



EU proposes sanctions on Russian coal, shipping



(SAI Bureau) The European Union's executive branch proposed Tuesday a ban on coal imports from Russia in what would be the first EU sanctions targeting the country's lucrative energy industry over its war in Ukraine.

(Contd. on page 28)

After blood, presence of microplastics unearthed in human lungs by scientists

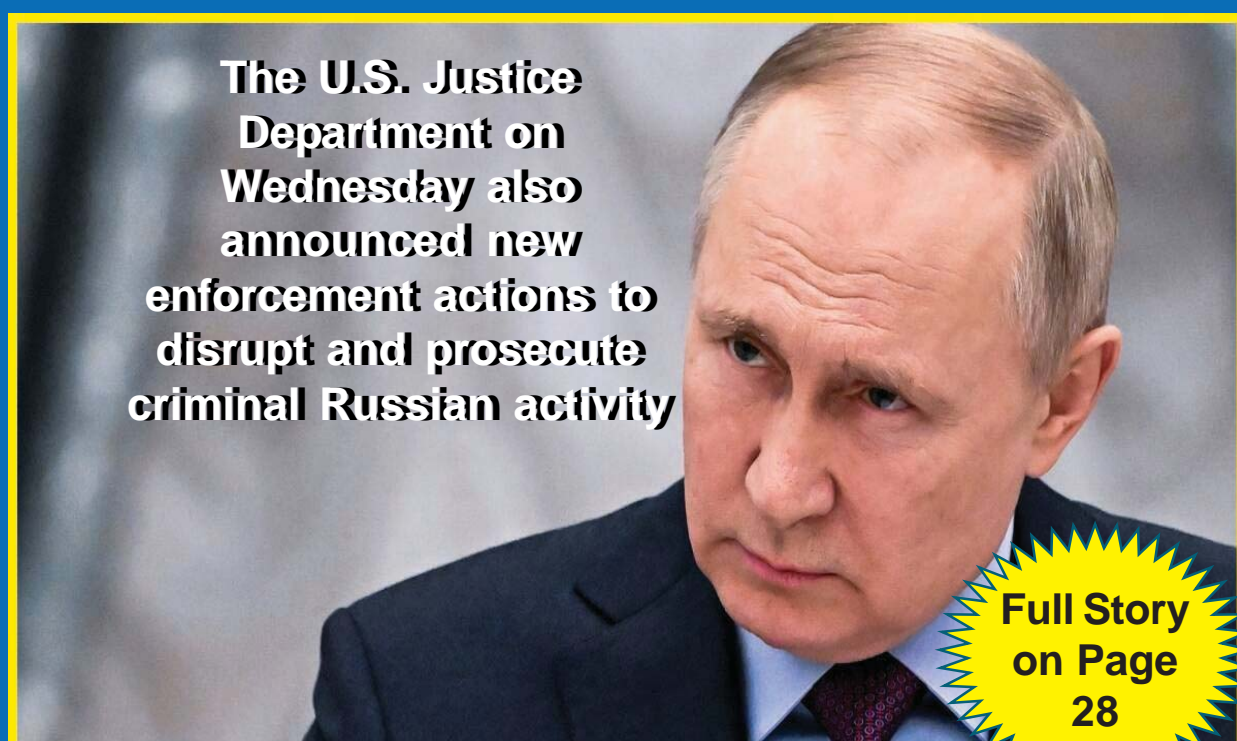


(SAI Bureau) In another glaring discovery, microplastics have been found in human lungs by scientists. This has happened for the first time. Earlier, microplastics were also found in human blood in another research. The new discovery was made by the experts of the University of Hull and Hull York Medical School. Microplastics were found in the deepest section of the lung. It was earlier thought to be impossible as the airways are very narrow.

This study showed microplastics are present in lungs of living people.

(Contd on page 28)

US sanctions Russia's Sberbank, Putin's kids, bans investment



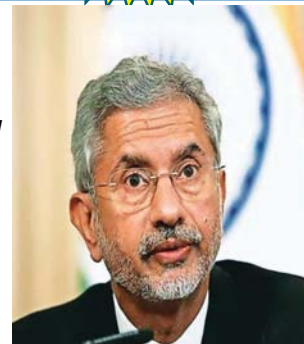
The U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday also announced new enforcement actions to disrupt and prosecute criminal Russian activity

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WMD Amendment Bill passed in LS; Jaishankar says it will boost national security

The External Affairs Minister said this while replying to the debate on the Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha

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What is XE variant of corona virus, and why you need not worry about it-at least for now

XE variant of coronavirus: Suspected to have infected a patient in Mumbai, it is a sub-variant of Omicron. So far, there is no indication that it is more dangerous than other variants

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Elderly Sikh Man Assaulted In New York

Images shared on social media showed the elderly Sikh person - whose name was not yet released - with a bloodied turban, face and clothes



(SAI Bureau) New York: An elderly Sikh man was reportedly assaulted here over the weekend, as authorities said they are in touch with local police for further information on the incident, the second such

since January this year. Images shared on social media showed the elderly Sikh person - whose name was not yet released - with a bloodied turban, face and clothes. Community-based civil and human rights organisation 'The Sikh Coalition' said it is aware of the reported assault on the elderly Sikh man in Queens, New York Sunday morning. "We are working quickly to engage the Richmond Hill sangat (group) to learn more facts and details and assess what resources and support

could be useful," the organisation said. "We are extremely disturbed by the violent and heartbreaking images that are being shared on social media platforms. As we continue learning more about what happened and any potential motivating factors, we encourage everyone to pause on sharing the name/image of the community member involved until somebody with direct access to the individual confirms consent and corroborates reported details," it added. Queens

Borough President Donovan Richards also tweeted that his office is aware of the "incident in Richmond Hill" and is contacting the New York City Police Department to learn more details about this reported attack. "Our thoughts are with him and we wish for nothing less than a full recovery," he said. In January this year, a Sikh taxi driver was assaulted at the JFK International Airport here, with the attacker allegedly calling him "turbaned people" and to "go back to your country".

Journalist Rana Ayyub Can Travel Abroad, Delhi High Court Cancels Ban

Rana Ayyub had been stopped from flying to London last week over a money laundering case being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate

(SAI Bureau) New Delhi: Journalist Rana Ayyub, who was stopped from flying to London last week, has been cleared to travel abroad by the Delhi High Court, subject to certain conditions.

A fierce critic of the government at the centre, Ms Ayyub was stopped at the Mumbai airport on Tuesday as she has been accused of money laundering by the Enforcement Directorate, which is investigating the

case. She challenged the move in the Delhi High Court where the agency on Friday opposed the petition, saying the charges against her are "serious" in nature.

Appearing for Ms Ayyub, senior advocate Vrinda Grover submitted that "all money in her bank accounts have been seized. The mala fide is writ large. After February 1, there is no summon by ED and no communication from their side. The ED's action is

nothing but a sham because my client is a critic of the government."

The Enforcement Directorate has said it is investigating alleged violation of foreign funding rules by Ms Ayyub while collecting donations for COVID-19 relief. The journalist, however, tweeted the Enforcement Directorate's summons "very curiously" reached her inbox only after she was stopped at Mumbai airport. "I was



stopped today at Mumbai immigration from travelling to deliver this address and onwards to International Journalism Festival to deliver the keynote speech on Indian democracy. I had made this announcement public over weeks, yet the ED (Enforcement Directorate) summon very curiously arrived in my inbox after I was stopped," Ms Ayyub tweeted.

The Washington-based non-profit, International Centre for Journalists, had invited Ms Ayyub to the UK for a discussion on online violence against women journalists. Ms Ayyub has often tweeted she faced online harassment and death threats from trolls. The money laundering case against Ms Ayyub is based on a First Information Report or FIR filed by Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad Police in September, by a

Vikas Sankrityayan - the founder of an NGO called "Hindu IT Cell" and a resident of Indrapuram in Ghaziabad. According to a document attributed to "ED sources", the agency which investigates financial crimes found that the journalist had raised over ? 2.69 crore through an online crowdfunding platform called Ketto for charitable purposes between 2020 and 2021. Ms Ayyub has maintained the "entire donation received through Ketto is accounted for and not a single paisa has been misused". However, the ED alleged its probe makes it abundantly clear that the funds were raised in the name of charity in a completely pre-planned and systematic manner, and the funds were not used completely for the purpose of which the funds were raised.

ELEVENTH OUTSTANDING WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS AWARDS GALA organized by Indu Jaiswal of IAF (Indian American Forum). Indu Jaiswal is known for her strong commitment and dedication to the community cause was the organizing force behind the gala.



Joe Biden Nominates Indian-Origin Woman Attorney To Key Admin Positions

Kalpana Kotagal is the nominee for Commissioner on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission while Singh has been nominated as Chief Financial Officer, Department of Housing and Urban Development, the White House said on Friday

(SAI Bureau) Washington: US President Joe Biden has announced his intent to nominate Indian-origin civil rights attorney Kalpana Kotagal and certified public accountant Vinay Singh to key administration positions. Kotagal is the nominee for Commissioner on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission while Singh has been nominated as Chief Financial Officer, Department of Housing and Urban Development, the White House said on Friday.

Kotagal, who is the daughter of immigrants from India, is a partner at Cohen Milstein, a member of the firm's Civil Rights and Employment practice group, and co-chair of the firm's Hiring and Diversity Committee. She is the co-author of the seminal legal template 'Inclusion Rider'.

Kotagal is also a diversity, equity and inclusion expert, and represents disenfranchised people in employment and civil rights litigation involving issues related to Title VII, Equal Pay Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Family and Medical Leave Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act, the White House said. Indian-American Impact, nation's leading civic Indian American and South Asian organisation, welcomed the nomination of Kotagal to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "Kotagal is an exceptionally talented litigator who has been a fierce advocate for employment equity and civil rights," said Neil Makhija, executive director of Indian American Impact. "She has broken barriers as one of the first South Asian women to become a law partner in the plaintiffs' bar and has been a leading voice in

the national conversation on diversity, equity and inclusion.

"We are proud to give our emphatic support to her nomination and look forward to celebrating her confirmation," Makhija said. Singh, a Certified Public Accountant, is currently senior advisor to the Administrator at the US Small Business Administration (SBA), assisting agency teams to deliver organisational efficiencies to better serve our communities' small businesses. He has 25 years of private sector leadership experience with a deep understanding of finance, analytics and strategy. Singh had also served in the Obama-Biden administration as a Deputy Assistant Secretary (US Field). He played a key role in leading trade and investment policy and promotion efforts to better market conditions for US companies. Prior to his role at



the SBA, Singh was a Partner and Chief Operating Officer for Infrastructure Practice at KPMG in India. As a senior member of the executive team, he led several organisational transformation projects, leveraging technology to improve profitability and decision-making, the White House said.

As lead partner for the World Bank Group account, he supported global sustainability projects focused on solving urban and rural challenges in

housing, water, energy, and economic development, it added. Last month, President Biden nominated two Indian-Americans as US envoys. He nominated diplomat Puneet Talwar as the country's ambassador to Morocco and political activist Shefali Razdan Duggal as his envoy to the Netherlands. In March, Biden also announced that Indian-American public health expert Dr Ashish Jha will take over as his COVID-19 Response Coordinator.

Number Of Indian Students In US Rose By 12%, From China Dropped By 8%

In its annual report released on Wednesday, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact international student enrolment in the United States in 2021



(SAI Bureau) Washington: The number of Indian students in the United States increased by over 12 per cent in 2021, while those from China, which accounts for the largest number, dropped by more than eight per cent, according to an official report. In its annual report released on Wednesday, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact international student enrolment in the United States in 2021. The total number

of SEVIS records for active F-1 and M-1 students was 1,236,748 in the calendar year 2021, a decrease of 1.2 per cent from the calendar year 2020.

SEVIS stands for Students and Exchange Visitor Information System. F-1 and M-1 are the two non-immigrant student visas. J-1 is also a non-immigrant student visa but is mostly given to scholars exchange programmes. In 2021, 8,038 SEVP-certified schools were eligible to enrol international

students, registering a decrease by 280 schools from 8,369 eligible schools in 2020. "The number of students from China and India made Asia the most popular continent of origin. However, China sent fewer students in 2021 in comparison to 2020 (-33,569) while India sent more students (+25,391)," the report said. As many as 37 per cent of Indian students are females. Overall, China continues to top the list of countries sending 348,992 students to the US. India follows China with 232,851 students. China and India are followed by South Korea (58,787), Canada (37,453), Brazil (33,552), Vietnam (29,597), Saudi Arabia (28,600), Taiwan (25,406), Japan (20,144) and Mexico (19,680). According to the report, only Asia and Australia/Pacific Islands saw an overall decline in the number of students coming to the United States last year as all other continents saw an increase.

International F-1 and M-1 students came from every continent in the world other than Antarctica and from more than 224 countries and territories. Students from China and India made Asia the most popular continent of origin, accounting for 71.9 per cent of the international student population. China sent fewer international students while India sent more, the report said. In 2021, California hosted 208,257 international students, the largest percentage of international students (16.8 per cent) of any US state. There were 240,479 active exchange visitors in the United States in 2021 compared to 256,944 active exchange visitors in 2020, it said. Most F-1 and M-1 students come to the US to take part in the higher education system. In 2021, roughly 92 per cent of all F-1 and M-1 students were

enrolled in a SEVP-certified associate, bachelor's, master's or doctoral programmes. Specifically, international students in the US pursued 1,142,352 degrees in higher education, which is an increase from the calendar year 2020 (1,121,981). It is important to note that one student might partake in more than one level of education in a given calendar year, so they may be counted in multiple educational levels. USCIS said 47 per cent (581,843) of all active SEVIS records hailed from either China (348,992) or India (232,851) in the calendar year 2021, the same percentage as the calendar year 2020. While the overall number of active F-1 and M-1 student records coming from Asia decreased by 34,781 from the calendar year 2020 to the calendar year 2021, student record trends varied across different countries, it said.

Hyderabad's Biological E to get mRNA technology from WHO to produce Covid vaccines

Biological E and the Indian government will work together with WHO and their partners to develop a roadmap for producing mRNA vaccines as soon as possible. At present, India has no Covid-19 vaccine made on mRNA platform



(News Agency) Hyderabad-based vaccine manufacturer Biological E. Limited (BE) on Monday announced that it had been selected as a recipient of mRNA technology from the

World Health Organisation (WHO) technology transfer hub. The company produces a number of critical and life-saving vaccines, including Corbevax. The company was selected

by WHO's Advisory Committee on Vaccine Product Development (ACPDV) after they examined a number of proposals from India.

WHO and their partners will work with the Indian government and BE to develop a roadmap and put in place the necessary training and support for the company to start producing mRNA vaccines as soon as possible.

Primarily set up to address the Covid-19 emergency, the WHO mRNA technology transfer hub has the potential to expand manufacturing capacity for other products as well, including treatments,

and target other priorities. mRNA vaccines use a messenger RNA created in a laboratory to teach the human cells how to produce a protein that in turn initiates an immune response inside the body against a particular disease. The immune response will fight the actual virus as it gets into the body. At present, India has no Covid-19 vaccine made on mRNA platform.

Mahima Datla, Managing Director, Biological E. Limited, said "We are excited about this remarkable milestone in our efforts to produce affordable vaccines for the world. We are very pleased with the trust that

WHO places in our organisation, which adheres to the standards set by the WHO. This is also a reflection of our world-class processes, scale and effectiveness." She further added that the company had been investing in mRNA technologies since last year. "This new technology will definitely strengthen our resolve to develop and manufacture more vaccines in future. This partnership with WHO will enhance our ability to develop next generation mRNA vaccines that could be more suitable globally and expand the reach of vaccines availability worldwide," she said.

Ex-Punjab minister takes away govt furniture, issues cheque when officials report missing items

Former Punjab minister Manpreet Singh Badal has claimed that he "purchased" the items reported missing from the official bungalow he vacated earlier this year

(News Agency) Valuables missing from the official homes of two former ministers made headlines days after the AAP rode to power in the Punjab Assembly elections. One of the two Congress ministers in question, Manpreet Singh Badal, has claimed that he has "purchased" the items reported missing from his house (No. 47) vacated on March 24. Badal also shared a photo of a cheque amounting to Rs 1.84 lakhs that he handed over to authorities.

Jaijeet Singh Johal, the brother-in-law of Manpreet Singh Badal, also said in a video shared on Facebook that the furniture reported missing by authorities was not 'antique' as is being claimed on social media. "I also want to clarify that the furniture has not been categorised as heritage but was renovated in 2008 when Manpreet Badal became the Finance minister. The furniture was repaired from a furniture shop by spending rupees 1.60 lakh," Johal said.

Badal's brother-in-law claimed that the valuables in question - a dining table, ten dining table chairs, a service trolley and a recliner sofa - were restored in 2017 since they had

not been in use for 15 years. "After 15 years, we vacated the house and the same was allotted to the then Akali Dal minister. He did not use those items which were lying in the PWD store. The items were again issued to Manpreet Badal in 2017 when he became the Finance Minister. "The items were repaired again and the PWD department gave you the option that, if you want to keep the furniture, you can pay for it. We paid Rs 1.84 lakh for the old furniture. We have already issued a cheque on the 24th of March 2022," Jaijeet Singh Johal said.

Asked why the items were not put forward in a public auction if they could not be pressed into service, an official of the Punjab PWD Department (B&R) said, "There is a provision to recover the cost of the items from the allottee if the items are missing."

The former minister has, therefore, been issued a no dues certificate by the authorities concerned, the official added. Besides house No. 47, two refrigerators, five LED TVs, four oil-filled radiators, six room heaters and five pedestal fans worth over Rs 4.86 lakhs were also reported missing from house

No. 960, which was allotted to Gurpreet Kangar, the former Revenue minister.

While the authorities have asked the minister to return the valuables, the minister has claimed he has yet to vacate the

official residence. Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, a Cabinet Minister in CM Bhagwant Mann's AAP government, reacted to the developments by saying, "I have also been allotted a government house. Upon inspection, it has

been found that even small items worth a few hundred rupees have also been taken away.

"If we stoop to this level, what type of politics are they doing? They are thieves and looters. I condemn it."

Indian Army helicopter makes emergency landing in Himachal Pradesh's Una

A Cheetah helicopter of the Indian Army which was flying towards Pathankot Air Base had to make an emergency landing in an open field in Himachal Pradesh's Una district on Monday morning due to technical issues

(News Agency) A Cheetah helicopter of the Indian Army made an emergency landing in an open field in Himachal Pradesh's Una district on Monday morning following a technical issue with it.

The helicopter was flying towards Pathankot Air Base but had to make an emergency landing in Nakaro of Gagret assembly constituency of Una district due to technical issues.

According to one of the eyewitnesses, it was in the morning that he was working in his fields when suddenly he saw an army helicopter spinning in the sky and within a few moments the helicopter



landed in the empty field, following which more people gathered at the spot. The pilot on board was safe, who later contacted his officers. Subsequently, four

officers reached the spot. While no one was hurt in this emergency landing, efforts are on to fix the technical snag in the helicopter.

150 AAP members join BJP after Arvind Kejriwal, Bhagwant Mann's visit to Gujarat

In a setback to the Aam Aadmi Party, around 150 leaders from AAP joined the BJP a day after Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann visited Gujarat

(News Agency) A day after already many from their party Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann visited Gujarat, they joined the BJP. This clearly shows that they can't fool the people of Gujarat. Their visit does not mean anything to Gujarat. There are around 150 leaders and workers from the party joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The Congress, too, suffered a setback as many of its members joined the BJP as well. Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Mann were on a two-day visit to Gujarat where they held a roadshow, visited a local temple, Gandhi ashram and conducted meetings. They left Gujarat on Sunday evening. The exodus of the AAP leaders and workers to the BJP happened on Monday at the saffron party's office in Kamalam in Gandhinagar. BJP Gujarat's general secretary Pradipsinh Vaghela said, "Delhi CM and Punjab CM have not reached their home or even had food and

blessings of Gujarat's people to the BJP. In just five days of the AAP government in Punjab, farmers were lathicharged." Vaghela, while addressing the new entrants, said, "Today, you left AAP and Congress. They will say that you people are of no use. But let me tell you, for the development of Gujarat, you are very useful and welcome in the BJP. For a long time, there has been a BJP government in Gujarat because the people have faith in us and the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

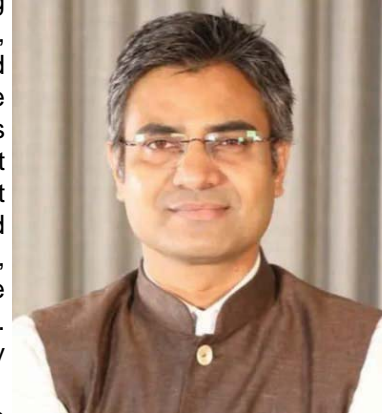


Will win 58 seats if elections happen today, says AAP Gujarat in-charge

Sandeep Pathak, AAP Gujarat state in-charge, speaks after his induction recently

(News Agency) Aam Aadmi Party Gujarat state in-charge, Dr. Sandeep Pathak, on Monday said that according to the internal scientific survey conducted by the party, if elections in the state happen today itself, AAP will win 58 seats. Speaking exclusively to India Today, Pathak, after being inducted as AAP's Gujarat in-charge on Monday said, "There was an intelligence agency report done by the government which said that AAP would get around 55 seats. However, we have our own team. We do surveys very scientifically. Our internal scientific survey says we will get 58 seats."

After a majestic win in the Punjab state assembly election, AAP has set its eyes on its next goal- Gujarat. It has emerged as a strong contender to BJP for the upcoming Gujarat state assembly election, which is slated to be held in December this year. Pathak told India Today, "People of Gujarat themselves need change. Congress cannot defeat the BJP. The whole of Gujarat knows this. The only option is AAP. People of Gujarat will bring the change. We don't want



to defeat any party. We want the people of Gujarat to win. People need better education, health, infrastructure and employment." "In villages where Congress had dominance, now things have changed. Our focus will be the villages of Gujarat. Economically weaker sections of city don't believe in the BJP anymore. AAP will have a very good future in Gujarat," Pathak added. On the challenges that AAP will have to face in the state, Pathak told India Today that there were a lot of challenges in Gujarat but more important is that people of Gujarat need change.

"A lot of leaders from different parties are in touch with us. All good people who want change and need good schools and hospitals are welcome. There is one thing common in Punjab and Gujarat- both are progressive states. People of both states need progress. In Punjab, we earlier had fought elections and won 20 seats. Gujarat is different," he said. Dr. Sandeep Pathak, is a former professor of IIT Delhi and is said to be one of the brains behind AAP's election strategies in Punjab.



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Realtors in Telangana stop work, hold strike as costs escalate

Real estate companies in Telangana suspended work as a mark of protest against rising costs of construction materials. They fear that property costs might go up by 10-15 per cent in Hyderabad

(SAI Bureau) Real estate companies in Telangana on Monday halted work as a mark of protest against the steep rise in the prices of cement, steel, aluminium and other construction materials. Realtors across the state voluntarily suspended work.

According to Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI), 5000 builders stopped work on Monday. Around 3.25 lakh people including workers and other staff, also joined the strike. Realtors suspended the work to protest against what they claim is an 'artificial' rise in construction material prices and to demand government intervention in the matter.

The real estate companies said the price of construction materials increased significantly affecting the cost of the project. There has been a steep increase in prices of materials like cement, steel and aluminium. They pointed out that it has already suffered for two years due to the pandemic, and now inflation is making matters worse. Rising petroleum prices have also affected the real estate industry. Cement and steel companies allegedly created artificial price rises, according to Telangana Construction Associations.

The association fear that in the current situation, property costs might see an increase of 10-15 per cent in Hyderabad. Live TV



Lok Sabha passes Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill through voice vote

The Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill provides a legal safeguard for police and investigating agencies to collect and store biological and physical samples of convicts and those accused of a crime

(SAI Bureau) The Lok Sabha on Monday passed the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill that seeks to replace the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920. The Bill was passed by a voice vote in the lower house after Union Home minister Amit Shah addressed concerns raised by Members of Parliament about the legislation.

"There should be no apprehension," he said, adding, "Next-generation crimes cannot be tackled with old techniques. We have to try to take criminal justice system to the next era." The Union Home minister also said that the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill will empower police and investigating agencies to remain two steps ahead of criminals. YSRC's

Midhun Reddy, who supported the

Bill, said during the discussion that more than 70 countries rely on similar laws to aid probe agencies. Opposition members, however, termed the legislation as "draconian" and demanded that it be referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee. Participating in the discussion on the Bill in the Lok Sabha on Monday, Congress MP Manish Tewari termed the legislation as "draconian and against civil liberties". DMK's Dayanidhi Maran said the Bill was against the spirit of federalism, while TMC MP Mahua Moitra said the legislation could lead to the violation of the privacy of an individual who



has not even been convicted of a crime. "Instead of helping the undertrials, the bill seeks to put those already in trouble into more trouble," said Shiv Sena MP Vinayak Raut. The Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill was tabled in the Lok Sabha on March 28 of this year. It seeks to provide

legal sanctions for the police and investigating agencies to collect and store physical and biological samples of convicts and those accused of crimes. Such samples can include finger impressions, palm print and foot-print impressions, iris and retina scan, as well as photographs.

Take Muslim community into confidence, says Karnataka minister on mosque loudspeaker row
Amid calls for a ban on loudspeakers in mosques, Karnataka minister Eshwarappa said a solution needs to be reached by taking the Muslim community into confidence



(SAI Bureau) Karnataka Minister KS Eshwarappa on Monday said the loudspeaker issue raised by Raj Thackeray needs to be resolved by taking the Muslim community in confidence. "The attempts by Raj Thackeray or Sri Rama Sene against the use of loudspeakers at mosques, has to be naturally done by taking the Muslim community into confidence. There have been complaints for a long time that it disturbs students and patients during the morning and evening hours," Eshwarappa said.

