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VAISAKHI SPECIAL EDITION

The INDIAN PANORAMA

will bring out a special edition to mark VAISAKHI on April 9. Advertisements may please be booked by April 6, and articles for publication may please be submitted by April 5 to salujaindra@gmail.com

John Kerry to visit New Delhi, U.A.E and Dhaka
Will hold consultations on increasing climate ambition ahead of President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate April 22-23



U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry
File photo

WASHINGTON (TIP): The U.S.'s Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, will travel to New Delhi, Dhaka and Abu Dhabi during April 1-9, the State Department announced on Wednesday, April 31.

The purpose of the travel is for "consultations on increasing climate ambition ahead of President Biden's Leaders Summit on Climate April 22-23 and the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change later this year," a State Department statement said.

Countries party to the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate are expected to announce new Nationally Determined

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President Biden Unveils What He Calls A 'Once-In-A-Generation' Infrastructure Proposal

The measure, called the American Jobs Plan, includes big infrastructure fixes



PITTSBURGH (TIP): President Biden on Wednesday, March 31, unveiled a sprawling, ambitious infrastructure proposal that, if enacted, would overhaul how Americans get from Point A to Point B, how their electricity is generated, the speed of their Internet connections, the quality of their water and the physical makeup of their children's schools.

The measure, called the American Jobs Plan, includes big infrastructure fixes that both major parties - as well as a majority of Americans - consistently say they want to see, including upgrades to bridges, broadband and buildings.

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<< President Joe Biden on March 31, unveiled the ambitious 2 trillion proposal to rebuild America - File photo / CNN

Indian IT professionals likely to benefit as Biden lets Trump era H-1B visa ban expire



WASHINGTON (TIP): US President Joe Biden on Thursday, April 1, let the ban on

foreign workers visa, H-1B, lapse as the notification issued by his predecessor Donald Trump expired, a move which is likely to benefit thousands of Indian IT professionals. Amidst a national lockdown and the COVID-19 crisis, Trump in June last year issued a proclamation that suspended entry to

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PNB fraud: Warrant against Nirav Modi's sister, brother-in-law kept in abeyance

Purvi was arraigned as an accused in the case, where multiple chargesheets have been filed by the ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)



Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi - File Photo

NEW DELHI (TIP): A special PMLA court on Thursday, April 1, kept in abeyance the warrant issued against the sister and brother-in-law of fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi till further orders.

Modi's sister Purvi and her husband Maiank Mehta had "turned approvers" in the USD 2 billion PNB fraud case, in which Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi are the prime accused. The couple had approached the court in February for cancellation of non-bailable warrants

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Trump enters FB via daughter-in-law's Page, kicked off again

SAN FRANCISCO (TIP): Facebook has kicked off former US President Donald Trump for the second time from its platform as he tried to evade the ban by posting an interview via a Facebook Page in the name of his daughter-in-law Lara Trump.

Lara is married to Eric Frederick Trump, the third child and second son of Donald Trump.

Facebook said in a statement to The Verge on Wednesday, March 31, that the company has removed content from Lara Trump's Facebook Page that featured former President Donald Trump speaking.

"In line with the block we placed on Donald Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts, further content posted in the voice of Donald Trump will be removed and result in additional limitations on the accounts," the company added. Lara later posted screenshots of emails that appear to be from Facebook, saying that a video of the interview was removed because it featured "the voice of Donald Trump,"

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President Biden Unveils What He Calls A...

The \$2 trillion proposal includes:

- \$115 billion to repair and rebuild bridges, highways and roads.
- \$100 billion to expand high-speed broadband across the entire country.
- \$100 billion to upgrade and build new schools.
- \$100 billion to expand and improve power lines and spur a shift to clean energy.

Embedded within the plan are efforts to build out U.S. clean energy infrastructure that, by itself, would rank as one of the most ambitious initiatives ever by the federal government to lower the country's greenhouse gas emissions, along with efforts to address racial inequalities and advance the U.S. economy to compete with China.

That's if the measure is signed into law.

Democrats have a slim House majority and control the Senate only because of Vice President Harris' tiebreaking vote. With Republicans already voicing concerns about the proposal's cost and corporate tax hikes, Democrats may once again have to force major legislation through complicated Senate procedures that could drastically narrow its scope. The party would also have to stick together on a historically expensive effort that has some moderates balking, while some high-profile progressives call for even higher spending levels.

What Biden announced in Pittsburgh on Wednesday is the first part of a larger plan to overhaul the economy. Additional proposals for spending on education, childcare and other social programs the administration calls "human infrastructure" are expected in the coming weeks.

Addressing climate and racial inequities

The initial package includes two environmental ideas Biden regularly talked about when running for president: creating a New Deal-inspired Climate Conservation Corps to work on conservation projects and environmental justice efforts, as well as catalyzing an irreversible shift from gasoline-powered to electric vehicles.

Biden wants to spend billions on rebates and tax incentives to encourage Americans to purchase electric vehicles, and he proposes paying for the transition of thousands of transit and school buses from diesel to electric. At the same time, he wants incentives for state and local governments to build electric vehicle charging stations to power those new cars and buses.

Altogether, Biden is proposing \$174 billion in spending on boosting the electric vehicle market - more than the plan would spend on highway and bridge repairs.

The proposal would also try to speed up private investments in clean energy such as wind and solar by expanding investment and production tax credits and funding existing state and local projects that already do the same.

Biden has repeatedly said that addressing historic racial injustice is one of the top goals of his administration. Attempts to fix decades of racial inequity run through the various efforts in the infrastructure proposal. The president's plan would replace all of the country's lead pipes and service lines - dangerous infrastructure flaws that predominantly affect communities of color such as Flint, Mich. It would spend \$85 billion improving and expanding mass transportation, the main mode of transportation for many people of color.

Biden's plan even includes a \$20 billion proposal to reconnect urban neighborhoods cut off, bulldozed and blighted by highways planned and built with little to no regard for the people who lived along their routes.

Biden's just-passed \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan relied entirely on deficit spending. This time, the administration is proposing tax hikes - with several directed at corporations.

The White House wants to raise corporate taxes to 28% - halfway between the current top corporate rate of 21% set by former President Donald Trump's 2017 tax law and the 35% rate before it was enacted. Biden's measure would also raise the global minimum tax for U.S. multinational corporations, attempting to stop the shifting of profits to tax havens.

The infrastructure proposal does not mention raising individual tax rates, including on wealthy Americans.

While the bulk of the proposal's \$2 trillion in spending would come over the coming eight years, the administration says the increased revenue would pay for all of the projects over a timespan nearly twice as long: 15 years.

But there's another fiscal argument many Democrats are

starting to make.

"Don't get hung up on this concept that we need to find a way to pay for it dollar for dollar because infrastructure is one of those issues that pays for itself," said Zac Petkanas, a senior adviser to Invest in America, a progressive group formed in January that advocates for an expansive infrastructure package.

The Biden plan points to lots of potential job creation that would generate tax payments and efficiencies, such as saving money in the power grid. But Republicans are certain to raise questions about those promises.

Seeking bipartisanship

President Biden campaigned on restoring bipartisanship and unity but has increasingly made it clear that he views that benchmark via the broader popularity of his proposals, not whether any Republican lawmakers actually vote for them.

As with the American Rescue Plan, the main immediate political question is whether any Republicans would support the proposal. Biden campaigned on restoring bipartisanship and unity to Washington, D.C., but has increasingly made it clear that he views that benchmark via the broader popularity of his proposals, not whether any Republican lawmakers actually vote for them.

A bipartisan measure would eliminate the need to tailor details to fit the nebulous rules of what can and cannot be considered in bills passed via the Senate's reconciliation rules, which bypass the chamber's filibuster procedures.

Historically, spending is an area where Democrats and Republicans in Congress collaborated, and there is a widespread acknowledgment now of a huge backlog that needs to be addressed.

Former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., says what can make infrastructure an easier sell is that there's something tangible for every lawmaker to tell their constituents about.

"You get a bridge! And you get a bridge! And you get a bridge! And you get a road! And you get a hospital! It's the Oprah of infrastructure," she said, adding that moderate Democrats may make a big show about demanding the spending be targeted, as Republicans certainly will. "If people see that it is an advancement of infrastructure and not like a Christmas tree bill for every other priority, I think that that will get a lot of traction."

Indeed, many Republicans are already making it clear that they see Biden's infrastructure proposals as far too broad and far too expensive.

"A transportation bill, I think, needs to be a transportation bill. Not a Green New Deal. It needs to be about roads and bridges," Missouri Rep. Sam Graves, the top Republican on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, warned Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg during a recent hearing.

Many Democrats seem resigned to the fact that this will likely be another party-line process. John Podesta - who coordinated climate policy during the Obama administration, in addition to advising both Bill and Hillary Clinton - trailed off and laughed when trying to make the case for how Republicans would support the climate aspects of the measure.

Jamal Raad, who co-founded the climate advocacy group Evergreen Action, argues that the Biden administration should proceed through reconciliation right off the bat or persuade Senate Democrats to vote to eliminate filibuster rules.

"I believe there is Republican support for certain investments in infrastructure," he said. "Certain investments in their community for jobs. Even in clean energy. But I do not think there will be anywhere close to 10 Republican votes for the scale, the scope, of the challenge we need to meet." It's a path that, despite decades in Washington as an aisle-crossing deal-cutter, Biden has now made clear he's willing - perhaps even eager - to take as he sets out to transform the country (Agencies)

John Kerry to visit New Delhi, U.A.E and...

Contributions (NDCs) - emissions targets - before the COP26 meeting in Glasgow in November. The U.S. is expected to announce its new 2030 targets soon.

"What we do in the realm of climate, of course, has implications for the broader globe because, of course, we are one of the world's largest emitters. But we also set an example, and we are seeking to raise that climate ambition by not only asking countries to make these commitments themselves, but also to lead by example. And I suspect in the coming weeks you will hear more about the example we intend to set ..." State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday in response to a question on what the U.S. was planning to do to curb its emissions. (Source: The Hindu)

Gov. Phil Murphy approves \$25 million in aid for New Jersey's smallest businesses

TRENTON, NJ (TIP): Gov Phil Murphy on April 1, signed a \$25 million bill for "microbusinesses". It is part of a package of bills passed by the Legislature to send \$100 million to small businesses, restaurants, bars, daycares, and arts and cultural organizations.

Business revenue during the pandemic has plummeted and unemployment skyrocketed. A third of small businesses in the Garden State have closed their doors. Among hospitality businesses, the closures are closer to 50%, according to the New Jersey Business and Industry Association.

The bill (S2523) describes a microbusiness as one with five or fewer



Gov. Phil Murphy on Thursday, April 1, signed a bill providing \$25 million to small businesses slammed by the pandemic - File photo

employees.

"Main Street businesses have always been the backbone of our economy and unfortunately have been the hardest hit

during the pandemic," Murphy said in a statement. "This bill, along with others I'll sign later this month, will help thousands of businesses keep their doors open as we climb out of the economic hardships wrought by COVID-19."

The state's Economic Development Authority would be charged with allocating and determining the size of individual grants. Funding will come from the state's federal stimulus aid.

Other bills sent to Murphy would set aside \$35 million in federal funds for bars and restaurants, \$10 million for daycares, \$15 million for arts and culture organizations million and \$15 million to other businesses and nonprofits.

Nassau County Holds Inter-Faith Candlelight Vigil for Victims of Hate



Nassau County will continue to work alongside our state and federal partners to combat hatred with action that will deter violence, protect our residents, and educate the public," said Nassau County Executive Laura Curran.

MINEOLA, NY(TIP): Nassau County Executive Laura Curran and the Nassau County Office of AsianAmerican Affairs on April 1 hosted an Interfaith Candlelight Vigil Against All Acts of Hate and Discrimination on the front steps of the Theodore Roosevelt Executive and Legislative. The vigil will be held in honor of the victims of the Georgia massage parlor shootings, which took the lives of eight people, six of whom were women of Asian descent.

"Nassau County is standing together against the rising tide of Anti-Asian hatred in our state and country. Although there have been no reported hate crime star getting Asians in Nassau, the attacks we're seeing in our State and country are unacceptable. Nassau County will continue to work alongside our state and federal partners to combat hatred with action that will deter violence, protect our residents, and educate the public,"said Nassau County Executive Laura Curran.

"We are here to stand vigil for the victims of the shooting in Atlanta, Georgia. We honor each life lost at the hands of ferocious, violent hate, and we are committed to raising awareness of the anti-Asian discrimination that has swept the country. Nassau County has no place for hatred, violence, and inhumanity," said Farrah Mozawalla, Executive Director of the Office of Asian American Affairs.

Event speakers included:

- o Pastor Steven Na from the Edge City Church in New Hyde Park
- o Dr. Isma Chaudhry from the Islamic Center of Long Island
- o Bishop Lionel Harvey from the First Baptist Cathedral of Westbury
- o Olivia Wong from New Hyde Park Memorial High School
- o Commissioner Shirley Shing from the Nassau County Human Rights Commission
- o Rabbi Susan Elkodsi from the Malverne Jewish Center

Mayor De Blasio, Trust For Governors Island Announce Governors Island To Reopen On May 1st



Mayor Bill de Blasio announced, April 1, that Governors Island will return to its pre-pandemic season calendar, open to visitors every day from May 1st through October 31st. - File photo

NEW YORK (TIP): Mayor de Blasio and The Trust for Governors Island (The Trust) announced, April 1, that the seasonal reopening of Governors Island on May 1st, 2021. Governors Island will return to its pre-pandemic season calendar, open to visitors every day from May 1st through October 31st. In addition to daily Manhattan ferry service, for the first time Governors Island ferries will serve two Brooklyn locations for weekend

Brooklyn ferries will serve two locations for the first time at Brooklyn Bridge Park's Pier 6 and Red Hook's Atlantic Basin on weekends
City to offer free ferry rides for residents of NYCHA, seniors, children, IDNYC holders, current and former military personnel and community organizations

service at Pier 6 in Brooklyn Bridge Park and Atlantic Basin in Red Hook, allowing easy access to the Island for a wider range of Brooklyn residents than ever before.

New Yorkers can visit the island to enjoy open space and car-free natural surroundings, unmatched views of New York Harbor and surrounding skylines, historic settings, dozens of free public art exhibitions, cultural programs and activities, and diverse selection of food and beverage vendors.

"Governors Island is one of New York City's crown jewels. It's the kind of beautiful, open public space that we will rely on to drive our recovery this spring and summer," said Mayor Bill de Blasio. "I'm grateful to the Trust for making the Island more accessible than ever this year, and the return of their full season will

give more New Yorkers than ever a chance to enjoy everything the island has to offer."

"We are thrilled to be able to open Governors Island for its full, six-month public season again this year, and with more access from Brooklyn than ever before," said Clare Newman, President and CEO of the Trust for Governors Island. "As the City reopens, Governors Island will provide an affordable destination for New Yorkers to enjoy open space, arts and culture, and everything that makes it such a remarkable place. One of the Trust's main goals is to provide equitable access to the Island, and we're proud to continue to deliver on that mission this year. We can't wait to see everyone on the ferry."

Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news

Big crackdown on texting while driving starts in NJ

Police departments across New Jersey began their annual crackdown on texting while driving on Thursday as part of April's National Distracted Driving Awareness.

TRENTON, NJ (TIP): The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration awarded more than \$1.2 million in grants for overtime to 183 law enforcement agencies in all 21 counties. Other departments are welcome to participate in the "U Drive. U Text. U Pay. campaign without receiving additional funding.

Distracted driving contributed to more than a quarter of the fatal crashes that occurred in New Jersey from 2015 through 2019, killing 730 drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and bicyclists, State Police said. More than half of all crashes in the state involved a distracted driver during that five-year span.

"Driver inattention is the leading cause of traffic fatalities in New Jersey and we're working to change that behavior through a public awareness campaign that uses the power of positive



messaging," state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said. "We're reminding people what's at stake every time they get behind the wheel. We want drivers of all ages to realize that their plans and dreams for the future depend on making safe choices here and now."

