spent \$6,000 billion for the welfare of the people. He said that apart from Covid-19, his government had to face the Afghan crisis as, after the Taliban takeover, dollars started flowing out of Pakistan, which had a negative impact on the rupee. Khan, defending his performance, said that the net wealth had increased as the World Bank had estimated an increase of 5.37 per cent in Pakistan's GDP.

**'In the end, you're treated like a spy,' says MIT scientist**



When Gang Chen returned to his laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on Friday, the day after the government had dismissed charges of lying on grant applications, he was surrounded by well-wishers, offering hugs and congratulations.

There were invitations, too. Colleagues were asking him to join funded research studies, resuming the work that has occupied his adult life.

Chen studies heat transfer; he hopes to develop a semiconductor that could convert heat from car exhaust into electricity, or fabric for clothing that could cool the body. During the year since his arrest, that had been the hardest thing - tearing himself away from research.

Chen said thank you, but no. After the experience of the past year - the early-morning arrest, the handcuffs and shackles, being described, in a news conference, as loyal to China - he is uncertain if he will ever feel safe applying for U.S. government funds for research again. "You work hard; you have good output; you build a reputation," Chen said in a 3 1/2-hour interview at his MIT office, the first he has given about the case. "The government gets what they want, right? But in the end, you're treated like a spy. That just breaks your heart. It breaks your confidence." Last week, the government dismissed the case against Chen, which alleged that he had concealed seven Chinese affiliations in applications for \$2.7 million in grants from the U.S. Energy Department. Prosecutors announced that they had received new information indicating that Chen had not been obliged to disclose those affiliations, undercutting the basis of the case.





# US puts 8,500 troops on heightened alert amid Russia tension

**Roughly 8,500 American troops have been put on heightened alert in the US in case NATO activates its Response Force or if the security situation in Europe deteriorates further, the Pentagon has said**

At President Biden's direction, the Pentagon is putting about 8,500 US-based troops on heightened alert for potential deployment to Europe amid rising fears of a possible Russian military move on Ukraine. Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Monday no final decisions had been made on deployments, which he said would happen only if the NATO alliance decides to activate a rapid-response force "or if other situations develop" in connection with tensions over Russia's military buildup along Ukraine's borders. "What this is about is reassurance to our NATO allies," Kirby said, adding that no troops are intended for deployment to Ukraine itself.

Kirby said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recommended to Biden that up to 8,500 troops be ordered to prepare for potential deployment to Europe in light of signs that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not deescalating his military pressure on Ukraine. Kirby said he was not prepared to identify the US-based units because they were still being notified.

"We've always said we would reinforce our allies on the eastern flank, and those conversations and discussions have certainly been part of what our national security officials have been discussing with their counterparts now for several weeks," said White House press

secretary Jen Psaki.

Later Monday, Biden was to hold a video call with several European leaders on the Russian military buildup and potential responses to an invasion, the White House said. The Pentagon's move comes as tensions have soared between Russia and the West over concerns that Moscow

is planning to invade Ukraine, with NATO outlining potential troop and ship deployments, Britain

saying it would withdraw some diplomats from Kyiv, and Ireland denouncing upcoming Russian war games off its coast.

Prior to the U.S. announcement, the Western alliance's statement summed up moves already described by member countries, but restating them under the NATO banner appeared aimed at showing resolve. The West is ramping up its rhetoric in the information war that has accompanied the Ukraine standoff.

Russia has massed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine's border, demanding that NATO promise it will never allow Ukraine to join and that other actions, such as stationing alliance

troops in former Soviet bloc countries, be curtailed. Some of these, like any pledge to permanently bar Ukraine, are nonstarters for NATO - creating a deadlock that many fear can only end in war.

Russia denies it is planning an invasion, and says the Western accusations are

**The Pentagon's move comes as tensions have soared between Russia and the West over concerns that Moscow is planning to invade Ukraine, with NATO outlining potential troop and ship deployments**

merely a cover for NATO's own planned provocations. Recent days have seen high-stakes diplomacy that failed to reach a

breakthrough and maneuvering on both sides.

NATO said Monday it is bolstering its "deterrence" in the Baltic Sea region. Denmark is sending a frigate and deploying F-16 warplanes to Lithuania; Spain is sending four fighter jets to Bulgaria and three ships to the Black Sea to join NATO naval forces; and France stands ready to send troops to Romania. The Netherlands also plans to send two F-35 fighter aircraft to Bulgaria from April. NATO will "take all necessary measures to protect and defend all allies," Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. "We will always respond to any deterioration of our security environment,

including through strengthening our collective defense."

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was NATO and the US who were behind the escalating tensions, not Russia.

"All this is happening not because of what we, Russia, are doing. This is happening because of what NATO, the US are doing," Peskov told reporters.

The NATO announcement came as European Union foreign ministers sought to put on a fresh display of unity in support of Ukraine, and paper over concerns about divisions on the best way to confront any Russian aggression.

In a statement, the ministers said the EU has stepped up sanction preparations and they warned that "any further military aggression by Russia against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe costs."

Separately, the EU also committed to increase financial support for embattled Ukraine, vowing to push through a special package of 1.2 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) in loans and grants as soon as possible.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Friday and said the US would give Russia written responses to Moscow's proposals this week, offering some hope that any invasion could be delayed for at least a few more days.





# Covid-19 vaccine booster drive is faltering in US

**The Covid-19 booster drive is losing steam in the US. Just 40 per cent of fully-vaccinated Americans have received a booster dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

The Covid-19 booster drive in the US is losing steam, worrying health experts who have pleaded with Americans to get an extra shot to shore up their protection against the highly contagious Omicron variant. Just 40 per cent of fully-vaccinated Americans have received a booster dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And the average number of booster shots dispensed per day in the US has plummeted from a peak of one million (10 lakh) in early December to about 4.9 lakh as of last week.

Also, a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that Americans are more likely to see the initial vaccinations -- rather than a booster -- as essential.

"It is clear that the booster effort is falling short," said Jason Schwartz, a vaccine policy expert at Yale University.

Overall, the US vaccination campaign has been sluggish. More than 13 months after it began, just 63 per cent of Americans, or 210 million (21 crore) people, are fully vaccinated with the initial rounds of shots. Mandates that could raise those numbers have

been hobbled by legal challenges.

Vaccination numbers are stagnant in states such as Wyoming, Idaho, Mississippi and Alabama, which have been hovering below 50 per cent.

In Wyoming, 44 per cent are fully vaccinated, up just slightly from 41 per cent in September. To boost numbers, the state has been running TV ads with healthcare workers giving grim accounts of unvaccinated people struggling with Covid-19.

"Certainly we would like to see higher rates. But it would be wrong for anyone to think that the rates we have are due to lack of effort," Wyoming Health Department spokeswoman Kim Deti said on Tuesday.

And in neighbouring Idaho, which also has one of the country's lowest vaccination rates, the number of people getting their first vaccine dose has remained under 1,000 almost every day this year and the number getting booster shots is also declining. Still, officials say they will not give up. "I do not like to use the word resigned," said Elke Shaw-Tulloch, administrator of the

Idaho Division of Public Health. "I think we just need to keep saying it over and over again, how important it is."

At the other end of the spectrum, Vermont is a national leader in the percentage of people who have been fully vaccinated and

and are eligible for a booster have not yet gotten one, Schwartz said public confusion is one important reason.

"I think the evidence is now overwhelming that the booster is not simply an optional supplement, but it is a

foundational part of protection," he said. "But clearly that message has been lost."

The need for all Americans to get boosters initially was debated by scientists and at first, the

government recommended that only certain groups of people, such as senior citizens, get additional doses. The arrival of Omicron and additional evidence about falling immunity showed more clearly a widespread need for boosters. But the message "has been lost in the sea of changing recommendations and guidance", Schwartz said.

The AP-NORC Center poll found that 59 per cent Americans think it is essential that they receive a vaccine to fully participate in public life without feeling at risk of Covid-19 infection. Only 47 per cent say the same about a booster shot.

Keller Anne Ruble, 32, of Denver,

received her two doses of the Moderna vaccine but has not gotten her booster. She said she had a bad reaction to the second dose and was in bed for four days with a fever and flu-like symptoms.

"I believe in the power of vaccines and I know that is going to protect me," said Ruble, the owner of a greeting card sending service. But the vaccine "just knocked me out completely and freaked me out about getting the booster."

She said she does plan to get the booster in the next few weeks and in the meantime, wears an N95 mask and tries to stay home.

"I just do not want to get Covid in general," she said. "It does scare me." Blake Hassler, 26, of Nashville, Tennessee, said he does not plan to get the booster. He received Pfizer's two doses last year after having a mild case of Covid-19 in 2020. He said he considers himself to be in a low-risk category.

"At this point, we need to focus on prevention of serious illness at the onset of symptoms rather than creating a new shot every six weeks and more divisive mandates," he said.

**The AP-NORC Center poll found that 59% Americans think it is essential that they receive a vaccine to fully participate in public life without feeling at risk of Covid-19 infection**

received a booster shot. About 60 per cent of the population over 18 has gotten a booster. But it is not enough, said Vermont Health Commissioner Mark Levine.

"I would love to see that percentage much closer to 90," Levine said.

The US and many other nations have been urging adults to get boosters because the vaccine's protection can wane. Also, research has shown that while the vaccines have proved less effective against Omicron, boosters can rev up the body's defences against the threat.

As for why an estimated 86 million (8.6 crore) Americans who have been fully vaccinated



# Biden warns Putin with sanctions as West steps up Ukraine defences



**US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday he would consider personal sanctions on President Vladimir Putin if Russia invades Ukraine, as Western leaders stepped up military preparations**

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday he would consider personal sanctions on President Vladimir Putin if Russia invades Ukraine, as Western leaders stepped up military preparations and made plans to shield Europe from a potential energy supply shock. The rare sanctions threat came as Nato places forces on standby and reinforces eastern Europe with more ships and fighter jets in response to Russia's troop build-up near its border with Ukraine.

Russia denies planning an attack and says the crisis is being driven by Nato and US actions. It is demanding security guarantees from the West, including a promise by Nato never to admit Ukraine. Moscow sees the former Soviet republic as a buffer between Russia and Nato countries. Following multiple rounds of US-Russia talks over Ukraine that failed to reach a breakthrough, Biden, who has long warned Moscow of economic consequences, upped the ante on Tuesday by saying Putin could personally face sanctions.

If Russia were to move into Ukraine with the estimated 100,000 soldiers it has massed near the border, Biden said it would be the "largest invasion since World War Two" and would "change the world."

Speaking to reporters, Biden was asked if he would see himself imposing sanctions on Putin directly if Russia invaded Ukraine. "Yes," he responded. "I would see that."

Direct US sanctions on foreign leaders are rare but not unprecedented. Others who have faced sanctions include Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, Syria's Bashar al-Assad and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi.

On Tuesday, a US plane carrying military equipment and munitions landed in Kyiv, the third instalment of a \$200 million package to shore up Ukraine's defences.

The Pentagon has put on alert about 8,500 US troops in Europe and the United States to be ready to deploy to Nato's eastern flank if needed.

Russia said it was watching with great concern and accused Washington of fuelling tensions over Ukraine, repeating its line that the crisis was being driven by US and Nato actions rather than by its own build-up of forces near the Ukrainian border.

Biden said on Tuesday he may deploy US troops in the nearer term but ruled out sending unilateral US forces to Ukraine, which is not a Nato member.

"There is not going to be any American forces moving into Ukraine," he said.

So far, Nato has about 4,000 troops in multinational battalions in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, backed by tanks, air

defences and intelligence and surveillance units.

As Western leaders appeal for unity, differences have emerged among European nations over how best to respond. Putin is due to meet Wednesday with the heads of some of the biggest companies in Italy, Russia's fifth biggest trading partner, despite the rising tensions.

"It is absolutely vital that... the West is united now, because it is our unity now that will be much more effective in deterring any Russian aggression," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said, adding Britain was discussing with the United States the possibility of banning Russia from the SWIFT global payments system.

French President Emmanuel Macron said he would seek clarification over Russia's intentions in a phone call with Putin set for Friday. Political advisers from Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France are due to meet in Paris on Wednesday.

**GAS DIVERSION PLANS**  
With fears of a new Russian military assault high after its invasion of Crimea in 2014, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged his compatriots on Tuesday to stay calm and said work was underway to bring about a meeting between him and the leaders of Russia, Germany and France.

"There are no rose-colored glasses, no childish illusions,

everything is not simple. ... But there is hope," Zelenskyy said in a televised address. "Protect your body from viruses, your brain from lies, your heart from panic."

In Washington, senior Biden administration officials said the United States was in talks with major energy-producing countries and companies around the world over a potential diversion of supplies to Europe if Russia invades Ukraine.