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray last week demanded that loudspeakers of mosques be shut down. "If this is not stopped, there will be speakers outside mosques playing Hanuman Chalisa at higher volume," he had said in Mumbai. Responding to calls for a ban on loudspeakers in mosques, Eshwarappa said the Muslim community have for long been following the tradition of using loudspeakers to call for prayer, but it is disturbing students, including their children and patients.

Four years on, disappearance of Jesna still remains a mystery

Jesna, a college student from Kerala went missing in 2018. Her disappearance still remains a mystery. The CBI is currently probing the case

(SAI Bureau) Jesna Maria James, a second-year B Com student, went missing in Kerala four years ago. Her disappearance still remains a mystery. Jesna who hails from Kollamula in Pathanamthitta district was reported missing on March 22, 2018. She was a second-year student at St Dominic's College in Kanjirapally. She left her home four years ago to go to her paternal aunt's house at Mundakayam in Kottayam. However, the trail turns cold after that trip.

Kerala High Court had directed the state crime branch, which was investigating the case earlier, to hand over the case diary and related files to CBI. But a year later, the CBI probe is along similar lines to that of police and officials have been unable to crack the case. The probe team launched a

massive search across the region, including the forest areas, but little progress was made. Jesna had reached Erumely after leaving for her relative's house in Mundakkayam.



Initially, the investigation was carried out by a special team led by Deputy Superintendent of Police, Thiruvalla. CBI took over the probe after a High Court order and filed

the FIR in court. Action committees to find Jesna continue to follow the case. However, the FIR filed by the CBI was similar to the one registered by the police. Both investigation teams suspect abduction as the reason for her disappearance. The probe which is at a dead-end may extend to other states now

Anil Deshmukh deliberately trying to evade custody, alleges CBI

The CBI, on Monday, alleged that Maharashtra's former home minister Anil Deshmukh was trying to evade custody

(SAI Bureau) The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) alleged that Maharashtra's former home minister Anil Deshmukh was trying to evade the custody of the agency and, therefore, he got himself admitted to state-run JJ hospital. The investigating agency made the claim during a hearing at a special court on Monday. "Please look at the timing. On April 1, the court allowed that the accused be transferred to the CBI. Investigating officer (of CBI) sends email to jail on that very day itself that this order has been passed. In the meantime, on April 2, Anil Deshmukh got himself admitted to the hospital. What is this? This is simply to circumvent the process of law and evade the effect of a court order. It is intentional to avoid custody. We were shocked to know that he was already admitted," said CBI lawyer Rajmohan Chand.

Chand sought Deshmukh's custody by arguing, "He may be

in hospital, but I am seeking custody of Anil Deshmukh. If simple ailments are there, then custody can be granted if movements of the accused are not restricted. The case is at a crucial stage." However, later, on instructions from investigating officer Mukesh Kumar, Chand said that a report from prison and the hospital authority should be sought for. An application to that effect was also filed by the CBI. However, the court said that the investigating officer is at liberty to conduct the investigation as per his wish in accordance with law. Separate discussion is not warranted. The special court in Mumbai sent three accused, aides of Anil Deshmukh, to CBI custody till April 11 in a corruption case registered against the NCP leader.

The court also refused to call for the report from jail and hospital authorities about Deshmukh's health condition as was being sought by CBI. Special CBI judge AS Sayed said, "Investigating

officer can take recourse to law. First, he has to show what attempts he has taken at this juncture. Such an order cannot be passed." While seeking remand, CBI lawyers Rajmohan Chand, Ratandeep Singh and Sumedh Wankhede said that there are serious allegations against Anil Deshmukh. "While investigating allegations against Deshmukh, the role of other accused, Sachin Waze as well as Deshmukh's personal secretary Sanjeev Palande and personal assistant Kundan Shinde emerged. Illegal gratification was being collected from orchestra bars. There was a demand and there were instructions for monthly collection. The target was more than Rs 1 crore per month. Very disturbing facts have emerged, and I cannot reveal everything in open court," said Rajmohan Chand. The CBI had recorded dismissed Mumbai cop Sachin Waze's statement before the magistrate under section 164 of

the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). Pointing to that, Chand argued, "There are certain witnesses who have clearly stated that illegal gratification was taken and 164 statements corroborate that illegal gratification was taken. But there are inconsistencies in certain statements and that is why custody of the accused is needed. The investigation is at a crucial stage. The magnitude of the case is very disturbing."

The investigating agency said that the case is with Delhi CBI ACB and that there are voluminous documents. "Scientific interrogation is needed. There is lot of digital evidence as well. So, we need custody and the agency may be allowed to take all the accused to Delhi. The Maharashtra government is not at all helping and we are facing serious opposition. In such difficult circumstances we are conducting the investigation. For want of secrecy and sanctity of

the investigation where the documents are voluminous, we need to take the accused to Delhi," argued Chand. However, advocate Sairuchita Choudhary appearing for Sanjeev Palande argued, "The CBI FIR was registered a year ago and the remand does not mention what happened after that. Raids were carried out, but it was 'Nil panchanama' as nothing was recovered. He had appeared before CBI and his statements were recorded and even his phone was mirrored. The CBI, as close as March 2022 said that Palande was never an accused." "What is it that you have not been able to get in the last one year and then suddenly you are saying that the investigation is at a crucial stage? What are these scientific tests? They must tell us before trying to scare us with these words. There is no extraordinary reason given by them," argued Choudhary.

KCR unable to take action against drug trafficking, says BJP after police bust rave party

BJP accused Telangana CM KCR of not being able to act against drug peddlers after Hyderabad Police busted a rave party and seized cocaine from the pub

(SAI Bureau) After Hyderabad Police raided a pub, seized five grams of cocaine and arrested the owner and manager of the pub, the BJP accused Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao of not being able to take action against drug trafficking in the state. BJP leaders on Monday demanded the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) government take action against everyone involved in drug trafficking in the city.

"We question whether Chief Minister KCR has the guts to arrest all those involved in drug trafficking and get them tested, as police have found cocaine from customers who were present at a party in the pub. Why is the KCR government hesitating to take immediate action," BJP spokesperson NV Subhash said. Over 125 customers, including children of some prominent

personalities, reportedly partying, were questioned and later released by the police.

Based on the information that the pub was open hours after midnight with customers taking drugs, the raid was conducted and there were over 100 others drinking at the pub at that time. Meanwhile, Congress leader Mohammad Ali Shabbir accused KCR of turning

Telangana into a hub of drugs and liquor in seven years. "Having turned Telangana into a hub of drugs & liquor in the last 7 years, CM KCR is now enacting the dramas of crackdown. TRS Govt did nothing when Congress demanded regulation of pubs & liquor shops. Consequently, an entire generation got spoiled due to drugs & liquor addiction," he said in a tweet. After the seizure of the drug, a case was registered against the two owners, one of whom is reportedly absconding.



Bombay HC imposes cost of improving Taloja prison library on 2 petitioners

The Bombay High Court is using the money from the cost imposed on two petitioners to buy books for the Taloja prison library

(SAI Bureau) The Bombay High Court has ordered two petitioners to pay Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000 each as costs while hearing their civil petitions. The court specified that the money will be used to buy books for the Taloja central prison's library. The petitions had no relation to the Taloja central prison in Navi Mumbai. The court's interest towards the state of the prison library started during an earlier hearing of Elgar Parishad accused Gautam Navlakha's plea. He had approached the court to allow a PG Wodehouse book inside the prison. During this hearing, the bench of Justices SB Shukre and GA Sanap expressed their disappointment after finding out that the number of books was less than the number of inmates in the prison. For the nearly

3,000 prisoners at the Taloja Central Prison, there are only 2,850 books in the library. The



bench informed government pleader Sangeeta Shinde that their order for the two civil cases have specified that the cost paid by the parties will go to Taloja jail. Shinde said she will convey the court's message to the Maharashtra state prison authorities. In normal cases, the money from the costs imposed on petitioners goes to the Chief Minister's relief fund or cancer hospitals and organisations.

India and Australia share the Indian Ocean, says Australian Envoy to India Barry O'Farrell



aggressive China has been a worry for both countries. Without mentioning China's name, he said, "there is a panda in the room" pointing to the border tensions India has been facing and the trade coercion that Australia faces which has also been the driving force behind Indo-Australia defence ties. The 2020 Virtual Summit saw both sides deepening military cooperation through a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement – allowing more interoperability.

Australia is part of the Malabar exercises, and the Australian Navy also participates in India's largest naval exercise, Milan. Additionally, an Australian Navy liaison officer has been deputed at India's Information Fusion Centre. Canberra also has a 2+2 ministerial dialogue with Delhi. At the 2022 Australia-India Institute Orator, in response to a question over Indian position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the High Commissioner said,

"Australia understands India's position.." explaining, "some of my friends and I have differences but I respect their right to support another football team, there right to send their children to this school, my right to send children to that school...so it has not got in the way, that way clear in the quad meeting where each country made the position clear at Ukraine" Amid the invasion, India has abstained from various resolutions on the Ukraine-Russia war at the United Nations. While Delhi has called for respecting the UN Charter, international law and territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries, it has also asked Moscow and Kyiv to have direct talks to cease hostilities.

Western countries have been asking India to strongly condemn Russian action, but Moscow has been a key support of Delhi at international forums and a key defence supplier as well. The High commissioner said, "I get

the fact, 65 years ago Prime Minister of India, an Indian PM 65 years ago....outlined a sensible doctrine where he said India was not in the business of condemnation but in the business of creating conditions in which solutions can be found, so keeping avenues open, dialogue open, got to be a good thing" Asked about Canberra's position on Russia at the G20 grouping, HC underlined his government's position, saying, "we will continue to lobby that Putin should not be at G20. That is Australian government's position, and that is the position of number of other governments and that will be resolved by the G20 themselves." Indonesia is the chair of the grouping this year and will hold the summit in November. Several western countries have been in touch with Jakarta for Russia's suspension from the economic grouping, but this will require a consensus that will be hard to achieve.

(SAI Bureau) Emphasizing the "trust which underpins the Australia India relationship", Australian High Commissioner to India has said that the two countries "share the Indian Ocean" and "at our heart...are both Indo-Pacific nations."

The comments come even as both sides have seen increased engagement, including the signing of the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement over the weekend.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison met each other virtually three times in the last month; the QUAD meet, summit and the signing of the trade pact. The High commissioner explained, "Our geography places us squarely in the middle of the world's strategic centre of gravity. And as the international system becomes more multi-polar, the region's resilience will be tested". This comes even as an ever-

Three terror attacks in 24 hours in Kashmir Valley: 1 CRPF jawan dies, four non-locals injured

(SAI Bureau) One CRPF soldier was killed and another injured in an attack in Srinagar's Maisuma area. Terrorists fired at the CRPF deployment party in the interiors of the Maisuma area and fled from the spot. In the last 24 hours, three attacks have taken place in the Kashmir Valley. The first attack took place in the Nowpora Litter area of Pulwama, where two non-locals were attacked and injured by terrorists. They were later shifted to the hospital where they are being treated.

"Terrorists fired upon two labourers identified as Dheeraj Dutt, son of Susheil Dutt, and Surinder Singh, son of Bishan Singh, both residents of Pathankot, Punjab, in the Nowpora Litter area of Pulwama. Both the labourers received gunshot injuries and were immediately shifted to a hospital for treatment," said Jammu and Kashmir Police. The second attack took place in the Lajurah area of South Kashmir's Pulwama district early today. In the attack, two non-locals were injured. The duo has been identified as Patlashwar Kumar, son of Joko Chowdary of Bihar, who has a right arm injury, and Joko Chowdary, son of Thaugh Chowdary of Bihar, who has injuries to the right arm and right leg. Jammu and Kashmir's former Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti, condemned the attack and said senseless violence does not yield anything. "Condemn the attack on CRPF personnel in Maisuma this afternoon. This senseless violence doesn't yield anything apart from misery for the innocent families of those killed. My condolences to the family and prayers for the injured," said Mehbooba Mufti, former CM of J&K. Police have registered cases in all three incidents.

As India's SC resumes physical hearing after 2 years, let's look at key rulings that marked lockdown

(SAI Bureau) After a gap of two years, India's Supreme Court began full-fledged physical hearing on Monday, after it had to switch to virtual hearing due to mounting Covid cases in the country.

On March 30, Chief Justice NV Ramana had said that the court will resume the physical hearings from April 4 onwards. "Monday onwards, we are opening fully, physically," he said. The Chief Justice added that they would still conduct virtual hearings on Monday and Friday provided the advocates ask for it.

Earlier, the top court used to hear matters physically on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and conducted hearings through video conference on Monday and Friday. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic hindered its functioning at the beginning, the Supreme Court's openness to adopting technology without any prior experience made sure that the gates of justice remain open to the people even in the most distraught times.

During the 100 days of lockdown between March and August 2020, 1,022 benches were set up. More than 15,000 cases were taken up, of which 4,300 were resolved, reported Hindustan Times newspaper.

During that time, around 51,000 lawyers argued their cases through videoconferencing till August 2020. At

present, more than 150 cases are heard every day by the SC through virtual hearings, the newspaper noted.

During its virtual functioning, the top

criminal history of their candidates

In a major fillip for electoral reforms, the Supreme Court had directed political parties to publish the entire criminal history of their candidates contesting for state and national elections. It also asked the parties to detail the reasons that prompted them to field suspected criminals. The court held that the information should be published in a local as well as a national newspaper as well as on the parties' social media handles. It should mandatorily be published either within 48 hours of the selection

of candidates or less than two weeks before the first date for filing of nominations, whichever is earlier, the court said. On cryptocurrency

The Supreme Court set aside the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) circular issued in 2018 that put a complete ban on banking services for the virtual currency. The court found the 2018 circular to be unreasonable and disproportionate to the objective sought to be achieved by RBI, paving the way for a regulatory regime of cryptocurrency in India instead of a complete ban. The 2018 circular stated that the entities regulated by RBI are prohibited from providing any service in relation to virtual currencies, including those related to the transfer or receipt of money in accounts relating to the purchase or sale of virtual currencies.



Jammu and Kashmir: Terrorist hideout busted near LOC, huge cache of arms recovered

(SAI Bureau) A joint team of the Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police busted a terror hideout and recovered a large cache of arms & ammunition near a village along the Line of Control in Poonch district. The Indian Army said that a search operation was conducted based on specific intelligence inputs, following which a team consisting of the Poonch Brigade of White Knight Corps and a special operations group (SOG) raided Noorkote village of Haveli tehsil on Sunday evening. "On Apr 3, the alert troops of Indian Army and SOG, carried out a joint operation and recovered arms and ammunition

from a village along Line of Control in district Poonch(J&K)," said PRO Defence, Jammu. He added that the search team seized two AK-47 rifles, two AK 47 magazines, one 223 bore AK shape gun with handgrip, two magazines of 233 bore AK shape gun, one Chinese Pistol, one Chinese pistol magazine, 63 AK-47 rounds, twenty rounds of 223 bore AK Shape gun and four Chinese pistol rounds. "The security forces have said that the terrorists were planning to disturb peace in Jammu and Kashmir, which has been foiled by them. Officials said that no arrests were made during the search operation.



Nepal Prime Minister offers prayer at Pashupatinath temple in Varanasi

(SAI Bureau) Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba along with his wife Arzu Deuba and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Samrajeswar Pashupatinath temple and offered prayers on Sunday, following their visit to Kaal Bhairav temple and Kashi Vishwanath temple.

Deuba arrived in India on Friday on a three-day visit. It is his first such visit abroad after

assuming office in July 2021. Today on the last day of his official visit he came to Varanasi to offer prayers at the Kaal Bhairav temple, Kashi Vishwanath temple and Samrajeswar Pashupatinath temple. After offering puja at the Samrajeswar Pashupatinath temple, Adityanath, Nepalese PM and his wife were felicitated with 'shawl' by the priest of the temple. Samrajeswar

Pashupatinath Temple in the holy city of Varanasi which stood as a symbol of India-Nepal unity is attracting scores of tourists and pilgrims after the development of Kashi Vishwanath Temple. It is also known as Nepali Mandir. Earlier in the day, Deuba along with his wife offered prayers at Kaal Bhairav temple and Kashi Vishwanath temple and offered prayers. At Kaal Bhairav temple,

Nepalese PM was welcomed as per the Indian ritual, with conch, damru and "bel patra" garland while at Kashi Vishwanath temple, Deuba was welcomed by applying 'tilak'. The streets of

Varanasi were all decked up with Deuba's posters and hoardings to greet him. Children could be seen standing with the national flags of both countries (India and Nepal).

Fuel prices continue to soar in India, 12th hike in two weeks



(SAI Bureau) The cost of fuel continued to soar in India, with diesel and petrol prices hiked 40 paise per litre—the twelfth hike in two weeks. In the national capital Delhi, petrol will now cost Rs 103.81 per litre, while diesel will be sold at Rs 94.67 per litre, according to a price notification of state fuel retailers. In the financial hub Mumbai, the petrol price has shot up to Rs 118.83 per litre, while the diesel rate has been increased to Rs 103.07.

Rates have been increased across the country and vary from state to state, depending upon the incidence of local taxation.

With Monday's hike, the compound increase in the last 14 days amounts to Rs 8.40 per litre. The fuel prices had remained the same for four and a half months from November 2021 till the third week of March. In November last year, when the petrol and diesel

prices were at an all-time high, the government had slashed excise duty on fuel to bring relief to the consumer's pocket.

Meanwhile, the fuel prices are expected to rise again considering the sharp jump in crude prices in the international markets following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At present, India imports nearly 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements.

Moody's Investors Services last month stated that state retailers together lost around US \$2.25 billion (Rs 19,000 crore) in revenue for keeping petrol and diesel prices on hold during the election period. Oil companies "will need to raise diesel prices by Rs 13.1-24.9 per litre and Rs 10.6-22.3 a litre on gasoline (petrol) at an underlying crude price of US \$100-120 per barrel," according to Kotak Institutional Equities.

Connectivity with Central Asia key priority for India: President Ram Nath Kovind

(SAI Bureau) President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday said that connectivity with the Central Asian countries remain a key priority for India, which is a member of both the International North-South Transport Corridor, and the Ashgabat Agreement.

Addressing the young diplomats of Turkmenistan at the Institute of International Relations in Ashgabat, he said: "We have taken steps to operationalise the Chabahar port in Iran which can provide a secure, viable and unhindered access to the sea for the Central Asian countries." "While expanding connectivity, it is important to ensure that connectivity



initiatives are consultative, transparent and participatory, with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. India stands ready to cooperate, invest and build connectivity in the region."

Kovind stressed that India's foreign policy has been constantly evolving since its Independence. "India's emergence as one of the major economies of the world and the relevance of India's technological

capabilities has shaped key global negotiations. India's partnerships with countries of the Global South have grown substantially while its relations with major powers have deepened further," he said.

He emphasised that one of the key pillars

of India's foreign policy in recent years have been the 'Neighbourhood First' policy. "While 'Indo-Pacific' is a recent addition to the geopolitical lexicon, India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region goes back several centuries. The dynamism and vitality of the region makes it a global economic centre. We stand for an open, balanced, rules-based and stable international trade regime in the Indo-Pacific," Kovind said.

India to face 'significant consequences' for aligning with Russia: US

President Joe Biden's top economic adviser says the administration has warned New Delhi against aligning itself with Russia

(Staff Reporter) President Joe Biden's top economic adviser said the administration has warned India against aligning itself with Russia, and that U.S. officials have been "disappointed" with some of New Delhi's reaction to the Ukraine invasion.

"There are certainly areas where we have been disappointed by both China and India's decisions, in the context of the invasion," the director of the White House National Economic

Council, Brian Deese, told reporters at a breakfast Wednesday hosted by the Christian Science Monitor.

The U.S. has told India that the consequences of a "more explicit strategic alignment" with Moscow would be "significant and long-term," he said.

While the U.S., Europe, Australia and Japan have piled economic sanctions onto Russia in response to its war against Ukraine, India has declined and

instead has sought to continue imports of Russian oil.

New Delhi's reaction to the invasion is complicating its relationship with Washington, where India is regarded as an important partner in countering Chinese influence in Asia.

Deese's comments come after Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh traveled to India last week for meetings with officials.

"What Daleep did make clear to his counterparts during this visit was that we don't believe it's in India's interest to accelerate or increase imports of Russian energy and other commodities," Press Secretary Jen Psaki said earlier this week.

India's Ministry of External Affairs didn't respond to a message seeking comment sent after normal business hours.

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar Wednesday again underlined the importance of New Delhi's ties with Moscow.

Russia is an "important partner in a variety of areas," the minister told parliament. "Like all other countries, we too are assessing the implications" of Russia's war in Ukraine and "deciding what is best for our national interest."

The U.S. and the rest of the Group of Seven nations will continue to collaborate with India and hope that they can align efforts to the greatest extent possible, a



U.S. official said in a briefing for reporters Wednesday on new sanctions against Russia. India and the U.S. collaborate extensively on food security and global energy, the official said.

The official asked not to be identified as a condition of the briefing.

In addition to seeking Russian oil, India is the world's largest buyer of Russian weapons. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has resisted entreaties from the U.S. and Australia to scale back the relationship, insisting that India needs Russian weapons to counter both Pakistan and China and that alternatives are too expensive, according to people familiar with the matter.

India defends ties with Russia on Thursday asserted that it has established economic relations with Russia, is very open

about it and political colouring should not be attributed to the engagement.

The comments by external affairs ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi came in response to questions on growing criticism of New Delhi by Western powers on its trade ties with Moscow during the Ukraine crisis.

'Dialogue with India will ensure peace'

The US on Thursday said its 2+2 dialogue (between the defence and external affairs ministers of both countries in Washington on April 11) with India will reaffirm the importance of the comprehensive and global strategic partnership between the two nations in ensuring peace and security and shared commitment to a prosperous Indo-Pacific region, a US state department spokesperson said.

Stopped again from flying abroad despite court order, claims Aakar Patel

Former Amnesty India chief Aakar Patel tweeted on Thursday evening that immigration officers had stopped him from boarding his flight despite the Delhi court's order to withdraw the circular against him



(Staff Reporter) Former Amnesty India chief Aakar Patel has claimed that he was again stopped from flying abroad despite a Delhi court issuing an order to withdraw the Look Out Circular (LOC) issued against him. In a tweet on Thursday evening, Patel claimed that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has not yet taken him off their LOC as he was again stopped from boarding his flight abroad by immigration officials at Bengaluru airport.

Patel further tweeted that he will "move court again tomorrow if I have to."

On Thursday, Delhi's Rouse Avenue court ordered the CBI to withdraw the LOC issued against Aakar Patel and allow him to travel to the US. In its order, the court also asked the Director of the CBI to issue a written apology "acknowledging lapse on the part of his

subordinate".

What is the case about?

On April 6, Aakar Patel alleged that he was stopped at Bengaluru airport and not allowed to go to the US after the CBI put him on the exit control list.

Patel reasoned that the move was a result of the Enforcement Directorate's money laundering case against

Amnesty International India. The ED case was based on an FIR filed by the CBI in connection with the alleged violation of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and Section 120B of the Indian Penal Code (criminal conspiracy). Aakar Patel said that a court in Gujarat had granted him permission to travel abroad. According to Patel, he needs to travel to the US to take up "foreign assignments" and "lecture series" organised by various universities till May 30.

Meteor shower or rocket re-entry? Blazing streak of light witnessed in night sky in Indian state

(Staff Reporter) A blazing streak of light could be witnessed in the night sky in many districts of Indian state of Maharashtra, an ANI report said. The incident was captured on camera by several people. The videos of the unusual event were also shared extensively on social media. Although some described it as a "meteor shower," astronomer Jonathan McDowell has speculated the sighting was actually the "re-entry of a Chinese rocket stage" launched in February 2021. Suresh Chopade, president, Skywatch group, Nagpur, told ANI, "It seems like a satellite of some nation might have fallen accidentally or may have

been caused to fall intentionally. It does not seem like a meteor shower or fireball." In a tweet, Jonathan McDowell, astronomer, Center for Astrophysics and comments on space launches, said, "I believe this is the reentry of a Chinese rocket stage, the third stage of the Chang Zheng 3B serial number Y77, which was launched in Feb 2021 - it was expected to reenter in the next hour or so and the track is a good match." Pramod Hile, tehsildar, Yeola, told ANI, "An 'ulkapat' (meteorite) was visible in the sky at around 8 pm. I saw it myself. It was split into four parts. No damage has been caused and there is nothing to fear."

Chinese hackers target India's power grid, emergency response system: Report

The hackers focused on at least seven 'load dispatch' centers in northern India that are responsible for carrying out real-time operations for grid control and electricity dispersal in the areas they are located, near the disputed India-China border in Ladakh, the report said

(Staff Reporter) Suspected for grid control and electricity state-sponsored Chinese hackers dispersal in the areas they are have targeted the power sector in located, near the disputed India-China border in Ladakh, the report India in recent months as part of said. One of the load dispatch an apparent cyber-espionage campaign, the threat intelligence centers previously was the target firm Recorded Future Inc. said in of another hacking group, a report published Wednesday. The RedEcho, which Recorded Future hackers focused on at least seven has said shares "strong overlaps" "load dispatch" centers in northern with a hacking group that the US India that are responsible for India has tied to the Chinese carrying out real-time operations government. "The prolonged targeting of Indian power grid assets by Chinese state-linked groups offers limited economic espionage or traditional intelligence gathering opportunities," the Recorded Future report states. "We believe this is instead likely intended to enable information gathering surrounding critical infrastructure and/or pre-positioning for future activity." In addition, the hackers compromised an Indian national emergency response system and a subsidiary of a multinational logistics company, according to the report.

Recorded Future. Researchers didn't identify the victims by name. Jonathan Condra, a senior manager at Recorded Future, said the method the attackers used to make the intrusions -- using compromised internet of things devices and cameras -- was unusual. The devices used to launch the intrusions were based in South Korea and Taiwan, he said.