Distracted driving crashes declined for the third straight year in 2019 but there were still more than those caused by speeding or driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Indian-British Steel Tycoon Sanjeev Gupta Rules Out Bailout, UK Closures
NIRPAL SINGH SHERGILL



"I am not waiting for anybody to come to the rescue. We will help ourselves but of course all help from everybody is always welcome," Sanjeev Gupta told the BBC.

LONDON (TIP): Indian-British billionaire Sanjeev Gupta on Thursday, April 1, ruled out a bailout or factory closures for his steelmaking group GFG Alliance after the collapse of corporate finance firm Greensill.

The remarks come after the UK government earlier this week refused GFG a rescue package totaling 170 million pounds (\$234 million, 200 million euros).

There is growing concern in Britain about the future of GFG and Liberty Steel, which together employ 5,000 people domestically and 35,000 worldwide.

GFG Alliance had been Greensill's biggest customer.

"I am not waiting for anybody to come to the rescue. We will help ourselves but of course all help from everybody is always welcome," Gupta told the BBC.

He admitted that his company owed "many billions" to Greensill but insisted that no facilities would face closure. "Our overall global operations are profitable," the GFG founder said.

"We have refinancing offers, we will refinance, and we will support our UK business also," he said.

"None of my steel plants under my watch will be shut down."

ADVERTISING

GFG has operations in more than 35 countries across the world, and annual global revenues of about \$20 billion according to its website.

"Our plants are conserving cash. Many of our customers are coming forward and giving us large orders, prepayments and so on, the market needs our material and we are working with financiers to refinance, added Gupta.

Greensill specialized in short-term corporate loans via a complex and opaque business model that ultimately sparked its declaration of insolvency last month. Gupta said there are "positive discussions" with Greensill's administrator.

"It makes no sense for them or any of the creditors to destroy jobs, or more importantly to destroy value, because that is the value which will give them the recovery," he said.

"So, I am very confident that we will find short-term solutions to our own efforts, and we will find long-term solutions for refinancing."

Indian-Origin Civil Servant in Singapore gets Deputy Secretary-General Post in ASEAN Secretariat

SINGAPORE (TIP): A senior Singaporean civil servant of Indian origin has been appointed as the ASEAN Secretariat's next deputy secretary-general for its economic community, according to a media report.

Satvinder Singh assumed the post on Friday, March 26, for a term of three years, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) announced.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aims to create a single market and production base for the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labor within the region.

Mr. Singh, who succeeds Dr. Aladdin D Rillo from the Philippines, will support the ASEAN secretary-general in the implementation of the AEC Blueprint 2025, as well as the realization of the AEC's goals, The Straits Times reported.

He will also oversee the directorates and divisions of the ASEAN Economic Community Department in the ASEAN Secretariat. Additionally, he will manage development cooperation in economic matters, policy and relations with



Satvinder Singh assumed the post of Deputy Secretary-General in ASEAN Secretariat on Friday, March 26, for a term of three years, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) announced.

ASEAN member states, dialogue partners and international organizations as well.

Mr. Singh has relinquished his earlier role as the assistant chief executive officer of Enterprise Singapore, a state-

owned trade promotion agency.

MTI said the AEC represents ASEAN's continued commitment to an increasingly seamless, integrated and connected region.

"It envisions ASEAN as a single market and production base, a highly competitive region with equitable economic development, and fully integrated into the global economy," The Straits Times quoted the ministry as saying. MTI said that over the years in its service, Singh has built strong relationships with the global trade community and strengthened the trading ecosystem in Singapore.

He has also led teams to develop strategies and policies to support companies in strengthening capabilities and expanding overseas.

Singh is one of four deputies and the secretary-general in the ASEAN Secretariat, who are all from different member states.

The secretary-general for the ASEAN Secretariat currently is Lim Jock Hoi from Brunei.

Six-year-old Indian-origin boy finds millions of years old fossil in UK garden
NIRPAL SINGH SHERGILL



According to a BBC report, Vish Singh, father of the boy Siddak Singh Jhamat, known as Sid, was able to identify the horn coral through a fossil group he is a member of on Facebook and estimates the fossil is between 251 to 488 million years old.

WALSALL, UK (TIP): A six-year-old Indian-origin boy says he is "really excited" after he found a fossil from millions of years ago while digging in his garden in the West Midlands region of England.

Siddak Singh Jhamat, known as Sid, was using a fossil-hunting set he received as a Christmas present when he came across a rock that looked like a horn.

"I was just digging for worms and things like pottery and bricks and I just came across this rock which looked a bit like a horn, and thought it could be a

tooth or a claw or a horn, but it was actually a piece of coral which is called horn coral," the schoolboy said.

"I was really excited about what it really was," he said.

According to a BBC report, his father Vish Singh was able to identify the horn coral through a fossil group he is a member of on Facebook and estimates the fossil is between 251 to 488 million years old.

"We were surprised he found something so odd-shaped in the soil... he found a horn coral, and some smaller pieces next to it, then the next day he went digging again and found a congealed block of sand," said Vish Singh.

"In that there were loads of little mollusks and seashells, and something called a crinoid, which is like a tentacle of a squid, so it's quite a prehistoric thing," he said. Singh believes the fossil's markings mean it is most likely a Rugosa coral and that the period that they existed from was between 500 and 251 million years ago, the Paleozoic Era.

"England at the time was part of Pangea, a landmass of continents. England was all underwater as well... that's quite a significant expanse of time," said Vish Singh. The family, from Walsall, said they do not live in an area known for its fossils, like the Jurassic Coast in the south of England, but that they do have a lot of natural clay in the garden where the fossils were found.

Singh added: "Lots and lots of people have commented on how amazing it is to find something in the back garden. "They say you can find fossils anywhere if you look carefully enough, but to find a significantly large piece like that is quite unique." They now hope to tell Birmingham University's Museum of Geology about their discovery.

Indian-origin entrepreneurs living in Singapore urge India to not ban crypto currencies



SINGAPORE (TIP): Two Indian-origin Singaporean block chain entrepreneurs, who spent a whopping USD 69.3 million in crypto currency for purchasing a digital artwork recently, have urged the Indian government to not ban the virtual currencies, arguing that these can be an "equalizing power" between the West and the rest of the world.

Crypto currencies are digital or virtual currencies in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of their units and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank.

Vignesh Sundaresan, an entrepreneur, coder and angel investor in block chain technologies whose pseudonym is Metakovan, and his friend Anand Venkateswaran, a former journalist, who goes by the name Twobadour, had caused a stir in the art world following the USD 69.3 million (Rs 5,02,06,04,820) acquisition of the landmark work by digital artist Beeple

Indian American Businessman Running for Virginia Lt Governor

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American businessman and community leader Puneet Ahluwalia, who is running for the powerful office of the Virginia Lieutenant Governor, is seeking to bring diversity in the country's political landscape at a time when there is a sudden national surge in violence against the Asian-American community.

The Republican Party is slated to pick its nominee for the Lieutenant Governor at a hybrid convention on May 8.

"I came to this country with almost nothing, built a business, married a wonderful woman who also immigrated, and raised a beautiful family," Ahluwalia told PTI ahead of the convention.

"Nadia (his wife who is an Afghan-American) and I have had our struggles along the way - as every family does. And, like most people of color, we've occasionally faced bias and prejudice, but we've never lost sight of the blessings we've enjoyed by being citizens of this wonderful country," Ahluwalia said.

Over the past several months, he and his team of volunteers have been crisscrossing the entire state of Virginia campaigning on his platform to create jobs and economic boom of Virginia.



Puneet Ahluwalia is seeking to bring diversity in the country's political landscape at a time when there is a sudden national surge in violence against the Asian-American community

"Now, I'm running for Lieutenant Governor. One reason is because I want to help every American share in the opportunity and blessing of America - no matter the color of their skin, the language they speak, or the country where they were born," he said.

A successful businessman, Ahluwalia has been with the Republican Party for 20 years. "I'm convinced our economic wellbeing and the future of our families depends on upholding the fairness and freedom that America stands for when it stands at its best. We are a country of law

and order," he said. He noted that his party has not been able to reach out to other ethnic and religious minorities in the state. "The tone matters. The conditioning matters. It's a matter of reaching out to them. This is not a matter of policy," he said, adding that the Republican Party's policy perfectly fits with the immigrant community, the ethnic communities like Asian-Americans.

Ahluwalia said there has been a great support to his candidacy not only from the rural Virginia, but also from the ethnic communities, be it the Indian-Americans, Afghan-Americans, Vietnamese-Americans or Korean-Americans. During his campaigning, Ahluwalia said he finds that there has been an outpouring of support.

"It was only a matter that we have not reached out to them earlier. There is a need for our leadership to engage with them," he added.

More than 3,000 incidents of abuse against Asian Americans were reported between March and December 2020, according to Asian American advocacy groups. There were only 216 reported cases in 2019, according to FBI statistics.

Indian American choreographer Vinita Hazari dances alongside Olaf the snowman



A trained kathak dancer, Hazari recently created a video where she, dressed like an Indian princess, dances alongside the snowman character Olaf from the hit Disney film Frozen

NEW YORK (TIP): Most little girls around the world grow up listening to fairy tales and often learn their first lessons on love and life inspired by the princesses in the stories. As questions about diversity and inclusivity gain mainstream attention, also has the scope of these fairy tales. In fact, there has been noise for some time about how often these Western fairy tales give a very white-washed view of the world. Stories of colored women of courage and brown princesses are still hard to come by in American popular culture. And an absence of an Indian American Disney princess has been debated about in the past few years.

While we still await a brown princess in popular stories, a New York City-based dancer and choreographer has found a unique way to address the issue while giving young South Asian girls a chance to feel represented.

Vinita Hazari, an emerging choreographer, has been creating innovative concept videos that talk about inclusion, diversity and stigmas within the South Asian community. A trained kathak dancer, Hazari recently created a video where she, dressed like an Indian princess, dances alongside the snowman character Olaf from the hit Disney film Frozen. Her video, which has been viewed more than 50,000 times, struck a chord with South Asian women who have often felt a lack of representation, especially in American culture and entertainment. Hazari reinforces her point by incorporating a kathak-based semi classical dancer in her video, as Olaf is seen synchronizing with her moves.

Hazari, who has been dancing for over 14 years now, has also been gaining attention for her videos that target mental health stigmas in South Asian communities. She's released a series of videos portraying the negative impact unwelcoming South Asian stigma can have on mental health. She conceptualizes, produces, choreographs and performs in dance videos. A trained kathak dancer she has also trained in hip-hop, jazz, and ballet.

Indian American Couple Donates USD 150,000 for Bihar, Jharkhand Healthcare



Ramesh and Kalpana Bhatia Family Foundation has donated USD 150,000 to the Bihar Jharkhand Association of North America (BJANA). Alok Kumar, former BJANA president said this kind of donation would help the BJANA carry out its healthcare works in Bihar and Jharkhand.

150,000 by the Ramesh and Kalpana Bhatia Family Foundation to the BJANA would be used for healthcare efforts in the rural areas of the two states through the PRAN-BJANA clinic initiative.

The Pravasi Alumni Nisshulk (PRAN) is an initiative by like-minded Indian-American physicians who are working to provide healthcare to the underprivileged and underserved in Bihar and Jharkhand.

These doctors have set up a PRAN clinic in Ranchi, providing free healthcare services to the needy. Their endeavor is to provide free healthcare services across the states.

"With the generous donation of Ramesh and Kalpana Bhatia, this became possible. BJANA getting a large donation is a testament to its ongoing philanthropic activities both here and back home," BJANA president Avinash Gupta said.

Alok Kumar, former FIA president, said this kind of donation would help the BJANA carry out its healthcare works in the region.

Kalpana Bhatia came from NIT, Patna, and runs a successful business in Texas.

WASHINGTON (TIP): An Indian American couple has donated over \$1 for crore healthcare works in Bihar and Jharkhand, the Bihar Jharkhand Association of North America (BJANA) announced on Monday, March 29. The generous donation of USD

Indian American Seema Nanda set to return to the Department of Labor

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American Seema Nanda is set to return to the Department of Labor, where she served for 40 months as Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff and Deputy Solicitor during the Obama administration.

President Joe Biden announced his intent to nominate her as the Solicitor of the Department of Labor on March 26, 2021.

The Arlington, VA, resident is currently a Visiting Fellow at Harvard Law School Labor & Worklife Program.

Nanda, who grew up in Connecticut, served as the CEO of the Democratic National Committee, an apex party body that coordinates strategy to elect its candidates various federal, state and local offices, from June 2018 to April last year.

During her tenure as the DNC chief, the party captured the House of Representatives in the 2018 mid-term election, propelling Rep. Nancy Pelosi back to the House speaker position.

As the DNC CEO, she worked closely with Chair Tom Perez, who was also her former boss at the Department of Labor, managing the group's day-to-day operations.

Prior to joining the DNC, she served as the Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President at the advocacy group Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

During President Obama's first term, Nanda served at the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice, initially as a Senior Trial Attorney and then as a Deputy Special Counsel.

From 2007 to 2010, she served as a supervisor attorney in the Division of Advice at the National Labor Relations Board.

Nanda earned her bachelor's degree from Brown University and law degree from Boston College Law School. Nanda was one of the six nominees announced by Biden on Friday.



President Joe Biden announced, March 26, 2021, his intent to nominate Seema Nanda as the Solicitor of the Department of Labor

BAPS CHARITIES HOST 2nd POP COVID -19 VACCINATION CLINIC

MELVILLE, NY (TIP): BAPS Charities had a very successful 2nd Covid Vaccination pop-up clinic on Friday, March 26th, 2021, at BAPS Hindu Temple in Melville, Long Island.

A total of 550 people received the Pfizer vaccine, out of which 240 people received their 2nd dose. The vaccination and logistics were provided by NYS Covid Task force, in collaboration with Stony Brook University Hospital and its medical staff.

Lisa Santeramo, assistant secretary for intergovernmental affairs, representing Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's office participated in welcoming the clinic.



The organizers were very happy and appreciative of the BAPS Charities volunteers for providing very valuable support to make this a successful event.

NY State Senator James Gaughran visited the site and was very appreciative of the excellent services BAPS Charities is providing to our communities.

BAPS Charities cherishes cooperation and support from all the stakeholders.

« NY State Senator James Gaughran visited the site and was very appreciative of the excellent services BAPS Charities is providing to our communities. He is seen here with Girish Patel (right)

GOPIO New York Celebrates Culture of India at Virtual Holi Festival

NEW YORK (TIP): Holi is the national festival of colors, celebrated across India in different forms and traditions. The celebration of this colorful festival brings people of different faiths with diverse socio-political ideologies closer. This unity in diversity was experienced by participants from around the world, representing almost all continents on Earth, as hundreds of Indian Diaspora members came together virtually to celebrate the Festival of Holi on Sunday, March 28, 2021.

With the support of the Consulate General of India in New York and organized by GOPIO New York, the oldest and the first Chapter of Global organization of People of Indian Origin, the colorful celebration of Holi Festival showcased the rich, colorful and the vibrant traditions of India, bringing them at the doorsteps of every household, as the audience from around the world were entertained with mesmerizing music, scintillating dance performances and inspiring speeches.

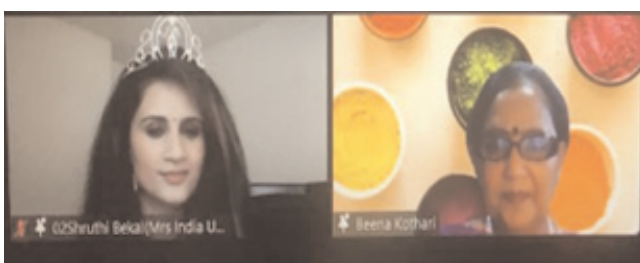
In his eloquent address to the Diaspora community, India's Consul General in New York, Randhir Kumar Jaiswal greeted the participants from around the world Holi on the occasion of Holi Festival. While describing the historical and symbolic traditions of the festival of Holi, the veteran diplomat said, "Holi is a very beautiful festival of color. A festival that helps us welcome spring. Holi has several connotations, social, religious, political and rhythmic with nature."

