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Russia began preparing for cyber attacks on Ukraine in early 2021



Full Story
on Page 28

State of the power crunch

From the heat wave to depleted capacity, and technical snags to coal shortage, states are facing multiple problems in meeting increased demand for power. A look at the situation in some:



Full Story
on Page 29

Common values, shared threats in India-Australia cyber security ties

Deepening cooperation can develop avenues for mutual learning and create complementary markets in cyber tools and technologies, boosting bilateral business and strategic commitments on both continents



(Contd. on page 30)

IP protection: India among most challenging economies, says USTR

In its 2022 Special 301 Report, the USTR designated seven countries in the Priority Watch List. These are Argentina, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Russia and Venezuela

(SAI Bureau) India remains one of the most challenging major economies with respect to protection and enforcement of intellectual property, the office of the US Trade Representative said in a report as it decided to retain New Delhi on the Priority Watch List. In its 2022 Special 301 Report, the USTR designated seven countries in the Priority Watch List. These are Argentina, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Russia and Venezuela. The review of Ukraine has been suspended due to Russia's premeditated and unprovoked invasion of the country, the USTR said. The USTR in the India



section of the report said over the past year, India has remained inconsistent in its progress on IP protection and enforcement. While India made meaningful progress to promote IP protection and enforcement in some areas over the past year, it failed to resolve recent and long-standing challenges and it created new concerns for right holders, the report said. (Contd. on page 30)

French President Emmanuel Macron reelected: What's happening next?

French President Emmanuel Macron was reelected in the recently-concluded presidential elections, but here's what will happen next.



(Contd. on page 30)

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on page 44

Indian High School Student Drowns In Pond In US

According to NJ.com, the pond in which Ajit died has a depth of about 12 to 15 feet and swimming is banned



(SAI Bureau) New York: In a tragic incident, an 18-year-old Indian high school student drowned in a pond in the US state of New Jersey after he went into the frigid water to retrieve a soccer ball for children playing nearby, according to media reports.

Clinton G Ajit, who hailed from Niranam in Kerala, went into Hardcastle Pond in New Milford

on Friday around 7 pm to retrieve the soccer ball and apparently drowned after he suddenly went underwater, northjersy.com, a digital news content provider, reported.

However NJ.com, another digital newspaper quoting police, said emergency officers responded to a call around 7:15 pm that someone went swimming in the pond and did not return. First

responders recovered Ajit's body in about three hours.

"The water went up to his waist. Then it went up to his neck. Then he had his whole, full body in the water," CBS news channel quoted 10-year-old Sam Rueda, who saw the tragedy unfold with his family, as saying.

"After he put his hands down, that was the last we ever saw of him. Then his friends started to panic," Sam said. Borough police confirmed Ajit's identity late Saturday afternoon.

The Bergen County Medical Examiner's Office and New Milford Police Department are partnering to determine the cause of death, according to a news release from the borough police department.

Police say his death appears to be an accident.

"There are no words that can

describe the pain that this family is going through right now," New Milford Mayor Michael Putrino said. "Our hearts are broken." Ajit was studying at New Milford High School.

Friends said he was a smart and kind kid. His classmates, like many others in the town, were in disbelief. Friends and strangers stopped by the pond on Saturday to leave flowers at a small memorial.

A GoFundMe fundraiser campaign was organised by Gabriella George, a family friend from Weehawken, according to NorthJersey.com.

George described Ajit as a "loving son ...and brother".

She described him as an inquisitive, intelligent young man with a passion for animals who knew "everything about everything." "His family

immigrated to the United States in September 2012 when he was eight years old," George said online.

"He enjoyed participating in musical theatre, band, and various sports. Clinton was an intelligent, humorous, and kind young man." According to George, Ajit planned to study criminal justice at Montclair State University. A GoFundMe for the family raised over USD 50,000 as of Sunday morning.

According to NJ.com, the pond in which Ajit died has a depth of about 12 to 15 feet and swimming is banned.

"I don't know. I just want the family to know they're in my prayers. I was up all last night just thinking about that poor mom and what she had to go through," neighbour Mary Lukas said.

A funeral service for Ajit will be held on Monday.

Little Girl Tries Indian Food For First Time In Australia, Her Reaction Leaves Internet In Awe

A little girl has tried Indian dishes for the first time at a restaurant in Australia and her reaction has left internet users in awe



(SAI Bureau) Indian food is famous all across the globe and it is renowned for its spices and aromatic flavours. There may not be many people who haven't tried Indian delicacies in their life. Now, a little girl has also tried Indian dishes for the first time at a restaurant in Australia and her reaction has left internet users in awe. "Trying Indian food for the first time is always an experience to share!" read the caption of the clip. The video was posted in early April and has since received thousands of likes. In the clip, the girl is seen dining at an Indian restaurant, gorging on some rice with kadhai chicken. She is then seen trying some mango kulfi.

After her meal, the girl tastes fennel seeds, or saunf, that is usually served at Indian restaurants.

Her reaction to tasting the mouth freshener is quite hilarious to see. The girl is even seen making friends with the restaurant servers as well, as she is seen talking to one woman.

Shared on Instagram, the post has been filled with users asking if she liked the food. One person said, "Mark my words, once you have a taste of Indian food. There is no going back." Another wrote, "Hope she loved it." "I bet she also loved the Mango...and i also don't like Saunf(3rd one)," added third. Meanwhile, in another viral video, an elderly couple from

Karnataka has been breaking the internet. Serving unlimited meals at just Rs 50, the clip of the couple has taken the internet by storm. The name

of the eatery run by the elderly couple is Hotel Ganesh Prasad or 'Ajja Ajji mane' as it is called by locals. The couple serves food daily

from 12pm to 3pm in an all-you-can-eat format. For just fifty rupees, guests can relish a complete meal to fill up their stomachs.

2 Indians Killed In Explosion At Oxygen Plant In Nepal

(SAI Bureau) The explosion took place at the Sagarmatha Oxygen Plant inside the Patan industrial estate on Thursday morning while workers were filling gas in a cylinder, police said Kathmandu: Two Indians were killed and six others injured on Thursday in an explosion at an oxygen plant in an industrial area in Lalitpur district near Kathmandu. The explosion took place at the Sagarmatha Oxygen Plant inside the Patan industrial estate on Thursday morning while workers were filling gas in a cylinder, police said. The explosion also destroyed the zinc roof of the oxygen plant and broke windows of adjacent buildings. In the explosion, 45-year-old Brij Mahato, a



resident of Ratanpurwa village in Bihar's West Champaran district, died on the spot while another Indian national, Raj Kumar Mahato, 25, died while undergoing treatment at B and

B Hospital in Lalitpur. Nepal Home Minister Balkrishna Khand has instructed the police to carry out rescue works and investigate the accident.



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Indian-Origin Malaysian Man Loses Death Term Appeal For Drug Trafficking In Singapore

Nagaenthran K Dharmalingam was convicted in 2010 at the age of 18 for importing 42.72g of heroin in 2009.



psychiatrists, with a stay of execution in the meantime. Following the conviction, Dharmalingam has exhausted all his legal recourse. On Tuesday, after his mother's application was dismissed, the court granted Dharmalingam two hours to spend with his family members and hold their hands, according to a report by the Straits Times newspaper. The mother, who is here from Malaysia, had her last-minute application dismissed by a three-judge Court of Appeal, comprising Justices Andrew Phang, Judith Prakash and Belinda Ang, the report said.

The attempt came nearly a month after a five-judge Court of Appeal, led by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, on March 29 rejected Dharmalingam's last-ditch bid to challenge his death sentence, calling it a blatant and egregious abuse of the court's processes.

Earlier on Tuesday, before a packed courtroom, the mother, Madam Panchalai Supermaniam, told the court through a Tamil interpreter: "I want my son back alive, Your

Honour." She said that she needed time to get a lawyer. Court papers filed on behalf of mother and son on Monday (April 25) contended that Chief Justice Menon, in presiding over the appeal, had "fundamentally breached" Dharmalingam's constitutional right to a fair trial, and that this gave rise to a "reasonable apprehension of bias". This argument was premised on the fact that Chief Justice Menon was the serving Attorney-General when Dharmalingam was convicted and had his sentence upheld on appeal.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Wong Woon Kwong said this argument was baseless and conveniently omitted the fact that Dharmalingam and his previous lawyers had no objections to Chief Justice Menon presiding over the case. The prosecutor said Chief Justice Menon's tenure as Attorney-General had specifically been brought to Dharmalingam's attention, but the inmate had confirmed through his counsel that he had no objections. DPP

Wong added that Chief Justice Menon was not involved in any of the decisions relating to Dharmalingam's prosecution. On March 1, his lawyers argued that Dharmalingam was "not competent" to be executed, claiming he was mentally disabled.

On March 29, the five-judge court said there was no admissible evidence showing any decline in Dharmalingam's mental condition. The only evidence offered by Dharmalingam's former lawyer M Ravi was a "self-serving" affidavit in which he speculated that the inmate had the mental age of a person under the age of 18. Dharmalingam's lawyers had also objected to psychiatric and medical reports of the inmate's scheduled check-ups - conducted on August 5 and November 3 last year - from being admitted as evidence. The court said the lawyers' objection supports the inference that Dharmalingam is seeking to prevent the court from accessing that evidence because he knows or believes it would undermine his case.

(SAI Bureau) Singapore: The Singapore Court of Appeal on Tuesday rejected a legal challenge filed by the mother of an Indian-origin Malaysian drug trafficker as an eleventh hour attempt to halt the hanging of her son that is scheduled at the country's Changi prison on Wednesday.

Nagaenthran K Dharmalingam was convicted in 2010 at the age of 18 for importing 42.72g of heroin in 2009. He was caught at Woodlands Checkpoint (a causeway link with Peninsular Malaysia) while entering Singapore, with the bundle of drugs strapped to his thigh. As

per the law of Singapore, which is extremely stringent against people who violate anti-drug laws, the Misuse of Drugs Act provides for the death sentence where the amount of heroin smuggled is more than 15g.

The mother of Dharmalingam, who is now 34, had appealed against a High Court decision that dismissed his application to commence judicial review proceedings on the basis that he purportedly possessed the mental age of someone below 18. The Malaysian national had also mounted a criminal motion to be assessed by an independent panel of

Picked by Biden, Indian American Arun Venkataraman appointed in key administrative role in US

Indian American Arun Venkataraman has been appointed as the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Global Markets and Director General of the US

(SAI Bureau) Indian American Arun Venkataraman was sworn in as the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Global Markets and Director General of the US and Foreign Commercial Service for the International Trade Administration.

In this position, Venkataraman will lead a team of over 1,400 employees strategically located in 106 offices across the United States and 78 markets abroad, supporting US companies in markets representing 95 per cent of global GDP and 97 per cent of US trade.

This includes over a thousand career professionals that specialise in export promotion, commercial diplomacy and foreign direct investment to help US companies expand into international markets and attract foreign direct

investment into the United States.

APPOINTED BY BIDEN

Venkataraman was appointed by President Joseph R Biden and confirmed by the US Senate on April 7 to lead the federal government's efforts to promote exports abroad and attract inward investment, an official release said.

"Arun's expertise in trade law and commercial policy will be an invaluable asset as the Commerce Department helps US businesses and workers recover and come back stronger from the economic toll inflicted by COVID-19," said Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. The Indian American has over 20 years of experience advising companies, international organisations and the US government on international trade issues.

Prior to his appointment, he served as the counsellor to the secretary of commerce, advising the department on trade and other international economic matters.

Before joining the Biden administration, he was a senior director at Visa, leading a global government engagement strategy on a range of international policy issues, including digital economy, trade, tax and sanctions.

SERVED IN THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

He also served in the Obama administration as the ITA's director of policy.

Additionally, he has had an extensive legal career, including serving as a legal officer for the World Trade Organization, Trade and Investment Policy Advisor at Steptoe and Johnson

LLP. He also served a law clerk for Judge Jane A Restani at the US Court of International Trade. Venkataraman holds a JD from Columbia Law School, a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and a BA from Tufts University. "In over 20 years working in the field of trade, I have seen first-hand the value that American companies and workers offer in every corner of the globe. The world turns to the US because we have the expertise, experience, and entrepreneurial spirit to provide the products, services and innovative solutions that make a difference. I thank President Biden, Secretary Raimondo, and the US Senate for entrusting me with this position," said Venkataraman in a press release.

Patiala turns into battleground as banned pro-Khalistan Sikh for Justice attacks police, clashes with other organisation

(SAI Bureau) Clashes erupted between pro-Khalistan supporters and members of a Hindu organisation outside the hallowed Ma Kali Temple in Punjab's Patiala on Friday. The incident took place during the 'Khalistan Murdabad' march carried out by Shiv Sena Bal Thackeray when pro-Khalistan supporters attacked the march with stones and swords. Stones were hurled and swords brandished as the pro-Khalistan supporters ran amok, barging into the Ma Kali Temple in Patiala. The skirmishes reportedly broke out after pro-Khalistan supporters raised slogans hailing Khalistan and attacking the participants of the 'Khalistan Murdabad' march. The armed Sikh mob which was a part of the

pro-Khalistan rally organised in opposition to the 'Khalistan Murdabad' march attacked the Kali Mata Temple after Hindus had taken shelter inside the temple premises.

Videos of pro-Khalistan supporters hurling stones and raising slogans in support of Khalistan have emerged on social media. In one of the videos that have emerged on social media, a bevy of protesters could be seen blocking a roundabout in Patiala and shouting "Khalistan Zindabad" slogans. As per reports, several people have been injured in the clashes. The police reached the spot shortly after the riots broke out between the two



sparring parties. The law enforcement officials fired in the air to control the situation. However, a Hindu leader, Karmaveer Singh, was injured, along with SHO Tripathi. SHO Tripathi was attacked by pro-Khalistan supporters with a sword, a report published in Dainik Jagran said. Around 15 rounds of aerial shots were fired by the police to bring the situation under control. OpIndia spoke to Harish Sangla, the Punjab working head of Shiv Sena Bal Thackeray, about the clashes that erupted between pro-Khalistan supporters and

Hindus. Sangla said a 'Khalistan Murdabad' march was organised by his party to protest against a small section of pro-Khalistan supporters harbouring secessionist mentality.

"We had organised a 'Khalistan Murdabad' march to mark our protest against a minuscule section of people who are still harbouring secessionist ideology and support the idea of Khalistan. This march was against proponents of Khalistan who have caused grave pain to the people of Punjab who were victims of Khalistani terrorism and had lost their loved ones to it. Our protest was against Khalistan and we will never allow Punjab to become Khalistan," Sangla said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman says India needs Russian help to defend its borders

(SAI Bureau) Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday (April 23) told Bloomberg that India needs Russian help to defend its borders. India and Russia are long-time allies and New Delhi procures most of its military hardware from Moscow. "You have a neighbour who joins hands with another neighbour, both of whom are against me. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, God forbid, if there are alliances created, India has to be strong enough to protect itself," Sitharaman said alluding to China and Pakistan. "India wants to be friends with the European Union and the Western, free, liberal world," she added, "but not as a weak friend that needs desperate help here and there."

Sitharaman is in Washington to attend the annual spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently visited India and signed a "new and expanded" defence and security partnership.

Political experts had said it was a move by the West to reduce India's reliance on its biggest military supplier Russia.

Although India has abstained from voting against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it has condemned the killing in Bucha and provided humanitarian aid to Kyiv. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had told US President Joe Biden that he had asked

Russian President Vladimir Putin to negotiate a peace deal with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Washington has asked New Delhi to limit bilateral relations with Moscow by reducing its oil trade with Russia.

In response, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said, "India's approach should be guided by our national beliefs and values, by our national interest, and by our national strategy."

Adding that European countries such as France and Germany were still buying oil from Russia, Jaishankar said, "So what should India do in these circumstances? At the time when energy costs have



spiked, clearly, we need to supply any goods which ensure that the common India wants to buy."

"I have no doubt that a to an additional and way would be (found) to unavoidable burden. Similarly, bypass the artificial fertiliser prices have a direct impediments which illegal implication for the livelihoods of unilateral sanctions by the the majority of our population." West create. This relates

According to Russian also to the area of military- Foreign Minister Sergei technical cooperation," he Lavrov, "We will be ready to added.

Air India loses preferential access to bilateral rights needed to operate international flights

(SAI Bureau) As per a revised set of guidelines issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Air India will no longer enjoy a priority in the allocation of international traffic rights. The move comes after Tata Sons took control of Air India from the government. In the revised guidelines issued on April 19, DGCA apparently removed a clause that gave the airline advantage over other private carriers. The deleted clause stated: "Due consideration shall be given to operational plans submitted by

Air India before allocation of the traffic rights to other eligible applicants." On January 27, the Tata Group took full control of the airline as it landed back in the hands of its founders decades after it was nationalised. The strategic disinvestment transaction was concluded after years as a burden on the public purse.

Meanwhile, the latest move means, it is now equal for all the airlines for the allocation of traffic rights.

The fresh circular read: "The central

government may at its discretion grant or deny allocation of traffic rights to any air transport undertaking having regard to its preparedness to undertake such operations, viability of the operations on a particular route, overall interests of the civil aviation sector etc." Significantly, for the airlines of a particular country to operate international flights to another country, the two sides have to negotiate and sign a "bilateral air services agreement". The agreement decides how many flights (or seats) per week can



be allowed to fly from one country to the other. Importantly, once such an agreement is signed, each country is free to allocate the bilateral rights to its respective airlines.

Police bandobast failed: Delhi High Court on vandalism at Arvind Kejriwal's home

Voicing displeasure over the “failure” of the police to prevent it, the court directed the Delhi Police Commissioner to fix responsibility for the “serious lapse”



(SAI Bureau) It is a “very inadequate.” This kind of incident happening at the residence of any constitutional functionary - whether it is the CM, it could be a judge of the high court or Supreme Court, it could be any other Union Minister. This is a very disturbing state of affairs that this kind of a thing could occur in the first place or such miscreants should succeed in their endeavour,” the court said. Voicing displeasure over the

“failure” of the police to prevent it, the court directed the Delhi Police Commissioner to fix responsibility for the “serious lapse”.

“It is very clear that there has been a failure. We want the Commissioner of Police to look into this. There are two aspects: one, on the part of the police to ensure that this should not have happened, and second, about the miscreants. You say you have made certain arrests. It's a judicial proceeding and we don't want to interfere there. You must look into the lapses by police,” the court said as the lawyer representing the force tried to put up a defence. “Wireless messages were there. The force was there. Water cannon were used but the people came in from the sides. I'm not saying there was no breach. Bandobast was

done because there was information about the protest permission being refused. One company of male and one company of female officers had been requisitioned. Highest officials are conducting a review of the security,” Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Sanjay Jain, appearing for the Delhi Police, told the court. “The CM's residence is right on the road. It's a running road and a very important running road. It is such that the best possible arrangements with regard to barricading cannot block the road. We will examine how it went wrong,” Jain argued. Abhishek Manu Singhvi, presenting the Aam Aadmi Party's case, said: “We are handicapped because we don't have the status report. Nothing like this can be kept closed as

a matter of security. On a matter like this, they should share information with those who are directly concerned. Here, there was a breach of the wall of the chief minister's residence. Courts have ordered SITs for other matters also. It's not a matter of politics. There should be an inquiry.”

“We are definitely not satisfied with the bandobast. You have admitted that they breached barricades at point A, then B and C. How can the police say this?” the court asked the police.

“The last time, the court had expressed anxiety about how such an incident happened at the residence of a constitutional functionary. It is a factual position that is emerging. An investigation is in progress. Camera angles are being examined.



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Bhagwant Mann visits Delhi's Mohalla Clinics, schools, announces to replicate 'Delhi Model' in Punjab

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday visited Mohalla Clinics and schools in Delhi and announced that the "Delhi Model" would be implemented in the state

(News Agency) Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday visited Mohalla Clinics in Delhi on his two-day visit to learn about the functioning of the healthcare facilities as well as the education model of the schools in the national capital. Mann visited the Mohalla Clinic in Greater Kailash, Chirag Enclave accompanied by Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi Health minister, Satyendra Jain, where he interacted with the doctors, paramedics and patients to have vital inputs regarding the performance of these clinics. The Punjab CM also visited the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital at Dilshad Garden where he inspected the Critical Care Unit (CCU) besides



interacting with the doctors after a detailed presentation. Mann, along with his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal, inaugurated the emergency services wing of the hospital. Earlier in the day, Mann along with his Delhi counterpart, Arvind Kejriwal had visited Dr. BR Ambedkar School of Specialized Excellence at Kalkaji, where he had detailed interaction with the students and even praised the state-of-the-art infrastructure. After the visit, he announced that Punjab would soon modernize the entire school education and health sector on the pattern of the Delhi model as promised by the Aam Aadmi Party during the run up to the assembly polls in the state

All-religion Roza Iftaar organised in Agra

An all-religion Roza Iftaar was organised in Agra. Thousands of people from Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian communities participated

(News Agency) Thousands of people from Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian communities sat together in the Sarafa Market building located in the densely populated area of Agra for Roza Iftaar. This was organised under the leadership of local social worker Syed Salman. The vice-president of Hindustani Biradari organisation, Vishal Sharma, said some elements are trying to tarnish the image of Agra, but peace-loving people of Agra will defy these efforts and present an example of "Sarv Dharm Sambhav". Sharma said that Hindustani Biradari Organisation was founded in the year 1927 by senior journalist and social worker Late Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi with the objective to emphasise that "we are Hindustani first, religion is second". "Every Indian should understand that we are only



people of "Hindustani Biradari". Religion and caste will now have to be put behind us," he said. Sharma said that when the communal fire broke out in Kanpur in 1930, the founder of the organisation, Late Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, was killed while trying to control the situation. Social worker Sameer hailed the spirit of communal harmony shown by the Agra residents at Roza Iftaar.

Tej Pratap Yadav says will resign from RJD after meeting party chief Lalu Prasad

RJD leader Tej Pratap Yadav announced on Monday that he would soon meet his father and resign from the party

(News Agency) Rashtriya Janata Dal leader and elder son of Lalu Prasad, Tej Pratap Yadav on Monday announced that he would soon meet his father and resign from the party. Taking to microblogging site Twitter, Tej Pratap informed about his decision. He said he had always followed his father's footsteps and respected all the party workers and he would soon meet his father and resign from the party. Tej Pratap's decision comes a day after RJD leader Ramraj Yadav accused the former of thrashing him at former Chief Minister Rabri Devi's official residence. Ramraj Yadav accused Tej Pratap of locking him up in a room and thrashing him during RJD's Iftar party on Friday,



Tej Pratap has rubbished the charges and accused RJD state president Jagdanand Singh, party MLC Sunil Singh and Tejashwi Yadav's political advisor Sanjay Yadav of conspiring against him.