The hacking group, dubbed TAG-38, has used a kind of malicious software called ShadowPad, which was previously associated with China's People's Liberation Army and the Ministry of State Security, according to

Amarnath Yatra: Registration to start from April 11 as 3 lakh pilgrims expected

The annual Amarnath Yatra could not be held in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid pandemic and was prematurely suspended in 2019 when the Centre abrogated Article 370 for Jammu and Kashmir

(News Agency) Registration for the annual Amarnath Yatra, which was suspended for two years owing to the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic, will begin on April 11. Nitishwar Kumar, CEO, Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, said that the pilgrimage to the Himalayan shrine of Amarnath will commence on June 30 and conclude on August 11, reported news agency. "Amarnath Yatra 2022 will start on June 30 and will conclude on August 11. The registration will start on April 11. The pilgrims can also register online through the website and mobile app of the Shrine Board," ANI quoted the board official as saying.

With a sustained decline in Covid cases and a gradual return to normalcy, the board is expecting more than three lakh pilgrims to the shrine this year.

Terrorists attack one more migrant worker in Kashmir: Police

(News Agency) A migrant labourer was injured after he was shot at by suspected terrorists in Yader area of south Kashmir's Pulwama district on Thursday, police said. Preliminary investigation revealed that terrorists had fired upon a labourer identified as Sonu Sharma son of Banarasi Das, a resident of Pathankot, a police spokesperson said. "In this terror incident, he (Sonu) received gunshot injuries and was immediately evacuated to nearby hospital for treatment where his condition is stated to be stable," the spokesperson added.

A case has already been registered in this regard, the spokesperson said. "The investigation is in progress and officers continue to work to establish the full circumstances of this terror crime," the spokesperson added. Jammu & Kashmir has been witnessing a spate of terrorist attacks against local residents and migrant workers.



to 5 lakh this year."

Millions of devotees trek through the Himalayas to Shri Amarnathji Shrine in South Kashmir every year to pay obeisance to Lord Shiva

believed to be present in the unique form of an ice Lingam. The yatra could not be held for the last two years due to the pandemic and was suspended a few days before its

scheduled conclusion in 2019 when the Centre abrogated Article 370 to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

"We have got rid of Covid-19 to a large extent and are expecting a good turnout of enthusiastic devotees (at Amarnath shrine) this year. The capacity of lodgment camps for the devotees has increased accordingly and all necessary security arrangements will be made (for the smooth and successful yatra)," Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police Dilbag Singh said last week.

Till further notice, Tata Group-owned Air India suspends non-stop flights to Russia

From April 1, 2022, Tata Group-owned Air India has suspended its Delhi-Moscow non-stop flight.

(News Agency) Earlier, the flight used to run twice a week. Now, there will be no direct connectivity between India and Russia, said an ANI report quoting sources. In a Facebook post, Russian Embassy in India, said, "Dear fellow citizens. Please note that Air India has stopped selling tickets on the Delhi-Moscow-Delhi route. The prospects for the resumption of flights remain uncertain at the moment." The funds for tickets, which were

purchased earlier, for the cancelled flights will be returned to passengers in full, as per the Air India office.

The reason for the suspension of the flight is not known yet. In connection with the abolition by the Government of India restrictions on international air traffic, it is possible to freely use transit routes to Russia through Tashkent, Istanbul, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha and other available destinations," the statement read.

Explaining India's stand in the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Lok Sabha, Union Minister for External Affairs S Jaishankar on Wednesday, said, "In terms of diplomacy, India continues to press forcefully for an immediate cessation of hostilities and an end to violence. We encourage talks between Ukraine and Russia, including at the level of their Presidents. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken to both of them in this regard."

Imran Khan as Pakistan's PM: To be or not to be after SC verdict?

By Susmita Ghosh

The Supreme Court of Pakistan, in a shock move, has restored the National Assembly of Pakistan, which was recently dissolved by desperate Imran Khan to stick to the power as the Prime Minister of the country. The opposition claimed this unparalleled move as 'unconstitutional' and turned to the Supreme Court against this decision.

A five-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice Bandial, was looking into the high-profile case. In an undisputed

verdict, the bench has called the move 'unconstitutional'. The dismissal of the no-trust vote is 'illegal' according to the court, hence it's back on course. The National Assembly will reconvene on 9th April to inform when the no-trust vote will take place.

As a nation, Pakistan was doing poorly for quite some time now, with the nation's growth coming to a standstill. Understandably, Imran Khan, as the PM was under fire as he was mostly to blame for the policies. He was losing support from even his allies and the provision of a no-trust motion came into play.

The political crisis-turned-circus in Pakistan took a major turn recently. It became evident that Imran Khan may have lost the necessary support to stay in power as the PM in Pakistan. The opposition brought the gesture for a no-trust motion and they expected to be victorious in this matter. However, Imran Khan created a pandemonium to hide behind, which shows the poor condition of Pakistan's parliamentary politics.

Imran Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), needed the support of a minimum of 172 members in the National Assembly to stay in power. Amidst the existing 155 members of the PTI, the press reported that 10 to 15 members of the ruling party would have abstained from voting or would have voted against Imran Khan Government. Two erstwhile allies of the government, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) with 11 Members of the National Assembly have switched support to the Opposition for the no-trust motion. In the end, the Opposition alliance

claimed the provision of more than 175 MNAs in their favour.

In the face of defeat, Imran Khan opted for a brazen move. The deputy speaker, Qasim Suri, who chaired the national assembly, declared the no-trust motion "unconstitutional". Subsequently, Imran Khan claimed the foreign hand is trying to bring him down, pointing fingers at the USA and India as well. He questioned the

loyalty of the opposition leaders to the country. According to him, the opposition was in cahoots with the foreign power to bring him and the country down. However, he did not

provide any concrete proof for his soaring claims except for flaunting a letter, calling it his 'triumph card'.

As Imran Khan stayed in power without the majority support, it brought to light the regretful state of Pakistan's democracy. The leader of the opposition in Pakistan's national assembly, Shehbaz Sharif has brought the case to the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He also asked the army chief as well as the DG of ISI to bring any proof, if there is, to light that shows that the opposition has committed treason, as the Prime Minister alleges. The Supreme Court played a key role to bring the nation to democracy, by recognizing the suspended session as an 'Unconstitutional move' as claimed by the opposition.

In lieu of a Supreme Court invention, the matter would have gone to the court of public mandate. In a late-night post, the president, under pressure from the joint force of opposition, issued a statement, that somewhat de-notifies Imran Khan as the prime minister. While the lawmakers and even the President's verdicts swing towards the opposition, it remains to be seen what the public opinion will be. If the no-trust motion is passed, an election may be the only future if the opposition unity is not preserved.

In a country like Pakistan, where the impact of the army plays a key role in every state of administration, the support from them often ensures a victory, which the Imran Khan government has till now. It will be a true test of democracy if a clean election goes on, ensuring that people's voice is still taken into consideration in the country.

Why government doctors in Gujarat are protesting

Nearly 10,000 government doctors have been on strike in Gujarat since April 4. What are they protesting? How has this affected medical services?

Nearly 10,000 doctors of government hospitals, government medical colleges, the Gujarat Medical Education Research Society (GMERS) and dental teachers of government medical

colleges under the aegis of the Gujarat Government Doctors Forum (GGDF) have been on strike since April 4.

What is the reason for the doctors' protest in Gujarat?

On May 16, 2021, the Gujarat government, under former chief minister Vijay Rupani's leadership, had issued a government resolution (GR) addressing several demands of senior doctors, some of which dated back to 2012. The issues addressed included those pertaining to pension benefits, direct recruitment for ad hoc appointments, payment of non-practising allowance and salary increments. However, the GR was not implemented as months later on November 22, 2021, the government issued a second GR, withdrawing the earlier May 2021 one.

The key demand now is that the May 16, 2021 GR be implemented.

Among the issues raised is senior doctors not being promoted for nearly two decades. They also want the government to stop making contractual hires as it lacks accountability, especially in times of crisis and duress as was seen during the Covid-

19 pandemic.

How has the Gujarat strike affected medical services?

The strike is being witnessed not only by government doctors of government and government-aided medical colleges, but also government doctors from PHCs and CHCs. With these doctors not reporting for duty, including for OPD services, this has affected

planned surgeries in hospitals. Emergency patients and patients in labour, however, are being attended to by resident doctors and contractually hired doctors. The Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, for instance, has postponed planned surgeries, and to supplement the shortage of staff, is relying on doctors from UN Mehta Institute of Cardiology, Gujarat Cancer Research Institute, and Institute of Kidney Diseases Research Centre. This is along with contractual staff who have been asked to handle emergency and OPD procedures. Surgeries being conducted at Ahmedabad Civil Hospital have fallen by about 80 per cent due to the strike. Post-mortem procedures, too, are seeing a delay. There are queues and longer wait times for patients, including in OPD. While the striking doctors say they are aware of the difficulties patients are being put through, they add that they have been left with no other way to air their grievances after nearly six months of trying different avenues to implore the state to act on their demands.

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Repairing the complex India-Nepal relationship

The Nepal Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, paid a long-awaited visit to India last week (April 1-3). Sworn in in July 2021, this was his first bilateral visit abroad, in keeping with tradition. The outcome might appear modest but what is significant is that India and Nepal effectively managed to steer clear of divisive issues. At 75, Mr. Deuba is a political veteran and first became Prime Minister in 1995. Now in his fifth stint, he is no stranger to the complex relationship between the two countries.

Positive outcomes

Among the highlights was the operationalisation of the 35 kilometre cross-border rail link from Jayanagar (Bihar) to Kurtha (Nepal). Two further phases will extend it to Bijalpura and Bardibas. The ₹787 crore project had been ready for over a year but operationalisation was held up because of the necessary administrative requirements in Nepal to set up a company that could recruit staff. The Konkan Railway Corporation will provide the necessary technical support initially. The second project that was inaugurated was the 90 km long 132 kV double circuit transmission line connecting Tila (Solukhumbu) to Mirchaiya (Siraha) close to the Indian border. Constructed with an Exim Bank concessional loan of ₹200 crore, there are a dozen hydroelectric projects planned in the Solu corridor for which the Nepal Electricity Authority has concluded PPAs of 325 MW.

In addition, agreements providing technical cooperation in the railway sector, Nepal's induction into the International Solar Alliance, and between Indian Oil Corporation and Nepal Oil Corporation on ensuring regular supplies of petroleum products were also signed.

The Mahakali Treaty, signed in 1996 during Mr. Deuba's first visit as Prime Minister, covers the Sarada and Tanakpur barrages as well as the 6,700 MW (approximately) Pancheshwar Multipurpose project. Both sides have agreed to push for an early finalisation of the detailed project report. The ambitious \$7 billion project needs political will to move it forward. The joint vision statement on power sector cooperation recognises the opportunities for joint development power generation projects together with cross border transmission linkages and coordination between the national grids; it can provide the momentum.

On February 27, Mr. Deuba pushed through the ratification of the agreement with the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), despite the reservations of his coalition partners, the Maoists and the UML (Unified-Socialist). The agreement provides a grant of \$500 million for



building 318 km of high voltage transmission lines along with sub-stations and the maintenance of 300 km of the East-West highway. The Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu had actively sought to sabotage the

negotiate an Agreement on Transit Transportation. Three years later, a Protocol was concluded with China providing access to four sea ports and three land ports. The first ever visit of the Chinese Defence Minister took

The operationalisation of the 35 kilometre cross-border rail link from Jayanagar (Bihar) to Kurtha (Nepal). Two further phases will extend it to Bijalpura and Bardibas. Nepal's induction into the International Solar Alliance and between Indian Oil Corporation and Nepal Oil Corporation on ensuring regular supplies of petroleum products were also signed

agreement by planting stories that it was part of the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at containing China. The agreement had been signed in 2017, during Mr. Deuba's fourth stint as Prime Minister, and was awaiting ratification. Together with the Pancheshwar project, it provides welcome synergy.

China's growing role

During the monarchy, China maintained a link with the Palace and its concerns were primarily related to keeping tabs on the Tibetan refugee community. With the abolition of the monarchy, China has shifted attention to the political parties and to institutions such as the Army and Armed Police Force and considers Nepal an important element in its growing South Asian footprint.

In recent years, India's relations with Nepal have had both 'highs' and 'lows'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often spoken of the "neighbourhood first" policy. He started with a highly successful visit in August 2014 but then saw the relationship take a nosedive in 2015, with India first getting blamed for interfering in the Constitution drafting process and then for an "unofficial blockade" that generated widespread resentment against India. It reinforced the notion that Nepali nationalism and anti-Indianism were two sides of the same coin that Mr. Deuba's predecessor, Mr. K.P. Sharma Oli, exploited successfully.

In 2016, Mr. Oli visited Beijing to

place in March 2017, followed by joint military exercises a month later. A military grant of \$32 million was also announced.

China has overtaken India as the largest source of foreign direct investment. In 2019, China's President Xi Jinping visited Kathmandu. Annual development assistance has been hiked to \$120 million. Today, China is also engaged with airport expansion projects at Pokhara and Lumbini. Rather than compete with China, India needs to up its own game.

Managing differences

Over the years, a number of differences have emerged between India and Nepal that need attention. The political narrative has changed in both countries and these issues can no longer be swept under the carpet or subsumed by invoking a 'special relationship' based on ties of a shared culture, language and religion. Part of the success of Mr. Deuba's visit was that none of the differences was allowed to dominate the visit. Yet, to build upon the positive mood, it is necessary these issues be discussed, behind closed doors and at Track 2 and Track 1.5 channels.

As one of the oldest bonds, the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship was originally sought by the Nepali authorities in 1949 to continue the special links they had with British India. It provides for an open border and for Nepali nationals to have the right to work in India. But today, it is viewed as a sign of an unequal

relationship, and an Indian imposition. The idea of revising and updating it has found mention in Joint Statements since the mid-1990s. It has been discussed sporadically, but in a desultory manner, by the Foreign Secretaries in 1997, and even at the ministerial level at the 2014 Joint Commission.

In 2016, an eight-member Eminent Persons Group was set up to discuss it. The report is available with both governments but the perception in Kathmandu is that it should be formally presented to the two governments. As long as it is clearly understood that this is only a report by well-intentioned experts in their individual capacity and not binding on governments, it should be possible for the two Foreign Ministers to acknowledge it publicly. It could even be made public to kickstart Track 2 conversations.

Demonetisation is another irritant. In November 2016, India withdrew ₹15.44 trillion of high value (₹1,000 and ₹500) currency notes. Today, over ₹15.3 trillion has been returned in the form of fresh currency. Yet, many Nepali nationals who were legally entitled to hold ₹25,000 of Indian currency (given that the Nepali rupee is pegged to the Indian rupee) were left high and dry. The Nepal Rashtra Bank, which is the central bank, holds ₹7 crore and estimates of public holdings are ₹500 crore. After more than five years, it should certainly be possible to resolve this to mutual satisfaction.

On the boundaries

In 2019, Mr. Oli, facing domestic opposition within his party, needed a distraction and found one in the form of the Kalapani boundary issue. These boundaries had been fixed in 1816 by the British, and India inherited the areas over which the British had exercised territorial control in 1947. While 98% of the India-Nepal boundary was demarcated, two areas, Susta and Kalapani remained in limbo. In November 2019, India issued new maps following the division of the State of Jammu and Kashmir as Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Though the new Indian map did not affect the India-Nepal boundary in any material way, Mr. Oli expanded the Kalapani area dispute. By whipping up nationalist sentiment, he got a new map of Nepal endorsed by the legislature through a constitutional amendment. While it did not alter the situation on the ground, it soured relations with India and added a new and emotive irritant.

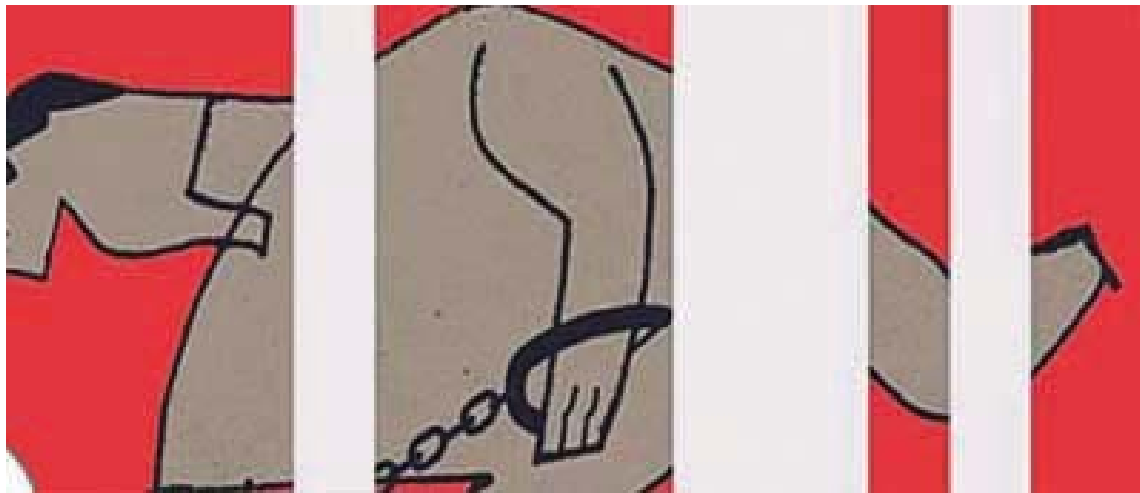
The need today is to avoid rhetoric on territorial nationalism and lay the groundwork for quiet dialogue where both sides display sensitivity as they explore what is feasible. India needs to be a sensitive and generous partner for the "neighbourhood first" policy to take root.

Criminal Procedure bill will not make Indians safer

It empowers police, governments to conduct such intrusive investigations with little accountability and few legal guidelines

On March 28, the government introduced the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill in the Lok Sabha, seeking to replace the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920 which regulates how the police can gather data from convicted or suspected criminals. The Bill exemplifies the current trend to pass laws that are filled with ambiguity and lack safeguards. It also reflects a desire to expand the power of the government to interfere in the lives of citizens.

If the Bill were passed, the type of data collected by the police would shift dramatically, from basic fingerprint and footprint impressions to a range of other samples, including iris and retina scans, behavioural attributes, and "biological samples". The National Crime Records Bureau would hold the collected data for 75 years. Rule-making power in this arena, currently vested only in state governments, would be



extended to the central government. More importantly, the Bill would entirely reshape the remit of law-enforcement officers to gather personal data. While the present law's provisions apply only to convicts, those who are out on bail or those arrested for serious crimes, the Bill extends this wanton collection of data not only to all convicts, but also to anyone who is arrested or detained, and even people who are merely "suspected" of committing a crime or are deemed "likely" to do so. It is

common enough for law-enforcement agencies the world over to collect personal data from people they arrest and convict. But two issues particular to the Indian context make this Bill disturbing. First, the Government of India has repeatedly demonstrated a crippling fear of dissent and a willingness to wage open warfare against its opponents – presented, lately, as enemies more than adversaries. If the Bill were enacted, nothing would stop the police from, say, detaining protestors and

collecting their personal data to use against them at a later date. Considering the way law enforcement has used such methods in the past, notably against crowds who were peacefully protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh in 2019-20, such a law would encourage this kind of behaviour, and further erode the already scant safeguards that exist against the government's intrusion into citizens' lives. The chilling effect of such a law would be severe. The Bill's widening of the present

law's scope, giving the police a free hand to gather personal data from more or less anyone they choose, proves that this fear may not be unfounded. Second, India's privacy rules are threadbare. The Govt's casual approach was most recently exemplified by the controversy surrounding the paucity of safeguards built into Aadhaar, as well as the numerous failures of the Aarogya Setu contact-tracing app. Although the Supreme Court's Puttaswamy decision in 2017 established privacy as a fundamental constitutional right, the process to draft and introduce national data protection legislation has dragged on for years. Following the Supreme Court's 2017 verdict, the state formed a committee chaired by Justice B N Srikrishna to deliberate on a law to protect privacy. In July 2018, the Justice Srikrishna Commission published its report and prepared the first Personal Data Protection Bill (PDPB). (Contd on page 31)

NATO is a danger to world peace. It must go

The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is rooted in the expansionary logic of the military alliance

The war in Ukraine has brought the spotlight on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). NATO was formed in the aftermath of the Second World War by the Western powers in response to the rise of the USSR. The rapid all-round progress made by the USSR, a planned socialist economy, made the capitalist economies uneasy and insecure. Thus, the capitalist West evolved a strategy to contain the spread of socialist ideology and NATO became its military instrument. NATO began as a military partnership between the leading capitalist nations of the world, led by the United States of America, ostensibly for "collective security". But its real motive was to encircle the USSR and other socialist states in Eastern and Central Europe. The West made a



narrative that Western Europe is facing a military threat from the Soviet Union. The USSR-led Warsaw Pact came into existence only after NATO integrated West Germany into the alliance and started weaponising the region. The USSR at that time was supporting national liberation movements in the Third World.

With the disintegration of the USSR in the early 1990s and the collapse of other socialist

regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, NATO should have been dissolved. Instead, it was refashioned and expanded to realise the hegemonic ambitions of the US, which sought to build a unipolar world order. Ironically, NATO did not militarily intervene formally even once in the Cold War era; it started after the disintegration of the USSR! The leaders of Western powers had assured Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s that

NATO would not expand into the East. But it kept expanding, and now has 30 member states in the place of the original 12 — all the Warsaw Pact allies except Russia are now NATO members. Destruction and instability have marked NATO's footprints. NATO's involvement in Kosovo is well known. Over 500 civilians lost their lives due to NATO's indiscriminate bombing in that campaign. During the 11-week long

bombing, the Chinese Embassy was destroyed causing an international furor. The Afghan war, according to the Costs of War Project led by Brown University, saw 1,76,000 deaths between 2001 and 2019. Over 46,000 of the dead were civilians. Similarly, the US-led intervention in Iraq resulted in over 1.5 lakh deaths from March 2003 to 2010 — 80 per cent of them civilians. NATO's intervention in Libya to enforce a no-fly zone is estimated to have killed more than 400 civilians. Close to a million people have died in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen etc. These numbers do not include indirect deaths nor do they reveal the havoc wreaked by forced migration, loss of property, psychological damage or geopolitical instability.

(Contd on page 31)

How individuals can save a warming planet

The right choice matters, but it must be enabled and supported by larger, systemic changes



A paradigm shift in the way we think about climate action has been reported for the first time in the recent IPCC report through a chapter on “demand, services and social aspects of mitigation”. This puts people and their well-being at the centre of climate change mitigation. The messages are from a global perspective but have relevance to the national context of every country. The report shows how, through comprehensive demand-side strategies, carbon dioxide and non-carbon GHG emissions globally can be reduced by 40–70 per cent compared to the 2050 emissions projection. What this implies is that the burden on supply-side mitigation can be reduced by 40–

70 per cent. This can be achieved through reduced food waste, following sustainable healthy dietary choices that acknowledge nutritional needs, adaptive heating and cooling choices for thermal comfort, climate-friendly dressing culture, integration of renewable energy in buildings, shifting to electric light-duty vehicles, and to walking, cycling, shared and public transit, sustainable consumption by intensive use of longer-lived repairable products, compact city design and efficient floor area use of buildings.

The IPCC report also shows that individuals with high socioeconomic status contribute disproportionately to emissions and have the highest potential for

emissions reductions, as citizens, investors, consumers, role models, and professionals. Demand-side mitigation potential differs between and within regions, and some regions and populations require additional energy, capacity, and resources for human well-being. The lowest 25 per cent of the population faces shortfalls in housing, mobility and nutrition. Addressing inequality and reducing many forms of status-related consumption (consumption of goods and services for social prestige and not necessarily well-being) and focusing on well-being supports climate change mitigation efforts. Of the 60 actions assessed in this report, on an individual level, the biggest contribution

comes from walking and cycling wherever possible and using electricity-powered transport. To be effective, these shifts will need to be supported by systemic changes in some areas — for example, land use and urban planning policies to avoid urban sprawl, support for green spaces, reallocation of street spaces for walking and physical exercise, investment in public transport and infrastructure design for active and electric vehicles. Many services can be improved while reducing energy demand. Electrification and shifts to public transport also bring benefits in terms of enhancing health, employment, and equality.

(Contd on page 31)

Punjab vs Haryana: Efforts to resolve the many disputes between the two neighbours

Chandigarh is not the only bone of contention between the states of Punjab and Haryana, which were carved out of greater Punjab in 1966. The two neighbours have also been battling over their share in the river waters, land boundaries, state Assembly and a joint High Court. This has led to multiple commissions, accords and a web of litigations. The Indian Express looks back at these efforts to resolve the disputes between the two neighbours.

Shah Commission

On April 23, 1966, the Punjab Boundary Commission, popularly known as “Shah Commission” chaired by Justice JC Shah, was constituted. On May 31, 1966, the Commission recommended that Kharar tehsil (including Chandigarh) shall be part of the Hindi-speaking state, because 71.3 per cent of its population was Hindi-speaking.

Indira Gandhi award

Since November 1, 1966, after reorganization of Punjab and creation of Haryana, both the states had been claiming Chandigarh to be their part. On January 29, 1970 the then prime minister Indira Gandhi announced that Chandigarh will go to Punjab and in lieu of that 105 Hindi-speaking villages, two cities – Abohar and Fazilka – shall be given to Haryana. Besides that, Haryana shall be given Rs. 20 crore for creating a new capital for the state.

White paper by Union

government on Punjab’s agitation

In a white released on July 10, 1984 by the Union government, the then home minister Prakash Chandra Sethi’s statement, given in Parliament on February 28, 1984, was mentioned. He had given four options to the Union government to resolve the dispute between two states. 1. Implementation of Indira Gandhi’s January 29, 1970 announcement; 2. Issue of Chandigarh to be handed over to a new commission; 3. Issue of division of Chandigarh between Punjab and Haryana to be sent to another commission; 4. any other option acceptable to both the states. However, Punjab’s then leadership refused to accept either of these four options.

Rajiv-Longowal accord

On July 24, 1985, the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi signed an accord with Sant Longowal in which it was decided that Chandigarh would be given to Punjab. A few nearby areas of Chandigarh that were Hindi or Punjabi speaking were to be distributed between Haryana and Punjab, accordingly. Sukhna Lake would remain part of Chandigarh and shall go with Chandigarh to Punjab’s share. A commission shall be constituted to identify all such Hindi-speaking areas in Punjab that would go to Haryana. The Rajiv-Longowal accord of June 24 specified that “the

principles of contiguity, linguistic affinity with village as the unity, will be the basis...to determine the specific Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab which should go to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh”.

