



Taliban recognise Afghans' goodwill towards India : Ex-envoy Yogendra Kumar



(SAI Bureau)- : The Taliban regime recognises that there is a great amount of goodwill among the Afghan people towards India, and wants to tap into it, former ambassador to Tajikistan and Philippines Yogendra Kumar said Wednesday. "The Taliban welcomed Indian (humanitarian)

assistance even when it was given during the previous government. In one way, they recognise that there is a tremendous amount of goodwill among the Afghan people for all that India has done there and they want to tap into that goodwill," said Kumar, speaking at a webinar hosted by the Institute of China Studies, titled 'India, China, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Regional Geopolitics'.

The webinar revolved around India's engagement with the SCO and Afghanistan, and how it will balance this alongside its Indo-Pacific agenda. ThePrint was the digital partner for the event.

Founded in June 2001 and headquartered in Beijing, the SCO aims to ensure security and maintain stability across the Eurasian region. Its member states include China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan,

(Contd on page 35)

'System collapse warning', by the workers who keep global supply chains moving



(SAI Bureau)- Seafarers, truck drivers and airline workers have endured quarantines, travel restrictions and complex Covid-19 vaccination and testing requirements to keep stretched supply chains moving during the pandemic.

But many are now reaching their breaking point, posing yet another threat to the badly tangled network of ports, container vessels and trucking companies that moves goods around the world. In an open letter Wednesday to heads of state

(Contd on page 34)

Lava from Spanish island volcano quickens pace toward sea



(SAI Bureau)- Lava flowing from an erupting volcano in Spain's Canary Islands has picked up pace on its way to the sea and is now within about 800 meters (875 yards) of the shoreline, officials said Tuesday. While one of two rivers of lava has slowed on La Palma, the other was hotter and more fluid and was bearing down on the small town of Todoque,

(Contd on page 35)

Expanding the child tax credit was a Democratic dream come true -- but it could be on the chopping block



(SAI Bureau)-When Democrats passed a one-year expansion of the child tax credit in their Covid relief bill earlier this year, it was seen by many in the party as a triumph, a move that could reduce child poverty by nearly half this year. Ever since Democrats won two seats

in Georgia in January giving the party a Senate majority, Democratic Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Michael Bennet of Colorado and Sherrod Brown of Ohio had been lobbying the Biden transition team and then administration to expand the child tax credit and make it fully refundable to ensure the lowest income Americans would receive the benefit. "From the time those guys won in Georgia, this was our main raison d'etre," Booker told CNN in an interview. Now they are focused, along with

(Contd on page 35)

Saving Australia's Great Barrier Reef



(SAI Bureau)-To slow the speed at which high temperatures and warm waters bleach the corals of the Great Barrier Reef, Australian scientists are spraying droplets of ocean water into the sky to

(Contd on page 34)



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Resignation won't be withdrawn until tainted leader removed from cabinet : Navjot Sidhu camp

Sources in Navjot Singh Sidhu's camp have laid out conditions for the withdrawal of resignation by the former Punjab Congress chief, who abruptly quit from the post yesterday.

(News Agencies)- Sources close to Navjot Singh Sidhu's camp have revealed conditions for the withdrawal of Sidhu's resignation. Sidhu had abruptly quit from the post of Punjab Congress chief yesterday. Navjot Singh Sidhu would not take back his resignation until 'tainted leader' Rana Gurjit Singh is removed from the cabinet, sources told India Today TV. "DGP IPS Sahota should also be replaced. As SIT chief he gave a clean chit to the accused in Behbal Kalan firing case," sources said. Sources also demanded, "Advocate General APS Deol should be removed. As counsel for the accused in the Behbal Kalan case, he had secured blanked bail for former DGP Sumedh Saini." Navjot Singh Sidhu, who abruptly quit as the Punjab Congress chief on Tuesday, has posted a video on Twitter saying he will continue to fight for the truth. "I will keep fighting the fight for truth till my last breath," wrote Navjot Singh Sidhu on Twitter, a day after he resigned as the Punjab Congress chief, throwing the state unit into chaos. In the video, Navjot Singh Sidhu has said, "I am fighting for the welfare of Punjab and I never compromised on this. I never fight for personal agenda."

New Parliament building will meet October 2022 deadline: Govt official

Stating that the new Parliament building will meet the October 2022 deadline, a top government official said that it will be a "monumental work in skill, speed and scale".

(News Agencies)-With thousands of labourers deployed at raising the new parliament building, a top government official said on Tuesday the complex will be a "monumental work in skill, speed and scale" and will be an ode to "Aatmanirbhar India" as its every component, from architecture to construction material, has been sourced indigenously.

Briefing reporters, Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra said the new parliament building will meet its deadline of October 2022 and claimed that it will be a work of "marvel" as there will be few precedences of such a gigantic exercise being completed in such a short span of time.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had laid the foundation stone of the project in December 2020. With critics wondering if the new

building will match up to old one in its grandeur, Mishra said it will look like "twin sister" of the current one with its mosaic of red and yellow stones while being much ahead in terms of its occupancy, use of modern technologies and amenities. Noting that the current parliament building was meant to be a "meeting hall" and retrofitted later and had two floors added, which resulted in lack of sunlight and cramped spaces, he said the new building will be inviting and look like a "people's parliament".

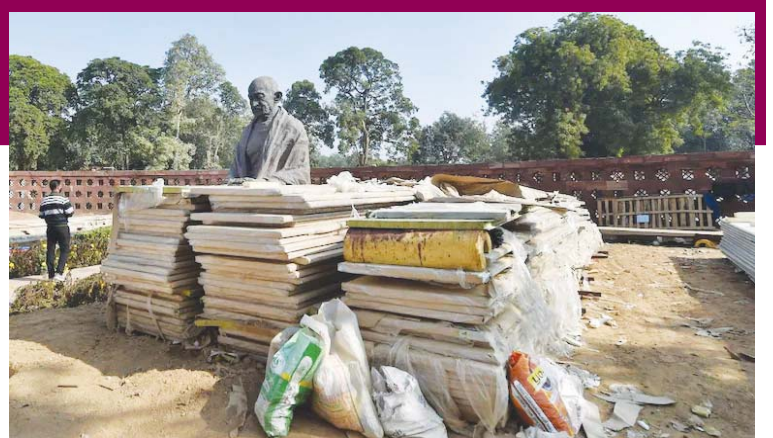
It will be truly a people's parliament and an ode to Modi's call for "Aatmanirbhar Bharat", he said, adding that the new legislature will be realisation of the prime minister's vision as he has been keenly involved in the entire exercise from the beginning. Highlighting the

hectic pace of work, Mishra said over 4,800 workers are deployed at the site and 1,200 at different places, adding that so far six lakh man days have been created.

He said work has been going on in over 20 places across the country, ranging from those related to furniture, stones and electricals to technological features, regarding the new building.

Over 1.65 lakh cubic metre of soil was removed in 45 days, he said highlighting the scale of the work. "It was disposed in a clinical manner that few would have noticed," he added.

So far, Mishra said, 1,13,625 cubic metre of concrete will be used at work and 72,000 cubic metre of it has been done so far. With extensive use of corrosion-free steel and other modern construction features, the building's planned life currently is



200 years, he said. He said new parliament building will meet construction requirement in seismic zone-5, which covers the regions most vulnerable to earthquakes even though the national capital falls in the zone-4, and will qualify for the top green rating of five-star platinum. He also allayed apprehensions about the loss of trees due to the construction of the new building, saying no trees were cut but 404 of them were transplanted and 80 per cent of them have survived.

In their place, 4,400 saplings

have been planted, he told reporters.

Mishra claimed the new buildings will have state-of-the-art technological features, making it secure against any security threats, including those emanating from cyberware.

"The new parliament building will be a monumental work of skill, speed and scale," he said.

With work going on round the clock, the new building will meet its October 2022 deadline, he asserted. The winter session next year will be held in the new building, he added.

Maharashtra: 3 dead, driver missing as Nagpur-Nanded bus swept away on flooded bridge



(News Agencies)-Three people, including the bus conductor, died after a state transport bus was swept away while crossing an inundated bridge in eastern Maharashtra's Yavatmal district. The driver is still missing.

Three persons died after a state transport bus was swept away

while crossing an inundated bridge in eastern Maharashtra's Yavatmal district on Tuesday morning, officials said.

Marathwada and parts of Vidarbha received very heavy rains during the day, causing floods in many places.

The incident took place around 8 am at Dahagaon bridge in

Umarkhed tehsil when the semi-luxury bus of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) was going from Nagpur to Nanded.

The bus got swept away while passing over the bridge which was flooded following heavy rains, and then overturned, an official said.

There were four passengers in the bus besides the driver and conductor, Umarkhed tehsildar Anand Deolgaonkar said.

In a late night release, the district administration said passengers Sharad Fulmali (27) and Subramanyam Tokla (48) were rescued.

But Sheikh Salim alias Babu

Sheikh Ibrahim (50), resident of Hyderabad; Indal Mahindre (35), resident of Pusad in the district, and conductor Bhimrao Nagrikar, resident of Nagpur, died and their bodies were recovered, it said.

Bus driver Suresh Surewar was still missing. Rescue operation will resume in the morning, it said.

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Locked up in my house again:

Mehbooba Mufti says dignitaries must be shown 'real picture' of Kashmir



(News Agencies)-Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti has said she has been 'locked up' in her house once again for trying to visit a village in Tral.

She said the 'real picture of Kashmir' should be shown to visiting dignitaries.

She said, "Locked up in my house today yet again for attempting to visit the village in Tral allegedly ransacked by army. This is the real picture of Kashmir that visiting dignitaries must be shown instead of GOIs sanitised & guided picnic tours."

Earlier, on September 7, she had said she was placed under house arrest and said the administration told her the situation is 'far from normal in Kashmir'. She also slammed the government on 'fake claims of normalcy [in Kashmir].'

She tweeted, "GOI expresses concern for the rights of Afghan people but wilfully denies the same to Kashmiris. I've been placed under house arrest today because according to admin the situation is far from normal in Kashmir. This exposes their fake claims of normalcy. (sic)" Previously, Mehbooba Mufti had called Kashmir an 'open-air prison' and criticised the Centre after an FIR was filed over the draping of separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani's body in a Pakistani flag and the alleged raising of "anti-national" slogans after his death. She said, "Having turned Kashmir into an open air prison, now even the dead aren't spared. A family isn't allowed to mourn & bid a final farewell as per their wishes. Booking Geelani sahab's family under UAPA shows GOI's deep rooted paranoia & ruthlessness. This is New India's Naya Kashmir."



Taliban want resumption of flights between India and Afghanistan, write to DGCA

In the first such communication between the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and India, the outfit has written to the government for resumption of flights between the two countries.

In a first such official communication between the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and India, the outfit has written to the government for resumption of flights between the two countries. India Today is in possession of the letter that the new regime in The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has written to India.

The letter, addressed to Director General of Civil Aviation Arun Kumar, has been written by Alhaj Hameedullah Akhonzada, acting minister, Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority. It is dated September 7.

After extending his compliments to the DGCA, Akhonzada writes, "As you are well informed recently, the Kabul Airport was damaged and dysfunctional by American troops before their withdrawal. By technical assistance of our Qatar Brother, the airport became operational once again and a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) in this regard was issued on 6 September, 2021."

The minister then requested the resumption of flights between India and Afghanistan.

"The intention of this letter is to keep the smooth passenger movement between two countries based on the signed MoU and our National Carriers

(Ariana Afghan Airline & Kam Air) aimed to commence their scheduled flights. Therefore, Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority requests you to facilitate their commercial flights," the letter said.

"The Civil Aviation of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan avails its highest assurance," Akhonzada further said. India does not officially recognise the Taliban regime in Afghanistan even though a meeting did take place in Doha on August 31. The Indian Ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, met Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, the head of the Taliban's political office in Doha, upon the latter's request.

The Taliban took over Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US troops on August 30. India last operated an Indian Air Force flight out of Kabul on August 21 to evacuate its citizens. They were flown to Dushanbe and then to Delhi via an Air India flight.

On the subject of flights to Afghanistan, Arindam Bagchi, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, said at a press conference, "We have been prioritising the evacuation of our people there and some Afghans too. Currently, of course, the Kabul airport is not operational. So I don't have an update on more flights. I think we will be able to revisit this issue once Kabul airport is operational."

Coimbatore: 1-year-old wounded tiger cub rescued by forest officials

(News Agencies)-A one-year-old severely injured tiger cub was rescued from Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore by forest officials after it strayed near human settlements. Forest officials were informed on Tuesday that a panther was roaming near the tea estate near Valparai. Officials reached the spot and after searching for several hours, they found the cub



hidden inside a bush. Officials caught the cub with a net. The cub, which was a female, was found to be seriously injured. Officials said the injuries could be the result of fighting with other animals over food. The cub is not able to eat on its own now. It will be treated at the man-animal conflict prevention centre in the Rotti Kadai area.

Chamber for MPs, travelators, ladies' lounge: Work on at frenetic pace at new Parliament building



The construction work on the new Parliament building had started just before the second Covid-19 wave. This week, the government allowed media teams to visit the site.

A white 20-foot-tall metal wall separates history and the future in the making inside

the Sansad Bhawan complex. The old Parliament building, a picture of grace and enigma, on one side of the wall, has been watching the frenetic pace of construction work in what was once its sprawling forecourt, reception, parking area and utility services zone, since December 10, 2020, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone.

Almost 50 metre-high construction cranes with high lifting capacity tower over the several floor high construction has already been done till now for the new building and the old one. In the superstructure, which is up and ready, the yellow helmets of construction workers at every metre made the building site resemble a bee hive.

The not so discomforting hum of machines and men belies the speed at which work is on to meet the new Parliament building's tryst with destiny - to be operational by the time an independent India is 75 in 2022.

The old one was conceived in 1913. Construction started on February 12, 1921, and on January 18, 1927, the Viceroy of India, Edward Frederick Lindley

Wood, commonly known as Lord Irwin, dedicated the building as the Imperial Legislative Council. Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker took six years to build the Sansad Bhawan. India's Parliament 2.0 is expected to be ready in 21 months.

On September 26, PM Modi, hours after his return from the US, arrived for what people at the construction site called a "surprise visit". That triggered a political storm. The fault lines between the government's will to give India a "swadeshi Parliament and the Opposition's charge of a government's whim erupted".

A PEEK INTO THE WORK FOR A NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING On Tuesday, the government took the first step to counter the charge of the Opposition of carrying out an obscure construction of the new Parliament building.

Instead of indulging in a political slugfest, for the first time since the start of the construction, media persons were allowed to visit the site.

For those visiting Parliament for some years, the sight of frenetic construction with cranes and nearly 100 big-sized construction machines like mixers, dumpers and excavators buzzing purposefully was initially slightly disconcerting.

But standing on top of an inspection deck, Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry secretary

Durga Shanker Mishra told India Today TV that the scheme, skill, scale and speed of construction was unprecedented. With the old Parliament building forming the backdrop, he said 30 per cent of the work on the new building being constructed here to last 250 years, was over.

Mishra said that the construction work had started just before the second Covid-19 wave. "Till now, six lakh man days of employment have been created by the new Parliament building project. 4,800 workers are at the site during the day and 1,200 are working at 20 other sites where related work is on for stone dressing, furniture making and other items that will be put together to make it a jewel in India's democratic crown," he said.

The magnitude of the project is mammoth and the timeline too tight.

To lay the foundation of the sprawling complex, a whopping 1.65 lakh cubic metres of soil was excavated in 45 days and sent for use at several other infrastructure sites. The excavated debris included tonnes of rocks and boulders, of which 70 per cent has been used at the construction site.

While 70,000 cubic metres of concrete has already been poured, another 1.3 lakh cubic metres will be used in the future. Till now, 36,000 MT of cement and

19,000 MT of steel from Tata Steel has been consumed.

The flooring space will be 62,000 sq mts and 43,000 sq metres of false ceiling will be put in place. Mason work will span 22,000 cubic metres and stone work over 54,000 cubic metres. The framework system being created can withstand 16 tonnes/sqm of concrete.

While Delhi lies in seismic zone IV, the building has been designed as per the parameters of seismic zone V. Corrosion proof steel is being used. HDPE membrane has been laid out below the raft foundations to check ingress of groundwater.

The entire building will have sensors all over for structural health monitoring in consultations with Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee. The National Council of Science Museum, Kolkata, has been roped in to install foucault pendulum in the Constitutional Gallery area. The MD of Tata projects, Vinayak Deshpande, who was present at the site, said, "The chamber top slab of the two houses in the new building is 23.5 metres high from the base slab, which is equivalent to a normal seven-storey building. Beams are being created at a 3.3 metre depth. The chamber slab is resting on corbels of 6 metres thickness."

**Gujarat govt
announces Rs 50,000
for families of those
who died of Covid**



(News Agencies)-Gujarat Health Minister Rishikesh Patel on Tuesday told the state Assembly here that committees will be formed at the district level to pay compensation of Rs 50,000 to the next of kin of those who died due to COVID-19.

The opposition Congress had raised the issue of deaths caused by the pandemic in the state, after which the minister came out with the statement.

The Congress had claimed that over three lakh people died due to the pandemic in Gujarat, while the official figure, given by Patel, is 10,082.

"As per a letter of the central home ministry, the state government has decided to give Rs 50,000 as financial assistance to the relatives of those who died due to COVID-19.

"The state government will give this compensation as per the guidelines of the centre. Committees will be formed at the district level to distribute the compensation," the health minister told the House.

The death rate due to COVID-19 in India was lower in comparison to other countries, while in Gujarat it was lower in comparison to other states due to effective management of the pandemic, Patel said.

The opposition party earlier in the day released a press note saying that in reply to questions asked by its members in the Assembly, the state government stated that only 3,864 people have died due to the pandemic in Gujarat.

But the health minister, in a statement, said Congress members had not asked for information about the deaths in municipal corporation areas. "The death toll due to coronavirus stands at 10,082 in the state," he said.

12 gates of Manjara dam closed after water discharge causes flooding in 3 Marathwada districts in Maharashtra

(News Agencies)-Twelve gates of the Manjara dam were closed early Wednesday morning, a day after heavy water discharge from the reservoir following heavy rains led to flooding in some villages of Beed, Latur and Osmanabad districts in Marathwada region of Maharashtra, officials said. With the closure of 12 out of the total 18 gates of the dam at 4 am, the water discharge came down to 18,747 cusec (cubic metre per second) as against the outflow of 70,845 cusec on Tuesday, that caused inundation in several downstream villages, a release from the irrigation department said.

Currently, six gates of the dam are open for water discharge, an irrigation department official said. In the last two days, at least 13 people died in heavy showers, floods and lightning in parts of Maharashtra with the Marathwada region bearing the



Twelve out of 18 gates of the Manjara dam in Maharashtra were closed on Wednesday morning after heavy water discharge from the reservoir following heavy rains led to flooding in some villages.

major brunt of rain fury, while more than 560 people were rescued after the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was mobilised and helicopters were deployed, officials said on Tuesday.

Besides, more than 200 cattle perished or were washed away and a number of houses were damaged in torrential rains that lashed Marathwada over the last few days, causing havoc in a region which is considered a

perennially drought-plagued area, they said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday forecast 'extremely heavy rains' at a few places in Marathwada in the next 24 hours.

The Marathwada region in central Maharashtra which faced the rain fury comprises eight districts - Aurangabad, Latur, Osmanabad, Parbhani, Nanded, Beed, Jalna and Hingoli.

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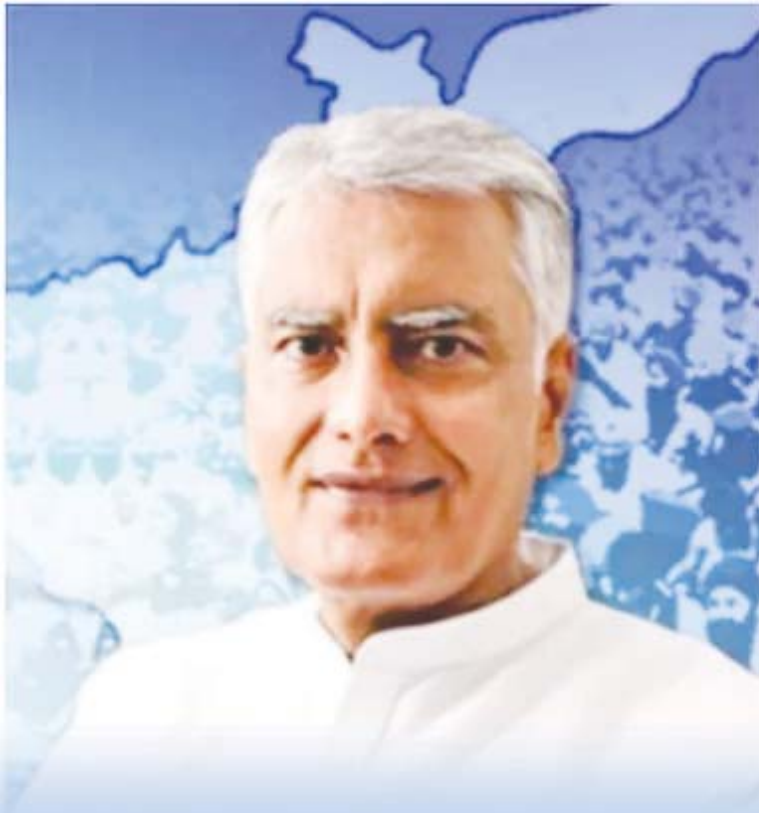
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UP assembly polls:

Yogi Adityanath to be CM face in 2022, says state BJP chief



(News Agencies)-UP

BJP president Swatantra Dev Singh on Tuesday reiterated that UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will be the party's face for the top post during the 2022 UP assembly elections.

Making the remark during a door-to-door contact programme here, Singh said they are going to the people with the work done by the UP government in the past four and half years.

"In the 2022 assembly election, Yogi (Adityanath) will be the CM face once again in UP. We want development. We want a crime and 'gunda'-free state. UP is treading on the path of development with an aim to become an Uttam Pradesh," Singh said addressing people during the programme.

Singh statement came barely days after UP Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma said the issue of the state's next CM is already "settled". "This is a settled issue as the BJP's central leadership has already made it clear that the party will contest the UP assembly elections under Yogi Adityanath Ji to return to power," Sharma, who himself was a strong contender for the CM's post in 2017, had said in a recent interview to PTI. Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had on Thursday said UP under Chief Minister Adityanath is scaling new heights and stressed that the state needs the BJP government again in 2022. "Under the leadership of CM Yogi, the state is scaling new heights. CM Yogi has changed the picture of Uttar Pradesh. In 2022, the state needs BJP government again," the Union Minister for Education and Skill Development had said while speaking at a public meeting in Siddharth Nagar.

It's not cricket

Sunil Jakhar after Sidhu quit as Punjab Congress chief, calls it 'breach of trust'

It's just not cricket!" -- former Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar lashed out at Navjot Singh Sidhu hours after the latter quit as the president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PPCC).

In a tweet on Tuesday, Sunil Jakhar criticised Sidhu for "breach of trust" and said the only thing that stands compromised in the scenario is the faith that the Congress leadership had reposed on Sidhu at the time of the crisis. Sunil Jakhar's comments came hours after Navjot Singh Sidhu resigned as the Punjab Congress chief.

While resigning from the key party post, Sidhu, in his letter

to Congress president Sonia Gandhi, had said, "The collapse of a man's character stems from the compromise corner, I can never compromise on Punjab's future and the agenda for the welfare of Punjab. Therefore, I hereby resign as the President of Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee [PPCC]. Will continue to serve the Congress." Reacting to Sidhu's statement, Sunil Jakhar said, "What stands compromised in this entire 'episode' is the faith reposed in the (outgoing ?) PCC President by the Congress Leadership." "No amount of grand standing can justify this breach of trust placing his benefactors in a peculiar predicament," Sunil Jakhar said

in his tweet. It's just not cricket ! What stands compromised in this entire 'episode' is the faith reposed in the (outgoing ?) PCC President by the Congress Leadership. No amount of grand standing can justify this breach of trust placing his benefactors in a peculiar predicament.

- Sunil Jakhar (@sunilkjakhar) September 28, 2021

Navjot Singh Sidhu resigned as the president of the Punjab Congress on Tuesday. However, he said he will continue to serve the party. Hours after Sidhu resigned as the Punjab Congress chief, several state party leaders stepped down from their posts. While Razia Sultana resigned as Punjab cabinet

minister, days after taking oath as a legislator, three other Punjab Congress leaders resigned from their party posts. Congress leader Yoginder Dhingra resigned as general secretary of the state party unit, Gulzar Inder Chahal resigned as treasurer of Punjab Congress and Gautam Seth also tendered his resignation as the general secretary (in-charge training) of the state Congress.

Taking a dig at Navjot Singh Sidhu after he resigned as the chief of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PPCC), former Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh said "he [Sidhu] was not a stable man".

Shiv Sena MLA says he received threat call from Chhota Rajan's nephew

(News Agencies)-A Shiv Sena MLA from Nashik district of Maharashtra has lodged a police complaint alleging that he had received a threat call from a man claiming to be the nephew of Underworld don Chhota Rajan.

The MLA Suhas Kande, who represents the Nandgaon constituency, received the threat call on Monday evening following which he lodged a complaint with Nashik police commissioner Deepak Pandey on Tuesday, an official



said.

The complaint application mentions that

Kande received a call on his mobile phone and the caller who identified himself as Akshay Nikalje, nephew of Chhota Rajan, threatened him to withdraw a writ petition filed by him in the Bombay High Court alleging that the Nashik District Planning Committee did not distribute the funds it received equally. The caller told Kande that if the latter fails to withdraw the application, it will not be good for the MLA and his family members, it said.

Animal rights body urges Centre, state govts to implement anti-rabies vaccination programme



(News Agencies)-Delhi-based animal rights body FIAPO (Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations) has called upon the Centre and state governments to implement a countrywide anti-rabies vaccination programme for stray and pet dogs.