The EU depends on Russia for around a third of its gas supplies. Any interruptions to its Russian imports would exacerbate an existing energy crisis caused by shortages.

"We've... been working to identify additional volumes of non-Russian natural gas from North Africa and the Middle East, Asia, and the United States," White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters.

"We're in discussion with major natural gas producers around the globe to understand their capacity and willingness to temporarily surge natural gas output and to allocate these volumes to European buyers," she said.

Psaki and other officials did not name specific countries or companies but said they included a broad range of suppliers, including sellers of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

## US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says will run for reelection



(News Agencies)-US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Tuesday that she plans to run for 19th term in office. The Democratic Party leader said she was determined to stay on to fight existential threats to democracy.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who turns 82 in March, had been expected to step down, with her party bracing for a possible heavy defeat in this year's midterm elections.

Despite dire predictions of a Democratic wipeout in November, Pelosi is likely to win her liberal San Francisco district comfortably -- but she did not reveal whether she intended to keep her leadership role.

"Our democracy is at risk because of the assault on the truth, the assault on the US Capitol and the state-by-state assault on voting rights," Pelosi said in a video announcement. "This election is crucial. Nothing less is at stake than our democracy. But as we say, we don't agonize, we organize, and that is why I am running for reelection to Congress and respectfully seek your support."

Pelosi, the only female speaker in US history, first took up the gavel in 2007 and returned to the role when the Democrats retook the House in the 2018 midterm elections.

After securing her party's nomination to lead the House in 2020, Pelosi suggested it would be her last term in the job.

The job places her second in line to the presidency behind Vice President Kamala Harris. "When people ask me, 'What are the three most important issues facing the Congress?' I always say the same thing: our children, our children, our children... That is why I am in Congress, for the children," she said.



# US Navy pilot ejects, 7 hurt in F-35 South China Sea 'landing mishap'

**Seven US military personnel were hurt on Monday when an F-35C warplane had a "landing mishap" on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in the South China Sea**

Seven US military personnel were hurt on Monday when an F-35C warplane had a "landing mishap" on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in the South China Sea and the pilot ejected, the US Navy said.

A Navy statement said the incident happened during "routine flight operations" in the South China Sea.

"The pilot safely ejected from the aircraft and was recovered via U.S. military helicopter," it said. "The pilot is in stable condition.

There were seven total sailors injured."

The statement said three of the personnel required evacuation to a medical facility in Manila and four were treated on-board the carrier and released. It said all the personnel evacuated were

assessed as being in stable condition.

The Navy said the cause of the "inflight mishap" was under investigation. The F-35 jet is made by Lockheed Martin.

The Pentagon said two U.S. Navy Carrier Strike Groups, led

by the Carl Vinson and USS Abraham Lincoln began operations in the South China Sea on Sunday. The carriers entered the disputed sea for training as Taiwan reported a new Chinese air force incursion at the top of the waterway.

## US: 39 people missing after boat capsizes off Florida coast, search on

**Rescue teams of the US Coast Guard are searching for 39 people who reportedly went missing when a boat capsized off the coast of Florida in a "suspected human smuggling venture", it said in a statement**

(News Agencies)-The US Coast Guard launched a search for 39 people reported missing when a boat capsized off the coast of Florida in a "suspected human smuggling venture," it said Tuesday.

The Coast Guard in Miami said it had received a report "from a good Samaritan" who rescued a man "clinging to a capsized vessel approximately 45 miles east of Fort Pierce Inlet."

The survivor said the boat had left Bimini in the Bahamas on Saturday night but encountered rough weather and capsized.

"According to the survivor, no one was wearing a life jacket," the statement said.



"Coast Guard air and surface asset crews are actively searching for people in the water. This is a suspected human smuggling venture," said the

statement, which was posted on Twitter.

An image released by the Coast Guard shows the capsized vessel in the water with a man

straddling the hull.

Human smugglers are known to use the Bahamas, a group of islands lying near the Florida coast, as a jumping off point for

getting people, many from other Caribbean countries such as Haiti, into the United States.

Bimini, the westernmost district of the Bahamas and its closest point to the mainland, is approximately 130 miles (217 kilometers) from Fort Pierce Inlet. On Friday, 32 people were rescued after a boat capsized some five miles west of Bimini in another suspected human smuggling attempt, according to the US Coast Guard and the Royal Bahamas Defence Force. The US Coast Guard tweeted that its vessels patrol the waters around Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas "to ensure the safety of life at sea."





# The America COMPETES Act and how it could improve opportunities for Indians in the US

It also includes means to combat social and economic inequality, climate change and immigration.

For example, it provides for an exemption for MINT doctorate holders from the green card upper limit and creates a new green card for entrepreneurs.

The bill also authorizes \$600 million per year to build manufacturing facilities to make the US less dependent on solar components made in Xinjiang, China.

What special provisions does the law contain?

The law amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to create a new classification of "W"

; nonimmigrants for entrepreneurs with an interest in a start-up company, key employees of a start-up company, and their spouses and children.

According to provisions released by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the bill, once enacted, will direct the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish procedures for foreign nationals with an interest in a start-up company to obtain lawful permanent resident status to apply as an immigrant entrepreneur if the company has a proven track record of creating jobs

and generating significant income or receiving investment capital.

It also directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish procedures for foreign nationals with an interest in a start-up company to self-apply for W-1 nonimmigrant classification and receive extensions of that classification for up to eight people years if the company meets certain growth benchmarks.

It also provides for a limited number of W-2 visas for personnel essential to the success of the start-up company when the start-up serves as the basis for a founder's W-1 status.

The bill exempts certain foreign nationals (and the spouses and children of such foreigners) who have earned a doctorate in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) from a qualifying U.S. research institution or a foreigner from the immigrant visa limit, if the degree is equivalent to a doctorate degree issued by a qualified US research institution.

The bill gives the Secretary

of Homeland Security the discretion to initially classify an individual as a W-1 nonimmigrant for a period of three years if the individual owns not less than a 10 percent interest in a start-up business if the foreign person plays a central and active role in the management or operation of the start-up company or if the applicant has the knowledge, skills or experience to

**Each year, Indians and Indian companies take a lion's share of the H-1B work permits. With this new category, Indian professionals are likely to have a better shot at opportunities that the law is likely to provide**

significantly support the start-up in the growth and success of the company.

During the 18-month period prior to filing the application, the startup company must have received at least \$250,000 in qualifying investments from one or more qualifying investors or at least \$100,000 in qualifying government awards or grants, the bill notes.

Why was this bill brought in?

In his statement, President Biden said the proposals from the House and Senate

(which passed broadly similar legislation last year) represent the kind of transformational investments in America's industrial base and research and development that have helped the US to bring leadership to the global economy in the 20th century and expand opportunities for middle-class families.

"They will help bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States, and they are directly focused on removing supply chain bottlenecks like semiconductors that have led to higher prices for the middle class," he said.

What would signing this bill mean for Indians?

It would mean more opportunities in the US for Indian talent and skilled workers.

Each year, the US government issues 85,000 H-1B work permits - 65,000 to those with specialized jobs and the remaining 20,000 to foreign workers who have earned a master's or higher degree in the United States.

Each year, Indians and Indian companies take a lion's share of the H-1B work

permits issued that year. With this new category, Indian professionals are likely to have a better shot at opportunities that the law is likely to provide.

How is the legislative process going?

Last year, the Senate passed the US Innovation and Competition Act, which earmarks \$52 billion to increase US semiconductor production and \$190 billion to boost US technology and research to compete with China be able.

The 2,900-page House bill has significant differences from the Senate version, Reuters reported. For example, it does not include the \$190 billion for technology and research, but includes \$45 billion to support supply chain resilience and the manufacture of critical goods, industrial equipment and manufacturing technology, the Reuters report said.

The House of Representatives is expected to take up the bill next week. If the law passes the House of Representatives, leaders from both houses of Congress will negotiate to resolve the differences between the versions, the Reuters report said.

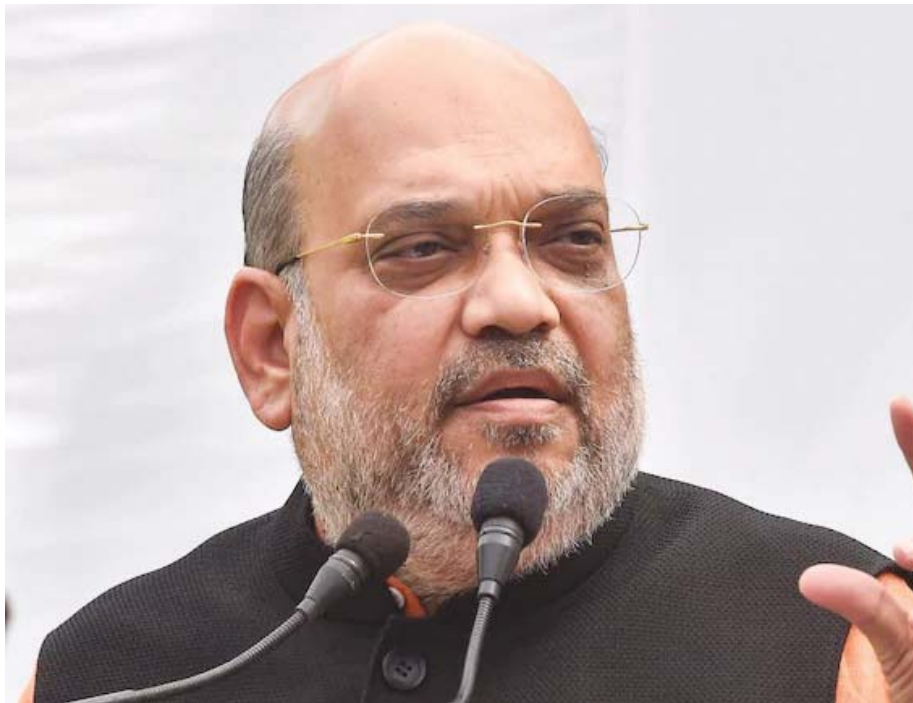


# 'You think of farmers' interests and so does BJP': Amit Shah meets Jat leaders ahead of UP polls

Jats think of farmers' interests and BJP too. Jats think of country's security and BJP too. The Jat community has showered us with votes every time we approached, even when we sometimes didn't listen to you."

The Jat community had supported the year-long farmers' protest against the Centre's three farm bills in 2020 and 2021.

After the meeting, an attendee reportedly told ANI news agency, "We have demanded Bharat Ratna for [former PM] Chaudhary Charan Singh, reservation for Jats and proportionate representation in central and UP governments. The home minister has responded positively." 'MODI IS KING WE NEED': AMIT SHAH Sources said that Amit Shah went on to say, "You fought the Mughals, we are fighting too. We've done a few things, let me



recount them. We got Mahendra Pratap Singh's respect. Soldiers asked for 'One Rank One Pension', we gave it. We appointed three Jat governors and nine MPs. 40,000 people had died due to Article 370 in

Jammu and Kashmir, Modi threw it away."

He continued, as per sources, "The BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government cleared over Rs 36,000 crore farmers' loans. Money was put into farmers'

accounts. If there's anything missing, we'll do that too. Other than BJP and Modi, who can protect the nation? This is the kind of king we need!"

AMIT SHAH A T T A C K S OPPOSITION Amit Shah also a t t a c k e d Opposition parties in his address, sources said. He reportedly said, "Rahul Gandhi doesn't know

kharif and rabi and he talks about farmers. We announce, we lay foundation stones and we inaugurate, unlike the Congress. Will you bring Akhilesh again? Don't you feel safer? Do you want our youth back in jails?"

He said that the BJP too had wanted to join hands with Jayant Chaudhary's Rashtriya Lok Dal for the upcoming election but he had "chosen the wrong house", sources stated.

"Don't think, give us your votes. We'll do the thinking," Amit Shah concluded, as per sources.

JAT VOTE IN UP POLLS

Although the BJP received considerable support from the Jat community in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls and in his address, 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, the Samajwadi Party has claimed that the Jats, who are mainly farmers, will not elect the BJP this time after the year-long protest.

The Uttar Pradesh Assembly election will be held over seven phases in February and March 2022. The votes will be counted on March 10.

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# UN chief urges major Afghan aid increase, unfreezing assets

"Time is of the essence," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Security Council. "Without action, lives will be lost, and despair and extremism will grow." Guterres said liquidity must be urgently restored to the Afghan economy. He said that means freeing up the country's frozen currency reserves, re-engaging with its Central Bank and finding other ways to inject money, including allowing international funds to pay the salaries of doctors, teachers, sanitation workers, electricians and other civil servants. China and Russia reiterated their calls for unfreezing Afghan assets, while US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the Biden administration is examining "various options to ease the liquidity crunch."