Mathew Commission

According to Rajiv-Longowal accord, Justice KK Mathew Commission was constituted on August 20, 1985 to identify the Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab to be given to Haryana, which submitted a list of 408 such villages and two cities (Abohar and Fazilka). On January 25, 1986 the Commission concluded that 83 Hindi-speaking villages and Abohar and Fazilka cities could be given to Haryana. But, Muktsar tehsil’s Kandukhera village hampered the contiguity of the Hindi-speaking land-bank that had to be transferred to Haryana.

Venkataramiah Commission

Another Commission was constituted under Justice ES Venkataramiah to identify Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab to be given to Haryana. This Commission in its report to the Union home ministry in June 1986 recommended that in lieu of Chandigarh, 70,000 acres of Punjab land should be given to Haryana and the Government of India should bear the expenses of acquisition of land, development and creation of a new capital city for Haryana. It was also

recommended that the Government of India can raise Rs. 200 crore by selling assets in the National Capital Region. The Commission had also identified 45,000 acres of land and recommended that another Commission should be constituted to identify the remaining 25,000 acres.

Desai Commission

On June 20, 1986, another Commission under Justice DS Desai was constituted by the Government of India to demarcate 70,000 acres of Punjab that had to be transferred to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. The Haryana government raised another claim of 141 villages adjoining Panchkula and Ghaggar river.

Haryana Vidhan Sabha resolution – March 13, 1997

On March 5, 1997, the Punjab Governor in his address to the Punjab Vidhan Sabha mentioned about transfer of Chandigarh and Punjabi speaking areas in Haryana to Punjab. In response to that, Haryana Vidhan Sabha on March 13, 1997 unanimously passed a resolution whereby the Union government had to be requested to end injustice being meted out to Haryana. It was also passed that Shah

Commission’s recommendations be implemented in totality.

(Contd on page. 28)

Pakistan slips into political uncertainty as Imran Khan ducks trust vote and bats for fresh elections

In Prime Minister Khan's telling, the story is that a "powerful foreign country", which he also identified as the United States, is behind the Opposition's moves to remove him from office, because this foreign power does not want Pakistan to have an independent foreign policy

Prime Minister Imran Khan said in the run-up to the no confidence motion against him that he was not the type to throw in the towel early and dug deep into his days as a cricketer to declare that the game was not over until the last ball had been bowled. That last ball turned out to be the National Assembly's ruling on Sunday that the no confidence motion, submitted



itself.

early in March, went against a provision of the constitution demanding all citizens' loyalty to the state. After this ruling, Khan pulled up stumps by dissolving the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies, and declaring that he would seek a fresh mandate from the people at elections. He now equates the political moves against his government as a conspiracy against Pakistan

South Asia has been here before. Several embattled leaders in the Subcontinent have used the foreign hand card to stay on in power. In Prime Minister Khan's telling, the story is that a "powerful foreign country", which he also identified as the United States, is behind the Opposition's moves to remove him from office, because this foreign power does not want Pakistan

to have an independent foreign policy. Khan was sure to go if the no confidence vote had been permitted. The Opposition was present in the National Assembly in strength, and would have been able to muster the numbers required to win the motion. However, it is doubtful if even after all this, Khan can stay on. There is a question mark over the legality of his decisions today. The Supreme Court of Pakistan has

taken suo motu cognisance of the matter, including if a prime minister already facing a no confidence motion can dissolve Parliament and call an election.

Whichever way the verdict goes, it seems as if the ultimate resolution of this political showdown does lie in an election. Until then, Pakistan seems set for a prolonged period of political uncertainty. In the midst of all this, it is yet too early

to arrive at definite conclusions about the significance of the remarks of the Pakistan Army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, that Islamabad wants to resolve the Kashmir issue through dialogue and diplomacy, particularly as his outreach seemed to indicate that the India-China border dispute and the Kashmir issue are linked.

However, as he pointed out, and as has been stated by Indian Army chief General M M Naravane as well, the Line of Control is quiet after the two armies arrived at an agreement last year reaffirming their commitment to the 2003 ceasefire. This gives hope that once matters settle down in Pakistan, there can be some forward movement in a relationship that has been frozen for far too long.

As economic crisis spirals in Sri Lanka, administration should desist from extending emergency powers, restricting civil liberties

Gotabaya Rajapaksa won a decisive mandate in 2019 with the promise to heal the scars of the Easter bombings. That popularity has dissipated with the economic crisis. He needs help from across the political spectrum to restore and repair

The economic distress in Sri Lanka is spiraling into a political crisis. On Sunday, the Mahinda Rajapaksa ministry resigned en masse to allow the prime minister to reconstitute the cabinet. The governor of the central bank has also put in his papers after taking the blame for economic mismanagement. The situation had taken a turn for the worse on Thursday after protestors encircled the presidential palace demanding that Gotabaya Rajapaksa should resign. With the slogan "Gota Go Home" reverberating in the streets of Colombo, the administration has invoked emergency laws and declared curfew in the city. The anger on the street has singled out the Rajapaksa clan for the mess — the four brothers, Gotabaya, Mahinda, Chamal and Basil, are in

government —which, perhaps, is why the president has pleaded with the Opposition to join a national government. However, the latter has rejected the proposal, apparently unwilling to share the responsibility for the crisis with the Rajapaksas, in office since 2019.

Multiple factors have contributed to the current crisis in Colombo. Besides short-sighted and reckless borrowing to build infrastructure projects that have since turned into white elephants and restrictions on fertiliser imports, unexpected events such as the 2019 Easter bombings and the pandemic have contributed to the collapse of the economy. There is a grave shortage of food, fuel and electricity. The credit line and supply of essential goods from India should help to ease the

situation, but a drastic restructuring of the economy could become necessary. Meanwhile, the government needs to address the public unrest over high inflation and shortages carefully and sensitively. The administration should be careful not to extend emergency powers or restrict civil liberties. Sri Lanka has been down that path before, with disastrous consequences. The refusal to decentralise and share political power had ended in the civil war that lasted nearly three decades. Similarly, the state's violent crackdown on the ultra-left Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna's insurrections left the southern districts bruised. The long years of emergency during the war caused the militarisation of the society and curtailment of civil rights. Mahinda

Rajapaksa, who had started out as a grass roots politician and trade unionist, and his brothers, have a record of ignoring civic freedoms while in office in the war years. However, the halo of winning the war against Tamil Tigers allowed them to escape censure then.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa won a decisive mandate in 2019 with the promise to heal the scars of the Easter bombings. That popularity has dissipated with the economic crisis. He needs help from across the political spectrum to restore and repair. The appeal to the Opposition to join his government is a promising beginning, but he may need to do more to convince his detractors of his intent. India, meanwhile, should deliver on the promised aid, for its commitment is to the people of a neighbouring and friendly nation.

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The Punjab-Haryana dispute over rivers waters and SYL Canal

The Haryana Assembly has passed a resolution seeking completion of the SYL Canal. What is the dispute between Punjab and Haryana over the sharing of the Beas and Ravi waters, and why is Punjab opposed to the canal?

The Haryana Vidhan Sabha has passed a resolution seeking completion of the Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal (SYL) Canal, bringing back into focus the contentious issue of sharing of river waters between Haryana and Punjab. Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar's resolution said: "The right of Haryana to share waters Ravi and Beas rivers by the construction of the SYL Canal were is historically, legally, judicially and constitutionally established over time. The august House has unanimously on at least seven occasions passed resolutions urging the early completion of the SYL canal."

The river waters

The canal, once completed, will enable sharing of the waters of the rivers Ravi and Beas between the two states. The issue dates back to 1966 at the time of reorganisation of Punjab and formation of Haryana was formed. Punjab was opposed to sharing the waters of the two rivers with Haryana, citing riparian principles.

A decade before the formation of Haryana, the water flowing down Ravi and Beas was assessed at 15.85 million

acre feet (MAF) per year. The Union government had organised a meeting in 1955 between the three stake-holders — Rajasthan, undivided Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir — and allotted 8 MAF per year to Rajasthan, 7.20 MAF to undivided Punjab and 0.65 MAF to J&K.

A decade after reorganisation, the Centre issued a notification allocating 3.5 MAF to Haryana out of the 7.2 MAF allotted to Punjab before reorganisation. In a reassessment in 1981, the water flowing down Beas and Ravi was estimated at 17.17 MAF, of which 4.22 MAF was allocated to Punjab, 3.5 MAF to Haryana, and 8.6 MAF to Rajasthan.

The canal

On April 8, 1982, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi launched the construction of the SYL Canal with a groundbreaking ceremony in Kapoori village in Patiala district. A stretch of 214 km was to be constructed, out of which 122 km was to cross Punjab and 92 km in Haryana. But the Akalis launched an agitation in the form of Kapoori Morcha against the construction of the canal. Then in July 1985, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and

then Akali Dal chief Sant Harchand Singh Longowal signed an accord agreeing for a new tribunal to assess the water.

The tribunal

The Eradi Tribunal headed by Supreme Court Judge V Balakrishna Eradi was set up to reassess availability and sharing of water. In 1987, the tribunal recommended an increase in the shares of Punjab and Haryana to 5 MAF and 3.83 MAF, respectively.

The canal and militancy

On August 20, 1985, Longowal was killed by militants, less than a month for signing the accord. In 1990, a chief engineer M L Sekhri and a Superintending Engineer Avtar Singh Aulakh were killed by militants.

In other violence, labourers were shot dead in Majat village near Chunni and Bharatgarh near Ropar. The construction came to a halt. In the backdrop of these incidents, Punjab leaders has been cautioning the Centre not to rake up the issue again.

Punjab's argument

As per a state government study,

many areas in Punjab may go dry after 2029. The state has already over-exploited its groundwater for irrigation purposes as it fills granaries of the Centre by growing wheat and paddy worth Rs 70,000 crore every year. As per reports, water in about 79% of the state's area is over-exploited. Out of 138 blocks, 109 blocks are "over-exploited", two blocks are "critical" five blocks are "semi-critical" and only 22 blocks are in "safe" category. In such a situation, the government says sharing water with any other state is impossible.

Haryana's claim

Haryana has been staking claim to the Ravi-Beas waters through the SYL Canal on the plea that providing water for irrigation was a tough task for the state. In southern parts, where underground water had depleted up to 1700 feet, there was a problem of drinking water. Haryana has been citing its contribution to the central food pool and arguing that it is being denied its rightful share in the water as assessed by a tribunal.

Sri Lankan crisis puts spotlight on debt, freebie culture in India

The unprecedented economic crisis that Sri Lanka is facing has sounded alarm bells in India. Economists believe that the policies of doling out freebies and subsidies by some of the state governments could spell doom in the long run

Sri Lanka, a nation with a population of 22 million, a figure that represents the residents of just the capital of India, is facing an unprecedented economic crisis. This has forced the citizens of Sri Lanka to take to the streets. Taking a cue from the island nation, economists in India have sounded the alarm bells.

SOME STATES ON SLIPPERY SLOPE

Economists believe that the policies of doling out freebies and subsidies by some of the state governments could spell doom in the long run. Many states in India are making the same mistake as Sri Lanka which may strengthen the ruling parties' vote banks at the cost of the economy.

K Pant, chief economist, India Ratings & Research Pvt Ltd, told India Today, "Freebies are tools in the hands of the government. If governments dole out too many freebies, they will directly reflect in the fiscal deficit of the states. This can impact the economy negatively."

"State governments need to be wary of these freebies and subsidies. If after receiving them, citizens don't spend to support state's economy, it can lead to a serious economic crisis, akin to what



Sri Lanka is going through," he said. Economist Sunil Agal said, "If you make freebies permanent, no one will work. Why will you work if you get food and drink for free? Many state governments are already facing a financial crunch. The need of the hour is to not give free things, but to push citizens towards contributing towards the economy." Most economists India Today spoke to believed that there was no such thing as a freebie in economics because ultimately someone has to bear the cost of the "free things". They said

the race among political parties to give away everything for free needed to stop immediately.

Politicians, too, are cautious of the economic situation in the country. Samajwadi Party general secretary Ram Gopal Yadav said, "People are worried about the fact that inflation is increasing continuously. We may see a Sri Lanka-like situation in India too if inflation keeps surging."

Echoing similar sentiment, Shiv Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said, "We need to keep a close eye on the rising

prices of everything from fuel to vegetables. Many items are becoming costly. This can spell disaster for the common man in days to come."

PUNJAB: FREEBIES POLITICAL

The recent elections in five states saw promises raining on voters. Let's take the example of Punjab where the Aam Aadmi Party formed the government. It is now looking for ways to provide free electricity for up to 300 units, as promised earlier by AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi chief minister who promised during the election campaign to replicate his government's Delhi model in Punjab.

Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema told India Today, "I will hold a meeting with the Chief Minister of Punjab, Bhagwant Mann, and discuss measures to manage state finances. The CM earlier held a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and he asked for a package of Rs 1 lakh crore for the state."

DEBTS HUGE, PROMISES GALORE

How will the AAP's promises impact Punjab's finances? The AAP government of Punjab recently presented an interim budget of Rs 37,120 crore. (Contd. on page 29)

Why is Europe balking at a ban on Russian energy?



Western sanctions so far have targeted Russian banks and companies but spared oil and gas payments—a U.S. concession to keep European allies on board and present a united front

Shocking pictures from the Ukrainian town of Bucha and accusations of Russian war crimes are building pressure for more sanctions against Moscow. A key potential target: Russian oil and natural gas, and the \$850 million that European importers pay for those supplies every day. But it's not so easy, given Europe's dependence on Russian energy.

Western sanctions so far have targeted Russian banks and companies but spared oil and gas payments — a U.S. concession to keep European allies on board and present a united front. Here are key facts around Europe's energy imports from Russia and whether a boycott is possible:

What supply is at stake?

The European Union gets about 40% of its natural gas from Russia, which is used to heat homes, generate electricity and supply industry with both energy and a key raw material for products such as fertilizer. For oil, it's about 25%, most of which goes toward gasoline and diesel for vehicles. Russia supplies some 14% of diesel, S&P Global analysts said, and a cutoff could send already high prices for truck and tractor fuel through the roof. Why can't Europe cut off Russian Energy like the US did?

The United States imported little oil and no natural gas from Russia as it's become a major producer and exporter of oil and gas thanks to fracking. Europe had some oil and gas deposits, but production has been declining, leaving the 27-country EU dependent on imports. Of the 155 billion cubic meters of gas that

Europe imports from Russia every year, 140 billion comes through pipelines crossing Ukraine, Poland and under the Baltic Sea. Europe is scrambling to get additional supplies by ship in the form of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, but that can't make up for losing gas by pipeline. LNG is also much more expensive, and suppliers are maxed out. While some European countries are well-connected to LNG terminals, such as Spain, and new projects are in the works in places like Greece and Poland, the infrastructure isn't there to get supplies to the rest of Europe. Building LNG import terminals and pipelines to connect the gas to places that need it can take years.

Because reliance on Russia varies, agreement on an EU boycott is harder to achieve. Lithuania said Saturday that it stopped Russian gas imports and would rely only on an LNG terminal it launched in 2014. Poland, which has spent years looking for alternatives, says it won't renew a Russian gas contract at year's end, on top of taking steps to ban Russian coal and oil.

Germany, the continent's biggest economy, still gets 40% of its gas from Russia, even after cutting its reliance. It aims to end Russian coal imports this summer, oil imports by year's end and be largely independent on gas by 2024, Economy Minister Robert Habeck said.

Where else could Europe get energy?

It's working to get off Russian gas as fast as possible by finding

new sources, conserving and accelerating wind and solar. The EU plan is to cut use of Russian gas by two-thirds by year's end and exit well before 2030.

Besides getting LNG from places like the United States and Qatar, Europe is pushing for more gas from non-Russian pipelines from Norway and Algeria.

Oil is different in that it mostly comes by ship. Still, it wouldn't be easy to replace Russian supply with global markets tight. Taking Russia's 2 million-plus barrels per day to Europe off the market would push oil prices higher worldwide. And Russia could try to sell the oil to India and China, though it might earn less.

What would happen if Europe banned Russian energy?

Estimates vary, but a cutoff implies a substantial hit to the European economy. A ban might mean governments would have to ration gas among companies to protect homes and hospitals.

Makers of metals, fertilizer, chemicals and glass would be hard hit. Even a partial shutoff of gas to industry could cost "hundreds of thousands" of jobs, said Michael Vassiliadis, head of Germany's BCE union representing workers in the chemicals and mining industries.

"We will likely continue to see resistance from Germany and a select few others as they're simply far more reliant on Russian imports of oil, gas and coal," said Craig Erlam, senior markets analyst for the U.K., Europe, Middle East and Africa at currency broker Oanda.

"Forecasts for the impact of an embargo vary, but it would almost certainly tip the country into recession."

A group of nine U.S., UK and German economists said an embargo would mean substantial economic costs for Germany but that it would be "clearly manageable." The country "weathered deeper slumps in recent years and recovered quickly," including the 2009 global financial crisis and pandemic recession, they said.

"Public fear-mongering about the catastrophic consequences of an energy embargo from lobby groups and affiliated think tanks does not hold up to academic standards," they said in an analysis on the Centre for Economic Policy Research's policy portal vox.eu.org.

What else could Europe do?

Energy policy expert Simone Tagliapietra and economist Guntram Wolff at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels proposed an EU import tariff on Russian oil and gas. That would reduce Russia's revenue while avoiding a major hit to Europe's growth, with the legal advantage of leaving contracts intact. European leaders last week insisted those same contracts protected them from Russia's demand to pay for gas in rubles. The money from the tariff could be used to protect vulnerable households from higher energy prices.

While the army that invaded Ukraine is already paid for, the tariff would put the Kremlin in "a more difficult economic position, in which they might possibly start having difficulties buying stuff from

the outside world, including armaments, and paying the salaries of the public sector," Tagliapietra said.

How did Europe get to this point?

Germany relied on natural gas as it transitioned away from coal and after former Chancellor Angela Merkel shut down the remaining nuclear plants after the Fukushima disaster in Japan in 2011. Merkel emphasized diplomatic dialogue with Russian President Vladimir Putin during her 16 years in office and stressed that even during the Cold War, energy supplies kept flowing from Russia.

She also backed the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia despite criticism it would increase Germany's dependence on Russia. Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who served as Merkel's finance minister, froze the project after the invasion.

Italy, another big EU economy, increased its reliance on Russian gas over the years as it transitioned away from coal. Italian officials say Russia supplies 38% of the natural gas used for electricity and for heavy industry, including steel and paper mills. Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, who has been traveling to energy-producing nations seeking alternatives, told the news agency ANSA on Monday that "Italy could not veto sanctions regarding Russian gas." But Premier Mario Draghi, who said last week that gas payments were funding Russia's war, didn't address energy when he condemned images of bodies on Ukrainian streets.

Sri Lanka President revokes emergency, govt in disarray as economic crisis deepens: Top points

Sri Lanka's ruling party lost its majority in Parliament after 41 lawmakers walked out of the alliance. The newly appointed finance minister also resigned in the face of growing unrest over the worsening economic situation. Here are the top points

(News Agency) Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis since independence. As protests intensified, ministers resigned en masse, leaving President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in a spot of bother. And on April 5, the ruling party lost its majority in Parliament.

The president then revoked the emergency order following continued protests by civilians. The order revoking the emergency will come into effect from the midnight of April 5, 2022. Here are the top developments.

1. As parliament reconvened for the first time after state of emergency was declared, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's coalition government lost the majority when 41 lawmakers walked out of the alliance. On Monday, Sri Lanka's opposition had rejected President Rajapaksa's invitation to join a unity government after all cabinet ministers resigned following widespread

protests.

2. Sri Lanka's newly appointed finance minister, Ali Sabry, resigned on April 5 a day after being sworn in. Sabry was among four new ministers sworn in before the president, hours before the entire cabinet resigned in the face of mounting public anger against the government's economic mismanagement.

3. A group of ruling party lawmakers called for the appointment of an interim government, warning that a failure to do so would lead to violence and anarchy, as demonstrators continued to demand the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The lawmakers urged the speaker to lead discussions with all parties to select an interim prime

minister with the support of a majority of legislators. The largest opposition party, however, said it will not support



any interim government and insisted that the president resign immediately.

4. Parliament Deputy Speaker Ranjith Siyambalapitiya stepped down after the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) quit the government amid growing unrest over food and fuel shortages.

5. Later in the day, Sri Lanka announced that it is temporarily shutting down two

foreign embassies in Norway and Iraq and its Consulate General in Australia with effect from April 30. According to the government, the decision was taken following 'careful deliberation'. The government said the move is part of a 'general restructuring of Sri Lanka's diplomatic representation overseas' in the context of current economic crisis.

6. The government authorities also declared an emergency health situation because of the severe drug shortage in the country. Sri Lanka's foreign currency reserves fell to \$2.31 billion in February. This stalled its imports, leading to an acute shortage of several essential items. Many veteran cricketers, including Kumara Sangakkara and Sanath Jayasuriya, have joined the protests against the Sri Lanka government. The police have warned protesters not to take law into their hands and said strict action will be taken against those involved in violent agitation.

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Shahbaz Sharif asks Pak Army chief, DG ISI to present evidence if Opposition lawmakers committed treason

Opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif on Tuesday asked the Pakistan army chief and the head of the ISI to present evidence to the apex court to back up Imran Khan's claim that the opposition lawmakers have committed treason

(News Agency) The Leader of the Opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif on Tuesday asked the army chief and the head of the ISI to present evidence before the Supreme Court whether the Opposition leaders have committed treason as alleged by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Sharif made the demand to Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and the Director General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lieutenant General Nadeem Ahmed Anjum following Khan's repeated claims that there is a "clear nexus" with a foreign state to bring about a change of government in Islamabad.

Khan has accused the Opposition of colluding with foreign powers, and said he was the target of a US-led conspiracy to remove him through a no-confidence vote in the National Assembly because of his refusal to back them on issues against Russia and China. The US has rejected Khan's allegations. Speaking to journalists outside the Supreme Court, the President of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) reiterated that none of the Opposition leaders have



committed treason as alleged by Khan.

"We did not invite any foreign power and neither are we involved in any foreign conspiracy," the 70-year-old leader said, adding that this issue should be clarified. "I demand Chief of Army Staff and the Director General of the ISI to take notice of this issue and produce evidence in the Supreme Court if we have committed treason," Sharif said. Khan has claimed that Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, the top

American official dealing with South Asia in the US State Department, was involved in the "foreign conspiracy" to topple his government. The top PML-N leader said he will also present this request before the Supreme Court which is hearing the case of the Opposition parties against the rejection of the no-confidence motion against prime minister Khan by the deputy speaker of the National Assembly.

Recalling their previous demands, he said: "We have been raising this

issue for last three-and-a-half years that this government and the prime minister is illegal." He complained that when the joint Opposition submitted a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Khan while practising its constitutional right, the government raised the issue of "foreign conspiracy."

The Leader of the Opposition said: "It is now time for the army officials, who have made innumerable sacrifices, to clarify whether the National Security Committee (NSC) passed a resolution in which the role of Opposition in the 'foreign conspiracy' is stated." The PML-N leader further stated that he had not received any letter from President Arif Alvi regarding the appointment of an interim prime minister, after the president dissolved the National Assembly on Sunday. Sharif dubbed both President Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan as violators of the Constitution. On Monday, President Alvi said that he had written a letter to Prime Minister Khan and the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Sharif to "propose a suitable person for appointment". However, Shehbaz said that he had received no such letter.

Shanghai residents claim quarantine facilities have insufficient staff, shortage of food

(News Agency) In a new video that has gone viral on social media, chaotic scenes can be seen at the Nanhui quarantine site in the Chinese city of Shanghai.

People can be seen complaining about the insufficient staff and shortage of food at the isolation site amid a lockdown in the city. They are fighting over limited resources such as water, food, and blankets which are considered basic necessities.

The video has been shared thousands of times on Chinese social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat. A Chinese user who shared the video said, "If you can, please help us expose (the situation). It's so scary...nobody is managing the situation properly."

Several people at the designated field hospital could not get any of the supplies being distributed because, by the time they reached the front of the queue, nothing was left.

The lockdown in Shanghai has created a situation of panic,

with people rushing to acquire as much as possible before they are unable to do so. Complaining about the horrible conditions at the quarantine site, another Chinese social media user wrote: "Can you take a look at the Nanhui hospital site, my mum tested positive and was at home for a week laying low and she recovered, yet they still recklessly took her away."

"When she arrived she had to snatch a room for herself, nothing was fixed, people testing positive and negative all mixed together, there was no hot water, no healthcare workers, no nurses, there was nothing. People had to fight over food and water, the chaos and confusion was over the limit."

As Shanghai battles the Omicron wave amid the lockdown, China's state-run Global Times said authorities had deployed 38,000 health workers during testing which is the largest number of medical aid since the virus broke out in Wuhan over two years



ago. Medical workers were sent from at least 15 provinces, the state-run newspaper informed.

The newspaper added that health workers had achieved the "mission impossible" as they finished sampling of 25 million residents. All Shanghai residents had taken nucleic acid coronavirus test on Monday which was the largest COVID-19 exercise so far in China.

Health officials said that after the sampling, testing and review will take place. The authorities have asked residents to remain at home until test results are announced.

China continues to stick with its "zero-COVID" policy, however, the number of coronavirus cases has reached record levels in the past month surpassing

cases recorded two years ago when the virus was first reported in Wuhan. Health officials in Shanghai conducted antigen testing in the city in a bid to cut the transmission chain. The present wave is being led by the Omicron variant as officials revealed they had detected a new Omicron subtype in Suzhou near Shanghai tentatively calling it BA.1.1.