Rajasthan government suspends Rajgarh official over temple demolition in Alwar

Bulldozers rolled in on the three-century old Shiva temple in Alwar's Sarai Mohalla on April 17-18, following which a complaint was filed against Sub Divisional Magistrate Keshav Meena and others



(News Agency) The Rajasthan government has suspended Rajgarh Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Keshav Kumar Meena with immediate effect amid a political firestorm in the state over the demolition of a 300-year-old temple in Alwar. The suspension order came this evening. Bulldozers rolled in on the three-century old Shiva temple in Alwar's Sarai Mohalla on April 17-18, following which a complaint was filed against the Executive Officer (EO) of the nagar panchayat, Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) and the Rajgarh MLA. The news broke at a time when the national capital was reeling under the aftershocks of violence during a Hanuman Jayanti procession in the city's Jahangirpuri area on April 16. Sharing a video of the

incident on Twitter on April 22 - days after incidents of communal violence were reported in Delhi's Jahangirpuri and Rajasthan's Karauli, BJP leader Amit Malviya launched a scathing attack on the Congress, saying, "Shedding tears on Karauli and Jahangirpuri and hurting the faith of Hindus -- this is the secularism of Congress." In another tweet, Amit Malviya alleged, "On 18 April, without issuing any notice, the administration ran bulldozers over the pucca houses and shops of 85 Hindus in Rajgarh town of Rajasthan. Rajasthan minister Pratap Singh Khachariyawas called the BJP's claim a lie. He alleged that the chairman of Rajgarh Urban Bodies Board, who is a BJP member, proposed to bring down the temples and houses.

NIA arrests 3 in connection with Khejuri bomb blast case

NIA arrested three persons for their alleged involvement in a bomb blast in West Bengal's Khejuri



(News Agency) National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested three persons for their alleged involvement in Khejuri bomb blast case. The accused have been identified as Saidul Ali Khan, Arif Billa and Samar Shankar Mandal. NIA probe revealed that all three accused were part of a criminal conspiracy to manufacture bombs to terrorise the local residents. One person was killed after a bomb that they were allegedly

manufacturing exploded in the house of Kankan Karan, a resident of West Bengal's Paschim Bhangannamari village in January 2022. While Kankan Karan, who is also an accused in the case, was seriously injured in the explosion, another person succumbed to injuries. A case was filed at the Khejuri Police Station in East Medinipur on January 4 and the NIA took over the investigation on January 25.

The PK-Congress deal: What went wrong

The news that poll strategist Prashant Kishor (PK) and the Congress party have decided to part ways amiably even before the nuptials, spread like a wildfire in Lutyens' Delhi. But what went wrong?



(News Agency) This afternoon, a tweet by AICC communication department head Randeep Surjewala took the entire political and media world by storm. The news that poll strategist Prashant Kishor (PK) and the Congress party

have decided to part ways amiably even before the nuptials, spread like a wildfire in Lutyens.

The blooming bond, which was the talk of the town, ended in a short span of time and that too abruptly. While the rumour mills worked overtime and the "sutr" or sources had a field day, Congress' highly placed sources said what led to the separation in this relationship was the factor that is a common one in any relationship that heads for splitsville - trust. According to highly placed

sources, a large chunk of leaders and workers in the Congress couldn't trust PK. And the we-told-you-so moment came when I-PAC reportedly signed a deal with TRS in Telangana. Congress' Telangana unit was up in arms and had sent an SOS to Delhi on Sunday night itself about the developments taking place in Hyderabad. Delhi immediately swung into action and P Chidambaram sub-committee was formed to discuss the recommendations given by the 11-member committee that met PK and other senior leaders and gave their recommendations to Congress President Sonia Gandhi. P Chidambaram along with six other leaders met Sonia Gandhi at 10, Janpath, following which the party made the announcement that the next month a three-day Chintin Shivir would take place in Udaipur, Rajasthan, where 400 leaders from across the country will brainstorm the party's 2024 roadmap. Surjewala had also announced that the party chief will soon constitute an Empowered Action Committee 2024 which will look into all the party's election related affairs up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

According to Congress

leaders present at the marathon meeting, Congress sent a signal to PK to clarify his standing regarding the I-PAC and TRS deal. He was also asked whether he would break his bond with other political opponents of Congress before joining the party. A Congress leader, who was present at the meeting, claimed, "The conditions PK kept weren't accepted by the committee. Had PK joined, he would have been expected to work in the party's framework. What he was asking for was "absolute power". Congress wasn't ready to take huge risks, that too, on a person who was 'wooing' other opposition parties, particularly the TRS, and invest heavily in his plan." Giving a glimpse of his side of the story, Prashant Kishore in his tweet said that "party needs leadership and collective will to fix the deep rooted structural problems through transformational reforms." Both parties, as of now, have maintained an eerie silence about their separation. But one thing is sure that this relationship with the grand old party as of now stands torn apart. What the future holds for this star-crossed relationship, only time will tell.

All Tata group aviation assets to be under one roof soon?

According to an internal email marked to the CEOs of Vistara, Air Asia, Air India Express, Air India SATS and the department heads of Air India, plans are afoot to move all entities together into a complex in Gurugram in a phased manner



is a joint venture it has with Singapore Airlines Limited (SIA), where Tata's own 51% and SIA hold 49% stakes. As for Air Asia, Tata Sons is a majority stakeholder with 83.67% stake while Air Asia Investment Limited (Malaysia) holds 16.33% stake.

(News Agency) Is the Tata Group moving forward on possible plans of synergy among its aviation assets? Well, it's been the buzzword since the group acquired erstwhile national carrier, Air India in January earlier this year. Now an email that has gone out to the top bosses of the company's aviation assets, may have confirmed the same. According to an internal email marked to the CEOs of Vistara, Air Asia, Air India Express, Air India SATS (ground handling supplier), and the department heads of Air India (after acquisition, the airline is yet to appoint a CEO), plans are afoot to move all entities together into a complex in Gurugram in a phased manner. As per the email, that India Today accessed, a new office space on NH8 has already been identified, where the option to lease 700,000 sq ft exists immediately. The target, it appears, is to move all the Tata Group aviation assets into a new space within the next two-three months. The email states the idea behind this plan is to "optimise resources, increase team work, and have higher synergies at work." Dr Harpreet A De Singh, Executive Director of Air India has been entrusted with the responsibility of coming up with a strategy plan. She is expected to be assisted by consultants from Ernst & Young and a team of professionals from Tata Realty. This new plan could involve challenges like existing leases that companies may have.

While Air India, Air India Express and AI SATS (Centre's 50% stake in the joint venture with Singapore Airport Terminal Services) were part of the bouquet that Tata Sons bought over from the government of India earlier this year, Vistara

Geetha Ravichandran takes charge as Mumbai's Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax

Geetha Ravichandran took over as Mumbai's Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax on Tuesday

(News Agency) Geetha Ravichandran, an Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer of the 1987 batch, took charge as Mumbai's Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax on Tuesday. Mumbai, India's financial capital, is the largest region in terms of revenue collection. The overall tax collection of direct taxes in the

Mumbai region for fiscal year 2021-22 was Rs 4,42,774 crores, which is 32 per cent of India's total tax collection. Before becoming the Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax for Mumbai, Ravichandran was the Principal Chief

Commissioner of Income Tax for Tamil Nadu and the Puducherry region. An alumna of Stella Maris College in Chennai, Geetha underwent training at the National Academy of Direct Taxes, Nagpur. She has also served in several cities across the country, including Chennai, Mumbai, Nagpur, and Bangalore.

During her 34-year career, she held key positions in the department, such as Assessment, Search Assessment, Tribunal Representation, TDS, Investigation, Central Charge, and International Taxation.



Terror module of Hizbul Mujahideen busted in J&K's Kulgam, 3 associates held

Kulgam police busted a terror module of proscribed terror outfit Hizbul Mujahideen by arresting three terrorist associates. In Baramulla, the police arrested two people belonging to the JeM hybrid module



(News Agency) Police in Kulgam busted a terror module of proscribed terror outfit Hizbul Mujahideen by arresting three terror associates. Besides, police along with security forces have arrested two hybrid terrorists linked with proscribed terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in the Pattan area of Baramulla. Incriminating materials, including arms and ammunition, have been recovered from their possession. In Kulgam, police busted a terror module of Hizbul by arresting three terror associates involved in the case pertaining to the killing of a Panch, Mohd Yaqoob Dar. Weapons used in the killing of the Panch, including one pistol, eight pistol rounds and two grenades were recovered from their possession. During the course of the investigation, it was learnt that an active terrorist of Hizbul, identified as Farooq Ahmad Bhat, had received directions from terror handlers based in Pakistan to target the PRI members of Kulgam. On their directions, he identified the target and further gave directions accordingly to active terrorist Raja Nadeem Rather to execute the terror act with the support of their associates Nasser Ahmad Wani, Adil Manzoor Rather and Majid Mohd Rather. The directions included conducting

Two terrorists of JeM arrested in Baramulla

In Baramulla, based on specific reliable inputs regarding the movement of two terrorists in a vehicle going towards Srinagar, joint Motor Vehicle Checking Points (MVCPs) were established by Police, 29RR, & 2Bn SSB at various spots along the national highway and surrounding by-lanes. At one such MVCP established at Hanjiveera Bala, a speeding Tavera was signalled to stop. As the vehicle stopped, the driver and co-passenger jumped off the vehicle and fled towards a nearby orchard area. A joint team chased the duo and the escape route cut offs were activated, following which the duo were arrested. They have been identified as Mohd Aqib Mir and Danish Ahad Dar. During the search, incriminating material, including two Chinese pistols, two pistol magazines, 10 rounds and two grenades were recovered. The duo were arrested and taken into custody for further questioning. The vehicle was also seized. During the course of the investigation, it was revealed that the duo belonged to a JeM hybrid module and were looking to target PRIs and minority/ outsiders.

a recce of the Panch's Hizbul terror module involved in presence, arrange transport the killing of Sarpanch Shabir and provide logistics to execute Ahmad Mir. Both the busted the terror act. During further modules received directions investigation, the involvement from their Hizbul handlers of one more person, Idrees Ahmad based in Pakistan. Further Dar, has surfaced. He was also investigation of the case is in part of the crime and is still at progress and more arrests and large. However, according to recoveries are also expected. reports, he had joined the Besides, efforts are on to terrorist ranks. It is pertinent to neutralise the active terrorists mention that the said module behind this heinous crime, said is linked with an already busted police.

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann slams opposition for criticising MoU with Delhi

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann lashed out at the opposition parties for statements criticising the AAP government's decisions. He said, 'criticism for the sake of just criticism and political survival is highly deplorable'

(News Agency) Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday lashed out at the opposition parties, asking them to desist from issuing unfounded, illogical, frivolous and politically motivated statements criticising the AAP government's recent landmark decisions. In a video message, Bhagwant Mann chided the Shiromani Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal for unleashing propaganda against the state government's recent initiatives to rejuvenate the health and education sectors on Delhi model. Advising Sukhbir Badal, the CM said, "Healthy criticism is always welcomed but criticism for the sake of just criticism and political survival is highly deplorable."

Bhagwant Mann said the Akali Dal leadership was bereft of any constructive political agenda and hell bent on tarnishing AAP's image, which

was voted to power with a thumping majority, thus decimating both Akali Dal and Congress parties from the Punjab polity. Bhagwant Mann rued that Akali Dal was making unnecessary hue and cry over the 'Knowledge Sharing Agreement' (KSA) in the field of Health & Education with the Delhi government.

"Had the Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal, which ruled Punjab for 44 years, done something tangible for the welfare of the people and prosperity of the state, they would not have to face such humiliation", he said. Further, Bhagwant said Sukhbir Badal should have patience at least for some time as AAP government had not completed its 44 days while the Congress remained in power for long period of over 25 years and Akali Dal ruled for 19 years. "Sukhbir Badal should not mislead the people by referring to false documents with regard

to the KSA besides befooling the people spreading canards about Punjab's AAP government being run from Delhi", the CM said, adding that Sukhbir Badal had gone to China to forge a collaboration for power generation from paddy straw

and his father Parkash Singh Badal had entered into several agreements in different fields with Ontario province of Canada. He questioned Sukhbir whether their government is run by the Chinese government or Ontario province. Taking MLA Partap Singh Bajwa to cudgels, the CM asked him to refrain from baseless accusations for sake of political bashing and reminded



him the time when their party's former chief minister was ordering posting and transfers of high-ups like Chief Secretary, DGP and senior bureaucrat at the instance of his foreign guest. "You were writing letters to the Chief Minister at that time showing displeasure over his autocratic style of functioning but later you too was seen having lunch and dinner with him", the CM reminded Bajwa.

Double whammy for wheat growers! Early summers, heat wave conditions shrivel grain & reduce yield

The continuous dry spell and the heat wave conditions have proved to be a double whammy for wheat growers in Punjab and Haryana. The farmers say wheat grains have shrivelled and the yield has declined



continuous dry spell. If you look at the total rainfall, only a few millimetres were recorded and a deficit of 99 per cent has been recorded. There was no active Western disturbance in these plains" says Manmohan Singh, a Chandigarh-based Met Department scientist.

The Met department said the month of March was the warmest in the past 10 to 12 years. Temperatures started rising in April. The temperatures in March and April this year were six to eight and four to six degrees above the normal temperatures, respectively. "No significant rain is expected in the days to come, while from April 28 onwards we are expecting heatwave conditions. We have also issued the warning. The heat wave conditions will continue during the next seven-eight days," Singh said. The Punjab Agriculture Department officials blamed the dry spell and heat wave conditions for the shrivelled

grains and a reduce in yield. The heat wave conditions, according to the officials, shortened the window of wheat crop ripening. Normally, the harvest season is over by mid Ma

"The heat spell occurred very fast and also matured the crop at a faster pace, which shrivelled the grain size. This also resulted in a drop in yield," says JDS Gill, Agriculture Information Officer, Punjab.

FARMERS LEFT HIGH AND DRY

Jagtar Singh, 45, a Mohali-based wheat grower, is among thousands of farmers who have been hit hard by the shrivelled grains and heat wave conditions. The yield per acre was between 22 to 26 quintals per hectare last year, which has come down to nearly half. The government should compensate us as the earnings will not even mitigate the input costs" says Jagtar Singh.

The worst-hit are the contract farmers as they have a fixed

expenditure. They not only have to pay the contract amount but also have to bear the input costs. Many of these farmers raise loans with the aim of returning the borrowed money after selling the crop. But the continuous dry spell and the heat wave conditions have shattered their dreams. Out of a total of 15 debt-ridden farmers who committed suicide during the tenure of the AAP government, two were wheat growers who could not bear the shock as the harvest declined beyond their expectations. The decline in the yield will also result in less procurement. The state government has fixed a target to procure 130 Lac metric tonnes of wheat this year, but the target will be missed by nearly 30 Lac metric tonnes. The total procurement till April 25 was just 91.12 LMT. As the wheat harvest is almost over, the state is likely to procure around 100 LMT of wheat as compared to 132.22 LMT procured last year.

(News Agency) The continuous dry spell since March and the subsequent hot weather conditions have proved to be a double whammy for the Punjab and Haryana wheat growers who are facing shrivelled wheat grains and a declined yield. The continuous dry spell since March and the subsequent hot weather conditions have proved to be a double whammy for the Punjab and Haryana wheat growers who are facing

shrivelled wheat grains and a declined yield.

The rain deficit, estimated at around 99 per cent by the Met Department, is responsible for the decline in the yield causing severe losses.

"This year, during the winter time in the months of January and February, there was excessive rain, but from March onwards there was no rain, especially in the plains, including Punjab and Haryana, which experienced a

Goa Electricity Dept tweets frustration over long power cuts, interacts with users



(News Agency) I also have no lights and would be anytime fadding away from you all until supply restored and mobile and laptop charged, a seemingly frustrated employee wrote on Goa Electricity Department's Twitter handle after the account flooded with questions about the duration of the blackout on Monday. I also have no lights and would be anytime fadding away from you all until supply restored and mobile and laptop charged, a seemingly frustrated employee wrote on Goa Electricity Department's Twitter handle after the account flooded with questions about the

duration of the blackout on Monday. Twitteraties even considered the possibility of the Goa power department's Twitter handle being hacked. However, the employee tweeted, "I do not think a hacker would work so late to lose his sleep & interact with you all in a pleasing way & providing correct info. They hack to cause destruction of some kind. No hack here pls note." Fierce winds caused by thunderstorms caused a lot of power cuts last night in Goa. According to the electricity department, supply was restored in many areas by the morning.

I-T dept confiscates properties in Nashik linked to Mehul Choksi

Income Tax department has confiscated properties worth over Rs 70 crore allegedly belonging to fugitive Mehul Choksi

(News Agency) Income Tax department has confiscated properties spread over 100 acres worth over Rs 70 crore allegedly belonging to fugitive jeweller Mehul Choksi, who is wanted in the Rs 13,500 crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case.

The property is located in a village in Maharashtra's Nashik. The confiscation

procedure was recently carried out after approval from the adjudicating authority. The confiscation process was carried out under the Prohibition of Benami Properties Transaction (PBPT) Act. Benami property is property that is purchased through means or channels to conceal the identity of the true buyer or owner of the property.

During investigation against Mehul Choksi, the I-T department found about a company to which funds had been transferred from Gitanjali Gems. The company was

identified as Nashik Multiservices SEZ Ltd which had bought fifty land parcels in Munde village



at Igatpuri in the Nashik district. Further, the funds being transferred for the purchase of land from Choksi's firm Gitanjali Gems indicated that the land was purchased by Mehul Choksi through the Nashik firm. In 2020, the land parcels were

provisionally attached by I-T department under the PBPT Act. Further, in February this year, the adjudicating authority approval was received and the confiscation process was initiated by the department. I-T department has now contacted local officers from the district administration for measurement and demarcation of the plot and land parcels, their valuation and other details. Once the measurement, demarcation and valuations are completed, I-T department will put up a signboard on the confiscated plots

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Oppn fumes over Delhi-Punjab MoU, accuses Bhagwant Mann of 'selling interests of state'

After the AAP-led government signed the MoU, opposition parties accused Bhagwant Mann of "selling the interests of the state to Delhi in the name of knowledge sharing"



last time, but the Punjabis understood in time and the AAP could not form the government." "But this time he (Kejriwal) has been successful, by portraying a local Punjabi leader, Bhagwant Mann. I think before he announced Bhagwant Mann, they already had an understanding that he would only declare him a CM but would be ruling from Delhi and this is how it is," Bajwa said, adding that the administrative decisions in Punjab were being taken by Arvind Kejriwal and his aides. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal also shared similar views on the issue of MoU. "Chief minister Bhagwant Mann sold off the interests of Punjab to Delhi in the garb of a knowledge-sharing agreement and now AAP Convener Arvind Kejriwal has become the de-facto chief minister of Punjab," Sukhbir Badal said. Sukhbir Badal said that never before in the history of the state

have outsiders been given control of the state and its future generations in this manner. "A municipality President has been given charge of the chief ministership of Punjab. The state has become subservient to Delhi, which is not even a state," he said. Meanwhile, CM Bhagwant Mann, while reacting to the allegations levelled by Congress and Akali Dal, asked the leaders of these parties to have "patience". "Sukhbir Badal should have patience at least for some time as the AAP government just came into power while the Congress remained in power for a long period of over 25 years and Akali Dal ruled for 19 years," Bhagwant Mann said in a recorded video message. Taking MLA Partap Singh Bajwa to cudgels, the CM asked him to refrain from baseless accusations and reminded him of the time when former Chief Minister (Captain Amrinder Singh) was

ordering the posting and transfers of high-ups like Chief Secretary, DGP and senior bureaucrats at the instance of his foreign guest (Aroosa Alam). "You were writing letters to the chief minister at that time showing displeasure over his autocratic style of functioning but later you too were seen having lunch and dinner with him," the CM said. The ruling AAP has clarified that the MoU between the two AAP-led governments will benefit Punjab and will be limited to knowledge sharing and implementation of welfare schemes only. The Opposition, however, fears the MoU was just an eyewash to let the Delhi government interfere with the functioning of Punjab. The opposition party leaders have alleged that the MoU, the first of its kind between the two states, was signed after a Punjab meeting chaired by Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi kicked off a controversy.

(News Agency) Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and his New Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal came under direct attack from the opposition Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal after the AAP-led governments signed an MoU for knowledge sharing. Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa, while speaking to India Today on Wednesday, accused Bhagwant Mann of selling the interests of the state to Delhi in the name of knowledge sharing. "First time an independent state chief minister tried to sell the

rights of Punjab, that too not to a complete state. Kejriwal, in my eyes and the eyes of anybody else, is just a glorified Mayor of Delhi, which is not even a state. Because neither does he has police under his control nor the Municipal corporation is under him. Bhagwant Mann's act will convert Punjab into a colony of Delhi," Partap Singh Bajwa said. Bajwa said that history would never pardon Bhagwant Mann. He said that the MoU seems to have been designed by Kejriwal, who wanted to "rule Punjab by proxy

Gupkar alliance should fight J&K polls together, says Omar Abdullah. BJP reacts

Former J&K CM Omar Abdullah said that the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration should fight polls in Jammu and Kashmir together to keep the BJP out of power in the region

(News Agency) Omar Abdullah, former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and current vice-president of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, said on Wednesday that he believes the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) should fight the Jammu and Kashmir polls together. The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration is a political alliance between several regional political parties in Jammu and Kashmir that have been campaigning for the restoration of special status to the region after Article 370 was abrogated in August 2019. Omar Abdullah said, "It's my personal opinion that PAGD should fight the polls together to keep BJP and its B and C teams away so they don't divide our votes. Though I am not an office-bearer of PAGD, this is my personal opinion and the final decision lies with the alliance."

BJP REACTS

Responding to Omar Abdullah's statements, BJP's J&K chief Ravinder Raina said, "Even if PAGD parties come together, J&K will not vote for them.

Whenever the election is held, BJP will come to power. J&K's next CM will be from the BJP." He said that Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti and Ghulam Nabi Azas were "frustrated and distressed" after they saw the way people came out in large numbers for PM Modi's recent rally in the union territory. "That's why they want to come together," he said.

ON LOUDSPEAKER, HALAL ISSUES

On the loudspeaker controversy in the nation, Omar Abdullah said, "They are saying loudspeakers should be banned in mosques. We don't say loudspeakers shouldn't be used in temples - don't they use loudspeakers in temples and gurdwaras? Why objection to Muslims only?" "Why are you forcing us not to have halal food. It's our religious obligation to have halal meat. We don't force to anyone to have halal meat. Everyone has the right to eat whatever he or she wants," he added on the halal row. Omar Abdullah said, "We are fighting with those forces that want to break our brotherhood."



Bhima Koregaon commission summons Sharad Pawar on May 5, 6

The Bhima Koregaon commission has asked NCP chief Sharad Pawar to appear as a witness on May 5 and May 6

(News Agency) The Bhima Koregaon commission has summoned NCP chief Sharad Pawar to depose before it on May 5 and 6. The commission is probing the causes of violence in the Koregaon Bhima area on January 1, 2018, in which one person died and several others were injured. The commission had earlier summoned Pawar to depose as a witness on February 23 and February 24. Pawar's deposition will take place at Sahyadri guest house in South Mumbai. Pawar has also filed an affidavit in 2018 as well. In the 2018 affidavit, Pawar had stated that the rioting took place due to the instigation by some anti-social elements for political mileage. "Whatever the historical

background of the particular site, there has been no incidence of violence by any of the communities in Maharashtra to date. Unfortunately, some antisocial elements instigated violence to gain political mileage. Unfortunately, historical facts were concocted and maliciously propagated through social media. A lot of rumour-mongering was precipitated through various social media sites, Pawar said in the affidavit. "Much before Jan 1, 2018, the platform of social media was widely misused in vernacular languages to instigate violence and create rifts between two communities which peacefully coexisted with each other for the last many decades.