According to FIAPO, India accounts for 36 per cent of the total global rabies cases. Measures such as animal birth control (ABC), vaccination, counselling, and medical aid are needed to control rabies cases, the animal rights body said.

"The World Health Organisation's target of eradicating human rabies deaths globally by 2030 won't succeed if we do not tackle rabies on an urgent footing so that ours is the last generation that lives under the threat of rabies," said Bharati Ramachandran, CEO of FIAPO. FIAPO also demanded immediate post-bite treatment, through onsite first-aid stations, and administration of rabies shot to bitten individuals.

"Since 2017, FIAPO has been researching and actively working towards tackling rabies through its campaign 'Rabies Free India', in line with WHO's 'One Health' approach. The campaign - implemented in Kerala, Punjab and Assam - aims to ensure that better policies are put in place and communities empowered to provide quality care to animals, thereby addressing the problem of human and non-human animal conflict at its root," added Bharati.

Recently, chilling incidents of mass killings of dogs were reported from across the country. In Karnataka's Shivamogga district, 150 stray dogs were allegedly buried alive in Lingapalem village of West Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh. In Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain, five dogs died after having acid poured on them.

Monsoon mayhem



13 killed in heavy rains, lightning in Maharashtra; NDRF rescues over 560

(News Agencies)-At least 13 persons died in heavy showers, floods and lightning in parts of Maharashtra with the Marathwada region bearing the brunt of rain fury, while more than 560 people were rescued after the NDRF was mobilised and helicopters were deployed, officials said on Tuesday.

Besides, more than 200 cattle perished or were washed away and a number of houses were damaged in torrential rains that lashed Marathwada on Sunday and Monday, causing havoc in a region which is considered a perennially drought-plagued area, they said.

Parts of the region and Mumbai received heavy showers on Tuesday also.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast 'extremely heavy rains' at a few places in Marathwada, Mumbai and other parts of the coastal Konkan region of Maharashtra in the next 24 hours.

The Marathwada region in central Maharashtra which faced rain fury comprises eight districts - Aurangabad, Latur, Osmanabad, Parbhani, Nanded, Beed, Jalna and Hingoli.

Heavy rainfall in catchment areas of the Manjara dam forced authorities to open all 18 gates of the reservoir to discharge water on Tuesday, which led to flooding in some villages in Beed district, while an alert was sounded in some neighbouring districts, the officials said.

At least 13 persons died in heavy showers, floods and lightning in parts of Maharashtra with the Marathwada region, considered perennially drought-plagued, bearing the brunt of rain fury.

The local administration opened all 18 gates of the Manjara dam and 11 gates of the Majalgaon dam, resulting in discharge of 78,397 cusec 80,534 cusec water from them, respectively, they said.

An official from the disaster management department said in Mumbai that 13 people have died due to heavy rains and lightning in parts of Maharashtra, while 136 others have received injuries. Of these 13 deaths, 12 were reported from Marathwada and Vidarbha regions and one from North Maharashtra's Nashik district, the official said.

Of the 12 deaths, three were reported from Yavatmal district (in Vidarbha where a bus was swept away), two each from Beed, Osmanabad, Parbhani (Marathwada) and one each from Jalna, Latur (Marathwada) and Buldhana (Vidarbha), he said. In Nashik district, a lightning strike killed one person and injured four others, the official said. Three persons died after a state transport bus was swept away while crossing an inundated bridge in Yavatmal district on Tuesday morning, officials said. The incident took place around 8 am at Dahagaon

bridge in Umarkhed tehsil when the semi-luxury bus of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) was going from Nagpur to Nanded. The bus got swept away while passing through the bridge which was flooded following heavy rains, and then overturned, an official said.

There were four passengers in the bus besides the driver and conductor, Umarkhed tehsildar Anand Deolgaonkar said.

In a late night release, the Yavatmal district administration said bus passengers Sharad Fulmali (27) and Subramanyam Tokla (48) were rescued.

But three others, Sheikh Salim alias Babu Sheikh Ibrahim (50), a resident of Hyderabad, Indal Mahindre (35), a resident of Pusad in Yavatmal district, and conductor Bhimrao Nagrikar, a native of Nagpur, died and their bodies were recovered, it said. Bus driver Suresh Surewar was still missing, it said.

With this, 434 people have been killed in rain-related incidents in the state since June 1, the disaster management department official said in Mumbai. A total of 205 animals, including 60 large milch

animals, were washed away or perished in the heavy rains over the last two days.

"With this, the total loss of livestock, including cows, buffaloes and goats, has increased up to 1,632. As many as 91,510 poultry birds are also estimated to be died in heavy rains (both figures since June 1)," the official said.

The heavy rain and flood have damaged crops on several acres of agricultural land in the region, he said. "Since yesterday (Monday), the Water Resources Department has been monitoring the situation closely. We are trying to minimise the damage," Water Resources Minister Jayant Patil told reporters in Beed. The administration will provide all possible relief to people, the minister said.

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams and choppers were deployed in parts of Marathwada to rescue stranded people. One team of the State Disaster Response Force has also been deployed in Jalgaon district in North Maharashtra, the official said.

A total of 564 people were rescued from rain and flood-hit areas in different districts.

As many as 459 people were rescued from flood-affected areas in the last 48 hours across Osmanabad district and the NDRF deployed a helicopter to reach those stranded in floodwaters, officials said on Tuesday evening.

Maharashtra: IAF helicopter rescues 3 people stranded in flooded Latur village



An Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter rescued three people stranded in an inundated village in Latur, Maharashtra, on Wednesday.

(News Agencies)-A day after heavy water discharge from the Manjara dam caused flooding in some places of Maharashtra's Marathwada region, an IAF team on Wednesday rescued three people stranded at an inundated village in Latur with the help of a helicopter, a district administration official said.

Following heavy rains in Marathwada over the last few days, the NDRF was mobilised and helicopters were deployed to rescue people stuck in some of the flooded places in the region.

On Wednesday morning, a helicopter of the Indian Air Force (IAF) rescued three people, Nagorao Kisan Tikanare (50), his wife Rukmabai (45) and son Chandrakant (11) from Poharegaon village in Renapur tehsil, where they were stranded in the flood, the official said in a release.

After heavy showers over the last few days, rains subsided in Latur on Wednesday.

Heavy water discharge from the Manjara dam on Tuesday following heavy rains led to

flooding in some villages of Beed, Latur and Osmanabad districts in Marathwada, officials earlier said.

On Wednesday, 12 out of the total 18 gates of the dam were closed, which reduced the water discharge from the reservoir.

In the last two days, at least 13 people died in heavy showers,

floods and lightning in parts of Maharashtra with the Marathwada region bearing the major brunt of rain fury, while more than 560 people were rescued after the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was mobilised and helicopters were deployed, officials said on Tuesday.

Besides, more than 200 cattle perished or were washed away and a number of houses were damaged in torrential rains that lashed Marathwada over the last few days, causing havoc in a region which is considered a perennially drought-plagued area, they said.



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PM Modi chairs meeting of Union Council of Ministers, monitors implementation of various projects



(News Agencies)-Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday chaired a meeting of the Union Council of Ministers wherein presentations were made on the implementation and monitoring of various projects.

Sources aware of the development said two ministers made presentations on the implementation of various projects.

This was the fourth meeting of the Union Council of Ministers

since its reshuffle and expansion on July 7.

During the previous meeting on September 14, Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya and Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan made presentations on efficiency and time management. After the September 14 meeting, sources had said it was kind of a 'chintan shivir' (brainstorming session) and that more such sessions would be held for further improving governance.

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The Quad is an important political signal. But it will be tested

The consolidation of the Quad is an important political pivot in reconfiguring the Asian order. For the United States, it signals a commitment to remain engaged with the Indo-Pacific and lead a more coordinated effort to contain China. For India, the big political signal is that it is willing to be part of a group that will deny China the opportunity to upend what this group thinks is a world order based on principles of democracy, and a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. For Australia, it is a clear signal that the die has been cast. China's assertiveness has left these countries with no other option. The Quad is part of a churning of the security architecture in Asia. It will be more confrontational, with all the attendant risks.

The Quad's innovative form is

also supposed to reflect that churning. The value of most groupings is often not specific policies, but the socialisation it produces. The Quad is not an alliance. It aims to secure an open order in the Indo-Pacific, but it is not a full-fledged security pact. It is supposed to pursue broad goals: Humanitarian relief, climate change, vaccines, coordination on technology, securing supply chains, trade, and a general outlook on a democratic and inclusive world order.

But the euphoria over political signals of this new experiment should not blind us to some important trends. The Quad is born against the backdrop of colossal failure and contradiction, as much as against the backdrop of a rising China. It will have to overcome the shadow of these failures.

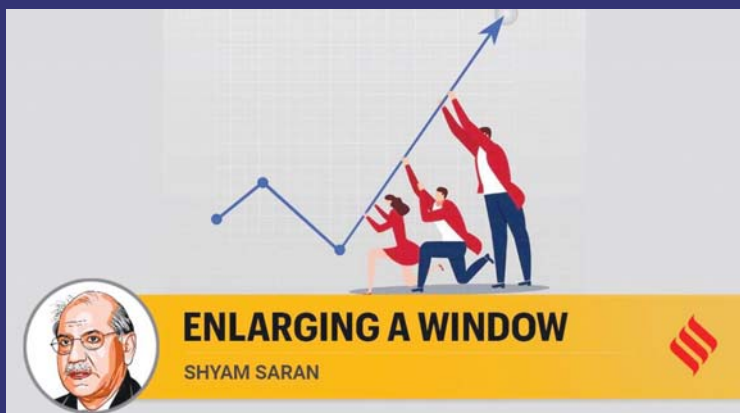
First, the group has staked its claim on shared values. But it has to acknowledge the deep crisis of democracy in the constituent members challenged by plutocracy, ethnic division and dysfunction. The US has, at least nominally, acknowledged that its own democracy is not out of the woods. Indian democracy is struggling. Australia's virtual abandonment of its own stranded citizens during Covid hardly burnished its credentials for a democratic humanitarianism. If being part of such a club can induce a deeper self-consciousness that the credibility of their democracies is the biggest asset of these countries to be preserved in law and deeds, it will be for the good. Second, the Quad is aimed at the Indo-Pacific and is not a security alliance. Fair enough. But there needs to be more

evidence that these countries are willing to listen or are attuned to each other's security needs where it really matters. Australia may be the biggest beneficiary of the Quad. Japan has always been under the umbrella. But India's biggest challenges are going to be its neighbourhood: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and China. Biden's decision to withdraw may have been the right one. But the manner signalled one abiding trait of US power: Its unwillingness to listen deeply to concerns and points of view that are not its own. It is to India's credit that it has mostly stood its ground. But we should not be under any illusion that socialisation into the Indo-Pacific translates into more leverage in places where we need it most: In our neighbourhood or dealings with other powers like Russia, which is where the fate of the

global order will be decided as much as in the Indo-Pacific.

Third, take critical technologies, supply chains and infrastructure. This group has the heft to do great research collaboration. It can help in further development of critical technologies, and can presumably coordinate some setting of global standards. In areas like cyber security, there is room for a great deal of cooperation, but whether the US will actually share its most advanced capabilities is an open question. But we have to be mindful of two caveats. First, this collaboration is happening just at the moment where both India and the US are turning more protectionist, are sceptical of global trade deals, and have some contradictory interests when it comes to shaping India's development policies.

Four geopolitical developments and a window of opportunity for India



now its real estate companies. This has heightened risk perception among international business and industry who have hitherto seen China as a huge commercial opportunity.

Three, the announcement of the Australia-UK and US (AUKUS) alliance which represents a major departure in US strategy by its commitment to enable Australia to join a handful of countries with nuclear submarines. The alliance reflects a clear strategic choice by Australia that it will be firmly on the US side of the fence despite its considerable economic and commercial equities in China; and four, the convening of the four-nation

(India, Australia, Japan and the US) Quad physical summit in Washington, reflecting a major step towards its formalisation as an influential grouping in the Indo-Pacific going beyond security.

These four developments, taken together, present India with both risks but also with opportunities. It is my sense that the opportunities outweigh the risks. The Afghan situation is a setback for India in the short run. The political capital and economic presence it had built up in the country over the past two decades has been substantially eroded. The Taliban government is dominated by more hardline

and pro-Pakistani elements. They will help deliver on the Pakistani agenda of preventing a revival of Indian diplomatic presence and developmental activity in Afghanistan.

In the longer run, it seems unlikely that the Taliban will give up its obscurantist and extremist agenda. This may lead to domestic inter-ethnic and sectarian conflict. The unwillingness of the Taliban to cut its links with various jihadi groups, including those targeting Afghanistan's neighbours, may revive regional and international fears over cross-border terrorism.

A number of important developments has taken place over the past several weeks. They may appear disconnected but in fact add up to a significant shift in regional and global geopolitics.

One, the withdrawal of US and

NATO forces from Afghanistan and the complete takeover of the country by the Taliban; two, significant domestic political changes in China, including the ideological and regulatory assault against its dynamic private high-tech companies and

Sentry Duty On High Seas: Any Move To Contain China Is Welcome

There was an air of nervousness on the Indian side ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first meeting with US President Donald Trump in August 2017. Indian officials were tight-lipped, not sure what to expect from the erratic new president with a reputation of trashing established US foreign policy. By then, Trump's statements on NATO and EU, and the damage he had done to transatlantic relations, were well known. But all misgivings dissipated when the two leaders met and hit it off famously. This time around, before Modi and President Joe Biden have their first face-to-face interaction during the former's US visit this week, there are no such qualms. Biden is a veteran politician, and his foreign policy agenda to contain a rising China in the Indo-Pacific fits with New Delhi's concerns about Beijing's muscle-flexing. India is a member of the four-nation Quad grouping and Modi will attend the Quad leaders' summit in Washington on September 24, hosted by Biden in the White House. "The first in-person Quad leaders' summit holds tremendous symbolism, especially for PM Modi as this comes at the same time as his bilateral meeting with President Biden," says Aparna Pandey of the Washington-based Hudson Institute. The Biden

administration has made the Japan-US-Australia-India grouping a priority, placing India in a critical position as a country whose support is key to US strategy. "As of now, Quad focus areas are supply chains and critical technologies, climate change and vaccine production, which are critical to US-China peer rivalry," adds Pandey. With China pushing its vaccine across East Asia, the Quad, too, hopes to get its supply chain in place and present alternative options. India will begin exporting vaccines from October. But the move goes far beyond that. The Modi-Biden meeting may not result in any big bang announcements, but is an opportunity for discussing critical issues, especially Afghanistan and the threat of terrorism emanating from there. The Quad gained momentum since 2017 and the India-China military face-off in Ladakh in 2020 gave a much-needed fillip to the quadrilateral security dialogue. India at the beginning was hesitant to join a group primarily formed to check growing Chinese influence. The Quad is focussed on the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and none of the other three has a long, 3,488-km border with China. Indeed, while Australia is protected by the US nuclear umbrella, the US-Japan security alliance has served both countries well since WWII.

PM Modi's eventful and 'Landmark' US visit

By Susmita Ghosh

PM Modi visited the US on a four-day trip after a long break. Packed meetings with various state heads and CEOs of the top American tech companies, the tour was highly productive, just what the administration targets to achieve. He capped off the effective tour with a powerful speech at the 76th UN General Assembly.

In this short but busy stay, PM Modi has more than 20 scheduled meets. One of the most important ones, of course, was the first in-person bilateral conversation with Joe Biden after the latter was elected as President of USA. He met Vice President Kamala Harris, whom he admired as a source of inspiration and invited her to India as well.

PM Modi's USA visit was hinged on the Indian connections, so he carried official documents and offered to the President. It is well-known about the Indian ancestral ties of first-time senator Kamala Harris, who was also the first woman Vice President of the USA. She is inspired by PV Gopalan, her grandfather, who was an Indian civil servant. However, President Biden also had family connections with India, which he knew vaguely as received a letter from India when he was the first-time senator. Biden is also proud of his ties with Irish ancestry.

In this hectic visit, Narendra Modi held discussions with prominent political figures like the Australian PM Scott Morrison and the Japanese Premier Yoshihide Suga. Besides the QUAD meeting, he also met five global CEOs, among them, two were Indian Americans, Vivek Lall, CEO, General Atomics and Shantanu Narayan, CEO, Adobe.

Another major highlight was that he brought home 157 antiques and artefacts that were stolen from India in the past. Most of them were in between 11th to 14th century. One of the most notable was a Nataraj figure from the 12th century, even though several terracotta and copper objects, date back to the 2nd century. In the UNGA session, India PM emphasised on taking proper action against the countries that use terrorism as a political tool and branded them as regressive thinkers. He also emphasised on the delicate situation in Afghanistan and warned against countries that might use the situation for their own advantage. He highlighted on the need for democracy where anything is possible.

While the returning artefacts have a major impact overall, there are still questions about the overall success of the tour. The opposition leader Rahul Gandhi has highlighted the words of US VP Kamala

(Contd on page 35)

Top US generals punch holes in Joe Biden's defense of Afghanistan withdrawal

Top American generals warned President Joe Biden that the Afghan military would collapse. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said in essence on Tuesday that both former President Donald Trump and Biden had botched negotiations with the Taliban -- and the net result of the US actions was a "logistical success but a strategic failure." If the old joke is true -- that in Washington, the definition of a gaffe is telling the truth in public -- then Milley and the other military leaders who testified Tuesday on Capitol Hill committed many gaffes. At a televised hearing of the US Senate Armed Services Committee featuring Milley, CENTCOM commander Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, and the Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin -- himself a retired four-star general and former CENTCOM commander -- all told a great deal of truth. Generals Milley and McKenzie said that they advised the Biden administration that unless the US kept 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, the Afghan military would collapse. They also said that the ground commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, provided the same advice.

This clearly contradicts what President Biden told ABC News anchor George Stephanopoulos last month -- that the US military didn't advise him to keep 2,500 troops in Afghanistan.

In answer to a question from a senator, Gen. Milley conceded that the abrupt and complete US withdrawal had "damaged" US credibility around the world. Milley also said that both the Trump and Biden administrations made

a mistake by putting specific dates on the US withdrawal rather than making it a conditions-based withdrawal.

Relatedly, McKenzie and Austin both agreed that the Doha agreement with the Taliban that was negotiated by the Trump administration and signed in February 2020, and which laid out the timeline for a total US withdrawal, significantly undercut the morale of the Afghan military.

Milley blamed the US intelligence community for missing the "scale and scope, plus the speed" of the collapse of Afghan government, testifying, "All the intel assessments, all of us got that wrong. There's no question about it. That was a swing and a miss on the intel assessment of 11 days in August, there's nobody that called that."

In fact, according to CNN's reporting before the fall of Kabul, the US intelligence community was predicting in early August that the Taliban could take Kabul within a month to three months, which at the time seemed like a reasonably accurate assessment of how dire the situation was becoming. Milley described the US airlift of more than 120,000 Afghans, US citizens and other nationals from Kabul as a "logistical success," but he called the overall policy in Afghanistan a "strategic failure." The fruits of that failure have been starkly clear from the actions of the Taliban during just the past month. In a highly symbolic move on September 17, the Taliban's feared religious police commandeered the building that once housed the Ministry of Women's Affairs.



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Hypervigilance: Why Does Disaster Always Feel Like It's Around the Corner?

In a hyperconnected future, society lives under constant surveillance by their peers, their state & their corporate interests. You might have already guessed that the future I'm referring to is our current present day. We hear of conflicts around the world before they're over, new threats arising every day & a growing precedent that our future will be at risk. It's very tough to drown out the issues, & many of them need to be addressed. How does one cope with this? How can we not let anxiety & fear of the future cripple our present? Part of it is to ignore the issues, bury your head in

the sand. There's nothing wrong with that, many issues today are larger than anything one person can control. Another part is to take action, if there are issues you know you can have a lasting impact upon. Then the best thing to do is be the change you want to see in the world. Do not waver, your impact will always be noticed, at the very least, by yourself. Is the issue larger than you? Great, create a group or join an existing



one, or multiple groups & see your change. There are always troubles & issues plaguing our minds, & there isn't enough time in our lives to settle all of our resolutions. The concept of a constantly growing society paired with an insatiable capital market system is not sustainable on Earth, not with our current technology at least. The conceptualization & execution of new, innovative ideas, products, technologies & systems should

be of the highest regard, along with human ethics. It is necessary for our growing future to solve issues that have been plaguing our species for generations. Can we sustain life on other planets co-independently? How can we stop the current mass extinction event? What are solutions to solve climate issues on all levels? What new technologies would help alleviate human suffering? What is true happiness? No one person will have all the answers, but collectively humans can rule the worlds peacefully.

By Max Thind

Physical or Digital Books?

It's always a tough decision whether to grab a physical copy, a digital copy or both of our favorite pieces of literature. This could likely be broken down into wealth groups as well, with richer families owning a library's collection worth of books & writings. Not everyone's the same with this & I'll throw in my two cents on the topic. If you're reading it for the first time, consider first going for the sample digital copy, if you love it, buy the physical copy. Still need more convincing on if it's a good read or not? Consider the digital copy. There's a lot of factors that can go into this, size restrictions being one. Not everyone has the luxury of unlimited storage space for literature. If this is your problem, then you're probably only keeping a few hard copies of personal favorites, while the larger part of your collection is digital. This is a solid way to keep on top of your reading. The more economical route will be digital, as you could also listen to audiobooks, podcasts, while having a large amount of storage for hundreds of books. All with the convenience of one device. If you plan on holding a very large collection, you might want to consider multiple devices, larger digital storage methods. Or you can create your own private library. There's many options you could take to have the most productive learning environment. Everyone doesn't have the same needs & what may work for some may not work for others. Consider having a personal book club with friends, or brainstorming sessions if that's your thing. The world is the book & we are the readers, so... The method isn't as important as the resources obtained by reading & analyzing the material you intend on learning. As with most things, this isn't definitive & is merely a suggestion or guidance for your own path to individual enlightenment. Do consider donating books you don't read for others to enjoy. Not only do you provide everyone with a great service, you provide the best thing of all, help towards enlightenment. Added benefit is you can make room for new books of your own!



Indian-Singaporean Sentenced To 21 Months' Probation For Ill-Gotten Gains

Guilty of receiving ill-gotten gains, the Indian-origin Singaporean is on 21 months' probation while his parents are bonded for 5,000 dollars.

(Insider Bureau)-A 22-year-old Indian-origin man in Singapore was sentenced to 21 months of probation, while his parents were bonded for 5,000 dollars to ensure his good behaviour, after he was found guilty of receiving ill-gotten gains of another person.

Kshan Pillai Ganesan Pillai had agreed to assist an alleged accomplice in obtaining a bank account to receive 10,000 Singapore dollars (USD 7,388) in ill-gotten gains, The Straits Times newspaper reported.

He had also recruited another friend Rufus Rakesh Kumar Kalaiselvan, age 19. Last month, Pillai pleaded guilty to one count each of dealing with the benefits of criminal conduct and instructing a man known as Emmanuel

Raymond to give false information to a public servant.

Kalaiselvan pleaded guilty on September 17 to one count of criminal breach of trust and will be sentenced on October 25. Emmanuel, 19, pleaded guilty in April to giving false information to a public servant. He was later sentenced to nine months' probation.

Cases of two others involved in the scam, Ravivarthan, 20, and Mahendra Sakkaravarthi Samraj Ahsockan, 34, are pending. The court heard that a 77-year-old man, whose name has been redacted from court documents, had earlier received a phone call from an unknown scammer. After giving the scammer his bank card details and a one-time password, the senior citizen found that someone had made 15 unauthorised

transactions on the card, leading to a total loss of 35,350 dollars (USD 26,119). The authorities later traced the transactions to Pillai, Rufus, Emmanuel, Ravivarthan and Mahendra. Deputy Public Prosecutor Chong Kee En said that in July last year, Mahendra asked Pillai if the younger man could help him procure a bank account to receive 10,000 dollars (USD 7,388). Pillai was also offered a "commission" of about 2,000 (USD 1,477).

Despite knowing that the money were unlawfully obtained, Pillai approached Kalaiselvan and asked for the teenager's help to funnel the cash back to them. As part of his probation, Pillai must remain indoors from 10 pm to 6 am every day and perform 60 hours of community service.



Sidhu Has Trapped Himself And Congress Must Exploit That

Navjot Singh Sidhu is known for his witticisms and motor mouth. But he now appears to have become the punchline himself. His latest tantrum could spell the end of his political journey which started after a not-so-glorious cricket career. Sidhu, like his batting, is unidimensional. He refuses to change either his style or his content. This did not bring him great glory in cricket, and is now repeating in politics. He thought he was destined for bigger things - in particular, being Chief Minister of Punjab - and as of this moment, that ambition is navigating disaster. And as always, it's likely that the 57-year-old will blame not himself but others.

Sidhu's abrupt resignation as Congress chief in Punjab be a boon in disguise for the party. The world knows Sidhu as temperamental; Captain Amarinder Singh terms him "not a stable man". In the last few months, the Congress leadership has bent backwards to accommodate his wishes, making him not only the state party president but effectively sacking its tallest leader in the state, Captain Amarinder Singh. In keeping with Sidhu's wishes and demands, Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, the choice of the Congress MLAs for Chief Minister was discarded, and on



his advice, Charanjit Singh Channi was appointed to the top job. But when Sidhu tried to act as a "Super Chief Minister", the Congress decided to push back. True to his nature, Sidhu acted to his own detriment. Now he seems isolated, and his resignation may not create the big crater he expected.

If Sidhu does not withdraw his resignation, a new state Congress chief is likely to be appointed to prove he has exhausted his political capital within the party. In my opinion, the Congress blundered in appointing him chief in the first place. Sidhu is charismatic, honest, a great orator who draws large crowds, but he is neither a team player nor an inspiring leader. He is too temperamental and ambitious. He left the BJP in 2017 because he felt he was not getting his due. He then floated his own

outfit which was too small to fulfil his mammoth ambitions. Then he flirted with the Aam Admi Party (AAP). Arvind Kejriwal in a 5 AM meeting realised that Sidhu was too hot to handle and cleverly offered him a deal he had to refuse. Sidhu was told that AAP could field his wife, an MLA, in the elections, and Sidhu would campaign for the party. Sidhu had not bargained for this. He got the message. He then met Rahul Gandhi and joined the Congress Party.