Holi has become known as India's most vivid, joyous festival. Holi is being celebrated in the Indian subcontinent for centuries, with poems documenting celebrations dating back to the 4th century CE. It marks the beginning of spring after a long winter, symbolic of the triumph of good over evil. It is celebrated in March, corresponding to the Hindu calendar month of Phalguna. On the eve of the festival, large pyres are lit in many parts of India to signify the burning of evil spirits. People often throw wood, dried leaves and twigs into bonfires, Ambassador Jaiswal explained.

Beena Kothari, GOPIO New York President poetically narrated the importance of Holi, and served as an emcee of the event. While introducing Ambassador Jaiswal as a veteran diplomat, Ms. Kothari shared about with the audience his vast his experiences in foreign diplomacy around the world.



Lal Motwani, Founding President of GOPIO New York and GOPIO International Coordinator At Large and Randhir Kumar Jaiswal, Consul General of India in New York



Shruti Bekal - EMCEE and Beena Kothari, President GOPIO New York Chapter

Emcee of the colorful cultural events, Shruti Bekal elegantly coordinated the celebration with participants from around the world.

Lal Motwani, Founding President of GOPIO New York and GOPIO International Coordinator At Large, and the main organizer of this global HOLI celebration, in his address, greeted Honorable India's Consul General in New York, Randhir Kumar Jaiswal and officials, members and leaders of GOPIO from around the world who have joined virtually to celebrate the colorful festival of Holi. We at GOPIO New York are very honored to have you with us today.

"The vibrancy of colors is something that brings in a lot of positivity in our lives and Holi being the festival of colors is actually a day worth rejoicing," Motwani said. "Holi is considered as one of the most revered and celebrated festivals of India and it is celebrated in almost every part of India, transcending every region, and people of all faiths, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsees, Buddhists, and Jains. It represents the uniqueness of Indian culture as we,



G 3: Begam Batool and Anwar Husain from Jaipur

from all backgrounds stand united to welcome Spring, as Mother Nature breathes freshness into our lives and that of every living creature on Earth. Welcome to each and every one of you and wishing you and your families A VERY HAPPY HOLI!"

Three little children adorably shared with the audience their perspectives, experiences of celebrating Holi and what it meant for them. A live Bollywood medley by Anwar Hussain and his Bollywood Maharajah group from India (Jaipur), representing a family of 12 generations serving the royals, was much appreciated and loved by all. His mother, Begum Batool from Jaipur, a famous singer who is the 1st woman from her community to perform publicly, mesmerized the audience with her beautiful voice.

Mamtha Putaswamy, Mrs India USA from the state of Connecticut, performed a medley of Bollywood dances from popular Hindi movies. Aparna Sreedhar from Paris presented a Bollywood Medley, mesmerizing the audience with her beautiful voice singing some of the very popular numbers from the ever-green Hindi movies. Lasya Komirisetty, a 11-year-old of South Africa, Guinness Book record holder for maximum performances on world stage, performed amazingly a Kuchipudy dance. Pritisha from South Africa, an 11-year-old from a family of musicians, mesmerized the audience with her melodious voice, singing some popular Holi songs.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian Consulate Launches India@75 at GOPIO-Manhattan's Shaheed Diwas Celebrations

NEW YORK (TIP): If India and the people of Indian origin living around the world enjoy freedom, liberty, equality and success, it's due to the sacrifices, vision and foresight of men and women who dedicated their lives at the cause of freedom, fighting for independence from the 200-years of British Rule. There are millions who dedicated their lives, while there are some whose leadership and bravery inspired millions of others to fight for freedom. Shaheed Diwas or Martyrs' Day is observed on six days across India which includes January 30th and March 23rd each year to remember the sacrifices of brave freedom fighters who devoted their entire lives to help us enjoy freedom.



Ambassador Randhir Kumar Jaiswal releasing the special Shaheed Diwas Calendar produced by GOPIO-Manhattan. From l. to r.: Deputy Consul General Shatrughna Sinha, Consul General Randhir Kumar Jaiswal and GOPIO-Manhattan Board member Siddharth Jain.

Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) along with the Consulate General of India in New York jointly organized and honored the martyrs during a virtual celebration of Shaheed Diwas 2021, which is the 90th death anniversary of three courageous youngsters on March 23rd, 2021. The celebrations touched many hearts as the hundreds of participants heard personal stories shared by family members of some of these brave men and women, who fought valiantly and gave up their lives at the altar of freedom for our motherland, India. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's daughter Dr. Anita Bose Pfaff (Germany), Lord Rami Ranger (UK), Dr. Maya Chadda (USA) and Historian/Author Dr. Bhuvan Lall (India).

India's Consul General Ambassador Randhir Kumar Jaiswal launched India@75, a yearlong Celebration commemorating the 75th Anniversary of India's Independence and called upon the Indian Diaspora to join him in celebrating India's freedom till August 15th, 2022. Shatrughna Sinha, Deputy Consul General in New York felicitated the community.

Ambassador Jaiswal and DCG Shatrughna Sinha released the Shaheed Diwas Calendar presented by Siddharth Jain (Sid Jain) of GOPIO-Manhattan, for the year 2021-2022. Ambassador Jaiswal while reviewing the calendar cited that it recognized contributions of Patriots of India. Ambassador Jaiswal further added on the Calendar as "A collector's delight and dream", where one can read about the freedom fighters and their heroic activities.

Consul General Jaiswal, in his address, commended GOPIO Manhattan for organizing the event and several others, honoring India and Indians. "Today is the Red Letter Day in the history of India," the Indian diplomat with over three decades of diplomatic services around the world, told the hundreds of community leaders from around several continents who joined the

celebration. "We honor today the legendary freedom fighters, recalling their bravery and love for our motherland." Describing today's celebrations as unique, Ambassador Jaiswal recalled the founding of the Ghadar Party by Lala Har Dayal over a century ago. "I humbly bow before their legendary sacrifices, which are inspiring us all."

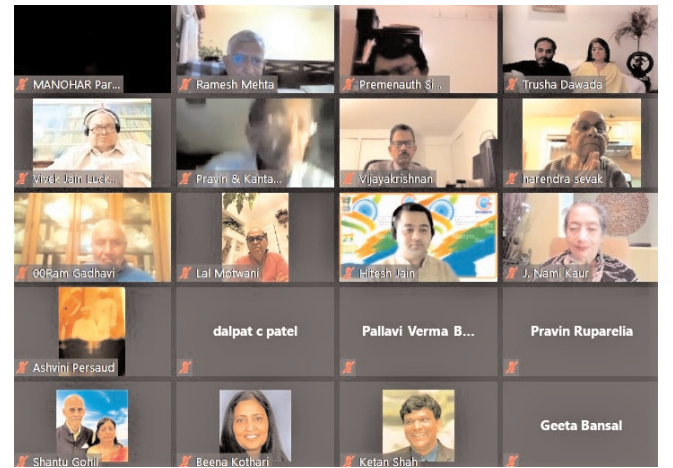
Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Daughter, retired Prof. Dr. Anita Bose Pfaff shared with the audience experiences from her own personal life, as she was growing up seeing her father, travelling across India to Europe to South East Asia, garnering support from Western and Asian nations, creating an army to fight the British power. Stating that her dad was one of the most hated by the British, she narrated about the many coup attempts by the British to assassinate him. Calling him a Leftist radical, Dr. Anita Bose Pfaff said, "He had joined the freedom movement at a very young age. Joined the non-violent movement led by Gandhi initially. He was imprisoned and lost his health in prison. He risked his life disguising himself and escaping the prison and joined and led the Independence Movement abroad by aligning with Germany, Soviet Union and Japan, creating an Indian National Army (INA) to fight the British". While Mr. Bose died in a plane crash, while trying to defeat the British, she said, "There is good reason to call him a martyr, because he died in the process of fighting for freedom. India was his sole love, and he was willing to put his life for the freedom of India. It's justifiable to call him a martyr."

Lord Rami Ranger, Member of the House of Lords, London, a self-made businessman and chairman of Sunmark Group, an international marketing and distribution company. He is also chairman and managing director of Sea Air and Land Forwarding Ltd. He is the Joint Chairman of Conservatives Friends of India in the British Parliament. Lord Ranger's father Shaheed Sardar Nanak Singh stood for the unity of India and was assassinated by a mob in Gujranwala (in Pakistan) in 1947. "My father was assassinated at age 42 when I was not even born," he said, sharing about the circumstances that led to his father's martyrdom.



Organizers and speakers at the Shaheed Diwas: Top Row, from l. to r. Chitranjan Belwariar, Dr. Thomas Abraham, Siddharth Jain (Sid Jain) and Dr. Asha Samant. Middle Row: From l. to r. Deputy Consul General of India Shatrughna Sinha, Consul General of India Randhir Kumar Jaiswal, Dr. Maya Chadda and Dr. Bhuvan Lall. Bottom Row, from l. to r.: Prof. Anita Bose Pfaff, Anoop Bhargava and Lord Rami Ranger

Describing that it is remarkable, India and the Diaspora are "paying tributes to those who made us what we are today. They demonstrated that their love for India was more than that for their love for their families. We cannot forget their sacrifices. We remember all those who made it possible for us today to celebrate our freedom. They are always martyrs and will live forever."



A screen of participants at the Shaheed Diwas Celebration on the Zoom

Lord Ranger praised Indians, who "are contributing a great deal around the world. If we are not a free nation, we could not do so, contributing to the world. We are shaping the destiny of the people of so many nations. India is the most sought-after nation by people from around the world. We must stay united and fight together to preserve our freedom. Learn from history."

Dr. Maya Chadda, Professor of Political Science, William Paterson University, Wayne, New Jersey. Member of Council of Foreign Relations. Dr. Chadda is an author of over half a dozen books. Her father, who was a linguist, had spent most of his time with Gandhiji in his Ashram. Dr. Chadda described at length about her works on Gandhian thoughts focusing on Satyagraha as a strategy of war. Sharing from her personal experiences, she shared with the audience about how her dad went to the Ashram at a very young age and his kids were born and grew up at the ashram, where he spent most of his life. Her dad was part of the editorial staff of Gandhi ji's educational movement by newspapers to spread his message. "We were a Gandhian family throughout our lives. They were all dreamers, who dreamt of a unified India with freedom. They inspired mass support that led to the freedom movement, with ability to move the nation and win their support," she said.

Dr. Bhuvan Lall, Film Producer, Entrepreneur, Speaker, Scriptwriter and Columnist, New Delhi, India. Author of The Man India Missed The Most - Subhash Chandra Bose & The Great Indian Genius - Har Dayal, eloquently told the story of the brilliant Lala Har Dayal, who spoke 9 languages and memorized 5,000 books at the very young age of 28-years. Har Dayal gave up his Government of India scholarship to St. John's College at Oxford and became a supporter of the Indian revolutionary movement in 1907. He traveled through France and Germany, disseminating anti-British propaganda and lauding Western science and political philosophy as holding the key to a successful anticolonial struggle.

In 1913 Lala Har Dayal formed the Ghadar Party to organize a rebellion against the British government of India. He fled to Switzerland and then to Berlin, where he tried to foment an anti-British rising in northwestern India. After the German defeat in World War I, Har Dayal settled in Stockholm as a professor of Indian Philosophy and wrote Forty-Four Months in Germany and Turkey. He moved to the USA in the late 1920s and became a Professor of Sanskrit at the University of California, Berkeley.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

AS I SEE IT

No Roadmap to Double Farmers' Income



BY YOGENDRA
YADAV

Finally, the bluff of doubling farmers' income has been called. Not by any critic of the government, but by Dr Ramesh Chand, Member (Agriculture) of the Niti Aayog. No, it was not a confession. You don't expect that from functionaries in the Narendra Modi government. Rather, the truth tumbled out in the course of a casual and disingenuous plea for the three farm laws. This is what the PTI copy of Chand's interview reads: "I will say that if these three farm laws are not adopted immediately, then I don't see that goal (of doubling farmers' income by 2022) getting fulfilled."

Just chew on this one. The grand mission of doubling the income of farmers was announced in February 2016. The deadline for meeting this target is 2022. We are already in the fifth year. Now, the Modi government's top expert on agriculture admits that the target may not be realised, neither because it was unrealistic to begin with, nor because of any failure on the part of this government, but because of non-adoption of the three laws that were introduced in course of the fifth year that have been stalled for the last three months. Weird logic? Well, you have not followed the story of the mirage called DFI - Doubling of Farmers' Income.

No homework

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made this announcement at Bareilly on February 28, 2016, a day before the Union Budget. This was not one of the manifesto promises of the BJP. So, you would imagine that some homework had gone into such a major declaration. Presumably, the government would know, first of all, what the farmers' income was in 2016. It must have done some basic arithmetic on what it would take to double that income within six years. You hope that the government would have at least a rough roadmap of policies that help achieve that target. Finally, you would expect that regular monitoring and review of the farmers' income follows such a major declaration. You are wrong on every single count!

As soon as Finance Minister Arun Jaitley repeated the PM's announcement in his budget speech, questions were asked



Monitoring or review of farmers' income was not done before making the decision.

about what was the farmers' income at that time and what it would take to double it. No one had any answer. It took the government a few months to answer an elementary arithmetic question: was the calculation going to happen at constant price or current price? In other words, was the target of doubling going to discount inflation? Thankfully, the government finally acknowledged that the target was to double the real income of the farmers, controlling for inflation, and not just their nominal income.

So, what would it amount to in rupee terms? Well, the government appointed a committee, six weeks after making the announcement to the country, to find this out. The Doubling of Farmers' Income Committee (DFIC), headed by a sensible and knowledgeable civil servant, presented the basic arithmetic of doubling income in August 2017. The committee had to extrapolate from an old survey carried out by the National Sample Survey in 2011-12, as there was no other reliable source of data to benchmark the starting point. It estimated the annual income of a farm family in 2015-16 at Rs 96,703. That works out to about Rs 8,000 per month for a family of five or more. Mind you, this income included earning from non-farm activities like service, business or dairy. Doubling of farm income by 2022 would mean an annual family income of Rs 1,72,694 at the prices of 2015-16 (doubling of farm income, but not that of non-farm income of the farmer household), or about Rs 2.5 lakh at the expected prices in 2022. This would require income to grow at an annual rate of 10.4 per cent in real terms - something Indian farmers had never experienced before.

We were already one and half years into

a six-year mission by the time its starting point and the target was clearly identified.

No policy roadmap

What, then, should be the policies to achieve this unprecedented growth? It took the DFIC another year to submit its substantive report in September 2018. The 14-volume report is undoubtedly a comprehensive document on agriculture policies. By the time the report arrived, two and half years had passed and India was already in election mode. The government had no time to consider the report. The only major step that the BJP government took then, following its defeat in assembly elections, was something the DFIC had not recommended: a handout of Rs 6,000 a year to every farm family.

So, at the halfway mark of this historic mission, the Modi government did not even have a plan on paper on how the farmers' income was going to be doubled. None of the budgets of this government has made any separate allocation for this publicised programme. Indeed, we do not know, if this is a "vision" or a "mission" or a "scheme". No one has ever clarified its official status. Yet, no BJP leader or spokesperson can speak for a minute on agriculture without mentioning the DFI. The most generous reading of the party's claims would be that the DFI is not a separate plan or programme, but a vision to be realised through all the agrarian policies put together.

No monitoring, no data

In that case, what about monitoring and review? So far, there is none. In the last five years, the Modi government has not gathered or released a single piece of

At the halfway mark of this historic mission, the Modi govt did not even have a plan on paper on how the farmers' income was to be doubled. None of the budgets has made any separate allocation for this publicised programme. The most generous reading would be that the DFI is not a separate plan or programme, but a vision to be realised through all the agrarian policies put together.

information about the increase in farmers' income ever since the announcement of DFI. It has not commissioned any ground survey to check the progress of this national mission. In 2020, it announced an 'empowered body' to 'review and monitor the progress'. It is yet to put out any document in the public domain.

The closest, though not strictly comparable, survey carried out by the NSS in 2018 was junked by this government, apparently because it showed a decline in the real income in rural India. It is fair to assume that we don't have data on farmers' income because the government is not interested in bad news.