Political status quo move in India and Europe

By Susmita Ghosh

The re-election of Emmanuel Macron as the President of France has brought forth a global political equilibrium. Due to this verdict, there is a sigh of relief across Europe and North America. Simultaneously, India, which has a strong strategic partnership

with France, is happy with the return of Macron.

Macron's rival, Marine Le Pen's victory would have created further tension for Europe in the

future. Le Pen's victory would have shaken The European Union to its political core. It could have altered France's international relations route. Like other right-wing leaders in Europe, Le Pen has close ties with Vladimir Putin. It would have resulted in a complete dynamic shift in which France is right now as far as Ukraine war is concerned.

India wants to have a normal relationship with the west and the other European countries. The country is not going to sacrifice its growing ties with the West due to the Russian-Ukraine conflict. As a trend, India is rapidly increasing political and economic relations with Europe. Consequently, India is embarking on the territorial integrity of states that is a repudiation of Russia's unacceptable aggression in Ukraine. India's political strength increases as Russia tends to lose its economic weight and international isolation for the Ukraine war. In recent times, Europe's economic complementarity and geographic advantage have tied itself even more deeply with Russia. The EU's annual trade with Russia rose to around \$260 billion as compared to India's \$10 billion. However, Putin is currently locked in an unwinnable situation and is sure to pay a huge amount for the losses. This weakens the political and economic ties between the neighbouring countries and Russia.

Russia has been deepening ties with China for more than 20 years. In the last two decades, China has greatly

developed and provided new challenges for the Indian policymakers, which can be concerning. At present, India is grasping at straws to handle the results of the Russian determination and its ties with Beijing.

America wants Europe and India to have strong relations with each other. Washington will take all measures to strengthen its security, especially after the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It wants Delhi too to play a big role in Asia and to be a great provider of national security

In February, Putin visited Beijing to form a partnership with China and to increase its strength in the south Asian countries. India strives to have a friendly relationship with

Russia too. Hence, India is ready to invest in serious political capital along with the leading European countries. The growing problems of doing business with Xi's China have allowed Europe to emerge eventually as the interested market. This development will let Europe act as an important partner in letting India cope with the China challenge. The rapid deterioration of Sino-US relations and Beijing's geopolitical alliance with Moscow will also be helpful to India for maintaining good relations with Europe in the long run.

America wants Europe and India to have strong relations with each other. Washington will take all measures to strengthen its security, especially after the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It wants Delhi too to play a big role in Asia and to be a great provider of national security.

The Chinese assertiveness has been again introduced in the U.S. It plays a vital role in maintaining national security and harmony. Europe's call for "strategic autonomy" from the US had been in alignment to India's worldview. Ever since independence, India's interests are in line with most European countries when it comes to global political trends. It has allowed Delhi to increase and strengthen its relationships with the other countries. In all, India and France's continued bond may help to reshape the Indo-Pacific and Eurasian regions in the future.

Unemployed Indians

For a country in the midst of a demographic transition, this is the biggest challenge

India has an employment problem which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. One indication of the building crisis is the continuing increase, over the years, in work demanded by households under the MGNREGA. In 2014-15, 4.13 crore households got work under the scheme. By 2019-20, just prior to the pandemic, this had risen to 5.48 crore. In 2020-21, at the peak of the economic distress,

the number of households that worked under the scheme had risen to 7.55 crore. While that figure declined to 7.26 crore in the subsequent year, it remains considerably higher than the pre-pandemic level, indicating perhaps the continuing absence of alternatives. This growing divergence between the demand and supply of jobs manifests in a myriad of ways — from louder demands for reservation in the public sector by various caste groups, and for including the private sector in its ambit, to state governments exploring ways to ensure job quotas for locals. All this is indicative of a wide and deepening anxiety over employment prospects.

The deterioration in the employment scenario can be tracked at many levels. One, over the years, there has been a sharp fall in the labour force participation rate in India. Data from CMIE suggests that the labour force participation rate has fallen to around 40 per cent. For comparable countries, it is significantly higher. This decline suggests that despite India's young population, many have simply opted out of the labour force, perhaps feeling let down by the absence of remunerative, productive jobs. The situation is

even more dire for women who had a considerably lower participation rate to begin with. India's female labour force participation is not only lower than the global average, but also lower than countries like Bangladesh. Two, even as the unemployment rate has declined from the highs observed during the initial phase of the pandemic, it

remains elevated, suggesting that among those looking for jobs, those unable to find jobs remains high. Three, the unemployment rate is higher among the younger and more educated. As per the periodic labour force surveys, the unemployment rate is higher among those in the 15-29 age group (22.5 per cent in September 2019), and those educated up to at least the secondary level (11 per cent). Four, while there are signs of increasing formalisation as indicated by the EPFO data, a substantial share of the labour force continues to remain employed in the informal sector, lacking a safety net.

While successive governments have taken steps to address the issue, the jobs crisis is in large part the result of the absence of a labour intensive manufacturing sector which can not only absorb the millions entering the labour force each year, but also those moving out of agriculture. For a country of the young, in the midst of a demographic transition, the employment problem is perhaps the most formidable challenge before the government.

This growing divergence between the demand and supply of jobs manifests in a myriad of ways — from louder demands for reservation in the public sector and for including the private sector in its ambit. All this is indicative of a wide and deepening anxiety over employment prospects

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What is Section 144 CrPC, imposed in Roorkee to restrict a Hindu religious gathering?

Section 144 of the CrPC: This colonial-era law, which has been retained in the Code, empowers a district magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate, or any other executive magistrate empowered by the state government, to issue orders to prevent and address urgent cases of apprehended danger or nuisance

The administration of Uttarakhand's Haridwar district on Tuesday (April 26) imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code Of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973 in an area upto 5 km around a village called Dada Jalalpur near the town of Roorkee.

Section 144 was invoked after the Supreme Court instructed the Uttarakhand government to give a commitment that there would be no "untoward situation" or "unacceptable statements" during a mahapanchayat that had been planned by Hindu religious leaders in the village on Wednesday (April 27).

Incendiary speeches against Muslims have been made by Hindu religious leaders at such gatherings previously, including one organised in Haridwar in December last year. This colonial-era law, which has been retained in the Code, empowers a district magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate, or any other executive magistrate empowered by the state government, to issue orders to prevent and address urgent cases of apprehended danger or nuisance. The written order by the officer may be directed against an individual or individuals residing in a particular area, or to the public at large. In urgent cases, the magistrate can pass the order without giving prior notice to the individual targeted in the order.

Powers under the provision

The provision allows the magistrate to direct any person to abstain from a certain act, or to pass an order with respect to a certain property in the possession or under the management of that person.

This usually means restrictions on movement, carrying arms, and unlawful assembly. It is generally understood that an assembly of three or more people is prohibited under Section 144. When aimed at restricting a single individual, the order is passed if the magistrate believes it is likely to prevent obstruction, annoyance or injury to any lawfully employed person, or a danger to human life, health or safety, or a disturbance of the public tranquility, or a riot, etc. Orders passed under Section 144 remain in force for two months, unless the state



government considers it necessary to extend it. But in any case, the total period for which the order is in force cannot be more than six months.

Criticism of Section 144

Affected parties have often argued that the section is sweeping, and allows the magistrate to exercise absolute power unjustifiably. Under the law, the first remedy against the order is a revision application that must be filed to the same officer who issued the order in the first place.

An aggrieved individual can file a writ petition in the High Court if

their fundamental rights are affected by the order. However, aggrieved individuals argue that in many cases those rights would have already been violated by the state even before the High Court has intervened.

It has also been argued that imposing prohibitory orders over a very large area — such as was done in all of Uttar Pradesh during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill — is not justified because the security situation differs from place to place and cannot be dealt with in the same manner.

Courts rulings on Sec 144

While challenges were mounted against the use of the provision in the pre-Independence era as well (for example in 'Re: Ardeshir Phirozshaw ... vs Unknown (1939)'), the first major challenge in the Supreme Court came in 1961 in 'Babulal Parate vs State of Maharashtra and Others'.

A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court refused to strike down the law, saying it is "not correct to say that the remedy of a person aggrieved by an order under the section was illusory". In 1967, the court rejected a challenge to the law by the socialist leader Dr Ram Manohar

Lohia, saying "no democracy can exist if 'public order' is freely allowed to be disturbed by a section of the citizens".

In another challenge in 1970 ('Madhu Limaye vs Sub-Divisional Magistrate'), a seven-judge Bench headed by then Chief Justice of India M Hidayatullah said the power of a magistrate under Section 144 "is not an ordinary power flowing from administration but a power used in a judicial manner and which can stand further judicial scrutiny". The court, however, upheld the constitutionality of the law, ruling that the restrictions imposed through Section 144 are covered under the "reasonable restrictions" to the fundamental rights laid down under Article 19(2) of the Constitution. The fact that the "law may be abused" is no reason to strike it down, the court said. In 2012, the Supreme Court criticised the government for using Section 144 against a sleeping crowd in Ramlila Maidan. "Such a provision can be used only in grave circumstances for maintenance of public peace. The efficacy of the provision is to prevent some harmful occurrence immediately. Therefore, the emergency must be sudden and the consequences sufficiently grave," the court said.

Why is Maharashtra experiencing a heatwave again?

A heatwave has gripped the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra. This is the fourth heatwave in the last two months, and the second in April. In fact, on Tuesday, Vidarbha was the hottest region in the country.

On the same day, the state's highest maximum temperatures (in degrees Celsius) were recorded at Brahmapuri (44.7), followed by Akola (44.5), Chandrapur and Wardha (44.4 each), Gondiya (43.5), Amravati (43.2), Nagpur, Washim and Parbhani (43 each), Ahmednagar (42.3) and Solapur (41.4).

What is a heatwave?

A region is considered to be under the grip of a heatwave if the maximum temperature reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius or more in the plains and at least 30 degrees Celsius or more in hilly regions. When the maximum temperature departure ranges between 4.5 and 6 degrees, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) declares a heatwave. A severe heatwave is declared when the recorded maximum temperature of a locality departure from normal is over 6.4 degrees

Celsius. Also, if an area records over 45 degrees and 47 degrees Celsius on any given day, then the IMD declares heatwave and severe heatwave conditions, respectively.

Maharashtra's fourth heatwave in two months

March marks the beginning of the summer season and is considered a transition phase, where day temperatures gradually rise. The peak month for heatwaves over India is May, with temperatures starting to peak in the second half of April.

However, Maharashtra's first two heatwave spells were recorded last month. March saw two long spells of a heatwave—March 11 to 19, and one of the longest spells from March 27 to April 12. The third heatwave began on April 17 and lasted till April 20.

While maximum temperatures above 45 degrees Celsius are recorded mainly over Rajasthan and the Vidarbha region in May, the latter recorded temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius starting in March, this season.

Lack of pre-monsoon showers

Except for the southern peninsula and northeast regions, the weather has remained dry across the rest of the country. Once, in the last week, parts of Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi reported light to moderate rainfall. The lack of pre-monsoon showers has also led to an increase in the overall maximum temperature. Maharashtra recorded 63 per cent deficient rainfall from March 1 to April 26.

What's the weather forecast for Maharashtra?

The IMD has issued a 'yellow' alert, warning of continuing heatwave conditions over Chandrapur, Wardha, Nagpur, Amravati, Akola, Jalgaon, Buldhana, Yavatmal, Ahmednagar and Nashik districts till April 30. A gradual rise in maximum temperatures by 2-3 degrees Celsius is very likely over most parts of the state this week. The IMD has said heatwave conditions are very likely to prevail in isolated pockets of Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada and parts of Vidarbha during the next 3-4 days. Maximum temperatures will remain above normal to appreciably above normal during this period.

What is Paxlovid, strongly recommended by WHO as the best therapeutic choice for high-risk Covid-19 patients?

Paxlovid consists of nirmatrelvir tablets and ritonavir tablets, co-packaged for oral use. It was given emergency use authorisation (EUA) by the USFDA in December last year

On April 22, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said Pfizer's oral antiviral drug Paxlovid was "strongly recommended" for patients with non-severe Covid-19 who are at highest risk of developing severe disease and hospitalisation, such as unvaccinated, older, or immunosuppressed patients. The recommendation was based on new data from two randomised controlled trials involving 3,078 patients. The data show that the risk of hospitalisation was reduced by 85% following this treatment, the WHO said in a statement. In a high-risk group (over 10% risk of hospitalisation), that meant 84 fewer hospitalisations per 1,000 patients. Paxlovid consists of nirmatrelvir tablets and ritonavir tablets, co-packaged for oral use. It was given emergency use authorisation (EUA) by the USFDA in December last year.

Nirmatrelvir inhibits a viral enzyme called protease that is necessary for the virus to replicate itself inside the host cell. Ritonavir slows down the breakdown of nirmatrelvir in order to help it remain in the body for longer at higher concentrations. A drug like nirmatrelvir is considered to have an advantage over vaccines because it attacks a vulnerability in the virus that does not mutate like spike proteins — which vaccines target — do. As a result, the medication is seen to be effective against all variants. (The Omicron wave showed that in a very large number of cases, vaccines are unable to prevent infection, even though they do prevent serious illness and deaths.) Even before the WHO's latest endorsement, Paxlovid was seen as a wonder drug that presented a dramatic new advantage in the battle against the coronavirus. A

second oral Covid-19 drug, molnupiravir, manufactured by Merck and Ridgeback, too received FDA authorisation in December last year, but showed a somewhat lower efficacy in clinical trials.

Paxlovid is administered as three tablets — two of nirmatrelvir and one of ritonavir — taken together orally twice daily for five days, that is, a total of 30 tablets. The USFDA authorised Paxlovid for use only up to five consecutive days.

The EUA for Paxlovid was based on clinical data that showed a reduced risk of hospitalisation or death by 89 per cent within three days of the onset of symptoms, and 88 per cent within five days of the onset of symptoms, compared to the placebo group.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) issued advice that Paxlovid can be used to

treat adults with Covid-19 who do not require supplemental oxygen and who are at increased risk of progressing to severe disease.

Eeneric versions

On November 16 last year, Pfizer had announced it had signed a voluntary licence agreement for Paxlovid that would facilitate the production and distribution of the drug by granting sub-licences to qualified generic medicine manufacturers.

Pfizer's licensing agreement with the United Nations-backed public health organisation Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) was intended to enable the supply of the medicines to 95 low- and middle-income countries including India, comprising approximately 53% of the world's population.

It was announced at the time that Pfizer would not receive royalties on sales in low-income

countries, and that royalties would be waived on sales in all countries covered by the agreement for as long as Covid-19 remained classified as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by WHO. Subsequently, on March 17 this year, the MPP announced that it had signed agreements with 35 companies to manufacture the generic version of nirmatrelvir, which in combination with a low dose of ritonavir can be supplied in 95 low- and middle-income countries. Six companies will produce the drug substance, nine will produce the drug product, and the rest will do both, the MPP said in a release.

The companies are located, besides India, in Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Dominican Republic, Jordan, Israel, Mexico, Pakistan, Serbia, Republic of Korea, and Vietnam.

(Contd. on page 29)

The case for extending constitutional protections to Muslim and Christian Dalits

They are primarily Dalits and their Muslim and Christian identity is secondary, as evident in several cases of atrocities against Dalits

An inter-ministerial dialogue has recently taken place to reassess the possibility of setting up a national panel to look into the merit of the demand to extend Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Muslim and Christian Dalits. After Independence, the Constitutional Order of 1950 listed SCs and STs using the list mentioned in the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1936. The order specified that no person professing a religion other than Hinduism could be deemed as a member of a Scheduled Caste community. The idea was that religions other than Hinduism did not have a caste system.

This argument can no longer be defended for two reasons.

First, the order was amended in 1956 to include Sikh Dalits and again in 1990 to include Buddhist Dalits, notwithstanding the fact that these religions were supposed to not observe caste

discrimination. Second, Muslim and Christian Dalits are as affected by caste discrimination as Hindu Dalits. They are primarily Dalits and their Muslim and Christian identity is secondary, as evident in several cases of atrocities against Dalits. The majority of the victims in the Kandhamal, Karamchedu, and Tsundur massacres and in the recent incidents of violence reported from Tumakuru, Belagavi, Mandya, and Bagalkot in Karnataka were Dalit Christians. These victims were attacked not because they were Christians but because they were "untouchables" who had converted to Christianity. Despite converting to Christianity, their socioeconomic status had not improved. In fact, it had worsened because, in the process, they lost access to positive discrimination.

In 2008, a study commissioned

by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and co-authored by Satish Deshpande and Geetika Bapna — "Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities — A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge" — showed that Dalit Muslims, who represent 8 per cent of their community and Dalit Christians, who constitute 23.5 per cent of their community, were over-represented among the poor of India. In rural India, 39.6 per cent of the Dalit Muslims live below the poverty line and 46.8 per cent of the Dalit Muslims in urban parts of the country are below the poverty line. The corresponding figures for Dalit Christians are 30.1 and 32.3 per cent. By contrast, 29.2 per cent of Muslims in rural India and 41.4 per cent of Muslims in urban parts of the country are BPL. Rural and Urban Dalit Christians below the poverty line were 16.2 and 12.5

per cent respectively.

Dalit Muslims and Christians have sometimes been forced to bury their dead in separate cemeteries. Churches have segregated against Dalit Christians in the past. The Sachar Commission Report observed in 2006 that the social and economic situation of Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians did not improve after conversion. In 2007, the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission Report recommended that the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, should be revised to delink SC status with religion, and religion-neutral status should be given to all Dalits and Scheduled Tribes. It also suggested a sub-quota of 8.4 per cent for minorities within the OBC quota of 27 per cent, as well as a reservation for Dalit minorities within the Scheduled Caste quota of 15 per cent.

The Mishra Commission report and the National Commission for Minorities report were tabled in Parliament in December 2009. Both were in favour of extending constitutional protection and safeguards to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims that are available to their counterparts who profess Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Governments have, however, not acted on these recommendations.

They have argued against these reports — despite the empirical evidence they have collected — citing the paucity of disaggregated data on Dalit Muslims and Christians and contesting the validity of conversion records across generations. This contradicts the fact that 20 states have extended benefits to Dalit Muslims and Christians under the OBC category,

(Contd on page 29)

In the midst of hate, let's not be defeatist

We must remain open to possibilities for empathy and dialogue

The fear of hurtling into an abyss has been around long before this current spate of violence. What is new is the widespread feeling of being overwhelmed by this threat, of not having any effective ways to contain or dissolve the toxicity. Mehta's article beautifully invoked the Ramcharitmanas with deep feeling, without actually quoting the words of Sita that express what many of us are now feeling:

"Deen dayal biridu sambhari, harhu nath mum sankat bhari". (Protector of those in need, take away my deep affliction). I grew up in a family where, as children, we were taught to recite these lines as a counter to fear and the feeling of being overwhelmed by any situation. It was much later, as a middle-aged person, that I truly began to draw strength from these lines. But before I could do that, like most of my contemporaries, I passed through a brief spell of thinking that such prayers are the last resort of the helpless and the defeated. With or without the aid of prayers, how we orient ourselves, or anchor ourselves, is surely as important as any objective measure of how far we now are from the abyss. Empirically, it is valid to see



those who are committed to "sadbhava" (good faith) and "sambhava" (fellow-feeling) as being out-flanked and out-manoeuvred. But are we really outnumbered?

Yes, there is evidence that being communal, as Mehta writes, "is fast becoming the default common sense of civil society". But what of the dissent and disagreement within families and households? Civil society, in a coherent organised form, may be thin on the ground when it comes to effectively countering the toxicity. But "civil society" was never the same as "samaj" — an organic, multi-layered, cultural and psychological reality that is both fluid and grounded. It is in the innards of samaj that the legend of worshipful squirrels thrives over aeons and becomes

a commonly experienced "bhava" — attitude and intention.

The worshipful squirrels appear in the Ramayana when the army of monkeys and other animals is helping Ram to build a bridge to reach Lanka. The squirrels approach Ram and say they too want to help in this noble endeavour of defeating arrogance and violent force, as embodied by Ravana. Ram is appreciative but wonders how the tiny, lightweight creatures could contribute to heavy stone lifting. The answer is provided by the squirrels, who rush to the beach, get wet in the waves, then roll their furry little bodies in the sand before rushing to the under-construction bridge to shake off the sand and smoothen the pathway that Ram must tread.

All well and good, you might say, but it is not the squirrels that liberate Sita. That takes muscle power, weapons and all the resultant blood and gore. Perhaps the most enduring insight of the Indic civilisation is knowing that the "bhava" of the squirrels and the gory reality of the battlefield are not a binary divide but an overlapping simultaneity. Thus, the striving for truth is a process of unveiling reality in its multiple dimensions, not a contest between opposites. Knowing this, not merely believing it, may not dissolve our anxieties about the approaching abyss but it can strengthen us. On scale, we may still feel helpless about being unable to stop

unspeakable brutalities being committed in the name of religion and politics. But we can be more profoundly re-energised by every account of individuals and small groups that do heroically protect innocent victims from the fury of mobs. And such stories surface with unfailing regularity. We will still feel shock and grief when people we love and respect support or make excuses for the hatred and violence. But if we cease to see them as our binary opposite then all kinds of possibilities for empathy and dialogue open up. Above all, we can build strength by acknowledging the limits of what we know. It is a truism that all empirical knowledge is incomplete and thus potentially flawed. Unfortunately, the high-speed access to seemingly limitless information in the digital age fosters the delusion that we not only see but also understand all the moving pieces of the puzzle. This is not a call for false optimism. That would be easy and futile. The difficult task before us is how to be watchful with an inward silence that empowers us to resist and deflect jump scares.

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An inter-ministerial dialogue has recently taken place to reassess the possibility of setting up a national panel to look into the merit of the demand to extend Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Muslim and Christian Dalits. After Independence, the Constitutional Order of 1950 listed SCs and STs using the list mentioned in the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1936. The order specified that no person professing a religion other than Hinduism could be deemed as a member of a Scheduled Caste community. The idea was that religions other than Hinduism did not have a caste system.

This argument can no longer be defended for two reasons. First, the order was amended in 1956 to include Sikh Dalits and again in 1990 to include Buddhist Dalits, notwithstanding the fact that these religions were supposed to not observe caste discrimination.

Second, Muslim and Christian Dalits are as affected by caste discrimination as Hindu Dalits. They are primarily Dalits and their Muslim and Christian identity is secondary, as evident in several cases of atrocities against Dalits. The majority of the victims in the Kandhamal, Karamchedu, and Tsundur massacres and in the recent incidents of violence reported from Tumakuru, Belagavi, Mandya, and Bagalkot in Karnataka were Dalit Christians. These victims were attacked not because they were Christians but because they were "untouchables" who had converted to Christianity. Despite converting to Christianity, their socioeconomic status had not improved. In fact, it had worsened because, in the process, they lost access to positive discrimination. This is also evident from the few available surveys.