One can argue that Sidhu was used to topple Amarinder Singh, and then Sidhu trapped himself and resigned. Those who support the Gandhis can only wish that all this was done by design. Instead, they genuinely believed that it was time to let him take charge. Handing over the entire Punjab Congress to him was naive and immature. The Gandhis will make an equally big mistake

if his resignation is not accepted. The Congress is not in a position to honour his ambition to make him Chief Minister and if it does so by removing Charanjit Singh Channi, then the Congress will antagonize the 32 per cent Dalit votes which have reportedly started galvanizing around Channi. It is better if the Congress begins anew with a clean slate in Punjab. Channi should continue as Chief Minister and a new party chief should be appointed and the two should work in tandem.

The Congress in Punjab is facing anti-incumbency, though it is not massive. The removal of Captain Amarinder Singh was a move in the right direction to neutralise the anger of the people up to a certain extent. If Channi, with his Dalit support, is able to project himself as an honest crusader in Punjab politics, he could lead the party to re-election, but if Sidhu is

retained, the Congress will have seated itself on a time bomb. Any more explosions courtesy Sidhu and the Congress will face total annihilation in the state.

Let's accept the new reality in Punjab where politics since the death of Beant Singh have hinged on Prakash Singh Badal and Captain Amarinder Singh. This will be the first election where neither leader is centrally placed. If Badal is too old to run for another term, Amarinder Singh has been marginalized (as of now). And AAP remains hamstrung by not having a leader it can offer as Chief Minister. The Congress should be able to turn this landscape into a significant relief map by choosing a Dalit leader as Chief Minister, a revolutionary step in Punjab. The 32% Dalit vote could become the Congress torch-bearer provided the party shows it is willing to truly empower it.



At Afghanistan Embassy In India, Quiet Resistance Against Taliban



In a leafy lane in Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave, Afghanistan's embassy is grappling with a question confronting Afghan diplomats in capitals across the world triggered by the hasty, unseemly exit of former President Ashraf Ghani and the rapid takeover by the Taliban - which authority does it now serve?

The embassy in India - just like Afghanistan's embassies across the world - has chosen to maintain that it continues to represent the earlier Afghanistan Republic, using the arguable logic that while Mr Ghani and several of his ministers may have fled, he and his government did not resign, keeping alive, so to speak, the authority of the erstwhile Republic.

At the Delhi embassy, the red-and-green flag of the earlier Afghan Republic has not been replaced by the austere black-and-white pennant of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate. The portrait of former President Ghani continues to hang from the walls.

It would be wrong, an official who spoke on condition of anonymity told me, to give legitimacy to a regime that has seized power by force. The Taliban, he said, does not represent all of Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate may have de facto control of Afghanistan, but not de jure, the official added, a stance he claims is similar to that of all Afghanistan embassies spread across the globe, who, he

says, are in regular touch with each other. This strategy, he says, is being steered by former ministers, almost all of whom are in exile.

The embassies have been emboldened by the reluctance of much of the world community, including India, in recognising the Taliban interim government.

The official said the Taliban had reached out to them on one occasion, a few weeks ago, but the embassy told them their allegiance remains with the

erstwhile Republic until their (the Taliban) government receives wider global recognition. Until then, the embassy is operating in a sort of jurisdictional twilight zone, mainly providing consular services to the sizeable Afghan diaspora in India. Practical problems, loom though - mainly of funds. The normal remittances from Kabul have ceased. The official told me they have cut costs and trimmed staff strength, mainly by laying off some of its Indian employees. "We have

funds to last us a few months," he said. What after that? The official said that diplomats and bureaucrats like him are hopeful that the ground reality in Afghanistan will change, with the emergence of a united resistance to the Taliban. During the previous Taliban regime, which ruled Afghanistan from 1996-2001, a large swathe of the country's north remained under the control of a coalition of anti-Taliban commanders known as the "Northern Alliance". Countries like

India recognised the Alliance as Afghanistan's government in exile, providing legitimacy and funds to the Afghan embassy in Delhi. This time, however, every pocket of anti-Taliban resistance has collapsed, including the holdout Panjshir Valley region north of Kabul. The whereabouts of the resistance's main leaders, Ahmad Massoud, son of the late Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, and former Vice President Amrullah Saleh, remain unclear.





Was supporting AAP a historic blunder?

An apology and a question to Congress: Yogendra Yadav

Pawan Khera accused me of helping BJP's rise through Anna movement. It would take a lazy mind to imagine that all was well with the India story before Anna.

Odd setting. Bad formulation. Wrong on facts. But a fair question, nevertheless. A question that needs to be faced squarely: Was supporting the Anna Hazare movement and the Aam Aadmi Party a historic blunder? Should people like me accept our responsibility for unleashing a monster on India?

This question sprang out of the blue during Rajdeep Sardesai's India Today TV show on 27 September on the Bharat Bandh organised by farmers. To the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s charge of Congress having sponsored this agitation, I took a light dig and said the country's history would have been different if the Congress (I should have added: or any other party in this country) could mobilise lakhs of farmers for 10 months. This evidently incensed Pawan Khera, Congress's bilingual, articulate, sharp and combative spokesperson on the show. Suddenly, he turned to the Anna movement, insinuated that I was involved in mobilising Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) support for it and challenged me to now organise RSS support for the farmers' movement.

I couldn't help smiling. Not because I don't take Pawan Khera seriously, but because the whole situation was so weird. One, this outburst had nothing to do with the topic of the day- the Bharat Bandh. Two, if he wanted to prove me wrong on Congress' mobilisational capacity, the role of the RSS in the Anna movement was hardly germane. This was classic ad hominem (attack the person, not the argument) reasoning so common on our TV debates. Three, in any case, he was dialling a wrong number since I had very little to do with decision making during the heydays of the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement. I was a supporter and fellow-traveller of the movement, but was not even a member of IAC, let alone a part of its formal or informal core, Team Anna. The first time I had any conversation with Anna Hazare was in 2012, months after the famous Jantar Mantar and Ramlila Maidan protests. So, the idea of my organising RSS support for IAC was beyond ridiculous. Instead of shouting, I just laugh off such things.

It didn't stop here. Congress supporters were clearly excited with Pawan Khera's performance, and showered me with choicest of abuses on social media. I clarified the difference between my association with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), but non-association with Team Anna during the heydays of IAC. For some reason, Pawan Khera

pressed the charge that I was lying to escape responsibility, but could not back up the charge. Thus ended an unpleasant, avoidable exchange that could not rise to the level of a meaningful dialogue.

Did the Anna movement aid BJP?

Let me attempt it here. Distractions, insinuations and abuses apart, there is a fair question underlying this exchange. Forget the technical difference between IAC and AAP, how do we assess the role of that movement and those associated with it? Was it a grand RSS conspiracy to bring the BJP to power? Was this a fraud perpetrated on the nation in the name of anti-corruption? Wasn't this movement and those associated with it responsible for discrediting Congress and bringing Narendra Modi to power? Let us examine these dispassionately.

The idea of the Lokpal movement as a grand conspiracy to bring the BJP to power does not merit much discussion. Not because there was no conspiracy, but because there were too many. At any given point, politics is full of designs, short term and long term, realistic and fanciful. Often, real life is an unintended consequence produced by a random collision of many of these conflicting designs. This is exactly what happened during the Anna movement. IAC promoters had their collective design that kept growing and changing. Anna Hazare brought his personal agenda. The BJP was in the wilderness then and it stands to reason that the BJP and RSS must have sensed an opportunity and tried their best to realise this. The idea that all these competing designs were secretly pre-aligned by the RSS has as much evidence to back it as the theory that the current farmers' movement has been designed by the Congress. Besides, such a neat theory does not explain why the AAP was such a thorn in the flesh for the BJP, and Modi personally, in the run-up to the 2014 election.

Let us consider a more plausible version, a theory of unintended but anticipable consequences: The Anna movement and the AAP may not have been a conspiracy to aid Modi, but they did end up helping the BJP's rise. Could the supporters of this movement not see this? Do they not carry that responsibility? There is some merit to this reasoning. The Anna movement delegitimised an increasingly unpopular United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and intensified popular anger against it. This presented a perfect opportunity for the BJP that was incapable of such mass mobilisation at that time.

Who Saw Sidhu Disaster Coming? Everyone - Except Gandhi Siblings

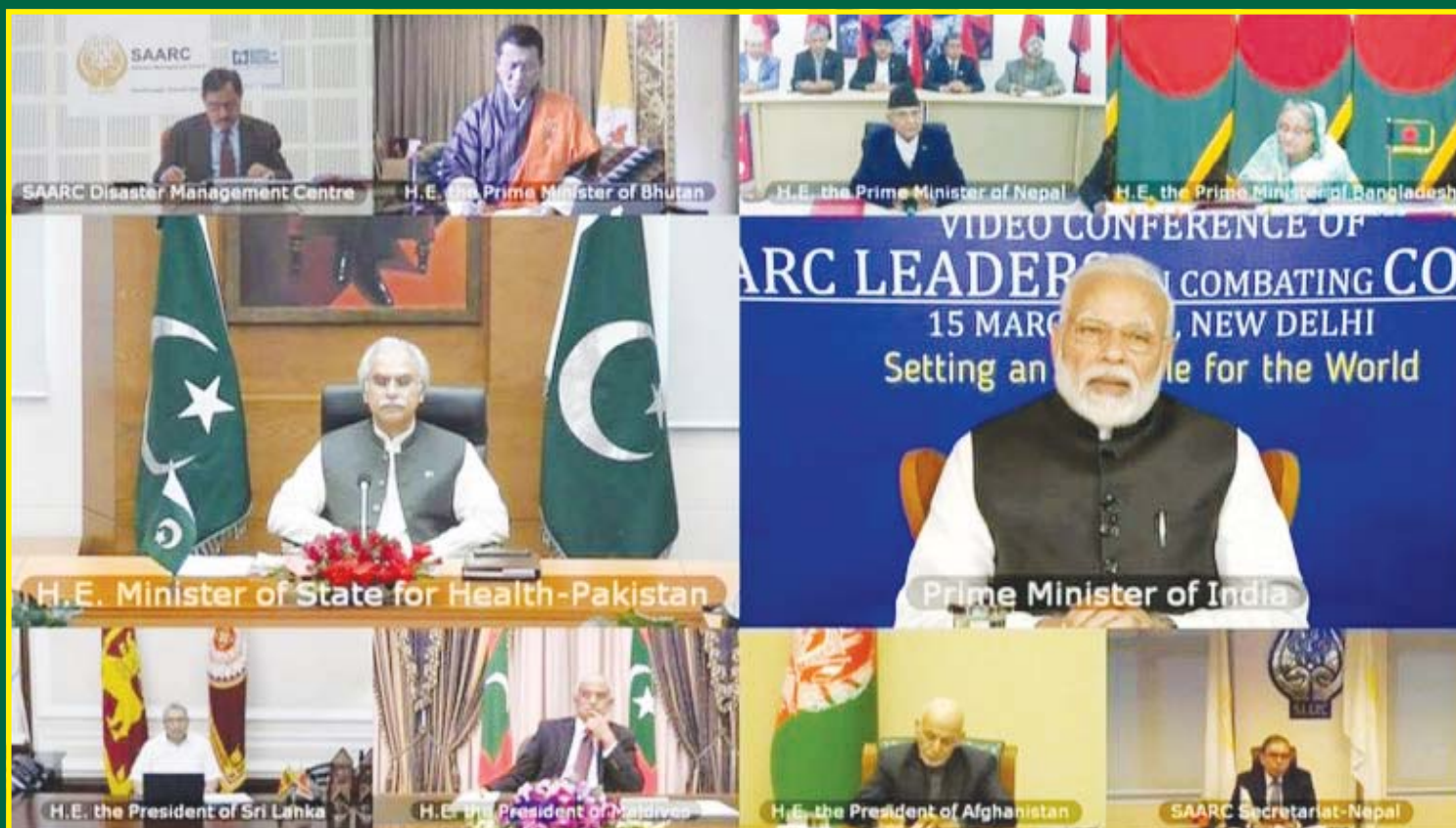


Captain Amarinder Singh, who lost his job as Punjab Chief Minister thanks to rival Navjot Singh Sidhu, is clearly relishing his "I told you so" moment. Currently in Delhi, staying at a five-star hotel, the Captain, aged 79, has refused to confirm or deny whether he's meeting the BJP's top leadership and is set to fill in a consent form to join the Prime Minister's party.

Exactly ten days after he was driven to quit, Sidhu did what the Captain had warned - he resigned as chief of the Congress in Punjab because he wasn't getting his way. The party says the resignation has not yet been accepted but what's incontrovertible is that the Congress has driven a bulldozer over itself in a state that it controls and where elections are just months away.

Sidhu this morning defiantly released a video saying that he cannot be pushed into "Compromise Corner" (typical Sidhu-ism) and will "fight till his last breath". Against what, exactly? Well, Sidhu says corrupt leaders have been made ministers by the new Chief Minister, Charanjit Singh Channi. And that the choices for several key posts including in the police are unacceptable because they ensured that no action was taken in what is commonly referred to as the 'sacrilege' case. -the desecration and disrespecting of the Guru Granth Sahib in Punjab in different instances in 2015 and the police opening fire on a crowd that gathered to protest against this. The Congress High Command (read the Gandhi family), especially Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the strongest Sidhu votary, spent all night sending feelers to Sidhu only to be spurned. Sidhu has not taken PGV's calls or replied to text messages. He snubbed Pargat Singh, an MLA from his own camp, who came calling with a placatory message from the High Command.

Some perspective on how temperamental Sidhu is - he had earlier threatened to quit as state chief if Sunil Jakhar, a Hindu, or Sukhinder Singh Randhawa who is a Jat Sikh like Sidhu, were made Chief Minister after the Captain was forced to quit. Multiple sources confirmed to me that Sidhu had walked out of the meeting and driven away when Charanjit Singh Channi, a Dalit, was floated as a compromise candidate. After exercising his veto twice, Sidhu who wanted to become Chief Minister, had no option but to agree and Punjab got its first Dalit Chief Minister. The Congress made a huge virtue out of a necessity and claimed that Rahul Gandhi all along wanted to appoint a Dalit to the top job. Gandhi made it a point to attend Channi's swearing-in and many pictures were posed for. Leaders claimed that Channi's appointment was a masterstroke, an acknowledgment of the 32 percent Dalit vote in Punjab, the largest in India, which effectively neutralised Mayawati's alliance with the Akalis in Punjab.



SAARC is well and truly dead. Let's acknowledge that, conduct its funeral rites and move on

China is no longer the elephant in the SAARC room, it occupies the entire zoo. India would rather jump over its neighbourhood and build ties with US, France, UK, Russia, and the Quad.

Is it time to junk SAARC?

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was launched with considerable fanfare in Bangladesh in 1985 and hosted by then president H.M. Ershad, who probably wanted to distract his audience from the military dictatorship he ran at the time. (He succeeded in his effort by winning the rigged election one year later.)

Fortunately for him, the region disregarded his lack of democratic credentials and showed up to promote the "creation of an order based on mutuality of respect, equity and shared benefits" - Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, India's PM Rajiv Gandhi, Sri Lanka's President J.R. Jayewardene, Maldives' fellow dictator Maumoon Gayoom, Nepal's King Birendra Shah and Pakistan's martial law administrator Zia-ul-Haq.

Fast forward to September 2021. On the margins of the UN General Assembly on the weekend, a scheduled annual SAARC meeting was called off because member states could not agree on who should be invited to represent Afghanistan - the Pakistanis reportedly wanted a Taliban representative, others wanted to keep a

symbolic empty chair. They argued, but could not agree. So, all the officials trooped back to their hotels, shrugging their shoulders, instead of trying to broker a compromise.

When the region looks back on the history of its on-off effort to try and create a regional identity, this will be the moment it will lock into - when SAARC fell apart, each nation going its own way, many of them towards China.

The truth about SAARC

Certainly, this is an exaggerated description of the scene. SAARC, most will argue, isn't disintegrating at all, that it exists in the Secretariat in Nepal, in the "youth award", in its Federation of Accountants, its initiative to End Violence Against Children and a few other politically correct efforts. But the truth is, SAARC is well and truly dead in the water. Let's acknowledge that fact and conduct its funeral ceremonies - light its pyre or bury it or both. Hire a helicopter and scatter the ashes on all the rivers of all the nations. Let's end the hypocrisy that South Asia's nations care about each other. It's time to move on.

The last SAARC summit was held in Nepal in 2014, after which the chairmanship was handed over to Pakistan. But because charter rules say that a summit can only

be held if all members agree and India's bilateral relationship with Pakistan has rapidly deteriorated over the years - although we shouldn't forget that Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited all the SAARC leaders to his swearing-in in May 2014 - the organisation has slowly shriveled up. Its last gasps were silenced in New York over the weekend. Goodbye, SAARC.

Although, I can't let you go, dear reader, without pointing out what could have been - and what is. In 2006, when SAARC met in Delhi, it spawned the idea of a free trade area; nations competed to put a name to the common currency. Today, SAARC is the least integrated region in the world - less than 5 per cent, according to the World Bank, compared to East Asia's 35 per cent and Europe's 60 per cent. Even sub-Saharan Africa does better, with 22 per cent intra-regional trade. Things are so bad that it is 20 per cent cheaper for Indian traders to trade with Brazil than with Pakistan. India's total trade with SAARC today hovers between 1.7 per cent to 3.8 per cent, according to 2017 figures, a Brookings study found. Protectionist policies, high cost of logistics, lack of political will and a broader trust deficit are the

reasons, the study said. For any South Asian reading this, all of it sounds all-too familiar.

In 2014, during the Nepal summit, Pakistan refused to participate in three efforts to improve connectivity. Subsequently, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and India tried to undertake a transport pact between them - but it failed because Bhutan's standards for vehicular emissions were much higher than India, for example. In 2019, the Pulwama terror attack paved the way for India striking deep inside Pakistan, which brought the relationship to a new low. In 2021, Pakistan reportedly wanted the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to be part of SAARC, but for the time being, other countries have demurred. Other groupings are taking over As SAARC lies writhing in its own spit, other regional groupings have sought to take its place - BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal community, authored by India; CASA-1000, an electricity transmission project between Central Asia and Pakistan; CPEC, between China and Pakistan; and BRI or the China-led Belt-and-Road Initiative that has tied up with all SAARC nations except India and Bhutan.

Covid and containment worsened women's mental health, increased food insecurity in India



The Covid-19 pandemic represents a twin - public health and economic - shock, with devastating effects, particularly in low-income settings where substitutes for in-person transactions are scarce, State capacity for aid and insurance are limited, and supply chains are less resilient (Egger et al. 2021). Women may be especially vulnerable in these settings given discriminatory gender norms and low availability of mental health services. To examine how women fare, we conduct a large-scale phone survey across six states in rural north India (Bau et al. 2021). India's highly spatially variant containment policies allow us to study how the pandemic and its containment policies affected nutrition, incomes, and female mental health.

While lockdowns may be crucial to stem the spread of Covid-19, we find that when not combined with adequate social safety nets, they can generate economic and mental distress.

Emerging evidence suggests that rural India suffered significant disruptions to food supply chains and reductions in economic livelihoods, perhaps affecting the physical and mental well-being of vulnerable populations (Afridi et al. 2020, Singh and Kumar 2021). Yet, without a systematic measurement of these outcomes for at-risk rural populations across different regions of the country, the extent of this crisis, and its relationship with containment policies, is difficult to quantify.

Phone survey

Building off a sample of 4,799 households that were interviewed in-person in Fall 2019, we conducted a timely re-survey of 32% of the sample via phone in August 2020 with IDInsight, at the height of the first Covid-19 wave in India, when the country had between 50,000 and 70,000 new cases per day.

Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou's return makes Chinese realise 'US imperialism is a paper tiger'



Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou was detained by Canada in 2018 at US' extradition request over alleged violation of Iran sanctions. But was it a prisoner swap deal with China?

Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou's triumphant return to Beijing was widely broadcast and viewed by audience across China this week. Meng was detained at the Vancouver airport, Canada, in 2018 after the US made an extradition request in connection with the Iran sanctions violation. Meng was released from detention after the US Department of Justice and her legal team reached a deferred prosecution. Chinese state media hailed Meng Wanzhou as a "hero" and gave her a grand welcome at the Shenzhen airport as thousands of people gathered to see her. The media used Meng to stoke nationalist sentiment. The live broadcast by China Central Television (CCTV) of Meng's landing received 400 million likes, according to Beijing News. The hashtag, "Meng is going to return to the motherland", was viewed 1.57 billion times, on Weibo where the hashtag remained the top trend for two days. "Meng Wanzhou's chartered plane flies around the North Pole to avoid US airspace" was the second

most viewed trend. It was a government-chartered flight, according to CCTV on Weibo. "Every cloud has a silver lining. It was an invaluable experience," said Meng in her parting message outside the Vancouver court. With teary eyes, she ended her extradition trial that garnered global media attention. US comes under attack "This is the result of the firm leadership of the CCP Central Committee, of the untiring efforts of China's government, of the efforts of the Chinese people, it is a major victory of the Chinese people," said an editorial in People's Daily. "The essence of the Meng case was that the United States tried to obstruct or even interrupt China's development process," said another state media editorial. Chinese experts said Meng's freedom symbolises a new and aggressive China that won't back down against "American imperialism". "This reminded the Chinese that 'the American imperialism is a paper tiger', that they can't break you as long as you don't give up,"

said Wang Yiwei, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing. Before arriving in Shenzhen, Meng wrote a personal blog post which was extensively shared by state media. "I was about to throw myself into the arms of the great mother of the motherland. The motherland, after three years of absence, is close to the horizon. Feeling closer to the hometown is even more timid, and tears have blurred my eyes." Meng Wanzhou wrote in a personal post. Controlling the release narrative Chinese censors tried to control the narrative on social media about the conditions on which Meng was released. Chinese state media emphasised that Meng Wanzhou had pleaded "not guilty". The intent was to show that Meng's trial was politically motivated, and she emerged unscathed. On the contrary, Meng "acknowledged helping to conceal the company's direct dealings in Iran" under the deferred prosecution deal. But she didn't have to plead guilty in

court. The deal appears to be a bargain that would allow Meng and the Chinese government to claim victory before the public. "Meng's admissions confirm the crux of the government's allegations in the prosecution of this financial fraud," said Nicole Boeckmann, acting US attorney for the Eastern District of New York. A series of social media posts on WeChat, which had Meng wearing the ankle monitoring device, and the posts on Meng's expensive dresses, were censored on 25 September. On 26 September, the two Canadians detained in China, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, were released. Chinese state media said the two were "granted bail for medical reasons". But experts believe Meng's release is part of a deal that resulted in the freeing of the two Canadians. White House has denied it was a prisoner swap deal between China and Canada. "I think it's important to note and to be very clear about this, there is no link," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

What happens to US-China ties? At the Shenzhen airport, Meng Wanzhou thanked President Xi Jinping in her speech. "President Xi is concerned about the safety of all the Chinese citizens, and he also took my matter to heart, which makes me deeply moved. I also thank all relevant departments for their support and help in this process," Meng said at the Shenzhen airport. "After Meng Wanzhou was unreasonably detained in early December 2018, the Chinese party and government attached great importance to it, and President Xi Jinping personally cared about it," Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said. Her remark was the second most viewed trend on Baidu. China hopes that Meng's return will mark a significant departure in the US' Trump-era China policy. Meng was detained when former President Donald Trump met Xi Jinping in Argentina for the G20 Summit.

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If Biden, Dems' \$3.5T cradle-to-grave welfare state happens here's what America will be like

With promises of "free" college, "free" child care, "free" Medicare dental and vision benefits, a new universal pre-K entitlement - and a president who says it's all paid for - what is there for Americans to worry about?

As Congress deliberates over another record-breaking spending bill, it's easy to get complacent about dollar amounts no one can comprehend. What really matters is what our lives will look like under a Biden economy compared to what we experienced in the pre-COVID Trump economy.

Let's fast forward five, six, even 10 years into the future. What do we get for the \$3.5 trillion of taxpayer money Democrats want to spend right now? According to the Wall Street Journal, we'll quickly come to wish the tab had only amounted to \$3.5 trillion. The Journal's Editorial Board estimates, once the budgetary gimmicks are exposed, the real cost will be closer to \$5.5 trillion.

We all remember how ObamaCare was supposed to make health care cheaper and more accessible. But 11 years later, data showed ObamaCare had more than doubled health insurance costs.

We can expect more of the same. The American Dental Association expects costs in its industry to go up once Medicare covers dental. That's because the program isn't means tested and reimbursements are low. Dentists will be expected to provide care at a loss to millions of Americans who can afford private plans or self-pay. To stay afloat, they'll need to make up the revenue elsewhere.

Ditto for child-care providers and community colleges. Don't be surprised if American colleges begin adopting some

of the same cost-saving strategies as European higher education - limiting who can major in lucrative fields, eliminating extracurricular activities, and providing only bare-bones campus facilities.

Without a doubt, we can expect state taxes to skyrocket within the next five years. These new entitlements are only covered for the first few years, after which states are expected to pick up millions of dollars of the tab. If your state doesn't have those millions, or if it has already raised taxes beyond what taxpayers can bear, you can expect to see steep cuts in education, transportation or public safety. Meanwhile, we shouldn't be surprised to see inflation continue as the debt grows exponentially. Furthermore, we know we're facing a hastening of Medicare and Social Security insolvency. Medicare is already expected to be insolvent by 2026 and Social Security by 2033. But with this bill, Medicare will be expected to cover the cost of dental and vision care - not just for the poor, but for every American older than 65. The high taxes necessary to maintain this cradle-to-grave welfare state will eventually slow the economy, curtail job creation and wage growth, and export profitable companies overseas. Instead of a glut of unfilled jobs, we'll see a glut of unemployed workers.