The closest proxy for trends in farmers' income during this period is the official data on Gross Value Addition (GVA) in agriculture and allied sectors. The latest official data in the Economic Survey of 2021 (https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/economicsurvey/doc/vol2chapter/echap07_vol2.pdf) shows that the average rate of annual growth of agri GVA during the seven years of the Modi government has been 3.3 per cent, compared to the average of 4.6 per cent during UPA-I and UPA-II. In the last five years, the agri GVA grew by a total of 24.5 per cent. Ramesh Chand expects a growth of 3.5 per cent in the coming year.

So, the six years of grand national mission for raising the farmers' real income by 100 per cent are likely to end with less than 30 per cent actual increase. That works out to about 4 per cent per annum against the target of 10.4 per cent. This is no different from the real increase in farmers' income between 2002 and 2012.

What, then, has the DFI achieved? Nothing for the farmers. Not to put too fine a point, it was a cynical propaganda devised to create positive vibes about the BJP government. Its success is to be measured not by cold agricultural statistics, but by air-time, TRPs and votes for the BJP. If there ever was a contest for super jumla of the century, doubling of farmers' income would be among the top contenders.

(The author is National President, Swaraj India)

GUEST COMMENT

The American way

Build social & political consensus on legalizing marijuana

New York has become the 15th American state to legalize the use of marijuana by adults, while Virginia intends to allow possession of small quantities of the drug from July onwards. A new law will bring relief to many people previously charged with marijuana crimes in NY, even as the state is expecting that the cannabis programme

will fetch \$350 million annually in tax collection and create 30,000 to 60,000 jobs. In India, the issue of legalizing weed - which has been consumed in one form or the other since time immemorial - continues to be contentious. 'Soft' drugs such as poppy husk, marijuana and opium fall under the ambit of the NDPS Act, 1985. Licit cultivation of opium is carried out in tracts notified by the Centre in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and UP. UK and UP let their farmers grow cannabis, but only for medicinal/industrial purposes, even as HP is reported to be framing a policy in this regard.

With drug abuse being a major social evil, politicians in general prefer to tread warily rather than address the root cause of the problem. Among the exceptions are former MP Dr Dharamvira Gandhi, who wants poppy husk, opium and marijuana to be made legally available in order to rein in the drug mafia, while claiming that the NDPS Act has largely failed to achieve its UN-mandated goals. His argument: in view of the prohibition of the common man's 'recreational' substances, addictive and potentially lethal synthetic drugs are swamping the market, wreaking havoc on users and their families.

Legalizing cannabis production has benefited not only farmers but also the pharma industry in Uttarakhand and UP. Such experience should spur other states to create conditions conducive for cultivators and investors. The procedure of granting licenses to the stakeholders should be eased, but there is also a need for a foolproof mechanism to deter unscrupulous elements. Such moves, if properly monitored and regulated, are worth a try. Above all, it's imperative to build social and political consensus on amending the law so as to decriminalize weed.

(Tribune, India)

Some Positive Signs in India-Pakistan Relations?



BY PRABHU DAYAL

"Hoping for a quick turn-around in Indo-Pakistan relations may just be wishful thinking. Perhaps it is, but I must admit that I have secretly indulged in it since 1978 when I went to Egypt on my first diplomatic posting and witnessed Anwar Sadat and Menahem Begin burying the hatchet between their two countries. Egypt and Israel too had fought deadly wars in 1948, 1967 and 1973, but there is peace between them now, even though some people refer to it as 'a cold peace'."

On the occasion of Pakistan's 70th National Day on 23rd March this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote a letter to Prime Minister Imran Khan, saying: "As a neighboring country, India desires cordial relations with the people of Pakistan. For this, an environment of trust, devoid of terror and hostility, is imperative." He added: "Excellency, at this difficult time for humanity, I would like to convey my best wishes to you and the people of Pakistan for dealing with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic." Three days earlier, PM Modi had tweeted wishing PM Imran Khan a speedy recovery after he and his wife tested positive for the deadly virus. "Best wishes to Prime Minister @ImranKhanPTI for a speedy recovery from Covid-19," he had said in his tweet.

On 29th January, Imran Khan replied to Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanking him for his greetings on Pakistan Day. Khan also said: "The people of Pakistan also desire peaceful, cooperative relations with all neighbors including India. We are convinced that durable peace and stability in South Asia is contingent upon resolving all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan, in particular the Jammu and Kashmir dispute." He added that the creation of an enabling environment is imperative for a constructive and result-oriented dialogue. The Pakistani Prime Minister also conveyed his wishes for the people of India in the fight against the Covid pandemic.

OTHER POSITIVE SIGNS : In this

regard, there are some other positive developments which also need to be noted. Both the armies recommitted themselves to the 2003 ceasefires along the line of control in J&K in February. After about two-and-half years, a delegation of Pakistani officials arrived in India for a meeting of the permanent Indus commission this week. Last week, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said India wants good friendly ties with Pakistan provided there's a conducive atmosphere for dialogue. Similar sentiments have been expressed across the border too. Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa said on March 18 that it was time for India and Pakistan to "bury the past and move forward." He added that the peace between the two neighbors would help to "unlock" the potential of South and Central Asia.

There are some hopeful signs in regard to trade also. Pakistan had suspended trade ties with India after New Delhi revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019. However, in May 2020, Pakistan lifted the ban on the import of medicines and raw material from India to ensure there is no shortage of essential drugs amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the first step of reversing the complete suspension of trade with India. Now, according to media reports, Pakistan's textile ministry headed by Prime Minister Imran Khan has recommended the lifting of a ban on the import of cotton from India to bridge the raw material shortfall the country's textile sector was facing. Currently, cotton and yarn imports are allowed from all countries except India. The textile sector in Pakistan strongly favors imports of cotton from India as they are much cheaper than imports from other countries. Pakistan Textile Exporters Association Chairman Khurram Mukhtar tweeted that the import of raw cotton, yarn and grey fabric from India will bridge the gap in demand and supply and will enable Pakistani exporters to continue the growth momentum.

Two steps forward, two steps backwards

The past has shown that Indo-Pak relations are a case of two steps forward followed by two steps backwards. However, it cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to end the deeply ingrained hostility unless we want to hurtle towards another conflict, one that will perhaps be more destructive than any in the past. We need bold and out-of-the-box thinking to chart out a new course. To use a cliché, the bull has to be taken by the horns.

Hoping for a quick turn-around in Indo-Pakistan relations may just be wishful thinking. Perhaps it is, but I must admit that I have secretly indulged in it since 1978 when I went to Egypt on my first diplomatic posting and

witnessed Anwar Sadat and Menahem Begin burying the hatchet between their two countries. Egypt and Israel too had fought deadly wars in 1948, 1967 and 1973, but there is peace between them now, even though some people refer to it as 'a cold peace'.

PAKISTAN'S HOSTILITY : Sadly, amidst all the turbulence which has marked Pakistan's history, and which has seen civilian governments and military juntas play musical chairs with one another, one aspect which has retained the stamp of permanence has been its unremitting hostility towards India and its steadfast desire to foment trouble across its eastern border. The inevitable conclusion that is drawn in India is that the ill-will of the Pakistan establishment, especially that of the army cannot be transformed into goodwill; whenever Pakistan can create problems for us, it will always do so. In turn, this has given rise to anti-Pakistan sentiments across many sections of the Indian polity.

Given the fact that Pakistan's economic, industrial and military strength is considerably less than India's, a fundamental plank of its policy continues to be built around the asymmetric or proxy war involving the sending of terrorists across the Line of Control. Although the Line of Control is fenced, there are portions of it where rivers and rivulets make the fencing vulnerable and such sections are used by the infiltrators. The use of tunnels for sending across infiltrators has also been resorted to by the Pakistanis.

KASHMIR ISSUE : Will we ever be able to resolve what Pakistan regards as the core issue - the Kashmir dispute? It is very difficult, but I would not say that it is impossible. It may be pertinent to note that according to the reputed journalist Kuldeep Nayyar, Nawaz Sharif had himself admitted to him some years ago that neither can Pakistan take away Kashmir from India nor can India give it away.

Some analysts have suggested that the only reasonable and workable solution would be to eschew jingoism and settle the Kashmir dispute by recognizing the Line of Control as an International Border. They feel that this is the only alternative to the endless hostility which only impoverishes both countries.

In his treatise Securing India's future in the new millennium, the well-known Indian strategic analyst Bramha Chellany has opined:

"In the long run, the only possible solution to the Kashmir dispute is for the three countries (India, Pakistan and China) to let bygones be bygones and agree to be content with the J&K territories they control."

The undeniable fact is that India-Pakistan relations can only be set right through a spirit of give and take. If the willingness to compromise is absent,

It is an axiomatic truth that our region needs development not conflict. To continue on our present path would be catastrophic. By working together, we can usher in a new age filled with hope not just for the two countries but for the whole of South Asia.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (right) wrote to his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan (left) on March 23. - Photos / PTI

then the conflict cannot end, and the hostility will keep increasing. It may take a very long time for everything to fall in place; there will be numerous setbacks. However, working towards this objective is preferable to just being reconciled to the war of attrition.

It goes without saying that one issue on which India cannot compromise is the demand that the nurseries of terrorism in Pakistan must be closed down. Hopefully, Pakistan will begin to realize that its policy of sponsoring terrorism is causing great damage to itself, as thousands of Pakistanis have died in acts of terrorism committed by the very same outfits which have been trained by the ISI and the armed forces.

'Sone ki chidiya' versus today's reality

Many in India as well as in Pakistan hope that one day our countries could live together as prosperous, good neighbors, much as France and Germany do now after having endured centuries of mutual conflicts. They hark back to those days when the Indian sub-continent produced so much wealth that it was called *sone ki chidiya* or a bird made of gold.

That bird is now malnourished, sick and weak. The IMF rankings of countries in terms of Per Capita Income (2020 estimates) place India at 140 in the list and Pakistan at 150 with figures of US\$ 1,877 and \$1,378, respectively. By comparison, Malaysia is ranked 60 with US\$ 10,192, Thailand at 77 with US\$ 7,295, Indonesia at 107 with US\$ 4,038 and Sri Lanka at 112 with US \$ 3,698. Even Bangladesh has overtaken India and Pakistan and ranks 139 with figures of \$ 1,888. Only really underdeveloped countries rank behind the South Asian giants India and Pakistan. Despite the fact that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been in existence since December 1985, it has precious little to show by way of real cooperation unlike ASEAN, another regional cooperation organization in Asia. It is an axiomatic truth that our region needs development not conflict. To continue on our present path would be catastrophic. By working together, we can usher in a new age filled with hope not just for the two countries but for the whole of South Asia.

(The author is a former career diplomat. He can be reached at prabhu_dayal70@hotmail.com) Courtesy / OPOYI

Sri Lanka, Pak militaries conduct joint exercise

COLOMBO (TIP): The militaries of Sri Lanka and Pakistan have conducted a 15-day joint exercise aimed at enhancing bilateral defence relations and sharing the rich experience of two armies against terrorism.

Titled the 'Ex-Shake Hands', the exercise was conducted in Saliyapura in North Central Province of Sri Lanka.

The exercise had the participation of six officers and 35 other ranks from the Pakistan Army and four officers and 40 other ranks from the Sri Lanka Army, the Pakistan High Commission here said in a release. It was aimed at enhancing the bilateral defence relations and mutually share the rich experience of two armies against terrorism, it said.

Speaking on the occasion, General Shavendra Silva, Sri Lanka's Army chief, said, "Pakistan has remained a true friend of Sri Lanka during all her critical endeavours and always stood with Sri Lanka. Especially, Pakistan supported Sri Lanka against UNHRC resolution recently".

Pakistan was among the nations which voted in favour of Sri Lanka at last week's UNHRC resolution which called for the island's human rights accountability and action for reconciliation.

In February, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Sri Lanka. — PTI

Nepal allows internet, telecom services during international flights

KATHMANDU (TIP): Nepal has become the third country in South Asia after India and Afghanistan to allow international airlines to use the Nepali sky for providing internet and telecom services to their passengers.

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA), an autonomous telecommunications regulatory body, in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal took the decision after the Telecommunications Authority Board of Directors held a meeting on March 22.

As per the decision, a company willing to provide the services to the passengers can use the frequencies above 10,000 feet from the surface.

Those airlines receiving permission from the International Civil Aviation Organisation would be granted permission to avail internet and telecom services above 10,000 feet in the Nepali sky, said the NTA's spokesperson Santosh Poudel. Granting permission to use the internet service below 10,000 feet could result in a disturbance in the service on the ground across the country, he said. To use the service, those willing to avail it should apply to the NTA. PTI

Myanmar protesters urge 'guerrilla strikes' as internet blackout widens

MYANMAR (TIP): Myanmar activists held candle-lit protests overnight and scrambled to find workarounds for a new internet shut down on Friday, as opponents to the military's bloody crackdown on dissent vowed no letup in efforts to unseat the ruling generals.

Anti-coup groups shared radio frequencies, offline internet resources and providers of text message news alerts to try to circumvent new curbs on the internet, which now limit Web access to fixed-line services only.

The military did not announce or explain its order to telecom firms to cut wireless broadband, which adds to a ban on mobile data through which a nationwide movement has mobilised on social media and spread images of the junta's lethal suppression of mostly youth-led protests.

Late on Thursday, protesters spread a call for a "flower strike" at bus stops where demonstrators killed by security forces had departed on their last journeys.

"We will leave flowers at bus stops tomorrow ... That's what I want to tell you guys before the internet is down," Khin Sadar, a protest leader, posted on Facebook.

"In the following days, there were street protests. Do as many guerrilla strikes as you can. Please join." "Let's listen to the radio again. Let's make phone calls to each other too."

The former British colony has been in chaos for two months following the military's overthrow of Aung San Suu Kyi's elected administration, which has



sparked anger across towns and cities and reignited hostilities between the armed forces and ethnic minority insurgents in several different regions.

New charges of violating the official secrets act were filed against the Nobel laureate, her chief lawyer said on Thursday, the most serious so far, on top of two comparatively minor offences. Breaches of the colonial-era law are punishable by 14 years in prison.

The charges were filed against three of Suu Kyi's deposed cabinet ministers and her Australian economic adviser Sean Turnell, who are among hundreds detained in the military's sweeping crackdown on opponents since it took power, alleging fraud in an election swept by Suu Kyi's party.

Lawyer Min Min Soe said Suu Kyi looked in good health during a video hearing on Thursday but was unable to

tell whether the ousted leader, the figurehead of Myanmar's decades-long fight for democracy, was aware of the situation in her country.

'WE WILL NOT SURRENDER'

Protesters were in the streets in several urban centres day and night on Thursday, where some burned copies of the military-drafted 2008 constitution. The media reported two people were killed, including an 18-year-old man, as police opened fire to quell gatherings.

Khit Thit Media reported shots were fired at a protest during the night, where 400 troops were present. The report could not immediately be verified.

Some 543 people have been killed in the uprising, according to the Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) advocacy group, which is tracking casualties and detentions. —Reuters

Pak takes U-turn, rejects proposal to import cotton and sugar from India

ISLAMABAD (TIP): In a volte-face, Pakistan's Cabinet on Thursday rejected a proposal of its Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) to import cotton and sugar from India, according to a Cabinet minister.

"Cabinet stated clearly NO trade with India," Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari said in a tweet soon after a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday.

"PM made clear there can be no normalisation of relations with India until they reverse" their actions viz Kashmir of August 5 2019, tweeted Mazari, who is known for her hawkish stand on Kashmir.

The Cabinet decision comes a day after Pakistan's new Finance Minister Hammad Azhar on Wednesday announced that the country will lift a nearly two-year long ban on the import of cotton and sugar from India after a



meeting of the ECC chaired by him.

Ahead of the Cabinet meeting, Mazari had said that all ECC decisions have to be approved by Cabinet and only then can they be seen as "approved" by the government.

"Just for the record - All ECC decisions have to be approved by Cabinet & only then they can be seen as "approved by govt"! So today in Cabinet there will be discussion on ECC decisions incl trade with India & then govt decision will be

taken! Media shd be aware of this atleast!" Mazari tweeted.