In 2008, a study commissioned

by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and co-authored by Satish Deshpande and Geetika Bapna — "Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities — A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge" — showed that Dalit Muslims, who represent 8 per cent of their community and Dalit Christians, who constitute 23.5 per cent of their community, were over-represented among the poor of India. In rural India, 39.6 per cent of the Dalit Muslims live below the poverty line and 46.8 per cent of the Dalit Muslims in urban parts of the country are below the poverty line. The corresponding figures for Dalit Christians are 30.1 and 32.3 per cent. By contrast, 29.2 per cent of Muslims in rural India and 41.4 per cent of Muslims in urban parts of the country are BPL. Rural and Urban Dalit Christians below the poverty line were 16.2 and 12.5 per cent respectively. Dalit Muslims and

Christians have sometimes been forced to bury their dead in separate cemeteries. Churches have segregated against Dalit Christians in the past. The Sachar Commission Report observed in 2006 that the social and economic situation of Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians did not improve after conversion. In 2007, the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission Report recommended that the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, should be revised to delink SC status with religion, and religion-neutral status should be given to all Dalits and Scheduled Tribes. It also suggested a sub-quota of 8.4 per cent for minorities within the OBC quota of 27 per cent, as well as a reservation for Dalit minorities within the Scheduled Caste quota of 15 per cent. The Mishra Commission report and the National Commission for Minorities report were tabled in Parliament in December 2009.

Common values, shared threats in India-Australia cyber security ties

Deepening cooperation can develop avenues for mutual learning and create complementary markets in cyber tools and technologies, boosting bilateral business and strategic commitments on both continents

Western and media attention may be focused on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but countries have not taken their eye off the Indo-Pacific where there is clear evidence of the changing world order. This is manifest in the signing of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement in goods and services earlier this month.

The botched US withdrawal from Afghanistan followed by China taking a serious interest in creating new economic, military and political alliances, and the impending energy crisis demand that nations recalibrate their strategic as well as long-term interests. The India-Australia ECTA is a concrete example of the bilateral faith in common values, and understanding of threats and goals. A reflection of this is cooperation in cyber security. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has shown how cyber threat actors, both state and non-state, have become significant players in hybrid or "unrestricted" warfare. Both countries have let loose malicious elements in the information as well as operational space, while non-state actors like the hacktivist group Anonymous claimed to have caused significant damage to critical

Russian and Belarusian financial and military infrastructure.

China is accused of having amassed a large number of cyber weapons and has allegedly carried out sophisticated operations aimed at espionage, theft of intellectual property, and destructive attacks on internet resources of some countries. Australia and India have been at the receiving end of several such campaigns by the so-called Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups, supported by or assumed to be located in China. At the June 2020 virtual bilateral summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison elevated the bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The new cyber framework includes a five-year plan to work together on the digital economy, cybersecurity and critical and emerging technologies. This will be supported by a \$9.7 million fund for bilateral research to improve regional cyber resilience.

An annual Cyber Policy Dialogue, a new Joint Working Group on Cyber Security Cooperation and a joint working group on ICTs have been established. An annual India-Australia Foreign Ministers Cyber

Framework Dialogue will be held. India will now be included in a core Australian initiative called the International Cyber Engagement Strategy — it began in 2017 to actively conduct capacity-building arrangements in Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand, and support similar activities in Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia. In 2021 Australia added critical technologies to the initiative, making it important to the bilateral partnership with India and to the Quad. India has much to learn from Australia's low-key but smart cyber expertise. The Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC) in Canberra is the receptacle of the country's cybersecurity information, advice and assistance efforts. It draws expertise from national law enforcement, intelligence agencies, crime investigation, and national security bodies. ACSC has a partnership programme with the corporate world to facilitate intelligence-sharing on threats. AustCyber, another government effort, aims at establishing an internationally competitive domestic cybersecurity industry. India has set up the office of the National Cybersecurity Coordinator, a national Computer Emergency Response

Team (CERT-IN), a national Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Agency (NCIIPC), and made appropriate amendments to the Information Technology Act and Rules to enhance its cyber security posture. This has upped India's rank to 10th in the Global Cyber Security Index (GCI) 2020, from 47th just two years earlier. India has capable cybersecurity professionals.

In February, the foreign ministers of India and Australia recognised cooperation in cyber governance, cyber security, capacity building, innovation, digital economy, cyber and critical technologies as an essential pillar of the relations between the two countries. A Joint Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy, to be located in Bengaluru, will be set up.

India and Australia share common concerns around 5G rollouts, threats by APT groups, cybercrime, information warfare and threats to a democratic order. Deepening cooperation can develop avenues for mutual learning and create complementary markets in cyber tools and technologies, boosting bilateral business and strategic commitments on both continents.

Asthma drug blocks protein crucial to replication of coronavirus: IISc study

A widely available drug, used for treatment of asthma and allergies, can also block a protein that is key to replication of SARS-CoV-2, a study has found

A widely available drug, used for treatment of asthma and allergies, can also block a protein that is key to replication of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, a study by Indian Institute of Science (IISc) researchers has found. The study has been published in the journal eLife.

The drug: The drug, montelukast, is an oral treatment given to prevent wheezing, difficulty breathing, chest tightness, and coughing caused by asthma, and also used to prevent breathing difficulties during exercise, according to the US National Library of Medicine.

"Montelukast is prescribed in India by physicians. It is readily available as tablets and syrup (for kids) in pharmacy shops under different brand names," IISc Assistant Professor Tanweer Hussain, senior author of the

study, told The Indian Express.

In fact, some clinicians were using montelukast to treat Covid-19 patients because of its known role in making breathing easier in asthma patients, Hussain said. "However, it was not known that this drug also has antiviral activity, which we have figured out in this study."

Antiviral activity: When it infects the human cell, the coronavirus releases a protein

called Nsp1, which is key to its replication. The viral protein binds to the host cell's protein-making machinery, called the ribosome. "If the ribosome is blocked, then the host cell is unable to synthesise proteins

needed to fight the viral infection. This helps in the establishment of viral infection," Hussain said.

Targeting Nsp1, therefore, can reduce the damage inflicted by the virus. And the IISc researchers found that montelukast binds strongly to Nsp1, blocking its access to the ribosome. Other viral proteins could, of course, still

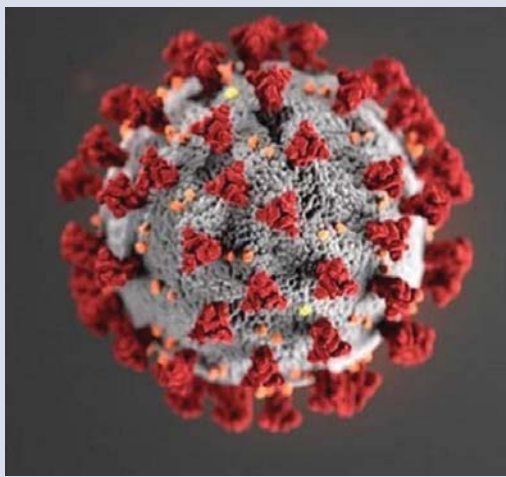
bind elsewhere on the host cell. "However, blocking viral Nsp1 allows the host cells to synthesise immune effector proteins to fight the viral infection," Hussain said.

Also, Nsp1's mutation rate is very low

compared to other viral proteins, which means Nsp1 is likely to remain largely unchanged in any virus variants that emerge, Hussain said. Hence drugs targeting this region are expected to work against all such variants.

How the drug was identified: The researchers first used computational modelling to screen more than 1,600 drugs approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). "A new molecule will have to clear all phase trials before it can be prescribed to patients, which would require months and years to complete. Hence we looked for candidates among USFDA-approved drugs," Hussain said.

The researchers shortlisted a dozen drugs that binds to Nsp1, among which they zeroed in on montelukast and saquinavir, an anti-HIV drug. Lab tests on cultured human cells then showed that only montelukast was able to rescue Nsp1's inhibition of protein synthesis.



Europe needs to find consensus on banning Russian oil and gas, says Lithuanian Foreign Minister



Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis believes that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a dangerous precedent in modern history. In an exclusive interview with Executive Editor of WION Palki Sharma, he explained that Baltic nations are worried about a possible Russian aggression.

"If a big country and a nuclear power is allowed to cross another country's border and stay there, it changes the meaning of the

security architecture that was probably built after the second World War. That means that if you are allowed to do it once, what stops you from doing it more times?" "There are countries in the vicinity who are at risk. One is Moldova and there was some military movement in Transnistria which is actually between Ukraine and Moldova. But the question is whether NATO borders will be enough to stop Russia and there are people in a number of Baltic states who are thinking that maybe it will not be enough," Landsbergis said in the interview. Ukraine has received a lot of help from NATO nations since the Russian invasion

started in February 24 and the Lithuanian FM praised the 'unprecedented' response from the world. "Before the 24th of February, you would have heard more about the disagreements and the difficult road towards a consensus when it comes to the European Union. Now, we have not only managed to secure the 27 around the European table but also to expand it. The global response to the Russian aggression was unprecedented and this is what caught Mr Putin by surprise," he explained. Lithuania was one of the first countries in Europe to massively decrease their reliance on Russia when it comes to oil

and gas imports and Landsbergis believes that along with all the economic sanctions, a ban on oil and gas is the right move in order to hurt Russia's economic interests. German economy minister Robert Habeck said on Tuesday that they are looking for ways to replace Russian oil and the Lithuanian FM believes that this is a great step towards finding a consensus. "The sanctions are extremely important if we need to stop the war from going on for one or two years. But what more can be done is to ban the imports of oil and gas. This is what Lithuania has been asking for and certain announcements from German government gives us hope."

From Kashmir, a son of a fruit-seller, who is yet to play for the country, offers hope Malik injects a never-before feeling: A visceral thrill at watching a ball rush through the air



For the past few years the Indian Test team has had a potent pace attack that has been the envy of the world. But there has never been someone quite like Umran Malik. You can marvel at Jasprit Bumrah's physique and the intelligence in his bowling, appreciate Mohammad Shami's seam positions, smile at Umesh Yadav's swing at pace, nod at Mohammad Siraj's springy zest. But Malik injects a never-before feeling: A visceral thrill at

watching a ball rush through the air. There have been highly skilful fast bowlers and more are mushrooming, but Malik hurls intimidatory blurs, adrenalin-kickers, cannonballs to satiate cricket devotees' lust for pace. His background adds romance to the story. From Kashmir, a son of a fruit-seller, a boy who began as a net-bowler, and who is yet to play for the country. What he offers is hope, and his emergence upholds the

cherished belief that in sport, particularly cricket at least, an Indian with a talent will be identified, nurtured, and celebrated — regardless of class, race, religion, region or language.

But at the core, the real deal is Malik's pace. It may not last too long, and he will probably need more than that to become a great bowler. But that sobering thought can wait. In the here and now, it's how he takes the pitch

out of the equation, how he makes fierce Australians go weak in their knees, how he makes international batsmen flinch in pain. He is growing as a bowler. Toes and heads are being threatened, LED-bails are lighting up eagerly, stumps are flying, and as Jeff Thompson, probably the fastest bowler that ever was, once said, he can smell fear in the batsmen. For the first time, an Indian bowler can say the same.

The post-pandemic world needs better public schools

Many families have found themselves unable to support their children's education. Good quality and more government-supported schools could be the answer

The pandemic has thrown a harsh light on the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by the world in education. There is an immense learning gap due to existing inequalities.

In India, we have to accept that unless we mobilise learning resources and institutions at the government level, the divides will continue to expand and learners will continue to fall between the cracks. We urgently need the government, both at the Centre and state levels, to invest in learning systems. This will help address poverty and bring in gender equality. How are we going to restart learning when we have pressed the pause button on many of our social systems? There are too many headlines telling us that education is catastrophically broken. How do we fix it? The rhetoric of brokenness and crisis doesn't help. It favours quick fixes over dialogue and reflection. Systems have to be put into place to find a variety of methods to equip all learners — privileged, poor, middle-class and alternatively-abled. The child must always be the priority and not an afterthought. The challenge is not about exams because exams are not a threat. It has been proven that assessments in the last three years, whether online or offline, have been child-centric, often to the point of being unrealistic. The challenge is about returning to school.

Conversations continue to hover around the lack of vaccinations for children and unmanageable protocols, along with the general atmosphere of fear that prevails across the country. In wealthier nations, schools have always been the first to open and last to close and citizens have benefited from

the public school system.

In India, across states, there is a sense of despair due to unemployment and lack of financial resources, which has snowballed due to the pandemic, resulting in greater inequality. Sending children to school, as opposed to keeping them at home, is a huge financial investment, particularly in the private school system. Uniforms, books, shoes, refreshments, transportation and other material for activities and school programmes are essential for children attending private schools. Parents have refrained from sending their children back to school due to a lack of funds. Ruchika Dhingra said, "My child is 3 years old and if I enrol her in any of the private pre-schools, the fees are approximately Rs 1,80,000 per annum. I may end up paying the fees and not sending her to school, as the virus may come again. I might as well not enrol her, as we are all facing a financial crunch". Another parent with two children has admitted the one with the better academic performance in an expensive private school, while the other child was admitted to a mediocre private school with lower fees. The reason they gave was that they did not have the money to educate both children in the same school.

These narratives show a lack of trust in government schools across the country. They would rather educate their children in a poor quality private school than a good government school. As a result of the pandemic, opportunity gaps have widened, as families do not have the financial capacity to support the education of their children. Many have placed education second to health in the priority list, thereby

undermining children's learning for years to come. The effect will be felt particularly in vulnerable countries and regions.

The big shift that we as a nation have to make is viewing education through a government school lens. This will only take place if states provide the opportunity for free, compulsory, neighbourhood education.

In western nations, over 90 per cent of education is under government control, with extremely well-run schools. Hot meals, uniforms, books, and other learning accessories, including medical care, are provided to the children.

Most children, other than those of extremely privileged citizens, attend public schools. This helps in achieving the sustainable development goals related to hunger, nutrition, quality education and gender equality, finally leading to livelihood and economic growth.

Radical reforms have to be implemented to restructure government schools and ensure quality. Across the country, subsidies are being given for electricity, gas,

water, housing, food distribution and other basic amenities. The government, both at the Centre and in the states, should build good-quality primary, middle and high schools and provide facilities that the best private schools have to offer.

Parents have realised the multiple roles that schools play. They provide for the wellbeing of children, health and nutrition along with academic learning. This increased awareness will serve as the basis for a revival of public education. We are subsumed by the myth that technology has expanded potential. The concern is that online learning will create greater inequality, not only in the global South but even in the most well-resourced corners of the planet. Online learning is not the way forward.

We need to safeguard the right to education by mobilising government schools to support all stakeholders. The UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education states in its report, "the core commitments that should always be remembered are public education and common

good". It says, "This is not the time to step back and weaken these principles but rather to affirm and reinforce them." We must take the opportunity to protect and advance public education.

We cannot allow the government health system and government education to be opposed to one another. Their synergies must overlap. Governments have to be involved with the lifelong learning of people. The French philosopher Edgar Morin observed that "public health and public education are closely interconnected, as they show the undeniable necessity of collaboration, solidarity and collective action for the common good."

Public education is crucial to societies, communities and individual lives. It is the only thing that will enable us to live with dignity and purpose. We have arrived at a moment, however unexpectedly, where we need to revisit the purpose of schooling and how we organise it. How we thrive should not be a continuation of the world as it was, but of the world that should be: A more sustainable one.

Right to be forgotten: Google begins to take requests for removal of search results with personal info

Privacy has become a big concern for netizens. Nowadays, one can also find several kinds of personal information in Google search results. To help people protect their privacy, Alphabet Inc's Google has finally started to take requests for removal of results containing information like phone numbers, home addresses and email accounts, a Reuters report said.

In an exclusive interview to Reuters, Michelle Chang, global policy lead, Google search, said, "Research has told us there's a larger amount of personally identifiable information that users consider as sensitive. They are increasingly unwilling to tolerate this content online." This move seems to have

indicated a shift in its stance between personal privacy and access to information. The rise in demand from users and development of norms related to threats posed by easy access to contact information has led to the expansion of removal policies globally, Google said on Wednesday. Till now, Google used to accept requests only to remove webpages, which shared contact information along with some sort of threat or asked for payment for removal. In recent years, the most used internet search tool has got tens of thousands of such requests annually. It had approved about 13% of them only. As per the company, it processes requests within a few days.

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EAM Jaishankar to visit Bangladesh and Bhutan later this week



foreign ministerial visit to the country in two years as the country had closed its borders due to the Covid. Jaishankar visited Bhutan in June 2019 as his first overseas visit after assuming office. Bhutan along with the Maldives was among the first country to get India made covid vaccines. Under the Vaccine Maitri Initiative, the Indian government gifted 5.5 lakh doses of the Made-In-India Covishield vaccines to Bhutan, which enabled it to vaccinate its adult population during the month of March-April 2021. The visits to neighbouring countries are part of India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. Earlier this month, India constituted an Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group (IMCG) to look into projects and initiatives with neighbours like—rail connectivity with Bangladesh, special needs of countries such as Bhutan and Maldives in terms of supply of essential commodities, fisheries issues with Sri Lanka etc.

(News Agency) India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar will be travelling to Bangladesh and Bhutan later this year as part of an in-person engagement with the Neighbours as the COVID-19 pandemic recedes. He will be in Bangladesh on April 28, following which he will be travelling to Bhutan on April 29. Last month, EAM travelled to the Maldives and Sri Lanka in the neighbourhood with a key focus on development projects and the BIMSTEC summit. EAM's visit to Bangladesh comes even as indications are that Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina could travel to India soon. Last year, Indian President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had travelled to Dhaka as part of the country's 50th independence anniversary celebrations which coincided with the birth centenary of Father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Both countries are engaged in connectivity, and power-sharing and this year could see the opening of the India Bangladesh Maitri pipeline that will help in the movement of diesel. When it comes to Bhutan, this will be the first

Uyghur genocide: UN team arrives in China ahead of visit by human rights chief

(News Agency) A UN team is in China ahead of a visit to Xinjiang to prepare for the long-awaited inspection by the UN human rights commissioner, which is set to take place next month. According to the South China Morning Post, the delegation was quarantined in Guangzhou before travelling to Xinjiang. According to Liz Throssell, UN human rights spokesman, the five-member team was invited by the Chinese government. Since 2018, the UN Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (OHRC) has been negotiating with the Chinese government for unrestricted access to Xinjiang and the freedom to interview civil society organisations without oversight. Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, announced in March that the OHRC had secured an

agreement with the Chinese government to visit in May. In the northwestern region of Xinjiang, China has been accused of perpetrating crimes against humanity and potentially genocide against the Uyghur population and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups. Human rights organisations claim China has arrested over one million Uyghurs against their will in a vast network of "re-education centres" and sentenced hundreds of thousands to prison terms in recent years. There is also evidence that Uyghurs are being compelled to work and that women are being sterilised forcibly. Former inmates have also claimed to have been tortured and sexually assaulted in the camps. Several countries have accused China of genocide in Xinjiang, including the United States.

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3 Chinese nationals killed as mother of two blows up van outside Karachi University

Four people, including three Chinese nationals, were killed and several others were injured in the suicide bombing outside Karachi University



advanced degrees, including an MSc and an MPhil. Farewell," the bomber - Shari Baloch, who reportedly had links to the Balochistan Liberation Army, tweeted in Urdu before the attack. It is suspected that her Twitter account is still up. A Pakistani separatist group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which was caught by a closed circuit camera installed near the gates. The chilling footage showed the white van approaching the gates as a woman in a burqa lurked near the entrance. As soon as the van reached the woman, the explosive detonated. Plumes of

thick smoke covered the camera. The lecturers, including the three Chinese nationals, were on their way back from the university where they worked at the Chinese language department, the local media reported. Pakistan's newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif offered his condolences to the families of the victims and "strongly condemned the act of terrorism".

ATTACK ON CHINESE NATIONALS IN PAKISTAN

In July 2021, two Chinese nationals were fired at by unidentified assailants on a motorcycle in Pakistan's

Karachi. The incident came two weeks after an IED attack on a bus carrying Chinese engineers to the Dasu dam site in Upper Kohistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. At least 13 people, including nine Chinese nationals, were killed in the incident. Last April, a bomb exploded at a hotel hosting the Chinese Ambassador in Quetta in southwestern Pakistan, killing four people. In 2019, gunmen stormed a luxury hotel overlooking a flagship CPEC project -- the deep-water seaport in Gwadar that gives China strategic access to the Arabian Sea -- killing at least eight people.

(News Agency) Four people, including three Chinese nationals, were killed and several others injured when a burqa-clad woman bomber detonated explosives near a van outside the gates of the Confucius Institute at Pakistan's Karachi University on Tuesday. The attacker was a mother of two children and had

Will not tolerate invasions: Taliban blames Pakistan for airstrikes that killed dozens

The Taliban administration blamed Pakistan for airstrikes that officials say killed dozens and said they will not tolerate "invasions" from its neighbours

(News Agency) Afghanistan's acting defence minister said on Sunday that the Taliban administration would not tolerate "invasions" from its neighbours after protesting against airstrikes it says were conducted by neighbouring Pakistan. Afghanistan's acting defence minister said on Sunday that the Taliban administration would not tolerate "invasions" from its neighbours after protesting against



airstrikes it says were conducted by neighbouring Pakistan. The comments come after the Taliban administration blamed Pakistan for airstrikes that officials say killed dozens in Kunar and Khost provinces. Pakistan, which has not confirmed any involvement in airstrikes inside Afghanistan's borders, said the two countries are "brotherly countries". "We are facing problems and challenges from both the world and our neighbors. The clear example is invasion by them in our territory in Kunar," said Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, acting Afghan defence minister, at a ceremony in Kabul commemorating the anniversary of the death of his father, Taliban founder Mullah Mohammad Omar. "We can't tolerate the invasion. We have tolerated that attack. We tolerated that because of national interests, next time we might not tolerate it," he

said. Pakistan's foreign office spokesperson said when asked for comment on Yaqoob's comments that Pakistan hoped for long term engagement with Afghanistan to secure peace. "Pakistan and Afghanistan are brotherly countries. The governments and people of both countries regard terrorism as a serious threat and have suffered from this scourge for a long time...therefore, it is important that

our two countries engage in a meaningful manner through relevant institutional channels to cooperate in countering cross border terrorism and taking actions against terrorist groups on their soil," the spokesperson said. The Taliban administration's foreign ministry last week called in Pakistan's ambassador to protest against the strikes. Local officials said the strikes by Pakistan military helicopters killed 36 people. The United Nations children's agency head in Afghanistan said that 20 children were killed in airstrikes in Khost and Kunar on April 16. Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August, there have been numerous standoffs along the 2,600-km (1,615-mile) border with Pakistan - drawn by British colonial rulers and disputed by Kabul. Increasingly frustrated by continuing militant attacks, Pakistan's military has stepped up operations along the Afghan border in recent months.

Hard lockdown fears trigger panic buying in Beijing amid Covid surge

Fears of a hard lockdown have led to panic buying in Beijing, even as mass testing was underway in the wake of a surge in Covid-19 cases in the Chinese capital



(News Agency) Hard lockdown fears trigger panic buying in Beijing amid Covid surge. Fears of a hard lockdown have led to panic buying in Beijing, even as mass testing was underway in the wake of a surge in Covid-19 cases in the Chinese capital. China is already trying to contain a wave of infections in its largest city Shanghai, which has been almost entirely locked down for weeks and reported 51 new Covid deaths on Monday. The mass testing order, and warnings of a "grim" Covid situation in the city, sparked a run on Beijing's supermarkets

overnight as residents rushed to stockpile essentials. Many items on grocery delivery apps sold out briefly on Sunday night after the testing order was announced, but stocks were replenished on Monday. SNAPPING UP GOODS Beijing resident Zhao picked up several bags of groceries including eggs and fresh vegetables from a grocery store on Monday after hearing about the mass testing order. The 31-year-old said he wanted to make sure his toddler would have enough to eat if the family was ordered to stay home.