Farmers pay price of Sri Lanka govt's ban on chemical fertilisers

Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Imran Khan stunned the Opposition parties on Sunday by recommending snap elections, after a no-confidence motion against him was dismissed by the deputy speaker of the National Assembly. Khan then got Pakistan President Arif Alvi to dissolve the 342-member

(News Agency) The Rajapaksa government's decision to ban all chemical fertilizers last year to make agriculture 100 percent organic severely hit the country's farm production, especially rice production, forcing the reversal of this decision.

Once a major exporter of food grains, Sri Lanka is currently reeling under its worst economic crisis. The country has been facing an acute shortage of food grains, triggering panic among farmers across the country. The Rajapaksa government decided to ban chemical fertilisers without preparing farmers, which prompted a surge in food prices. The government is now worried about shortages due to an imbalance in demand and

supply.

MP Roshan Ranasinghe recently proposed that a decision must be made to distribute organic and chemical fertilisers (50% each) to the agricultural community. At Kesbawa village, on the outskirts of Colombo, the farmers are sitting idle. Challenges are double, as on one side the chemical fertilisers are banned and the other side there is an acute shortage of diesel, which is essential for the agricultural process.

Farmer Gunasiri said that he currently has no fertilisers nor the diesel to carry out any work on his farm. But to make ends meet, he is working at some shop. The fields that used to be covered by paddy crops every year are now deserted. For more

than four decades, farmers of Sri Lanka have been using foreign-made chemical fertilisers and pesticides that help them reap better crops. Citing health concerns and shortages of foreign reserves to import chemical fertilisers, the Rajapaksa administration imposed a ban on the use of chemicals and started organic farming. Farmers and agriculture experts now hold the government responsible for the sharp decline in the yields and soaring prices of essential food grains.

Prices for grains, including rice, which is a key product in

Sri Lanka, have skyrocketed. The country is now importing rice from India, China and Pakistan. Subsequently, the prices for other food items have also gone up by almost three times. Shortages of fuel are affecting transportation, adding to the already soaring inflation.

Farmer Anura said, "The government forced us to switch to organic farming all of a sudden and due to that, we could not produce anything. Now we are left with no money, survival is very difficult here. Somehow, we got chemical fertilisers from the black market at very high rates." The farmers

of Sri Lanka are now turning into labourers due to failed policies of the government. In cash crops like rubber and tea, the use of chemicals is 90 per cent, but a ban imposed in April 2021 left farmers in the doldrums. Two million farmers in Sri Lanka were left in misery with no help. Reportedly, the domestic rice production was reduced by more than 20 per cent. The decline in tea production could cost the country to the tune of \$425 million. Although the government had decided to pay \$200 mn compensation for a failed organic farm drive to 2 million rice farmers, it's too late.

China reports 16,412 new Covid cases, the most since pandemic began

(News Agency) China has reported a total of 16,412 new daily Covid-19 cases, the most since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020. More than 27 Chinese provinces and regions have been reporting fresh Covid-19 cases, mostly the highly transmissible Omicron variant, forcing the authorities to impose stringent mobility restrictions or even city-wide lockdowns.

The financial hub of Shanghai, which is the epicentre of the current outbreak, extended lockdown to review results of an exercise to test all of its 26 million residents for Covid-19. The city began its two-stage lockdown on March 28.

Authorities did not state when the stringent curbs would be lifted. The city reported 8,581 asymptomatic Covid-19 cases and 425 symptomatic cases on Monday. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has dispatched more than 2,000 medical personnel from across the army, navy and joint logistics support forces to Shanghai, on top of the 38,000 healthcare workers already deployed in the city. It is

China's largest public health response since it tackled the initial Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, where the novel coronavirus was first discovered in late 2019. The financial capital's lockdown has massively disrupted daily life and businesses, even as healthcare workers and volunteers work round the clock trying to test the entire population and supply residents with groceries. Most of Shanghai's infections have been asymptomatic, according to official data, but China's "dynamic clearance" approach requires authorities to test, trace and centrally quarantine all positive cases. The harsh containment measures have sparked anger and pushback from locals.

In a significant development, a sample taken from a Covid patient showed the presence of a new subtype of the Omicron variant, Bloomberg News reported. The new iteration of the virus evolves from the BA.1.1 branch of Omicron and does not match other strains that are fuelling the current Covid wave in China



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Ready to hold general elections if required, says Pakistan Election Commission

Amid the ongoing political turmoil in Pakistan following the dissolution of the National Assembly, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said that it will fulfill its responsibility to hold general elections in the country if required



Khan. "There is no truth in the reports that the next general elections cannot be held in three months," the Express Tribune newspaper quoted the ECP spokesperson as saying.

Earlier in a tweet, the commission stated that "It is necessary to clarify that the Election Commission of Pakistan has not issued any statement regarding the election." The ECP's clarification came following media reports stating that the commission would not be able to conduct general elections in three months due to some procedural and legal challenges. The Dawn newspaper, quoting a senior official of the ECP said that due to fresh delimitation of constituencies, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the number of seats was increased under the 26th Amendment, and bringing district-and constituency-wise electoral rolls in conformity were the major

challenges, the preparations for the general elections would require some six months. "Delimitation is a time-consuming exercise where the law provides for one month's time just to invite objections," the report said quoting the official. The official said procurement of election material, arrangement for ballot papers and appointment and training of polling staff were among the other inherent challenges. Meanwhile, expressing grave concern over the recent political developments and ensuing constitutional crisis, the Free and Fair Election Network (Fafen), an independent non-government body, has identified multiple constitutional, legal and operational challenges to the conduct of an early election. "While the constitutionality of the measures leading to the dissolution of the National Assembly will be decided by the Supreme Court, Fafen hopes for

a prompt decision by the apex court, which rightly took up the matter suo moto, as any delay will continue to accrue collateral issues arising out of the constitutional deadlock. "Public confusion and political divisions that have already arisen as a result can potentially translate into violent expression. Political parties have a great responsibility to manage their workers and make sure that political disagreements do not turn into violence, especially ahead of an early election," Fafen said in a statement issued on Monday. According to the organisation, an early election may not be a smooth process in view of several constitutional and legal complications. "The critical factor for the legitimacy of any election will be the completion of the Election Commission," it said, pointing out that the ECP members from Punjab and KP were yet to be appointed.

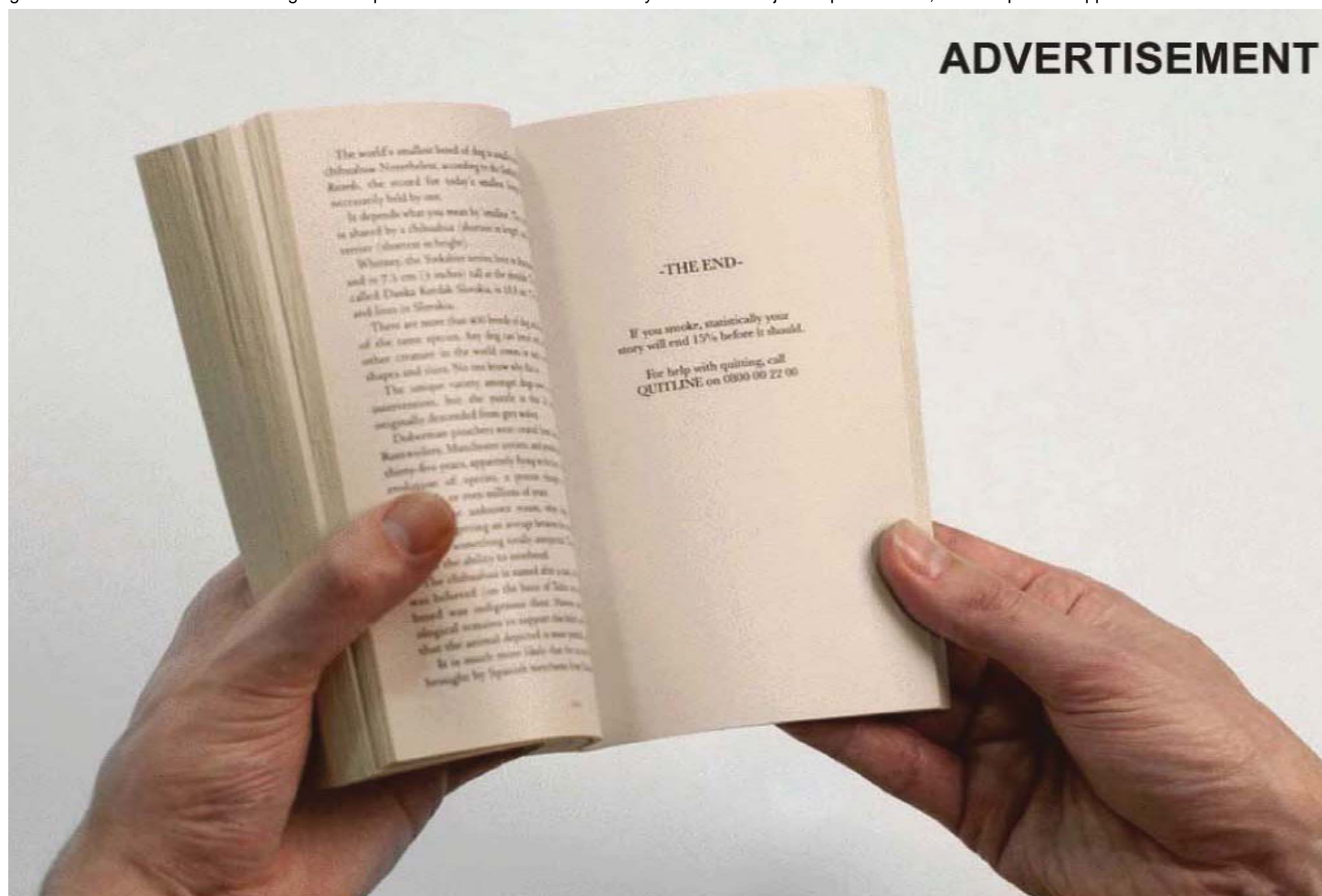
(News Agency) Pakistan's election commission on Tuesday said it will fulfil its responsibility to hold general elections in the country if required.

Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Imran Khan stunned the Opposition parties on Sunday by recommending snap elections, after a no-confidence motion against him was dismissed by the deputy speaker of the National Assembly. Khan then got Pakistan President Arif Alvi

to dissolve the 342-member National Assembly before its term ended in August 2023.

"Election Commission will fulfil its responsibility under the Constitution and the law. The meeting will review the preparation in the event of general elections," the spokesperson of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), said, even as the Supreme Court is hearing a case against the rejection of the no-trust vote against prime minister

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US pushes to suspend Russia from Human Rights Council

We believe it is time the UN General Assembly vote to remove Russia from the Human Rights Council, says the US

(News Agency) The United States will ask the UN General Assembly to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council, the US ambassador to the United Nations said on Monday, after Ukraine accused Russian troops of killing dozens of civilians in the town of Bucha. A two-thirds majority vote by the 193-member assembly in New York can suspend a state from the council for persistently committing gross and systematic violations of human rights.

Speaking in Bucharest on Monday, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said: "Russia's participation on the Human Rights Council is a farce."

"And it is wrong, which is why we believe it is time the UN General Assembly vote to remove them." Since the Ukraine invasion began on February 24, the UN General Assembly has adopted two resolutions denouncing Russia with at least 140 yes votes. Moscow says it is carrying out a "special



military operation" to destroy Ukraine's military infrastructure.

"My message to those 140 countries who have courageously stood together is: the images out of Bucha and devastation across Ukraine require us to now match our words with action," Thomas-Greenfield, visiting Romania to

see how it is coping with an influx of Ukraine refugees, told reporters. Russia is in its second year of a three-year term on the 47-member Geneva-based council. Moscow's mission to the United Nations in New York did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The council cannot make legally

binding decisions but its decisions send important political messages and it can authorise investigations.

It last month set up an investigation into alleged rights violations, including possible war crimes, in Ukraine since Russia's invasion. Thirty-two members

voted in favour of the resolution, brought by Ukraine. Russia and Eritrea voted against while 13, including China, abstained.

Bucha's deputy mayor said around 50 bodies found after Kremlin forces withdrew were the victims of extra-judicial killings carried out by Russian troops. Reuters could not independently verify that information.

Ukrainian authorities said they were investigating possible war crimes there. The Kremlin categorically denied any accusations related to the murder of civilians in the town.

The United States has said war crimes have been committed in Ukraine and US experts were gathering evidence to prove it.

The General Assembly has previously suspended a country from the Human Rights Council. In March 2011, it unanimously suspended Libya because of violence against protesters by forces loyal to then leader Muammar Gaddafi.

US may send longer-range anti-aircraft systems, artillery to Ukraine



(News Agency) As Ukraine claimed to have liberated Kyiv region, the US said it is working with its allies to send "longer-range anti-aircraft systems, artillery systems and coastal defence systems" to Ukraine.

US national security advisor Jake Sullivan said the US is working on new sanctions measures to cripple the ruble in order to halt Putin's war machine with further sanctions announcements this week.

The US has already sent \$2.3 billion worth of arms to Ukraine amid the Russian invasion including anti-tank weapons, short-range rockets and drones however President Zelensky has demanded more

arms to keep up the country's fight against the Russian forces. The US national security adviser hinted that the "extent and depth" of advanced weapons capabilities would be "extraordinary" and "unprecedented".

Meanwhile, UK said Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky will speak during the United Nations Security Council meeting on Tuesday as the

United States and Britain said they would seek Russia's suspension from the UN Human Rights Council over alleged crimes committed in the execution of civilians in Bucha. "The images out of Bucha and devastation across Ukraine require us to now match our words with action," US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said. UN's human rights chief Michelle Bachelet

added that the images point to "possible war crimes" while putting pressure on Putin's regime. However, Russia has denied accusations of war crimes. Amid the controversy, authorities said they had found bodies of civilians including that of a mayor and her family. Police claimed Olga Sukhenko, her husband and her son were abducted by Russian troops on March 24.

Indian imports of Russian energy represent only 1-2% of its total energy imports: White House

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that India's imports of Russian energy represent only one to two per cent of its total energy imports

(News Agency) Noting that reporting energy payments by India are not sanctioned, the White House said New Delhi's imports of Russian energy represent only one to two per cent of its total energy imports. The White House also reiterated that it is not in India's interest to increase its import of energy from Russia and that the Biden administration is willing to work with New Delhi to help it do that. "Right now, just to give everybody the full scope of it, India's imports of Russian energy represent only one to two per cent of their total energy imports," White House Press

Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at her daily news conference on Monday. She was responding to questions on the visit of top Indian-American US advisor Daleep Singh to New Delhi last week. "While he (Singh) explained both the mechanisms of our sanctions and reiterated that any country or entity should be abiding by those, we also made it clear that we would be happy to be a partner in reducing their reliance or even their small percentage of reliance on that," she said. "Daleep Singh, our Deputy National Security Advisor, was just there. I would note that, you know, just given some

of the reporting energy payments are not sanctioned. That is a decision made by each individual country," Psaki said in response to a question. "And we have been very clear that each country is going to make their own choices even as we have made the decision and other countries have made the decision to ban the energy imports. What Daleep Singh did make clear to his counterparts during this visit was that we do not believe it is in India's interest to accelerate or increase imports of Russian energy and other commodities," the senior official added.

Ivanka Trump to testify to House panel investigating January 6 attack



(News Agency) Ivanka Trump, former President Donald Trump's eldest daughter, who served as one of his senior advisers, plans to testify Tuesday before the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Ivanka Trump was one of several aides who tried to persuade the president to call off the violence that ultimately injured more than 150 police

officers and sent lawmakers and Vice President Mike Pence fleeing for safety, according to evidence gathered by the committee.

The schedule for her testimony, which was reported earlier by NBC, comes days after her husband, Jared Kushner, who was also a top adviser to Donald Trump, sat for an interview and provided what one member of the panel described as "valuable" and "helpful" information.

"There were some things revealed, but we'll just share that a little later," Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., the chairman of the committee, said of Kushner's testimony.

Ivanka Trump and Kushner are among the highest-ranking Trump White House officials to testify before the committee. The interviews have been closed to the public as the panel conducts its work in secret.

Ivanka Trump's lawyers have been in talks with the committee

since January, when it sent her a letter requesting voluntary testimony. In the letter, dated Jan. 20, the committee said it had heard from Keith Kellogg, a retired lieutenant general who was Pence's national security adviser. Kellogg had described Donald Trump's refusal to condemn the violence as the mob engulfed the Capitol, despite White House officials — including Ivanka Trump, at least twice — urging him to do so, the letter said. Kellogg testified that the president had rejected entreaties from him as well as from Mark Meadows, his chief of staff, and Kayleigh McEnany, the White House press secretary. Kellogg then appealed to Ivanka Trump to intervene. "She went back in, because Ivanka can be pretty tenacious," Kellogg testified. Kellogg also testified that he and Ivanka Trump had witnessed a telephone call in the Oval Office on the morning of Jan. 6 in which Donald Trump pressured Pence to go along with a plan to throw out electoral votes for Joe Biden when Congress met to certify the Electoral College results. The call to Pence was

part of an effort to invalidate the 2020 election and give Trump a chance to stay in office. Kellogg told the committee that the president had accused Pence of not being "tough enough" to overturn the election. Ivanka Trump then said to Kellogg, "Mike Pence is a good man," Kellogg testified. The committee has interviewed more than 800 witnesses and plans to interview dozens more. Thompson told reporters on Monday that he had authorized five additional subpoenas that day. Thompson said the committee had ruled out a subpoena for Pence, citing "significant information" it had received from two of his aides, Marc Short and Greg Jacob. "There won't be a subpoena," Thompson said, adding, "We've been able to validate a lot of the statements attributed to President Trump and the vice president without his specific testimony." "There's no effort on the part of the committee to get him to come in," he said of Pence, adding: "We initially thought it would be important, but at this point we know that people broke in here and wanted to hang him.

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

WWF

Biden-Obama: White House Reunion to Celebrate Health Law



(News Agency) Washington: The last time President Barack Obama was in the White House was on Jan. 20, 2017, when he left to escort his successor — bent on overturning “Obamacare” — to the Capitol to be inaugurated. Obama returns to the White House on Tuesday for a moment he can savor. His signature Affordable Care Act is now part of the fabric of the American health care system, and President Joe Biden is looking to extend its reach. Also Read - Biden Calls For War Crimes Trial Against Putin For Bucha Killings; US Pushes To Suspend Russia From UN

Human Rights Body

Sign-ups under the health law have increased under Biden’s stewardship, and more generous taxpayer subsidies have cut costs for enrollees, albeit temporarily. Biden and Obama are marking the 12th anniversary of the law that back in 2010 the then-vice president had memorably called a “big (expletive) deal.” Its staying power has been enhanced by three Supreme Court victories and an emphatic thumbs-down vote by the late Sen. John McCain, which took the wind out of former President Donald Trump’s efforts to

repeal and replace it. Also Read - President Joe Biden Cites Economic Gains, But Voters See Much More To Do

In addition to talking health care at the White House, Biden and Obama plan to meet for lunch, recalling their weekly ritual when Biden served as Obama’s vice president. Also Read - US President Joe Biden Signs Bill Making Lynching A Federal Hate Crime

“They are real friends, not just Washington friends,” said White House press secretary Jen Psaki. She indicated that the two presidents would also discuss Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and other world events.

“They are real friends, not just Washington friends,” said White House press secretary Jen Psaki. She indicated that the two presidents would also discuss Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and other world events. Obama likes to refer to his health care law as a “starter home” that Americans can build upon, gradually reducing the 9% share of the population that remains uninsured. The rate was nearly 15% in 2013, before the coverage provisions of the law took effect. Between the health law’s Medicaid expansion and its health insurance markets, more than 30 million people are now estimated to be covered. Shortly after taking office, Biden opened

up the health insurance markets to anyone seeking coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic, and his coronavirus relief bill provided a significant, though temporary, increase in financial assistance. The result was a record 14.5 million people signed up for subsidized private coverage. When it comes to how to keep that trend going, Obama and Biden have no shortage of options to discuss. The Biden administration has been working on a fix to what’s known as the law’s family glitch, a quirk estimated to be keeping about 5 million people from getting coverage under the law. The new policy will be announced Tuesday, said a person familiar with the planning who was not authorized to publicly discuss it and spoke on condition of anonymity. People tripped up by the family glitch are dependents of workers who have an offer of employer coverage that the government interprets as being affordable. As a rule, people with affordable employer coverage are not eligible for taxpayer-subsidized ACA plans. But the issue with the current interpretation is that affordability is determined by the cost for employee-only coverage, and not more expensive family policies. Workers able to afford their own share may not be able to cover premiums for the entire family. So the family is cut out of ACA coverage.



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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ : ਭਾਰਤ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਇਸ ਸਾਲ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਹਰ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਭੇਜੇ ਗਏ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਗਿਣਤੀ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਲੱਗ ਚੁੱਕੀ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਪਤਾ ਚਲੇ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਲੱਗ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਹਨ। ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਪਤਾ ਚਲੇ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27,000 ਕਰੋੜ ਰੁਪਏ ਲੱਗ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਹਨ।

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ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ

ਨਵੀਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ : ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਜ਼ਕਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ ਨਿਰਾਸ਼ਤਾ ਵਾਲੀ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਨੂੰ ਮਿਟਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਸੱਜਣ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਤੋਂ ਬਚਾ-ਬਚਾ ਕੇ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

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US sanctions Russia's Sberbank, Putin's kids, bans investment

The United States targeted Russian banks and elites with a new package of sanctions on Wednesday that includes banning any American from investing in Russia, after Washington and Kyiv accused Moscow of committing war crimes in Ukraine.

The new sanctions will put full blocking sanctions in Russia's Sberbank (SBER.MM), which holds one-third of Russia's total banking assets, and Alfabank, a senior U.S. official told reporters. Energy transactions are

blocked from these sanctions, the official said. The United States is also sanctioning Russian President Vladimir Putin's adult daughters, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's wife and daughter, and members of Russia's security council, the official said. Americans are banned from investing in Russia, the official said, including through venture capital or mergers. The U.S. is "dramatically escalating" the financial shock on Russia by cutting off that country's largest banks, the official said.

Russians may be forced back into Soviet-style living standards from the 1980s, the official said.

The U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday also announced new enforcement actions to disrupt and prosecute criminal Russian activity.

Grim images emerging from the Ukrainian city of Bucha include a mass grave and bodies of people shot at close range, prompting calls for tougher action against Moscow and an international investigation. U.S.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the killings were part of a deliberate Russian campaign to commit atrocities. Russia, which says it launched a "special military operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24, denies targeting civilians and said images of the deaths were a "monstrous forgery" staged by the West. Neither provided evidence to support the assertions. A senior French official said the European Union would also likely impose new sanctions on Wednesday.

EU proposes sanctions on Russian coal, shipping

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU needed to increase the pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin after what she described as "heinous crimes" carried out around Kyiv, with evidence that Russian troops may have deliberately killed Ukrainian civilians.

Von der Leyen said the ban on coal imports is worth 4 billion euros (\$4.4 billion) per year and that the EU has already started working on additional sanctions, including on oil imports.

She didn't mention natural gas, with consensus among the 27 EU countries on targeting the fuel used to generate electricity and heat homes difficult to secure amid opposition from gas-dependent members like Germany, the bloc's largest economy.

Until now, Europe had not been willing to target Russian energy over fears that it would plunge the European economy into recession. Europe's dependence on Russian oil, natural gas and coal means finding unanimity on energy measures is a tall order, but the recent reports of civilian killings have increased pressure for tougher EU sanctions.

The U.S. and United Kingdom previously announced they were cutting off Russian oil. Individual EU countries have announced efforts to draw down their energy reliance on Russia: Poland says it plans to block imports of coal and oil from the country, while Lithuania said it's no longer using Russian natural gas. "To take a clear stand is not only crucial for us in Europe but also for the rest of the world," von der Leyen said. "A clear stand against Putin's war of choice. A clear stand against the massacre of civilians. And a clear stand against the violation of the fundamental principles of the world order." Energy policy expert Simone Tagliapietra with the Bruegel think tank in Brussels said coal represented 20 million euros in revenue for Russia from Europe per day at current prices, compared with 850 million per day for oil and gas.

The coal ban "is important because it breaks the energy taboo," he said, but is not "a game changer. ... Targeting coal for the moment is too prudent, it's too symbolic and the time for symbolic measures is gone."

"It's not with coal that Putin can get rich or sustain the funding of the war. The big flow of money is certainly oil and gas, not coal, and that's the issue." The proposal still must be adopted unanimously by all 27 EU countries and is included among a new package of sanctions. Other measures proposed by the EU's executive arm include sanctions on more individuals and four key Russian banks, among them VTB, the second-largest Russian bank. "These four banks, which we now totally cut off from the markets, represent 23% of market share in the Russian banking sector," von der Leyen said. "This will further weaken Russia's financial system." The bloc also would ban Russian vessels and Russian-operated vessels from EU ports, with exceptions for essentials such as

agricultural and food products, humanitarian aid and energy.

Further targeted export bans, worth 10 billion euros, in sectors covering quantum computers, advanced semiconductors, sensitive machinery and transportation equipment also were proposed. "With this, we will continue to degrade Russia's technological base and industrial capacity," von der Leyen said. But energy was the focus. EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said 62% of Russia's exports to the EU were hydrocarbons last year. "If we really want to affect Russia's economy, that's where we need to look," he said. "And that's exactly what is subject to discussions concerning this sanctions package."

Because of its climate ambitions, the EU has been moving away from coal for years. Coal use fell from 1.2 billion tons a year to 427 million tons between 1990 and 2020, but imports rose from 30% to 60% of coal use. The European Union imported 53% of hard coal from Russia in 2020, which accounted for 30% of the EU's hard coal consumption.

Russian coal would be easier to replace than natural gas because coal comes by ship and there are multiple global suppliers. Germany's association of coal importers said last month that Russian coal could be replaced "in a few months." But the switch would mean more import demand from Europe and higher global coal prices, with significant effects on emerging and developed economies that also rely on coal.