Azhar's announcement on Wednesday to import cotton and sugar from India had raised hopes of a partial revival of bilateral trade relations, which were suspended after the August 5, 2019 decision of New Delhi to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

India is the world's biggest producer of cotton and the second biggest sugar manufacturer.

In May 2020, Pakistan had lifted the ban on import of medicines and raw material of essential drugs from India amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ties between India and Pakistan nose-dived after a terror attack on the Pathankot Air Force base in 2016 by terror groups based in Pakistan. Subsequent attacks, including one on an Indian Army camp in Uri, further deteriorated the relationship. PTI

Farmers' protest will go on for 8 more months: Tikait

Says the movement will pick up speed after May 10, as till then farmers, will remain engaged in harvesting wheat crop

NEW DELHI (TIP): Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said on Thursday the agitation against the Centre's three new farm laws will have to go on for eight more months as it is a question of their rights and lands. The movement will pick up speed after May 10, as till then farmers will remain engaged in harvesting wheat crops, Tikait said.

"Farmers can harvest their wheat crops till May 10 post which the agitation will pick up speed," Tikait was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

Farmers have been camping at several border points in Delhi for more than four months, seeking a repeal of the laws-- Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; the Farmers Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 -- which were cleared by Parliament in September last year.

Despite several rounds of negotiation and repeated requests by the government, the farmers have remained determined that they would not stop protesting until the laws are completely rolled back and are also firm on their demand for a legal guarantee for the



Minimum Support Price (MSP).

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) general secretary Hannan Mollah told ANI on Wednesday that lakhs of protesters would march to Parliament in May. "Modi Government and Parliament are not listening to the farmers then it is our right to go in front of Parliament and raise our demand and we will decide sometime between the middle in the month of May," he said. Pointing out that the march would be peaceful, he added that they (farmers) will go to Parliament to express their pain and grief before the citizens.

Several strikes and marches have been staged by farmers across India since last year and the majority of them were peaceful. However, the farmers' tractor rally on Republic Day (January 26) in Delhi took a

violent turn as protesters deviated from the designated route and entered the national Capital after breaking barricades and were also involved in incidents of vandalism. A few protesters reached the iconic Red Fort and hoisted religious flags on it. The Delhi Police has made multiple arrests in the case.

In January, the Supreme Court suspended the implementation of the farm laws and appointed a committee on January 12 to examine these laws and further recommend changes. The committee on Wednesday submitted its report and the apex court will hear the matter on April 5. Speaking to Hindustan Times, one of the expert members in the committee Anil Ghanwat said that it is entirely up to the apex court to act on the recommendations given.

Delhi borders remain blocked as farmers' protest continues

NEW DELHI (TIP): Delhi's Singhu and Tikri borders continue to be blocked due to the protest by farmers who are demanding withdrawal of the three contentious farm laws. The Ghazipur border, which connects Uttar Pradesh with Delhi, was opened partially as vehicular movement from Delhi to Ghaziabad was allowed on the stretch.

"Ghaziipur NH-24 upper side towards Ghaziabad is open for traffic movement. Chilla border between Noida and Delhi is open on both sides," a traffic police officer said.

The Delhi Traffic Police have diverted the traffic that may possibly lead to traffic congestions in parts of the city during the peak hours.

According to Delhi Traffic Police officials, vehicles entering Delhi from Ghaziabad are being diverted to alternate border routes such as Anand Vihar, Surya Nagar, Apsara, Bhopra, Loni, Kondli, Chilla, New Ashok Nagar, DND, and Kalindi Kunj, so these routes may see traffic congestion.

Apart from the Ghazipur, other borders, namely Singhu, and Tikri, are closed. "The following borders are closed for traffic movement — Piyau Maniyari, Singhu border, Harewali, Mangeshpur and Tikri border," said a traffic police officer.

Traffic police officers also said that Auchandi border is opened only during morning and evening peak hours while Lampur, Safiabad are open.



Farmers hold placards during their ongoing protest against the three farm laws at Ghazipur border, in New Delhi on April 1.

Samyukt Kisan Morcha asks BJP MPs, allies to support farmers' agitation

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Samyukt Kisan Morcha on Thursday, April 1, appealed to the BJP MPs and its allies to extend their support to the farmers' movement.

The SKM also noted that they would continue their "peaceful social boycott" of leaders of the BJP and its allies.

"We request the BJP MPs and its allies and other elected representatives to support the farmers' movement. The SKM appeals to these leaders that they can support the movement in any form, including resignation from their posts," according to a statement released by the SKM. It claimed that Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala was met with "fierce opposition" by the farmers during his visit to Hisar on Thursday.

"Farmers did not let the helicopter of the anti-farmer Dushyant Chautala take off," the statement claimed.

Chautala, whose Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) is the coalition partner of the ruling BJP in Haryana, has faced repeated protests from farmers over the past few months for supporting the agricultural



laws. In Rajasthan's Hanumangarh too, farmers "gheraoed and protested against Pilibangan MLA Dharmendra Singh at Dabli toll plaza".

"At the time of the vote, they (leaders) become very friendly to the farmers and other people, but today when the farmers are struggling, he (Singh) is standing

against them," the statement said.

The Centre has said the new farm laws will benefit farmers by freeing them from the clutches of middlemen and ushering in new technology in the sector.

However, farmers say these legislations will remove the safety net of the minimum support price (MSP) and leave

them at the mercy of big corporates.

SC-appointed panel on farm laws submits report

The Supreme Court-appointed three-member committee, on the three newly-enacted farm laws, has submitted its report to the top court in a sealed cover.

The SC panel, in its report, said that around 85 farmer organisations have been consulted in the case. The committee has submitted its report after meeting with the farmer organisations to find a solution to the matter. "The report has been submitted in the Supreme Court in a sealed cover envelope on March 19," agricultural economist Anil Ghanwat, one of the members of the SC-appointed committee, has confirmed. However, he refused to divulge any other details, saying it is a "confidential process" and that the matter is sub judice.

The committee had also sought comments, views, and suggestions of the public through a public notice published in major newspapers.

IRS, Treasury disburse more Economic Impact Payments under the American Rescue Plan; total tops 130 million with more to come



Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service

WASHINGTON (TIP): The Internal Revenue Service, the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Bureau of the Fiscal Service announced, April 1, they are disbursing several million more payments in the third batch of Economic Impact Payments from the American Rescue Plan. This brings the total disbursed so far to more than 130 million payments worth approximately \$335 billion.

As announced on March 12, Economic Impact Payments continue to roll out in batches to millions of Americans. The third batch of payments began processing on Friday, March 26, with an official payment date of March 31, with some people receiving direct payments in their accounts earlier as provisional or pending deposits. Here is additional information on this batch of payments:

This batch includes the first of ongoing supplemental payments for people who earlier in March received payments based on their 2019 tax returns but are eligible for a new or larger payment based on their recently processed 2020 tax returns. These "plus-up" payments could include a situation where a person's income dropped in 2020

compared to 2019, or a person had a new child or dependent on their 2020 tax return, and other situations.

The payments announced today also include payments for people for whom the IRS previously did not have information to issue a payment but who recently filed a tax return and qualify for an Economic Impact Payment. Payments to this group -- and the "plus-up" payments noted above -- will continue on a weekly basis going forward, as the IRS continues processing tax returns from 2020 and 2019.

In total, this third batch includes more than 4 million payments, with a total value of more than \$10 billion.

This batch of payments contains more than 2 million direct deposit payments (with a total value of more than \$5 billion) and approximately 2 million paper check payments (with a total value of nearly \$5 billion).

For the first two batches of payments (which began processing on March 12 and March 19), payments were primarily sent to eligible taxpayers who filed 2019 or 2020 returns. People who don't typically file a return but who successfully used the Non-Filers tool on IRS.gov last year were also sent payments in these first two batches, either as a direct deposit or by paper check or an EIP Card, a prepaid debit card.

Starting Friday, a large set of payments will begin going to Social Security and other federal beneficiaries who didn't file a 2020 or 2019 tax return and didn't use the Non-Filers tool last year. These payments will go to Social

Security retirement, survivor or disability (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) beneficiaries. As announced previously, these payments will begin to be issued this weekend, with the projection that the majority of these payments will be sent electronically and received on April 7.

No action is needed by most people to obtain this round of Economic Impact Payments. People can check the Get My Payment tool on IRS.gov on to see if their payment has been scheduled. The IRS notes that the Get My Payment tool on IRS.gov will not be updated until the weekend of April 3-4 with information for Social Security and other federal beneficiaries expecting payments next week.

The IRS continues to review data received for Veterans Affairs (VA) benefit recipients and expects to determine a payment date and provide more details soon. Currently, the IRS estimates that Economic Impact Payments for VA beneficiaries who do not regularly file tax returns could be disbursed by mid-April. VA beneficiary payment information will be available in the Get My Payment tool at a future date.

Special reminder for those who don't normally file a tax return

Some federal benefits recipients may need to file a 2020 tax return, even if they don't usually file, to provide information the IRS needs to send payments for any qualified dependent. Eligible individuals in this group should file a 2020 tax return to be considered for an additional

payment for their qualified dependent as quickly as possible.

People who don't normally file a tax return and don't receive federal benefits may qualify for these Economic Impact Payments. This includes those experiencing homelessness, the rural poor, and others. For those eligible individuals who didn't get a first or second Economic Impact Payment or got less than the full amounts, they may be eligible for the 2020 Recovery Rebate Credit, but they'll need to file a 2020 tax return. See the special section on IRS.gov: Claiming the 2020 Recovery Rebate Credit if you aren't required to file a tax return.

Free tax return preparation is available for qualifying people.

The IRS reminds taxpayers that the income levels in this new round of Economic Impact Payments have changed. This means that some people won't be eligible for the third payment even if they received a first or second Economic Impact Payment or claimed a 2020 Recovery Rebate Credit. Payments will begin to be reduced for individuals making \$75,000 or above in Adjusted Gross Income (\$150,000 for married filing jointly). The payments end at \$80,000 for individuals (\$160,000 for married filing jointly); people with Adjusted Gross Incomes above these levels are ineligible for a payment.

Individuals can check the Get My Payment tool on IRS.gov to see the payment status of these payments. Additional information on Economic Impact Payments is available on IRS.gov.

First Asian Ajay Data gets Elected Unopposed Chairman of UASG

YASH GOYAL IN JAIPUR

LOS ANGELES /JAIPUR (TIP): In a very keenly watched election for the Chair of Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) which is supported by the International Internet Body (ICANN) at LA (USA), Jaipur's Dr Ajay Data, Chief of Indian IT Firm Data Xgen has been declared elected at a recently held poll at LA (USA).

Dr Ajary remains the first Asian to occupy this prestigious post, according to a statement here on Weekend.

UASG is financially supported by Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) here, over 600 global IT companies including representatives from Microsoft, Google, Apple, XgenPlus, Yandex, THNICetc.

Dr. Ajay was elected chairman after



defeating Richard Madinger, VP of GoDaddy in 2019 and now after completing two years nominations were asked and no one opposed the nomination of Dr. Ajay as chair.

After two years of remaining chair as UASG, Nominations were asked on 25th Feb 2021 to elect Chair of UASG which is an Internet community initiative and tasked with undertaking activities that will effectively promote the Universal Acceptance of all valid domain names and email addresses.

"I am thankful to all 600 + members of UASG to elect me as share of Universal Acceptance Steering Group. It's also a proud moment to lead this group which is working to break the language barriers to bring billions online," Dr Ajay reacted when contacted by TIP.

CDC director gives emotional warning of 'impending doom'

WASHINGTON (TIP): Thousands of cases of the B.1.1.7 strain have been reported across the United States, and experts fear the variant could drive another Covid-19 surge as states race to get ahead and vaccinate.

The strain, first spotted in the United Kingdom, isn't just more contagious than the original novel coronavirus. It appears to be deadlier as well.

B.1.1.7 has been wreaking havoc in parts of Europe, and health experts the US could be next if Americans don't take precautions.

"In the Upper Midwest, we're starting to see lots of younger adults getting sick and going to the hospital from Covid because of the B.1.1.7 variant," said Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. "So, remember that the B.1.1.7 variant is different from past types of Covid infections that we've seen -- more serious and possibly more severe disease among younger people."

Where B.1.1.7 is thriving

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported more than 11,500 cases of B.1.1.7 infections. But those were just the ones caught by genomic sequencing. The actual number may be much higher, since not every Covid-19 case is sequenced.

The highest B.1.1.7 case counts are in Florida, which has welcomed packed crowds of spring breakers -- many of whom are unvaccinated and maskless.

Michigan has the next highest number of B.1.1.7 cases. Officials there say another surge is well on its way.

"We've got a high proportion of variants, and that means coronavirus spreads faster," Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said. "These are much more contagious, and we're seeing that whether it is at youth sports or it is the re-engagement of some of our restaurants."

Whitmer said the disturbing trend is fueled by new variants, pandemic fatigue and more travel.

Village of Lincolnwood community comes out in support of Jesal Patel in the Mayoral Race

Punch # 13456 Jesal Patel for Lincolnwood Mayor

LINCOLNWOOD, IL (TIP): A wave of excitement engulfed the Village of Lincolnwood since Jesal Patel declared his candidacy for the office of the Village Mayor. During the recent meet and greet held on March 25th, 2021 at Holiday Inn, Skokie, IL 60077, many prominent members of Lincolnwood wholeheartedly expressed their support for Jesal Patel. Some of the



Jesal Patel: Jesal Patel Mayor for Village of Lincolnwood



Lincolnwood Alliance Party: Jesal Patel for Mayor, Beryl Herman for Clerk, Jean Ikezoe, Grace Diaz Herrera and Mohammed Saleem



CAMU1291: Invited distinguished guests at the event were Minal Desai (Skokie Park District Commissioner), Susan Patel (President IADO (Indian American Democratic organization), Harendra Mangrola Past President IADO, Babu Patel (Marsha), Bhavesh Patel and Babu Patel (Saahil), Nick Patel (LA Tan), Kiraan Shah, Gautam Patel, Ashok Patel, Kishor Patel, J P Patel, PC Sha, Bharat Liwani and Karim and Hannah Lakhani.

distinguished guests invited at the event were Minal Desai (Skokie Park District Commissioner), Susan Patel (President IADO (Indian American Democratic organization), Harendra Mangrola Past President IADO, Babu Patel (Marsha), Bhavesh Patel and Babu Patel (Saahil), Nick Patel (LA Tan), Kiraan Shah, Gautam Patel, Ashok Patel, Kishor Patel, J P Patel, PC Sha, Bharat Liwani and Karim and Hannah Lakhani.

Susan Patel steered the entire event and thanked everyone who came to support Jesal. Nick Patel talked about the great work that Jesal has done since 2007 and extended his support for him in the current election. The guests also talked about how, under the leadership of Jesal and the Lincolnwood Alliance Party, Lincolnwood has been better able to navigate the challenging times during covid-19 pandemic and has seen a robust economic period. A special mention was made about how Lincolnwood Alliance was able to secure the financing necessary to initiate the first phase of the 10-year infrastructure improvement program with zero property tax increases. It also supported public and private partnerships, and new TIF districts to help spur development in Lincolnwood.

Jesal reminisced about spending his childhood in the Village of Lincolnwood and expressed his love for the village. Jesal's father Babu Patel, who is a very well-known community leader, urged everyone to vote for Jesal to make Lincolnwood prosperous and a safe place to live. One of candidates for the office of trustee, Mohammed Saleem also addressed the guests at the

event. Saleem, a civil engineer by profession, aims at building bridges that bring people and community together. Saleem mentioned how he could use his expertise as a civil engineer towards revamping the roads, buildings and the overall infrastructure of the Village of Lincolnwood.

Lincolnwood Alliance candidates in the current elections are Jesal Patel for Mayor, Beryl Herman for Clerk, and three candidates Jean Ikezoe-Halevi, Grace Diaz Herrera, Mohammed Saleem for Trustees.