Pakistan toasted brotherly Taliban's takeover but why they are bombing each other

Pakistan had celebrated when "brotherly" Taliban captured Afghanistan in August 2021. But why are the two sides bombing each other now?

(News Agency) On August 15, 2021, armed Taliban militants posed at President Ashraf Ghani's adorned desk in the Afghan presidential palace. Ironically, hanging on the wall behind them was a painting of Sufi mystic Sabir Shah crowning a kneeling Amad Shah Durrani, regarded as the modern Afghan founder. While the world expressed shock over the astonishingly swift fall of Kabul, prominent Pakistanis raised a toast. They included political parties, senior journalists and retired generals. But none as overtly as Pakistan's then Prime Minister Imran Khan who said "the Afghans have broken the shackles of slavery." One of his ministers even said India has got an appropriate gift for its Independence Day.

Pakistan had always backed the Taliban. This continued even when Pakistan supported America's war on terror in Afghanistan after 9/11. Pakistan's backing, now more covert, for the Taliban only deepened as India became a close ally of non-Taliban governments after 2001. The Taliban's return would not only install a friendly government in Kabul but also deal a blow to arch-rival India.

So, now the Taliban are running Afghanistan. "Breaking the shackles of slavery", they have reversed a decision to allow Afghan girls to return to high schools. Government employees have been told not to shave their beards and to wear local clothing and pray at correct times. But what has also stood out is this: The border between Pakistan and

Afghanistan is on fire. Sample some of these incidents from April 2022. All this followed a fight between Taliban and Pakistani forces in Kandahar's Spin Boldak district that left 20 wounded and 3 dead, and another clash in which five Pakistani soldiers were killed in Khurram district.

Afghanistan's acting defence minister said on April 24 that the Taliban administration would not tolerate "the next invasion by Pakistan." This was after The Taliban called in Pakistan's ambassador to protest the strikes.

Pakistan's foreign office spokesperson said Pakistan and Afghanistan are brotherly countries who regard terrorism as a serious threat and that Pakistan hopes for long-term engagement with Afghanistan to secure peace.

BUT WHY THE FIGHTING?

But why are the "brotherly" sides fighting? Pakistan clashed at the

border with soldiers of even the US-backed Afghan governments. When Kabul fell, Pakistan thought this would change. Pakistan also thought the Taliban would control its ideological offshoot Tehreek-e-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP), a terror group that's been trying to establish an Islamic caliphate in Islamabad. Both were wrong assumptions. Since August 15, 2021, Taliban fighters have more frequently clashed with Pakistani soldiers, often fatally, along the 1893 Durand Line (created by British diplomat Mortimer Durand after whom India's football tournament, Durand Cup, is named) that the former does not recognise. TTP has stepped up terror attacks in Pakistan. In response, Pakistan's military has ramped up operations. 128 armed fighters have been killed since January 2022. The number of soldiers dead during this period is 100.

THE BORDER DISPUTE

Let's first understand the boundary question. The Taliban object to Pakistan's fencing work on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border that "separates the ethnic Pashtuns living on both sides." While the Afghan governments have disputed the border since Pakistan's formation in 1947, the Taliban's objection could also be from their desire to assert that they are not Pakistan's proxy. Espousing the Pashtun cause may also earn the Taliban legitimacy from Afghanistan's largest ethnic group. Fencing anyway pricks the Taliban because a generation from its community grew up in Pakistan's refugee camps, and now they have businesses and family there. Last but not least: the fencing work also impedes drug and human trafficking Afghanistan thrives on. On record, however, Pakistan and the Taliban have pledged to resolve the dispute through talks.

Myanmar junta sentences Aung San Suu Kyi for five years in prison



(News Agency) A Myanmar junta court on Wednesday (April 27) found deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi guilty of corruption and sentenced her to five years in prison, news agencies reported citing a source familiar with the matter. On February 1, 2021, a coup d'état in Myanmar began when members of the ruling party National League for Democracy (NLD) were deposed by the military. Suu Kyi has been in military custody since the night of the coup.

The 76-year-old Nobel laureate is facing criminal cases that could apparently see her jailed for decades. In the latest case, she was accused of accepting a bribe of \$600,000 cash and gold bars. Meanwhile, Suu Kyi had called the allegations "absurd" and denied all the charges. The source further added that the judge handed down the verdict within moments of the court convening.

The source declined to be identified because the trial is being held behind closed doors, with information restricted.

It has been understood that the case centred on allegations that Suu Kyi accepted 11.4 kg of gold and cash payments from her protegee-turned-accuser, former Yangon chief minister Phyo Min Thein.

Reports have stated that Suu Kyi has been held in an undisclosed location, however, there's no confirmation whether she would be transferred to a prison.

The international community has been demanding the release of Suu Kyi ever since she, with some other politicians, was detained when the military seized control of the country and ousted the democratically elected government. The military says Suu Kyi is on trial because she committed crimes and is being given due process by an independent judiciary.



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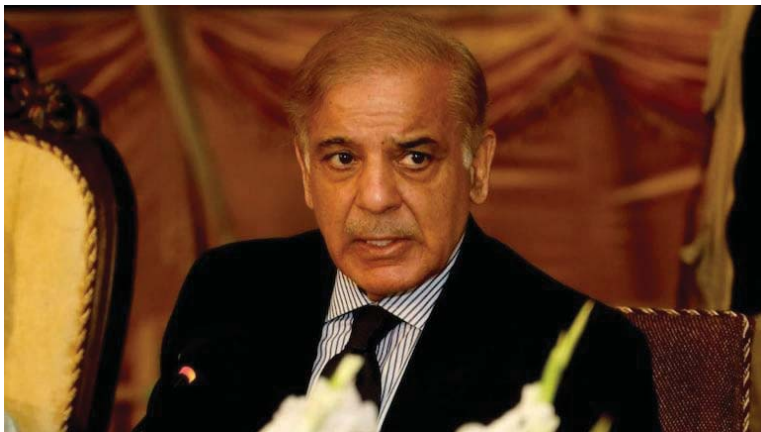
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Cash-strapped Pakistan, IMF agree to extend stalled bailout package, increase loan size to USD 8 billion

According to media reports, Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have agreed to extend the stalled bailout package and increase the loan size to USD 8 billion



the paper reported, citing sources.

The IMF is expected to issue a statement on Monday on the development. Minister of State for Finance Dr Aisha Ghaus Pasha, outgoing State Bank Governor Dr Reza Baqir, Finance Secretary Hamid Yaqoob Sheikh and Pakistan's Executive Director to the World Bank Naveed Kamran Baloch also participated in the meeting with the IMF team. Ismail was in Washington to renegotiate the USD 6 billion bailout package that was stalled by the previous Imran Khan regime.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government and the IMF had signed a 39-month Extended Fund Facility (July 2019 to September 2022) with a total value of USD 6 billion. However, the previous government failed to fulfil its commitments and the program remained stalled

for most of the time as USD 3 billion remained undisbursed.

Before taking Pakistan's case to the IMF Board for approval, Islamabad would have to agree on the budget strategy for the next fiscal year 2022-23, the sources said.

Also, the government of Prime Minister Sharif would have to demonstrate that it would undo some wrong steps taken by the former regime against the commitments that it gave to the IMF Board in January this year.

Cash-strapped Pakistan is passing through a phase of political and economic uncertainty and the decision to stay in the IMF program for longer than the original period would bring clarity in economic policies and soothe the rattling markets. The release of the fund would be a welcome antidote for the country's sagging economy that is

staring at plummeting forex reserves (USD 10.8 billion) and a current account deficit crisis.

To give a final shape to the extended program, an IMF mission would visit Pakistan likely from May 10, the sources said, adding that the IMF team will be led by its new mission chief, Nathan Porter. On the successful conclusion of talks, it was expected that both sides would reach a staff-level agreement, a senior finance ministry official said.

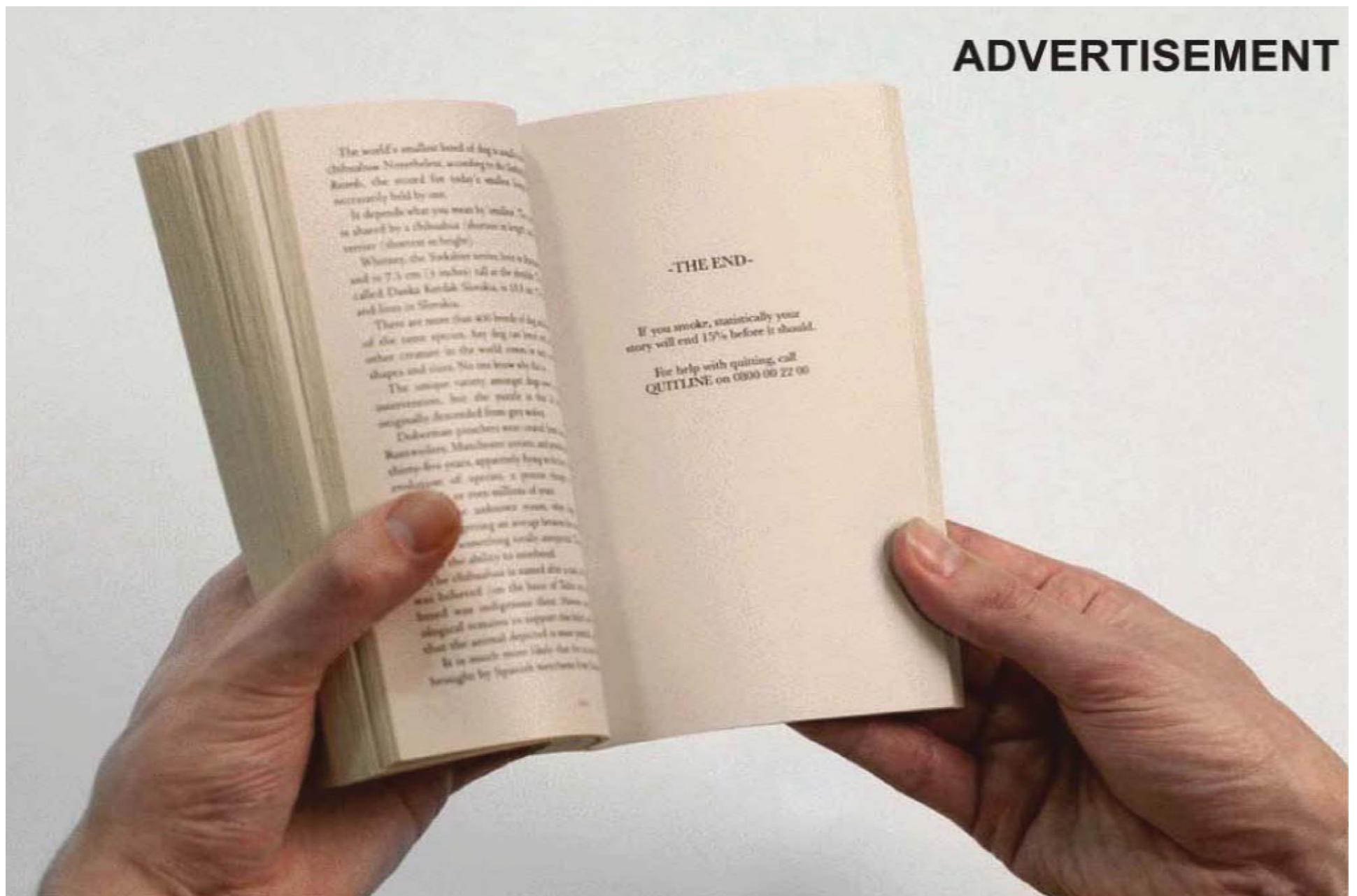
The technical staff of Pakistan and the IMF would start engagement from Monday to see the budget position in light of the "irresponsible" decisions made by the previous government. However, before formally securing the IMF approval for increasing the program size and the cash limit, the government will have to show that it is sincere in making the needed tough policy decisions.

(News Agency) Cash-strapped Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have agreed to extend the stalled bailout package by up to one year and increase the loan size to USD 8 billion, giving breathing space to the new government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, a media report said on Sunday. The understanding was reached after the crucial talks between Pakistan's newly-appointed Finance Minister

Miftah Ismail and IMF Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Sayeh in Washington, The Express Tribune reported, citing sources.

Subject to the final modalities, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed that the program will be extended by another nine months to one year as against the original end-period of September 2022, while the size of the loan would be increased from the existing USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion,

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US diplomats to return to Ukraine as Washington pledges \$700m in military aid

Washington's secretary of state and defence chief on Monday said that US diplomats will begin a gradual return to Ukraine this week, as they announced \$700 million in military aid



(Staff Reporter) United States diplomats will begin a gradual return to Ukraine this week, Washington's secretary of state and defence chief said Monday, as they announced \$700 million in military aid during their first war-time visit to Kyiv. The trip by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin — which the United States confirmed only after the two had left Ukrainian territory — came as the invasion enters its

third month, with thousands dead and millions displaced. Presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky met the US officials Sunday, as the port city of Mariupol's defences were "on the brink of collapse" and Kyiv was in dire need of offensive weapons. Washington ordered the withdrawal of its diplomats in the weeks prior to Russia's February invasion of Ukraine, but has been a leading donor of financial aid and weaponry to the country, and a key sponsor of sanctions targeting Moscow. "Since the start of hostilities, we've had a team across the border in Poland

who's been handling this work for us," the official told reporters waiting for Blinken and Austin on the Polish side of the border. "Starting this week, members of that team will be able to do day trips instead into Ukraine," he said. "Ultimately, (they will) resume their presence in Kyiv." The visiting envoys also pledged another \$700 million in military aid to Ukraine, including some \$300 million to allow the country to purchase necessary weapons. The rest of the money will go to Ukraine's regional allies who need to resupply after sending weapons to their neighbour. The United States has sent some \$4 billion in military

aid since Biden's term began last year, and already announced on Thursday a new \$800 million aid package to bolster Ukraine in their fight against Russian troops in the country's east. But it has been reluctant to intervene militarily, for fear of entering a conflict against nuclear-armed Russia, and officials Monday poured water over claims the visit represented a major escalation of US involvement in Ukraine. "This visit does not portend actual involvement by US forces," a senior defence official said. "The president has been very clear there will be no US troops fighting in Ukraine and that includes the skies over Ukraine."

This US IT engineer was a Hezbollah agent planning terror attacks in New York

(Staff Reporter) A software engineer living in New Jersey for the past 22 years was leading a double life as a "sleeper agent" for the Hezbollah militant organisation, surveying landmarks in US for terror



and transportation hubs to Hezbollah in 2003. Saab had reconned dozens of locations in New York City, including the United Nations headquarters, the Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, Times Square, the Empire State Building, the federal offices at 26 Federal Plaza, and local airports, tunnels, and bridges, including the George Washington Bridge. Saab joined Hezbollah in 1996,

attacks from 2000 to 2005, federal prosecutors said on Monday. Alexei Saab, 45, of Morristown, — also known as Ali Hassan Saab, Alex Saab, or "Rachid"—had a double identity. By the day, he was a software engineer working in big tech companies and trying to pass off as an American citizen.

By night, he was "a terrorist and spy" trying to attack Americans at popular locations if Iran was attacked by the US, said Assistant US Attorney Samuel Adelsberg, reports AP news agency. Saab was arrested in July 2019 after being questioned during 11 sessions over several weeks with FBI agents. He remained in federal custody. It is being claimed that Saab provided photos and other detailed intel on New York City landmarks and his earliest activities with the group include spying in Lebanon on the movements of Israeli and Southern Lebanese Army soldiers, and intelligence-gathering in Istanbul, the indictment alleges. In 2000, Saab lawfully entered the United States using a Lebanese passport, and he became a naturalised US citizen in 2008, the indictment alleges. Meanwhile, the alleged spy's lawyer Saab's lawyer, Marlon Kirton, argued that all the evidence in the case was from Saab himself and could not be considered reliable, according to AP. And he noted that Hezbollah had never attacked Americans in the United States. Saab has pleaded not guilty to charges related to terrorism and citizenship application fraud.

Donald Trump rules out Twitter return as Elon Musk announces \$44 billion purchase

Former US president Donald Trump ruled out returning to Twitter following the purchase of the platform by Elon Musk

(Staff Reporter) Former US president Donald Trump vowed he would not be returning to Twitter if his account was reinstated following the purchase of the platform by tech billionaire Elon Musk, announced on Monday. The Republican leader said he would be using his own site, Truth Social, although he appears only to have posted once since its launch in February.

"I am not going on Twitter, I am going to stay on TRUTH," Trump said, according to Fox News.com, adding that Musk was a "good man" who would improve the service. "We're taking in millions of people, and what we're finding is that the response on TRUTH is much better than being on

Twitter. Twitter has bots and fake accounts, and we are doing everything we can," he told the network. Trump was banned for life from Twitter -- and impeached for a second time -- following the January 2021 assault on the US Capitol by his supporters, with the company citing the "risk of further incitement of violence." The California-based platform has been dogged by complaints from conservatives that it was biased against them and violating their free speech rights with suspensions for rule-breaking. Lawmakers have called for the modification or repeal of a 1996

law shielding social media platforms from liability over their content moderation practices and for the postings of third parties. Musk, whose immense wealth stems from the popularity of Tesla electric vehicles, as well as other ventures, struck a deal Monday to buy Twitter for \$44 billion, the company announced.

A self-proclaimed "free-speech absolutist," he is expected to take a less robust approach to regulating content, and analysts have speculated that he may reinstate accounts of Trump and allies who have fallen afoul of the rules. Trump appeared to have spoken to Fox News before he was aware of Musk's purchase. But



progressive group Media Matters for America had already warned that the former president could return.

"Any negotiations to sell Twitter to Musk must include clear enforceable mechanisms to uphold and maintain existing community standards, including the removal of those who violate those standards," the group's president Angelo Carusone said in a statement. Trump struggled to pronounce the name of his social media platform during a rally in Ohio on Saturday, appearing to refer to it as "something called trove, Truth Central."

India-Russia ties grew out of necessity as US couldn't do it earlier: Antony Blinken

(Staff Reporter) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that India forged its relations with Russia out of necessity, which is not the case with the United States as there is a growing strategic convergence between the two democratic countries. Speaking at a Congressional hearing by the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, Blinken acknowledged that US could not build its ties with India like Russia did in the early stage, adding that the US is now taking efforts to rectify this. "In the case of India, there is a relationship that goes back decades. And Russia, for India, was out of necessity a partner of choice when we were not in a position to be a partner," he told lawmakers," Blinken said while responding to a question by Senator William Hagerty on the India-US relationship during the hearing. In the hearing, Hagerty said, "What I see before us is something I'm certain that is very frustrating in the short-term when we have our differences and you deal with that every day." "But in the long-term, the strategic partnership that we have with India I think poses the opportunity to do more good in the 21st century," he said. To which Blinken responded, "A number of countries are now relooking at some of their relationships and some of their interests particularly when it comes to their relationship with Russia. And of course, in the case of India, there's a relationship that goes back decades." The top American diplomat said that US President Joe Biden has spent "a lot of time directly engaging with Prime Minister Modi and India's leadership". "We have energised the Quad that brings India together with Australia and Japan and us. This has been a very important vehicle for strengthening our collaboration across a whole variety of fronts with India," he said.



US President Joe Biden to meet Indian PM Modi, other Quad leaders in Tokyo in May

(Staff Reporter) US President Joe Biden will be meeting the Quad leaders in Tokyo after travelling to South Korea and Japan for a bilateral visit, the White House in a statement said.

Biden's trip to South Korea and Japan has been scheduled From May 20 to 24, following which he will be meeting other Quad leaders. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to visit Tokyo on May 24 for the Quad visit after concluding his trip to Europe, where he will be meeting the leaders of Germany, Denmark and France from May 2 to May 4.

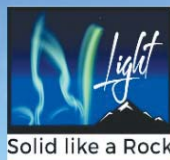
"This trip will advance the Biden-Harris Administration's rock-solid commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific and to US treaty alliances with the Republic of Korea and Japan," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. "It will build on more than a year of intensive diplomacy with the Indo-Pacific, including the U.S.-ASEAN Special Summit on May 12-13 in Washington, DC," she added. Biden will also

hold bilateral meetings with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio. "The leaders will discuss opportunities to deepen our vital security relationships, enhance economic ties and expand our close cooperation to



deliver practical results," she said. Quad or 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' is an informal strategic four that comprises four nations - India, United States, Australia and Japan. One of the main objectives of Quad is to work for a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. It is also basically seen as a strategic grouping to reduce Chinese domination.

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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.



Russia began preparing for cyber attacks on Ukraine in early 2021

While Russia's invasion has been viewed as poorly planned and executed, Microsoft researchers describe a cyber campaign that often coincided with military plans

Russian-affiliated hackers were positioning themselves for cyberattacks against Ukraine as early as March 2021, according to researchers at Microsoft Corp. A handful of hacking groups secured access to Ukrainian organizations — including defense, IT and energy networks — for strategic and battlefield intelligence collection, the technology giant revealed in a report published on Wednesday. The campaigns appeared to be setting the groundwork for attacks before and after the invasion began in February. These previously unreported reconnaissance operations preceded what has become an aggressive and damaging campaign against Ukraine, which has been hit with more than 237 cyberattacks by at least six Russian-affiliated hacking groups since the invasion began, Tom Burt, Microsoft's vice president for customer security and trust, said in a blog post that accompanied the report. In addition, Microsoft researchers identified nearly 40 destructive attacks that permanently destroyed files in dozens of organizations across Ukraine. More than 40% of those attacks were aimed at organizations that provide

critical infrastructure, according to the report. While Russia's invasion has been viewed as poorly planned and executed, Microsoft researchers describe a cyber campaign that often coincided with military plans. The report also provides a detailed account of Russia's cyber operations, which some experts have said played a smaller role in the conflict than anticipated. "Russia's use of cyberattacks appears to be strongly correlated and sometimes directly timed with its kinetic military operations," Burt wrote in a blog post. "For example, a Russian actor launched cyberattacks against a major broadcasting company on March 1, the same day the Russian military announced its intention to destroy Ukrainian 'disinformation' targets and directed a missile strike against a TV tower in Kyiv." A representative for the Russian embassy in Washington didn't respond to a request for comment. The state-sponsored hacking groups embedded themselves in the technological scaffolding that keep some of Ukraine's critical infrastructure online, according to Microsoft. They also conducted phishing attacks on the

Ukrainian military to collect intelligence which could later be used by the Russian army, the report found. Microsoft said the cyber operation expanded to a large phishing campaign, by a hacking group it calls Nobelium, against those rallying international support for Ukraine. In early 2021, Nobelium attempted to access IT companies serving governments in NATO member states, including the U.S and Europe. It successfully stole data from Western foreign policy organizations to gauge how NATO would respond to Russian military actions. Microsoft, which has been working with Ukrainian authorities to help thwart cyberattacks, didn't identify the targeted countries. Nobelium, also known as APT 29 and Cozy Bear and believed to be affiliated with Russian intelligence, has also been accused of the supply chain attack involving SolarWinds Corp., which was made public in December 2020, and the breach of the Democratic National Committee prior to the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Later in 2021, suspected Russian hackers embedded themselves in the

networks of IT and energy providers which would later become targets of destructive attacks. This included the company Kitsoft, an IT service provider for Ukrainian government departments, the websites of which were defaced with threatening text warning Ukrainians to "be afraid and wait for the worst" and claiming their personal data had been stolen. A representative for Kitsoft couldn't be located for comment. By 2022, when diplomacy between the two countries had turned sour, hacking groups linked to Russian intelligence appeared to begin exploiting the access to these networks, and began sending malicious "wiper" software, named for its damaging nature, to Ukrainian organizations, according to Microsoft. Burt warned that cyberattacks in Ukraine would probably increase and that Russian-aligned hacking groups may target NATO members, and he advised organizations to take alerts published by U.S government agencies seriously. "Given Russian threat actors have been mirroring and augmenting military actions, we believe cyberattacks will continue to escalate as the conflict rages," he said.