She said the United States, which announced an initial contribution of \$308 million in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan on January 11, remains the largest provider of assistance to the country. But she said that "much more support from the international community will be required to meet the extraordinary level of need the Afghan people are experiencing." Afghanistan's aid-dependent economy was already stumbling when the Taliban seized power last August amid the chaotic departure of US and NATO troops after 20 years. The international community froze Afghanistan's assets abroad and halted economic support, unwilling to work with the Taliban, given the brutality during their 1996-2001 rule and refusal to educate girls and allow women to work. Guterres said the World Bank's reconstruction trust fund for Afghanistan transferred \$280 million last month to the UN children's agency UNICEF and the World Food Program. He said the remaining \$1.2 million should be released urgently to help Afghans survive the winter.

Deborah Lyons, the UN special representative for Afghanistan, told the council that the more than \$4.4 billion humanitarian appeal the UN launched two weeks ago for Afghanistan -- the largest in the UN's history for a single country - "is roughly the same amount



that donors spent on the entire operating budget of the government." Most of that budget support came from the United States.

The UN says 8.7 million Afghans are on the brink of starvation, and Guterres said over half the population faces "extreme levels of hunger."

"More than 80% of the population relies on contaminated drinking water, and some families are selling their babies to purchase food," he said.

The council adopted a resolution last month affirming that humanitarian aid to Afghans doesn't violate sanctions against the Taliban, but China's UN ambassador, Zhang Jun, claimed aid "is being used as a bargaining chip, a political tool."

That is "playing games with the lives and well-being of 38 million Afghans who are in dire need of relief," Zhang said, saying that freezing Afghan assets and unilateral sanctions "are no less lethal than military intervention." If Afghan women "can't even have food or survive, then the talk of education, employment and political participation will become empty words," he added.

Deputy Russian Ambassador Dmitry Polyansky warned that unless the issue of unfreezing Afghanistan's assets is quickly solved "Afghanistan has no long-term prospects to make it out of this crisis."

"We call on the United States and other Western donors to get the money back to the country," he

used for bargaining or as a tool to punish the Afghans for the new reality that has evolved in their country."

Polyansky warned that the consequences of Afghanistan's economic collapse will not only increase the number of refugees but will "spread terrorist activity, boost drug production and, as a result, lead to even greater instability both in the region and beyond." Lyons, the UN envoy, said in a video briefing from Kabul that it is clear donors are still not satisfied with political progress by the Taliban, either in including greater ethnic diversity in its government or in ensuring girls' higher education and women's opportunities to work.

This week, a high-level Taliban

delegation met with Afghan civil society representatives in the Norwegian capital, Oslo.

Lyons noted that a joint communique from the talks highlighted that "understanding and joint cooperation are the only solutions to all the problems of Afghanistan." She said now the Taliban "must act on it."

Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, whose country holds the Security Council presidency this month and chaired the meeting, said the Taliban delegation also held direct talks with representatives from Norway, the US, France and Britain, but he stressed that did not signify recognition of the Taliban government.

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## As tensions rise on Ukraine's border with Russia, here's all that you need to know

in a long-awaited written response delivered to Russia on Wednesday in Moscow, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Blinken said the US response, delivered to the Russian Foreign Ministry by US Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan, gave up no ground on "core principles" such as NATO's open-door membership policy and the alliance's military presence in Eastern Europe.

Blinken said the document made clear that the U.S. is standing by its oft-stated positions. "There is no change, there will be no change," he said. But, he said the written response to Russia also contains "serious" offers for a diplomatic path to de-escalate soaring tensions over Ukraine by addressing Russian concerns on other matters. The US response comes as Russia is warning that it would quickly take "retaliatory measures" if the US and its allies reject its security demands and continue their "aggressive" policies over Ukraine.

Russia has demanded guarantees that NATO never admit Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations as members and that the alliance roll back troop deployments in former Soviet bloc countries, a region Moscow still views as its sphere of interest.

**WHAT DO UKRAINIAN LEADERS SAY?**

Ukrainian officials have sought to calm nerves as tensions

escalate.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Wednesday that while the concentration of Russian troops near Ukraine poses a threat, "their number is now insufficient for a large-scale offensive."

"They are still missing some key military elements and systems to mount a big, full-scale offensive," Kuleba told reporters. He also noted that causing alarm could be an end in itself. Russia, he said, hopes to destabilize Ukraine by "spreading panic, raising pressure on Ukraine's financial system and launching cyberattacks."

**WHAT IS THE MOOD ON UKRAINE'S FRONT LINE?**

Soldiers and civilians in eastern Ukraine are waiting with helpless anticipation to see if war comes. They understand that their fate is being decided by politicians in distant capitals. Even politicians

in their own capital, Kyiv, have found themselves on the sidelines of several rounds of high-stakes diplomacy that so far have not yielded a breakthrough. The battle-weary region has been fighting pro-Russia separatist fighters since 2014. It is an area close to where Russia has massed tens of thousands of soldiers in a troop buildup that US President Joe Biden says could mount the largest invasion since World War II.

**WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT?**

Envoys from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany met Wednesday for more than eight hours in Paris to discuss the separatist conflict in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland. Although there was no breakthrough, they promised to meet for new talks in two weeks in Berlin.

The French president's office said

afterward in a statement that the parties support "unconditional respect" for a cease-fire in eastern Ukraine.

The Ukrainian representative, Andriy Yermak, was cautiously optimistic. He also acknowledged Wednesday's talks did not directly address current tensions at the border or resolve past differences.

**WHAT IS BRITAIN'S STANCE?**

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has urged European nations to do more to support Ukraine, saying "we would like to see our allies do more to help supply defensive support to Ukraine."

The UK has sent anti-tank weapons to Ukraine in response to Russia massing troops near its border. It has ruled out sending combat troops, but Truss said Britain has "ruled nothing out in terms of sanctions."

"In fact, we'll be legislating to

toughen up our sanctions regime and make sure we are fully able to hit both individuals and companies and banks in Russia in the event of an incursion," she told the BBC.

"What's important is that all of our allies do the same, because it's by collective action, by showing Vladimir Putin we're united, that we will help deter a Russian incursion."

**WHAT IS GERMANY DOING?**

Among the NATO allies, Germany in particular has faced calls to help Ukraine more and been faulted for a perception that it is prioritizing its economic ties with Russia over Ukraine's security.

Amid that backdrop, German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht said Germany will deliver 5,000 military helmets to Ukraine following a request from the country's embassy. She said that it was "a very clear signal that we stand by your side."

Ukraine's ambassador to Germany welcomed the planned delivery of the helmets but described it as a "purely symbolic gesture." Andriy Melnik told German news agency dpa that "this is only a drop in the ocean."

He added that "Ukraine expects a 180-degree turn from the German government, a real paradigm change."

Germany has said that it won't deliver lethal weapons to Ukraine.

Yet German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock insisted on Wednesday that the European Union's common goal in the Ukraine crisis "is and remains the defense of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

**WHAT DO ITALIAN BUSINESSES WANT?**

Like Germans, some Italians are suspected of putting business ties with Russia ahead of solidarity with Ukraine.

## Astronomers discover mysterious object in space that releases giant bursts of energy three times an hour

It is being termed as unlike anything astronomers have seen before but the team that discovered the celestial object believe it could be a neutron star or a white dwarf with an ultra-powerful magnetic field.

As per the astronomers, the strange object, which appeared to be spinning around in space, sends out a beam of radiation that crosses our line of sight,

and for a minute in every twenty. The published study claimed it to be one of the brightest radio sources in the sky. Astrophysicist Dr Natasha Hurley-Walker, who is from the Curtin University node of the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research, led the team.

"This object was appearing and disappearing over a few hours during our observations. That

was completely unexpected. It was kind of spooky for an astronomer because there's nothing known in the sky that does that. And it's really quite close to us -- about 4000 lightyears away. It's in our galactic backyard," she said. A student named Tyrone O'Doherty from Curtin University discovered the object by using the Murchison Widefield Array (MWA) telescope in outback

Western Australia. He also used a new technique developed by him.

O'Doherty, who is now studying for a PhD at Curtin, said, "It's exciting that the source I identified last year has turned out to be such a peculiar object." "The MWA's wide field of view and extreme sensitivity are perfect for surveying the entire sky and detecting the unexpected," he added.





# Russia vs NATO

## Crisis in Ukraine a showdown of two world views

**The challenge for Biden, NATO and the European Union is whether their collective resolve and solidarity can protect Ukraine's vision of itself as part of the West, and whether Putin's Russian nationalist ambitions in the region will succeed or fail**

The crisis in Ukraine is hardly going away - a showdown of two world views that could upend Europe. It carries echoes of the Cold War and resurrects an idea leftover from the 1945 Yalta Conference: that the West should respect a Russian sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

Since coming to power in 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin has worked steadily and systematically to reverse what he views as the humiliating breakup of the Soviet Union 30 years ago.

While massing troops along Ukraine's border and holding war games in Belarus, close to the borders of NATO members Poland and Lithuania, Putin is demanding that Ukraine be permanently barred from exercising its

sovereign right to join the Western alliance, and that other NATO actions, such as stationing troops in former Soviet bloc countries, be curtailed.

NATO has said the demands are unacceptable and that joining the alliance is a right of any country and does not threaten Russia. Putin's critics argue that what he really fears is not NATO, but the emergence of a democratic, prospering Ukraine that could offer an alternative to Putin's increasingly autocratic rule, which Russians might find appealing.

Russia's present demands are based on Putin's long sense of grievance and his rejection of Ukraine and Belarus as truly separate, sovereign countries, but rather as part of

a historic Russian linguistic and Orthodox motherland.

In a millennium-spanning treatise last summer titled, "The Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," Putin tipped his hand. He insisted that the separation of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus into separate states today is artificial, due largely to political mistakes during the Soviet period and, in the case of Ukraine, driven by a malevolent "anti-Russia project" supported by Washington since 2014. His Russo-centric view of the region poses a crucial test for U.S. President Joe Biden, who

already is grappling with crises on multiple domestic fronts - the coronavirus pandemic, resurgence of inflation, a divided nation in which a large segment of the

electorate refuses to acknowledge his presidency and a Congress that has blocked many of his social and climate goals.

Biden has ruled out military intervention to support Ukraine, and instead has employed intense diplomacy and rallied Western allies to support what he promises will be severe and painful sanctions against Russia if it dares to invade Ukraine. But depending on how the situation plays out, he has admitted he could have trouble keeping all the allies on board.

The Russian leader has already invaded Ukraine once, with little reaction. Russia took Crimea back from Ukraine in 2014 and has supported pro-Russian Ukrainian separatists fighting

to the Kyiv government in the Donbass region, a quiet war that has killed 14,000 people, more than 3,000 of them civilians.

Putin's strategy has been to try to recreate the power and a defined sphere of influence that Russia lost with the fall of the Berlin Wall, at least in the area of the former Soviet Union. He has bristled at what he sees as Western encroachment into the countries of the former Warsaw Pact -- which had once formed a pro-Soviet buffer between the USSR and NATO.

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were allowed to join NATO in 1999, followed in 2004 by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia.



Subjected to post-World War II Soviet domination, the countries were eager to join the Western defensive alliance and the Western free-market system to secure independence and prosperity after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

For similar reasons, both Ukraine and Georgia also want in, and have been recognized by NATO as aspiring members of the alliance. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has asked Western leaders to take on Ukraine's request for membership with greater urgency as a signal to Moscow that the West will defend Ukraine's independence.

Russia contends that NATO expansion violates commitments made to it after the Berlin Wall's collapse in exchange for Moscow's acceptance of the



reimpose its dominance.

A disputed election in Belarus led to months-long mass demonstrations against

reject the very idea of liberal democracy as a sustainable model, seeing it rather as a conceit the West uses to

human rights organizations. Beyond Russia's borders, his secret services have overseen the assassinations of critics and meddled in foreign elections, including offering clandestine support to the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the pro-Brexit campaign in Britain and various right-wing European parties that oppose European integration.

He told an interviewer in 2019 that "liberalism is obsolete," implying that the dominant Western ideal of liberal democracy no longer has a place in the world. The idea that Ukrainians are independent and could be freely choosing their own alliances is to him a charade.

"All the subterfuges

associated with the anti-Russia project are clear to us. And we will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia. And to those who will undertake such an attempt, I would like to say that this way they will destroy their own country," he wrote in his essay last summer.

"I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia."

The challenge for Biden, NATO and the European Union is whether their collective resolve and solidarity can protect Ukraine's vision of itself as part of the West, and whether Putin's Russian nationalist ambitions in the region will succeed or fail.



reunification of Germany. U.S. officials deny any such promises were made.