Jesal, for over 14 years, has proven his honesty and integrity through his work and community service. Being a finance graduate, he envisions a thriving Lincolnwood through smart planning by creating new business opportunities as well as employment opportunities. He has many years of experience as a small business owner behind him. His firsthand knowledge and experience as an entrepreneur help him understand how important it is to support small businesses so they can expand, create new jobs, and thrive in our community.

Jesal, during his address at the meet and greet, mentioned how his career has helped him understand the challenges faced by homeowners as well as business owners especially during the pandemic. Jesal's business, Patel Realty, has been serving the Village of Lincolnwood with its specialization in residential and retail real estate sales and investment for many years. Jesal has been a Trustee in Lincolnwood since 2007 and has served as Board liaison to multiple Village

committees and boards.

The Lincolnwood Alliance team, under Jesal Patel's proven leadership, promises to build an inclusive and welcoming village through transparent governance by involving the Lincolnwood residents in the decision-making process. One of the dreams of The Lincolnwood Alliance team is to create a welcoming and efficient atmosphere for all by providing first class customer service with its Service First Organization concept. Its emphasis on utilizing diversity on various committees and commissions aims to generate ideas and form visions for a prosperous village.

Jesal requested everyone to go for early voting which is at Oakton Community College 7701 N Lincoln Mon-Fri 9am - 5pm and on weekends 10am - 4pm through April 5th, 2021. Election Day is April 6 and voters can find their polling place at <https://www.cookcountyclerk.il.gov/service/your-voter-information>

The numbers on the ballot for the Lincolnwood Alliance Party are Jesal Patel for Mayor - #1, Beryl Herman for Clerk - #3, Jean Ikezoe-Halevi - #4, Grace Diaz Herrera - #5 and Mohammed Saleem - #6

(Photographs and Press release /Asian Media USA)

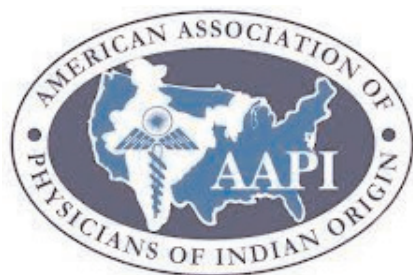
AAPI urges government to prevent attacks on Asian Americans

CHICAGO (TIP): Expressing deep concern and anguish about recent attacks against Asian Americans, the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) has urged the federal, state and local Governments to make all out efforts to protect them.

"AAPI wants to express our deep concern and anguish about the violence the nation has witnessed against people of Asian origin," AAPI President Dr. Sudhakar Jonnalagadda, stated condemning such incidents.

"We at AAPI, the largest ethnic medical organization in the nation, urge the federal, state and local Governments to make all the efforts possible to prevent violence against Asian Americans and all those innocent people around the nation who continue to suffer due to violence, harassment and discrimination."

"We strongly condemn this ongoing violence. And we want immediate action against the culprits, who have



been carrying on these criminal acts," Jonnalagadda stated.

A coalition tracking reports of racism and discrimination against Asian Americans says it has received at least 3,795 firsthand complaints since last year, AAPI noted.

Stop AAPI Hate began tracking violence and harassment against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in March last year.

From then through the end of 2020, Stop AAPI Hate received a total of 3,292 complaints from all 50 states and Washington, DC, according to a Stop AAPI Hate news release. There were at least 503 anti-Asian hate incidents reported between January 1 and Feb. 28 according to the group's latest report, released last week.

Quoting the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Dr. Sajani Shah, Chair of AAPI Board of Trustees, said, "AAPI recognizes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is

entitled to all the rights and freedoms set out therein, without distinction of any kind, in particular as to race, color or national origin."

"All human beings are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law against any discrimination and against any incitement to discrimination." Recognizing the pain and sufferings of the people impacted by the increasing violence and harassment against Asians and Asian Americans, especially in the past few months, Dr. Anupama Gotimukula, President-Elect of AAPI stressed the need for education. "We stand in solidarity with peaceful protestors across the nation condemning the increasing violence and harassment against some minority groups," said Dr. Ravi Kolli, Vice President of AAPI.

"As immigrants to the US, our families may not always understand this history, but we join in solidarity with the minority communities and call for justice and peace."

"We are saddened by the divisive rhetoric and racial tensions that seem to be getting worse each day. AAPI supports the Bills introduced by two Democratic lawmakers in the House and the Senate calling for the expedited review of hate crimes related to the pandemic," said Dr. Amit Chakrabarty, Secretary of AAPI.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

2nd Phase: Over 80% turnout in Bengal, 77% in Assam

EC bars DMK leader A Raja from campaigning for 48 hrs

Days after DMK leader A Raja issued an apology following a controversy over his derogatory remarks against Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, the Election Commission (EC) on Thursday, April 1, reprimanded him for violation of the model code of conduct, debarred him from the poll campaign for 48 hours, and removed his name from the list of star campaigners.

Raja moved the Madras High Court against the EC order but his plea was dismissed.

"The commission also advises you to be watchful and not to make intemperate, indecent, derogatory, obscene remarks and lower the dignity of women in future during the election campaign," said an EC order, dated April 1, addressing Raja.

The High Court dismissed Raja's plea for urgent hearing of a writ petition challenging the EC order. A mention to this effect was made by Raja's senior counsel V Shanmugasundaram before the first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy. He pleaded the request might be heard immediately considering the availability of a short period of just three days for canvassing. A categorical "no" was the reply of the CJ.

Assembly polls will be held in Tamil Nadu on April 6 in a single phase for which campaigning would end on April 4 evening.



Voters show their ID cards as they arrive to cast their votes during the second phase of West Bengal Assembly polls, in Nandigram, Thursday, April 1, 2021. Photo source: PTI

NEW DELHI (TIP): Sporadic violence was reported in West Bengal while Assam witnessed peaceful polling, barring a firing incident, as people exercised their franchise in large numbers in both states in the second phase of assembly elections on Thursday, April 1.

Officials said that over 80.43% voter turnout was reported from 30 constituencies in West Bengal up to 5 pm, while Assam registered 77.21% voting in 39 seats.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee accused Central forces deployed in Nandigram constituency, where she is locked in a fight with her former lieutenant Suwendu Adhikari, of helping the saffron party under instructions from Union home minister Amit Shah.

Allegations of booth capturing and

partisan behaviour prompted the Election Commission to seek a report on an incident in Boyal village where the feisty Trinamool Congress boss stayed put for over two hours outside a polling booth following a siege of sorts by BJP supporters.

Suwendu Adhikari's car was pelted with stones at two places while he was visiting booths in the constituency. BJP candidate of the Keshpur seat, Tanmay Ghosh's vehicle was also vandalised allegedly by TMC workers, officials said.

Despite the violence and accusations of vote fraud in Nandigram, Banerjee said that she was confident of victory from the constituency where she had a decade-and-a-half ago led a farmers' movement against a chemical hub planned by the then Left Front government.

Though tight security measures have been taken in 30 assembly segments spread across Purba and Paschim Medinipur, Bankura and South 24 Parganas districts, workers of the TMC and the BJP fought pitched battles at several places in the four districts.

In Assam, three persons were injured in firing by the bodyguards of deputy speaker Aminul Haque Laskar in the Sonai seat in Cachar district after clashes broke out between supporters of the ruling BJP and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), which is a constituent of the Congress-led alliance, officials said.

There are no other reports of violence from any of the 39 constituencies, where voting took place to decide the fate of 345 candidates, including five ministers, they said. *Source: PTI*

Days ahead of Kerala polls, parties race to rake up Sabarimala

With a few days left for the crucial assembly elections in Kerala (polling on April 6), the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) is busy with a house-to-house contact programme throughout the state to inform believers of the "real situation in Sabarimala" even as people living around the revered shrine are disillusioned with the politics over the issue.

The contentious issue has returned to haunt the ruling party after its opponents invariably flaunted the temple card to woo believers. Having learnt a bitter lesson in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, in which it lost all but one of 20 Lok Sabha seats, the ruling party is worried -- unrest in Sabarimala was cited as the main reason for its defeat in the last general elections. The hill temple and surrounding areas had witnessed unrest in 2018 after the state government tried to implement the Supreme Court verdict that removed

restrictions on visits of child-bearing women saying it was against gender equality. The state had witnessed five shutdowns and two people died in the violence that rocked the state.

Chittar is a hilly village located in Pathanamthitta district; at least 22 km away from the Sabarimala temple base camp Pambha, where the unrest against the verdict first began in 2018. Locals say it was a spontaneous movement sans any political colour or flag and they agree even Communists participated in the voluntary movement.

Many political parties including the Congress and BJP initially welcomed the verdict. Then Congress president Rahul Gandhi and senior leaders of BJP including O Rajagopal termed the verdict "historic".

But as the situation slowly changed after spontaneous protests broke out throughout the state, the political parties were forced to change their stand. *Source: HT*

One-fifth of candidates in poll-bound states have criminal cases against them

NEW DELHI (TIP): Out of 6,318 candidates contesting in assembly elections in four states and a UT, 18 per cent have declared criminal cases against themselves, according to a report by poll rights group ADR (Association for Democratic Reforms).

The National Election Watch and Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) have analysed the self-sworn affidavits of 6,318 out of 6,792 candidates who contested in the Union Territory of Puducherry and the four states of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal till Phase 3 of assembly polls.

Out of 6,318 candidates analysed, 1,157 (18 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits and 632 (10 per cent) candidates have declared serious criminal cases against themselves. As many as 1,317 (21 per cent) are crorepatists.

Of the 6,318 candidates, 567 were analysed from West Bengal (till phase 3) out of which 144 (25 per cent) declared criminal cases against themselves and 121 (21 per cent) declared serious criminal cases against

themselves, the report said.

Of the 3,559 candidates analysed from Tamil Nadu, 466 (13 per cent) declared criminal cases against themselves and 207 (6 per cent) declared serious criminal cases against themselves.

Of the 928 candidates analysed from Kerala, 355 (38 per cent) declared criminal cases against themselves and 167 (18 per cent) declared serious criminal cases against themselves.

Of the 941 candidates analysed from Assam, 138 (15 per cent) declared criminal cases against themselves and 109 (12 per cent) declared serious criminal cases against themselves.

Of the 323 candidates analysed from Puducherry, 54 (17 per cent) declared criminal cases against themselves and 28 (9 per cent) declared serious criminal cases against themselves.

Among major political parties, 143 of the 191 candidates (75 per cent) from DMK have declared criminal cases against them and 55 (29 per cent) declared serious criminal cases against themselves. *Source: PTI*

EC orders repolling in Assam's Ratabari station after EVMs' found in BJP candidate's car

NEW DELHI (TIP): A day after a video surfaced on social media which allegedly showed electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the car of Patharkandi BJP candidate Krishnendu Paul, the Election Commission ordered repolling in polling station 179 of Ratabari seat in Assam. The officers responsible for the transportation of EVMs have been suspended.

The video had surfaced after the second phase of polling concluded in Assam on Thursday, April 1. It was tweeted out by Assam-based journalist Atanu Bhuyan, who mentioned that the "situation is tense in Patharkandi" following the incident.

Targeting the BJP over the incident, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi said the Election Commission should act decisively on such complaints and that a serious re-evaluation of the use of EVMs needs to be carried out by all national parties.

Priyanka also said that the BJP uses its media machinery to accuse those who exposed them as sore losers. "Every time there is an election video of private vehicles



The video was tweeted by Assam-based journalist Atanu Bhuyan, who mentioned that the "situation is tense in Patharkandi" following the incident.

caught transporting EVM's show up. Unsurprisingly they have the following things in common: 1. The vehicles usually belong to BJP candidates or their associates. 2. The videos are taken as one off incidents and dismissed as aberrations. 3. The BJP uses its media machinery to accuse those who exposed the videos as sore

losers," she tweeted.

"The fact is that too many such incidents are being reported and nothing is being done about them. The EC needs to start acting decisively on these complaints and a serious re-evaluation of the use of EVM's needs to be carried out by all national parties," Priyanka added.

India contributes \$300,000 to UN body for gender equality

India has contributed USD 300,000 to the United Nations agency for gender equality and women empowerment, a contribution lauded by the UN entity.

India made a contribution to UN Women, the world organisation's entity for gender equality and women's empowerment.

"#India contributes USD 300,000 to @UN_Women for 2021," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador T S Tirumurti tweeted on Thursday.

He said India reaffirms its support for gender equality and women empowerment, describing UN Women as a "valued partner in our progress from women's development to #women-led development."

Assistant-Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women Anita Bhatia thanked India for the contribution and its support to UN Women and said in a tweet that "Women-led development envisions women as agents of change driving measurable impact in the lives of women & girls."



Rajinikanth To receive Dadasaheb Phalke Award

NEW DELHI (TIP): Superstar Rajinikanth will be honoured with the 2019 Dadasaheb Phalke award, the government announced today. He will receive the award on May 3.

In a congratulatory tweet, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said "it is a matter of immense joy that Thalaiiva has been conferred with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award". Tamil Nadu Chief Minister E Palaniswami spoke to Rajinikanth on phone and congratulated him.

In tweets, the actor thanked the government, PM Modi, Mr Javadekar and the jury for the award. "I sincerely dedicate it to all those who have been a part of my journey. Thanks to the almighty," he said.

Responding to PM Modi's wishes, Rajinikanth said he is "humbled and honoured" with his greetings and the award.

The announcement of the top honour for Rajinikanth, 70, comes just days before the assembly election in Tamil Nadu where his largest fan base is.

Union Minister Prakash Javadekar responded sharply to a question linking the two. "This is an award related to the film world and Rajinikanth has been working for 50 years...one must ask proper questions," he said.

Congress leader Rajiv Shukla was among those who questioned the timing of the award. "The BJP puts vote angles in everything and finds politics in everything. The BJP should not do everything according to votes. A great actor like Rajinikanth should have been given the honour earlier," he said.

Rajinikanth dropped his political plans in December last year, in a stunning about-turn after years of speculation. On the brink of launching his political party, he backed out citing his health.

Many devotees arrived for Kumbh without Covid negative report

HARIDWAR (TIP): Many devotees who arrived here on Thursday for the Kumbh Mela did not carry their coronavirus report, according to an inspection conducted by Garhwal Commissioner Ravinath Raman at the local railway station.

Station Superintendent MK Singh told him that around 10,000 pilgrims are arriving every day for the Kumbh that started on Thursday.

The Garhwal Commissioner said the railway authorities have been told to let the devotees proceed to the mela area only after they produce their negative RT-PCR report.

Those who arrive without a report should be tested on the spot and allowed to proceed only after their coronavirus report turns out to be negative, he said.

The Garhwal Commissioner has ordered the expansion of the waiting area, augmenting drinking water and toilet facilities for passengers awaiting their reports at the railway station.

He asked the railway authorities to coordinate with officials of the railway stations from where the trains originate and ensure that only passengers who carry negative test reports are allowed to board the Haridwar-bound trains. The Uttarakhand High Court has made it mandatory for devotees attending the Kumbh Mela to bring their negative RT-PCR report, not older than 72 hours on arrival.

Source: PTI



Over 6.75 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in India so far

NEW DELHI (TIP): The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 6.75 crore with a total of 17,47,094 doses given on Thursday, April 1, till 8 pm, the health ministry said as India opened up vaccination against the viral disease for all people aged above 45 from April 1.

The countrywide vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16 with healthcare workers (HCWs) getting inoculated and the vaccination of frontline workers (FLWs) started on February 2. The next phase of the vaccination drive commenced on March 1 for those over 60 years of age and those aged 45 and above with specified co-morbid conditions.

A total of 6,75,36,392 vaccine doses have so far been administered across the country, according to a provisional report compiled at 8 pm. These include 88,48,558 HCWs who have taken the first dose, 52,63,108 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 93,99,776 FLWs who have been administered the first dose and 39,18,646 FLWs who have taken the second dose. These also include 4,01,06,304 beneficiaries aged above 45 years.

A total of 17,47,094 vaccine doses were given on Thursday (till 8 pm), the 76th day of the vaccination drive - 16,20,746 beneficiaries vaccinated for the first dose and 1,26,348 for the second dose.