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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ੀ ਸ਼ਾਹੂਕਾਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਯਾਤਰੇ ਲਈ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਡਾਲਰ ਖਰਚੇ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ ਦੱਸੀ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਗੱਲ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਯਾਤਰੇ ਲਈ ਪ੍ਰੇਰਿਤ ਕਰੇਗੀ।

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

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਸਬੰਧਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੇਗਾ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ।

ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਨਸਰਾਨ ਸਿਰਕਸ ਨੂੰ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਈ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ: ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖਾਨਸਰਾਨ ਸਿਰਕਸ ਨੂੰ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਾਈ।

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

ਵਾਸ਼ਿੰਗਟਨ: ਅਮਰੀਕੀ ਫੌਜ ਨੇ ਬੰਬ ਦਾ ਟਵੀਟ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮੁਆਫੀ ਮੰਗੀ।

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State of the power crunch



MW, and supply less than half of that. While shortage in open market is one reason, depleted capacity generation of J&K's own power projects has added to the woes. The UT's power projects have an installed capacity of 1,211 MW but produce just over 450 MW. While NHPC-owned projects in J&K have an installed capacity of 2000 MW, they produce less than 1,400 MW. Of this, J&K receives a little over 150 MW. Officials say J&K has a deficit of around 2,300 MWs but given high tariff and unavailability, it is purchasing around 800 MW.

Rajasthan: Daily power demand in April 2021 was about 2,131 lakh units. This has shot up to about 2,800 lakh units

Jharkhand: The state has a power consumption of 1,800-2,100 MW during peak hours. Power supply to Jharkhand used to be around 1,850 MW before April, with the government usually managing to meet the shortage of 200-250 MW. Demand has now surged to 2,500-2,600 MW. Damodar Valley Corporation usually supplies 550 MW; CM Hemant Soren has asked it to provide 200 MW more to plug the shortage. The state has also filed its bid on the power exchange, but there is no availability. It is negotiating with private companies.

Jammu & Kashmir: Parts of J&K are facing power outages for more than 16 hours. Demand is 3,000

daily. Similarly, peak demand was 11,570 MW, which is now 13,700 MW. Principal Secretary (Energy) A Sawant said that due to a nationwide coal crisis, production has been affected and power plants are not working at full capacity. The state's plants can generate up to 10,110 MW but are generating about 6,600 MW.

Haryana: Haryana is facing shortage of at least 3,000 MW. CM Manohar Lal Khattar has said the government is making arrangements from multiple sources to bridge the gap. Haryana is in negotiations with Adani Power Limited for restoration of supply from Mundra Power Plant and is expecting restoration of power supply to the

tune of 1,000 MW in near future, Khattar stated. Power Minister Ranjit Singh has cited the heat wave and infrastructure projects to explain the rise in demand. "I hope 1400 MW due from Adani Power will be received within one week. I hope that by coming Saturday, the power situation will be fine," he said.

Punjab: Coal shortage and technical snags are said to be the main reasons behind the shortage. On Wednesday, demand reached 7,800 MW and availability was around 7,000 MW. This led to 2-5 hour powercuts in domestic areas. Industrial areas faced no cuts. Agriculture power use is at a bare minimum now due to wheat harvesting. Thermal plants generate 5,480 MW in Punjab. As on Wednesday, they were generating only around 3,700 MW amid a coal shortage. Officials said around 1,000 MW of capacity is on maintenance and the remaining gap is due to technical snags. Odisha: Odisha has been facing a shortage of around 400 MW daily against its average need of 4,150 MW and maximum demand of 4,450 MW during peak hours. Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra had on Monday held a meeting on the shortage. According to officials, the shortfall is temporary and the situation will improve within a week. Officials said the shortage is due to a technical snag that halted a 441-MW unit of NTPC in Sundargarh district. An Odisha Power Generation Corporation unit is undergoing annual maintenance.

What is Paxlovid, strongly recommended by WHO as the best therapeutic choice for high-risk Covid-19 patients?

The MPP, founded by the Geneva-based Unitaid, works to increase access to, and facilitate the development of, life-saving medicines for low- and middle-income countries. MPP partners with civil society, governments, international organisations, industry, patient groups, and other stakeholders to prioritise and license needed medicines and pool intellectual property to encourage generic manufacture and the development of new formulations.

Drug in India

Nineteen of the 35 companies with which the MPP has signed sub-licensing agreements are Indian, and they include drugmakers such as Bengaluru-based Biocon Ltd; Mumbai-based Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, Sun Pharmaceuticals, and Cipla; Ahmedabad headquartered Torrent Pharmaceuticals and Cadila

Pharmaceuticals; Hetero Drugs and Laurus Labs of Hyderabad; and Emcure Pharmaceuticals of Pune.

It was reported earlier this week that Hetero's drug could be available at chemists' very soon, but no confirmation was available.

In its April 22 statement, WHO said it was "extremely concerned" that low- and middle-income countries could be pushed to the "end of the queue" while accessing Paxlovid treatment — in the same way these countries had suffered when it came to the supply of Covid-19 vaccines. It said that Pfizer's licensing agreement with the MPP limited the number of countries that can benefit from generic production of the medicine.

Push in the US The Biden administration is aiming to expand access to oral antiviral treatments like Paxlovid by doubling the number of locations at which they are

available, the White House said on Tuesday.

Currently, pharmacies were dependent on states to obtain the pills. The government sends the treatments to select pharmacies, as well as directly to states and community centres. Under the current system, the treatments are available in around 20,000 locations, a Reuters report said. The administration now expects to increase their direct distribution to over 30,000 locations and reach 40,000 sites over the coming weeks, the report said, quoting an official. Demand for Paxlovid has been unexpectedly light due to complicated eligibility requirements, reduced testing, and potential for drug interactions. The US has agreed to buy up to 20 million pills at around \$530 a course, and Pfizer is on pace to produce 3.5 million courses earmarked for US use by the end of April, the Reuters report said.

The case for extending constitutional protections to Muslim and Christian Dalits

(Contd from page 16) Both were in favour of extending constitutional protection and safeguards to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims that are available to their counterparts who profess Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Governments have, however, not acted on these recommendations. They have argued against these reports — despite the empirical evidence they have collected — citing the paucity of disaggregated data on Dalit Muslims and Christians and contesting the validity of conversion records across generations. This contradicts the fact that 20 states have extended benefits to Dalit Muslims and Christians under the

OBC category, following the Mandal Commission's recommendations. The continued exclusion of Muslim and Christian Dalits from the benefits of reservation, solely on the basis of religion, violates the equality provisions of Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution. Reservation, according to the Constitution, relies on criteria such as social status, standing in the community, marginalisation, discrimination, violence and social exclusion. How can one explain the government's obstinacy? It's something that dates back to 1950. Among the few things that keep Hindu Dalits from converting is that they retain the benefits of reservation. If reservation becomes

universal, they would be less hesitant to accept the materialistic offers given by missionaries for converting. This could lead to a fall in the numbers of the country's Hindu population — something that worries a lot of Hindu organisations. While the Constitutional Order of 1950 could be amended regarding Indian religions like Sikhism and Buddhism, the same relaxation of the rule cannot apply to "foreign religions" — this is a clear indication that communalism is now influencing this important issue. Besides, giving Dalit Christians and Muslims access to reservation would make the competition tougher for Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Dalits.

Common values, shared threats in India-Australia cyber security ties

Deepening cooperation can develop avenues for mutual learning and create complementary markets in cyber tools and technologies, boosting bilateral business and strategic commitments on both continents

Western and media attention may be focused on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but countries have not taken their eye off the Indo-Pacific where there is clear evidence of the changing world order. This is manifest in the signing of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement in goods and services earlier this month.

The botched US withdrawal from Afghanistan followed by China taking a serious interest in creating new economic, military and political alliances, and the impending energy crisis demand that nations recalibrate their strategic as well as long-term interests. The India-Australia ECTA is a concrete example of the bilateral faith in common values, and understanding of threats and goals. A

reflection of this is cooperation in cyber security. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has shown how cyber threat actors, both state and non-state, have become significant players in hybrid or "unrestricted" warfare. Both countries have let loose malicious elements in the information as well as operational space, while non-state actors like the hacktivist group Anonymous claimed to have caused significant damage to critical Russian and Belarusian financial and military infrastructure.

China is accused of having amassed a large number of cyber weapons and has allegedly carried out sophisticated operations aimed at espionage, theft of intellectual property, and destructive attacks on internet resources of some

countries. Australia and India have been at the receiving end of several such campaigns by the so-called Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups, supported by or assumed to be located in China.

At the June 2020 virtual bilateral summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison elevated the bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The new cyber framework includes a five-year plan to work together on the digital economy, cybersecurity and critical and emerging technologies. This will be supported by a \$9.7 million fund for bilateral research to improve regional cyber resilience.

An annual Cyber Policy Dialogue, a new Joint Working Group on Cyber Security Cooperation and a joint working group on ICTs have been established. An annual India-Australia Foreign Ministers Cyber Framework Dialogue will be held. India will now be included in a core Australian initiative called the International Cyber Engagement Strategy — it began in 2017 to actively conduct capacity-building arrangements in Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand, and support similar activities in Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia. In 2021 Australia added critical technologies to the initiative, making it important to the bilateral partnership with India and to the Quad.

India has much to learn from Australia's low-key but smart cyber expertise. The Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC) in Canberra is the receptacle of the country's cybersecurity information, advice and assistance efforts. It draws expertise from national law

enforcement, intelligence agencies, crime investigation, and national security bodies. ACSC has a partnership programme with the corporate world to facilitate intelligence-sharing on threats. AustCyber, another government effort, aims at establishing an internationally competitive domestic cybersecurity industry.

India has set up the office of the National Cybersecurity Coordinator, a national Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN), a national Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Agency (NCIIPC), and made appropriate amendments to the Information Technology Act and Rules to enhance its cyber security posture. This has upped India's rank to 10th in the Global Cyber Security Index (GCI) 2020, from 47th just two years earlier. India has capable cybersecurity professionals.

In February, the foreign ministers of India and Australia recognised cooperation in cyber governance, cyber security, capacity building, innovation, digital economy, cyber and critical technologies as an essential pillar of the relations between the two countries. A joint Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy, to be located in Bengaluru, will be set up.

India and Australia share common concerns around 5G rollouts, threats by APT groups, cybercrime, information warfare and threats to a democratic order. Deepening cooperation can develop avenues for mutual learning and create complementary markets in cyber tools and technologies, boosting bilateral business and strategic commitments on both continents.

French President Emmanuel Macron reelected: What's happening next?

After winning another five years in the French presidential palace, Emmanuel Macron intends to go back to work straightaway on domestic and foreign policy — but he will soon face crucial parliamentary elections where he may struggle to keep his majority. Here's a look at what comes next for Macron and his leadership of France.

INAUGURATION CEREMONY

The Constitutional Council will publish the presidential election's official results on Wednesday and Macron will hold a Cabinet meeting. Macron will then need to set a date for his inauguration ceremony, which must be held by May 13, at the Elysee Palace. He will receive the National Guards' honors and make a speech. Usually, 21 cannon shots are fired to mark an inauguration, although Presidents Francois Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac both skipped that tradition for their reelections in 1988 and 2002. Macron is the only other leader of modern France to win a second term at the ballot box.

MACRON'S FIRST MOVES

Like five years ago, Macron plans to quickly head to Berlin, in line with the tradition that newly elected French presidents make their first trip abroad to neighboring Germany to celebrate the countries' friendship after multiple wars. He will meet with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, with efforts to try to end the war in Ukraine topping the agenda. At some point, he may also travel to Kyiv to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy, a trip he said he would only do on condition that it would have "a useful impact." Macron spoke to both Zelenskyy and Scholz within hours of his victory. US President Joe Biden tried to congratulate Macron on Sunday night too, but told reporters, "I spoke to his staff and he was at the Eiffel Tower having a good time." The two leaders spoke briefly Monday instead, and agreed to hold longer talks soon about support for Ukraine, pressure on Russia to negotiate an end to the war, food security and deepening U.S.-EU relations, according to Macron's office. On May 9, Macron is expected to make a speech on Europe in Strasbourg, home to the EU parliament.

"India remains one of the world's most challenging major economies with respect to protection and enforcement of IP," it said.

The report further said India's accession to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Performances and Phonograms Treaty and WIPO Copyright Treaty, collectively known as the WIPO Internet Treaties, in 2018 and the Nice Agreement in 2019 were positive steps.

However, the USTR said the potential threat of patent revocations, lack of presumption of patent validity and narrow patentability criteria under the Indian Patents Act impact companies across different sectors. The USTR said despite

India's justifications of limiting IP protections as a way to promote access to technologies, India maintains high customs duties on IP-intensive products such as medical devices, pharmaceuticals, information and communications technology products, solar energy equipment and capital goods. In the pharmaceutical sector, the United States continues to monitor the restriction on patent-eligible subject matter in Section 3(d) of the Indian Patents Act and its impacts, it said. Pharmaceutical stakeholders also express concerns as to whether India has an effective mechanism for the early resolution of potential patent disputes, particularly shortcomings in notifying interested parties of marketing approvals, it said.

IP protection: India among most challenging economies, says USTR

How to shock-proof India's power sector

The efficiency of thermal plants must be increased and regulators empowered to bring down losses

In October last year, India witnessed significant power shortages stemming from the low inventory of coal at the power plants. After seven months, we are back to square one as reports of coal-shortage induced power outages across states continue to pour in. On the one hand, there is a rush towards buying expensive coal and power on the exchanges. On the other, states like Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat have asked industries to reduce consumption to manage the power deficit. As economic activity resumed after the Covid-induced lockdowns, the demand-supply mismatch for commodities such as coal widened globally, leading to a surge in prices. Geopolitical tensions have exacerbated the existing crisis. Amidst such unprecedented volatility, how can the Indian power sector become more resilient to future shocks?

Global supply disruptions due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict have sent coal prices touching historical highs. The cost of imported coal in India is expected to be 35 per cent higher in the fiscal year 2022-23 compared to the past year. Subsequently, power producers paid a premium of up to 300 per cent in March to secure coal supplies in the domestic

spot market.

Even as coal stocks available with state thermal power plants fell, India also witnessed a sudden rise in energy demand in March — the hottest in its recorded history. This pushed peak power demand to 199 GW in the middle of March. The last week of March saw a 13 per cent higher demand over past year trends, accompanied by high electricity prices on the power exchange. This has left distribution companies (discoms) with two options: Procure expensive power, but face uncertainty in revenue recovery or resort to power rationing, as several states are doing.

The Ministry of Power has taken a host of measures to alleviate the crisis. This includes giving directions to ensure maximum production of coal at captive mines, rationing of coal to non-power sectors, and a price cap of Rs 12 per unit on electricity traded on exchanges. But we need to do more to enhance the sector's resilience to such disruptions from exogenous factors.

First, create an enabling ecosystem to ensure power plants work efficiently. India has about 200 GW of coal-based generation capacity which accounts for

nearly 70 per cent of the total electricity generated in the country. However, according to a CEEW assessment, a disproportionate share of generation comes from older inefficient plants, while the newer and efficient ones remain idle for want of favourable coal supply contracts or power purchase agreements. Revisiting fuel allocation and supporting the priority dispatch of efficient plants could help India reduce coal demand by up to 6 per cent of our annual requirement, and set aside more coal for the proverbial rainy day. Second, enable discoms to undertake smart assessment and management of demand. We have advanced tools for medium- and short-term demand forecasting. However, few discoms have embraced these to inform their procurement decisions. With more than 90 per cent of power being procured through long-term contracts, discoms have little incentive to dynamically assess and manage demand. Introducing time-of-day pricing and promoting efficient consumption behaviour would help shave peak demand and avoid panic buying in the market. Third, empower electricity

regulators to help bring down discom losses. Despite two decades of sectoral reforms, the aggregate losses of discoms stand at 21 per cent (2019-20). This is reflective of both operational inefficiency and poor recovery of dues from consumers, including those affiliated with state governments and municipal bodies. These losses are also the reason for discoms not being able to pay the generators on time, resulting in payment delays to Coal India, which, in turn, is reluctant to supply coal on request. Besides the ongoing initiatives like introducing smart meters and network strengthening, empowering regulators would be critical to infuse payment discipline across the supply chain of the electricity sector and to keep cost recovery as a key metric.

Given the country's development aspirations, India's power demand is set to rise substantially and become more variable. Increasing climatic and geopolitical uncertainties underscore the need to become more efficient in the way we generate, distribute and consume energy. We need to act now for the long-term resilience of India's power sector.

What's next after COVID-19?

Global heating may cause 'potentially devastating' future pandemics

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is not even close to being over. It wreaked havoc across the world since it was first identified in late 2019 in China. The world is not at all ready for another pandemic? However, researchers have issued a warning about future pandemics.

A recent study, published in Nature journal stated that because of climate change, thousands of new and emerging viruses might jump from animals to humans in the coming years.

The peer-reviewed paper titled "Climate change increases cross-species viral transmission risk" predicts that if global temperatures rise by 2 Celsius, at least 15,000 new cross-species viral transmissions to happen by 2070.

The study explained that due to fast environmental change, several species will move from one place to another to track shifting climates

In the process of shifting they will bring their parasites and pathogens into new environments, which poses threat to global health, particularly given several "recent epidemics and pandemics of viruses that originate in wildlife". Part of the study read: "Climate and land use change will produce novel opportunities for viral sharing among previously geographically-isolated species

of wildlife." Gregory Albery, who is an expert in disease ecology at Georgetown University and also the co-author of the paper, said that "as the

apparently causing alarming interactions between species that are prone to spreading viruses. Albery said, "This is happening, it's not preventable even in the best case climate change scenarios and we need to put measures in place to build health infrastructure to protect animal and human populations."

Will be able to stop it? Well, Albery noted that even drastic action to address the temperature rise now won't be enough to halt the risks. The mass movement of species will lead to encountering among species, may for the first time. The process might create unique opportunities for viruses to transmit. As per the study, areas of high human population density in Asia and Africa are highlighted by the authors as it will drive the novel cross-species transmission of their viruses an estimated 4,000 times.

"We predict that species will aggregate in new combinations at high elevations, in biodiversity hotspots, and in areas of high human population density in Asia and Africa, driving the novel cross-species transmission of their viruses an estimated 4,000 times," the study mentions. As per the study, bats account for the majority of novel viral sharing because of their unique dispersal capacity. They are likely to share viruses along evolutionary pathways that will facilitate future emergence in humans.



world changes, the face of disease will change too."

"This work provides more incontrovertible evidence that the coming decades will not only be hotter, but sicker. We have demonstrated a novel and potentially devastating mechanism for disease emergence that could threaten the health of animals in the future and will likely have ramifications for us, too," he added. Albery further added that said that climate change is "shaking ecosystems to their core". The process is

Global coal power plant capacity declined in 2021; China still leads, India at second

Global coal power plant capacity under development declined in 2021, falling by 13 per cent compared to 2020, a survey from the Global Energy Monitor's (GEM) stated. In its eighth annual survey, the GEM found that 34 countries have new coal plants under consideration, down from 41 countries in January 2021. The report finds that after rising in 2020 for the first time since 2015, the total coal power capacity under development declined from 525 gigawatts (GW) to 457 GW, a record low, last year.

China, South Korea and Japan notably pledged to stop funding new coal plants in other countries. However, China continued to lead all countries in the domestic development of new coal plants, commissioning more coal capacity than the rest of the world combined, followed by India, the report noted.



The authors of the report concluded that "coal's last gasp is not yet in sight", despite countries agreeing at the COP26 UN climate summit last November to a "phase down" instead of "phase out" coal. "The coal plant pipeline is shrinking, but there is simply no carbon budget left to be building new coal plants. We need to stop now. The latest IPCC report's directive for a fighting chance at a livable climate is clear – stop building new coal plants and retire existing ones in the developed world by 2030, and the rest of the world soon after," Flora Champenois of Global Energy Monitor, one of the report's authors, said. He said coal power might take longer to peak because a key aspect of China's carbon neutrality plan was to replace direct fossil fuel use in industry, transport, buildings and other sectors with electricity. The report comes on the back of this month's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which showed that there is no carbon budget left to accommodate new coal plants, and that coal use needs to fall by 75 per cent by 2030 (from 2019 levels) to limit global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius in line with the Paris Agreement.

Germany may deliver tanks to Ukraine: Report



Amid controversy over weapons delivery to Ukraine, newswire AFP reported that the German government will deliver tanks to Ukraine. The development comes as countries meet in Ramstein airbase in southwestern Germany to discuss arms delivery to Ukraine. President Zelensky has been pleading for more offensive weapons to take on the Russian forces. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin who had visited Kyiv over the weekend had said Ukraine "can win if they have the right equipment" and "right support". Reports claim there is pressure on Social Democratic Party (SPD) to dismiss German ex-Chancellor Gerhard

Schroeder from the party over his apparent ties with Russia. Schroeder is reportedly on the shareholders' committee of Nord Stream AG the controversial gas pipeline project which has been discontinued after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. Russia meanwhile had said on Monday that it had expelled 40 German diplomats after the German government expelled Russian diplomats over the Ukraine war. Russia said it had made a "strong protest" to the German diplomatic mission in Moscow over the "unfriendly decision" of the German government. The German government retorted saying Russia's decision was "in no way justified".



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

REWARD

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

REMARKS

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

CAUTION

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

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No, PM Modi DID NOT rechristen Rajiv Gandhi Foundation as PM Cares fund

There is no relation between the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and the PM Care fund. Both are completely different entities and are currently in operation



There is no relation between the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and the PM Care fund. Both are completely different entities and are currently in operation

Over the years, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre has been accused of renaming and repackaging schemes launched by the Indian National Congress when it was the ruling party. The Congress website even lists such schemes. Recently, an infographic went viral on social media, showcasing schemes, places, institutions, and awards that were rechristened by the Narendra Modi-led union government.

The post said, "Decades-old mistakes rectified with a change," and listed some of these changes: Nehru Museum was changed to PM Museum, Indira Awas Yojana to Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna to Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna, and the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation to PM Cares.