Early in his presidency, Putin did not show adamant opposition to NATO. He suggested in a 2000 BBC interview that Russia might even be interested in joining; years later, he said he had raised that prospect with U.S. President Bill Clinton before Clinton left office in 2001.

Now, however, Putin sees the alliance as threatening Russia's security.

But the newer NATO countries take the opposite view. They regard Russia, which boasts the region's largest military and a vast nuclear arsenal, as the real threat, which is why they rushed to join NATO - afraid that a strengthened Russia might someday try to

longtime Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko. Alienated from his own people and unrecognized as a legitimate president in the West, Lukashenko has been driven closer into Putin's protective embrace.

Similarly, after civil unrest in Kazakhstan just weeks ago, Russia sent in troops to help that former Soviet republic's president restore order as part of a peacekeeping mission of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization alliance. The troops have since departed the country.

Putin's aim has been to reimpose ties with Russia's former Soviet neighbors, while challenging and dividing the West. Rather than leading Russia in a more democratic direction, he appears to now

pursue its own aims and humiliate its foes.

He came to power vowing to restore to Russia a sense of greatness. He seized back economic control from the oligarchs, crushed rebels in Chechnya, gradually strangled independent media and upped investment in the military. More recently, he has banned Russia's few remaining







## Union Budget 2022-23: Here's what crypto industry expects from govt

***With the central government yet to bring a bill on cryptocurrency in Parliament, the booming digital coin sector has a host of expectations from Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget 2022-23***

While there have been talks regarding the regulation of cryptocurrencies, the sector is seeking more clarity on the taxation part.

As India has nearly 15-20 million cryptocurrency investors with total crypto holdings of around USD 5.29 billion, the sector would like to have clarity on the taxation aspects of buying and selling different cryptocurrencies, said Edul Patel, CEO and Co-founder of Mudrex.

Secondly, the government earlier stated that they might classify cryptos based upon their use cases. Patel said the sector is waiting for more clarity on the same in the budget.

For the growth of the crypto market, the sector is looking forward to progressive regulatory guidelines keeping in mind the stakeholders, he added.

While the government is yet to bring the cryptocurrency bill, much-needed clarity is expected on its taxation in the upcoming Union Budget 2022, said Archit Gupta, Founder and CEO, Clear.

There are various concerns about the taxation of crypto, its classification, applicable tax rates, TDS/TCS and GST implications on the sale and purchase of cryptocurrencies, added Gupta. He said the sector hopes for some clarity on all these issues during the Budget Session of Parliament.

Last week, Industry body ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood said India Inc agrees with Prime Minister Narendra Modi who called upon leaders at the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos for cooperation on a number of global issues including cryptocurrency.

## Will govt give booster shot to tackle rising inflation?



Rising inflation has taken a massive toll on Indian households as economic disruptions triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic continue to impact jobs and incomes. In view of deteriorating income and the rising cost of essential goods, millions of households are expecting the government to provide some form of relief in the upcoming Union Budget 2022-23.

Poorer and middle income households have been grappling with rising inflation across various categories, including rising medical costs, the price of essential consumer goods and more.

Tea, edible oil, pulses, meat, cooking gas and a host of other essential items have become costlier to the tune of 20 per cent to 40 per cent since the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020. The price rise has hurt consumers, especially as most families have been burdened with higher medical costs due to the pandemic.

**Budget 2022-23: Full coverage**

Overall, retail prices have gone up by nearly 10 per cent in the last 2 years compared to 8 per cent in the previous five-and-a-half-years, according to a Reuters news report based on data from the Ministry of Statistics.

### INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT & INCOME LOSS

Unemployment and loss of income have hurt millions of households in the country, leaving them unguarded against the wave of rising inflation.

In December, retail inflation jumped to a five-month high of 5.59 per cent -- inching closer to overshooting the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) upper limit of 6 per cent -- and wholesale inflation remained in double digits. This is likely to increase further in coming months due to a host of factors, according to economists.

## Tata group takes first step in Air India, to introduce 'enhanced meal service' in four flights

The Tata Group has taken its first step at Air India by introducing "enhanced meal service" in four flights that will operate from Mumbai on Thursday, officials said on Wednesday. However, Air India flights will not be flying under the banner of the Tata Group from Thursday itself, they stated.

Earlier during the day, the officials had told PTI that the Indian government is likely to hand over Air India to the Tata

Group on Thursday, nearly 69 years after it was taken from the conglomerate.

However, while the "enhanced meal service" will be provided on four flights -- AI864 (Mumbai-Delhi), AI687 (Mumbai-Delhi), AI945 (Mumbai-Abu Dhabi) and AI639 (Mumbai-Bengaluru) -- on Thursday, the takeover will take place after Thursday, the officials clarified.

After a competitive bidding process, the government had on

October 8 last year sold Air India to Talace Private Limited -- a subsidiary of the Tata Group's holding company -- for Rs 18,000 crore.

The officials said the new date from which all Air India flights will fly under "Tata Group's banner or aegis" will be told to the employees later. The "enhanced meal service" will be served on Mumbai-Newark flight and five Mumbai-Delhi flights on Friday, they noted.

The "enhanced meal service" - devised by the Tata Group officials -- will be expanded to more flights in a staggered and phased manner, the officials added.

Meanwhile, two airline pilot unions -- Indian Pilots' Guild (IPG) and Indian Commercial Pilots' Association (ICPA) -- on Monday warned Air India's CMD Vikram Dev Dutt of legal action as "multiple deductions and recoveries have been projected"

on the dues owed to pilots.

"This recovery exercise is entirely illegal, and we demand that this anomaly is rectified and the amount due is repaid with immediate effect," a letter sent by the two unions said.

Additionally, two other unions have opposed the carrier's January 20 order to check grooming and measure the body mass index (BMI) of cabin crew members at the airports just before their flights.





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# UK's other health crisis: A huge backlog of delayed non-Covid-19 care

**In England, nearly 6 million procedures are currently delayed, a rise from the backlog of 4.6 million before the pandemic, according to the NHS. The current delays most likely impact more than 5 million people - a single patient can have multiple cases pending for different ailments - which represents almost one-tenth of the population.**

Lara Wahab had been waiting for more than two years for a kidney and pancreas transplant, but months had passed without any word. So last month she called the hospital, and got crushing news. There had been a good match for her in October, the transplant coordinator told her, which the hospital normally would have accepted. But with COVID-19 patients filling beds, the transplant team could not find her a place in the intensive care unit for postoperative care. They had to decline the organs.

"I was just in shock. I knew that the NHS was under a lot of strain, but you don't really know until you're waiting for something like that," she said, referring to the National Health Service. "It was there, but it sort of slipped through my fingers," she added of the transplant opportunity.

Wahab, 34, from North London, is part of an enormous and growing backlog of patients in Britain's free health service who have seen planned care delayed or diverted, in part because of the pandemic - a largely unseen crisis within a crisis. The problems are likely to have profound consequences that will be felt for years.

The numbers are stark: In England, nearly 6 million procedures are currently delayed, a rise from the backlog of 4.6 million before the pandemic, according to the NHS. The current delays most likely impact more than 5 million people - a single patient can have multiple cases pending for different ailments - which represents almost one-tenth of the population. Hundreds of thousands more haven't been referred yet for treatment, and many ailments have simply gone undiagnosed.

There was already a huge and rising backlog of patients before the pandemic, but the unrelenting

burden of the past two years, with health staff and hospital capacity stretched even thinner by coronavirus cases, saw it balloon to record proportions. The latest official figures are almost two months out of date, and experts say that severe staffing shortages this winter and the wildfire spread of the omicron variant have almost certainly made the situation worse. "Just because we've got omicron doesn't mean that other illnesses have just stopped still and don't emerge and develop in people, sadly," said Saffron Cordery, the deputy CEO of NHS Providers, a membership organization for health workers. Public health experts worry that even if the pandemic eases and relieves some of the immediate burden, the pandemic and delayed care could do lasting harm to the health system, as well as patients. This month, a report from the parliamentary health committee revealed a complex and troubling picture of record waiting lists, high caseloads and severe staffing shortages. It warned that a major expansion of the labor force was needed, but that the government was not doing enough to recruit and train health workers. Generations of Britons have endured longer waits for treatment than many insured Americans, with most accepting that as the price of caring for everyone. But the problem has worsened for almost a decade, with critics accusing Conservative governments of steadily underfunding the system.

In 2012, there were 2.5 million cases awaiting specialist treatment in England. By the start of 2020, the backlog had swelled to 4.6 million cases, according to the NHS.

At the end of November 2021, the caseload was 6 million. More than 300,000 cases have been waiting for more than a year for

planned care. A decade ago, there were fewer than 500.

The true backlog is probably much bigger, experts and government officials say. As the health committee noted in its report, the pandemic has greatly

disrupted normal patterns of assessments and referrals by primary care doctors, keeping people off the official tallies.

A recent report from the National Audit Office estimated that there were 7.8 million to 9.8 million

"missing" referrals - those that ordinarily would have occurred but never did - by primary care physicians from the start of the pandemic to September 2021, including 240,000 to 740,000 for suspected cancer cases.



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FRONT PAGE COMING SOON & RESORTS



# How computer chip shortage could incite US conflict with China?



The war game scenario conducted by a Washington think tank began with a sudden failure at three Taiwanese semiconductor foundries that make high-end computer chips used in such items as smartphones, automobiles and military equipment.

The halt in production raised questions of whether a cyberattack by Beijing was responsible - touching off an international crisis between China and the United States that the researchers said could grind the global economy to a halt and incite a military confrontation.

The war game and study by the Center for a New American Security, which is set to be released Thursday, illustrate how dependent the world is on Taiwanese computer chips - and how that dependence could draw the United States and China into various kinds of conflict.

The report comes as Congress has put new energy into bills to increase domestic production of semiconductors in the United States. Diversifying the global supply chain for computer chips is a key recommendation in the report.

Last week, President Joe Biden urged Congress to pass those bills and promised he would work to bring production of semiconductor chips back to the United States.

"Today we barely produce 10 per cent of the computer chips, despite being the leader in chip design and research," Biden said. "And we don't have the ability to make the most advanced chips now - right now.

But today, 75% of production takes place in East Asia. Ninety per cent of the most advanced chips are made in Taiwan. China is doing everything it can to take over the global market so they can try to outcompete the rest of us and have a lot of applications - including military applications."

Even if Congress approves new government investments in America's microchip production capacities, matching Taiwanese expertise is years away, if it is even possible, the report's authors say. The United States is already

more dependent on Taiwan's high-end microchips than it was on Middle Eastern oil in decades past, the report said.

China, the war game predicts, could use economic coercion, cyber operations and hybrid tactics to try to seize or harm Taiwan's semiconductor industry - and the United States must become better able to identify and counter Chinese tactics that could threaten the microchip supply.

War games like this one involve current and former officials, academics and other experts sitting around a table playing various roles. After an initial scenario is presented, the teams take turns making strategic decisions. Such exercises are supposed to yield insights about how different players would act and lay plain what sort of moves each group might make.

Becca Wasser, who helped

design and lead the scenario, said while many war games were conducted to study China, most focus on conventional military threats, giving short shrift to the many ways China could exert pressure on Taiwan.

And countering those pressure points is difficult, especially if the United States and Taiwan are at odds over the best strategy. In

**The war game scenario conducted by a Washington think tank began with a sudden failure at three Taiwanese semiconductor foundries that make high-end computer chips used in such items as smartphones, automobiles and military equipment.**

the scenario, the US team presumed the Taiwan team would go along with its strategies to counter China. But Taiwan's interest sometimes led it to cross-purposes. For example, when the United States wanted to bring semiconductor engineers to the safety of America, Taiwan resisted, worried about a brain drain.

"Whatever the United States tried to do by itself in the game really fell flat," Wasser said. "We have seen a variety of examples of that in real life."

As a result, multilateral responses and global efforts to build resiliency in the supply chain for computer chips are most likely the best strategy, the report said.

Taiwan has relied on its dominance of the microchip industry for its defence. The "silicon shield" theory argued that because its semiconductor

industry is so important to Chinese manufacturing and the US consumer economy, actions that threaten its foundries would be too risky.

Martijn Rasser, a co-author of the study and a former CIA analyst, said it was crucial for the international community to persuade Taiwan that its shield strategy needed to be internationalized. "The long-term play has to be a geographic dispersal of those capabilities out of Taiwan in exchange for enhanced security guarantees for the island," he said.

The Biden administration has made clear that in the case of Ukraine, while the United States would economically punish Russia for any invasion, it would not commit troops to fight alongside Kyiv to stop any intervention by Moscow. The long-standing US policy toward Taiwan calls for shoring up its defences and practicing strategic ambiguity over whether Washington would militarily intervene in a conflict over the island.