Source: PTI

Good Friday

WE WISH OUR READERS A HAPPY GOOD FRIDAY

Every year on the Friday before Easter, Good Friday is observed and this year it falls on April 2, 2021. Easter is observed on the first Sunday after the Paschal Full Moon which falls on April 4, 2021, according to the Church's Lunar calendar. Christians commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on this day. For Christians all over the world, it is a day of mourning, penance, and fasting. For the same reason, the day is also known as Black Friday. Good Friday, also known as Holy Friday, marks the end of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting for Christians.

Why is it called Good Friday?

According to the Bible, the son of God was flogged, ordered to carry the cross on which he would be crucified and then put to death. It's difficult to see what is "good" about it.

Some sources suggest that the day is "good" in that it is holy, or that the phrase is a corruption of "God's Friday".

However, the adjective good traditionally "designates a day on (or sometimes a season in) which religious observance is held". The "good" in this context refers to "a day or season observed as holy by the church", hence the greeting "good tide" at Christmas or on Shrove Tuesday. In addition to Good Friday, there is also a less well-known Good Wednesday, namely the Wednesday before Easter.

The earliest known use of "guode friday" is found in The South English Legendary, a text from around 1290, according to the dictionary. According to the Baltimore Catechism – the standard US Catholic school text from 1885 to the 1960s, Good Friday is good because Christ "showed His great love for man, and purchased for him every blessing".

The Catholic Encyclopedia, first published in 1907, states that the term's origins are not clear. It says some sources see its origins in the term "God's Friday" or Gottes Freitag, while others maintain that it is from the German Gute Freitag. It notes that the day was called Long Friday by the Anglo-Saxons and is referred to as such in modern Danish.

It also says that the day is known as "the Holy and Great Friday" in the Greek liturgy, "Holy Friday" in Roman Languages, and Karfreitag (Sorrowful Friday) in German.

History

The crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ are commemorated on Good Friday. According to many accounts, Christ was arrested and executed on this day. Good Friday is considered holy because it was on this day that Jesus Christ, out of love for all people, gave his life as a sacrifice while suffering for their sins. Humanity was given a new start as a result of this gesture, and all of their sins were forgiven. The above-mentioned crucifixion is also said to have occurred around AD 30 or AD 33.

Now the question arises: why is the day known as Good Friday if it has such a sad history? The term is thought to have originated from the words "God's Friday." However, some people believe that the letter 'Good' stands for Holy, which is why the day is also known as Holy Friday.

Significance

Despite the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified on Good Friday, the



Bible claims that the son of God was resurrected on Easter. It symbolizes that good always triumphs, and that Christ went through so much pain for humanity's sins demonstrates how much he loved everyone.

Importance of Easter

Easter is, without a doubt, the most significant Christian holiday of the year. It is the day on which Christians commemorate Jesus Christ's resurrection. According to the Bible, Jesus Christ was resurrected on Easter

Sunday and came back to life. Easter has grown in importance in modern times, and markets, malls, and confectionary shops are flooded with Easter goodies. Easter, which commemorates Christ's Resurrection, is derived from the old English 'eastre', which refers to a spring festival.

The tradition of Good Friday

On this day, believers traditionally gather to attend Church services. The service time on this day varies slightly, with services beginning

around noon and lasting until 3 p.m. This is done because it is thought that Jesus suffered on the cross during these hours. On this day, many Christians all over the world fast. Processions commemorating Jesus' death are held in some parts of the world, including the Philippines, Italy, and Spain.

However, this year, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, safety precautions need to be followed, which might hinder some people from attending Church and its large gatherings.

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Science of Spirituality is a worldwide spiritual organization dedicated to transforming lives through meditation, under the guidance of Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj.

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Artists Speak Out In Support Of Asian Community

NAAP STATEMENT

"We at National Asian Artists Project (NAAP) feel the need to express our sadness and outrage stirred by the recent tragedy in Atlanta, and over the increased incidents of senseless violence that have come upon our Asian Communities. These aggressions and events have impacted our families and friends across the nation, leaving many with increased fear in their everyday lives.

Our mission has always focused our support on the performing arts, while also building a safe place in our

community. In the wake of not just last week's event, but the multiple horrible attacks in recent memory, we at NAAP want to reach out to our friends and members who are feeling anger, grief, confusion and experiencing various levels of trauma as a result of these horrendous and random attacks. It is further troubling to try to grasp the idea that this is happening due to an unprecedented and wildly inaccurate sourcing of misinformation targeted toward our ethnic origin.

This pain and grief affect all of us and to have this happening during an historic and disastrous pandemic,

makes all of this an even more heightened tragedy. Like any family, we encourage everyone to please take care of each other and look out for one another. We are asking that you make that extra effort to check in on friends, family, elders, and, please, don't be afraid to use your voices and share your opinions and thoughts."

"Stay well, stay safe.
In loving spirit,"
Baayork Lee & The NAAP Team
www.naaproject.org

MY MAN KONO: Play

BY MABEL PAIS



(Left) Toraichi Kono with Charlie Chaplin - Photo / PanAsianRep.Org

PAN ASIAN REPERTORY THEATRE PRESENTS VIRTUAL READING OF NEW PLAY "MY MAN KONO"
PLAYWRIGHT: PHILIP W. CHUNG
DIRECTOR: JEFF LIU
FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2021 AT 5:00PM (EST) ONLY
FREE

"A Stage for All the World of Asian -Americans"- Mel Gussow, The New York Times

I became fascinated by how this Asian American man who had somehow become the confidant to the most famous person in Hollywood could also end up imprisoned as a Japanese spy. As more Asian-American stories are being discovered, rediscovered, and amplified, the time feels right to share Toraichi Kono's story and reclaim his place in Asian-American history." = Philip W. Chung, Playwright

The Pan Asian Repertory Theatre (Tisa Chang, Founding Artistic Director), continuing their educational initiative, presents a reading of the new play, "My Man Kono" by Philip W. Chung.

Directed by Jeff Liu, the 8-member cast will feature David Dean Bottrell, Katie Lee Hill, Lily Holleman, David Lee Huynh, Zach Lusk, Jonathan Medina, Ron Nakahara, and Armin Shimerman. The FREE virtual presentation is set for Friday, April 2, 2021 beginning at 5:00PM (EST). Follow this Link to access the reading: cccforms.gle/43uwvRnatiM3QDHA8

"My Man Kono" is based on the life of Toraichi Kono, who worked as Charlie Chaplin's personal valet for two decades before being arrested as an enemy spy during the anti-Japanese hysteria of World War II. "My Man Kono" was awarded second place in the East West Players' Pacific Century Playwriting Competition.

Playwright Philip W. Chung shared this about his new play, "I had no idea Toraichi Kono existed until I

attended a Charlie Chaplin retrospective at the L.A. County Museum of Art. "The Adventurer" was one of the shorts screened and I noticed an Asian man in the film playing the chauffeur of Chaplin's character. I was surprised to see an Asian in a non-stereotypical role in a 1917 Hollywood production and wondered who this was."

For additional information, email info@panasianrep.org

Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, celebrating its 44th Milestone Season, is the most veteran Asian American theatre company on the East Coast. Tisa Chang founded Pan Asian Rep in 1977 at Ellen Stewart's La Mama ETC with the vision to promote equity and access that Asian Americans artists can equally follow, focusing on stories of probing social justice issues with distinctive Off-Broadway Productions, Tours, National Outreach, and Community Service. To learn more, visit panasianrep.org

CRAZY TALENTED ASIANS: Comedy



Crazy Talented Asians, Poster - Photo / FTH

BY MABEL PAIS

FTH Presents CRAZY TALENTED ASIANS & FRIENDS JATIN CHHUGANI, VIVEK NETRAKANTI Among Performers SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021 AT 8 P.M. EST, FREE

Flushing Town Hall (FTH) this April goes all out with an incredibly diverse lineup of comedy events. As New York City slowly reopens, the cultural nonprofit continues to present its programs to an all-virtual audience while livestreaming small ensembles from its stage.

Audiences can enjoy "Crazy Talented Asians & Friends" and other programs.

Crazy Talented Asians & Friends - Live Comedy

On Saturday, April 17, 2021, Flushing Town Hall presents the return of "Crazy Talented Asians &

Friends" with a new comedy show, "Triumphing Over Quarantine." highlighting Asian American perspectives and experiences during the global pandemic, the virtual event kicks off at 8:00 PM (ET). These rising East and South Asian American comedy talents will share their struggles and triumphs over the pandemic through the lens of sketch and stand-up comedy.

Flushing Town Hall will present this special, FREE event on its YouTube channel - youtu.be/wNa4dtfWoU4

Mr. Otter Lee, who plays Otter Lin on Stephen Colbert Presents: "Tooning Out the News," returns to host this exciting event. He will be joined by 'Overstep Comedy,' whose Manhattan shows frequently sell out, and other talented comedians and special guests, including Jatin Chhugani, Patricia Dinglasan, Vivek Netrakanti, Becky Yamamoto, and Angel Yau.

The event will also pay a Memorial Tribute to Corky Lee, the legendary journalistic photographer who passed away due to COVID-19 in January 2021. Furthermore, the event will also feature the NYC Chinatown small business community and Patrick Mock, the manager of 46 Mott Bakery, which has been delivering meals to hospitals and the elderly since the onset of the pandemic.

Looking ahead, "Crazy Talented Asians & Friends" will continue in May with an evening of animated short films selected from several hundreds of submissions to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

Flushing Town Hall via its redesigned website: flushingtowhall.org, remains a great source for information about the history and mission of the organization, as well as important contact and community engagement information.

DONATIONS

Most of Flushing Town Hall's "FTH At Home!" (flushingtowhall.org/events) virtual programming is presented for free to the general public; however, donations (flushingtowhall.org/donate-now) in any amount are welcome and appreciated to support the artists and the nonprofit cultural organization as they continue to provide programming and entertainment across New York and the world. Currently all programs are being presented virtually.

About Flushing Town Hall

Flushing Town Hall (FTH), a Smithsonian affiliate, presents multi-disciplinary global arts that engage and educate the global communities of Queens and New York City, in order to foster mutual appreciation. As advocates of arts equity since 1979, FTH supports local, immigrant, national, and international artists, developing partnerships and collaborations that enhance its efforts. It serves one of the most diverse communities in the world and strives to uphold the legacy of inclusiveness that has defined the community since the Flushing Remonstrance of 1657. To learn about Flushing Town Hall, visit flushingtowhall.org

(Mabel Pais writes on Social Issues, The Arts and Entertainment, Spirituality, and Health & Wellness)

SAVION GLOVER: DANCE, RESISTANCE & HISTORY

BY MABEL PAIS

Tuesday, April 6, 2021 at 7PM
Free Virtual Event
MUST RSVP



Savion Glover - Photo / Courtesy NJPAC

Savion Glover, since he was 11 years old, has been a tap dance superstar, acknowledged as one of - if not the - leading interpreters of jazz tap. Starting with his appearance in Broadway's "The Tap Dance Kid" in 1985 and continuing to the present day, Savion's obvious brilliance as an artist has only been exceeded by his diligence as a scholar of the art form he practices so uniquely.

Join Savion and NJPAC President and CEO John Schreiber for a conversation that will trace the history of tap through historical performances by the likes of Jimmy Slyde, George Hillman, Lon Chaney, Gregory Hines, Sammy Davis and Fred Astaire, examining not just their artistry, but the cultural and historical context in which these timeless works were created.

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center's (NJPAC) John Schreiber joins the featured guest in a wide-ranging discussion, taking a deep dive into the history of music, dance and theater - and the legendary artists who brought these genres to life.

Savion Glover is a Member of the NJPAC Board of Directors and has taught dance performance and choreography to the Arts Center's students for many years.

NJPAC - To learn more, visit njpac.org

UTE PERFORMS MARLENE

BY MABEL PAIS

"It's a huge thrill to see and hear Ute up close and to witness her evocation of Marlene with such skill and humanity." - BroadwayworldUK

"It is my personal homage to that great lady. There are many portraits of Marlene out there, but this one is coming from my heart. Audiences are in for an incredible story; history, fate, courage, style, politics, glamour and sex, talent and a huge career." Ute Lemper, Writer-Performer

THE YORK THEATRE COMPANY
PRESENTS

**UTE LEMPER: RENDEZVOUS WITH MARLENE
WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY UTE LEMPER
A MAGICAL FUSION BETWEEN THEATER AND
CINEMA
STREAMING APRIL 8 - 10, 2021**



Ute Lemper - Photo /York Theatre.Org

The York Theatre Company (James Morgan, Producing Artistic Director; Evans Haile, Executive Director) presents "Ute Lemper: Rendezvous With Marlene," in a brand-new version of the 2019 sold-out show, a magical fusion of theatre and cinema, gorgeous music that will take you on an intense journey.

When Marlene Dietrich phoned a young singer (Ute Lemper - Sally Bowles in "Cabaret") out of the blue, the icon stayed on the line for an unforgettable three hours. 30 years later Broadway and West End star Ute Lemper reveals all in her 5-star critically acclaimed show. Following sold out performances at The York in the fall of 2019 and around the world, "Ute Lemper: Rendezvous With Marlene" has been adapted for the screen with special effects to enhance the production.

"Ute Lemper: Rendezvous With Marlene" will stream online beginning Thursday, April 8, 2021 at 7:00pm (EST) and available on demand through midnight on Saturday, April 10, 2021 (EST). For Tickets, visit web.ovationtix.com/trs/pr/1045035

Set list for "Ute Lemper: Rendezvous With Marlene"

To learn more about Ute and her playlist for the performance, visit yorktheatre.org/ute

Where Have All The Flowers Gone / Sag mir wo die Blumen sind (Pete Seeger)

Just A Gigolo (Leonello Casucci)

One For My Baby (Harold Arlen / Johnny Mercer)

Life's A Swindle (Mischa Spoliansky / Marcellus Schiffer)

They Call Me Naughty Lola / Ich bin die fesche Loal (Friedrich Hollaender)

Boys In The Backroom (Frank Loesser / Friedrich Hollaender)

Lili Marleen (Norbert Schulze / Hans Leip)

Ruins Of Berlin (Friedrich Hollaender)

Black Market (Friedrich Hollaender)

When The World Was Young (Johnny Mercer / M. Philippe-Gérard)

Ne me quitte pas (Jacques Brel)

Laziest Gal In Town (Cole Porter)

Die Antwort mein Freund weiss ganz allein der Wind / The Answer My Friend Is Blowing In The Wind (Bob Dylan)

Que reste-t-il de nos amours / I Wish You Love (Charles Trenet)

Falling In Love Again (Friedrich Hollaender)

Band: Vana Gierig (Piano), Jesse Mills (Violin), Matthew Parrish (Bass), Todd Turkisher (Drums), Tim

Ouimette (Trumpet)

The York Theatre Company

The York Theatre Company (yorktheatre.org) is the only theatre in New York City - and one of very few in the world - dedicated to developing and fully producing new musicals and preserving neglected, notable shows from the past. For over four decades, York's intimate, imaginative style of producing both original and classic musicals has resulted in critical acclaim and recognition from artists and audiences alike. The York is the recipient of a special Drama Desk Award for "Developing and Producing New Musical" and, more recently, a special Outer Critics Circle Award for "50 Years of Producing New and Classic Musical."

To learn more about The York Theatre and Ute Lemper, visit

www.yorktheatre.org

Twitter: [@yorktheatrenyc](https://twitter.com/yorktheatrenyc)

www.facebook.com/yorktheatrecompany

www.youtube.com/user/yorktheatre

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MARIZA SINGS AMALIA

BY MABEL PAIS



Mariza - Photo / Courtesy NJPAC

Friday April 9, 2021 at 8 p.m.

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) presents a virtual performance of the Portuguese Fado sensation with "Mariza Sings Amália," on Friday, April 9, 2021 at 8:00 p.m.

Attendees can watch the streaming by reserving their tickets at thetownhall.secure.force.com/ticket/?orderSource=NJPAC#/events/a0S5G00000I5KuTUAV

The Stream will be available to rewatch for 72 hours, until April 12 at 8PM

See Mariza whose career who has proceeded now with even greater success than ever, with appearances on some of the most important stages in the world: the Paris Olympia, the Frankfurt Opera, the London Royal Festival Hall, the Amsterdam Le Carré, the Barcelona Palau de la Música, the Sydney Opera House, the New York Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Walt Disney Concert Hall - in the latter case with a stage setting specially designed for her by none other than one of the world's greatest architects, Frank Gehry.