Europe gets around this problem by balancing their welfare state with low corporate taxes, deregulated markets and free trade - all without inheritance taxes and minimum wage laws. None of that is on the Democrats' policy agenda.

As always, we can expect to get more of what we reward and less of what penalize. As we reward participation in welfare programs with new entitlements and penalize participation in the economy with

high taxes, we can expect more people consuming resources and fewer people producing them. That's a recipe for economic stagnation. We should also expect to see partisans weaponize the IRS, local elections and the federal justice system. This bill provides nearly \$80 billion to help the IRS detect tax cheats, enabling sweeping new powers to surveil your bank account transactions. But this is the same agency that leaked tax return data to Pro Publica earlier this year, targeted conservative groups to influence an election, and "routinely skirted or ignored due process requirements when investigating taxpayers," according to a 2017 report from the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA). Crime is another likely outcome that has already begun to climb. The amnesty promised to illegal immigrants in this bill, combined with our open border policies, can only result in mass unvetted migration. We can expect to see, mixed among the huddled masses, drug cartels, human traffickers, felons and terrorists. Once they arrive, they can settle in sanctuary states where they can commit felonies without fear of prosecution and be released on cashless bail.

While Democrats have an insatiable desire for power by increasing spending, raising your taxes, and ultimately controlling all aspects of your life, the only thing they are really willing to cut (budget increase is less than inflation) is the Department of Defense.

I don't expect Americans to tolerate such a future. I have great faith in this nation to turn the tide in 2022. But just as ObamaCare has been almost impossible to dislodge, these new entitlements, once enacted, will not be easily reversed.

Someone is lying about the Afghanistan debacle



If you tuned in to see the hearing in the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing today - if you didn't you missed out - you may have been surprised to see Mark Milley sitting there. You remember Milley, he's the fleshy, hooded-eyed man who is the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is also a national disgrace, a living insult to the military he oversees. That's not an insult. It's objectively true. And yet somehow - despite the overwhelming evidence that Milley is dishonest, incompetent, partisan and dishonorable - he still has a highly prominent job. That's the amazing thing. And not only is Mark Milley still employed at the highest level, he is still lying, and doing so with his characteristic relish and enthusiasm. Today, for example, with an entirely straight face, Milley delivered an impassioned monologue about the importance of civilian control over the military. "This country doesn't want generals figuring out what orders we are going to accept and do, or not. That's not our job."

Oh really? Is that so Mark Milley? Isn't this the same Mark Milley who once illegally seized personal control of our country's nuclear arsenal? And then, when that wasn't sufficient, promised to tip off the government of China about future American military operations - and did all of this because he didn't like his boss, who unlike him, was a civilian elected by voters? Yes, it's the same Mark Milley, the one lecturing you about civilian control of the military.

It was all pretty amusing in a dark way, but it did make you wonder: what is this about? Why is Mark Milley saying something so obvious preposterous? It's got to be helping him in some way. And indeed it was helping him. What you watched in the Senate hearing today was pure blame-shifting. Joe Biden's foreign policy is a legitimate disaster. No one disputes that. Mark Milley wants you to know that none of it is his fault. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin wants you to know that too. So does the head of Central Command, Gen. McKenzie. All three of them want to make it crystal clear that the senile guy in the White House did this.



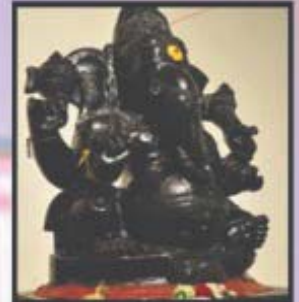
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Biden and his generals tell two very different stories about Afghanistan. Which one's true?

President Joe Biden and his top military officials seem to inhabit separate universes. In testimony Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark A. Milley, and Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, the head of U.S. Central Command, contradicted several of their commander in chief's assertions about his controversial decision to withdraw American forces from Afghanistan.

In an interview on Aug. 19, four days after Kabul fell, Biden denied that his top generals had urged him to keep at least 2,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. "No. No one said that to me," he said, adding a politician's classic wiggle words, "that I can recall."

But under oath on Tuesday, the senior military officials insisted that senior military officials had urged him to do so, and that Biden had heard them.

While both Gens. Milley and McKenzie declined to discuss their personal conversations with the president, Milley said he had been recommending since the fall of 2020 under President Trump that the U.S. keep between 2,500-3,500 troops in Afghanistan and that his opinion had "remained consistent throughout." Gen. McKenzie said that Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, the top U.S. general in Afghanistan, shared that view and that he, McKenzie, was "present" when Miller's opinion was discussed with Biden. "I am confident that the president heard all the recommendations and listened to him very thoughtfully," he said.

Calling the president "an honest and forthright man," Austin, Biden's appointee as secretary of defense, nevertheless

contradicted Biden's claim. "Their input was received by the president and considered by the president, for sure," he said.

In response to the testimony, White House press secretary Jen Psaki scrambled to square a circle. During a post-hearing press briefing, she said Biden's military advisers were "split" on whether the U.S. should maintain a troop presence there. But she declined to say who had urged Biden not to keep a residual force on the ground. The advice about troop levels was only one of several issues about which Biden's top military brass seemed to contradict his claims. While Biden called the evacuation of 124,000 U.S. citizens and Afghans and the withdrawal of U.S. forces an "extraordinary success," Milley called it a "logistical success, but a strategic failure." Milley suggested, however, that Biden was not the only president responsible for the failure of what critics call the "forever war" to accomplish its ever-expanding mission, despite \$2 trillion worth of investment and 20 years of military training and nation-building.

"Outcomes in a war like this - an outcome that is a strategic failure, the enemy is in charge in Kabul - there's no way else to describe that," Milley said. "That outcome," he added, "is the cumulative effect of 20 years, not 20 days."

In other words, four presidents share some blame for the inability to see that no amount of money could turn Afghanistan into Switzerland and that no amount of military training would inspire the Afghan forces to keep fighting an enemy that seemed to have endless strategic patience. The military men also contradicted Biden's claim that the U.S. could leave Afghanistan

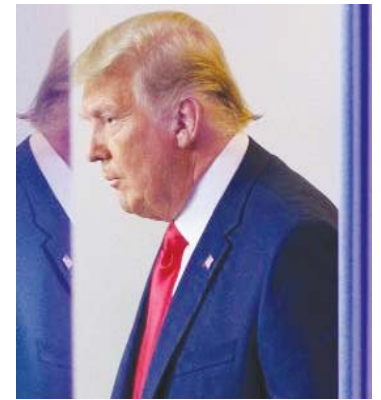
with little increase risk of terrorism because al Qaeda and the Islamic State had been defeated. Both terrorist groups were alive, if not well, they testified, and America's withdrawal had increased the risk of an eventual terrorist strike on the U.S. homeland.

McKenzie said there was a "very real possibility" that al Qaeda would reconstitute itself within 12 to 36 months. Milley and McKenzie also agreed that the withdrawal had made the counterterrorism mission "much harder, but not impossible." At times, the generals seemed more critical of President Trump than Biden due to the U.S. withdrawal agreement that the former made with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, in early 2020.

They lambasted the initial deal, saying that the failure to include the Afghan government in negotiations, as well as Biden's determination to proceed with the withdrawal despite the Taliban's violations of six of the seven commitments it made had seriously undermined the Afghan government's credibility and the Afghan military's morale and determination to keep fighting.

Although Afghan forces had suffered between 60,000 to 70,000 casualties in two decades of war, they said, the withdrawal of American advisers three years ago, and more recently Biden's determination to withdraw by a firm date of Sept. 11 - a "tragic mistake," Milley called it -- and finally, the withdrawal of American contractors, troops and air support had all helped trigger the collapse of the military's morale and its melting away in 11 days.

What Arizona's sham audit really taught us



At long last, the sham "audit" of the 2020 election results in Arizona found President Joe Biden beat former President Donald Trump in Maricopa County. Despite this confirmation, the Cyber Ninjas, a novice group tasked with conducting the review, has drafted a report rife with misinformation that could continue to sow distrust in the US election system. Many of those who supported the "audit" have expressed extremely unhealthy views about politics and the election processes in this country, to put it lightly. Last month, Arizona state Sen. Wendy Rogers tweeted, "I would like to know if we have enough solitary confinement cells in Arizona available for the entire Maricopa Board of Supervisors" after the chairman condemned the partisan audit. Meanwhile, Cyber Ninjas CEO Doug Logan appeared in a movie that pushes Trump's big lie that the 2020 election was "stolen."

This kind of extreme rhetoric, coupled with the web of lies and conspiracy theories, is increasingly spreading from the fringes of the Republican Party to the mainstream. And while Trump and his supporters failed to overturn the 2020 elections, charges of election fraud have already become a dangerous blueprint for the future, threatening to undermine our free and fair elections and stoke the potential for violence throughout the country.

We saw this on January 6, when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol while Congress was certifying the results of the presidential election. While several Republicans initially condemned the attack, members of the party went on to downplay what happened.



Pakistani forces kill 10 militants in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa raid

(News Agencies)- according to a media report. Pakistani security forces on Tuesday killed 10 militants, including four insurgent commanders, in a planned raid in restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's South Waziristan district, (ISPR). Firing began on both

sides and 10 terrorists, explosive devices), including four insurgent commanders, were killed. A large quantity of weapons and ammunition were recovered, it added. "All the killed terrorists remained actively involved in planting IEDs (improvised

conducting fire raids, and target killing of innocent civilians. These terrorists were planning to conduct more acts of terrorism inside the South Waziristan district," the Army statement read.

Fumio Kishida elected as new leader of Japan's ruling LDP, set to be next PM

(News Agencies)-Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) elected ex-foreign minister Fumio Kishida as their new leader on Wednesday.

Kishida beat his rival Taro Kono in a close race. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga had earlier decided to step down from office. Two woman candidates Sanae Takaichi and Seiko Noda had dropped out of the race. The country is set to go to the polls later this year. Kishida, 64, is widely known as a consensus builder. The former banker will have to address the economic problems in the country after it suffered due to the pandemic. Kishida has reportedly proposed a spending package to boost the economy. The new LDP leader had promised a more aggressive policy to beat the virus and proposed mass vaccination for citizens. Kishida had said the country needed to produce oral drugs and that the government needs to speed up efforts to overcome the virus.

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Woman who claimed to be next prophet sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan

(News Agencies)-A woman school teacher was sentenced to death in Pakistan after she claimed to be the next prophet after Prophet Muhammad. The district and sessions court



also slapped a fine of PKR 5,000 (\$29) on Salma Tanvir, principal of a private school in Nishtar Colony.

Additional district and sessions Judge Mansoor Ahmad observed in the verdict that Tanvir committed blasphemy by

denying that Prophet Muhammad was not the last prophet of Islam.

Lahore police in 2013 had registered a blasphemy case against Tanvir on the complaint of a local cleric. She was

have taken the fact into account. However, a report by a medical board of the Punjab Institute of Mental Health submitted to the court by the prosecution said, "The suspect was fit to stand trial as she was not mentally deranged."

Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws and their prescribed punishments are considered extremely severe. At least 1,472 people were charged under the blasphemy law in Pakistan since 1987.

People accused of blasphemy are usually deprived of the right to counsel of their choice, as most lawyers refuse

to take up such sensitive cases.

The blasphemy laws are colonial-era legislation but they were amended by former dictator General Ziaul Haq which increased the severity of prescribed punishments.

With rivals on mind, China flaunts new sophisticated arsenal in airshow



(News Agencies)-With an eye on rivals, China on Tuesday flaunted its sophisticated airpower in the much-awaited airshow.

In the southern coastal city of Zhuhai, the country's biggest airshow is being held, where it showed surveillance drones and jets.

The airshow has been closely watched by several countries around the world, including the adversaries of the Beijing. The show is coming at a time when tensions are high in South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. It is also a part of China's push to meet

the 2035 deadline to retool its military for modern warfare. The CH-6, a prototype of a new surveillance drone, which can also carry out attacks, was among the tech unveiled on Tuesday.

According to open-source intelligence agency Janes, the drone can carry missiles and is designed for surveillance and strike operations. The WZ-7 high-altitude drone for border reconnaissance and maritime patrol, and the J-16D fighter jet, which can jam electronic equipment, were also displayed in the show.

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'Strategic weapon':



North Korea says it test-fired new hypersonic missile

North Korea fired its newly developed hypersonic missile, state news media KCNA reported on Wednesday, the latest in a series of new weapons tested by the reclusive state.

The projectile North Korea fired off its east coast on Tuesday was a newly developed hypersonic missile, state news media KCNA reported on Wednesday, the latest in a series of new weapons tested by the reclusive state.

North Korea fired the missile towards the sea off its east coast, South Korea's military said, as Pyongyang called on the United States and South Korea to scrap their "double standards" on weapons programmes to restart diplomatic talks.

The development of the weapon system increases North Korea's defence capabilities, KCNA said, describing the hypersonic missile as "strategic weapon".

North Korea has been steadily developing its weapons systems amid an impasse over talks aimed at dismantling its nuclear and ballistic missile arsenals in return for US sanctions relief.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not inspect the launch, according to the report.

"In the first test-launch, national defence scientists

confirmed the navigational control and stability of the missile," the report said.

It said the missile, called Hwasong-8, performed to its technical targets "including the guiding maneuverability and the gliding flight characteristics of the detached hypersonic gliding warhead."

The Hwasong series missiles use liquid propellant engines, according to Ankit Panda, a senior fellow at the US-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"This is the first test of a liquid propellant missile in North Korea since November 2017," he said in a post on Twitter. between the neighbours can be assured, following South Korean President Moon Jae-in's call for a declaration to formally end the 1950-1953 Korean War.

The denuclearisation negotiations, initiated between former US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in 2018, have stalled since 2019.

The two Koreas both test fired ballistic missiles on

Sept 15, part of an arms race in which both nations have developed increasingly sophisticated weapons while efforts prove fruitless to get talks going on defusing tensions.

On Tuesday, North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), the isolated state's rubber-stamp parliament, met to discuss national economic policy, youth education, and other issues, state media reported in a separate dispatch.

The North's parliament rarely meets and usually serves to approve decisions on issues such as governing structures and budgets that have been created by the state's powerful Workers' Party, members of which form the vast majority of the assembly.

North Korea has not reported any confirmed Covid-19 cases, but has imposed crippling border closings, banned most international travel and severely restricted movement inside the country, seeing the pandemic as a matter of national survival.

US grants licenses for more aid flow to Afghanistan despite sanctions

The United States on Friday further paved the way for aid to flow to Afghanistan despite US sanctions on the Taliban, who seized control of the country last month, issuing general licenses amid concern that Washington's punitive measures could compound an unfolding humanitarian crisis.

The US Treasury Department said it issued two general licenses,

one allowing the US government, NGOs and certain international organizations, including the United Nations, to engage in transactions with the Taliban or Haqqani Network - both under sanctions - that are necessary to provide humanitarian assistance. The second license authorizes certain transactions related to the export and re-export of food, medicine and medical devices.

"Treasury is committed to facilitating the flow of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan and other activities that support their basic human needs," Andrea Gacki, director of the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, said in the statement. She added that Washington will continue to work with financial institutions, NGOs and international

organizations to ease the flow of agricultural goods, medicine and other resources while upholding sanctions on the Taliban, Haqqani Network and others. The United Nations said that at the start of the year more than 18 million people - about half of Afghanistan's population - require aid amid the second drought in four years. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said last week that

Afghanistan is on "the verge of a dramatic humanitarian disaster" and has decided to engage the Taliban in order to help the country's people. US President Joe Biden's administration has said it is committed to allowing humanitarian work in Afghanistan to continue despite Washington listing the Taliban as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist group.



Our friendship with India and China remains of 'paramount importance' in conduct of our foreign policy: Nepal at UN

(News Agencies)-Nepal's friendship with both neighbours, India and China, remains of "paramount importance" in the conduct of its foreign policy, the country's new foreign minister Narayan Khadka has said at the high-level 76th United Nations General Assembly.

Addressing the General Debate of the UNGA's final day on Monday, Khadka said that Nepal's worldview is shaped by its adherence to the principle of 'amity with all and enmity with none'.

The government of Nepal led by prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is "committed to conduct the foreign policy on the basis of sovereign equality, mutual respect, and mutual benefit and remains engaged with all friendly countries in the wider international community," he said.

"Our friendship with both of our neighbours, India and China, remains of paramount importance in the conduct of our foreign policy based on the principles of Panchsheel - five principles of peaceful co-existence, derived from the teachings of Lord Buddha, the enlightened son of Nepal," he said.

The relevance of these principles as a framework for interstate relations cannot be overstated in the present context, Khadka, who was appointed as Nepal's foreign minister on September 22, said. "Principles and purposes of the UN Charter, non-alignment, international law and norms of world peace form the basis of our foreign policy," he said.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar

had met Khadka on the sidelines of the UNGA session here on Sunday and tweeted, "Pleased to welcome my new Nepali colleague, Dr. Narayan Khadka. Agreed that we should work together closely to take our special relationship forward."

Last week, Jaishankar had said he looks

to food security to mass migration to political radicalism and extremism," he said.

He said that under the cumulative impact of all these factors, "we are experiencing new ways of life in the midst of confusion and uncertainty. We see conflicts in different parts of the



forward to working with Khadka as he congratulated him on his appointment. Khadka told the General Assembly that "we live in troubled times" and asserted that there has been a dramatic shift in geopolitics and geo-economics in the post-Cold War era posing unprecedented challenges on all fronts.

"The world's economic center of gravity is shifting decisively towards Asia, centered on the economic growth of China and India. At the same time, the world is becoming more complicated and polarised, with transnational challenges ranging from terrorism to climate change

world, these conflicts are more within nations than between nations. This has given rise to identity politics. Nations find themselves increasingly divided along lines of race, ethnicity, gender and religion," he said.

He called on the international community to find a "common ground" and practice tolerance and harmony to confront these unimaginable problems. "My delegation considers that democracy and multilateralism have no alternative to overcome the stresses and strains of the day. It is also the best antidote to the risk of civil conflict in

ethnically diverse societies," he said.

Addressing world leaders, Khadka also expressed gratitude to India and China for their support to the Himalayan nation in the fight against the pandemic.

"In Nepal, saving lives, strengthening the health system, and pursuing economic recovery and transformation underpin our efforts to build a sustainable and resilient recovery. Despite constraints and challenges to access Covid-19 vaccines, we have been able to vaccinate close to 20 per cent of our population.

"We remain grateful to our immediate neighbours-India and China for their support in fighting the Covid crisis," he said and also thanked "friendly countries" like the United States, Britain, Japan and others for providing vaccines, critical medical equipment, and medicines in Nepal's fight against the pandemic.

Condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, Nepal denounced all activities aimed to fuel social discord, communal conflicts, and intolerance.

"There is a need of robust global cooperation to effectively implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, to combat and control financing of terrorism, and to fight the organised trans-border crimes. This underlines the urgency for conclusion of a comprehensive convention against terrorism," Khadka said.

Khadka also termed as "worrisome" new signs of arms race through modernisation of nuclear arms, and weaponisation of outer space among big powers.



Modi in America

Why China dominates Quad talks

The Quad meeting in the US involving the head of states of the four countries is the second summit-level meeting of the leaders in little over six months. But why were Quad nations forced to collaborate on China-centric agenda? Read on to know more.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US for the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is being analysed more in terms of Quad talks than the UN conference. At the centre of the Quad talks is China.

Quad stands for Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, what India describes as a "plurilateral" arrangement for addressing the strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific region.

The group was conceived in 2007 but it got a serious attention of Quad leaders only around 2017 with China asserting its dominance in South China Sea, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean region, and also along the borders with India.

The Quad meeting in the US involving the head of states of the four countries is the second summit-level meeting of the leaders in little over six months. But why were Quad nations forced to collaborate on China-centric agenda?

CHINA'S STREAK OF CHALLENGING SOVEREIGNTY World War II was a watershed event for nation-state building across the globe. Colonial powers withdrew from scores of nations recognising their territorial sovereignty. Communist China emerged around the same time and announced its arrival with a major sovereign transgression in Tibet. Since then, China's streak of challenging sovereignty has continued.

India is one of the victims of China's state policy of transgressing sovereignty of other countries. Besides India, China has territorial disputes with at least 17 other countries, and in all these cases China is the aggressor. China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific region is both territorial and maritime. It has challenged the sovereignty over land of countries such as India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos and Mongolia besides annexing Tibet. On seas and oceans, China has disregarded sovereignty of countries such as Taiwan, Philippines, Japan, North Korea (a friend of China), South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Singapore. In fact, Singapore's prime minister wrote an article in 2019 arguing that America's military presence in the Indo-Pacific region was "vital" for

peace.

The US has no territorial claim in the region but it is hugely invested for geo-strategic reasons in the Indo-Pacific. The US has undertaken several naval operations in the South China Sea to assert the international understanding of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs). China claims sole sovereignty over the South China Sea.

CHINA 'PUNISHES' ERRANT NATIONS, INCLUDING AUSTRALIA

In the days of the Cold War, the US and the Russia (erstwhile USSR) tried to 'lure' their allies with financial and military aid. In contrast, China punishes its allies, it considers as errant even for expressing disagreement over a Chinese policy. Australia has become a classic example. For long, Australia did not give much weightage to the Quad as its ties with China were deep. China emerged as a major source of revenue becoming the biggest export destination from Australia. However, their relation practically broke down after Australia questioned China for its handling of the coronavirus outbreak in 2019 and demanded last year a fair probe into the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic. China not only responded in a

harsh tone to Australian political leadership but banned key imports from Australia. Reports said the China's blacklist of Australian imports were not issued in an official notification but "delivered verbally to commodity traders".

It stopped import of coal, copper, timber, barley, sugar, wine and even lobster from Australia. Exceptions were iron ore and natural gas, possibly because a ban on these items might have impacted China's manufacturing hubs. As Australia complained about it, a Chinese spokesperson justified China's 'punishing act' saying, "We will not allow any country to reap benefits from doing business with China while groundlessly accusing and smearing China and undermining China's core interests based on ideology."

CHINA'S SUPPORT TO FAILED, ROGUE STATES

While the entire international community tried to build pressure on Pakistan for reversing its state policy of sponsoring terrorism and a terror financing watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), moved to constrict availability of fund to Pakistan over its support for terrorism, China came to its rescue multiple times.

China slams Quad ahead of 1st in-person summit in US, says 'doomed to fail'



Ahead of the first in-person Quad summit among the leaders of the US, India, Japan and Australia in Washington, China on Friday criticised the grouping, saying the formation of "exclusive closed cliques" runs against the trend of times, and it is "doomed to fail". At the invitation of US President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his counterparts Scott Morrison of Australia and Yoshihide Suga of Japan have gathered in the American capital for the first-ever in-person Quad summit at the White House on Friday.

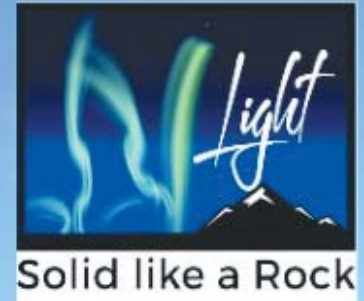
Asked for China's reaction as the Quad summit is expected to address the challenges and rising risks Beijing poses in the Indo-Pacific region, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told the media that the quadrilateral grouping should not target any third country and its interests.

"China always believes that any regional cooperation mechanism should not target a third party or harm its interests. Seeking exclusive closed cliques against a third country runs against the trend of the times and aspiration of countries in the region. It will find no support and is doomed to fail," he said.

Defending the Chinese claims in the South China Sea, Zhao said: "China is a builder of world peace, contributor of global development and upholder of world order". "The growth of China means the growth for peace and stability in the world and China's contribution to peace, stability and development in Asia Pacific is therefore all to see.

"Relevant countries should do more that is conducive to solidarity and cooperation with the four countries in the region," he added.

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Taliban warn US against operating drones over Afghan airspace



The Taliban have warned the United States against operating drones over Afghan airspace.

The Taliban have asked the United States to stop operating drones in Afghan airspace, saying it needs to follow obligations to prevent negative consequences.

Terming the US move a breach of national security, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid asked all the nations to act in accordance with mutual

obligations to prevent consequences.

According to a statement issued by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) on Tuesday, all countries are the sole owners of the territorial and air sovereignty of their states under international law." Therefore, the Islamic Emirate, as the sole legal entity of Afghanistan, is the guardian of

Afghanistan's land and airspace".

"But we recently saw United States violating all international rights, law and United States' commitments to the Islamic Emirate in Doha, Qatar, as Afghanistan's sacred airspace is being invaded by US drones. These violations must be rectified and prevented," it added.

Mujahid called on all countries,

especially the United States, to act in accordance with mutual obligations to prevent any negative consequences.

Earlier this month, the US military backtracked from its defence of the drone strike in Kabul that took place last month targeting ISIS-K terrorists that killed 10 civilians, including seven children, and apologised for the

"tragic mistake".

In light of the findings of a probe into the August 29 strike, General Frank McKenzie, the commander of the US Central Command, also said it was "unlikely that the vehicle and those who died in the drone strike were associated with ISIS-K or were a direct threat to US forces".

Overseas spectators banned from attending Beijing winter Olympics in 2022

All domestic and international Games participants and workforce will be tested daily for Covid-19, the Beijing 2022 Organising Committee told the International Olympic Committee in a presentation.

(News Agencies)- Overseas fans have been banned from attending the Beijing 2022 winter Olympics while all unvaccinated athletes will be quarantined for 21 days ahead of the games, scheduled to begin on February 4. Tickets for the games will only be sold to mainland residents, which means domestic spectators will be allowed to watch the games following the Summer Olympics in Tokyo, which was mostly played out in empty stadiums. All domestic and international Games participants and workforce will be tested daily for Covid-19, the Beijing 2022 Organising Committee told the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in a presentation on Wednesday.