But Taiwan and its semiconductors are far more important to America's economy than Ukraine is - meaning it would very likely be far more difficult for the United States to stay out of a conflict involving Taiwan.

Taiwan accounts for half of the overall production of microchips that are critical to the functioning of mobile phones, consumer

electronics, cars, military equipment and more. South Korea, the nearest competitor, has about 17% of the overall market.

But Taiwanese chips are the smallest and fastest, and its foundries account for 92% of the most advanced designs.

"It's almost impossible to duplicate Taiwan's manufacturing capability of high-end chips, of low-end chips," said Dan Blumenthal, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. "It's just the manufacturing hub of the world."

Although the United States and Europe are trying to boost their own domestic design and production of semiconductors, they do not have the abilities to mass produce the most advanced designs that the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company can make. "If the semiconductor supply chain is infringed upon by China in some way, all of the sudden the things that Americans look to in their daily lives, to get to and from work, to call their loved ones, to do a variety of different things, those disappear," Wasser said.

Other experts said it would be an overstatement to say that the United States would be dragged into a war over microchips. China would decide what kinds of coercive measures it would take against the Taiwanese based on the perceived threat to its sovereignty and the expected international backlog, said Bonny Lin of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.





# Why is Kerala's Covid strategy falling apart?

**With the number of infections shooting up, Kerala, which could once lay claim to the best Covid management in India, is missing an action plan as the third wave advances**

Kerala has been recording worryingly high daily infection numbers for the past week-over 40,000 a day for the last five days-and has a positivity rate near 47.7 per cent. About 2,733 wards across the state have been declared containment zones. Thiruvananthapuram district is in category III, after more than 25 per cent of patients admitted to the hospitals in the district were found to be Covid positive. Social, cultural, religious and political gatherings were banned or restricted on January 25. Movie theatres, swimming pools and gyms will remain closed. Education, except undergraduate and postgraduate final year studies and classes for those in Class X and XII, is now entirely online. After a Covid 19 review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on January 24, the state government announced that Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Aalapuzha, Idukki, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakad and Wayanad districts were in category II, and that

public meetings there would be banned. Currently, only Malappuram, Kottayam and Kannur districts are under category I. Kozhikode and Kasargod are not listed any of the categories, though Kozhikode has reported a massive spread of Omicron variant cases.

The ICUs in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Kannur and Thrissur are flooded with Covid patients. Private hospitals do not have vacant ICU beds either, and frontline Covid fighters, including doctors and nurses, are falling sick. Meanwhile, state health minister Veena George denied media reports that there were no ICUs and ventilators free in the state and visited Thiruvananthapuram Medical College to evaluate the situation. "There is no shortage of ventilators or ICUs in Kerala," he said. "Media speculation regarding the shortage of ICU beds in the hospitals is baseless and wrong. More than 100 ICU beds remain vacant and only 28 were occupied in

the Trivandrum medical college. More beds, ICUs and ventilators will [be brought online] if the number of patients seeking admission in hospitals [rises very high] in the state," Health Minister Veena George told India Today. "I would request the media not to spread misinformation while the state is fighting Covid-19 on a war footing and providing the best medical care to those who require critical care in hospitals," he added.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is currently undergoing treatment at the Mayo Clinic in the US, offered a note of solidarity in an article published in leading vernacular dailies on January 25. Appealing for people to stand united against the virus, he wrote, 'Now, the test positivity rate (TPR) has no relevance as we are testing only those who have Covid symptoms. Though the TPR has crossed over 40 per cent, there is nothing to worry about. The state government has increased the number of ICU beds and ventilators and the

oxygen buffer stock for the treatment of patients in critical condition. We have also introduced Covid cluster management in the areas where massive spreads [of infections] have been reported,' he added. He also presented his rationale for not imposing a total lockdown despite the surge in infections across the state, saying that the state has achieved or has nearly achieved herd immunity as a result of the focused vaccination drive. Kerala has given 100 per cent of those eligible and over the age of 18 their first dose of vaccination, and given second doses to 83.38 per cent. It has also vaccinated 66.47 per cent of those eligible in the 15-17 age group, with booster doses given to 36.3 per cent. Currently the state accounts for 264,638 positive cases and 51,816 deaths.

Opposition members, both from the Congress and the BJP, have blamed the ruling CPI(M) for allowing the case numbers to surge to these levels, saying that intervention was delayed to

allow party district conferences to be conducted. "Kerala has failed miserably to counter the third wave of infections in the state," says V.D. Satheeshan, leader of the Opposition. "The CPI(M) is mainly responsible as they conducted its district level party conferences without Covid protocols when there was a surge in Covid cases being reported in the state since January 2. Now the case load in hospitals has shot up, with clusters forming among Covid front liners, institutions and government offices. It's a pathetic situation. Like delayed justice, delayed action in the time of pandemic amounts to a crime."

For now, the situation is getting worse as the Delta and Omicron variants continue to grip the state. Many even report repeated bouts of infection as the virus spreads within communities. And some in Kerala fear that the worst of it is yet to appear, and worry what the next two weeks will bring.



# Will Rahul Gandhi's Golden Temple mega visit turn the tables in Punjab?



Rahul Gandhi is set to begin his mega Punjab Assembly poll campaign on Thursday, January 27. But unlike the campaigns of Kerala and Tamil Nadu Assembly polls in 2021, Rahul seems to be shying away from putting his prestige at stake. Instead, he is letting the regional satraps of the poll-bound states of Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa, and Manipur take the lead. In his scheme of things, the March 10, 2022 verdict would be more of a reflection on the leadership of Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee president Navjot Singh Sidhu. Similarly, the outcome of the Uttarakhand campaign would mark a make-or-break moment for aspirant Harish Rawat.

In Manipur, the Congress's three-term chief minister 73-year-old Okrom Ibobi Singh is leading the charge to wrest the power from the BJP's Nongthombam Biren Singh. In Goa, where defections converted Panjim into a bazaar, the Congress is counting heavily on Michael Lobo, a recent but influential addition from the BJP. In a show of strength and piety, Rahul is scheduled to visit the Golden Temple in Amritsar, along with all 117 poll candidates, on Thursday.

Rahul Gandhi, it may be recalled, had planned to begin his campaign in Punjab in early in January. Instead, he went out of the country, leaving Sidhu to deny that the Moga campaign was to be flagged off by Rahul. However, Rahul's absence was baffling on several counts. This was a period that the third

wave of Covid had not begun to hurt badly or draw the Election Commission's attention. The period was also testing in terms of Rahul striking a balance between rival factions, ticket seekers, poll-related issues or forcing a peace deal between Sidhu and Punjab Chief Minister Channi. Instead, these issues were allowed to be blown out of proportion.

Many Congress leaders feel that if the Aam Aadmi Party beats the party on March 10, Rahul cannot escape the blame for permitting drift, factionalism, and self-goals festering within the organisation. **SHIFT IN STYLE** Congress insiders said there has been a clear shift in Rahul's attitude and style of functioning from April-May, 2021. During the Kerala Assembly elections, Rahul led from the front and relied heavily on inputs from the AICC general secretary in charge of the organisation, KC Venugopal. KCV, as he is addressed in party circles, hails from Kerala and was the chief architect of Rahul's 'Mission Kerala'. Congress insiders recalled that while most opinion and exit poll surveys kept predicting an LDF victory in Kerala, Rahul remained convinced that the May 2 verdict would prove them wrong. Apparently, Rahul was constantly flooded with 'in-house reports', forecasting UDF victory in Kerala and the Congress-led 'Mahajot' in Assam. The former AICC chief failed to realise that the entire 'feedback' system was 'doctored' or 'tailor-made'.

The internal mechanism had collapsed. This was even more evident when the party leader from Uttar Pradesh, RPN Singh defected to the BJP. When there was a strong buzz of RPN Singh switching sides, Venugopal is said to have sent a memo that the former Union minister would not defect. The leadership seems to have relied on the party functionary rather than the open-source information from a section of the media. Though the election

**In Rahul Gandhi's scheme of things, the March 10, 2022 verdict would be more of a reflection on the leadership of Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee president Navjot Singh Sidhu**

campaigning is yet to peak, the Congress seems demoralised already. Unless the party tastes success in Punjab and Uttarakhand, the disquiet is set to gain momentum or result in the disintegration of the Grand Old Party. Rahul, instead of getting pro-active or waging a battle, seems to be going through the motions.

## **PRIYANKA GANDHI'S MISSION UP**

In Uttar Pradesh, of course, Priyanka Gandhi is the prominent face. In Priyanka's scheme of things, the task before her is to somehow bring the Congress to third spot after the BJP and SP-RLD alliance. Regardless of the number of seats or vote share, the Congress general secretary is determined to ensure that her

gender-based and progressive-looking politics help edge out the BSP, largely seen as a third contender for power in the country's most populous state. If the Congress manages to get more vote share or seats than the BSP, Priyanka's "mission Uttar Pradesh" would be dubbed as a success. Many within and outside the Congress view Priyanka's "mission Uttar Pradesh" as "futile" and "suicidal" or a combination of the

two. There are reports that even the state party unit chief, Ajay Kumar Lallu, has been approached by other political parties to switch sides. In fact, over a dozen Congress leaders from UP, who have stayed on with the party through thick and thin, have been getting "offers" and allurements from the BJP and SP. Party insiders said that since the Kerala poll debacle, Rahul has not been the same. The outcome of Kerala, Assam, Bengal, etc, was a huge setback for him and "Team Rahul", which was hoping to officially take the control of the party apparatus. The stature of KC Venugopal, the AICC general secretary in charge of the party organisation, has, in particular, taken a beating. Traditionally, the AICC general secretary in charge of the organisation is seen as unofficial number two or three in the hierarchy. Dithering and reluctant post-defeat, Rahul is said to have gone inside a shell. If these sources are to be believed, the possibility of a non-Gandhi to head the Congress

organisation is gaining currency. As per the Congress party constitution, the tenure of the AICC chief is for five years only. The question that needs to be addressed is whether the Gandhis can afford to have a non-family member at the helm from 2022 to 2027, a period that includes the crucial 2024 general election.

It may be remembered that Sonia Gandhi's tenure (longest in the history of 137 years) saw many 'constitutional' and institutional amendments in the Congress party and parliamentary wing constitutions, giving her sweeping powers.

## **STRATEGY STRUCTURED FOR SONIA**

When Sonia took over as AICC chief in early 1998, she was not a Member of Parliament. Her party manager, namely Pranab Mukherjee, worked on a strategy to ensure that she had the authority to appoint leaders of the House in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, even though she was not a Member of Parliament. Mukherjee, who had been a man of all seasons, had offered a remedy to ensure Sonia's authority over the parliamentary wing continued undiluted even though a new leader was elected as CPP leader. In May 2004, Sonia had appointed two leaders as CPP leaders in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. She had named Manmohan Singh as leader of the House in Rajya Sabha and Pranab Mukherjee as leader of the House in Lok Sabha. Manmohan was, by then, sworn in as the Prime Minister too.

Under the CPP constitution, the CPP leader's post was the highest but clause 5 of the party constitution was amended to create the chairperson's post. Under sub-clause 'C,' the chairperson, and not the CPP leader, would nominate the party leaders in both Houses as well as deputy leaders and chief whips. The amended clause now reads: "The chairperson shall have the authority to name the leader of the CPP to head the government, if necessary."

Some Congress leaders think that Rahul somehow fancies himself in the mould of grandfather Feroze Gandhi, an able parliamentarian who had created a niche for himself in the Nehruvian era. Among many qualities that Feroze had, he excelled as democracy's David without holding any formal post.