The India Today Anti Fake News War Room (AFWA) found the claim was misleading. There is no relation between the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and the PM Care fund. Both are completely

different entities and are currently in operation.

Archived versions of posts with similar claims can be seen here and here.

AFWA Probe

While investigating the claims, we found several media reports about the Centre renaming the Nehru Museum in New Delhi, the Indira Awas Yojana and Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award.

However, we did not find any reports suggesting that Rajiv Gandhi Foundation was renamed as the PM Care fund. According to the official website of the PM Cares

fund, the Public Charitable Trust was registered under the Registration Act, 1908, in New Delhi on March 27, 2020. While the Prime Minister is the ex-officio chairman of this trust, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Minister of Finance are its ex-officio trustees. Per the trust deed of the PM Cares fund, the PM of India is the "Settlor" who

executed the deed. And, in order to set up the trust, the "Settlor" transferred an initial sum of Rs 2,25,000 as initial corpus. This meant that with the execution of the aforementioned deed, an entirely new trust was formed on March 27, 2020.

However, we did not find any reports suggesting that Rajiv Gandhi Foundation was renamed as the PM Care fund. According to the official website of the PM Cares fund, the Public Charitable Trust was registered under the Registration Act, 1908, in New Delhi on March 27, 2020

The website of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation stated that it was "set up on June 21, 1991, to realise the vision of Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India. From 1991 to 2009, the Foundation worked on a number of critical issues and in 2010, the Foundation decided to focus on the education sector." There's no mention that the

organisation stopped its operation or the name of the organisation was changed. The website stated that Sonia Gandhi was the chairman and several known faces of the Congress party, including Manmohan Singh, P. Chidambaram, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, were its board members.

To further confirm the claim, we visited the verified Facebook page of the organisation. The page provided regular updates on the foundation's activities, and the latest post (at the time of writing this) was shared on April 26, 2022 — photos of a training workshop organised by the foundation. To further confirm this, India Today spoke to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's office which said, "Rajiv Gandhi Foundation is still there and Manmohan Singh is one of the board members of that organisation. It has nothing to do with the PM Cares fund."

Hence, we concluded that one of the claims in this post was false. The Rajiv Gandhi Foundation was not rechristened as the PM Cares fund.

11 electrocuted as chariot grazes high-tension wire in Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur

As many as 15 people were injured in the accident which took place around 3 am near Kalimedu when the Appar Swamy temple chariot procession was underway

At least 11 people, including three children, were electrocuted after a temple chariot procession in Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur district came in contact with a high-voltage power line early on Wednesday, police said. As many as 15 people were injured in the accident which took place around 3 am near Kalimedu when the Appar Swamy temple chariot procession was underway. Police said the death toll is likely to increase as some of those who were injured and undergoing treatment at Thanjavur medical college hospital are believed to be in a critical condition. Explaining the circumstances leading to the electrocution, police said the temple car was negotiating a turn when it came into contact with the overhead line. The people standing on the chariot were thrown in the impact, they said.

"The electricity board had switched off the low tension wire here. The high tension wire was by the corner of the road. Preliminary probe suggested that the chariot lost balance and slipped towards the high-tension wire," Tiruchirappalli (central zone) inspector general of police V Balakrishnan said. "While three persons died on spot, the remaining died during treatment at Thanjavur medical college hospital. A first information report (FIR) has been filed to investigate the exact cause and how the electrocution happened," he added.

Eyewitnesses said "people were thrown away, they just fell down". "I could see a man lying here and another one there and the unfolding scene was frightening as we could not understand what was happening," a woman eyewitness said. "Organisers could not go near the generator, leave alone turning it off. Obviously no one was



sure from where the electricity was originating and how it was passing on and it was mayhem," a villager who witnessed the procession move on said.

A third eyewitness said authorities of roads and electricity boards are to be blamed for the incident. "This should go to the chief minister's notice so that such accidents do not occur elsewhere," the witness said. Chief minister M K Stalin, who met the injured in the hospital, announced the formation of a

one-man commission of inquiry to thoroughly probe the accident and to put forth recommendations to make sure that such unfortunate incidents are not repeated. "It is a tragic and painful incident. We have ordered government officials to take action on this issue. I have conveyed my condolences to the bereaved families," Stalin told reporters. "I have instructed officials to carry out rescue and medical work. We have to find the exact cause of the accident and will ensure that such accidents don't occur in the

future. For this purpose, I've appointed revenue secretary Kumar Jayant to understand the issue and make recommendations for necessary precautions to be taken," he added.

The chief minister handed over a solatium of ₹5 lakh to each of the families who lost their kin in the mishap. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) president also provided a ₹2 lakh solatium to kin of each of the deceased on behalf of his party. At the hospital, Stalin handed over a

solatium of ₹1 lakh to those critically injured and ₹50,000 to those who sustained mild injuries. He also gave the injured a solatium of ₹25,000 on behalf of his party. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ram Nath Kovind also expressed their anguish over the incident. Modi announced a compensation of ₹2 lakh each to the families of the deceased and ₹50,000 each for the injured. The electrocution of the 11 people echoed in the state assembly. Leader of the opposition AIADMK K Palaniswami sought enhanced compensation to the victims' families. Taking exception to the government for not preventing the incident, Palaniswami led his party members in staging a walk out. Later, the opposition party members returned and insisted upon the speaker M Appavu to allow them to debate on the accident. But the speaker initially declined saying they cannot debate as they had staged a walk out on the issue. However, he would provide them an opportunity later, he said.

Salmonella outbreak in UK caused by Belgium chocolates?

UK reported a Salmonella outbreak and investigations have linked the outbreak to Belgium chocolates

The United Kingdom on Wednesday notified the World Health Organisation (WHO) of a number of Salmonella cases and investigations have linked the outbreak to Belgium chocolates. A total of 151 suspected Salmonella cases linked to the consumption of Belgium chocolate products have been reported from over 11 countries. WHO was informed by a UN health body of a widely distributed cluster of S Typhimurium with an unidentified source. However, epidemiological evidence has linked the outbreak to chocolate products from Belgium.

According to WHO, these contaminated chocolate products are in stores in at least 113 countries.

Salmonella is one of the most common food-borne infections. Salmonella- is a type of bacteria that



causes symptoms including diarrhoea, fever and stomach cramps in humans.

The salmonella bacteria can cause serious and severe infections, especially in children or elderly people and others with weak immune systems. Earlier, a Kinder chocolate factory in Belgium was ordered to

close after it was linked to dozens of salmonella cases. As of April 25, a total of 151 genetically related cases of S. Typhimurium suspected to be linked to the consumption of Belgium chocolate products have been reported. Belgium has reported 26 cases, France 25 and Germany 10. UK is the worst affected with 65 cases so far. Usually, Salmonella infections are mild and do not require treatment. But for cases with information on symptoms and severity, a high hospitalisation rate was observed. However, children and elderly individuals are at greater risk for severe complications related to associated dehydration. To date, most cases have been in children under 10 years of age, which may be due to the implicated product being targeted at children.

MHA cancels FCRA licence of 2 Odisha-based NGOs

Notably, the registration of both the NGOs was suspended in August last year after prima facie information that they had violated FCRA. "Following completion of investigations against them, their FCRA has been cancelled," a home ministry official said

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration of two NGOs based in Odisha for alleged violations of the law. Sources said the registration of People's Organisation for Empowerment of Tribals (Poet) and Heavenly Grace Ministries have been cancelled after evidence was found that they had violated various provisions of the FCRA.

While Poet works for tribal welfare in districts such as Malkangiri and Koraput in Odisha, HGM is a Christian evangelical organisation established in 2001 that also

works in the domain of employment, housing, education and child and youth development. The latter's main office is in Kolnara, Odisha.

Notably, the registration of both the NGOs was suspended in August last year after prima facie information that they had violated FCRA. "Following completion of investigations against them, their FCRA has been cancelled," a home ministry official said.

The development comes days after MHA cancelled the registration of Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) citing violation of FCRA on the NGO's part. The

license of CHRI had been similarly put under suspension last year. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had suspended CHRI's license for 180 days last year for alleged violation of FCRA. In its suspension order the Ministry of Home Affairs had said that the information about opening of a bank account in February 2016 was not given by CHRI to the authorities. It also accused CHRI of other violations of FCRA, 2010.

"Further, one utilization account through which the Association has been utilizing foreign contribution has not been intimated in ARs for FY 2016-17 and 2017-18," the MHA order stated.

Other allegations included not giving information about projects for which foreign contribution was received in its annual report and refunding some foreign contributions back to the donor in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 in violation of FCRA regulations. CHRI had gone to the Delhi High

Court against the order last year. Contending that the 180-day suspension threatens its "very existence" and causes great harm to its reputation, CHRI in the petition had said that freezing of its receipt and utilisation bank accounts have severely restricted its planned programme activities. CHRI is also now not in a position to pay salaries to its 40 staff members and consultants, the plea said.

Countering the allegations, CHRI had informed the High Court that it had provided clarification to the government where it had given details of project-wise foreign contribution received and utilised in 2018-19. It said it had also informed the MHA about the opening and closing balance of foreign contribution through online receipts account, payments account, income account and the expenditure account for 2018-2019. The HC, however, did not provide any relief to the NGO and upheld the MHA's suspension order.

Air India seeks Competition Commission's nod to acquire 100% stake in AirAsia

Air India Private Limited was formally acquired by Tata Sons Private Limited through a wholly-owned subsidiary company, Talace Pvt Ltd, on January 27, 2022



Air India has proposed to acquire a 100 per cent equity of AirAsia (India) Private Limited. Air India made the proposal in a petition moved before the Competition Commission of India (CCI). Air India Private Limited was formally acquired by Tata Sons Private Limited through a wholly-owned subsidiary company, Talace Pvt Ltd, on January 27, 2022. Meanwhile, Tata Sons holds 83.67 per cent stake in AirAsia, while the remainder 16.33 per cent is held by AirAsia Investment Limited (Malaysia). Both aviation businesses provide domestic scheduled air transport services, air cargo transport services and charter flight services in India. Air India also operates commercial international flights. In its note to the CCI, Air India has said "the proposed combination will

not lead to any change in the competitive landscape or cause any appreciable adverse effect on competition in India, irrespective of the manner in which the relevant markets are defined." But as expected, the combination will lead to overlaps in the domestic air transport, cargo, charter flights, in-flight catering services markets, along with ground handling markets at Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Delhi, Thiruvananthapuram and Mangalore airports. On Tuesday, India Today Television had reported that Tata Sons is working on a plan to move all its aviation assets - Air India, Vistara (optional), AirAsia, Air India Express and AI SATS (ground handling supplier) under one roof, which includes a new office space in Gurugram.

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Hands tied, face covered, highest level of pain: Ukrainians recount time spent in Russian custody

More than 20 civilians from Trostyanets town of Sumy region in Ukraine were picked up by Russian forces and taken into custody, as per officials. The few who have come back home recounted their experiences to India Today's reporter

Baranick Valentin, 53, in their own country. nonchalantly pulled down his pants to show the scar on his backside that he said was a bullet wound. The Ukrainian man said he was shot by the invading Russian forces in March. Like many others, he ended up in Russian custody when they had occupied Trostyanets, a town in Sumy province that shares a 500 km border with Russia. The town is about 35 km from the Russian border. Men like him were picked up by Russian forces on the suspicion of having inside information about the Ukrainian military. They were being called prisoners of war

How did Valentin end up in Russian custody? He said he was caught when he found a grenade outside his house and went to the riverside to dispose of it. "That's when they caught me. They tied my hands, covered my face, and the next morning, transferred me to the railway station from where Russian officers were working," he narrated. The railway station is in ruins. It had become the epicentre of a fierce battle as the Ukrainian military took on Russian forces who occupied the city for over 30 days. Now back at home to



the great relief of his wife and daughter, Baranick Valentin recalled the horror of his time in Russian custody. "I spent a week in custody at the railway station where I was tortured. It was a living hell. Happy I could come back alive," he said. He was taken into custody on March 18 and released on March 24. During his time in custody, the Russian forces asked him for contacts of Ukrainian soldiers and their locations.

Olexandr Sasha, 41, is another individual who was kept in Russian custody. He said, "Russians entered my home and asked for my phone and passport. My phone was drained out of battery and didn't work so they took me away for verification. For ten days, from March 16 to 25, I was a prisoner. Most of the time, my hands were tied and face

covered." He told India Today's reporter that he witnessed killings but did not want to talk about it.

"I was tortured as the Russians kept asking the same questions that I had no answers to. They asked about Ukraine military, local government representatives, employees of local departments and location of soldiers."

Edward Pachkov, 33, said that his right hand was still injured after he faced 'the highest level of pain' while in Russian custody. "Russians stopped me and asked me to show documents. Within minutes, my hands were tied and I was stuffed in the trunk of a car. Next few days, I faced the highest level of pain. I don't feel any sensation in my hand, it's numb," he said.

In all, 22 civilians were

picked up by Russian forces in Trostyanets town of Sumy region in Ukraine. There are several who are still missing and almost every day, bodies are found in the forest, officials said.

The city of Trostyanets remains tense even though the Russian forces have retreated. After the Russian occupation, not much is left of the city.

India Today visited homes, official buildings and the local hospital in the city all destroyed. Some other parts of Sumy region in northeast Ukraine are still being pounded by Russian missiles.

The Russians have retreated from Trostyanets but for many, the nightmare isn't over. Those who faced the worst of the occupation still live in anxiety with one question in their minds - what if the Russian forces come back?

LIC to hold roadshows ahead of IPO launch



Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) management and investment bankers will hold roadshows in six cities across India ahead of the launch of its initial public offering (IPO), according to a Reuters report. LIC filed a preliminary IPO prospectus on Tuesday with the regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). The roadshows will be held in Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Rajkot, and Kolkata. During these roadshows, LIC management and investment bankers will meet potential investors and analysts. The road shows are likely to finish by the end of this week. In the last two years, physical roadshows came to a grinding halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but with infections down, LIC management has decided to

restart the process, the Reuters report said. Online roadshows covering investors across other regions will continue. Meanwhile, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Wednesday said the listing of LIC is part of the long-term strategic vision of the government and will highly enhance the value of the corporation in the long-run. "This (LIC IPO) is right sized, considering the capital market environment and will not crowd out capital supply given the current market environment," Pandey said. Even after the reduced size of about Rs 20,557 crore, the LIC IPO is going to be the biggest initial public offering ever in the country, he said.



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ICICI Bank share price jumps big

ICICI Bank's share price jumped 1.89 per cent to Rs 761.50 on the BSE. On the NSE, it went up by 1.83 per cent to Rs 761.35.



(Staff Reporter) ICICI Bank's share price on Monday gained nearly 2 per cent after the company reported a 59 per cent jump in standalone net profit for the fourth quarter of 2021-22. The private sector lender on Saturday reported a 59 per cent jump in standalone net profit to Rs 7,019 crore for the fourth quarter of 2021-22. ICICI Bank's share price jumped 1.89 per cent to Rs 761.50 on the BSE. On the NSE, it went up by 1.83 per cent to Rs 761.35. ICICI Bank's share price on BSE can be tracked at <https://www.bseindia.com/stock-share-price/icici-bank-ltd/icicibank/532174/>. The bank had earned a profit of Rs 4,403 crore in the corresponding January-March period of the last year. Total income of the bank rose to Rs 27,412

crore in January-March from Rs 23,953 crore in the year-ago quarter, ICICI Bank said in a regulatory filing. Net interest income (NII) increased 21 per cent to Rs 12,605 crore from Rs 10,431 crore in the same quarter a year ago, it said. On a consolidated basis, ICICI Bank Group's net profit jumped 58 per cent to Rs 7,719 crore in March quarter from Rs 4,886 crore in the year-ago period. The bank's asset quality improved as gross non-performing assets fell to 3.60 per cent of gross advances as of March 31, 2022, from 4.96 per cent in the corresponding period a year ago. Net NPAs also declined to 0.76 per cent from 1.14 per cent at the end of the fourth quarter of the previous financial year.

Rupee dives 26 paise to close at 76.68 against US dollar

The rupee declined 26 paise to close at 76.68 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, tracking a strong greenback overseas and a lacklustre trend in the domestic equity markets

(Staff Reporter) The rupee greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.34 per cent higher at 101.56. Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures fell 4.38 per cent to USD 101.98 per barrel. The 30-share BSE Sensex ended 617.26 points or 1.08 per cent lower at 56,579.89, while the broader NSE Nifty fell 218 points or 1.27 per cent to 16,953.95. "The Indian rupee declined on Monday amid risk-off sentiments in global markets. There are increased expectations that US Federal Reserve may hike interest rates by 50 bps in upcoming FOMC meet next week as indicated by

Fed Chair Jerome Powell's speech last week.

"There are expectations of further aggressive rate hikes in the coming months, too," said Praveen Singh, AVP-Fundamental currencies and Commodities analyst Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Significant foreign fund outflows have also dented the domestic currency, while the sharp decline in crude oil prices have cushioned the downside for the rupee. "We expect Rupee to remain under pressure on deteriorating global risk sentiments due to escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine, and hawkish US Federal



Reserve. Concerns over institutional investors remained resurgence of COVID-19 may net sellers in the capital market also weigh on Rupee. Rupee may on Friday as they offloaded trade in the range of Rs 76-77.20 shares worth Rs 2,461.72 crore, in the next couple of sessions," according to stock exchange Singh added. Foreign data.

Gautam Adani overtakes Warren Buffett to become world's 5th richest person

(Staff Reporter) Gautam Adani has become the world's fifth richest person overtaking 91-year-old investor Warren Buffett, according to Forbes. The net worth of Adani, the 59-year-old Adani Group Chairman, has surged to \$123.7 billion, while Warren Buffett's net worth stood at \$121.7 billion.



According to Forbes data, Adani's estimated net worth makes him the richest person in India, \$19 billion wealthier than Reliance Industries Ltd chairman Mukesh Ambani. Only four people are richer than Adani in the world. These include Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates (\$130.2 billion), French luxury goods king Bernard Arnault (\$167.9 billion), Amazon founder Jeff Bezos (\$170.2 billion) and Tesla's Elon Musk (\$269.7 billion).

LIC IPO to open on May 4, govt to sell 3.5% stake in state-owned insurer

The initial public offering (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation of India will open on May 4 and close on May 9, government sources said

(Staff Reporter) The long-awaited Initial Public Offering (IPO) of insurance behemoth Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) has been cleared and an official announcement is likely in the coming days. Sources told India Today TV that India's mega IPO is slated to open on May 4 and close on May 9, 2022. For anchor investors, the issue will open on May 2, 2022.

According to sources, the IPO issue size for the company whose embedded value, a measure of the consolidated shareholders' value in an insurance company, is pegged at

about Rs 5.4-lakh crore will be Rs 21,000 crore. This in real terms works out to be around 22.14 crore shares.

The government aims to offload a trimmed down quantum of 3.5 per cent of its holding in the insurance giant, sources said. The size of the IPO has been brought down by 1.5 percentage point or around 9.4 crore shares. The LIC is a household name in India. So much so that long insurance meant LIC. The government hopes that this measure would help improve its revenues for this fiscal by meeting the divestment

targets. In absolute numbers the 3.5 percentage of holding works out to around 22.14 crore shares. In comparison on February 13 in the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP), filed with SEBI, the government had proposed offering around 5 percent of total shares or nearly 31.62 crore shares. In absolute terms, for this the government had filed an updated draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) for the trimmed IPO. The launch plan of the LIC IPO in March was derailed by the geopolitical tensions created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Covid-19 cases rising: Can a cloth mask protect you?

As India witnesses a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases again, read on to know whether wearing a cloth mask can protect you

(Staff Reporter) Weeks after the third wave of Covid-19 led by the Omicron variant receded, several parts of the world including India are witnessing a sharp rise in cases. The sudden rise in infection comes amid several states easing the rules on wearing masks in public places. Wearing masks, however, is now again compulsory in Delhi and other cities.

Even though health experts have not rung the alarm, the swift increase in Covid cases is concerning. It is definitely time to mask up.

Wearing masks properly is, hands

down, one of the most effective ways to keep Covid infection at bay. However, the kind of mask you wear also matters. If you have been wearing cloth masks lately, read on as we discuss how effective they are.

According to the US-based Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, everyone who is two years or older and not fully vaccinated should wear a mask in indoor and public places. As far as cloth masks are concerned, it has been noted that single-layered cloth masks are not that successful in protecting

you from catching the virus. Doctors are

urging people to wear at least two or three-layered face masks that effectively prevent the transmission of minute aerosols. In the case of a single-layer mask, one must certainly pair it with a surgical mask. "Wear one disposable mask underneath a cloth mask that has multiple layers of fabric. The second mask should push the edges of the inner mask against the face and beard," CDC guidelines suggest. It is also important to not repeat wearing a disposable face mask and replace it with a new one after a single use. As for the reusable masks,

washing them after use properly is imperative.

N95 masks, on the other hand, could be more helpful to prevent you from Covid infection. They boast of a dense network of fiber held together by tighter mesh, and hence are more efficient.

An N95 mask filters up to 95 per cent of particles in the air and tightly seals the face if worn properly. However, it is important to note that experts have suggested people with breathing issues or those who have certain types of facial hair should not wear N95 masks and use surgical or cloth masks

What does your health insurance policy not cover?

Here is the list of medical expenses that your health insurance policies do not cover



(Staff Reporter) The health insurance policy covers a variety of expenses but some of them are excluded from the coverage of the plan. The research and planning can be done before selecting a health plan of an individual's choice. Therefore, a person should choose a plan that has minimal exclusions and maximum coverage. So a policyholder should read the policy wordings from the start till the end. So that there is clarity on both inclusions and exclusions of diseases.

Health insurance is a contract which is availed by most citizens in India. The contract is between the insurer and the policyholder where the insurance company offers medical coverage to the insurer under a certain limit.

There are several benefits of health plans, like pre and post hospitalisation, medical checkups, room rent coverage, cashless facilities etc. The advantage of health insurance is assured in a medical emergency.

LIST OF MEDICAL EXPENSES HEALTH INSURANCE

DOESN'T COVER:

1. Cosmetic procedure

Nowadays, people are more concerned about the transformation of looks through

cosmetic surgery like botox, liposuction, and implants, which are excluded from the health insurance policy. Insurance companies don't encourage treatment based on medical procedures.

2. Fertility treatments

The health insurance companies don't include surgery related to complications like infertility, abortions and pregnancy-related issues. There is an exclusive maternity health plan that covers all pregnancy-related expenses but not the basic health

plans. There might be any disease due to the consumption of excess alcohol can cause damage to organs like the liver and kidney. In such cases, the insurance companies have the right to reject such insurance claims.

3. Health supplements

Health tonics and supplements are not covered in health insurance plans.

On the recommendation of the doctor treating it, the expenses can be claimed.

The supplements that are consumed without any prescription are not covered under the policy.

4. Diseases related to the over consumption of alcohol

Individuals who have developed

5. Diagnostic charges

The diagnostic or pathological services including scans, blood tests, and body tests that can be performed at the nursing home or hospital are excluded. Thus, it is possible if the policy covers them specifically when it is required as a part of the treatment.