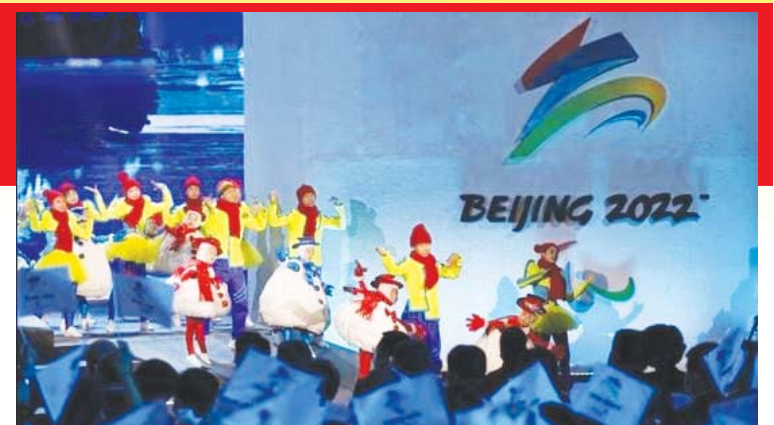
The winter multi-sport event, being held in China for the first time, is scheduled to take place from February 4-20 in Beijing and towns in the neighbouring Hebei province.

Beijing will be the first capital to hold both the Winter and Summer Olympics, which was held in the Chinese capital in August, 2008.

The IOC, while acknowledging the disappointment among international fans unable to attend the games, welcomed the decision to have Chinese spectators after the Tokyo 2020 summer Olympics in July were held with empty stadiums due to Covid-19 precautions.

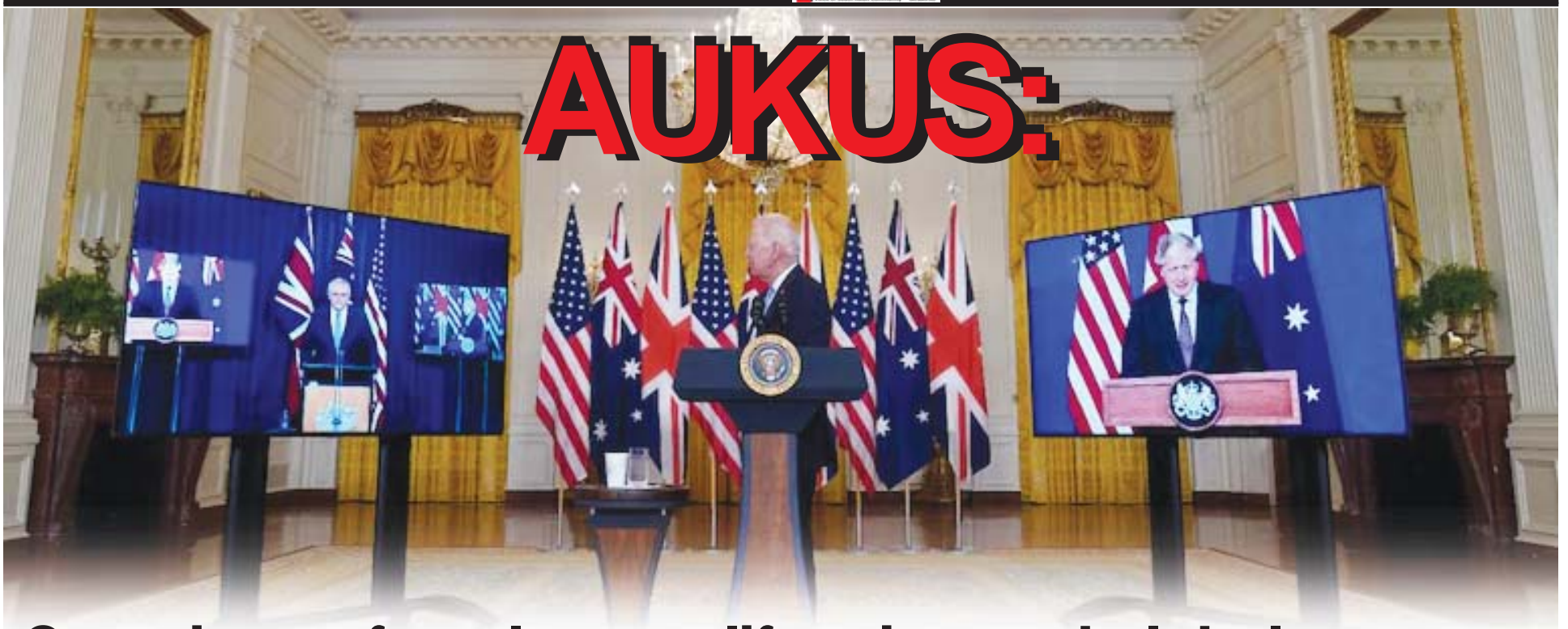
The presentation by China laid down the anti-Covid-19 protocols to be implemented ahead of the

games. "All athletes and games participants who are fully vaccinated will enter a closed-loop management system upon arrival. Games participants who are not fully vaccinated will have to serve a 21-day quarantine upon arrival in Beijing," the Xinhua news agency quoted the organising committee as saying in the presentation. "All vaccines recognised by World Health Organization or related international organisations, or approved officially by countries or regions concerned will be accepted. Athletes who can provide a justified medical exemption will have their cases considered," the committee said. "All domestic and international Games participants and workforce in the closed-loop



management system will be subject to daily testing," it said. "As for the audience, Beijing 2022 organisers made it clear that tickets will be sold exclusively to spectators residing in China's mainland who meet the requirements of Covid-19 countermeasures," the organising committee added. According to the rules, from 23 January until the end of the Paralympics, a closed-loop management system will be implemented to ensure the safe

delivery of the Games. "This closed-loop management system will cover all Games-related areas, including arrival and departure, transport, accommodation, catering, competitions, and the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. Within the closed loop, participants will be allowed to move only between Games-related venues for training, competitions, and work. A dedicated Games transport system will be put in place," the committee said.



Questions of nuclear proliferation and global percepts

The details of the first initiative of AUKUS--formed by the UK, the US, and Australia-- to deliver a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, raised the hackles of China, while France bristled with indignation.

In September 2021, the English-speaking hegemony of international politics announced that they have banded together to form a pact, a security pact to counter the ever-rising might of the so-called Chinese dragon - the People's Republic of China.

Together, Australia, the UK and the US formed the AUKUS with the objective of dominating the South China Sea in particular and the Asia-Pacific region in general. Along with the announcement of AUKUS came the details of the first initiative of AUKUS - to deliver a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, and that set the cat amongst the pigeons from Beijing to Paris. China had its hackles up and France bristled with indignation; the former saw this as another attempt by the western powers (read US & UK) trying to bulldoze their presence into regions which China considers its backyard, and the latter took this as a sneaky stab in the back by their oldest ami - États-Unis d'Amérique (read USA).

But let us keep aside the individual noise and clamour of indignation that led to Presidents Biden and Macron kissing and making up, issuing statements that varied ever so slightly in English and French translations but saved national face amongst their respective domestic audiences. Let us, instead, on the shoulder of knowledgeable giants,

take a deeper dive into AUKUS and see what are the pros and cons of this getting together by pals the US, the UK and Australia. Let's begin behind the Great Wall where on 24th September, Xinhua reported that AUKUS has sparked fierce criticism and widespread concerns over its impact on regional security in the Asia-Pacific region and on global non-proliferation. It went on to list several sources, individual, national, and institutional who are purportedly critical of the pact called AUKUS.

Two of the national interests that Xinhua quoted were Malaysia and Indonesia, who are concerned because what the AUKUS and PRC may cook will finally spoil the broth in the vicinity of these two nations in particular. Even Singapore, considered Australia's best chum in the region, has furrowed its brows; if nation-states have brows, because the worry in the region is obviously nuclear.

On 15th December 1995, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations - ASEAN - signed the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty) as a commitment to preserve the Southeast Asian region as a region free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. None of the ASEAN member countries incidentally are nuclear-capable; so, while ASEAN well wants South East

Asia to be a nuclear weapons-free zone that has not stopped the US, China, the UK, and France to send in their Nuclear weapons-loaded ships on 'strategic' or 'friendly' jaunts in the region. Now that Australia will have a nuclear-powered fleet of subs, they would also add to the belligerent chatter in S E Asia, an added reason for ASEAN to be unhappy about AUKUS; they don't want a US-China arms rivalry accidentally setting off an incident in their territory. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, traditional 'unfriendlies' of China, are the countries in the Asia Pacific region that have reason to support the AUKUS pact. The Foreign Minister of Japan, Toshimitsu Motegi, welcomed the security cooperation between Australia and the United States and the launch of AUKUS. (No mention of UK's cooperation as the 3rd wheel in the pact).

It is also interesting that Australia's next-door neighbour and equally English-speaking New Zealand has not been made part of AUKUS. The Labour government of Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand has faced criticism in the past for not being critical enough of China. In July 2020, when two Labour MPs of Chinese extraction announced their retirement from politics within days of each other, there were reports that the resignations came after intelligence agencies

flagged concerns over the MPs' relationship with the Chinese Government. Now reacting to the announcement of AUKUS Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, reiterating New Zealand's strong anti-nuclear stance, said Australia's nuclear submarines will not be allowed in New Zealand waters.

The reaction to AUKUS in mainland Europe has been mostly negative; in general, there was a sense of disappointment that the US under President Biden was still erratic as might have been expected when President Trump was in charge. There has been anger over the way the French deal got scuttled and the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council sharply condemned what they saw as a snub for the Union, not just for France. With this, Europe is coming to realise that for the US, security of Asia-Pacific will be taking precedence in the times to come. German sentiments have been that France had been complacent and that the French had relied on the fact that Australia had no alternative till Canberra came up with one that caught the French completely unawares.

Russia issued a statement that said, "Before forming a position, we must understand the goals, objectives, means. These questions need to be answered first. There is little information so far." In Australia, the reaction to AUKUS has ranged from

exuberance to one of concern; political opinion has been cautious because in matters of trade and commerce, there is much at stake. Australia relies heavily on business with China; politics aside, the country is Australia's largest two-way trading partner in goods and services, accounting for 31 per cent of Australia's trade with the world.

To push through AUKUS, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison needed the support of the opposition Australian Labor Party (ALP), and apparently, ALP imposed conditions for its support of the agreement - a) that no civil nuclear industry established b) that there would be no nuclear weapons and c) Australia would not infringe its obligations under the Nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Prime Minister Morrison is said to have met all the conditions but even as Australia celebrated AUKUS, several experts are pointing out that some transfer of nuclear submarine technology to Australia is bound to take place and that would be circumventing the NPT. This and there are other clauses too that might get eroded with time as AUKUS delivers nuclear-powered submarines to Australia. With this Australia will become the first non-nuclear-weapon state to remove nuclear material from the inspection system of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

World Maritime Day 2021: Tributes pour in for seafarers who kept supply lines running amid Covid-19

World Maritime Day 2021 is being observed across the globe on September 30 in a tribute to the professionalism and sacrifice of the two million seafarers who served the world's merchant navy fleet even amid the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic situation. During these dire times - shipping played a major role in transporting vital medical supplies, food, and other basic goods that are significant for Covid-19 response and recovery. However, according to the United Nations, the seafarers themselves sacrificed aplenty - being stranded at sea for days as their contracts kept on being extended by many months. The 2021 theme for the 'World Maritime Day' respects the sacrifice made by the navy men: 'Seafarers at the core of shipping's future.' World Maritime Day 2021: Theme

The theme for the 2021 World Maritime Day is 'seafarers at the core of shipping's future.' According to the United Nations, this year's theme "reflects a clear need to raise awareness of seafarers' crucial role in world trade and increase their visibility." The world has seen how the seafarers have dedicated their valuable time during the Covid-19 period to ensure that the global supply chains keep functioning to deliver vital goods throughout the pandemic. "This could not happen without the professionalism and dedication of the world's seafarers," the UN has observed. World Maritime Day 2021 will highlight the work of seafarers at the heart of the maritime industry, while also promote activities that delve into specific topics relevant to the role of the seafarer in safety, maritime security, environmental protection, and seafarers' well-being; and the future of seafaring against a backdrop of increased digitalization and automation.

World Maritime Day 2021: Significance

According to the United Nations, the international shipping industry consists more than 80 per cent of the aggregate global trade among people and communities across the world. "Shipping is the most efficient and cost-effective method of international transportation for most goods; it provides a dependable, low-cost

means of transporting goods globally, facilitating commerce and helping to create prosperity among nations and peoples," it

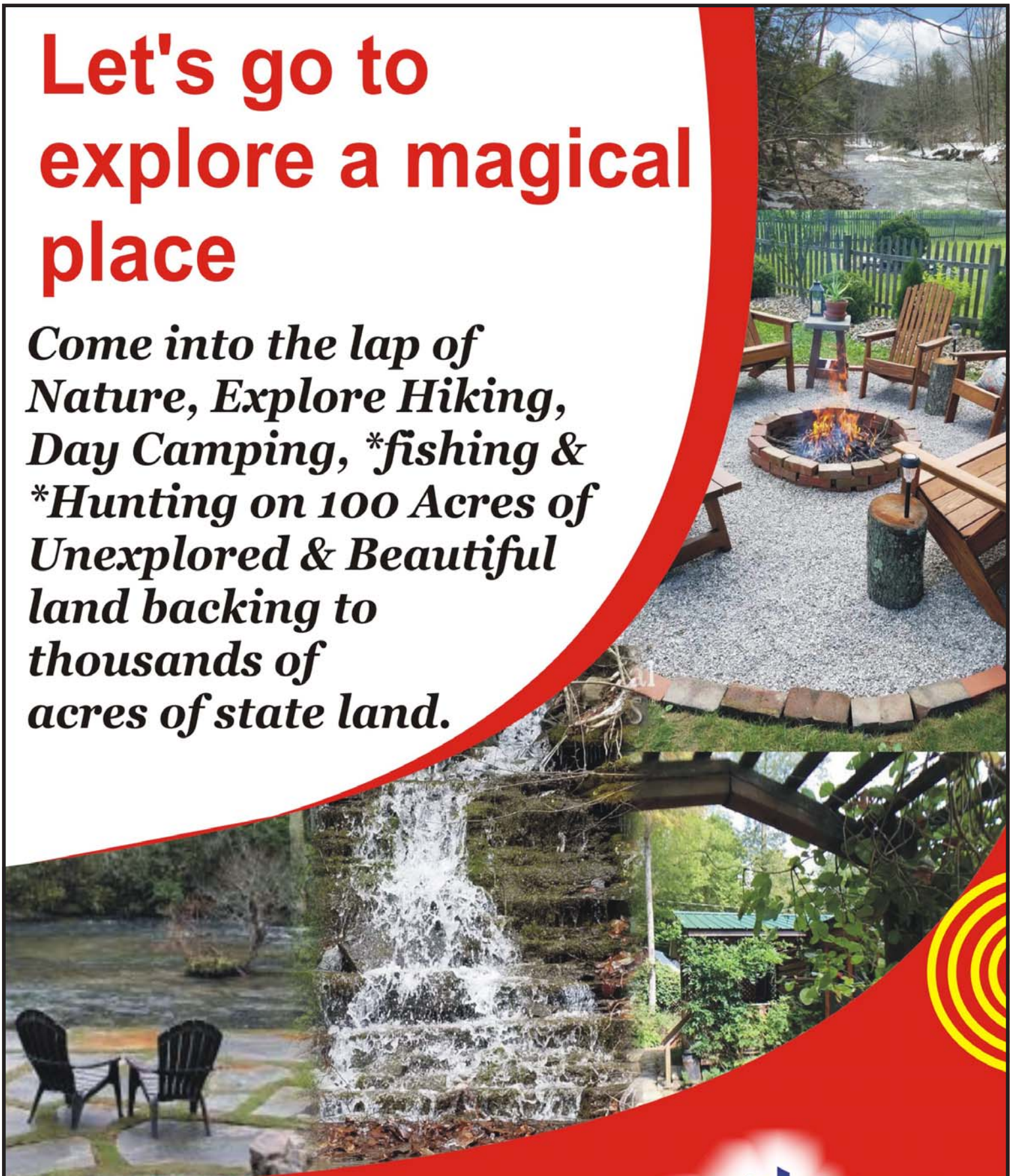
said. A safe and secure, as well as efficient, shipping industry is the backbone of successful maritime trade for any country

and the globe as a whole. It is also capable of containing pollution to a minimum, and is an essential component of

any programme for or future sustainable green economic growth in a sustainable manner.

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The workers who keep global supply chains moving are warning of a 'system collapse'

attending the United Nations General Assembly, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and other industry groups warned of a "global transport system collapse" if governments do not restore freedom of movement to transport workers and give them priority to receive vaccines recognized by the World Health Organization.

"Global supply chains are beginning to buckle as two years' worth of strain on transport workers take their toll," the groups wrote. The letter has also been signed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). Together they represent 65 million transport workers globally.

"All transport sectors are also seeing a shortage of workers, and expect more to leave as a result of the poor treatment millions have faced during the pandemic, putting the supply chain under greater threat," it added.

Guy Platten, secretary general of the ICS, said that worker shortages are likely to worsen towards the end of the year because seafarers may not want to commit to new contracts and risk not making it home for Christmas given port shutdowns and constant changes to travel

restrictions.

Fragile supply chains

That will heap pressure on stretched supply chains and could, for example, worsen current challenges with food and fuel supply in the United Kingdom. "The global supply chain is very fragile and depends as much on a seafarer [from the Philippines] as it does on a truck driver to deliver goods," added Stephen Cotton, ITF secretary general.

"The time has come for heads of government to respond to these workers' needs." When Karynn Marchal and her crew were told that they wouldn't be allowed to go on shore upon docking in Hokkaido, Japan it was a big hit to morale.

"None of us knew how long it would go on for," the 28-year old chief officer of a car-carrying ship told CNN Business. That was more than 18 months ago. Marchal - and hundreds of thousands of seafarers like her - have not been permitted shore leave since.

After weeks on board a ship, a couple of hours on shore provides much needed respite. But seafarers can only leave a vessel in order to travel elsewhere, usually to return home. Marchal considers herself "one of the luckier ones," because she has

at least been able to make it home to the United States.

"There are people who have been stuck at sea for over a year," she said.

Early in the pandemic, many seafarers agreed to extend their contracts by several months to keep supplies of food, fuel, medicine and other consumer goods flowing around the world. The grounding of planes and border closures had made it



almost impossible to move workers from one part of the world to another and to swap crews.

At the peak of the crisis in 2020, 400,000 seafarers were unable to leave their ships for routine changeovers, some working for as long as 18 months beyond the end of their initial contracts, according to the ICS.

Multiple vaccinations, repeated testing

While these numbers have improved, crew changes remain a major challenge. Some travel

restrictions were reimposed as a result of the coronavirus Delta variant and transport workers continue to face a myriad of vaccine and testing requirements just to do their jobs. Often these are imposed at a moment's notice, said Platten.

Inconsistent requirements mean that some seafarers have been vaccinated multiple times because some countries have approved only certain vaccines, according to Platten.

He knows of at least one seafarer who has received six vaccine doses, or three two-dose regimens. "It's an absolute nightmare. I can't understand why we don't have some sort of global standard," he told CNN Business.

Meanwhile, the unequal distribution of vaccines globally means that only about 25% to 30% of seafarers, many of who are from India and the Philippines, are fully vaccinated, according to Platten.

Coronavirus testing is also a challenge. In February, Germany unilaterally introduced mandatory PCR testing with no exemption for truck drivers, leading neighboring countries including Italy to impose similar restrictions to avoid having thousands of drivers

stranded in their own territory.

These measures affected thousands of truck drivers, particularly on the Brenner Pass between Italy and Austria, forcing them to queue for days in sub-zero temperatures with no food or medical facilities. The EU Digital Covid Certificate has since eased some of the pressure, but bottlenecks remain.

"Drivers have faced hundreds of border issues and blockades through the pandemic," said Umberto de Pretto, IRU secretary general. "Truck drivers, and the citizens and businesses that depend on the goods they move, pay a heavy price for misguided Covid restrictions that do not exempt transport workers," he added.

Marchal, the chief officer, and her crew had to do 10 Covid tests in seven days before they were allowed to enter the shipyard in Singapore for repairs last month. Maintenance was delayed by a week following a coronavirus outbreak at the port and the vessel is not expected to leave before mid October. In the meantime, the crew must remain on board the ship. Compulsory quarantines when disembarking and on arrival in their home countries can mean that pilots and seafarers spend a month of their vacation time stuck in a hotel room before they're able to see their families.

Saving Australia's Great Barrier Reef: Little fluffy clouds may help reduce coral bleaching

form clouds to protect the environmental treasure.

Researchers working on the so-called Cloud Brightening project said they use a turbine to spray microscopic sea particles to thicken existing clouds and reduce sunlight on the world's largest coral reef ecosystem located off Australia's northeast coast.

The water droplets evaporate leaving only tiny salt crystals which float up into the atmosphere allowing water vapour to condense around them, forming clouds, said Daniel Harrison, a senior lecturer at Southern Cross University, who runs the project.



"If we do it over an extended period of time for a few weeks to a couple of months when the corals are experiencing a marine

heatwave we can actually start to lower the water temperature over the Reef," said Harrison. The project had its second trial

in March, the end of the Southern Hemisphere summer when the Reef off Australia's northeast is at its hottest, gathering valuable data on the atmosphere when corals are at most risk of bleaching. A combination of light and warm water causes coral bleaching. By cutting light over the reef by 6% in summer, "bleaching stress" would be cut by 50% to 60% on the undersea ecosystem, Harrison said. But the benefits

of cloud brightening would lessen over time unless other measures slowed the march of climate change.

"If we do have really strong action on climate change then the modelling shows that the cloud brightening is enough to stop the reef declining and to actually see it through this period while we reduce our carbon emissions," he said. One of Australia's best-known natural attractions, the Reef came close to being listed as an endangered World Heritage Site by the United Nations, although it avoided the designation following lobbying by Australia.

Expanding the child tax credit was a Democratic dream come true -- but it could be on the chopping block

Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia, on making sure that enhanced child tax credit and the new monthly payment distribution method are extended until 2025 and its full refundability is made permanent by including those items in their party's massive economic package currently being negotiated and crafted by congressional Democrats and the White House.

It's one of a number of priorities Democrats' are seeking to include in their economic package but their wish list -- that includes free pre-k for all 3- and 4-year-olds, paid family leave, two years of free community college, expansion of Medicare benefits, provisions targeting climate change and more -- is running into the reality that all Democrats are not on board with the current price tag.

Democrats had originally settled on a top line of \$3.5 trillion but some Senate moderates including Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona have indicated they will not support a number that high. Democrats need all 50 senators on board to pass the legislation. As Democrats' work to find a topline number that is acceptable to all members, the jockeying has begun to see what may stay and what may go.

It's a reality President Joe Biden acknowledged during a recent White House meeting with a group of senators that included Booker. "He was clear that maybe ... if there's 15 great things in this, we may have to settle for 10," Booker said. "He was very real about the compromises that may have to be made."

Created by the Democrats' \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package in March, the enhanced credit provides families with up to \$3,600 a year for each child up to age 6 and \$3,000 for each one ages 6 to 17. Parents are receiving half the credit in monthly installments of up to \$300 for each younger child and \$250 for each older one, between July and December. They'll get the other half when they file their taxes in the spring.

The full beefed-up credit is available for heads of households earning up to \$112,500 a year and joint filers making up to \$150,000, after which it begins to phase out. For many families, the credit then plateaus at \$2,000 per child and starts to phase out for single parents earning more than \$200,000 or for married couples with incomes above \$400,000.

More low-income parents are eligible for the child tax credit because the relief package made it fully refundable. It had been only partially refundable -- leaving more than 26 million children unable to get the full credit because their families' incomes were too low, according to Treasury Department estimates. The changes are expected to lift millions of kids out of poverty and cut the child poverty rate by more than 40% in 2021, experts say. The expansion is estimated to cost about \$110 billion for the year. The House Ways and Means measure would cost about \$556 billion, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

"There's nothing bigger than this" Extending the child tax credit changes is on the list of priorities Democrats are considering cutting from their economic package, as they work to get to a spending number all Senate Democrats will support, according to two congressional Democratic sources familiar with the discussions.

Booker said he's frustrated he's having to plead his case to members of his own party.

"There's nothing bigger than this. I'm a guy that fights for a whole lot of issues. And I do believe in paid family leave...I want all of it. But if you just want to look at the impact of a child's life, this is the biggest thing that we're doing," he said.

"To me, it's a moral obscenity. Do we love our children or not? And love is not sentimentality. Love is saying we're going to be there for you," Booker added.

It's a sentiment shared by Warnock who also expressed

frustration there's even a possibility extending the child tax credit enhancements would not be included in the final package.

"I think it's par for the course in



Washington, because children don't have lobbyists," he said. "I'm going to fight for it," Warnock, told CNN. "This is a tax cut for working families. It will help 97% of families with children. I know firsthand the big difference it will make."

Booker said his top priority is making the child tax credit permanently fully refundable, which attacks poverty by allowing the poorest Americans to qualify for the full amount even if they have no income. He also wants to extend the enhanced payments and continue the new practice of issuing the credit in monthly installments sent directly to families through 2025. Citing Biden's support for the issue, Booker placed the odds of the child tax credit provisions being included in Democrats' final bill at "better than 50%, I think it's more likely than not."

Biden initially proposed extending the enhanced child tax credit monthly payments through 2025 and making permanent its full refundability in his \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan and the House Ways and Means Committee included those provisions in its piece of the House legislation. Booker, Warnock, Brown and Bennet have all spoken publicly about their support for those provisions in the Senate version of the bill. Negotiations within the party

But not all Senate Democrats are on the same page when it comes to if and how they will keep the child tax credit provisions in the final economic package. Manchin, a moderate Democrat from West Virginia, has said a work requirement may need to be added in order to receive the

expanded tax credit payments, an idea that proponents of the credit strongly disagree with, arguing data shows the credit can actually increase single mothers' workforce participation.

"I talk to him," Booker said of Manchin. "I don't know where he is right now. There's a lot coming at Joe and a lot of issues from the environmental issues to other things, so I don't know."

Manchin told CNN's Dana Bash on State of the Union on September 12 he supports child tax credit but did float the idea of means testing and capping the income levels that determine who receives the benefits at a lower number than where the cap currently sits.