After blood, presence of microplastics unearthed in human lungs by scientists

In this study, samples were taken from the tissues removed from 13 patients, who were undergoing surgery. In 11 cases, microplastics were found. The particles, which were most commonly found, were polypropylene. It is used in plastic packaging, PET bottles, etc. "We did not expect to find the highest number of particles in the lower

regions of the lungs, or particles of the sizes we found. It is surprising as the airways are smaller in the lower parts of the lungs and we would have expected particles of these sizes to be filtered out or trapped before getting this deep," Laura Sadofsky of Hull York medical school in the UK, who was also a senior author of the study, told The Guardian. "The

characterisation of types and levels of microplastics we have found can now inform realistic conditions for laboratory exposure experiments with the aim of determining health impacts," Bloomberg quoted Sadofsky as saying. The research has also been accepted for publication by 'Science of the Total Environment' journal.

WMD Amendment Bill passed in LS; Jaishankar says it will boost national security

Observing that India is "very focused" on diplomacy, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said that the country should focus on its national interests and be less "concerned" about giving "gyan" to the world. The minister was replying to the debate on the Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Amendment Bill, 2022 in the Lok Sabha. "Today, we should be less concerned in foreign policy about giving gyan to the world. We should play our role. We should make our contribution. We should look at our national interests. We should do this effectively," Jaishankar said, replying to the debate on the Bill in which 21 members participated. During his speech, Jaishankar referred to points raised by various members.

Referring to Sougata Ray's remarks that Indian diplomacy is "passive", Jaishankar said, "At the same time, he [Ray] said that the Prime Minister has spoken to Russia and Ukraine only. Ab jhagda Russia aur Ukraine ke beech me hai (when the conflict is between Russia and Ukraine), who else we will

speak to? So, speaking to the relevant party. May be doing the relevant thing may look irrelevant to the other people... We are today in diplomacy very, very focused," Later, the House passed the Bill unanimously. Jaishankar said that passing of the Bill will "strengthen" India's "national security and global reputation".

The Bill, which was introduced in Lok Sabha on April 5, provides against the "financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems so as to fulfil our international obligations." It also seeks to "prohibit" financing of "any activity" in relation to weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. The Bill also seeks to empower the Centre to "freeze, seize or attach funds or other financial assets or economic resources for preventing such financing." It also proposes granting powers to the government to "prohibit making available funds, financial assets or economic resources for any prohibited activity in relation to weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems".

What is XE variant of corona virus, and why you need not worry about it-at least for now

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Wednesday (April 6) announced that a 50-year-old woman with a travel history to South Africa may have been infected with the newly-discovered 'XE' variant of the coronavirus.

XE, a sub-variant of Omicron, which caused the third wave of Covid-19 this winter, had not been found in India until now. The announcement about its discovery sparked concern about the possibility of a fresh wave of infections in India, where Covid-19 cases are in continuous decline, and are now at their lowest level in more than two years.

Almost immediately, however, Union Health Ministry sources in New Delhi clarified that the identification of the XE variant in that particular patient was yet to be confirmed. In fact, a preliminary analysis had suggested that the virus detected in the patient was not the XE variant.

A confirmation one way or the other was expected in a day or two.

What is the XE variant of coronavirus?

The Omicron variant, which is responsible for over 90 per cent of the infections detected this year, has two prominent sub-variants, called BA.1 and BA.2. There is a BA.3 sub-variant as well, but that is less common.

During the initial phase, the BA.1 sub-variant was the most widespread. In India, however, it was the BA.2 that was the most dominant during the third wave.

BA.2 was found to be slightly more transmissible than BA.1, even though it was not more dangerous. In the last

couple of months, the BA.2 variety has become the most widespread across the globe, accounting for almost 94 per cent of all Omicron infections in the last one month, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The incidence of the BA.1 variety is declining sharply.

The XE variant is what is called a 'recombinant'. This means it contains the mutations found in BA.1 as well as BA.2 varieties of Omicron. This was first discovered in the United Kingdom in January, and so far more than 600 samples of XE have been found in different countries.

Recombinant variants are not uncommon. Variants that contain mutations characteristics of two or more known variants occur all the time. In fact, variants that contain the characteristic mutations of Delta and Omicron have also been identified.

The random process of genetic mutations in viruses and other organisms keeps happening continuously. But only a small fraction of these mutations significantly alter the abilities of the virus to infect, or to cause severe diseases.

"Given the current high level of transmission worldwide, it is likely that further variants, including recombinants, will continue to emerge. Recombination is common among coronaviruses and is regarded as an expected mutational event," the WHO said in a recent update.

So is there a threat from XE?

As of now, there is no evidence to show that the XE variant is significantly different from the other varieties of

Omicron.

What has been noticed is that XE could be about 10 per cent more transmissible than the dominant BA.2 variant. But that is a very small advantage that XE has, and even this has not been confirmed as of now.

The fact that there has been no significant increase in the incidence of the XE variant since its detection three months ago shows that it might not be a big worry at present.

The clinical manifestation of the XE variant has not been found to be any different from BA.1 or BA.2. It has, so far, not been found to cause a more severe form of the disease compared to other Omicron varieties. As such, the XE variant is not being considered different from Omicron.

"XE belongs to the Omicron variant until significant differences in transmission and disease characteristics, including severity, may be reported," the WHO said.

Will the XE variant of Covid-19 come to India?

It would not be surprising if the XE variant is indeed found in India — in the Mumbai woman, or in some other patient at a later stage. Travel restrictions have been mostly done away with, and international air travel is back to almost where it was in the pre-pandemic period.

Also, the possibility of XE, or any other recombinant variety of Omicron, developing within the Indian population cannot be ruled out. It is also possible that the XE variant is already circulating in the Indian population, but is yet to be

detected.

However, the mere detection of the XE variant does not, on its own, trigger worries of a fresh wave in the country. As of now, it is not very different from the Omicron variant. Unless it develops special abilities to infect, bypass immunity, or cause a more severe form of disease, the threat from the XE variant to the Indian population is quite low right now.

Can Indians breathe easy, therefore?

The fact is that a fresh wave of infections in India can never be ruled out, considering that the virus has not been eliminated, and is also undergoing mutations.

But in the absence of the emergence of a new variant, that is either much more transmissible, has special abilities to bypass the immunity gained by human beings from prior infection, or causes more severe disease, this situation seems unlikely in the near term. That is mainly because a very large proportion of the Indian population, an estimated 40 to 50 per cent, has very recently been infected by the Omicron variant. The immunity gained from that infection is likely to be still effective. Reinfection from the same variant is not unknown, but not very common either.

A fresh wave in the near future, if it comes, would most likely be caused by a new variant that is not very similar in characteristics to the Omicron variant. And the XE variant might not be that candidate, considering what is currently known about it.

Sri Lankan crisis puts spotlight on debt, freebie culture in India

The largest part of this — approximately Rs 4,688 crore — will be spent only on paying the interests of loan.

As much as 40 per cent of the state's income is spent on repayment of loans as Punjab has a debt of about Rs 3 lakh crore.

According to a CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General) report, Punjab's debt will increase to Rs 3,37,000 crore by 2024-25.

The annual income of Punjab in 2021-22 was only Rs 95,263 crore, which is Rs 15,997 crore less than the annual expenditure of Rs 1,68,015 crore and this income-expenditure deficit is the reason why the Punjab government resorts to taking loans every year.

So, how will the government of such a debt-ridden state fulfill its promises?

Another moot question is, if the government is surviving by taking loans or seeking relief packages, why are promises of freebies made?

Punjab BJP leader Vineet Joshi told India Today, "Whichever government is in power — be it the Aam Aadmi Party

or the Congress — they tend to distribute gifts to woo the people of Punjab."

"The Channi government made many promises, resulting in a burden of Rs 1 lakh crore. Now, the government of the Aam Aadmi Party has also come up with lucrative promises, among which is the pledge of giving Rs 1,000 to every woman. Who will foot the bill?"

TREASURY RUNNING ON FUMES

As soon as the AAP formed the government, the promise of providing 300 units of free electricity was postponed till June. This was done because the government needed Rs 5,000 crore to provide free electricity and that would completely empty the coffers.

The other promise of giving Rs 1,000 to every woman every month will require Rs 12,000 crore per month.

Previous promises of freebies under former chief ministers Captain Amarinder Singh and Charanjit Singh Channi have remained unfulfilled in Punjab. For example, the promise of

waiving all farmer loans has not been fulfilled.

Promises of providing a government job to one member of each household and giving Rs 2,500 every month to the unemployed, too, remain unfulfilled.

WHY CITE LANKAN CRISIS?

The inception of the current crisis in Sri Lanka began in 2019 after the government was formed. Under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka's treasury saw more outflow than inflow as he announced tax cuts as part of election promise. Now, the condition is such that citizens are paying through their noses for essential items like milk, pulses, bread, and fuel.

One litre of coconut oil was available for Rs 350 until a few days ago. Now, it costs Rs 900/litre. The island nation is now in a dire state with debt mounting, an empty treasury, unprecedented inflation, and violent protests.

The country, which was once called the "sone ki Lanka" or the "Lanka made of gold", is standing on the verge of

falling to anarchy.

SRI LANKA'S MISTAKES

President Rajapaksa reduced taxes from 15 per cent to eight per cent after the government was formed in November 2019. Due to this, the country lost Rs 60 thousand crore in annual revenue.

Another mistake was to make promises without provisioning for them. Sri Lanka is a country dependent on tourism and imports. Unemployment increased when tourism came to a standstill during the Covid-19 pandemic and income across sectors fell drastically.

The treasury became empty. It became difficult for Sri Lanka to import goods. The third big mistake was keeping tight check on its mounting debt. Foreign debt on Sri Lanka has increased by a whopping 175 per cent in two years. The country's total debt now stands at Rs 2.66 lakh crore. Experts say that the faulty policies of the Rajapaksa government alone are responsible for the current crisis.

Criminal Procedure bill will not make Indians safer

However, the version that was subsequently drafted by an ad hoc Joint Parliamentary Committee was so disrespectful of the Commission's work that Justice Srikrishna declared, in December last year, that it "enhanced" the danger to the fundamental right of privacy and even had "Orwellian" dimensions. Indeed, the new name of the Bill now includes "national security" as one of its objectives – and this is one of the reasons why privacy has been so diluted.

Justice Srikrishna pointed out that the Bill allows the Centre to exempt any of its agencies from the provisions supposed to protect privacy – in the name of security. He also argues that the "Data Protection Authority" is "entirely captive to the government and cannot be said to be an independent regulator". The Bill shows that the government has no serious intention of passing comprehensive privacy rules, let alone adhering to them – another cause for worry when

assessing the possible ramifications of the new Criminal Procedure Bill.

The Bill has met severe criticism from several quarters. The Opposition has slammed the proposal, calling it "draconian" and arguing that it violates clauses of the Constitution that protect life and personal liberty and guard against self-incrimination. The Internet Freedom Foundation noted its "extreme concern" and urged Parliament to refer the Bill to a standing committee. Defending itself, the government has asserted that the present prisoner identification law is a century old and perhaps not appropriately rigorous for the present day, considering the array of technological and scientific advancements that have transformed crime and law enforcement since 1920. There is some merit in this argument. But some progress has already been made. The

Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and System project, for example, set up by P Chidambaram in 2009 under the UPA government, played a significant role in modernising Indian policing. Much more can be done and perhaps the legal framework behind this process does need updating to bring it into line with modern international standards.

But this sweeping and accountability-free Bill ends up making the cure far worse than the symptom. The government's tendency to target protestors and political opponents using surveillance techniques means that the danger this Bill poses is simply too great. Empowering police and governments to conduct such intrusive investigations and in such an arbitrary manner, targeting whomsoever they choose with little accountability and few legal guidelines, will not make Indians safer.

NATO is a danger to world peace. It must go

NATO has a state-of-the-art arsenal and a combined defence expenditure of \$1.036 trillion (2019) compared to Russia's \$60 billion defence budget. Moscow's apprehensions of NATO reaching its borders need to be considered in this backdrop. After the deterrence offered by the USSR ended, NATO has become an instrument to achieve the US' foreign and defence policy objectives in Europe and Asia. A body of the size and influence of NATO,

with its 30 members accounting for close to 60 per cent of the global defence expenditure, enjoys a disproportionate advantage and mastery over the international scene by its mere existence.

The fact is that NATO's continuous expansion and involvement in world affairs is a threat to global peace and a just world order. Peace-loving people and states of the Global South should be opposed to the very idea of such a

military alliance for it thoroughly distorts the level-playing field at the international level where every nation state is supposed to be equal.

As NATO's track record suggests, instead of the "collective security" it promised, it has only offered grave insecurity to nations opposed to US interests. Its needs have filled the coffers of the military-industrial complexes and monopolies, effectively diverting funds from vital programmes that could

otherwise be deployed to improve the lives and livelihood of the people.

The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is rooted in the expansionary logic of the military alliance. We oppose the ongoing war in no uncertain terms. It should be stopped immediately and the parties should engage in a dialogue. At the same time, questions must be asked about the cost of NATO to humanity. If peace is to prevail in the world, NATO should be disbanded.

How individuals can save a warming planet

Individual choice alone can make only a modest contribution to reducing GHG emissions and this is insufficient unless it is linked to structural and cultural changes that make it easier for people to lead low-carbon lifestyles. Our assessment shows that if people get access to appropriate infrastructure and technology and are facilitated with policy support and information to make the right choices, then this mitigation potential can be realised through their actions. It provides a rich evidence base to show that a better life is possible for those with drastically lower GHG emissions. It shows that, so far, climate action has ignored what people need, demand, and aspire for and, instead, focused on what needs to be supplied to people. By assessing social science literature, we could clearly show in this report that people aspire for a healthy life, food for daily nutrition, a comfortable home, and transportation system, thermal comfort, communication, and participation in decision-making processes.

By providing user-level access to more efficient energy conversion technologies, the need for primary energy can be reduced by 45 per cent by 2050, compared to 2020. Lifestyle changes require targeted policy support and investment in appropriate infrastructure, and various user-centric technologies. Demand-side changes cannot deliver the net-zero goal on their own. But this requires investment in and transformation across every sector, along

with policies and incentives that encourage people to make low-carbon choices in all aspects of their lives. In our cities, where more than half the world's population lives, packages of policies that design urban-scale changes that cascade across sectors can achieve greater emissions reductions than the sum of individual actions alone.

Lifestyle changes are so important because demand-side potential can partially be tapped in the short-term. This makes it an important category for immediate action, when energy prices are high and energy

security is a critical issue. There is huge untapped potential in the near term through changes across transport, industry, buildings, and food that will take away the supply-side uncertainties and make it easier for people to lead low-carbon lifestyles and, at the same time, improve well-being. The demand for fossil fuels is projected to reduce. The report is clear: To limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, coal use without carbon capture and storage would have to fall by about three quarters by 2030, although the

world will continue to use oil and gas at least until the mid-century. The use of coal globally would have to fall by about 90 per cent by 2050, and gas and oil would need to decline by anywhere from 25 to 50 per cent or more to give us a chance to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius with no or limited overshoot. Further reductions would be required in gas and oil by 2100. Ultimately, it is for the IPCC to provide the evidence and for policymakers, investors, and all other decision-makers to decide what needs to be done based on national contexts.

Punjab vs Haryana: Efforts to resolve the many disputes between the two neighbours

Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004

Punjab enacted the Termination of Agreements Act in 2004 nullifying all such interstate treaties, agreements, resolutions between the two states and any orders/ recommendations passed by the Commissions or any Accords. It annulled the Government of India's 1976 orders, tripartite agreements of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan of 1981; Rajiv-Longowal accord and several other recommendations made by multiple Commissions resolving the disputes between the two states. A similar resolution was once again passed by Punjab Vidhan Sabha on December 23, 2014, as well.

Hansi-Butana canal

In 2007, Punjab and Rajasthan moved the Supreme Court against linking of Hansi-Butana canal with Bhakra main line. On August 17, 2007, the Supreme Court issued a stay order on linking of the canal with Bhakra main line. The then Congress government of Haryana did not initiate any steps in the Supreme Court to get this stay order vacated. The incumbent state government of Haryana has started pursuing the matter in the Supreme Court since October 27, 2014 – the date when

hearing of this case took place in the Supreme Court. The matter is pending for over seven years and the stay order continues. The final arguments are yet to take place in this case.

Separate High Court

On May 4, 2017, Haryana passed a resolution in the Vidhan Sabha seeking a separate High Court. Under Article 214 of Constitution of India, there is a provision that all the states should have their separate High Court. Newly formed states including Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand have got their separate High Courts. Although Haryana has been a separate state for over five decades, it has not got its own High Court. In the current strength of 85 judges in Punjab and Haryana High Court, only 18 judges are from Haryana. Even the filing of litigations in Punjab and Haryana High Court from Haryana is more as compared to Punjab. Earlier too, the Haryana Vidhan Sabha had passed similar resolutions seeking partition of Punjab and Haryana High Court and a separate High Court for Haryana on March 14, 2002 and December 15, 2005.

A remarkable rise in life expectancy in India but efforts needed to improve country's healthcare: Report

(News Agency) A comprehensive report on India's health system published by the global health governing body World Health Organization (WHO) highlights how the policies and the entire system coming along.

As per the report, India is broadly performing better than ever to treat those who are sick, however, the nation has faced new challenges as types of diseases have changed.

India Health System Review shows that the average age of Indians has increased, however, the cost of treatment is also becoming expensive day by day.

As per the WHO's report, overall India has taken necessary steps in the field of health care but a lot still needs to be done.

The average age in India increased

The report states that the average age in the country has increased. In 1970, the average Indian lived 47 years, but it increased to 70 years in 2020. However,



the average age in Sri Lanka is 74 years and in China, the average age is 75 years.

The average age of women has increased by 24 years while the average age of men has increased by 20 years. The average age of women is 71 years and that of men is 68 years. The report

stated, "The number of years an average Indian can expect to live at the time of their birth has increased sharply, from 47.7 years in 1970 to 69.6 years in 2020, a gain of more than two decades." "Life expectancy at birth among Indian women increased by 24 years between 1970 and 2016, more than that of men, who experienced an increase of 20 years over the same period. In addition, at 60 years of age, the average life expectancy for men is 15 years compared to 17 years for women," it added.

The report also mentioned India's

infant mortality rate (IMR). In 1970, out of 1000, 132 infants died at the time of birth. The latest data shows improvement as in 2020, 32 out of 1,000 newborns were killed.

Important to note that, the cases of death of women during delivery have also decreased. According to 1990 data, 556 out of 10,000 women died during delivery. By 2018, this figure has come down to 113 per 10,000.

Cost of treatment

The report shows that the nation requires more efforts to overhaul the health facilities. According to the report, 70 per cent of OPD services, 58 per cent of admitted patients and 90 per cent of the medicines and tests are still in private hands. The data shows that easy access to potential cures and treatment of the diseases are still out of the common man's reach. The ratio of doctors and nurses has improved compared to earlier data but the overall situation is still bad. 10,000 people now have 9.28 per cent of doctors in India and there are 24 nurses per 10,000 people. Also, there are about nine pharmacists per 10,000 people. The report also mentions that spending on public health in India is very low.

Rice from India to arrive in the country soon,' says Indian envoy to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay

(News Agency) India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay has said that rice from India will arrive in the country soon under the \$1 billion line of credit. The line of credit was signed during former Sri Lankan Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa's visit to India last month. The agreement was signed in Delhi in the presence of the Indian foreign and finance minister.

Speaking exclusively to WION's Principal Diplomatic Correspondent Sidhant Sibal, Baglay said, "Under the food the first consignment has is likely to arrive very soon, exports of rice from India. These things are providing relief to Sri Lankan people in the current situation." The country is going through an economic crisis which has now become a political crisis as well with the cabinet of the Rajapaksa govt handing over resignation.

The Indian envoy also assured the safety of Indian nationals, pointing out that the Indian mission is in touch with the authorities over the issue. According to unofficial statistics, it is estimated that around 14,000 Indian expatriates are living in Sri Lanka.

Sidhant Sibal: How has India helped Sri Lanka under the current economic crisis?

Gopal Baglay: In the past 3 months, we have from India extended support worth about \$2.5 billion, 2 lines of credit - \$500 million for fuel and \$ 1 billion for food, medicine and essential supplies. Both lines of credit are in operation. Under the fuel 4 consignments of diesel,

petrol and aviation petrol have come. Under the food the first consignment has is likely to arrive very soon, exports of rice from India. These things are providing relief to Sri Lankan people in the current situation. The Reserve bank of India has also extended currency swap of \$400 million, and some other currency support they have provided to central bank of Sri Lanka.

Sidhant Sibal: What has been the situation of stranded Indian tourists, how has the mission reached out?

Gopal Baglay: This is a very important question because Indian tourists are the largest group of tourists coming into Sri Lanka. So their safety and security, safety and security our citizen abroad is one of the most important questions for high commissions and embassies abroad. So we have actually been reached, we have contacted by number of people who want to come to Sri Lanka or are in Sri Lanka. So far we have not come across any major or serious matter but what we have told people is if they have any problem, they can certainly contact us and the high commission will help them in the situation they are. Sri Lankan tourist authorities, we are also in touch with them, we are in touch with Sri Lankan govt, if there is any problem by our people, then with help of Sri Lankan authorities we will try and resolve it. So far, we have not come across any major difficulties.



FBI TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVE

BHADRESHKUMAR CHETANBHAI PATEL

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



Photograph taken April 2015

DESCRIPTION

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

REWARD

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

REMARKS

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

CAUTION

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

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

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

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Great Resignation is not slowing and is here to stay as workers put personal lives before jobs: Report

Randstad NV, a Dutch multinational human resource consulting firm, stated that the phenomenon of 'Great Resignation' is not showing any signs of easing and is here to stay, Bloomberg reported. The report added that the supply of workers, which is already gradually diminishing is likely to persist.

Sander van 't Noordende took over as chief executive officer of Randstad NV recently. Noordende said that fewer people in the job market are allowing talented workers to have more options and they are going where their needs are met. Bloomberg quoted him as saying that "employees are more prepared to attach consequences to their unhappiness or not getting what they

want".

He added that employees are "prepared to quit" their jobs if they are not happy. His remarks came as Randstad revealed its latest Workmonitor report.

What is The Great Resignation?

Also known as the Big Quit or the Great Reshuffle, this phenomenon is an ongoing economic trend witnessed globally. In this particular trend, employees have voluntarily resigned from their jobs beginning in early 2021. The Great Resignation is seen primarily in the United States.

Job exits in the US rose to 4.35 million in February as reports have stated that there were 11.27 million

openings in the month. The labour shortage has left businesses struggling to find staff, despite offering higher wages.

As per reports, the trend of Great Resignation is benefitting those employees who are looking for better working conditions and a higher pay scale. As the economies have opened up after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, employees are finding it easier to quit unappealing positions and look for alternatives. Work from home option has played a vital role in taking such decisions. As per Randstad's survey, one-third of the participants said they have left a job because it "didn't fit their personal lives". "More than half of

Millennials and Gen-Z respondents said they would quit a job if it prevented them from enjoying life," the Bloomberg report mentioned. According to the report, 83% and 71% of those who participated in the survey said flexible hours and the workplace were important, respectively.

As quoted, van 't Noordende said, "Employers really have to raise their game in terms of personalising the work experience for every individual employee."

He said, "Most senior-level executives understand that they can trust their people. The role of the office is becoming more of a collaboration and meeting place than a place where the work gets done."

Chinese firm surges 229% in Hong Kong after claims its Covid drug reduces deaths and hospitalisation: Report



Hong Kong is facing a coronavirus (COVID-19) surge with reports of bodies being "piled up together" for funerals and authorities are running short of traditional wooden coffins.

As reported by the news agency Reuters, Hong Kong has recorded more than a million infections and more than 8,000 deaths since the fifth wave of coronavirus hit the global financial hub. Amid the rise in cases, some pharma firms are making profits globally. For example, the latest data by Bloomberg shows how Chinese Pharma firm Kintor Pharmaceutical Ltd surged to 229 per cent in Hong Kong. The rise was witnessed after the firm stated its drug reduces Covid deaths and is quite effective in reducing the risk of hospitalisation. The comments raised the prospect of a first homegrown antiviral treatment. The Bloomberg report published on April 6 stated that shares of the company were up 141 per

cent as of 11:06 am (local time) after earlier surging as much as 229 per cent. This is said to be the biggest jump after the company got listed in Hong Kong in mid-2020. All this has happened after the company released a statement related to its effectiveness. Kintor announced the top-line results of the Phase III MRCT of proxalutamide in outpatients with mild to moderate COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status and risk factors. As per the statement, data from the study demonstrated that the protection rate of patients in the trial (regardless of age or risk factors) treated with proxalutamide for more than seven days reached 100% ($p < 0.02$).

"The treatment with proxalutamide significantly reduced hospitalization or death in COVID-19 patients, especially in the middle-aged and elderly with high-risk factors," the statement added.

Russia-Ukraine war

Pope, holding Ukrainian flag, condemns Bucha killing



Pope Francis on Wednesday condemned Bucha killing and held up a Ukrainian flag sent to him from the town where tied bodies shot at close range, a mass grave and other signs of executions were found.

"Recent news from the war in Ukraine, instead of bringing relief and hope, brought new atrocities, such as the massacre of Bucha," he said at the end of his weekly audience in the Vatican's auditorium. "Cruelty that is increasingly horrendous, even against civilians, defenceless women and children. They are victims whose innocent blood cries out up to heaven and implores: 'Stop this war! Let the weapons fall silent! Stop sowing death and destruction'," he said.