Cutting Edge: Biomarker can predict pre-diabetes years before diagnosis

While a patient's glucose levels have been the gold standard for detecting pre-diabetes and diabetes, a recent report has explored the potential of a new marker for identifying the condition: microRNA

(Staff Reporter) With Type 2 diabetes becoming increasingly common in the younger population, there is a push for identifying high-risk sections early on. While a patient's glucose levels have been the gold standard for detecting pre-diabetes and diabetes, a recent report has explored the potential of a new marker for identifying the condition: microRNA. These are essentially small molecules which regulate the expression of genes in response to prevailing environmental factors (nutrition, metabolism, stress etc). Collaborative research between scientists at the Diabetes Unit of KEM Hospital and Research Centre, Pune, and Western Sydney University, Australia, suggests that circulating levels of microRNAs

measured during childhood might help predict pre-diabetes at a later age. The findings of the study have been published recently in the Journal of Developmental Origins of Health and Disease. "This is the first report of longitudinal changes in circulating microRNAs as biomarkers of metabolic disease in later life. This preliminary discovery was done on small numbers and needs to be confirmed in larger numbers and other populations" Dr C S Yajnik, Director, Diabetes Research Unit KEM Hospital told The Indian Express. The research was done using archived blood samples at the bio-bank of the Pune Maternal Nutrition Study, a birth cohort now in its 30th year. This study examined 710 families around Pune

spanning three generations to track the development of diabetes. Previous research had shown that 30% of the participants in the study who had pre-diabetes at 18 years of age, had higher glucose levels at 6 years and at 12 years of age compared to those who had normal glucose levels at 18 years.

Pre-diabetes is a stage where the patient's glucose levels are higher than normal but lower than diabetic levels. Screening for pre-diabetes is usually done for high-risk groups such as individuals who have a family history of diabetes (especially in parents) or those who are overweight/obese. The simple test measures a patient's blood glucose, either on an empty stomach or after a glucose drink.

China promotes coal in setback for efforts to cut emissions

Governments have pledged to try to limit warming of the atmosphere to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above the level of pre-industrial times



(Staff Reporter) BEIJING — China is promoting coal-fired power as the ruling Communist Party tries to revive a sluggish economy, prompting warnings Beijing is setting back efforts to cut climate-changing carbon emissions from the biggest global source. Official plans call for boosting coal production capacity by 300 million tons this year, according to news reports. That is equal to 7% of last year's output of 4.1 billion tons, which was an increase of 5.7% over 2020. China is one of the biggest investors in wind and solar, but jittery leaders called for more

coal-fired power after economic growth plunged last year and shortages caused blackouts and factory shutdowns. Russia's attack on Ukraine added to anxiety that foreign oil and coal supplies might be disrupted. This mentality of ensuring energy security has become dominant, trumping carbon neutrality," said Li Shuo, a senior global policy adviser for Greenpeace. "We are moving into a relatively unfavorable time period for climate action in China." Officials face political pressure to ensure stability as President Xi Jinping prepares to try to break with

tradition and award himself a third five-year term as ruling party leader in the autumn. Coal is important for "energy security," Cabinet officials said at an April 20 meeting that approved plans to expand production capacity, according to Caixin, a business news magazine. The ruling party also is building power plants to inject money into the economy and revive growth that sank to 4% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2021, down from the full year's 8.1% expansion. Governments have pledged to try to limit warming of the atmosphere to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above the level of pre-industrial times. Leaders say what they really want is a limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit). Scientists say even if the world hits the 2-degree goal in the 2015 Paris climate pact and the 2021 Glasgow follow-up agreement, that still will lead to higher seas, stronger storms, extinctions of plants and animals and more people dying from heat,

smog and infectious diseases.

China is the top producer and consumer of coal. Global trends hinge on what Beijing does. The Communist Party has rejected binding emissions commitments, citing its economic development needs. Beijing has avoided joining governments that promised to phase out use of coal-fired power. In a 2020 speech to the United Nations, Xi said carbon emissions will peak by 2030, but he announced no target for the amount. Xi said China aims for carbon neutrality, or removing as much from the atmosphere by planting trees and other tactics as is emitted by industry and households, by 2060. China accounts for 26.1% of global emissions, more than double the U.S. share of 12.8%, according to the World Resources Institute. Rhodium Group, a research firm, says China emits more than all developed economies combined. Per person, China's 1.4 billion people on average emit the

equivalent of 8.4 tons of carbon dioxide annually, according to WRI. That is less than half the U.S. average of 17.7 tons but more than the European Union's 7.5 tons.

China has abundant supplies of coal and produced more than 90% of the 4.4 billion tons it burned last year. More than half of its oil and gas is imported and leaders see that as a strategic risk. China's goal of carbon neutrality by 2060 appears to be on track, but using more coal "could jeopardize this, or at least slow it down and make it more costly," Clare Perry of the Environmental Investigations Agency said in an email. Promoting coal will make emissions "much higher than they need to be" by the 2030 peak year, said Perry. "This move runs entirely counter to the science," she said. Beijing has spent tens of billions of dollars on building solar and wind farms to reduce reliance on imported oil and gas and clean up its smog-choked cities.

Declassified US documents reveal plans to nuke the Moon, test advanced tech in space

New documents released by the US Defence Intelligence Agency reveal scientific research, and proposals to tunnel the Moon using nuclear explosions and test advanced technologies in space

(Staff Reporter) A tranche of documents from the US government's Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) reveals that the now-defunct body had plans to test advanced technology on the Moon, which included invisibility cloaks, and antigravity devices, traversable wormholes, and tunneling the Moon using nuclear explosion. However, none of these technologies saw the light of day, as per the reports.

The documents obtained by Vice, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), similar to Right to Information in India, include scientific research, contracts, presentations, briefings, and memos related to the program along with documents written for or by former Senator Harry Reid, who, according to Vice, was responsible for the creation of the program.

The 1600-page document shows the extent of research underway in AATIP, which was a secretive organisation that came into the public domain after its former director resigned from the Pentagon. The agency was funded by the US Defense Intelligence Agency and has

been at the center of several theories over the existence of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs). The documents highlight the focus of the agency in delving deeper into the defense and military capabilities of several advanced technologies, including invisibility cloaking, traversable wormholes, stargates, negative energy, antigravity, and high-frequency gravitational wave communications, among others.

The latest revelation is set to raise questions as the US government and Nasa push for a return to the lunar surface nearly half a century after the Apollo mission was shut. The most talked-about proposal revolves around tunneling the Moon using nuclear explosions. Another report talks about the development of Warp Drive, which "involves local manipulation of the fabric of space in the immediate vicinity of a spacecraft. The basic idea is to create an asymmetric bubble of space that is contracting in front of the spacecraft while expanding behind it. Using this form of locomotion, the spacecraft remains stationary inside this "warp bubble," and the movement of



space itself facilitates the relative motion of the spacecraft." The agency was at the center of global controversy when The Sun accessed classified documents that talked about a shadowy program to study and conduct research around UFOs. The research also delved into the biological effects of UFO sightings on humans, sets out categorisations for paranormal experiences, and studied sci-fi-style tech. The program, which does not exist anymore, was commissioned in 2007 and

was mostly funded at the request of Harry Reid, the Nevada Democrat who was the Senate majority leader at the time. According to a report by The New York Times, which exposed the shadowy program in 2012, they studied videos of encounters between unknown objects and American military aircraft. The new tranche of documents is now under investigation and more is expected to be revealed in the coming days.

Asthma drug blocks coronavirus from replicating, finds study

Researchers at the IISc found that Montelukast, used to reduce inflammation caused by conditions like asthma, blocks SARS-CoV-2 from replicating



The study published in the journal eLife states that "montelukast sodium hydrate can be used as a lead molecule to design potent inhibitors to help combat SARS-CoV-2 infection."

Tanweer Hussain, Assistant Professor in the Department of Molecular Reproduction, Development and Genetics (MRDG), IISc, and senior author of the study explains that the mutation rate in this protein, especially the C-terminal region, is very low compared to the rest of the viral protein and since Nsp1 is likely to remain largely unchanged in any variants of the virus that emerge, drugs targeting this region are expected to work against all such variants. The latest study comes in the backdrop of a major surge in

coronavirus cases across the world, including in India, where Omicron remains the dominant variant in the fresh cases.

The researchers screened over 1,600 US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved drugs in order to find the ones that bound strongly to Nsp1 using computational modelling. They then shortlisted a dozen drugs including montelukast and saquinavir, an anti-HIV drug, to understand the stability of the drug-bound protein molecule. The team then cultured human cells in the lab that specifically produced Nsp1 and treated them with montelukast and saquinavir separately. They found that only montelukast was able to rescue the inhibition of protein synthesis by Nsp1. "There are two aspects: one is affinity and the other is

stability. The anti-HIV drug (saquinavir) showed good affinity, but not good stability. Montelukast, on the other hand, was found to bind strongly and stably to Nsp1, allowing the host cells to resume normal protein synthesis," Tanweer Hussain, Assistant Professor in the Department of Molecular Reproduction said in a statement.

The researchers also tested the effect of the drug on live viruses, in the Bio-Safety Level 3 (BSL-3) facility at the Centre for Infectious Disease Research (CIDR). "Clinicians have tried using the drug and there are reports that said that montelukast reduced hospitalisation in COVID-19 patients," says Hussain, adding that the exact mechanisms by which it works still need to be fully understood.

(Staff Reporter) A study by researchers from the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru has revealed that a drug used in the treatment of Asthma can reduce SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, from replicating in human immune cells. Montelukast, used to reduce inflammation caused by conditions like asthma, hay fever and hives, has been found effective against Covid-19. Researchers at the IISc found that the drug binds strongly to one end ('C-terminal') of a SARS-CoV-2 protein called Nsp1, which is one of the first viral proteins unleashed inside human cells. This protein can bind to ribosomes the protein-making machinery inside our immune cells and shut down the synthesis of vital proteins required by the immune system, thereby weakening it.

Amid delay, Isro drops first pictures of Chandrayaan-3 mission

Isro has said that it will be trying to launch the awaited mission by August this year. However, it seems difficult

(Staff Reporter) Hit by successive delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic-induced lockdown, the first pictures of the Chandrayaan-3 mission to the Moon have finally arrived. The images were released in a documentary by the Indian Space & Research Organisation (Isro) titled "Space on Wheels" which showcases 75 satellites launched by India. The video shows what appears to be the Chandrayaan-3 lander that will touch the lunar surface. The mission is a successor of the Chandrayaan-2 mission that unfortunately crashed on the dark side of the Moon in 2019. Isro has said that it will be trying to launch the awaited mission by August this year, however, it



seems difficult since several hardware testing remains to be done. The Department of Space in a written response in February this year had said that work is underway on Chandrayaan-3 and it will be launched in August this year. The mission has been delayed due to Covid-19 as Minister of Science & Technology Dr. Jitendra Singh said that several ongoing missions were impacted and that "Reprioritisation of projects has taken place in the backdrop of space sector reforms and newly introduced demand-driven models." Apart from Chandrayaan-3, the 17-minute-long documentary contains details about the country's upcoming Aditya L1 mission and the Gaganyaan mission that will launch Indian astronauts into space. The Aditya L1 mission that will be placed in the first Lagrange point of the Earth-Sun system will study a number of properties of the Sun, such as the dynamics and origins of coronal mass ejections. India has already been working with the European Space Agency to create a network to track the lunar and solar missions. ESA has said its global deep-space communication antennas will provide essential support to both missions every step of the way, tracking the spacecraft, pinpointing their locations at crucial stages, transmitting commands, and receiving 'telemetry' and valuable science data.

First eclipse of 2022 on April 30: Partial solar eclipse to be visible in these places

The April 30 partial solar eclipse will begin at midnight on April 30-May 1 and will be visible in several parts of the world

(Staff Reporter) Days after the world gazed at the images of an eclipse on Mars, Earth is set to experience its first eclipse of the year on April 30. A solar eclipse will occur when the new Moon passes in front of the Sun, blocking the sunlight. The first eclipse of the year will be partial as the Moon will only block a fraction of sunlight. According to Nasa, during the April 30 eclipse, 64 per cent of the sun's disk will be blocked by the Moon as seen from Earth. The eclipse is partial, also, due to the fact that the Moon, the Sun, and Earth will not be aligned in a perfect straight line. The Moon will cast only the outer part of its shadow, which is known as the penumbra.

WHAT IS PARTIAL SOLAR ECLIPSE?

According to Nasa, a solar eclipse happens when the Moon moves between the Sun and Earth, casting a shadow on Earth, fully or partially blocking the Sun's light in some areas. During the partial eclipse, the Moon does not completely

cover the Sun, giving it a crescent shape appearing as if someone has taken a bite out of the object. **WHEN WILL PARTIAL SOLAR ECLIPSE BE SEEN?**

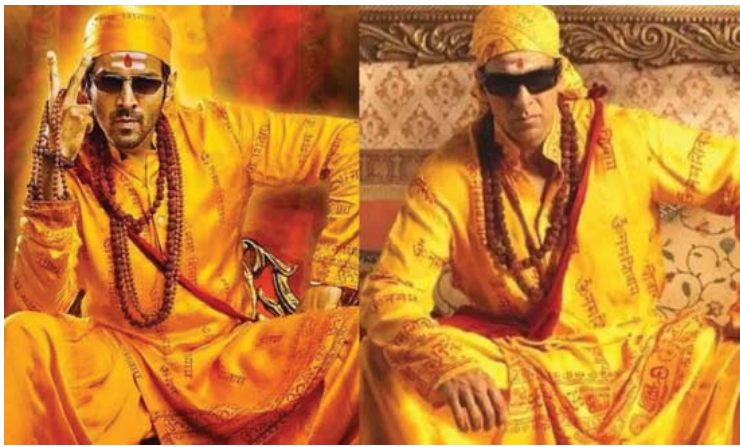
The April 30 partial solar eclipse will begin at midnight on April 30-May 1. According to the MP Birla Planetarium, Kolkata, the partial eclipse will begin at 12:15 am and end at 4:07 am IST.

WHERE WILL PARTIAL SOLAR ECLIPSE BE VISIBLE?

The celestial event will be visible in the skies over Chile, Argentina, most of Uruguay, western Paraguay, southwestern Bolivia, southeastern Peru, and a small area of southwestern Brazil. It will also appear in parts of the northwestern coastline of Antarctica, in the Atlantic Ocean just off the southeastern coast of South America, including the Falkland Islands, and in much of the South Pacific Ocean and the Southern Ocean.

in Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2: 'Comparison na hi karein to better hai'

Kartik Aaryan's Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2 will release on May 20, 2022. The film will also star actors Tabu, Kiara Advani and Rajpal Yadav. The original film, which released in 2007, starred Akshay Kumar



(Staff Reporter) Actor Kartik Aaryan is currently promoting his upcoming film Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2. The trailer of the film released on Tuesday. At the film's trailer launch event, Kartik

opened up about people comparing him to actor Akshay Kumar, who was the lead in the first part, which released in 2007. Judging by the trailer and teaser, Kartik's character is similar to Akshay, further fuelling comparisons. Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2 is a follow-up to Bhool Bhulaiyaa, which was directed by Priyadarshan and featured Akshay as a psychiatrist tasked with uncovering the truth of an ancestral palace believed to be haunted. The sequel, directed

by Anees Bazmee, stars Kartik playing a character similar to Akshay's. Asked if he was under pressure to headline the sequel considering the impact of Akshay's performance in the first one, Kartik said he didn't "want to do that comparison". He said, "I never wanted to draw this comparison. People shouldn't do it. I loved Akshay in Bhool Bhulaiyaa. I have grown up watching him, we all have grown up watching him. Woh comparison kabhi na hi karein toh better hai (It's better if you don't

compare us)." Kartik further added, "We have taken that world (of the previous film) but everything else is new, of our own. I hope people will love it in its own new dynamic world that we have created with Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2. Comparisons will be there, but I hope people remember this film for its own." The film will also star Kiara Advani and Tabu. Actor Rajpal Yadav will reprise his role of Chhota Pandit from the first installment. The film will hit the screens on May 20, 2022.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui reveals Bollywood's mistake that allowed South cinema to dominate, calls current scenario a 'phase'

Nawazuddin Siddiqui said the perception that South Indian films have scared Bollywood with their success will disappear as soon as a Hindi film becomes a massive hit

(Staff Reporter) Nawazuddin Siddiqui has said he does not believe the recent success of South Indian films in the Hindi market is going to have a lasting impact on Bollywood. Hindi versions of SS Rajamouli's Telugu film RRR and Prashanth Neel's Kannada film KGF Chapter 2 have done record-breaking business after their release on March 24 and April 14 respectively. KGF 2, which starred Yash, Sanjay Dutt, and Raveena Tandon among others, even impacted the earnings of Shahid Kapoor-starrer Jersey, which was released a week later. Nawazuddin believes that it is just a phase, and the perception that South Indian

films have scared Bollywood with their success will disappear as soon as a Hindi film becomes a massive hit. However, he admitted that Bollywood has made a mistake by remaking South Indian films, which won't be possible anymore with South Indian filmmakers releasing their work in the Hindi market.

Asked if Bollywood is being affected by the entry of South Indian films into the Hindi market, Nawazuddin said, "I think it's just a phase, now if a Bollywood film comes and becomes a super-duper hit, then the things you are saying right now, that will change. Here people's thoughts change after every picture, people only talk

about the film that becomes a hit. But if a Hindi picture comes now and becomes a super-duper hit, this perception will change again." Asked again if he thinks Bollywood appears a bit frazzled at least right now, especially in case hit stars like Allu Arjun, Yash join the Hindi film industry, Nawazuddin admitted that there is one mistake that the Hindi film industry has made. He said, "One mistake that happened is that we kept doing remakes of South films. The biggest problem here is with the writers and stories, we are not making originals at all, leaving everything up to the remakes. I think we should take a lesson from that mistake and start



making original films. That would be better." Meanwhile, Nawazuddin will be seen next in the action-thriller Heropanti 2. The film, all set to release on April 29, also features Tiger Shroff and Tara

Sutaria in the lead roles. Heropanti 2 presents Tiger's character Babloo who will be seen locking horns with Nawazuddin's Laila in a bid to stop cyber crimes across the world.

Sikandar Kher: The web gave me visibility like never before

The actor talks about how the OTT space brought about a shift in his career; adds it has had a transformative impact on cinema as a whole with language barriers blurring

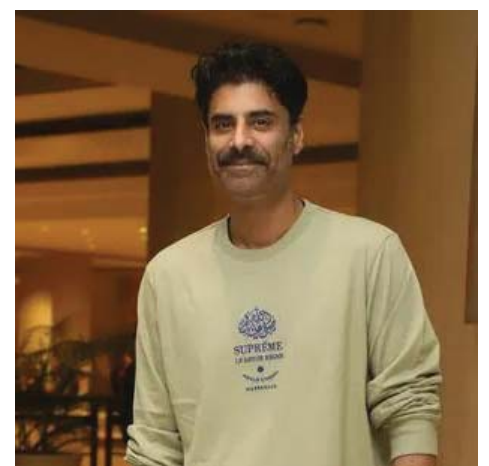
(News Agency) Actor Sikandar Kher's career took a 180 degree turn with web series Aarya that released in 2020, where he played a hitman named Daulat. And he credits the web space for bringing about a change in his professional trajectory. "I would most definitely credit the web space for giving me visibility like never before. As an actor, you need and want people to see your work and your abilities. And when you get that many eyeballs, filmmakers also get the chance to view you in their projects and the characters they create," he explains.

Talking further about his successful stint on the web has helped him, the actor says, "You can do different roles but if a film doesn't work, nobody can see your work. That's when you keep your head down and keep going for it. But Aarya has done well and the character of Daulat has been loved so much. It has 100% helped my career graph."

But it's not just actors who have been benefitted from the OTT bandwagon, believes Kher. Stressing on how it has provided a platform for everyone to showcase their versatility, he says, "It

works the same way for writers and technicians. There's so much work for everybody today and that's helping everyone across the board. It's a great time for the industry and creative people."

With the digital medium opening up newer creative possibilities, the 40-year-old feels it has also brought audiences from across the world together and has had a transformative impact on cinema as a whole with language barriers blurring. "You've a Parasite (2019) that won the Oscar.



Deepika Padukone named Cannes 2022 jury member.

All about her red carpet looks from 2010-19

Deepika Padukone has been named as a jury member of Cannes 2022. Here's a glimpse at all her red carpet looks from 2010-2019



(News Agency) There couldn't be better news for Deepika Padukone as the diva has made it to the list of jury members at the upcoming Cannes Film Festival. Yes, after slaying her way into her fan's hearts with her Cannes appearances, she is now set to represent India with her being a part of a 9-member jury at the 75th edition of the prestigious film festival which reviews and reward one of the 21 films in Competition with the Palme d'Or.

Apart from Deepika, other members of the jury this year include Rebecca Hall, Noomi Rapace from Sweden, filmmakers Jasmine Trinca from Italy, Iranian director Asghar Farhadi, Ladj Ly from France, Jeff Nichols from the United States and Joachim Trier from Norway. French actor Vincent Lindon will preside over the Cannes Film Festival's jury this year and the festival will be held from May 17-28.

According to reports, Deepika will be making her big appearance at Cannes this year, as part of her collaboration with Louis Vuitton, a French luxury fashion house and company. Moreover, the actress has also been signed as one of the global ambassadors of the brand and her Instagram feed is already a proof of her association with the

popular luxury house.

Now, Bollywood divas always make a style statement at the Cannes Film Festival every year, but Deepika Padukone is one of the very few who has nailed every look. In fact, she is one of the constants at the red carpet since a last couple of years and if looked closely, one can even trace the evolution of her sartorial choices.

With just a few years in the industry, the diva managed to grab eyeballs. While Hollywood celebrities sizzled in western gowns at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, she made India proud in France in a beautiful white and golden Rohit Bal saree. Deepika Padukone wore a low back blouse with embellished strings pulling it together. She opted for a low bun, showing off her tattoo and completed the look with a Kundan earrings and a matching bindi. In 2017, Deepika turned up the heat in a bold dark purple Marchesa Notte ensemble as she walked down the Cannes red carpet representing cosmetics brands - L'Oreal Paris.

Her second appearance in the same year was equally impressive as she chose an emerald green Brandon Maxwell one-shoulder gown with a long train and a thigh-high slit. She

had aptly teamed her stunning outfit with heels by Chloe Gosselin and chose accessories by de Grisogono. A high bun and statement earrings rounded off her look.

Similarly in 2018, Deepika turned heads by donning a hot pink gown from Ashi Studio's collection. She completed her look with matching stilettos, smokey eyes and a chic hairdo. And if this wasn't enough, Deepika left her fans asking for more when she walked down the red carpet in white Zuhair Murad gown, posing for thousands of cameras, looking like a million bucks.

.That's right, she cast a spell on the onlookers with her everlasting beauty and breathtakingly beautiful ensemble that featured a flowy cape and intricate work.

Deepika was a vision in 2019 when she stepped out in a lime green tulle tiered gown from Giambattista Valli. Her outfit featured a long train and it was accessorized with a rose gold floral headwrap from Emily-London. She looked elegant even in her black and white Dundas couture gown.

So yes, with her stunning outfits, minimum accessories and on point makeup, Deepika has surely looked nothing less than alluring in each of her

Cannes appearance over the years and now all eyes are on her as she is set to walk down the red carpet as one of the jury members this year in May.



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