"There's no work requirements whatsoever. There's no education requirements whatsoever for better skill sets. Don't you think, if we're going to help the children, that the people should make some effort?" Manchin said.

"Let's make sure that we're getting it to the right people," Manchin explained. "I can tell you, people that are working and working poor making every effort they can to get ahead in life, that's in that \$50,000 and below. I've got people that are making combined \$200(thousand) and \$300 (thousand) and more, up to \$400 (thousand), saying they're getting checks."

Like Manchin, others in the caucus have also raised concerns about who will be receiving the payments.

Sen. Angus King, an independent from Maine who

caucuses with the Democrats, told CNN while he thinks the child tax credit is "very important," he has "some reservations about what the income levels are and who it goes to."

The Republicans tax cut law of 2017 raised the income eligibility thresholds for the credit to \$200,000 for single parents and \$400,000 for married couples filing jointly, before phasing out. These changes are set to expire by the end of 2025. Prior to this, the phaseout thresholds were \$75,000 for single filers and \$110,000 for couples.

Booker he's willing to negotiate on the phase out number.

"I can understand that people that people may be wanting to govern it down a little bit. I'm open to that," he said.

Sen. Jon Tester, a moderate Democrat from Montana, said he thinks they "should try to negotiate to see if we can keep it in."

But Tester also made clear that at the end of the day Democrats "need enough votes to get the damn thing passed."

"If it's important enough leave it in, if it's not take it out," Tester said.

For those advocating for its inclusion in the bill, there is nothing more important.

"It's one of the best investments you can make in America right now. So to say this is about giving things away, no. This is a nation that says we're going to invest in ourselves, in our infrastructure, in education, but we want to invest in our children," Booker said.

PM Modi's eventful and 'Landmark' US visit

Harris on the need of protecting democracy and asked over Instagram if Modi understood the importance of the words.

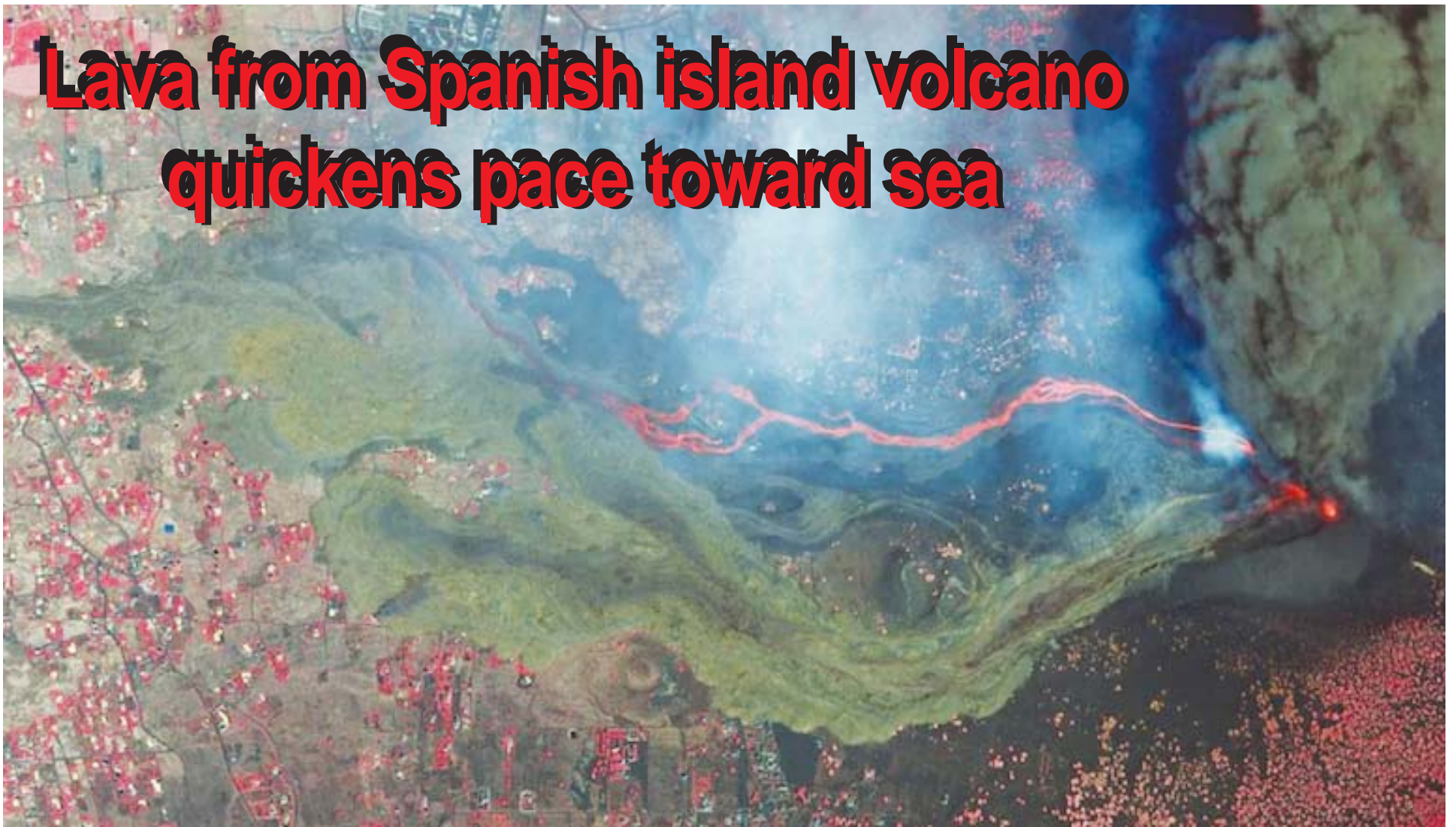
Nevertheless, the Indian PM received a cordial welcome from his party leaders and common supporters when he landed in Delhi. All the top brass present from the Bharatiya Janata Party applauded for making India, a global player.

None can deny that Narendra Modi's visit to US was extremely

at crucial time. He emphasised on four T's like Talent, Technology, Trade and Trusteeship as a part of the roadmap for the coming decade. He conveyed and strengthened India's position on terrorism and climate change, along with a proposed solution. The Indian PM's amicable meeting with US President can have a great positive impact to reinforce Indo-US ties.

By Susmita Ghosh

Lava from Spanish island volcano quickens pace toward sea



where people have been evacuated from, the Canary Islands emergency volcano response department said.

Officials have for days been expecting the lava to reach the Atlantic Ocean, but the eruption has been erratic. After calming

down on Monday, the volcano became more explosive again overnight.

When the molten rock eventually meets the sea water it could trigger explosions and the release of toxic gas, though authorities say they don't expect the slow-moving lava to create

large disruption on the coast.

La Palma, home to about 85,000, is part of the volcanic Canary Islands, an archipelago off northwest Africa. The island is roughly 35 kilometers (22 miles) long and 20 kilometers (12 miles) wide at its broadest point.

Lava from the eruption, which began on Sept. 19, has destroyed 589 buildings and 21 kilometers (13 miles) of roads on La Palma. The lava now covers 258 hectares (637 acres), mostly farmland, according to a European Union satellite monitoring agency.

No fatalities or serious injuries have been reported since the volcano's eruption, thanks to prompt evacuations. The volcano has so far spewed out more than 46 million cubic meters (1.6 billion cubic feet) of molten rock, according to the Canary Island Volcanology Institute.

Taliban recognise Afghans' goodwill towards India, want to tap into it: Ex-envoy Yogendra Kumar

Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan. Iran has joined the organisation earlier this month. 'Growing resentment among Central Asian nations towards China'

Happymon Jacob, associate professor of diplomacy and disarmament studies at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, who was also part of the panel, explained that China intends to use the SCO to promote issues like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) at the international level.

The BRI seeks to build rail, maritime and road links from Asia to Europe and Africa, in a revival of ancient Silk Road trading routes.

"Beijing will seek to use the SCO as a vehicle for promoting BRI. And for the moment, it seems to be succeeding," said Jacob.

Yogendra Kumar noted that while



there is no backlash from Central Asian countries against BRI, resentment is definitely growing. "More so, it (resentment towards BRI) gets combined with the Xinjiang situation, where some Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks are

in (China's) detention camps," he said.

Since 2019, China has come under scrutiny for its treatment of Uyghurs, a Turkic ethnic group, in Xinjiang province, and allegedly detaining people in

internment camps. Muslim ethnic minority groups like Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Kazakhs have also been subjected to alleged inhumane conditions. Neighbouring countries like Kazakhstan have seen spurts of

protests in which demonstrators demanded the release of detainees, some of whom were their relatives.

'India should work with Russia to pursue interests at SCO'

According to Jacob, the SCO will try to fill the power vacuum left by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. He also noted that the grouping has "anti-American streaks", which will only grow.

This will be tricky for India, which is an SCO member and is now a close ally of the US. But he had a suggestion for New Delhi.

"There is some resentment in Russia about the Chinese hegemonic behaviour in its neighbourhood. I think New Delhi would do well to use its relationship with Russia to pursue its interests at the SCO," Jacob said.

India, the US, Japan and Australia. US President Joe

Third-Time Lucky. The Air India Story And How It Finally Comes Full Circle



After a process that went round and round for decades, the Air India story comes full circle as India's national carrier is reportedly set to return to the house of the Tatas about nine years shy of the 100th anniversary of its launch. It is a journey marked by highs and lows as the airline that took India to the world (and brought the world to India) could find no takers for the longest time as it bled the national exchequer and ran into rough weather on everything from management to finances.

WHY IS THE GOVT SELLING AIR INDIA?

It is the third attempt to sell the national carrier and this time the Centre went all out, deciding to offload its entire stake lock, stock and barrel to the highest bidder.

"We've decided that Air India will be 100 per cent disinvested. Choice isn't between disinvestment and non-disinvestment, it's between disinvestment and closing down," Civil Aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri had said in March this year.

The airline remains a "first-rate asset" but there is a need to wipe the "slate clean" since it is now buckling under a cumulative debt of Rs 60,000 crore, the minister had said.

The story of AI's sale has witnessed several twists and turns since such a move was first put together in 2000. "There is no choice, we either privatise or we close the airline. We run a loss of Rs 20 crore every day despite Air India making money now. Because the mismanagement has resulted in a cumulative debt of Rs 60,000 crore," Puri said.

The Narendra Modi government had attempted in 2017, too, to sell the airline, but reports suggest that its decision then to hold on to 24 per cent stake had led to no buyers coming forward. Before that, the NDA government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee had in 2001 decided to sell 40 per cent stake in the airline. But while several major players are said to have shown an interest, the stake sale didn't eventually materialise.

WHAT DOES THE LATEST OFFER INVOLVE?

The government is divesting its 100 per cent ownership of Air India and Air India Express along with its 50 per cent stake in ground-handling company AISATS. The bids were invited on the enterprise value of the company, which includes short-term and long-term debt as well as any cash on the company's balance sheet.

According to reports, Air India will pass into the hands of its prospective owner with a debt of Rs 23,000 crore. The remaining debt of the company will be taken up by the government-owned Air India Asset Holdings Ltd (AIAHL) - which is a new entity that will hold the carrier's assets, such as the Air India building in Mumbai, Airlines House in Delhi, etc.

But the deal for the airline is not all about tallying losses since the buyer will at once get access to the enormous infrastructure owned by Air India along with the tremendous cachet it enjoys for being India's premier international carrier. That should instantly propel its new owners into the league of aviation royalty.

Control over Air India will automatically bring control of 4,400 domestic and 1,800

international landing and parking slots at domestic airports, as well as 900 slots at airports overseas.

One of these international slots can cost millions of dollars while the real estate Air India owns in India alone runs into the hundreds of crores. In a reply to Parliament earlier this year, the aviation ministry had said that the total value of Air India's fixed assets - comprising its land and buildings, aircraft fleet, etc. - in March 2020 was more than Rs 45,000 crore.

HOW DID IT GET HERE?

The history of the airline is older than that of independent India and goes back to 1932 when JRD Tata, the first Indian to earn a pilot's licence, decided to start an airmail service between Karachi and Bombay. He would soon expand services and, after World War II, launch passenger operations in 1948.

Even after the Indian government decided to nationalise the airline in 1953, JRD Tata remained at its helm, discharging a labour of love and ensuring the airline continued to give the best international carriers a run for their money. He would eventually be pushed out in 1978 due to differences with the Morarji Desai-led Janata Party government, though Indira Gandhi would later bring back, putting him on the Air India board.

Experts say that its present problems can be traced back to 2007, when the then UPA government effected a merger of Air India and Indian Airlines and placed a huge order for aircraft, which saw the airline's debt swell to tens of thousands of crores. By then, the domestic aviation sector had undergone a transformation but Air India could

not capitalise on the opportunity and saw the likes of Jet, IndiGo and other new entrants capture plum shares of the Indian aviation pie.

WHAT IS THE AIR INDIA LEGACY?

At a time when the world was far less connected than it is now, Air India gave wings to India's global aspirations and proved to be an iconic ambassador for the country's culture. It opened offices in prime locations across the major capitals and built its brand on Indian art and aesthetics to woo foreign patrons. In the process, it also came to become one of the biggest collectors of Indian art. Works by MF Hussain, VS Gaitonde, Anjolie Ela Menon, to name just a few, are still a part of its enviable inventory.

Its efforts to create a unique brand saw Air India executives also convince Salvador Dali to design an ashtray, about 250 pieces of which were given as a gift to its first-class flyers. Such was the lengths to which the airline was permitted to go that a baby elephant, reportedly with a mahout in tow, was dispatched to Spain at the painter's request. The pachyderm is said to have

ended up eventually at a zoo.

But nothing captures the emotional connect Air India holds for entire generations of Indians than the 'Maharajah' mascot. Conceived by Bobby Kooka, Air India's Commercial Director and created in collaboration with artist Umesh Rao, the Maharajah made his first appearance in 1946. He soon came to symbolise Indian hospitality, taking "Air India's sales and promotional messages to millions of travellers across the world".

The airline also has a few firsts and records to its name. In 2017, it said it had become the first airline to fly around the world with an all-woman crew. In 1990, it entered the Guinness World Record for the largest evacuation conducted by a civil airline, operating more than 450 flights in 59 days to airlift over 1 lakh Indians from Kuwait during the Iraq War. Going private also raises the question of where the government will now turn when a need arises to evacuate Indians at short notice. And what about the aircraft for the user of dignitaries like the President and PM?





Air India: The Brand and Burden of Legacy

As Air India prepares itself for sale, the successful bidder has a tough flight path ahead. In all likelihood, the brand will continue. Yet that also carries with it the burden of legacy. A legacy that-if you go back long enough-speaks of a glorious past. A past with extremely high levels of service, luxurious cabins and a golden age of flying. But also a legacy that in the more recent past speaks of less-than-satisfactory levels of service, cabins screaming for upgrades, a bureaucratic setup and general malaise. This contradiction will exist in the traveler's mind and will inform traveler expectations. And for the most part, it will negatively impact the willingness to pay a premium. To overcome this, continuing with the brand will mean refreshing the brand and nudging the traveler towards positive associations. The burden of legacy will have to be expertly managed.

For airlines, the concept of a brand over the last two decades has diminished. This, as the experience has become more commoditized and the willingness to capture a premium has become even more challenging. Given that

a brand at its core is a set of associations which translates into a higher willingness to pay, a high mindshare and ideally a lower cost-most airlines have not been very successful in developing a strong brand.

In the case of Air India, there is no denying the brand has a high recall value and a high familiarity quotient. Interestingly, this has evolved due to a strange set of circumstances. For one, Air India over the years has become a story everyone loves to cover. The general management or mismanagement of the airline and stories that spill over into the political arena make for extensive eyeballs and passionate debate. It is also an airline that many have experienced and thus can relate to. While some travelers have had good experiences with Air India, these are few and far between, for the most part, the criticism continues and the airline has become a punching bag of sorts. At the same time, Air India also ranks high as a sizeable number of travelers can trace their first flights back to the airline. Thus the fondness of memories remains. Together these contradictions influence mindshare. But mindshare is

only half the battle. FACING A SET OF CONSTRAINTS

For the successful bidder, the challenge will be to continue the brand, move it towards positive associations and then leverage the brand. And continuing the brand comes with a set of constraints. Constraints on business model, constraints on expectations and if buzz is to be believed also constraints on a complete talent overhaul. To get back into the consumers mind as a brand of significance, Air India will have to deliver on consistency. Consistency of product. Consistency of design. And consistency of experience. To the question of where the airline can compete effectively and position itself, what Air India does have going in its favour is the long-haul market or flights that are in excess of 5 hours. In this segment, customers, especially business customers, will pay a premium for comfort and reliability. And increasingly, they will pay a premium to avoid transferring over a hub airport whether it is in Dubai or Singapore or some point in Europe. This market is also wide open for Indian airlines because with the grounding of Jet Airways these flights are now only flown by Vistara and Air India. Of course,

this means competing with the likes of airlines such as Emirates, Qatar and Singapore Airlines but it is not a challenge that India's heritage and hospitality cannot surmount. But underneath all of that, the airlines costs have to be competitive. And on that front Air India is found wanting. Consultants that peddle a narrative that a higher cost does not matter as long as it is covered by higher revenues fall into a trap of misreading the market and walking away with non-actionable advice. This is an area that Air India will have to navigate carefully.

THE BRAND CHALLENGE

The brand challenge for Air India will also be driven by the fact that the ecosystem is fast evolving. Traditional means just don't work. One sees Air India advertising on TV, on metro stations and on trains but this overlooks the fact that the phone screen has become integral to the decision-making process. Thus the content, the design and the ease of use of screens will need a relook. The Air India app, the website and social media accounts as they stand today are not even an option.

Finally the brand refresh will have to incorporate feedback

channels. Indeed, for every advertisement that is put out and for customer experiences both good and bad, there is now instant validation. In forms of customer reviews, feedback, posts on social media, photographs and complaints. Brands in that sense are no longer what you say about yourself. They also encompass what others say about you, what you say about others and what others say you say about them. Put this in the context of Air India and ask consumers, suppliers and employees for feedback and it will be an uphill climb.

As Air India stands ready for disinvestment, purchase behaviour does not point to the brand delivering on a premium experience, on price or on value. Couple that with a weak loyalty programme and confused positioning and managers have their work cut out. For Air India, the burden of legacy continues. Revitalizing and repositioning the brand can only be achieved via sticking to core values, via delivering consistency and via a clear and well-articulated value proposition. Failing that the customer simply has too many options. And every customer that the airline loses is one too many.

Tata Group may combine airline businesses if Air India acquisition succeeds: Report

Tata Group is likely to explore ways of bringing all its existing airlines businesses under a single entity if it successfully acquires Air India.

Tata Group, one of the frontrunners to acquire Air India, could be looking at the possibility of bringing all its airline ventures under a single entity.

The conglomerate has proposed to initially bring AirAsia India, the low-cost airline, under Air India if it emerges as the successful bidder for the national carrier, reported The Economic Times after speaking with top executives.

It may also look to bring full-service carrier Vistara under the combined entity if Singapore Airlines (SIA), which holds a 49 per cent share in the company, at a later stage.

As per the report, Tata Group has reached out to SIA about its plan to include their joint venture Vistara as a part of the combined airline entity to make operations more efficient.

No official comment on the



matter has come from AirAsia India, Vistara and Tata Sons did not comment on the matter.

However, Tata Group is reportedly exploring plans to hire integration specialists to create a single airline entity as there would be complications involved in

combining the organisational structures.

One of the people cited in the ET report said the group is clear that the strategy is to have a single airline entity if it successfully acquires Air India. Bringing the airline business

under one umbrella could reduce operational costs as multiple cost structures would be eliminated. Data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) suggests that AirAsia India, Vistara and Air India together have 26 per cent

share of the domestic aviation market. It is still lower than market leader IndiGo that has a market share of 57 per cent.

On September 15, Tata Group and Spicejet promoter Ajay Singh submitted final bids for Air India. The government is expected to select the winner of the bid soon.

Following the selection, two high-level committees will decide the reserve price for the national carrier within this period. This will be one of the final steps in the Air India divestment process, following which the government will plan to complete the transaction by December.

The reserve price of the airline will be decided by an inter-ministerial group (IMG) head by the secretary of the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), based on inputs from government-appointed valuers.

The Two-Horse Race For Air India Enters The Final Lap

Air India, India's state-owned airline, and its iconic mascot, the Maharajah, may soon find themselves a new owner if the Narendra Modi government's efforts to privatize the loss-making national carrier bear fruit.

The government has reportedly fixed the reserve price for the airline, though there was no official word about it. Government officials involved in the disinvestment process also have met representatives of the two sole bidders for the airline. The frontrunner is Tata Sons, which has a stake in two airlines—AirAsia India and Vistara. The other is SpiceJet, a low-cost carrier founded by Ajay Singh. Media reports say Ajay Singh himself is bidding for the airline and not SpiceJet.

This is the government's third attempt to sell the airline, though in earlier attempts the plan was to sell only a majority stake and not the entire stake. The first attempt to rope in a



partner for Air India was made in 2000, when the government decided to sell a 60% stake. However, this was given up within two years when there were no bidders. In June 2017 again, the government planned to privatize the carrier, but gave up the process when it failed to attract any buyers for the 76% stake it was offering.

Since then, the government has changed its strategy and decided to sell all its equity shareholding in the airline, despite facing

criticism from various quarters. The process kickstarted in December 2020, when the government invited expressions of interest from bidders for its entire stake in Air India, including Air India's 100% shareholding in AI Express and a 50% stake in AI SATS Airport Services, a ground handling joint venture with Singapore Airlines.

Air India has a fleet of 172 aircraft, including 16 Boeing 777-300 aircraft, 27 Boeing

787-800 and 27 Airbus 321 New Engine option aircraft. More than the fleet, what will be attractive for the bidders are the slots that Air India has, including at international airports such as New York, Chicago, London, Narita (Japan) and Seoul. In Mumbai alone, the airline has close to 20 morning departure slots. If the Tatas emerge as the successful bidder, it remains to be seen where they will house Air India. Tata Sons has an over 80% stake in Air Asia, a low-cost carrier, in partnership with Air Asia of Malaysia, and a 51 % stake in Vistara, a full-service carrier, in partnership with Singapore Airlines. It will be a homecoming of sorts for Air India if the Tatas emerge victorious in their bid. For, it was the late J.R.D. Tata who started Air India in 1932 as Tata Airlines. The government nationalized the airline in 1953, but allowed J.R.D. Tata to remain at the helm. He headed the airline until the late 1970s.

According to available information, Air India's total debt for 2019-20 was over 386 billion rupees (\$5.2 billion), after the government transferred a debt of over 220 billion rupees (\$2.9 billion) to a special purpose vehicle. The debt has since ballooned to around 430 billion rupees (\$5.8 billion). For the financial year 2019-20 (April-March), the latest available numbers, the airline posted a loss of over 74 billion rupees (\$1 billion). The accumulated losses are estimated to be over 700 billion rupees (\$9.4 billion).

However, the government's attempt to sell the airline is bound to meet with stiff resistance. Subramanian Swamy, a member of the Upper House from the ruling BJP, has been vocal in his criticism of the disinvestment process itself. It remains to be seen how the government will overcome this and other challenges that it may face, as the process reaches the final stage.

The Air India Disinvestment Saga: A Primer



Besides 100 per cent of its stake in the state-owned national airline, the potential buyer will get Air India's 100 per cent of AI Express and 50 percent of Air India SATS Airport Services

about ₹ 43,000 crore. Of this, ₹ 22,000 crore will also be transferred to the Air India Asset Holding Limited (AIAHL), which has a key role in the disinvestment process: Making the debt-ridden airline attractive for potential buyers by holding a part of the debt and non-core assets of the Air India group.

On September 15, Tata Sons and SpiceJet Chairman Ajay Singh officially submitted their final bids to buy India's flag carrier Air India, raising hopes that the disinvestment process of the loss-making airline will be completed in this financial year. Besides 100 per cent stake in the national airline, the potential buyer will get Air India's 100 per cent of AI Express - a low-cost airline - and 50 percent of Air India SATS Airport Services. The idea of the government selling its stakes in Air India - The flying 'maharajah' which was once among Asia's top-most airlines - is not of recent origin. Following is a 10-point primer on the Air India saga

1. The attempts to privatize Air India had begun during the third term of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government (1999-2004). In May 2000, the cabinet decided to sell 60 per cent of government's shares in the carrier. However, the process fell apart by early 2002, after the consortium of Singapore Airlines and Tata Sons fell apart and the other bidder - Hindujas - also withdrew from the race.

2. In 2007, the government of India merged Indian Airlines - the domestic carrier - and Air India. While the rationale behind merging the two entities was to achieve economies of scale and cut losses, human resources issues plagued the merged entity. Experts believe that the merger has played a major role in Air India's continuous troubles. Ever since the two entities merged in 2007, Air India has suffered heavy losses every year. As of March

31, 2020, the accumulated losses stood at over ₹ 70,000 crore.

3. In April 2012, the Manmohan Singh-led government announced a bailout package of over ₹ 30,000 crore for a 10-year period to keep the beleaguered national carrier afloat.

4. In 2012, the Ministry of Civil Aviation published a report compiled by a committee headed by Justice Dharmadhikari. The committee was formed to look into the human resources issues that emerged after the merger.

5. Among the many

recommendations were the formation of departmental promotion committees to ensure a fair promotion process and keeping the pay scale as per Department of Public Enterprises' norms for the executive cadre, and as per industry norms for pilots, cabin crews and engineers. The government also formed a committee to implement the recommendations.

6. A 2013 report by CAPA - Centre for Aviation sums up the issues that continue to plague the airline even now. "Low productivity, high

costs, poor staff morale, significant unresolved human resource issues and an unviable business model," the report noted.

7. In mid-2012, amid a prolonged strike by the staff, then Civil Aviation Minister Ajit Singh sparked speculations of Air India's privatisation. In October 2013, Mr Singh told a private broadcaster that "privatisation is the only way to save Air India". However, nothing happened during his term.