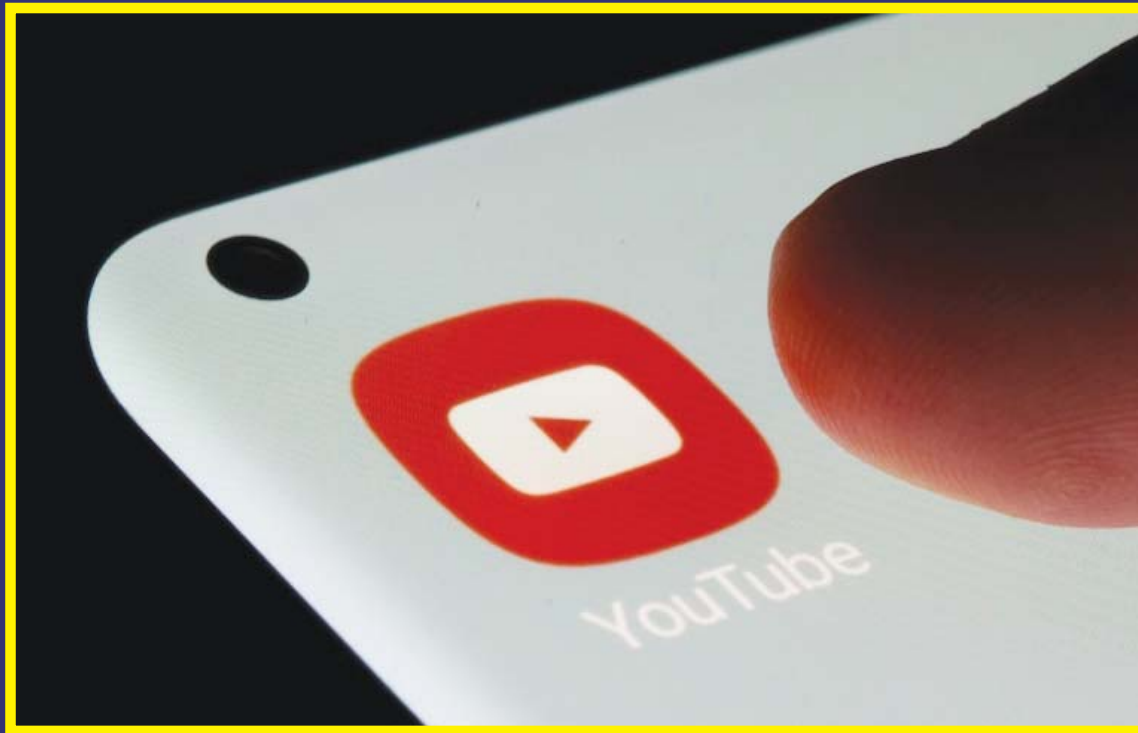
# YouTube may soon bring NFT features that let creators make money, CEO hints

Yet another social media platform may soon be foraying into the world of NFTs. YouTube CEO has hinted that the company eyes the space keenly, among other emerging technologies that may benefit its creator community

After a long reign of its video hits, YouTube may be targeting NFTs as the next go-to thing for its creator base. YouTube CEO has recently hinted at the same and it seems like we might see an NFT feature on the platform sometime soon.

Without sharing any details on the idea, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki recently noted that the company is looking at NFTs as a possible source of revenue for its creator community in the future. In a letter to the YouTube community, Wojcicki mentioned that the company is working on emerging technologies, specifically mentioning NFTs as one of them.

The interest follows that of several other online platforms, who have either already introduced an NFT feature for their user base or are looking to do so. Twitter, for instance, recently came up with a hexagonal profile picture



for those wanting to show off their NFTs. As The Verge reports, Facebook and Instagram are also working towards a similar concept. It is thus, only natural for YouTube to be intrigued by the prospective of NFTs too. In her

letter, Wojcicki mentioned that the team is working to bring NFT features to the YouTube ecosystem in order to "help creators capitalize on emerging technologies." It will be interesting to see how YouTube will do so.

Till now, NFT features on social media platforms are inclined to simply displaying the NFT as a prized possession of a person. If you have a Bored Ape Yacht Club NFT, for instance, you can use it as your profile picture across your social media

handles to show off your valuable digital asset.

There are few to none methods for an NFT creator or owner to actually make money off it through social media. The only value exchange happens through NFT marketplaces where one can simply buy or sell NFTs. YouTube's take on this may help bring in a new way of revenue generation through NFTs.

Interestingly though, NFTs are not the only focus for YouTube when it comes to emerging technologies. Among other areas that YouTube plans to invest in, online gaming and shopping may take priority. At the same time, the company notes the opportunities offered by crypto, decentralized autonomous organizations (DAOs), and NFTs. It even finds Web3, claimed to be the next-generation internet, "as a source of inspiration," as noted by Wojcicki in her letter.

## Astronomers identify mysterious particles in 'primordial soup'

The research, published in Physical Review Letters, could redefine the kinds of particles that were abundant in the early universe

The research, published in Physical Review Letters, could redefine the kinds of particles that were abundant in the early universe.

According to the Big Bang model, the universe expanded rapidly from a highly compressed primordial state, which resulted in a significant decrease in density and temperature.

Soon afterward, the dominance of matter over antimatter (as observed today) may have been established by processes that also predict proton decay. During this stage, many types of elementary particles may have been present. After a few seconds, the universe cooled enough to allow the formation of certain nuclei.

The theory predicts that definite amounts of hydrogen, helium



and lithium were produced. Their abundances agree with what is observed today. About a million years later the universe was sufficiently cool for atoms to form.

"This is just the start of the story," says lead author Yen-Jie Lee, the Class of 1958 Career

Development Associate Professor of Physics at MIT. "We've shown we can find a signal. In the next few years we want to use the quark-gluon plasma to probe the X particle's internal structure, which could change our view of what kind of material the universe should

produce." "For years we had thought that for some reason, nature had chosen to produce particles made only from two or three quarks," Lee says.

"Theoretically speaking, there are so many quarks and gluons in the plasma that the production of X particles should be enhanced,"

Lee says. "But people thought it would be too difficult to search for them because there are so many other particles produced in this quark soup." Although the theory of cosmic inflation received a great deal of experimental support, the failure to find the gravitational waves it predicted caused many cosmologists to hold off endorsing it. Because cosmic inflation was powered by quantum effects, with the universe springing from a volume smaller than a subatomic particle, primordial gravitational waves were also created by quantum processes, cosmologists believe. If so, then by scrutinizing the gravitational waves that pervade today's cosmos, scientists might finally show that all four forces of nature arise from a single uber-force, achieving Einstein's dream.





# Bihar railways exam protest

## Job aspirants torch train, govt promises resolution

On the third day of a Bihar-based agitation against alleged anomalies in the tests conducted by the Railway Recruitment Board for the Non-Technical Popular Categories (RRB NTPC), a train was set on fire at Gaya Junction. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

Following the incident, Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw urged job aspirants not to destroy public property and assured them that their grievances would be addressed. The ministry has suspended the RRB NTPC and Level 1 exams for the time-being.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took to Twitter to condemn the 'repression' of protesting candidates and asked the government to find a solution through dialogue. She appealed to the protesters to maintain peace and demanded from the government that arrested candidates be released.

Here are all the top points in this story:  
**TRAIN BURNT AT GAYA STATION**

A train was allegedly set on fire by protesting railway job aspirants over the recruitment exams on Wednesday. The incident occurred at Gaya railway station in Bihar.

The agitated protesters vandalised trains and pelted stones. Stones could be seen all over the platform at the railway station and visuals also showed broken windows of a train.

Nobody was injured as a result of the protests at Gaya Junction. "The rakes were

empty and parked inside the yard when miscreants set a coach on fire. It has not resulted in disruption of rail traffic," said a railways official. Gaya Senior Superintendent of Police Aditya Kumar said, "We have brought the situation at Gaya Junction under control. Some protesters have been taken into custody. Action will be taken after the arsonists are identified."

### PROTESTS IN OTHER PLACES

An official of East Central Railway, Rajesh Kumar, said that demonstrations were also witnessed at Taregana, on the outskirts of Patna, and at Jehanabad in Bihar. Agitators were pacified without much trouble, he added.

On Tuesday, protests were reported from Patna, Nawada, Muzaffarpur, Buxar and Bhojpur districts of Bihar. Protesters squatted on rail tracks, hampering train movement. Several trains were cancelled or ran on alternative routes as a result.

Officials said that in Sitamarhi, police fired in the air to disperse demonstrators at the railway station. Protests were also reported in Uttar Pradesh.

### GOVT PROMISES SOLUTION

At a press conference on Wednesday, railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw urged job aspirants not to destroy public property

and assured them that their grievances would be resolved.

Earlier in the day, the ministry suspended the Non-Technical Popular Categories (RRB NTPC) and the Level 1 exams.

Ashwini Vaishnaw said the railways is in touch with the chief ministers concerned and the issue is being handled "sensitively". He added, "The authorities will follow due process if public property is damaged."

### COMMITTEE FORMED

**On the third day of a Bihar-based agitation against alleged anomalies in the railways recruitment tests, protesters set a train on fire and some of them have since been arrested. The government has called for calm while Priyanka Gandhi condemned 'repression' of the protesters**

To resolve the issue, the Centre has formed a committee. Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw urged candidates to put forth their grievances formally to the committee.

"An email address has been set up for this purpose. The committee will go to different parts of the country and listen to the grievances," the minister said.

He also said that all Railway Recruitment Board chairpersons have been asked to listen to the concerns of candidates, compile them and send them to the committee. "A high power committee has been formed to look into the concerns and doubts raised by candidates in regard to

results of 1st Stage Computer Based Test (CBT) of Centralized Employment Notification (CEN) 01/2019 of Non Technical Popular Categories (NTPC) issued by Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs) on 14-15th January 2022," the railways said.

### VIOLENT PROTESTERS DEBARRED

On Tuesday, the railway ministry issued a statement saying that railway job aspirants found involved in vandalism and unlawful activities while protesting will be 'debarred for life' from getting recruited in the railways. Videos of the protest will be examined by the ministry with the help of specialized agencies to identify perpetrators of violence, the statement said.

### PRIYANKA GANDHI CONDEMNS 'REPRESSION'

On Wednesday, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra condemned the "repression" of the protesting candidates and urged the government to find a solution to their problems through dialogue.

She also appealed to protesting job aspirants to keep walking on the path of 'satyagraha' in a peaceful manner.

"No amount of condemnation is enough for the repression of the youth associated with Railway NTPC and Group D examinations," the Congress general secretary said in a tweet in Hindi.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra demanded that arrested students be released and the order barring aspirants from recruitment for protesting be withdrawn.



# Cannabis compound CBD stops coronavirus in test tube, but can it treat Covid?



**Early research suggesting that a popular non-psychoactive compound derived from marijuana might help prevent or treat Covid-19 warrants further investigation in rigorous clinical trials, researchers say**

Early research suggesting that a popular non-psychoactive compound derived from marijuana might help prevent or treat Covid-19 warrants further investigation in rigorous clinical trials, researchers say.

Several recent laboratory studies of cannabidiol, or CBD, have shown promising results, attracting media attention.

However, many other potential Covid treatments that showed promise in test tubes, from hydroxychloroquine to various drugs used to treat cancer and other diseases, ultimately failed to show benefit for Covid-19 patients once studied in clinical trials.

Marsha Rosner of the University of Chicago led a team that found CBD appeared to help curb SARS-CoV-2 in infected cells in laboratory experiments. "Our findings do not say this will work in patients. Our findings make a strong case for a clinical trial," she said.

Using small doses of highly purified CBD that approximate what patients receive in an oral drug already approved for severe epilepsy, Rosner and colleagues found that CBD did not keep the coronavirus from infecting cells in test tubes.

Rather, it acted soon after the virus entered the cells, blocking it from making copies of itself in part via effects on the inflammatory protein interferon. They found similar effects in

infected mice, according to a report in Science Advances. When they looked at a group of adults with severe epilepsy, the researchers found those who were taking the approved CBD drug had lower rates of Covid-19. But a backward look at a small number of patients does not yield conclusive information. Only randomized clinical trials can do that, Rosner said.

"I know my message is not something people want to hear," she said.

Small doses of liver.



tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) - the marijuana ingredient that causes the high - cannabidiolic acid (CBDA), cannabidivarin (CBDV), cannabichromene (CBC), and cannabigerol (CBG) did not keep the virus out of cells or prevent it from replicating, her team found. "Not only did THC not work, but combining it with CBD prevented CBD from working," Rosner said. NO COVID CURES AT CBD DISPENSARY

A separate team reported recently in the Journal of Natural

Products that high doses of CBG and CBDA do prevent the coronavirus from breaking into cells.

Richard van Breemen from Oregon State University told Reuters that the doses his team tested were non-toxic to cells. It is not clear yet that similarly high doses would be safe for humans, his team said.

"You want the lowest possible effective dose," Rosner said, because of potential side effects as the drug is filtered through the

liver.

The CBD her team tested was more than 98 per cent pure, while purity in commercial products is far lower. "People should not run out and get CBD from their favourite dispensary," she said. CBD products have become widely available in many forms and have been touted - often without proof from clinical trials - as treatments for pain and other ailments.

Small CBD trials in humans with Covid-19 are underway.

In one completed study,

researchers in Brazil randomly assigned 105 patients with mild or moderate Covid-19 to receive CBD or a placebo for 14 days along with standard care. The CBD had no apparent effect, according to an October report in Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research.

In a proof-of-concept study at Sheba Medical Center in Israel, researchers are randomly assigning patients with mild Covid to receive CBD or a placebo. An early-stage trial at Rabin Medical Center, also in Israel, aims to test the effect of CBD in severely or critically ill patients. However, study leader Dr. Moshe Yeshurun told Reuters that accruing participants has been difficult because the current Omicron-driven coronavirus wave "consists mostly of patients with mild to moderate disease."