The Kremlin said on Tuesday that Western

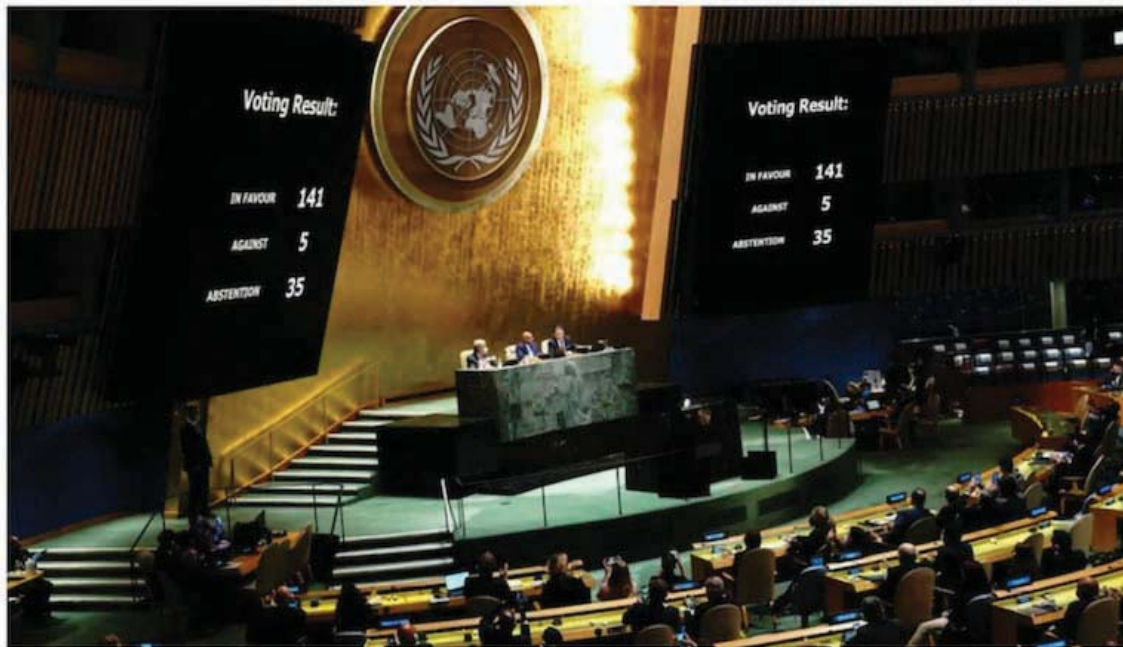
allegations Russian forces committed war crimes by executing civilians in Bucha were a "monstrous forgery" aimed at denigrating the Russian army. Yesterday, precisely from Bucha, they brought me this flag," he said, unfolding it and holding it up for the audience of several thousand, which broke into applause. The flag looked darkened and stained and had writing on it. "It comes from the war, precisely from that martyred city, Bucha," he said, before asking a group of children war refugees who arrived on Tuesday from Ukraine to come up to him. "These children had to flee in order to arrive in a safe land. This is the fruit of war. Let's not forget them and let's not forget the Ukrainian people," he said, before giving each child a gift of a chocolate Easter egg.

United Nations to vote on suspending Russia from Human Rights Council

UN General Assembly will vote on a motion to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council for its aggression and invasion of Ukraine

The UN General Assembly will vote on Thursday on a move by the US to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council of the world body for its aggression and invasion of Ukraine.

The office of the President of the UN General Assembly said that the Emergency Special Session of the 193-member UN body will resume on Thursday at 10 A.M. and action is expected on the draft resolution to suspend Russia. The Human Rights Council consists of 47 Member States, elected directly and individually by secret ballot by the majority of the members of the General Assembly. The General Assembly, by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting, "may suspend the rights of membership in the Council of a member of the Council that commits gross and systematic violations of human rights." US



Ambassador at UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield had told reporters in Bucharest, Romania that Washington, in close coordination with Ukraine, European countries and other partners at the UN, was going to seek Russia's suspension from the UN Human Rights Council. "A hundred and forty UN

Member States have already voted to condemn Russia over its unprovoked war and the humanitarian crisis it has unleashed upon the people of Ukraine. My message to those 140 countries who have courageously stood together is simple: the images out of Bucha and devastation across Ukraine

require us now to match our words with action." "We cannot let a Member State that is subverting every principle we hold dear to continue to sit on the UN Human Rights Council," she said, as she referred to the UN Member States who voted in favour of General Assembly resolutions deploring Russian

action and demanding that Moscow immediately withdraw its forces and cease hostilities. "Russia should not have a position of authority in that body, nor should we allow Russia to use their role on the Council as a tool of propaganda to suggest they have a legitimate concern about human rights... Russia's participation on the Human Rights Council is a farce. It hurts the credibility of the Council and the UN writ large. And it is simply wrong. Which is why we believe it is time for the UN General Assembly to suspend them," she said. India has unequivocally condemned the "deeply disturbing" reports of civilian killings in the Ukrainian city of Bucha and supported the call for an independent investigation, as it underlined that when innocent human lives are at stake, diplomacy must prevail as the only viable option.

How China left Sri Lanka in financial fiasco

The Sri Lankan economy is on the verge of collapse. Several geopolitical experts cite Sri Lanka as an example of China's "strategic trap diplomacy or "debt-trap diplomacy"

Foreign debts and loans taken from China have led to the worst economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The country is currently facing an acute shortage of food, fuel and all essential commodities in the country. The debt-ridden country is unable to meet the ends of its own people. While speaking to India Today, leader of the opposition Sajith Premadasa said, "Post 2009 war with the rebels, Sri Lanka looked at China for financial help. Taking loans from various countries, Sri Lanka's total external debt surged to more than \$45 billion, of which, around \$8 billion was from China."

Sri Lanka borrowed \$1.2 bn from China to build Hambantota Port. The island failed to run the port and to pay the debt back to China. They negotiated and handed over the strategically critical and crucial port which was very close to the international maritime

route to the Chinese on lease for 99 years.

Shashi Dhanatunge, economist and former

ridden country handed over the port city to China as it was struggling to pay the debt of several Chinese firms. Whatever money it earned also vanished by paying off debts."

"Loan from China, followed by Covid outbreak and the failed port city project in sequence added to the financial fiasco in Sri Lanka," he said, adding, "Now Lanka is living on a credit card given by India as China refused rescheduling and offered only another loan that could lead to selling more national assets."

Formal Sri Lankan cricketer and former minister of petroleum and aviation Arjuna Ranatunga, while speaking to India Today,

termed the decision of surrendering the port to China as "wrong" and said, "They don't know who is their friend and who is not."



chairman of a shipping corporation and vice chairman of the civil aviation authority said, "Hambantota port is no longer in Sri Lanka's control. In 2017, the debt-

In major breakthrough, study discovers 42 new genes linked to increased risk of Alzheimer's disease

According to a UK university, with Alzheimer's disease were studied researchers have identified 42 genes and it was compared with 600,000 healthy individuals in order to find out more about genetic makeup. "This study more than doubles the number of identified genes influencing risk for the genome of more than 100,000 people more common form of Alzheimer's

The research published in the journal Nature Genetics informed that the identified genes influencing risk for the genome of more than 100,000 people more common form of Alzheimer's

Believe it or not: Fungi talk to each other like humans, claims study



Do fungi communicate with each other like humans? Well, anyone would say no. But a new study suggests that they may be great communicators.

The secret of their communication seems to have been spilled by the mathematical analysis of the electrical signals' the fungi send to one another. The patterns are structurally similar to human speech, said the study.

Earlier, research had shown fungi conduct electrical impulses like nerve cells transmit information in humans. To understand if this electrical activity has anything in common with human language, Prof Andrew Adamatzky, who is working at University of the West of England's unconventional computing laboratory in Bristol, analysed the patterns of electrical spikes, which were

generated by four species of fungi like split gill, enoki, ghost and caterpillar fungi. "We do not know if there is a direct relationship between spiking patterns in fungi and human speech. Possibly not. On the other hand, there are many similarities in information processing in living substrates of different classes, families and species. I was just curious to compare," Adamatzky told the Guardian. He inserted tiny microelectrodes into substrates, which were colonised by patchwork of hyphae threads. The research has been published in Royal Society Open Science. It found that these spikes seem to have resembled vocabularies of up to 50 words. The distribution of these "fungal word lengths" also matched with human languages.



disease," Dr Rebecca Sims, co-leader of the study said. The study showed specific biological signalling pathway involving TNF-alpha, a protein which plays an important role in the "inflammation and the immune system" was "implicated in Alzheimer's".

The study also found "dysfunction of microglia, immune cells in the brain that are responsible for eliminating toxic substances that contribute to disease pathology."

The study is considered a breakthrough in dementia research as scientists study how likely patients with cognitive impairment may develop Alzheimer's within three years of first

showing symptoms. Although the current research is not intended to be used in clinical practice, however, the report said researchers hope it would help to improve the evaluation of new drugs in clinical trials.

The research hopes to identify people who have the greatest risk of developing Alzheimer's before they develop the condition and also broaden studies on demographics since the present study is primarily conducted on Caucasian populations.

The worldwide study involved genome samples from the EU, Argentina, New Zealand, UK, US, Canada, Iceland, Australia and Brazil.

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After failed Kyiv blitz, Russia focuses on east Ukraine

Faced with stiff resistance in Ukraine's capital Kyiv and other major cities, Russia has now shifted its focus to the country's east, seeking to make gains there. Here's all you need to know

With Russian hopes of storming Kyiv and other major cities in northern Ukraine dashed by stiff resistance, Moscow has refocused its efforts on the country's east, seeking to make gains there and use them to dictate its terms in talks on ending the conflict.

The Russian troops are preparing for a massive offensive in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland known as the Donbas, and the coming weeks could determine the outcome of the war.

A look at the shift in Russian strategy and its possible consequences.

A STALLED BLITZ

When Russian forces invaded Ukraine from the north, east and south on Feb. 24. President Vladimir Putin counted on a quick victory, similar to its 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

The Russian troops that pushed into Ukraine from Moscow's ally Belarus quickly reached the outskirts of Kyiv, only 75 kilometres (47 miles) south of the border, but they got bogged down facing Ukrainian defences. After the failed attempts to storm the capital and other big cities in the north, Russian forces tried to encircle and pummel them with artillery and airstrikes. The relentless barrages led to massive civilian casualties and damaged infrastructure but didn't weaken Ukraine's resolve. Ukrainian forces, meanwhile, successfully used artillery and drones against Russian convoys that stretched for dozens of kilometres (miles)

along highways outside Kyiv. That created massive logistical problems for the Russians.

A SHIFT IN STRATEGY

On March 29, Russia announced a drastic change in strategy, saying it would scale down military activities around Kyiv and Chernihiv, focusing instead on the "liberation" of Donbas.

A quick withdrawal from areas in the north and northeast followed, with forces pulling back to Belarus

and Russia for rest and resupply. Moscow sought to put a positive spin on what Ukrainian and Western officials described as the failure of the offensive. Russia said the action in the north was intended to tie down and weaken Ukrainian forces there and prevent them from joining troops engaged in the fighting in the east.

REDEPLOYMENT AND REGROUPING

Observers said it could take Russian troops several weeks for the troops to rest, resupply and regroup before they could launch a new attack in the east. "Many Russian units withdrawing from northern Ukraine are likely to require significant re-equipping and refurbishment before being available to redeploy for operations in eastern Ukraine," a tweet from the British Ministry of Defence said. Some Western

estimates said nearly a quarter of Russian units involved in the fighting had been rendered unfit for further action and would need long reequipment and resupply before being sent back into combat. "They will be remanned because they have lost a lot of troops in the different units," NATO Secretary-General Jens

On March 29, Russia announced a drastic change in strategy, saying it would scale down military activities around Kyiv and Chernihiv, focusing instead on the "liberation" of Donbas

Stoltenberg said. "They will be remanned because they have used a lot of ammunition and they will be resupplied ... to launch a new big offensive."

FORTRESS EAST

The separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine, home to a mostly Russian-speaking population, began in 2014 shortly after the annexation of Crimea and has killed over 14,000 people. The fighting has tempered Ukrainian forces, which have gained ample combat experience and built multilayered defences along the line of contact. Those efforts paid off at the start of the Russian invasion, preventing the separatist forces and Russian troops from making any significant gains there despite far superior firepower. From the start of the invasion, Moscow's key goal was to capture the Sea of Azov port of Mariupol to secure a coastal corridor to Crimea.

Russian troops have besieged Mariupol for a month, reducing much of the city to rubble with artillery and air raids that killed thousands. So far, however, they have failed to win full control.

RUSSIAN PINCER MOVEMENT

Ukrainian and Western officials say the Russian plan is to encircle tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops in Donbas by moving from Izyum, near Kharkiv in the north, and from Mariupol in the south. The timing for the offensive

depends on how quickly the Russians wrap up the battle for Mariupol and free those forces for the offensive. It also will depend on how much time is needed to resupply and regroup the troops that were pulled back from Kyiv and other areas in the north. The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said in an analysis that the Russian troops will likely try to advance from Izyum to capture the strategic city of Sloviansk and link up with other Russian forces in Donbas in what it said: "will likely prove to be the next pivotal battle of the war in Ukraine." Stoltenberg warned that such an eastward shift by Russia marks a "crucial phase of the war," saying a further push in eastern and southern Ukraine is expected "to try to take the entire Donbas and to create a land bridge to occupied Crimea."

MOSCOW'S VULNERABILITIES

During an eastern offensive, Russian forces will face the same problems that hampered their attack in the north. Maintaining supply lines over long distances under constant Ukrainian attacks was a key challenge that eventually doomed the blitz on Kyiv and forced Moscow's retreat. Such an operation in the east could prove just as hard. The lack of proper cohesion among different forces, the failure to fully suppress Ukrainian air defenses, and the growing popular resistance to the invasion would likely make it difficult for quick Russian gains in the east. As they seek to encircle Ukrainian troops in Donbas, Russian forces could also face attacks on their flanks.

CONDITIONS FOR PEACE

Military success in the east could offer Putin a face-saving exit from the conflict, allowing him to claim that Moscow's main goals were fulfilled. He could argue that Russia has destroyed the bulk of the Ukrainian military, liquidated the "neo-Nazi nationalist" forces and "liberated" Donbas. Putin's conditions for peace, however, include a demand for Ukraine to acknowledge Russia's sovereignty over Crimea and to recognize the independence of the eastern separatist regions, something that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has rejected. Zelenskyy said the issues of Crimea and Donbas could be put on hold, but Moscow wants to make them part of a deal now.

Ride cancellation, surge pricing remain top concerns for Ola, Uber riders: Survey

The survey shows 71 per cent of respondents complained of ride cancellation by drivers, 45 per cent said they were overcharged beyond the surge pricing cap. Ola, Uber and other app-based taxi service users have said they faced issues such as "drivers cancelling the ride", "surge pricing", "long waiting times", and "cancellation charges" in the last 12 months, according to a survey. The survey conducted by citizen engagement platform LocalCircles shows 71 per cent of respondents complained of ride cancellation by drivers, 45 per cent said they were charged beyond the surge pricing cap. However, 60 per cent of

respondents were happy with compliance with Covid-19 protocols by drivers. The survey received more than 65,000 responses from app taxi users from 324 districts across India.

RIDE CANCELLATION

In November 2020, the government came up with the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, which capped the surge pricing at 1.5 times higher than the base fare, and also introduced a cancellation penalty for drivers at 10 per cent of fare capped at Rs 100. However, most states have yet to implement the guidelines. The survey asked app-based taxi users about their experience with drivers cancelling rides in the last 15 months as compared to

before. Around 71 per cent of respondents said that ride cancellation by drivers continued to persist despite Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020 being in place, indicating poor enforcement. However, 45 per cent of app-based taxi users respondents claimed that they were charged more than 1.5 times in surge pricing despite it being set as the threshold by Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020, indicating poor implementation and enforcement, according to the survey.

"Thousands of complaints from consumers have been reported on LocalCircles just in the last 12 months

with drivers canceling rides or asking consumers to do so either because they do not want to travel to the destination address or they want cash instead of digital payment. Other issues reported by consumers include long waiting time, driver misbehaviour, excessive surge charge, and worse of all extortion," the survey noted.

COVID SAFETY MEASURES

During the pandemic, compliance with Covid-19 protocols of wearing masks, social distancing and hygiene or sanitisation became mandatory. While 60 per cent of respondents were happy with masking and social distancing compliance, only 35 per cent were happy with hygiene or sanitation compliance.

Japan, Philippines to step up security ties amid China worry

Japan and Philippines defence ministry on Thursday agreed to bolster security cooperation and expand joint drills between their forces in the wake of China's increasing military actions in the region

The defense ministers of Japan and the Philippines agreed Thursday to bolster security cooperation and expand joint drills between their forces as they shared concerns about China's increasingly assertive military actions in the region. Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi and his Philippine counterpart, Delfin Lorenzana, also shared concern about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact in the Indo-Pacific, and noted that any attempts to change the status quo

by force is unacceptable, Japan's Defense Ministry said in a statement that avoided identifying China by name. Japan has significantly expanded joint drills with the United States and other partners, including Australia, India, France, Britain and Germany, that share its concerns about China's assertion of its territorial claims in the region, which has some of the world's busiest sea lanes. Japan is especially concerned about Chinese military and coast guard activity in the

East China Sea near the Japanese-controlled Senkaku islands, which China also claims and calls Diaoyu. On Thursday, Japan's Defense Ministry said it spotted a Chinese Y-9 electronic warfare aircraft flying over the Sakishima islands, although it did not violate Japanese airspace. Kishi and Lorenzana also agreed to increase cooperation in defense equipment and technology transfer between the two countries. Tokyo and Manila agreed in

2020 on the Japanese export of air radar systems to the Philippine military. China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei have been locked in an increasingly tense territorial standoff in the busy waterway for decades. The defense ministers will be joined by foreign ministers from each country on Saturday for the first "two plus two" security talks between the two countries.

Sri Lanka appoints advisory committee to address worsening debt crisis

The Sri Lankan govt on Thursday appointed an advisory committee consisting of various economic and fiscal experts to provide advice about the current debt crisis.

The Sri Lankan government has appointed an advisory committee comprising eminent economic and fiscal experts to provide guidance on addressing the current debt crisis and engaging with the IMF and other lenders as the island nation struggles to combat the unprecedented shortage of foreign reserves.

The Presidential Advisory Group on Multilateral Engagement and Debt Sustainability includes Indrajit Coomaraswamy, former governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and former director of the Economic Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, according to a statement issued by the President Media Division on Wednesday. The other members are Shanta Devarajan, Professor of the Practice of Development, Georgetown

University and former chief economist of World Bank; and Sharmini Coorey, former director of the Institute of Capacity Development of the IMF Institute, and former deputy director of the Africa Department, IMF.

"Among the responsibilities that the Presidential Advisory Group will undertake are to engage in discussions with relevant Sri Lankan institutions and officials engaging with the IMF, and to provide guidance that will address the present debt crisis and lead towards sustainable and inclusive recovery for Sri Lanka," the statement said.

Meanwhile, the President Office on Thursday announced Nandalal Weerasinghe was appointed as the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, replacing Ajith Nivard Cabraal, who resigned earlier this week just seven months after taking charge in September 2021. K M M Siriwardena was appointed as the Secretary to the Treasury, replacing S R Attygalle. Rajapaksa is yet to appoint a new minister of finance. The country's

Finance Minister Ali Sabry on Tuesday resigned, a day after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed him after sacking his brother Basil Rajapaksa amidst the island nation's worst economic crisis.

Basil Rajapaksa was fired as he was planning to visit Washington to hold negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

A government parliamentary group met with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on Wednesday to discuss urgent steps that must be taken to improve the situation so that citizens would no longer need to stand in long queues for fuel, gas and essentials, Shehan Semasinghe, a state minister, said. He asserted that the government has not lost its parliamentary majority despite 42 of its members saying they would remain independent of the ruling SLPP coalition in parliament.

"Our majority is solid," Semasinghe

said. Speaking in Parliament on Wednesday, Chief Government Whip Johnston Fernando said the government will face this problem and there is no reason for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign as he was elected to office.

"As a responsible Government, we state that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa will not resign from his post under any circumstances," Fernando said.

Sri Lankans have protested for weeks over lengthy power cuts and shortages of gas, food and other basic goods. The public anger has prompted nearly all Cabinet ministers to quit, and scores of lawmakers to leave Rajapaksa's government.

Police said they are planning to deploy a special security arrangement for key locations such as the President's House, Presidential Secretariat, Prime minister's residence-cum-office and Parliament in view of the growing public protests over the country's worst economic crisis.

Mukesh Ambani vs Gautam Adani: Who is winning see-saw battle of fortune?



on the billionaires indexes has raised the million-dollar question - Who is India's richest man. One overtakes the other in the lists of richest persons from time-to-time.

The "Bloomberg Billionaires Index" and "Forbes Real Time Billionaires" are two popular indexes that track net worth and the growth or decline of the world's richest people.

ADANI VS AMBANI

Gautam Adani has overtaken Mukesh Ambani on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

As of April 4, 2022, Gautam Adani has a net worth of \$100 billion, according to Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Gautam Adani has joined the centibillionaires club. Any individual with a net worth of \$100 billion or above is called a centibillionaire.

While Gautam Adani is in 10th position, Mukesh Ambani is in 11th position with a net worth of \$99 billion.

Meanwhile, on the Forbes Real Time Billionaires list, Gautam Adani is in the 9th position, Mukesh Ambani is in the 10th position.

Gautam Adani has a net worth of \$106.1 billion, according to Forbes Real Time Billionaires. Mukesh Ambani has \$101.5 billion, according to Forbes Real Time Billionaires.

Mukesh Ambani heads Reliance Industries, which has ventures in petrochemicals, oil and gas, telecom and retail. Gautam Adani's Adani group's ventures include ports, airports, infrastructure, commodities, coal, power generation and transmission and real estate, according to Forbes.

GREEN, RENEWABLE ENERGY Both Adani and Ambani have announced major plans for green and renewable energy.

Mukesh Ambani announced that Reliance Industries would invest Rs 75,000 crore in green energy. Gautam Adani also said that his group would invest \$20 billion in renewable energy generation.

(News Agency) Mukesh Ambani heads Reliance Industries, which has ventures in petrochemicals, oil and gas, telecom and retail. Gautam Adani's Adani group's ventures include ports, airports, infrastructure, commodities,

coal, power generation and transmission and real estate, according to Forbes

The see-saw battle of fortune between Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani and Reliance Industries CMD Mukesh Ambani

Sri Lanka crisis: Trading on stock exchange halted after share market crashes

(News Agency) Trading on the Sri Lankan stock exchange has been halted after the share market crashed amid an economic crisis in the country. Authorities on Monday halted trading on Sri Lanka's stock exchange after the share market plunged 5.9 per cent, according to a report by AFP. This comes even as Sri Lanka's president Gotabaya Rajapaksa is all set to appoint a new cabinet Monday as security forces brace for possible violence with more protests expected against worsening shortages of food, fuel and medicines, the AFP report

said.

The son of Sri Lanka's prime minister resigned from the cabinet on Monday and several other members have offered to do so, a minister said, just days after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a state of emergency following protests over an economic crisis, as per a Reuters report.

The debt-laden country is struggling to pay for imports of fuel and other essentials due to a severe shortage of foreign currency, leading to hours-long power cuts and widespread demonstrations that continued

despite a weekend curfew

Traffic was back on the streets of the country's main city Colombo on Monday, but there were reports of sporadic and peaceful protests from across the country. Youth and Sports Minister Namal Rajapaksa, nephew of Gotabaya and the son of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, said on Twitter on Monday he had told the president's secretary about his resignation with immediate effect. The island nation of 22 million, is also grappling with soaring inflation after the government steeply devalued its currency last month



ahead of talks with the International Monetary Fund for a loan programme. The country's expenditure has exceeded its income under successive governments while its production

of tradable goods and services has been inadequate. The twin deficits were badly exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic that crippled its economic mainstay, the tourism industry.

Supertech insolvency: Guide for homebuyers to file claims

All financial creditors, including real estate allottees of Supertech, must submit their claims with proof online

(News Agency) Thousands of homebuyers of Supertech housing projects in the national capital region (NCR) need to submit their claims to insolvency resolution professional (IRP) after the real estate developer was declared bankrupt by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). Acting on a petition filed by the Union Bank of India for non-payment of around Rs 432 crore worth of dues, the bankruptcy court ordered the initiation of insolvency proceedings against real estate firm Supertech Ltd, one of the companies of the Supertech group. The NCLT said, "there has been a default

in payment of the financial debt" and appointed Hitesh Goyal as the Interim Resolution Professional (IRP) superseding the board of Supertech Ltd.

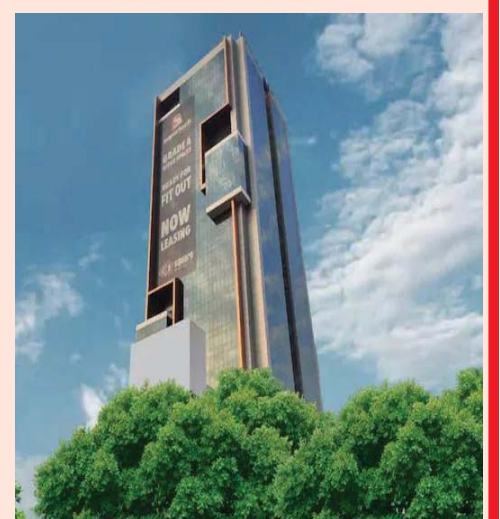
PROJECT HIT

Supertech Ltd has 38,041 customers and out of them, homes have been delivered to 27,111 people. As many as 10,930 homes are yet to be delivered and among them, over 70 per cent construction is complete with respect to over 8,000 homes, Supertech Group Managing Director Mohit Arora was quoted as saying by PTI.

Arora said, "there are around 11-12 housing projects in the Supertech Ltd

against which insolvency proceedings have been initiated. Around 90 per cent of these projects are completed."

The projects that will be impacted include Hilltown, hill estate, Aravile, Hues, Azalia, Official Enclave/Hill Crest, Sports village, Eco village 1, Eco village 2, Eco village 4, Eco village 3, Capetown, Cape Crown, North Eye, Romano, Livingstone, Meerut Sports City, Green village Meerut, Palm Green Meerut, Palm Green Moradabad, 34 Pavillion, Up Country, Czar, Doon Square, River Crest, Micasa, Eco Citi, Emerald Court, Apex/Ceyane, and Ritz Vila, according to document provided by Supertech.