8. According to media reports, Air India's total debt now stands at

9. The second major push for a privatization took place during the first term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In June 2017, the cabinet 'in-principle' approved a plan to privatise the airline. However, the government failed to attract any bidder for its 76 per cent stake in the carrier in 2018.10. The government's latest disinvestment attempt started in December 2020, when it sought an Expression of Interest (EoI) from potential buyers. An EoI is an informal declaration that an entity is interested in buying a business.

Tata submits bid to buy loss-making Air India

Tata Group, India's largest conglomerate, has submitted a bid to buy Air India as the government says its effort to finally sell the debt-laden national carrier is entering its "concluding stage."

"The Tatas have submitted [their] financial bid for Air India," a spokesperson for the salt-to-software conglomerate told Nikkei Asia on Thursday, without giving further details.

A government source also confirmed Tata's bid amid reports that Ajay Singh, founder of budget carrier SpiceJet, has also submitted a bid. The government has yet to reveal the names of prospective buyers, though it announced that it had received offers.

"Financial bids for Air India disinvestment [have been] received by [the] Transaction Adviser," Tuhin Kanta Pandey, secretary in the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management, tweeted on Wednesday evening. "Process now moves to concluding stage."

This is the government's second attempt to sell Air India after a previous bid failed to draw any potential buyers. It extended the deadline for expressions of interest several times in

2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic, following which it received initial bids in December.

When it again began seeking buyers in January last year, the government said that even after infusing about 305 billion rupees (\$4.15 billion) into the airline since 2012, Air India had continued to lose money and had accumulated a debt of about 600 billion rupees.

Air India has incurred losses since its 2007 merger with fellow state-owned domestic carrier Indian Airlines, weighed down by competition from private budget airlines, as well as rising fuel prices and high debt-servicing costs.

The airline reported a net loss of 79.8 billion rupees in the financial year ended March 2020, the government reported in August, compared with losses of 85.6 billion rupees the year before and 53.5 billion rupees in the financial year ended in March 2018.

On a provisional basis, Air India's fix assets stood at 400.78 billion rupees for the year ended March this year, including 178.72 billion rupees on account of right-of-use

assets, namely leased aircraft and land.

"The enterprise value set for bidding has not been determined so far," the government informed Parliament.

In its first attempt to sell Air India, the government drew no expressions of interest to divest a 76% stake. Now it is putting all of its 100% stake on offer. The plan also includes selling off the carrier's budget arm, Air India Express, and its 50% stake in Air India SATS Airport Services, a ground-handling joint venture with Singapore's SATS.

When launching the second sale attempt last year, the government said Air India, along with Air India Express had 146 aircraft in its fleet, 82 of which were owned by it. Air India covered 98 destinations -- 56 domestic and 42 international -- and offered 75 additional destinations through its secondary network of code-share operations, it added.

If Tata acquires the airline, it would expand the group's aviation business, which already includes budget carrier AirAsia India and full-service airline Vistara, run as joint ventures with Malaysia's AirAsia and Singapore Airlines, respectively.



Tatas lead race to acquire Air India



Tata Sons is the front runner among bidders to acquire the country's flagship carrier Air India even as the government is working on formalities to declare the conglomerate's name as the prospective owner of the state-run airline, which was once owned by the Tata group, three people aware of the development said on Friday, requesting anonymity. One of the people cited above, working in an economic ministry, said while financial bids that opened

recently indicated the Tatas as the successful bidder ahead of SpiceJet promoter Ajay Singh, an elaborate evaluation by a ministerial panel was still pending and a formal announcement was unlikely immediately. The panel, Air India Specific Alternative Mechanism (AISAM), is headed by home minister Amit Shah; finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, and commerce minister Piyush Goyal are its members.

The ministries of finance, home and civil aviation did not respond to email queries on the matter. While a Tata group spokesman did not respond to HT's queries, its external spokesperson declined comment.

A second person said the financial bids had been vetted by the core group of secretaries on disinvestment (CGD) headed by the cabinet secretary this week and the matter will now be considered by the AISAM. "No official announcement can be

made before the ministerial group formally approves the name of the winner," he said.

Tuhin Kanta Pandey, secretary in the department of investment and public asset management (Dipam), said in a tweet: "Media reports indicating approval of financial bids by Government of India in the AI [Air India] disinvestment case are incorrect. Media will be informed of the Government decision as and when it is taken." Dipam is an arm of the Union finance ministry. Once AISAM gives formal approval to the winning bid by the Tatas, only formalities may be left for the salt-to-software conglomerate to take over control of Air India, founded by JRD Tata in 1932 as Tata Airlines.

"The full handover process may, however, take some time," a third person said.

After the first attempt to divest Air India did not attract investors' interest in 2017, the government launched the disinvestment process again in January 2020 and sweetened the deal by reducing the debt burden for the prospective owner as the airline was running into losses after its merger with domestic carrier Indian Airlines in 2007. According to Dipam, the airline had a total debt of ₹60,074 crore as of March 31, 2019 and the successful buyer is expected to absorb about ₹23,286 crore.

The Air India disinvestment

process was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Financial bids were invited in April 2021 and bidders were asked to submit offers by September 15. The government wants to sell off its entire 100% stake in the company, including 100% stake in Air India Express Ltd (AIXL) and 50% in Air India SATS Airport Services Pvt Ltd (AISATS).

AIXL, a wholly owned subsidiary of Air India, operated a low-cost carrier and is headquartered in Kochi. AISATS is a 50:50 joint venture between AI and SATS Ltd, Singapore. SATS is a leading provider of food solutions and gateway services with over 70 years of ground handling and catering experience.

According to Dipam, AI is one of the most extensive flight service providers in India with network coverage of 98 destinations (56 domestic destinations with around 2,712 departures per week and 42 international destinations with around 450 departures per week) as of November 1, 2019. AI offers 75 additional destinations through its secondary network of code share operations covered under 25 agreements with foreign carriers. During FY2019, AI carried around 22.1 million passengers. The airline has a fleet of 121 aircraft (excluding four B747-400s), mainly comprising Airbus and Boeing planes.

Air India sale: Third time lucky?

New owner will get 1,500 highly trained pilots, over 2,000 trained engineers and slots in airports around the globe



State-owned airline Air India runs the best chance of finally moving out of the government's hands. On September 15 evening, Tuhin Pandey, Secretary, DIPAM, tweeted, "Financial bids for Air India divestment received by Transaction Adviser. The process now moves to the concluding stage."

Shortly after the tweet, Tata Sons confirmed that it had bid for the Maharaja. Sources also indicated that SpiceJet's promoter Ajay Singh too, had bid.

After two unsuccessful attempts at divesting the Maharaja, the government has made the terms more favourable for the bidders. The government is selling 100 per cent of its equity share capital in the state-owned airline, including Air India's shareholding interest of 100 per cent in AI Express Limited and 50 per cent in Air India SATS Airport Services Private Limited.

Air India's divestment process started in December 2020 with the Expression of Interest being called from prospective bidders. The government has since then been taking steps to ensure that this divestment process is successful.

In October last year, the government decided not to predetermine Air India's debt levels and leave it to the market to determine as these were uncertain times due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from the market-determined price that the two bidders have quoted, they will have to provide 15 per cent of that value as cash. Earlier this month, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said that the buyer of a state-run company could carry forward losses of the erstwhile state-owned company and claim up to 30 per cent tax rebate annually. In another move to encourage buyers, this time around,

the new owner only needs to pick up all aircraft-related debt, including normal working capital debt. In contrast, the debt relating to excess working capital and some debt guaranteed by the government has been transferred to a special purpose vehicle (SPV) set up a few years ago.

In February 2021, the civil aviation minister had informed Rajya Sabha that national carrier Air India's total debt as per provisional figures for 2019-20 (April-March) was Rs 38,366.39 crore after transfer of debt amounting to Rs 22,064 crore to an SPV.

Air India is an attractive buy this time around as the new owner will get about 1,500 highly trained pilots capable of flying the Airbus 320 aircraft, which criss-cross the country and fly to neighbouring countries. The new owner will also get pilots who can fly the bigger Boeing 777 and 787 aircraft, which are currently doing non-stop flights between India and the US, Canada, Australia, UK, Germany and other parts of Europe. The new owner will also get over 2,000 trained engineers to look after the fleet, which in May this year stood at 173 aircraft, including 13 Boeing 777-300 Extended Range, three Boeing 777-200 Long Range, 27 Boeing 787-800 and 27 Airbus 321-New Engine Option aircraft.

Another plus for Air India's new owner will be the slots that the airline has in airports around the globe, including in New York, Chicago, London, Narita (in Japan) and Seoul. In Mumbai itself, the airline has 18-morning departure slots. A slot is defined as the scheduled time of arrival or departure made available at an airport to an airline for operating regular flights.

The new owner will thus get an airline that started in 1932, which set the benchmark for other global airlines and sound marketing in many foreign countries to which the airline operates.

Given this situation, it will most likely be the third time lucky for both Air India and the government when divesting the Maharaja.

In 2001, the Vajpayee government attempted to sell Air India, then primarily operating only international flights. The Tatas and Singapore Airlines formed a consortium, but the consortium eventually pulled out with things moving at a snail's pace. Initially, the Hinduja Group was also in the fray at that time. The entire process was called off for various reasons, including the terror attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001.

In 2017 the Modi government again unsuccessfully attempted to sell Air India, and it had by then been merged and was a combination of domestic and international routes. Still, no bids were received as the market was said to be lukewarm to the idea of owning only 76 per cent of Air India's stake that was on offer.

This time around, if the Tatas successfully win the bid for Air India, it will be a sweet victory for the group. The original Air India was set up by JRD Tata, who launched Air India international when known international carriers like KLM, Air France and Imperial Airways were dominant players on the India-UK route. In 1948, a brand new Lockheed Constellation L-749 made its first Mumbai-Geneva-London flight, flying in Air India International's colours.

Europe's next leap beyond Earth

Manufacture materials, drugs in space and bring them back

The space agency aims to initiate companies to "manufacture in space very pure and more capable materials, discover new pharmaceutical drugs."

After designing CubeSats, finalising the mission to Venus and unveiling a brand new mission control that will be the brains behind the next generation of space flight, Europe is now looking to begin manufacturing in space. The European Space Agency (ESA) is planning a round-trip commercial space transportation service that will enable companies to manufacture in space. The agency has partnered with UK based Space Forge to develop ForgeStar a reusable suitcase-sized vehicle that can be sent into space and return to Earth after an extended stay in low Earth orbit. The space agency aims to initiate companies to "manufacture in space very pure and more capable materials, discover new pharmaceutical drugs."

The agency in a statement said that the ForgeStar will be part of a complete commercial service offering "microgravity on-demand" as routine access to and return from space service,



that can be launched from a variety of launch vehicles.

"Space Forge has raised private funding, identified niche markets and strengthened its core team and industrial organisation to bring these new re-entry and recovery technologies to life. ESA is delighted to support Space Forge in its endeavour to prepare this service for the market," Jorgen Bru, ESA's Commercial Services Manager said in a statement.

WHY MANUFACTURE IN SPACE?

Manufacturing in space could

offer a unique advantage to companies due to its low pressure that removes chances of contamination. This would save a lot of money not only for companies but also for researchers.

Space Forge in a brief on its website said that manufacturing on Earth has several challenges to overcome, the biggest among them is gravity which causes buoyancy preventing the formation of perfect alloys in metals of different densities, while the dense, ambient atmosphere of Earth

contaminates even the cleanest of processes. Meanwhile, maintaining extreme temperatures in cryogenic refrigerators to furnaces are difficult.

However, in microgravity, a 10 trillion times lower pressure than Earth removes contamination and the need for multi-stage pumps and prevents buoyancy, allowing for larger, perfect crystal formation and uniform alloy mixing. "Radiators facing cold space can freely produce temperatures close to absolute zero for superconductor and

quantum devices," it added.

"The service presents opportunities for companies to use the special environment of space to manufacture new materials, increase the purity or capability of existing materials, or carry out experiments. This will improve life on Earth in areas such as medicine and advanced industrial applications," ESA said in a release.

MORE IN PIPELINES

Apart from the commercial service, the European agency is also working on an uncrewed robotic laboratory about the size of two minivans. It will stay in low orbit for about two months after being launched onboard the Vega-C rocket and the agency will conduct experiments inside its cargo bay that will allow technology demonstration and benefits research in pharmaceuticals, biomedicine, biology and physical science. "At the end of its mission, Space Rider will return to Earth with its payloads and land on a runway to be unloaded and refurbished for another flight," ESA said. The first launch is being targeted for 2023 with a mass of 3000 kg including payload and fuel for the reentry module.

Post-poll violence in Bengal

**Supreme Court
notice on Calcutta HC
order for CBI probe**



The SC issued notices to the Centre, the ECI, the CBI on a petition filed by the West Bengal government challenging a Calcutta HC order to transfer investigation into the cases of post-poll violence.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued notices to the Centre, the Election Commission of India, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and complainants on a petition filed by the West Bengal government challenging the Calcutta High Court order to transfer investigation into the cases of post-poll violence.

Seeking responses from concerned parties, the Supreme Court said the West Bengal government "has made out a fit case for issuing notice". Appearing as counsel for the West Bengal government, Kapil Sibal said, "There is a disconcerting situation. The CBI is issuing notices to police officials. This is happening on the ground."

"We will take up these issues

on the next date," said the Supreme Court bench of Justices Vineet Saran and Aniruddha Bose responding to Sibal's submission while fixing the next date for hearing on October 7.

The bench was hearing the Special Leave Petition filed by the State of West Bengal against the August 19 order of the Calcutta High Court transferring the cases of post-poll violence to the CBI. The fate of the ongoing CBI investigation is likely to be decided by the outcome of the Supreme Court hearing in this case.

Sibal said the Bengal government informed the high court that it did not have the report. Sibal argued that the West Bengal Police was not given chance by the high court to show what steps it took as part of the probe into the alleged post-poll violence. Sibal said such orders "destabilise" the federal structure of the country. He said, "The police had taken steps to stop violence. The HC observations must be expunged. The reputation of the state is also

at stake. This is flashed everywhere in newspapers across the country. We gave a chart and the high court says we don't believe it. That's in the June 21 order."

Sibal argued that the high court relied on the interim NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) committee report to pass its orders but did not allow us to raise objections to it. We were told let the final report come and then you can raise objections."

He said the committee submitted its interim report on June 30 but it was not given to the Bengal government despite requesting a copy of the same. Sibal said the high court made stinging remarks on the Bengal government on the basis of the NHRC report that the government did not get to see. He said the Bengal government did not get the full report of the NHRC which ran into 3,400 pages. Sibal contended that the annexures with the names of the complainant who had raised allegations of rape were not given to the state police. They said

cannot disclose name of complainant, Sibal said.

Sibal argued, "You can deny information to the public but how can you deny information to the state? How can we respond on whether report is correct or not if we don't know the name/details of the complainant?"

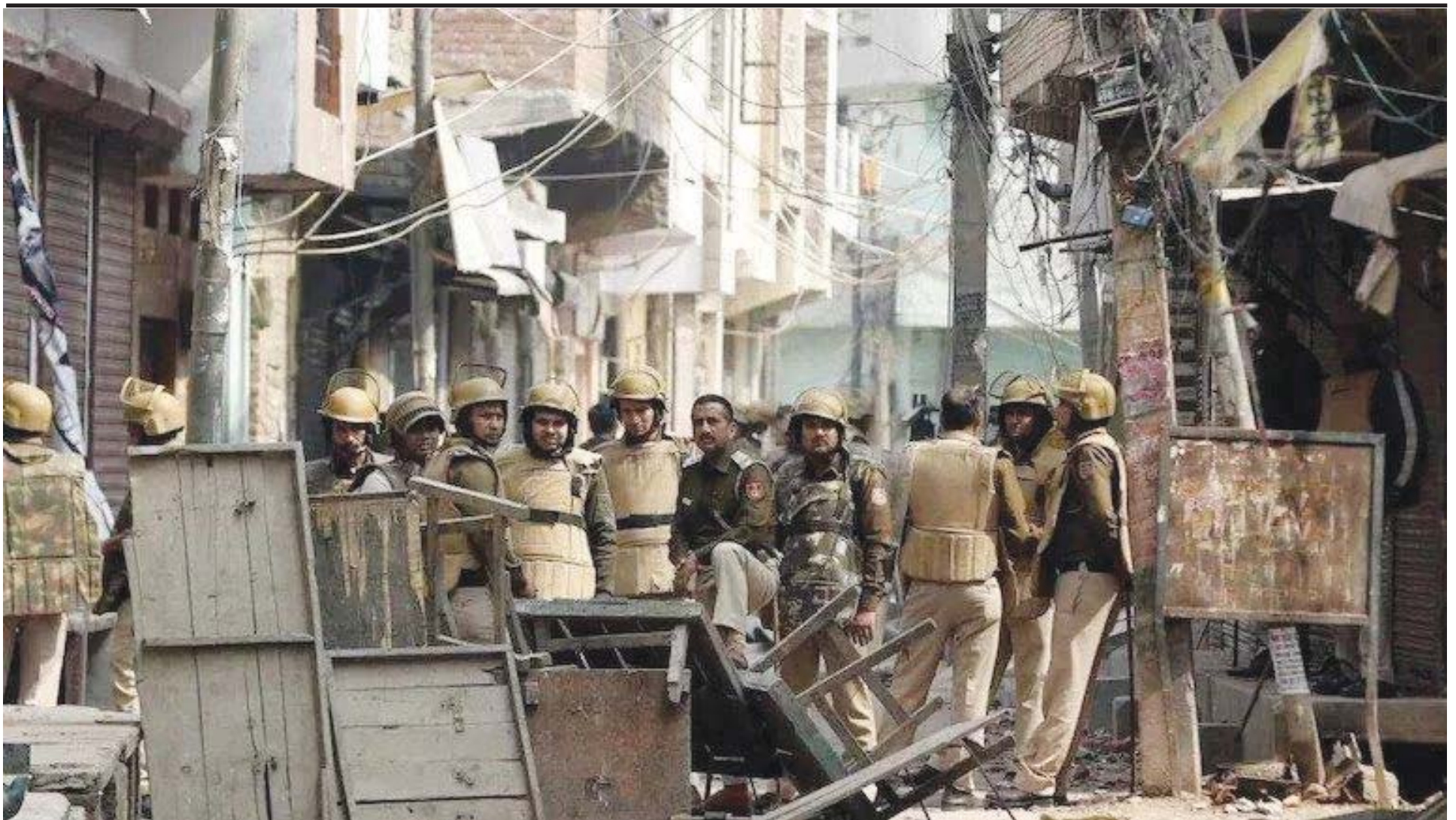
There are 28 districts, 6 commissionerates, and 35 police units in each commissionerate. "We would have to have the ADG identify the area, then send the information to the concerned district police and get a report back. The high court asked the government do all the verification in five days," he said. "We tried to do the verification, and the high court passed orders to transfer investigation. The timeline shows the breach of natural justice," Sibal argued.

"In the Muzaffarnagar riots, the Supreme Court took five months to analyse each case," Sibal said.

Justice Saran posed a series of questions to Sibal saying,

"The high court has said that murder and rape cases go to CBI, and other cases of violence go to SIT. How is this divided? There can be murder coupled with Arson. In that case will it go to CBI or SIT? Is SIT constituted by the state or by the court?"

Sibal responded by saying, "[The SIT was constituted] by the court. It is headed by a retired judge. As an officer of the court, no victim is to be left without a remedy. It's the duty of the state to maintain law and order, and to meet our Justice. There is no doubt about it. But before you come to a conclusion there must be evidence on record." "You question the police as if every police officer in the state cannot be trusted, so you transfer all cases. You claim that the political party in power controls the police, but you don't apply the same yardstick to the central agency. Central agency you trust even though the same political party in power which has raised allegations controls the central agency," Sibal argued.



Delhi court docks Rs 5k off police officer's salary for casual approach in riot cases

A Delhi court has ordered a salary cut of Rs 5,000 of the responsible officer for casual approach in Northeast Delhi riot cases.

A Delhi court has directed the police commissioner to conduct an inquiry and deduct Rs 5,000 from the salary of police officer for his lackadaisical approach in Northeast Delhi riot cases. The court was reportedly irked over Delhi Police seeking adjournment of the case in a "very casual manner".

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Arun Kumar Garg imposed the fine after the Delhi Police failed to comply with the court's previous order in which he had

directed the investigating officer (IO) to supply a copy of an e-challan to one of the accused and sought an adjournment to supply it. The court had earlier pulled up the Delhi Police for their "lackadaisical approach" in Northeast Delhi riot cases and had warned the police of passing adverse orders if this continues.

The judge said, "Under the circumstances, request for an adjournment for compliance of order dated April 12, 2021, is hereby allowed subject to cost of

Rs. 5,000 to be deposited by Delhi Police in the Prime Minister National Relief Fund." In his September 25 order, the judge added, "this court is not oblivious of the fact that burden of this cost shall fall on public exchequer and hence I deem it appropriate to direct Commissioner of Police Delhi to conduct an inquiry and to order deduction of aforesaid cost from the salary of the responsible officer." Pointing out the Delhi Police's casual approach to the

case, the judge noted that the special public prosecutors (SPPs) and IOs do not appear in the cases on the dates fixed, and when they appear after prodding, it is without inspection of the file and then seeks adjournment in a "very casual manner". CMM Arun Kumar Garg noted that the conduct of the police, as well as the prosecutor, has already been brought to the notice of senior police officers, including, the Commissioner of Police.

However, they have "failed to ensure that such incidents do not take place anymore", the judge said. The Delhi court was dealing with a case wherein the IO was directed to supply a copy of the e-challan to the accused named Komal Mishra in compliance with an order dated April 12, 2021. However, the IO informed the court that the copy of the e-challan has not yet been supplied to the accused as he was not aware of the court order.

Xiaomi confirms NFC-enabled Mi Pay watch straps launch in India in partnership with RuPay, RBL and Zeta

Xiaomi has announced NFC enabled watch straps that will allow contactless payments for its users in India. The watch straps will exclusively work with Xiaomi's own payment solution Mi Pay and for this, the company has tied up with several stakeholders in India.

The information has been shared by Xiaomi executive Raghu Reddy on Twitter recently. Reddy wrote that Xiaomi has announced its entry into the "future of contactless

payments" at the ongoing virtual-only Global Fintech Festival. With this, the company shared the idea of coming up with a Xiaomi NFC Mi Pay strap soon.

No details around the product have been released as of now. Though such a contactless payment option from Xiaomi has been hinted at for a while now. The idea is to have dedicated hardware that will increase the adoption of Mi Pay in India among Xiaomi users.

Xiaomi says that it has partnered

with RuPay, RBL Bank and fintech platform Zeta to power the new Xiaomi NFC Mi Pay Strap. While this may hint at limited support for the contactless payment service by Xiaomi, it is likely that the company will include more partners going forward.

For those who find the concept a bit alien, know that NFC-enabled watch straps are exactly what is hinted at by their name. They are specially designed straps for wristwatches that

come with NFC functionality. Such straps can be designed to be compatible with more than one wristwatch. Though it is likely that the NFC Pay strap by Xiaomi will be compatible with its own watch offerings. Once used on a watch, the smartwatch straps do not need any source of power to function. They can easily be tapped onto a point-of-sale device for making contactless payments. In addition, they can even be configured to work in

place of dedicated cards for a place. An example of this would be the metro cards or tokens that we use in metros in India. The NFC-smart watch straps can easily be used to make such payments on the go, with just a touch of the wrist. How Xiaomi will find the use-case for the watch straps is yet to be seen. Though the initiative is commendable and is surely in line with how the future of payments is expected to be.

Paras Defence IPO: All you need to know about the company



Paras Defence and Space Technologies Ltd announced its final share allotment on Tuesday, September 28. The Initial Public Offering (IPO) was open for subscription from September 21 to 23.

The public issue saw an overwhelming response as it was subscribed 304 times with investors bidding for 217 crore shares against the 71.40 crore shares on offer. The price band of the IPO was fixed at Rs 165-175 per share.

For those who have not been allotted the shares, the initiation of a refund procedure will begin from today, September 29. The expected listing date of Paras Defence IPO is October 1, 2021.

Here is all you need to know about the company:

Paras Defence, a Mumbai-based defence engineering company, is primarily engaged in designing, developing, manufacturing and testing a variety of defence and space engineering products and solutions.

The firm is one of the leading providers of optics for various Indian defence and space programs. It has two manufacturing plants set up in Maharashtra. The company is also in the process of expanding its current manufacturing facility at Nerul in Navi Mumbai.

Furthermore, it claims to be the only Indian company with the design capability for space-optics and optomechanical assemblies. Its offerings are aligned with the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" and "Make in India" initiatives by the government.

China's Evergrande sells \$1.5 billion bank stake amid crisis

Evergrande said in an exchange filing that it would sell a 9.99 billion yuan (\$1.5 billion) stake it owns in Shengjing Bank Co Ltd to a state-owned asset management company.



Cash-strapped China Evergrande Group left its offshore bondholders guessing whether it would pay interest on a bond coupon due Wednesday despite agreeing to settle debt with a Chinese bank in a \$1.5 billion stake divestment deal. With liabilities of \$305 billion, Evergrande has sparked concerns its woes could spread through China's financial system and reverberate around the world - a worry that has eased with the Chinese central bank vowing to protect homebuyer interest. Evergrande said in an exchange filing that it would sell a 9.99 billion yuan (\$1.5 billion) stake it owns in Shengjing Bank Co Ltd to a state-owned asset management company. The bank, one of Evergrande's main lenders, demanded all net proceeds from the sale go towards settling the developer's debts with Shengjing. As of the first half last year, the bank had 7 billion yuan in loans to Evergrande, according to a report by brokerage CCB International, citing news reports.

The move underscores how Evergrande, once China's top-selling developer and now expected to be one of the largest-ever restructurings in the country, is prioritising domestic

creditors over offshore bondholders. It also highlights the role state-owned enterprises may play in Evergrande's denouement.