Rosner's team is exploring the possibility of a clinical trial that would likely focus on asymptomatic or mild cases of Covid. Meanwhile, she is concerned that media reports overstating the potential of cannabinoids will lead people to self-medicate with CBD, stop using masks and avoid vaccines.

"We would love to be able to say specifically" that a certain dose of cannabinoids is helpful, she said, but at this point, "vaccine-induced antibodies and antibody drugs are much more effective at blocking infection."

## Crypto money laundering rises 30% in 2021



Cybercriminals laundered \$8.6 billion in cryptocurrencies last year, up 30% from 2020, according to a report from blockchain analysis firm Chainalysis released on Wednesday.

Overall, cybercriminals have laundered more than \$33 billion worth of crypto since 2017, Chainalysis estimated, with most of the total over time moving to centralized exchanges.

The firm said the sharp rise in money laundering activity in 2021 was not surprising, given the significant growth of both legitimate and illegal crypto activity last year.

Money laundering refers to that process of disguising the origin of illegally obtained money by transferring it to legitimate businesses.

About 17% of the \$8.6 billion laundered went to decentralized finance applications, Chainalysis said, referring to the sector which facilitates crypto-denominated financial transactions outside of traditional banks.

That was up from 2% in 2020. Mining pools, high-risk exchanges, and mixers also saw substantial increases in value received from illicit addresses, the report said. Mixers typically combine potentially identifiable or tainted cryptocurrency funds with others, so as to conceal the trail to the fund's original source. Wallet addresses associated with theft sent just under half of their stolen funds, or more than \$750 million worth of crypto in total, to decentralized finance platforms, according to the Chainalysis report.

Chainalysis also clarified that the \$8.6 billion laundered last year represents funds derived from crypto-native crime such as darknet market sales or ransomware attacks in which profits are in crypto instead of fiat currencies.





# Days after CMs meet, fresh tension along Assam-Arunachal border

**The flashpoint is the ongoing Likabali-Durpai PMGSY road project in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Siang district - Assam claims that some parts of the road, under construction since 2019, falls under its Dhemaji district**

Just days after the chief ministers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh met to discuss a "permanent solution" over the decades-old boundary dispute between the two states, fresh tensions were reported along the inter-state border on Wednesday night.

The flashpoint is the ongoing Likabali-Durpai PMGSY road project in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Siang district - Assam claims that some parts of the road, under construction since 2019, falls under its Dhemaji district.

On Wednesday evening, a

culvert under construction close to Hime village in Lower Siang was burnt by "unidentified miscreants from the Assam side", authorities said. Following that, there were unconfirmed reports of "firing in the air" by the locals from the Arunachal Pradesh side on Wednesday night. District officials from both Dhemaji in Assam) and Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Siang-the two districts share a border of about 150 kilometres-reached the spot on Thursday morning, and said the incident was "minor" and that the "situation was

under control." As per reports, the tension began after an Assam Police team stopped the construction of the road at Hime. "The Likabali-Durpai road touches the disputed territory at some points on the border. The day before yesterday, our team stopped one such construction. Since this is a disputed area, we have prevented construction on previous occasions too," said Ranjan Bhuyan, Dhemaji district's Superintendent of Police (SP). Kushal Pal Singh, SP of Lower Siang district, said some stretches of the

road were under dispute, and an argument between the Assam Police and local villagers of Hime was reported on Tuesday. "Following that, last night, Some miscreants from the Assam side set fire to a culvert under construction," said Singh. He added that they had received information about some firing in the air by locals from the Arunachal side, but they were unconfirmed. According to Singh, such incidents of violence keep happening "occasionally". "This was not a major incident," he said. Dhemaji SP Bhuyan added the tension was between the local people and that he was in constant touch with his Arunachal counterpart. "Both sides of the administration have been meeting, talking and trying to resolve the situation," he said.

Arunachal Pradesh, which was earlier a part of Assam, shares a boundary of over 800 km with the state. The border region has reported frequent flare-ups. Clashes were first reported in 1992, and since then, there have been several accusations of illegal encroachment from both sides, and intermittent clashes. The matter is in the

Supreme Court. In August 2021, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told the State Assembly there were at least 1,200 areas of dispute along the border with Arunachal Pradesh, and that the two states were working toward solving it. After the Monday meeting with Arunachal Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Sarma tweeted: "Solving boundary issues with neighbours is our priority. Discussed with Hon'ble CM of Arunachal Pradesh Sh @PemaKhanduBJP, who came all the way to Guwahati, measures for a permanent solution to the long-pending issue. We decided to conduct a ground level survey on boundary status." Later, Khandu told The Indian Express that the meeting was "very positive" "We had very positive discussions on finding mutually acceptable permanent solutions to this problem. Under the guidance of Hon'ble PM and active support of Hon'ble Home Minister Amit Shah Ji, we will work towards resolving this and many vexed issues in the region. All this will pave the way for the holistic development of the Northeast," he said.

Supreme Court. In August 2021, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told the State Assembly there were at least 1,200 areas of dispute along the border with Arunachal Pradesh, and that the two states were working toward solving it. After the Monday meeting with Arunachal Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Sarma tweeted: "Solving boundary issues with neighbours is our priority. Discussed with Hon'ble CM of Arunachal Pradesh Sh @PemaKhanduBJP, who came all the way to Guwahati, measures for a permanent solution to the long-pending issue. We decided to conduct a ground level survey on boundary status." Later, Khandu told The Indian Express that the meeting was "very positive" "We had very positive discussions on finding mutually acceptable permanent solutions to this problem. Under the guidance of Hon'ble PM and active support of Hon'ble Home Minister Amit Shah Ji, we will work towards resolving this and many vexed issues in the region. All this will pave the way for the holistic development of the Northeast," he said.







## Case against research scientist who discovered 'ship of gold' delayed

**The long-running case of a former deep-sea treasure hunter marking his sixth year in jail for refusing to disclose the whereabouts of missing gold coins has hit yet another roadblock**

The long-running case of a former deep-sea treasure hunter marking his sixth year in jail for refusing to disclose the whereabouts of missing gold coins has hit yet another roadblock.

Research scientist Tommy Thompson has been held in contempt of court since Dec. 15, 2015, for that refusal. He is also incurring a daily fine of \$1,000. A hearing held Monday in hopes of helping draw the case to a conclusion ended with a federal judge giving

Thompson two months to find a new attorney ahead of yet another hearing.

Thompson's case dates to his discovery of the S.S. Central America, known as the Ship of Gold, in 1988. The gold rush-era ship sank in a hurricane off South Carolina in 1857 with thousands of pounds of gold aboard, contributing to an economic panic.

Despite an investors lawsuit and a federal court order, Thompson, 69, still won't cooperate with authorities trying

to find 500 coins minted from some of the gold, according to court records, federal prosecutors and Algenon Marbley, the judge who found Thompson in contempt.

Thompson has previously said, without providing details, that the coins - valued at about \$2.5 million - were turned over to a trust in Belize. After Thompson failed to appear for a 2012 Ohio hearing to discuss the coins, U.S. marshals eventually tracked him to Florida in 2015 and arrested him.

Thompson pleaded guilty in April 2015 to skipping that hearing and was sentenced to two years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. But his criminal sentence has been delayed until the issue of the gold coins is resolved.

Thompson, who has gone through several attorneys, is currently housed in a federal detention center in Milan, Michigan. Thompson told Marbley on Monday that he's having trouble finding a secure phone or computer connection

to discuss his case with potential attorneys. A message seeking comment was left with the facility. Thompson also said he continues to suffer the effects of systemic exertional intolerance disease, also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome, which also affects his short-term memory. "It's hard to explain the number of roadblocks," Thompson said. "I don't rest on my laurels; I'm working all the time here. It's hard to communicate here."

## Out-of-control rocket by Elon Musk's SpaceX puts India's Chandrayaan in danger

A SpaceX rocket that has lost control has put India's Chandrayaan and NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter in danger. They are orbiting the Moon to collect observations about the impact crater. The debris of the seven-year-old rocket, that had been launched from Florida, can collide with the Moon as well.

The dry mass of Falcon 9's second stage is about 4 metric tonnes, and it should impact the Moon at a velocity of about 2.58 km/s.

The aim of the booster was to attempt an interplanetary mission to send a space-weather satellite on a million-mile journey.

"It has been following a somewhat chaotic orbit since February 2015," said meteorologist Eric Berger explained in a recent post on Ars Technica.

"This is the first unintentional case [of space junk hitting the moon] of which I am aware," as per Bill Gray, who writes the widely used Project

Pluto software to track near-Earth objects.

For those asking: yes, an old



Falcon 9 second stage left in high orbit in 2015 is going to hit the moon on March 4. It's interesting, but not a big deal.

- Jonathan McDowell (@planet4589) January 25, 2022

This comes after Starlink satellites launched by Elon Musk's SpaceX nearly struck a Chinese space station called Tiangong.

It had to manoeuvre to avoid colliding with one Starlink satellite in July and with another in October, according to a note submitted by Beijing to the United Nations space agency this month.

Beijing's complaint about Starlink had prompted criticism on Chinese social media of SpaceX's billionaire founder Musk, who is widely admired in China.

SpaceX is a private American company, independent of the US military and civilian space agency NASA.

In March last year, debris from a Falcon 9 rocket launched by US aeronautics company SpaceX fell to Earth in Washington and on the Oregon coast.





# Was Moon once a magnetic powerhouse? Scientists unravel new lunar mystery

**A new study confirms that Moon could have been an occasional magnetic powerhouse early in its history**

Scientists have long been intrigued by the non-magnetic nature of the Moon today, while rocks and regolith samples returned from the lunar surface indicated that they formed in the presence of a strong magnetic field. This magnetic field was so strong that it rivalled Earth's.

A new study confirms that Moon could have been an occasional magnetic powerhouse early in its history as scientists identify how a Moon-sized body could have generated a magnetic field that strong. The evidence of the likely magnetic nature of the Moon popped up during analysis of rocks returned to Earth during Nasa's Apollo program from 1968 to 1972.

The study, published in the journal Nature

Astronomy, shows that giant rock formations sinking through the Moon's mantle could have produced the kind of interior convection that could have generated those strong magnetic fields. Researchers say that this process could have produced intermittently strong magnetic fields for the first billion years of the Moon's history.

## HOW IS A MAGNETIC FIELD GENERATED?

"Everything that we've thought about how magnetic fields are generated by planetary cores tells us that a body of the Moon's size should not be able to generate a field that's as strong as Earth's," said Alexander Evans, an assistant professor of Earth, environmental and planetary sciences at

Brown and co-author of the study.

The magnetic field in planetary bodies is produced by a process known as core dynamo when slowly dissipating heat causes the convection of molten metals in a planet's core. The constant churning of electrically conductive material is what produces a magnetic field. It is the same way that Earth produces its magnetic field, which protects the surface from the sun's most dangerous radiation.

Evans added that instead of thinking about how to power a strong magnetic field continuously over billions of years, maybe there's a way to get a high-intensity field intermittently. "Our model shows how that can happen, and it's consistent with what we know about the Moon's interior," Evans said. For a core

to continuously churn out magnetic it needs to dissipate a lot of heat.

## A MAGNETIC MOON

In the case of the early Moon, Evans says, the mantle surrounding the core wasn't much cooler than the core itself. Because the core's heat didn't have anywhere to go, there wasn't much convection in the core. The new study now shows how sinking rocks could have provided intermittent convective boosts. A few million years after the Moon was formed it is believed to have been covered by an ocean of molten rock. As the vast magma ocean began to cool and solidify, minerals like olivine and pyroxene that were denser than the liquid magma sank to the bottom, while less dense minerals like anorthosite floated to form the crust.

# Mars is alive! Indian scientists find unique movements on the surface

The images of tracks left behind by Curiosity and the Perseverance rover on Mars are reminders of human ingenuity on another planet that has remained untouched for millennia. However, the two rovers are not the only things leaving their marks on this uninhabitable world, there are natural forces at work as well. Scientists at the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad have spotted thousands of tracks on the surface created by tumbling boulders. These boulder tracks can be used to pinpoint recent seismic activity on the planet as humans become more and more interested in the Red Planet with plans to

develop colonies in the near future.

"Mars is currently active," says Dr S Vijayan, Assistant Professor with the Planetary Science Division at the Physical Research Laboratory, who led the research.

## MOVEMENT ON MARS

The study published last month in Geophysical Research Letters states that it takes about two to four Martian years (four to eight Earth years) for these boulder tracks to disappear, whereas on Earth they are rarely preserved. These ejections and tracks can be used to recognise very recent surface processes on planetary surfaces.