Study Reveals How Vegan Diet Can Help in Easing Arthritis Pain

(News Agency) According to a new study, a low-fat vegan diet with no calorie restriction helps in improving joint pain in patients who are suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. People who participated in this study experienced weight loss and also improved cholesterol levels. The study was published in the journal, 'American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine'. Also Read - World Vegan Day 2021: Everything You Need To Know About Vegan Diet, Explained | Watch Video

"A plant-based diet could be the prescription to alleviate joint pain for millions of people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis," said Neal Barnard, MD, lead author of the study and president of the Physicians Committee. Also Read - World Vegan Day 2021: All the Pros and Cons You Need to Know About Vegan Diet "And all of the side effects, including weight loss and lower cholesterol, are only beneficial," she added. Rheumatoid arthritis is a common autoimmune disease that typically causes joint pain, swelling, and eventually permanent joint damage. Also Read - World Environment Day 2021 | What Steps You Can Take to be Environment Friendly? At the outset of



the Physicians Committee's study, previously diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis participants were asked to use a visual analog scale (VAS) to rate the severity of their worst joint pain in the preceding two weeks, from "no pain" to "pain as bad as it could possibly be." Each participant's Disease Activity Score-28 (DAS28) was also calculated based on tender joints, swollen joints, and C-reactive protein values, which indicate inflammation in the body. DAS28 increases with rheumatoid arthritis severity. During the study, 44 adults

followed an unrestricted diet but was asked to take a daily placebo capsule, which had no effect on the study. Then the groups switched diets for 16 weeks. During the vegan phase of the study, DAS28 decreased 2 points on average, indicating a greater reduction in joint pain, compared to a decrease of 0.3 points in the placebo phase. The average number of swollen joints decreased from 7.0 to 3.3 in the vegan phase, while that number actually increased from 4.7 to 5 in the placebo phase. For those who completed the study, VAS ratings also improved significantly in the vegan phase, compared with the placebo phase. The vegan diet also led to greater decreases in DAS28 in a sub-analysis that excluded individuals who increased medications during the study and another sub-analysis limited to participants making no medication changes. In addition to reductions in pain and swelling, body weight decreased by about 14 pounds on average on the vegan diet, compared with a gain of about 2 pounds on the placebo diet. There were also greater reductions in total, LDL, and HDL cholesterol during the vegan phase.

Study Reveals How Avocados Help in Lowering Risk of Cardiovascular Disease

Avocados contain dietary fibre, unsaturated fats especially monounsaturated fat (healthy fats) and other favourable components that have been associated with good cardiovascular health. Clinical trial



study to support the positive association between higher avocado consumption and lower cardiovascular events, such as coronary heart disease and stroke. Also Read - Dedicating 30-60 Minutes in Muscle-

Strengthening Activity Every Week can Lower Death Risk "Our study provides further evidence that the intake of plant-sourced unsaturated fats can improve diet quality and is an important component in cardiovascular

disease prevention," said Lorena S. Pacheco, PhD, M.P.H., R.D.N., lead author of the study and a postdoctoral research fellow in the nutrition department at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston.

Staying Well-Hydrated May Reduce Long-Term Risks of Heart Failure: Study

(News Agency) New research published in the study, 'European Heart Journal,' says that good hydration might be associated with a reduced risk of developing heart failure. New findings of the research have suggested that consuming sufficient amounts of fluids throughout life not only supports essential body functioning but may also reduce the risk of severe heart problems in the future. Also Read - Skincare Tips: Here Are 8 Essential Tips to Make Your Skin Summer Ready Heart failure, a chronic condition that develops when the heart does not pump enough blood for the body's needs, affects more than 6.2 million Americans, a little more than 2 per cent of the population. It is also more common among adults ages 65 and older. Also Read -

Skincare Tips: 5 Ways to Prevent Rashes This Summer Season "Similar to reducing salt intake, drinking enough water and staying hydrated are ways to support our hearts and may help reduce long-term risks for heart disease," said Natalia Dmitrieva, Ph.D., the lead study author and a researcher in the Laboratory of Cardiovascular Regenerative Medicine at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of NIH. Also Read - 5 Healthy Summer Foods to Eat to Beat The Scorching Heat After conducting preclinical research that suggested connections between dehydration and cardiac fibrosis, a hardening of the heart muscles, Dmitrieva and researchers looked for similar associations in large-scale population studies.

(News Agency) According to a recent study, eating two servings of avocados a week can help in lowering risk of cardiovascular disease. The study was published in 'Journal of the American Heart Association'. Also Read - Eating Protein-Rich Diet Can Help in Regulating Hypertension: Study Avocados contain dietary fibre, unsaturated fats especially monounsaturated fat (healthy fats) and other favourable components that have been associated with good cardiovascular health. Clinical trials have previously found avocados have a positive impact on cardiovascular risk factors including high cholesterol. Also Read - 5 Benefits of Canola oil Which Will Instantly Make You Switch From Olive Oil Researchers have believed this is the first, large, prospective

Scientists use artificial intelligence to confirm that birds are more colourful near equator

(News Agency) Using artificial intelligence, scientists have confirmed that birds are more colourful near the equator. According to the study's author Christopher Cooney, "We found that colourfulness was highest in birds from dense, closed forest habitats." "In vibrant rainforests, having colours that stand out from the crowd may help tropical species to distinguish themselves from others", he added. The study, published in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, has confirmed previous suspicions that colour patterns of

animals vary as per their latitude. The researchers have proved a theory proposed by biologists Charles Darwin, Alexander von Humboldt, and Alfred Russel Wallace in 1850. After comparing the flora and fauna of northern Europe with the tropical region, they were all stunned.

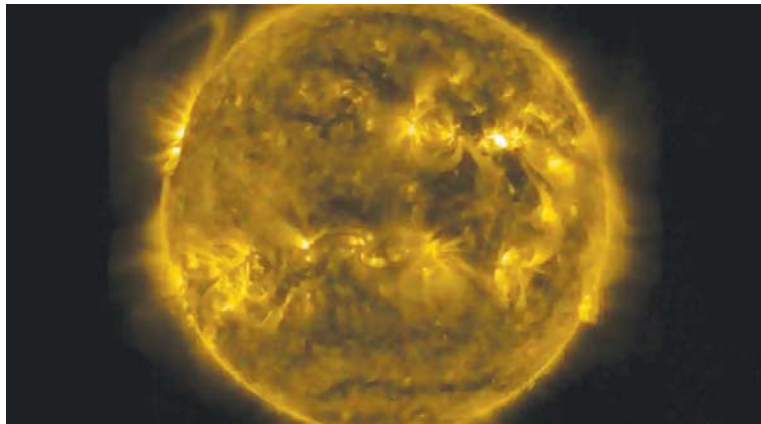
As per German naturalist Humboldt, "The nearer we approach the tropics, the greater the increase in the variety of structure, grace of form, and a mixture of colours, as also in perpetual youth and vigour of organic life." To confirm the

previous theory, researchers at the University of Sheffield studied more than 4,500 species of passerine birds. These included songbirds such as wrens, sparrows and blackbirds across the globe. They used artificial intelligence to extract data from the pixels of three photographs taken from the collection of the Natural History Museum in Tring, Britain. During their analysis, they identified the colour at 1,500 different parts of the plumage of each adult bird and ranked them on the level of intensity of the colour. As the birds came closer



to the equator their colour became brighter. While if they went farther it became duller due to the "luxuriant vegetation of the tropics." This acted as a natural camouflage for the birds all year round. Meanwhile, the birds in the north had to adapt their plumage to handle bare trees every winter.

NASA captures 'most intense' solar flares exploding from Sun



(News Agency) On March 22, Sun emitted the most intense solar flares that are capable enough to impact radio communications,

an "X-Class flare"—the most intense category of solar flares. Solar flares are powerful bursts of energy. They are capable of "impacting radio communications, electric power grids, navigation signals, and pose risks to spacecraft and astronauts," NASA stated.

The mesmerising images were captured by NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory. According to the US space agency, X-class denotes the most intense flares, while the number provides more information about its strength. An X2 is twice as intense as an X1,

and similarly X3 is three times as intense, etc.

Moreover, there were 17 of these solar flares that were caught exploding from Sun by NASA on Monday. At least two were fired towards the Earth's direction, reports the New York Post. Even though these solar flares are capable enough to cause geomagnetic storms that can disrupt the functioning of the satellite, the ones directed towards the Earth were of low intensity and posed no threat. In the past, large solar flares have wreaked havoc on our planet. In March 1989, a solar

flare and accompanying coronal mass ejections caused the entire power grid in Quebec, Canada to lose power. The event was later referred to as "the day the sun brought darkness."

Apart from harming our technologies, these solar flares can hinder astronauts working on the International Space Station, either through radiation exposure or by interfering with mission control communications. The Earth's magnetic field helps to protect us from the more extreme consequences of solar flares.

India's HAL hands over satellite structure that is meant to support ISRO's Gaganyaan mission

(News Agency) India's state-run Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) supplied to ISRO, what is being referred to as the first set of hardware for India's Human Spaceflight mission. According to HAL, this hardware is the Satellite bus or external structure of the satellite that is meant to provide communication support for the Gaganyaan mission. While the Satellite bus can be thought of as a skeleton, it attains its final form only after electronics, hardware, solar panels and other components are fitted on it. The newly handed over satellite bus also happens to be the 150th such unit being rolled out of HAL. Specifically, this structure that was handed over is meant for the IDRSS Satellite. Two of these Indian Data Relay System Satellites would be placed nearly 36,000km above the equator (where they would remain in sync with the earth's rotation or at a

constant position when seen from earth) and will offer near-total tracking and communication with India's space assets. It must be noted that a constellation of 3 satellites positioned in a 36,000km orbit can offer real-time, 24/7 monitoring of almost the entire earth. Each IDRSS satellite weighs 2275kg and is meant to be launched by the GSLV Mk2 rocket. Earlier, Dr. K. Sivan, Chairman, ISRO had told WION that ISRO intends to launch two such IDRSS satellites prior to the Gaganyaan Human Spaceflight. While the Gaganyaan spacecraft would be placed in a low earth orbit, 400kms above the earth, these two IDRSS satellites would help Indian astronauts communicate with the ground stations. For context, when Gaganyaan is orbiting the earth, but not visible to the

ground stations, Gaganyaan can send its signals and communicate with the IDRSS



satellites up above, which in turn would relay it down to the ground stations and vice versa. This would ensure constant communication between the astronauts and their mission control on earth. R. Madhavan, Chairman and Managing Director of HAL recalled the organization's four-decade-long association with ISRO and how it is poised to play a bigger role in the

integration of ISRO's rockets. "We will continue to be a reliable partner of ISRO with dedication, devotion and zeal" he added. HAL also inaugurated a new facility that is meant to integrate the PS2 and GS2 stages of India's PSLV and GSLV rockets, respectively. The PS2 and GS2 stages serve as the second stages of India's launch vehicles PSLV and GSLV respectively and are powered by a Vikas engine, which uses liquid fuels. The most ambitious programme of ISRO, Gaganyaan or the Human Spaceflight programme has been delayed to the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant impact on industries and restrictions. ISRO is expected to have the first unmanned flight of Gaganyaan by end of 2022 or early 2023. This will be followed up by one or two additional unmanned flights and the manned attempt.

No obituary for Earth: Scientists fight climate doom talk

Earlier IPCC reports have shown that after 1.5 degrees, more people die, more ecosystems are in trouble and climate change worsens rapidly

(News Agency) It's not the end of the world. It only seems that way. Climate change is going to get worse, but as gloomy as the latest scientific reports are, including today's from the United Nations, scientist after scientist stresses that curbing global warming is not hopeless. The science says it is not game over for planet Earth or humanity. Action can prevent some of the worst if done soon, they say. After decades of trying to get the public's attention, spur action by governments and fight against organized movements denying the science, climate researchers say they have a new fight on their hands: doomism. It's the feeling that nothing can be done, so why bother. It's young people publicly swearing off having children because of climate change. University of Maine climate scientist Jacquelyn Gill noticed in 2018 fewer people telling her climate change isn't real and more "people that we now call doomers that you know believe that nothing can be done." Gill says it is just not true.

"I refuse to write off or write an obituary for something that's still alive," Gill told The Associated Press, referring to the Earth. "We are not through a threshold or past the threshold. There's no such thing as pass-fail when it comes to the climate crisis." "It's really, really, really hard to walk people back from that ledge," Gill said. Doomism "is definitely a thing," said Wooster College psychology professor Susan Clayton, who studies climate change anxiety and spoke at a conference in Norway last week that addressed the issue. "It's a way of saying 'I don't have to go to the effort of making changes because there's nothing I can do anyway.'" Gill and six other scientists who talked with The Associated Press about doomism aren't sugarcoating the escalating harm to the climate from accumulating emissions. But that doesn't make it hopeless, they said. "Everybody knows it's going to get worse," said Woodwell Climate Research Center scientist Jennifer Francis. "We can do a lot to make it less bad than the worst case scenario."

The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on



Climate Change just issued its third report in six months. The first two were on how bad warming is and how it will hurt people and ecosystems, with today's report focusing on how the extent of disruption depends on how much fossil fuels are burned. It shows the world is still heading in the wrong direction in its fight to curb climate change, with new investments in fossil fuel infrastructure and forests falling to make way for agriculture. "It's not that they're saying you are condemned to a future of destruction and increasing misery," said Christiana Figueres, the former

U.N. climate secretary who helped forge the 2015 Paris climate agreement and now runs an organization called Global Optimism. "What they're saying is 'the business-as-usual path ... is an atlas of misery' or a future of increasing destruction. But we don't have to choose that. And that's the piece, the second piece, that sort of always gets dropped out of the conversation."

United Nations Environment Program Director Inger Andersen said with reports like these, officials are walking a tightrope. They are trying to spur the world to action because scientists are calling this a



crisis. But they also don't want to send people spiraling into paralysis because it is too gloomy. "We are not doomed, but rapid action is absolutely essential," Andersen said. "With every month or year that we delay action, climate change becomes more complex, expensive and difficult to overcome." "The big message we've got (is that) human activities got us into this problem and human agency can actually get us out of it again," James Skea, co-chair of Monday's report, said. "It's not all lost. We really have the chance to do something."

Monday's report details

that it is unlikely, without immediate and drastic carbon pollution cuts, that the world will limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times, which is the world's agreed upon goal. The world has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit). And earlier IPCC reports have shown that after 1.5 degrees, more people die, more ecosystems are in trouble and climate change worsens rapidly. "We don't fall over the cliff at 1.5 degrees," Skea said, "Even if we were to go beyond 1.5 it doesn't mean we throw up our hands in despair." IPCC reports showed that depending on how much coal, oil, and natural gas is burned, warming by 2100 could be anywhere from 1.4 to 4.4 degrees Celsius (2.5 to 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times, which can mean large differences in sickness, death and weather disasters. While he sees the increase in doom talk as inevitable, NASA climate scientist Gavin Schmidt said he knows first-hand that people are wrong when they say nothing can be done: "I work with people and I'm watching other people and I'm seeing the administration. And people are doing things and they're doing the right things for the most part as best they can. So I'm seeing people do things."

Comet from interstellar space is coming to visit Earth, will never return once gone

The comet will be at its closest to Earth on May 8, sweeping about 0.60 AU from us or 82 million kilometers from the planet.

(News Agency) After parts of India witnessed Chinese rocket fragments re-entering skies like meteors breaking apart, a comet is set to light up the skies in the coming month. C/2021 O3 (PanSTARRS) is approaching the inner planets of the solar system and is expected to cross the skies over Earth by May this year. Discovered in July 2021, the comet is currently flying behind the Sun when seen from Earth and is coming from the Oort Cloud, the most distant region of our solar system. The Oort Cloud is believed to be a giant spherical shell surrounding the rest of the solar system. It is like a big, thick-walled bubble made of icy pieces of space debris the size of mountains and sometimes larger. Cosmic snowballs of frozen gases, rock, and dust that orbit the Sun, comets are frozen leftovers from the formation of the solar system. According to Nasa, they range

from a few miles to tens of miles wide, but as they orbit closer to the Sun, they heat up and spew gases and dust into a glowing head that can be larger than a planet. This material forms a tail that stretches millions of miles.

Astronomers, while predicting the movement of the comet C/2021 O3, speculate that it might vapourise as it comes close to the Sun. If it survives, that's when it gets exciting. The comet is expected to hit the Sun on April 21, coming as close as 0.29 astronomical units (AU) from our star (1 AU = 1 average Earth-sun unit of distance). According to EarthSky, the comet will be at its closest to Earth on May 8, sweeping about 0.60 AU from us or 82 million kilometers from the planet. The comet was first spotted by astronomers using the Panoramic Survey Telescope And Rapid

Response System, or 'Pan-STARRS' telescope. At the time of its discovery, the comet was 48 million kilometers from the Sun, putting it beyond the orbit of Jupiter. It was shining roughly 4,00,000 times dimmer than the faintest star visible to the eye.

Astronomers said that it is the first time that this comet is visiting the solar system and has traveled millions of years to visit the inner planets. However, if it survives the Sun's gravity, it's never coming back and will remain floating in the Milky Way galaxy. As it passes close to our planet, while it will not be visible to the naked eye, it can be seen using binoculars. Since comets are very deceiving in their appearance thanks to their unpredictable nature of brightness, C/2021 O3's brightness could increase or decrease based on its interaction with the Sun later this month.

Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor will get married at THIS location next week

(News Agency) Bollywood's favourite couple, Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, are soon going to tie the knot. The couple, who started dating during the shooting of *Brahmastra*, is expected to wed in the second week of April. As per reports, the wedding festivities will take place between April 13 to 18. In one of its latest updates, IndiaToday.in has exclusively learned that Ranbir and Alia are planning to get married at RK's Bandra home!

RANBIR-ALIA'S WEDDING VENUE REVEALED

What looks like it, Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor's marriage is happening for real! A source shared exclusively with IndiaToday.in, "Ranbir and Alia are seeing all the logistics as to where to hold the

wedding. For now, both the families have agreed to have the wedding at Ranbir's Bandra home, Vastu. All the wedding functions are expected to take place at Vastu. Both the actors have invited their close family and friends for the wedding."

RANBIR-ALIA WEDDING GUEST LIST

It is also reported that the couple will host a grand reception towards the end of April. The guest list for the reception includes Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Karan Johar, Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh, among others.

On the work front, Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt recently wrapped the shoot of Ayan Mukerji's *Brahmastra*. The film is slated for a theatrical release on September 9, 2022



Javed Akhtar leaves court after no hearing in Kangana Ranaut case: 'Khatam toh karna hai'

Veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar had to leave the court disappointed after the hearing in his case against Kangana Ranaut was stalled due to the magistrate's absence



(News Agency) Veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar arrived at Andheri Magistrate court on Thursday but had to leave disappointed. As per a new report, Javed returned after learning that the hearing had been cancelled as the magistrate was on leave. Javed was at the court for a hearing in his defamation case against actor Kangana Ranaut. He filed the complaint in the court in November 2020, claiming that Kangana had made defamatory statements against him in a television interview, which allegedly damaged his reputation. Recently, the court dismissed Kangana's plea, asking for exemption from appearing for hearings in the case.

Javed, however, told India Today on Thursday that he makes it a point to come to every hearing. "Main koshish karta hun ki har baar aoon (I try to come every time)," he said. Javed added, "Jo shuru kiya hai, use khatam toh karna hi hai (We have to end what we started)." Kangana had sought permanent exemption from appearance, saying she is one of the top most female actors of the Hindi film industry and she needs to travel to different parts of the country and international locations for professional

commitments. The court, however, rejected her application and said, "No doubt, being a celebrity, the accused (Kangana) is having her professional assignments, but she cannot forget that she is an accused in this case." "If the accused is permanently exempted at this juncture, then the complainant, a senior citizen, will be seriously prejudiced and there will be no progress in the trial," the court order had said. Javed's advocate had opposed the application, arguing that Kangana was showing a casual attitude towards the court.

In his complaint, Javed claimed that Kangana dragged his name during an interview while referring to a 'coterie' existing in Bollywood, following the alleged suicide by actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Kangana had later filed a counter complaint in the same court against Javed for alleged "extortion and criminal intimidation". The actor in her complaint against Javed claimed that following her public dispute with her co-star, the lyricist had called her and her sister Rangoli Chandel to his house with "malafide intentions and ulterior motives and then criminally intimidated and threatened" her.

Shah Rukh Khan spotted shooting for next project, fans are convinced he is working on Atlee's Lion

(News Agency) Shah Rukh Khan filmmaker Atlee's next, rumoured to be titled *Lion*. However, there is no confirmation on that development. In a picture shared by fan clubs on social media, Shah Rukh can be seen sitting in the driving seat of what appears to be a truck. The actor's face is covered with a cloth with only his eyes and hair partially visible.

Some crew members are also standing in the foreground. Fan clubs began sharing the picture with the hashtag #Lion, a reference to Atlee's next film. One fan shared on social media, "This is King Khan on the set of *Lion* for sure." Another posted the picture on Instagram and

wrote, "So it is confirmed that SRK has begun the shoot of Atlee sir's *Lion*." In the past, several reports have claimed that Shah Rukh is starring in Atlee's *Lion* although neither the actor, nor the filmmaker have confirmed it yet. Shah Rukh had himself added fuel to the rumours recently. On Tuesday evening, the actor

tweeted that he was sitting with the filmmaker, discussing Vijay's *Beast*. "Sitting with @Atlee_dir who is as big a fan of @actorvijay as I am. Wishing the best for beast to the whole team...trailer looks meaner....Leaner...stronger," he wrote alongside *Beast*'s trailer. This led fans to speculate that they were discussing the film.

Kangana Ranaut says 'local awards' Grammys, Oscars should be boycotted after they didn't pay tribute to Lata Mangeshkar

Kangana Ranaut has demanded her fans to "boycott" western awards, after Oscars 2022 and Grammys 2022 failed to add late singer Lata Mangeshkar's during the In Memoriam ceremony



(NewsAgency) Actor Kangana Ranaut expressed her disappointment over iconic Lata Mangeshkar's name missing from In Memoriam ceremony at Grammys 2022, which was held on Sunday. While Lata's name was not mentioned

in the segment, her name is mentioned in a list featured on the Grammys website. Earlier, the Academy Awards had also been criticised for failing to include Lata in their list of tributes last week. We must take strong stands against any local awards who claim to be international and yet ignore and intentionally sideline legendary artists because of their race or ideologies... both Oscar and Grammy failed to give tribute to Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar

Ji... our media should totally boycott these biased local events who claim to be global

awards..." Kangana wrote on her Instagram Stories. She also wrote, "We should boycott these snooty western awards." The In Memoriam segment of the 64th Annual Grammy Awards paid tribute to several late musical powerhouses including Stephen Sondheim and Taylor Hawkins. However, the late legendary Indian singer Lata's name was missing from the section. Several fans of the iconic singer expressed their disappointment on Twitter.

One person shared a picture of Kangana's IG Stories and wrote, "I agree with Kangana. Lata Didi was bigger than

#GRAMMYS. Us Indians always go gaga over Grammys, Golden Globes and Oscars, without even having proper knowledge, but then the same people troll Indian Awards. Someone had the guts to say this #KanganaRanaut. #LataMangeshkar." Another person wrote, "No notable mention for #Lata Ji during #Oscars & #Grammys is their loss, not ours. Why do Indians seek validation from the West for things that are beautiful & do not require any validation?"



Who is Saba Azad?: Know All About Hrithik Roshan's Rumoured Girlfriend Looks like Hrithik Roshan and Saba Azad's romance is gathering steam with each passing day

(NewsAgency) Looks like Hrithik Roshan and Saba Azad's romance is gathering steam with each passing day. The latter has also been spending quality time with the Roshan family. The pair was also recently spotted at the airport hand-in-hand. Here's all that we know about Hrithik's new lady love.

1. Azad's real name is Saba Singh Grewal.
2. Azad is the niece of India's renowned theatre artist and communist playwright Safdar Hashmi.
3. She began her acting career

with her late uncle's theatre group Jana Natya Manch in Delhi, where she worked with the likes of Habib Tanvir and MK Raina.

4. Azad moved to Mumbai from Delhi and acted in a two-man play directed by Makarand Deshpande staged at Prithvi Theatre.

5. Her first film stint was in a short film Guroor which was helmed by director Ishaan Nair.

6. She made her Bollywood debut in 2008 with Anil Senior's Dil Kabaddi, which also starred Irrfan, Rahul Bose and Soha Ali Khan.

7. Azad is a popular musician and singer in the Indian indie music

scene and one half of widely popular electronic band Madboy/ Mink which she started with actor and musician Imaad Shah in 2012.8. Azad and Shah dated for seven years before calling it quits in 2010. They continue to work as music partners.

9. Azad started her own theatre company The Skins in 2010 and directed her first play Lovepuke which opened at NCPA's experimental theatre in September 2010.

10. She recently starred in web series Rocket Boys.

RRR Hindi version inches towards ?

200 crore mark, crosses Akshay Kumar-starrer Sooryavanshi's lifetime business

(News Agency) SS Rajamouli's RRR has been breaking box office records. On Sunday, the film crossed the ₹900 crore mark globally, and on Tuesday, a trade analyst tweeted that the film's Hindi version is just inches away from crossing the ₹200 crore mark. The film is also expected to surpass Rohit Shetty's film Sooryavanshi's lifetime business

on Tuesday, the 12th day of its release. On Tuesday, trade analyst Taran Adarsh tweeted, "RRR will cross *lifetime biz* of ₹200 cr tomorrow. The only other Hindi film to hit the ₹200 crore mark in nett earnings within India is The Kashmir Files. The Vivek Agnihotri directorial is the most successful Hindi film in the post-

pandemic era. Analysts are pre-Sooryavanshi was released on November 5, 2021.

On Monday, RRR became the fifth highest-grossing Indian film, beating Aamir Khan's PK's lifetime collection of ₹832 crore (worldwide gross) at the box office. Trade analysts estimate that it may go past the ₹1000-crore mark soon.

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