The company is due on Wednesday to make a \$47.5 million bond interest payment on its 9.5% March 2024 dollar bond. The company missed a payment deadline on a dollar bond last week, a day after its main property business in China said it had privately negotiated with onshore bondholders to settle a separate coupon payment on a yuan-denominated bond. Evergrande's silence on its offshore payment obligations has left global investors wondering if they will have to swallow large losses when 30-day grace periods end for coupon payments due on Sept. 23 and Sept. 29.

A spokesperson for Evergrande did not immediately respond to Reuters request for comment. "We are in the wait-and-see phase at the moment. The creditors are organising themselves and people are trying to figure out how this falling knife might be caught," said an advisor hired by one of the offshore Evergrande bondholders.

Gold, Silver prices today: Precious metals record slight jump on MCX

A day after trading on the lower side of the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), the prices of gold and silver witnessed a jump on September 29, 2021.

Today, gold futures, maturing on October 5, 2021, are retailing at Rs 45,963 per 10 grams with a slight jump of 0.14 per cent or Rs 65. Witnessing a hike of 0.11 per cent or Rs 65, the rate of silver futures traded at Rs 60,555 per kg on the MCX today.

On Tuesday, both the metals registered a dip on the MCX. Gold stood at Rs 46,071 per 10 grams, while silver traded at Rs 60,572 per kg with a dip of 0.23 per cent or Rs 138. The prices of gold and silver stood at Rs 45,853 and Rs 60,464 respectively, when the market closed on September 28, 2021. Gold and Silver prices on international market: Globally, gold prices remained flat

on Wednesday after hovering near a seven-week low due to a rise in the dollar, reported news agency Reuters. On the other hand, spot gold was also flat at



\$1,735.17 per ounce after its price fell to its lowest since August 11 to \$1,726.19 on Tuesday. There was a little change in U.S. gold futures and it traded at \$1,735.90, according to reports. Fed Chair Jerome Powell was quoted by Reuters as saying that the U.S. economy still has a long way to go to achieve maximum

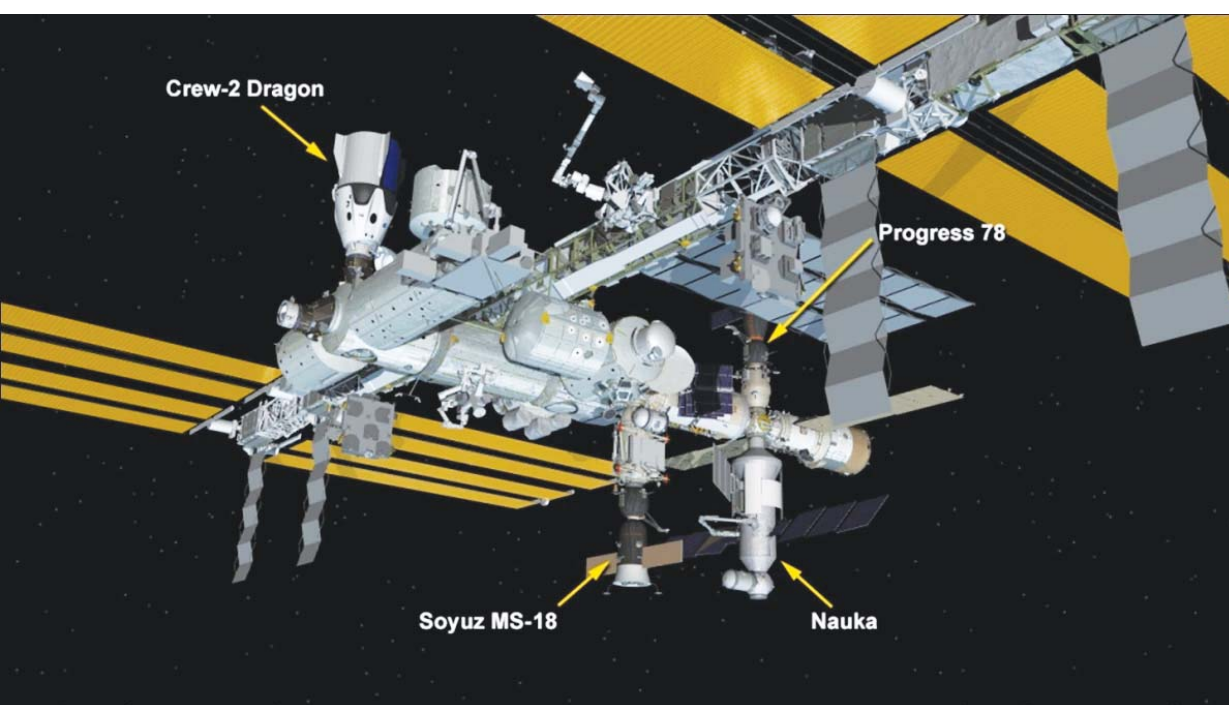
employment. The upward trend in the Covid-19 cases is still a cause of concern for the economy and the confidence of U.S. consumers fell to a seven-month low in September. The world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund, holdings of SPDR Gold Trust, fell to 990.03 tonnes against 990.32 tonnes. Meanwhile, silver ticked upwards by 0.1 per cent to \$22.46 per ounce and platinum eased 0.1 per cent to \$966.03 on the global front. Gold and Silver prices in major Indian cities CITY GOLD (per 10 grams, 22 carats) SILVER (per kg)

DELHI	Rs 45,340	Rs 60,450
MUMBAI	Rs 45,030	Rs 60,450
CHENNAI	Rs 43,540	Rs 64,300
KOLKATA	Rs 45,590	Rs 60,450

Parking in space

**ISS crew
docks Soyuz
spacecraft
with newly
arrived
Russian Nauka
module**

Nauka arrived at the station in July and was attached to the station's Zvezda module, providing a new laboratory and robotic arm aboard the orbiting outpost.



The crew at the International Space Station (ISS) has successfully relocated a Soyuz spacecraft from one module to another as they await the arrival of the next rotation crew from Earth. Russian cosmonauts Oleg Novitskiy, commander of the Soyuz, and Pyotr Dubrov along with NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei re-docked the Soyuz MS-18 with the Nauka module freeing up parking space at the Earth-facing Rassvet module. This is the first time that a spacecraft has been parked with the Nauka Module that arrived at the Space Station in July. Meanwhile, it was the 20th Soyuz port relocation in station history and the first since March 2021.

Nauka arrived at the station in July and was attached to the station's Zvezda module, providing a new laboratory and

robotic arm aboard the orbiting outpost to conduct experiments and store scientific instruments. In addition, Nauka provides an additional sleeping area and toilet for station crew members.

Nasa in a blog said that the relocation frees the Rassvet port for the arrival of another Soyuz spacecraft on October 5, designated Soyuz MS-19, which will carry Soyuz commander and cosmonaut Anton Shkaplerov of

Roscosmos and spaceflight participants Klim Shipenko and Yulia Peresild.

The docking of the spacecraft with the new Russian module is a significant event given the module had led to a major mishap on the ISS when its thrusters fired inadvertently hours after its arrival at the ISS. The incident caused the flying laboratory to spin one-and-a-half revolutions - about 540 degrees - before coming to a stop upside down, relative to its original position.

US, RUSSIA PREP FOR CREW ROTATION

The Russian Soyuz MS-19 spacecraft will lift off from Baikonur on October 5 to arrive at the Space Station. The Russian space agency ROSCOSMOS said that the designer's inspection and final checks of Soyuz MS-19 at its integration and testing facility were conducted. "Specialists from RSC Energia and core enterprises of Roscosmos conducted processing operations on encapsulation of the fairing, prepared the assembled ascent

unit for the upcoming launch readiness check and finished payload stowing in the habitable compartment and descent module of the spacecraft," Roscosmos said in a statement. As the new crew arrives, the current crew members Novitskiy, Shipenko, and Peresild are scheduled to return to Earth in October aboard the relocated Soyuz MS-18 spacecraft.

Weeks after the arrival of the new Russian crew, SpaceX Crew-3 mission will launch onboard Falcon-9 rocket to the ISS on October 31. The Crew-3 mission will launch NASA astronauts Raja Chari, mission commander, Tom Marshburn, pilot, and Kayla Barron, mission specialist, along with European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Matthias Maurer, also a mission specialist in microgravity. Meanwhile, current inhabitants Vande Hei and Dubrov are scheduled to remain aboard the station until March 2022. "At the time of his return, Vande Hei will have set the record for the longest single spaceflight for an American," NASA said.

Cyclone Shaheen



Coast Guard on high alert, advises fishermen in Arabian sea to return



The depression is very likely to move further west-northwestwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours.

The Indian Coast Guard on Wednesday raised warnings for fishermen to return to harbour amid reports of cyclonic built up in the Arabian Sea. The Coast Guard Headquarters at Porbandar, Okha and stations in Gujarat has been put on high alert and on standby as the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) warned that Cyclone Gulab could re-intensify as Cyclone Shaheen in the next 24-hours.

In a video released on social media, The Indian Coast Guard officer can be seen announcing and advising the fisherman at sea to return to harbour. "The message was also relayed through a shore-based radar system to those deep into the sea," PRO Defence Gujarat tweeted. "The remnant of the cyclonic storm Gulab lay as a

The depression is very likely to move further west-northwestwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours.

well-marked low-pressure area over south Gujarat region and adjoining Gulf of Khambhat. It is very likely to move west northwestwards, emerge into the northeast Arabian sea and intensify into a depression by tomorrow," IMD said in its latest cyclone bulletin on Wednesday. The weather agency added that the depression is very likely to move further west-northwestwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours. In 48 hours it will Continue to move west-northwestwards close to Pakistan Makran coasts, moving away from the Indian coast. As the Coast Guard urges fishermen and

people who are at sea to return, the IMD maintained that the Sea surface temperature in the Arabian sea is about 28-30 degrees celsius, which is ripe for cyclonic formation. "Under these favourable conditions, there is moderate to a high probability of cyclogenesis (formation of depression) over northeast Arabian sea and the neighbouring areas with further intensification into a cyclonic storm during September 30 to October 2.

The cyclone is building up from the remnants of Cyclone Gulab, which has already led to heavy to very heavy rainfalls in parts of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra. K S Hosalikar, a

senior scientist at IMD Mumbai, said, "The remnants of Gulab cyclone will continue to have its impact on Marathwada, Madhya Maharashtra, Konkan with few places receiving extremely heavy rainfall. The northern parts of Konkan and Madhya Maharashtra will receive more showers on Wednesday as well." He added that as it is moving towards the Arabian sea and its effect on Maharashtra will decrease from Thursday. Meanwhile, one of the biggest reasons for the cyclone's remnants to gain energy is the availability of moisture in the air as it tracks through the land across Telangana. "The moment it comes close to a sea, it starts regaining energy from moisture and there is always a possibility that it will re-emerge [as a cyclone]," said Dr GK Das, Director, Regional Meteorological Centre, Kolkata. As the monsoon withdrawal is delayed this year, the moisture content is high which is energising the cyclone.

Explained: How Cyclone Gulab from Bay of Bengal is re-emerging as Shaheen in Arabian sea



Days after heavy rainfall hit Kolkata, a low pressure-area began taking shape off the Odisha coast in west-central Bay of Bengal. Within a few days, the low-pressure area intensified to become Cyclone Gulab, which made landfall in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh earlier this week. The cyclonic movement has since calmed down and is now somewhere over Telangana and adjoining areas of the Marathwada and Vidarbha region. In a rare phenomenon, the weather system is predicted to reintensify once it hits the Arabian Sea and turn into Cyclone Shaheen. The Indian Meteorological Department said that the chances of formation of a depression over the Arabian Sea are very high in the next four to five days. It is the remnants of Cyclone Gulab that are likely to result in heavy to very heavy rainfall in parts of Gujarat in the coming two days starting Tuesday. Dr Manorma Mohanty, a scientist with the Regional Meteorological Centre in Ahmedabad told IndiaToday.in, "We are expecting very heavy rainfall over Navsari, Valsad and neighbouring districts [of Gujarat]. We are expecting similar conditions in Saurashtra on day one and on day two we are expecting heavy rainfalls in Rajkot, Navsari, Valsad, on day three it will reduce and there will be low rainfall activity." The department is expecting a wind speed of 30-40 kilometres per hour going up to 60 kilometres per hour.

HOW ARE REMNANTS OF CYCLONE GULAB SUSTAINING? The remnants of Cyclone Gulab -- currently a depression -- are over Vidharba and will likely emerge and intensify over the northeast Arabian sea and could hit land by September 30.

Pfizer submits data on Covid-19 vaccine for kids ages 5 to 11 to FDA, not seeking EUA yet

Pfizer and BioNTech said Tuesday they have submitted Covid-19 vaccine data on children ages 5 to 11 to the US Food and Drug Administration for initial review, but are not yet seeking emergency use authorization.



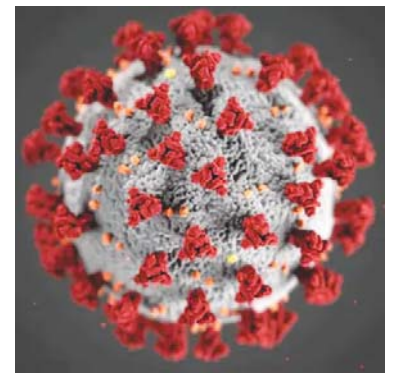
A formal submission to request EUA for the vaccine is expected to follow in the coming weeks, the companies said in a statement. Submissions to the European Medicines Agency and other regulatory authorities are also planned, they said. This is the first submission of data to the FDA for a Covid-19 vaccine for younger children. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is approved for people age 16 and older and has an EUA for people ages 12 to 15. Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said he does not know how long that process will take. "I think it's not appropriate for me to comment how long FDA will

take to review the data. They should take as much time as they think is appropriate for them to have high levels of comfort," Bourla said while speaking at the Atlantic Festival Tuesday. Last week, Pfizer released details of a Phase 2/3 trial that showed its Covid-19 vaccine was safe and generated a "robust" antibody response in children 5-11. The trial included 2,268 5- to 11-year-olds and used a two-dose regimen of the vaccine administered 21 days apart. This trial used a 10-microgram dose -- smaller than the 30-microgram dose given to those 12 and older. Participants' immune responses

were measured by looking at neutralizing antibody levels in their blood and comparing those levels to a control group of 16- to 25-year-olds who were given two shots of the larger 30-microgram dose. Pfizer said the levels compared well with older people who received the larger dose, demonstrating a "strong immune response in this cohort of children one month after the second dose." Pfizer and BioNTech said Tuesday they plan to submit data from the full Phase 3 trial for scientific peer-reviewed publication. FDA officials have said that once vaccine data was submitted, the agency could

authorize a vaccine for younger children in a matter of weeks -- not months -- but it would depend on the timing and quality of the data provided. The FDA has moved quickly in the past to extend vaccine authorization to additional groups. For example, Pfizer sought emergency use authorization for its Covid-19 vaccine for people ages 12 to 15 on April 9 and the EUA was granted May 10. However, for these younger children, FDA is expected to convene its vaccine advisers to make a recommendation before authorization.

Covid triggers life expectancy decline unseen since WWII



The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the biggest drop in average life expectancy since World War II. Notably, the decline has been the worst among American men. Before Covid, average life expectancy rose globally, but the pandemic seems to have wiped out all the progress achieved so far for a longer life. A study released on September 27 by Oxford University and published in its International Journal of Epidemiology finds a decrease in life expectancy for 29 countries, including the United States, Chile and 27 European countries. According to the research, the drop scale is so huge that it has wiped out years of progress on this front.

Life expectancy at birth is the most widely used metric to measure the population's health and longevity, which shows the number of years a person is expected to live based on age, gender and country.

A significant drop in life expectancy has been found among males a decline of 2.2 years in the USA, followed by Lithuania (1.7 years) and Bulgaria (1.6), relative to 2019 levels. Men have suffered a bigger drop in life expectancy than women in most countries, research led by scientists at Oxford's Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science said.

Working with WHO for Covaxin approval, Bharat Biotech says after reports of delay

Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech on Tuesday said it is working with the World Health Organisation for approval of emergency use authorisation (EUA) for Covaxin, the Covid vaccine developed in India, at the earliest.

"As a responsible manufacturer with past approvals for our other vaccines, we do not find it appropriate to speculate or comment on the regulatory approval process and its

timelines. We are diligently working with the WHO to obtain EUL at the earliest," Bharat Biotech told India Today. "We request media organisations to exercise restraint while reporting on public health-related issues and timelines, as it has an impact on millions of lives and livelihoods," Bharat Biotech said in its statement. "At appropriate times, we will make announcements to

indicate the availability of regulatory approvals," it said.



The statement comes amid reports that WHO had delayed emergency use authorisation

(EUA) for Covaxin.

Developed by Bharat Biotech in partnership with the National Institute of Virology and ICMR, Covaxin displayed an efficacy of nearly 78 per cent in clinical trials. It was approved by the Indian government for emergency use in January this year.

Bharat Biotech had reportedly submitted all documents required for the listing to the

WHO by 9 July, and the WHO review process, which takes close to six weeks, had commenced by July-end. If granted, the EUA of Covaxin would enable its recipients to travel abroad without mandatory quarantine.

Earlier, NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr VK Paul said he expected a "positive decision" on Covaxin's emergency use authorisation before the end of September.

Emraan Hashmi



Emraan Hashmi to star alongside Akshay Kumar in the Hindi remake of the Malayalam film Driving License

Earlier today, Bollywood Hungama had reported that Akshay Kumar is reuniting with Karan Johar's Dharma Productions for director Raj Mehta's next film. The trio had last worked together for the film Good Newwz. Now, according to the latest reports, Emraan Hashmi has also joined the cast of the film. The film in question is the official Hindi remake of Prithviraj's Malayalam film Driving License (2019). In the original film, Prithviraj played a film superstar

while Suraj Venjaramoodu essayed the role of a motor inspector who is a massive fan of the superstar. However, a misunderstanding leads to the two locking horns with each other and the two trying to make each other's life a living hell. Reportedly, Akshay Kumar will essay the role played by Prithviraj and Emraan Hashmi will step into the shoes of Suraj Venjaramoodu. The film will be presented for the Hindi audience with some changes in the script. The film will go on floors in the month of January with a start to finish 40-day schedule in the UK.



Arjun Kapoor signed on as the Brand Ambassador of BFizz

Bollywood actor Arjun Kapoor has been signed on by food and beverage giants Parle Agro to be the brand ambassador of their fruit-based sparkling beverage, BFizz. Announcing his association, the actor took to his Instagram and shared a picture where



we can see a fully transformed Arjun. He can be seen donning a leather jacket while showcasing his newly chiselled body and flaunting his toned six-pack abs. Sharing the post, Arjun says,

"Thrilled to be @TheBFizz Brand Ambassador, a cool drink for the Brave & Bold!!! Sometimes your personality & the brand you align with just fit together seamlessly... can't wait to get started on this exciting new journey with @parle_agro @nadiachauhan!! let's do this & brew this " The Bollywood star has been turning heads with his incredible transformation as he battled obesity and came out stronger. He has maintained, "Not many know, but I have been battling obesity for the longest time. I was just not a fat kid, it was a health issue. It hasn't been easy.

Pooja Bhatt marks 5 years of sobriety with special note. Says my priority is myself



Pooja Bhatt, who has struggled with alcoholism in the past, is celebrating 5 years of sobriety. The actress shared a special note on social media and talked about her relationship with sobriety and how it had positive effects on her life.

POOJA BHATT CELEBRATES 5 YEARS OF SOBRIETY

Pooja Bhatt, who recently returned to the screen after 21 years, is marking 5 years of her healthy relationship with sobriety. She wrote a long post on Instagram, describing how sobriety helped her to stay afloat through losses and struggles.

Pooja began by explaining how her life was before she fell in love with sobriety. "I can't remember a time when I've not been in love. With people, yes...but more so with the very idea of love. I looked for love everywhere I went. Chased it down unfamiliar avenues in the dead of the night & even across countries, borders, continents. Have a lot of myself to attribute to the ones who loved me back & especially the ones that didn't. I can't blame anyone for failing me, because the truth is I more often than not, failed

myself. And then one day the universe introduced me to the love of my life - sobriety. And the need for validation from any other source ebbed (sic)," Pooja Bhatt said. The actress-director further explained the changes sobriety brought in her life. "A demanding yet fulfilling lover, Sobriety breaks down your defences, bares & reveals your soul, calls out any and all bullshit, yet clasps your hand tight & ensures you make it through many uncertain nights, filling your dawn with such unimaginable light when you do the most revolutionary thing-say

NO to yourself. It's been almost five years of this deeply gratifying relationship (sic)," added Pooja. She continued saying, "One that has helped me weather many vicious storms, kept me afloat through great loss & grounded through a supposed revival of fortune & fame. There is no room for a third in my life at this point. My priority for the first time ever, is myself. My emotional health comes first. Sobriety, recovery gets first priority. And because recovery, like love, is selfish no matter what people say, my choice is clear- it is SINGLE

BLESSEDNESS all the way (sic)." WHEN POOJA BHATT SAID SHE DECIDED TO BE OPEN ABOUT QUITTING ALCOHOL During an interview with Filmfare, Pooja Bhatt said that while she started her career with her film Daddy, which was about a girl whose father was an alcoholic, she herself dealt with the same problem years later. The actress said, "We try to cover up many things. But four years ago when I decided to quit drinking, I decided to be open about it.

Salman Khan returns to Mumbai to shoot Bigg Boss 15 after Tiger 3 Austria schedule wrap



On September 26, Salman Khan was spotted at Mumbai airport. He returned from Austria, where he was shooting for his upcoming film, Tiger 3. The actor has come back to shoot the brand new season of Bigg Boss. The 15th season of the

controversial reality show will mark Salman's return as a host for the show for the 11th time. SALMAN KHAN

RETURNS TO MUMBAI TO SHOOT BIGG BOSS 15

Recently, Salman Khan interacted with the media and talked about Bigg Boss 15. He was in Austria and attended the press conference via a video call. Now, the actor has returned to Mumbai to commence

the shoot of the 15th season of the reality show, Bigg Boss. On September 26, Salman Khan was spotted at Mumbai airport and his photos were shared on Instagram. He was seen in a plain black T-shirt, blue jeans and a blue button-down shirt. He completed his look



by adding a black hat and matching facemask.

BIGG BOSS 15 TO PREMIERE ON OCTOBER 2

On September 19, the makers announced the date of the Bigg Boss 15 grand premiere. Bigg Boss 15 is all set to air on Colors TV from October 2. This was revealed in the BB OTT grand finale on September 18. In a new promo shared by the Instagram handle of Colors TV, host Salman Khan is

seen revealing the release date. The caption read, "Harr season mein hota hai ek naya twist! #BiggBoss ka yeh season bhi layega sadasyon ke liye nayi-nayi samasyaen! Safar hoga unka, magar entertainment humara! Toh kya ready hain

aap, #BB15 ki premiere night ke liye? Tune in on 2nd October, Sat-Sun 9:30 PM and Mon-Fri 10:30 PM, only on #Colors (sic)." ABOUT SALMAN KHAN'S TIGER 3 Salman Khan is reprising his role as

RAW agent Tiger in Tiger 3. Katrina Kaif, on the other hand, will be seen in her role as ISI agent Zoya. Earlier, Emraan Hashmi rubbished rumours and clarified that he isn't a part of the Salman Khan-starrer. However, despite denying being a part of the film, Emraan's photo from Austria went viral recently. Tiger 3 is produced by Yash Raj Films and is directed by Maneesh Sharma.

Nandita Das: 'As an alumna, it's a happy moment'

For actor Nandita Das, it's a moment of pride as her alma mater - Delhi University's Miranda House - has been ranked the number one college in India. The college has retained the top position for the fifth year in a row in the NIRF (National Institutional Ranking Framework) rankings 2021 released recently. The actor-director is elated to be a part of the college's legacy. "I'm most delighted to know that it has been rated as the number one college. I am not sure what the criteria are but as an alumna, it is a happy moment," she shares.

Das, 51, who has served twice on the jury of the Cannes Film Festival, reminisces her memorable campus life and shares that she was an active participant in art and drama. She says, "I did my Geography Hons from Miranda House. But apart from the academics, I was really active in the performing arts too." However, being involved in extra curricular activities didn't mean bunking classes for Das. She says,



"I was a fairly diligent student, my attendance was rather boringly high. That was also a time when I used to do street theatre, dance and music. So, immediately after classes, I was out of college."

The 1947 Earth (1998) actor also had her first brush with student union politics during her time at Miranda House. She recalls, "I contested elections as an independent candidate. I remember making 'parchas', writing them with friends and sticking them all over and then picking them up when people threw them away. Winning that election had its own excitement!"

Going from studying at a co-ed school to adapting to an all-girls college, Das admits, was a learning experience. She continues, "Hanging out with other girls was a lot of fun and that's where I also learnt first-hand about women bonding. That women are effortlessly strong and vulnerable and can lean on each other."



Saif Ali Khan says he doesn't advise Kareena Kapoor on social media: 'That's not the secret to healthy marriage'

Saif Ali Khan has said that he doesn't tell Kareena Kapoor what to and what not to do, even if it is about her social media. Kareena Kapoor made her Instagram debut last year. The actor often shares photos and videos of her workout sessions, her family trips and even pictures from her house parties. Saif and their sons Taimur and Jeh also feature in few posts. While Kareena has been active on Instagram, Saif Ali Khan was asked if he ever asks Kareena to give the social platform a break. The Bhoot Police actor denied it and noted that dictating what one should and shouldn't do is not the secret of a healthy

marriage.

"No, no, that's not the secret to a healthy marriage. You let each other do whatever they want. She's great on it, she's a multi-tasker. She's a woman, so she can do that. You never really feel she's doing it in the sense that she's all there," Saif said, speaking with RJ Siddharth Kannan. He added, "I'm easily addicted to the phone. And I got a headache in the car, really felt dizzy because I just couldn't put the phone down and it was a moving car so I felt really sick. So now, Taimur and Kareena, everyone's telling me 'Don't be on the phone.'"



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Clean Slate

Tata submits bid to buy loss-making Air India



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