When a boulder falls, at each bounce the regolith (Martian surface material) on the surface is thrown out in a unique pattern. On Mars, these patterns appear V-shaped, with the spread pointing downslope and the spacing between each bounce is non-uniform. The spatial spread of BFE varies from bounce-to-bounce and boulder-to-boulder.

The herringbone-like patterns of tracks on the surface are formed by the bouncing of boulders, and 4,500 such tracks have been spotted in the nearly 900-kilometre length of the surface. Nearly 30 per cent of these ejections are observed in the Cerberus Fossae region, which suggests it is one

of the most seismically active regions on Mars. Led by Vijayan, the researchers glanced over thousands of images captured from 2006 through 2020 by the High-Resolution Imaging Science Experiment (HiRISE) camera onboard Nasa's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter. They found unique tracks all over indicating recent activity on the planet.

## MARS IS ACTIVE

Dr Vijayan said that most of these tracks that they have spotted are likely just a few decades old, some even younger than that. "These tracks take a few years to disappear, which indicate that the ones we have spotted are fairly new."





## COVID-19 Strain: Healthcare Workers Increasingly Seek Mental Health Help

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has seen a steep decrease in mental health Trusted Source across different groups, while new research Trusted Source finds doctors are also reaching their limits during the pandemic.

Canadian researchers analyzed anonymous data from an Ontario database involving 34,000 physicians who had 50,000 mental health visits during the first year of the pandemic. They found that 27 percent more Ontario doctors sought help for burnout and substance misuse in the first year of the pandemic than in 2019.

Some specialties more affected than others

The study published this month in JAMA Network Open also revealed certain specialties had many more mental health visits than others.

Findings indicate that psychiatrists showed the highest rate of annual visits at about 3,442 visits per 1,000 physicians, while surgeons had the lowest rate, at only 371 per 1,000.

"Not all physicians are the same, and some specialties face different pressures and realities. The differences we saw between specialties may be explained by specialty-specific attitudes towards seeking care for mental health," co-senior study author Dr. Manish Sood, said in a statement. However, the findings also showed that mental health visits didn't vary by demographic group or work locations - with no differences by gender, age, or whether they worked in an urban or rural environment.

Pandemic has brought unique challenges to healthcare

Anthony LoGalbo, PhD, associate

professor at the Florida Tech School of Psychology, told Healthline that doctors aren't only struggling with many of the same concerns as the general population - like restricted access to friends and family, concerns about the virus, and information overload.

"Healthcare workers are often dealing with additional stressors related to increased vigilance and sanitary guidelines they must follow to reduce infection risk at work," he said.

According to LoGalbo, increased stress may cause a variety of symptoms, such as problems sleeping, increased tiredness, rapid heart rate or breathing rate, feeling more easily overwhelmed or anxious, and having trouble concentrating.

"Compassion fatigue and burnout in physicians has been a growing topic of study in recent years," said Arianna Galligher, a licensed independent social worker supervisor and associate director of the STAR Trauma Recovery Center at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

Galligher pointed out that one of the most common reasons that doctors and other healthcare professionals are drawn to the field is a desire to help others.

However, she pointed out that even when "everyone does everything right" positive outcomes aren't guaranteed, and healthcare professionals bear the burden of being present with patients and their families on their worst days.

"The stress that accompanies this vicarious exposure to trauma can result in emotional exhaustion, anxiety, depression, feelings of cynicism,

increased errors, increased substance use, relationship problems, and suicidal ideation," Galligher said.

Virtual care options might explain some of the increase

According to researchers, the expansion of 'virtual care' options during the pandemic might play a role in the increased mental health visits they observed.

This could be due to less perceived stigma associated with this type of care compared to traditional, in-person treatment.

"Doctors in particular are hesitant to reach out for mental health services, most commonly citing worry about perceptions and the possibility of future career damage, especially when it comes to affecting their professional licenses," said Scott A. Gustafson, PhD, professor in the Florida Tech School of Psychology and director of Community Psychological Services. Gustafson added that although the move to "more robust" telehealth delivery of mental health likely increases availability of services, the mass adoption of online treatment is "so new" that there are no reliable numbers regarding its effectiveness, "especially in comparison to in-person services."

'Culture of compassion' key to supporting healthcare staff  
Galligher emphasized that the most impactful strategies to support healthcare professionals use "a multifaceted approach at the system level."

She said that mental health programs must incorporate preventative strategies to support well-being and

## Ten things to keep in mind during a cold wave



With the mercury plunging, influenza and Covid-19 aren't the only health concerns. Cold temperatures that keep people indoors can lead to a lack of exercise, thereby leaving people more susceptible to illnesses. Being indoors more also leads to sedentary habits and this may lead to fluctuation in nutrition levels causing ailments like diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Dr Sandeep Patil, chief intensivist at Fortis Hospital in Kalyan, Mumbai, tells us what to do.

**Exercise Regularly:** Physical activity is important to keep fit throughout the winter. Daily routine of yoga or any form of physical activity will help keep you warm and boost the immune system, improving defense against seasonal ailments.

**A Healthy Diet:** Eating a well-balanced diet, including whole grains, lean meats, fish, poultry, legumes, nuts and seeds, herbs and spices, as well as plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables are essential to boost the immune system. We can also have an optimum intake of foods rich in Vitamin C, as it helps to strengthen our immune system and to keep your body fit. Moreover, abstain from consuming high-calorie winter delights.

**Manage Stress:** When you feel stressed out, take a break and do something that gets your mind off stress. This gives your stress response system a chance to rest and reboot.

**Regular Health Checks:** During winters, people prefer to stay cozy and indoors where they are in contact with several other people; thus, facilitating the speedy and easy transmission of diseases. Moreover, the foggy climate and less sunlight help promote bacterial growth. Thus, health check-ups in winter are very important as a preventive step.

**Monitor your vitals:** It is essential to keep a note of one's blood pressure, heart rate and blood sugar level as well as consult a doctor in case major fluctuations are recorded.

**Abstain from Smoking and Drinking Alcohol:** Smoking and alcohol consumption in excess should be avoided. Alcohol has a toxic effect on the heart muscles. It can lead to atrial fibrillation--an abnormal heart rhythm. Smoking can aggravate heart problems, respiratory ailments and cause high blood pressure.

**Getting Enough Sleep:** Sleep is crucial because it helps regenerate the body while stabilising energy and appetite levels the next day. As per data released by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), it is recommended that an individual should get at least 7-8 hours of sleep daily.



# JAPNAAM, says Prashantt Guptha, The new entry into AASHRAM



awe of him. And Bobby Deol is a sweetheart human being. He's a gentle soul and we bonded very well. So much so when I kept complimenting his fragrance, he sent his boy to go buy me a bottle of the same. The full circle of it all is, years ago we were Co-Grand Marshals in an India Day Parade in Long Island, NY, and now we were co-actors in one of India's biggest shows.

Born and raised in New York, Prashantt Guptha has long been a Mumbai resident and Bollywood actor. He recently played prominent roles in Vivek Agnihotri's THE TASHKENT FILES and Hotstar's SPECIAL OPS. Closing words on his experience of Bollywood and where he has reached, he now feels he wants to guide Bollywood aspirants that are from the US. And he extends a gesture to those seriously interested to find him on Instagram, @prashanttguptha, and get in touch with him. "Having been through what I have, I'd love to save many much miseries and hardships."

Actor Prashantt Guptha is set to play a pivotal role in the next season of India's leading streaming platform MX PLAYER's hit webseries, Aashram. The super successful show is directed by veteran Indian filmmaker Prakash Jha, and stars Bobby Deol.

Now in it's new season releasing soon in 2022, Prashantt will make his mark as the new entry in a very dynamic character. Speaking to Prashantt, he expressed with much joy, "The show is one of the most massively viewed webseries in Indian OTT history, and im delighted to be a part of its next chapter. The highlight for me was to shoot in Jaipur, my native city." Prashantt mentioned that the location of the shoot was five minutes away from his ancestral village of Kunda, near the historical Amer Fort. When asked about the experience of working with a veteran filmmaker like Prakash Jha and a star like Bobby Deol, he made some interesting points. "I have never seen a more enthusiastic and energetic man then Prakash ji. His charisma and command

would almost give me a complex, such was my level of





## Heartbroken Huma Qureshi says she's 'stuck in a never-ending world of cheats' in cryptic posts

Actor Huma Qureshi has shared a bunch of cryptic posts on her Instagram Stories. Without revealing the reason behind the posts, the actor said that she is tired of "never-ending lies or cheats." Huma wrote on her Instagram Stories in three parts, "Stuck in a never ending world of lies or cheats if you want to call them, just tired from all of this (broken heart emoji)." Huma was seen in three different projects last year. She saw the release of her Bollywood film *BellBottom* in theatres. Also starring Akshay Kumar and Lara Dutta, *BellBottom* was entirely shot during the coronavirus pandemic and was the first film to release in theatres post lockdown last year. She also headlined the web show *Maharani*,

in which she played a the role of a homemaker turned politician. The actor was also seen in American film, *Army of the Dead*.

Huma will next be seen in Tamil film, *Valimai*. It would star Ajith Kumar as the male lead. She is also working on Netflix Original film *Monica O My Darling*. In December, Huma shared the trailer of her upcoming film, *Double XL*. She co-stars with Sonakshi Sinha in the movie. Both of them have addressed the issue of fat-shaming through the film's subject.

During an interview with *Forbes* during the making of *Army of the Dead*, Huma had talked about how women are not getting better roles. She had said, "This entire system is male dominated. Films

were written by men and made for the male gaze. Yes, we are headed in the right direction. Now, better roles are being written for women, they have better representation.

But women before us

have toiled hard to

ensure we stand

where we are

right now. We

are standing on

their shoulders

and it is our

duty to

improve

things for

the next

generation.

## Kareena Kapoor shares glimpse of Taimur Ali Khan's 'tricoloured' breakfast on Republic Day

Kareena Kapoor has shared a glimpse of son Taimur Ali Khan's Republic Day celebrations. The actor shared a picture of how Taimur had a healthy tricoloured breakfast on the occasion.

Taking to her Instagram Stories, Kareena shared a picture of snacks made from a slice of orange (saffron), apple (white) and what appears to be a kiwi (green). She captioned it, "Tim's tri-coloured breakfast" along with



a tricolour icon. Kareena will now be seen in *Laal Singh Chaddha* that stars Aamir Khan in the titular role. She would be seen opposite Aamir in the

film which also stars their 3 Idiots co-star Mona Singh. Last year, Kareena welcomed her second child, Jehangir. She also released her pregnancy manual named *Kareena Kapoor Khan's Pregnancy Bible*.

The actor had also opened up about how she and husband Saif Ali Khan have been bringing up Taimur. "I am not very strict. I think I am quite relaxed and chill.

I have to inculcate discipline a little more as Saif spoils Taimur so much that it annoys me sometimes. And during the lockdown, our schedules went haywire.



## Anushka Sharma congratulates new parents Priyanka Chopra, Nick Jonas: 'Get ready for sleepless nights'

Anushka Sharma penned a congratulatory post for Priyanka Chopra and her husband Nick Jonas, who welcomed their first baby together recently. Priyanka announced the news on social media on Saturday. In a note posted on her Instagram Stories, Anushka wrote, "Congratulations Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas. Get ready for sleepless nights and unparalleled joy and love. Lots of love to the little one." Anushka and her husband Virat Kohli became parents last year - they celebrated their daughter Vamika's first birthday in January this year. Anushka Sharma congratulates Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas. Anushka's wishes comes a few



days after Priyanka and Nick announced that they have welcomed a baby via surrogacy on their Instagram handles. "We are overjoyed to confirm that we have welcomed a baby via

surrogate. We respectfully ask for privacy during this special time as we focus on our family. Thank you so much," their posts read. On Sunday, Priyanka's close friend Natasha



Poonawalla penned a long note for the couple, congratulating them. Natasha wrote, "Congratulations PC and Nick!! (red heart emoji) Thrilled for you guys... brace yourself for life's

greatest joyride! (baby emoji) Wish you all the love and strength for this new chapter. From sleepless party nights to sleepless parenting nights! - with you all the way." In a recent interview to *Vanity Fair* magazine, Priyanka had spoken about starting a family with Nick. Priyanka was asked whether her mother, Dr Madhu Chopra hopes to become a grandma someday. "They're a big part of our desire for the future. By God's grace, when it happens, it happens," Priyanka said. But when the interviewer pointed that both her and Nick lead very busy lives, she had cheekily replied, "No, we're not too busy to practice."





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## Russia vs NATO

Crisis in Ukraine a showdown of two world views



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The challenge for Biden, NATO and the European Union is whether their collective resolve and solidarity can protect Ukraine's vision of itself as part of the West, and whether Putin's Russian nationalist ambitions in the region will succeed or fail

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