Mariza is now celebrating the 20th anniversary of her career and the centenary of the late Queen of Fado, Amália Rodrigues. With her new album, "Mariza Sings Amália," Mariza continues to carry Amália's legacy from the 20th century into the 21st. In this streamed concert, Mariza reinvents fado standards for the next generation-their soul intact, their identity unmistakable, their stylings delightfully unexpected.

To learn more, visit thetownhall.org

(Mabel Pais writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Spirituality, and Health & Wellness)



Akshay Kumar's magician avatar from 'Atrangi Re' released

Megastar Akshay Kumar, who had been shooting for 'Atrangi Re', recently wrapped up shooting for the film and the actor took to social media to share his first look from the film. Akshay also extended his gratitude to his co-stars Sara Ali Khan and Dhanush for their contribution in the project.

Looking at the first look photo of Akshay from 'Atrangi Re', one can assume that the actor might be seen in the role of a magician. The photo features Akshay dressed in a black designer suit and a huge hat as he holds a king of hearts card on his palm. The actor is seen smiling wickedly as he poses for the lens. Akshay seems to bear a look that has an uncanny resemblance to a magician.

He penned a note of gratitude for Sara and Dhanush, writing, "It's the last day of #AtrangiRe and I can't wait for you'll to experience the magic created by @aanandrai. Also a big thank you to my co-stars @saraalikh95 and @dhanushkraj for letting me be a part of this beautiful film. An @arrahman musical. Written by: #HimanshuSharma."

Dia Mirza shares 'special' moments with husband Vaibhav, stepdaughter

Dia Mirza has made some 'really special memories' on her honeymoon with her husband Vaibhav Rekhi and his daughter Samaira. She took to Instagram to share fresh photos from their Maldives getaway.

"We made some really special memories in Maldives," she wrote, along with a host of emojis, including an ocean wave, sun, heart and dolphin. One of the hashtags she added to the post was 'you are special'.

In the first photo, Dia held up her hair as she posed with Vaibhav. The second had her posing with Samaira on the beach. The third was a selfie of the couple, with the ocean visible in the background.

Other pictures included Vaibhav and Samaira sipping coconut water and laying out a picnic on the beach. Dia was seen holding the young girl's hand in one of the photos.

Earlier, Dia shared pictures and videos of them watching dolphins, and said that the joy they felt was beyond words. "Talk about saving the best for last!?! We spent over an hour with a few schools of #Dolphins... 20-30 of them at a time. Words are inadequate to express the joy of witnessing these beautiful creatures in the wild. The Indian Ocean was magic, our time here in her calm waters has been restful and restorative," she wrote.

Dia and Vaibhav got married in an intimate ceremony in the garden of her apartment complex last month. He shares his daughter Samaira with his ex-wife, Sunaina Rekhi. Sharing the first photos of the wedding, Dia had written on Instagram, "Love is a full-circle that we call home. And what a miracle it is to hear its knock, open the door and be found by it. Sharing this moment of completion and joy with you...my extended family. May all puzzles find their missing pieces, may all hearts heal and may the miracle of love continue to unfold all around us. #ThankYouPreeta #SunsetKeDiVaNe."



Taapsee Pannu to essay the role of Sania Mirza in her biopic?

Taapsee Pannu is clearly on a roll. The actress, who has delivered some fantastic performances in the last two years, has one of the strongest line ups among actors of the current generation. While she has almost 4 films almost over - Do Baara, Rashmi Rocket, Haseen Dillruba and a South film, the Pink actress is currently prepping for her sports biopic Shabaash Mithu on Mithali Raj's life.

But now, we can tell you that the Mithali Raj biopic isn't the only sports biopic Taapsee is doing. A source says, "Taapsee has now been approached for the Sania Mirza biopic as well. This has been in the works for some time. Ronnie Screwvala bought the rights to her life. The makers wanted a younger actress to play Sania and after Parineeti Chopra playing Saina, they didn't want her to do it. They took the film to Taapsee who has liked the script."

Taapsee's team is currently working out the modalities for the same. Apart from the cricketer biopic, Taapsee is also in talks for Rajkumar Hirani's next with Shah Rukh Khan but according to latest reports, that film has got pushed. So, Taapsee might be able to accommodate the Sania Mirza biopic in that time frame now.



Kangana lauds Sanya's performance in 'Pagglai'

Kangana Ranaut heaped praise on Sanya Malhotra in a fresh tweet, calling her talented and deserving. Kangana also gave a shout-out to Sanya's new release, Pagglait, and said that she heard that the film is 'doing amazingly well'.

"She is soooo good I am gald people are recognising her talent, I heard #PagglaitOnNetflix is doing amazingly well... so happy for you Sanya you deserve everything and much more ... lots of love to you," Kangana wrote, retweeting one of Sanya's magazine covers. "Thank you so much. It really means a lot," she replied, adding heart and puppy dog eyes emojis.

Fans, in their replies, agreed with Kangana. "Omg Kangu I luv u. Sanya is a definetely good good good actress. Her choices are mindblowing. Two awesome personalities of bollywood. Its big happy to see ur support towards her," one wrote. "Yeayyy!! Our Queen only appreciates fine talent and never mediocrity! Love it! And yes, I agree! Sanya is really good," another wrote.





Sharon Stone says she paid DiCaprio's salary for 'The Quick and the Dead'

Sharon Stone paid for Leonardo DiCaprio's salary from her own pocket to hire him for her 1995 movie "The Quick and the Dead", the actor has revealed in her memoir "The Beauty of Living Twice". The book, in which the actor talks about her life and career in Hollywood, was released in the US on Tuesday.

In the memoir, the 63-year-old actor reflects on everything, from her painful childhood in Pennsylvania to films such as erotic thriller "Basic Instinct" and Martin Scorsese's mobster epic "Casino", which had earned her an Academy Award nomination and a Golden Globe award.

"The Quick and the Dead", which was directed by Sam Raimi, marked a major moment in Stone's career as she was also co-producing the film besides headlining it.

It featured Stone as Ellen, a gunfighter who relocates to a rural town in the Old West and clashes with its leader (Gene Hackman) to avenge her father's death. During the course of the movie, she befriends DiCaprio's character, simply called The Kid.

Kristen Stewart matches Princess Diana's school run look

Kristen Stewart continues to nail her looks as Princess Diana on the set of the upcoming film Spencer.

A new photo of the actress, 30, as the late royal features Stewart wearing a red and black bomber jacket, light blue jeans, gloves and a pair of tan lace-up boots.

The outfit is nearly identical to one that Princess Diana wore in images of her on a school run in Kensington in 1992.

Stewart was also photographed driving a vintage supercar while sporting a plaid tweed jacket while filming, according to The Sun. The actress was driving the dark green vehicle to Hunstanton beach in Norfolk, where Princess Diana was believed to visit during trips to Sandringham.

The new photos of Stewart come shortly after it was announced that Poldark star Jack Farthing would play Prince Charles in the Pablo Larraín-directed film.

Prince Charles married Princess Diana in 1981 before they separated in 1992. Four years later in 1996, the couple officially ended their marriage.

The casting news broke last Thursday as filming for the highly-anticipated film shifted from Germany to the U.K. The movie will also star Timothy Spall, Sally Hawkins and Sean Harris.



Russell Crowe joins Thor: Love and Thunder cast

Hollywood star Russell Crowe has boarded the cast of Marvel Studios' much-anticipated superhero movie Thor: Love and Thunder.

According to Deadline, Crowe will appear in an unspecified role in the upcoming fourth instalment in the Thor franchise. Russell took to Instagram to share a photo with Chris Hemsworth and his wife Elsa Pataky.

Elsa also shared the pictures and wrote, "Great night at the rugby with @ssfcrabbitohs #russellocrowe and good friends!"

The film, directed by filmmaker-writer Taika Waititi, is currently in production in Australia. It marks actor Chris Hemsworth's return as the titular superhero. Actors Natalie Portman and Tessa Thompson are reprising their roles of Jane Foster and Valkyrie, respectively. Hollywood star Christian Bale, Matt Damon, Jaimie Alexander, Chris Pratt and Karen Gillan are also part of the cast.

Waititi has penned the script with Jennifer Kaytin Robinson. Thor: Love and Thunder is scheduled to be released on May 6, 2022.

Russell was recently tapped to star opposite Zac Efron in Peter Farrelly's The Greatest Beer Run Ever, which was just acquired. On top of that, he was most recently seen in the Solstice Studios thriller Unhinged.



Kim Kardashian shuns Kanye West's request to 'cover up' amid split drama

Kim Kardashian reportedly gave no importance to Kanye West and enjoyed sunbathing in nude amid her divorce from the rapper.

The famous reality star was previously asked by the father of her kids to cover up. Kim seemingly paid no heed to Kanye's words.

The 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' star is said to be embracing her body after reportedly become self-conscious over her curves prior to the power couple's shock split.

The 40-year-old reality star flaunted hourglass figure in skimpy bikini as she sunbathed fully nude.

Kim - who filed for divorce from rapper last month, shares four children with him - North, seven, Saint, five, Chicago, three, and Psalm, one.

Kanye and Kim's marriage publicly hit the rocks last summer when Kanye talked about a conversation to abort their daughter North during a campaign rally for his ill-fated presidential run.



Easter: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

WE WISH OUR READERS A HAPPY EASTER



Easter is a Christian holiday that celebrates the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament of the Bible, the event is said to have occurred three days after Jesus was crucified by the Romans and died in roughly 30 A.D. The holiday concludes the “Passion of Christ,” a series of events and holidays that begins with Lent—a 40-day period of fasting, prayer and sacrifice—and ends with Holy Week, which includes Holy Thursday (the celebration of Jesus’ Last Supper with his 12 Apostles, also known as “Maundy Thursday”), Good Friday (on which Jesus’ crucifixion is observed) and Easter Sunday. Although a holiday of high religious significance in the Christian faith, many traditions associated with Easter date back to pre-Christian, pagan times.

Easter will be celebrated on Sunday, April 4, 2021.

The English word Easter, which parallels the German word Ostern, is of uncertain origin. One view, expounded by the Venerable Bede in the 8th century, was that it derived from Eostre, or Eostrae, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. This view presumes—as does the view associating the origin of Christmas on December 25 with pagan celebrations of the winter solstice—that Christians appropriated pagan names and holidays for their highest festivals.



Given the determination with which Christians combated all forms of paganism (the belief in multiple deities), this appears a rather dubious presumption. There is now widespread consensus that the word derives from the Christian designation of Easter week as in albis, a Latin phrase that was understood as the plural of alba (“dawn”) and became eostarum in Old High German, the precursor of the modern German and English term. The Latin and Greek Pascha

(“Passover”) provides the root for Pâques, the French word for Easter.

The Date Of Easter And Its Controversies

Fixing the date on which the Resurrection of Jesus was to be observed and celebrated triggered a major controversy in early Christianity in which an Eastern and a Western position can be distinguished. The dispute, known as

the Paschal controversies, was not definitively resolved until the 8th century. In Asia Minor, Christians observed the day of the Crucifixion on the same day that Jews celebrated the Passover offering—that is, on the 14th day of the first full moon of spring, 14 Nisan (see Jewish calendar). The Resurrection, then, was observed two days later, on 16 Nisan, regardless of the day of the week. In the West the Resurrection of Jesus was celebrated on the first day of the week, Sunday, when Jesus had risen from the dead. Consequently, Easter was always celebrated on the first Sunday after the 14th day of the month of Nisan. Increasingly, the churches opted for the Sunday celebration, and the Quartodecimans (“14th day” proponents) remained a minority. The Council of Nicaea in 325 decreed that Easter should be observed on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox (March 21). Easter, therefore, can fall on any Sunday between March 22 and April 25.

Eastern Orthodox churches use a slightly different calculation based on the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar (which is 13 days ahead of the former), with the result that the Orthodox Easter celebration usually occurs later than that celebrated by Protestants and Roman Catholics. Moreover, the Orthodox tradition prohibits Easter from being celebrated before or at the same time as Passover.

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In the 20th century several attempts were made to arrive at a fixed date for Easter, with the Sunday following the second Saturday in April specifically proposed. While this proposal and others had many supporters, none came to fruition. Renewed interest in a fixed date arose in the early 21st century, resulting from discussions involving the leaders of Eastern Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican, and Roman Catholic churches, but formal agreement on such a date remained elusive.

Liturgical Observances

In the Christian calendar, Easter follows Lent, the period of 40 days (not counting Sundays) before Easter, which traditionally is observed by acts of penance and fasting. Easter is immediately preceded by Holy Week, which includes Maundy Thursday, the commemoration of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples; Good Friday, the day of his Crucifixion; and Holy Saturday, the transition between Crucifixion and Resurrection. Liturgically, Easter comes after the Great Vigil, which was originally observed sometime between sunset on Easter Saturday and sunrise on Easter Sunday. Later it would be celebrated in Western churches on Saturday evening, then on Saturday afternoon, and finally on Sunday morning. In 1955 the Roman Catholic Church set the time for the vigil at 10 PM, which allowed for the Easter mass to be celebrated after midnight. In the Orthodox traditions the vigil continues to be an important liturgical event, while in Protestant churches it is little known.

By the 4th century the Easter vigil was well established in various liturgical expressions. It was characterized by a spirit of joyful anticipation of the Resurrection and—because of the belief that Jesus' Second Coming would occur on Easter—the return of Jesus. In the Roman Catholic tradition the vigil has four parts: the celebration of lights



focused on the Paschal candle; the service of lessons called the prophecies; the administration of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation to adult converts; and the Easter mass. The use of the Paschal candle, to denote the appearance of light out of darkness through the Resurrection, was first recorded in the year 384; by the 10th century it had gained general usage. The prominence of baptism at Easter goes back to early Christianity, probably the 4th century, when baptism was administered only once a year, at Easter. In the Roman Catholic service the priest blesses the water to be used in the forthcoming year for baptism, with the faithful taking some of that water with them to receive protection from vicissitudes. Lutheran and Anglican churches use variations of this vigil service.

All Christian traditions have their own special liturgical emphases for Easter. The Easter sunrise service, for example, is a distinctive Protestant observance in North America. The practice may derive from the Gospel

narrative of Jesus' Resurrection, which states that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb "while it was still dark" (John 20:1) or as dawn was breaking (Matthew 28:1 and Luke 24:1). It is a service of jubilation that takes place as the sun rises to dispel the darkness.

Easter Customs

Easter, like Christmas, has accumulated a great many traditions, some of which have little to do with the Christian celebration of the Resurrection but derive from folk customs. The custom of the Easter lamb appropriates both the appellation used for Jesus in Scripture ("behold the lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world," John 1:29) and the lamb's role as a sacrificial animal in ancient Israel. In antiquity Christians placed lamb meat under the altar, had it blessed, and then ate it on Easter. Since the 12th century the Lenten fast has ended on Easter with meals including eggs, ham, cheeses, bread, and sweets that have been blessed for the occasion.

The use of painted and decorated

Easter eggs was first recorded in the 13th century. The church prohibited the eating of eggs during Holy Week, but chickens continued to lay eggs during that week, and the notion of specially identifying those as "Holy Week" eggs brought about their decoration. The egg itself became a symbol of the Resurrection. Just as Jesus rose from the tomb, the egg symbolizes new life emerging from the eggshell. In the Orthodox tradition eggs are painted red to symbolize the blood Jesus shed on the cross.

Easter egg hunts are popular among children in the United States. First lady Lucy Hayes, the wife of Pres. Rutherford B. Hayes, is often credited with sponsoring the first annual Easter egg roll (an event where children and their parents were invited to roll their eggs on the Monday following Easter) on the White House lawn, in 1878. That year the event was moved to the White House from the grounds of the U.S. Capitol Building, where large numbers of children had gathered beginning in the early 1870s to roll their eggs and play on Easter Monday. Members of Congress were dismayed by the large crowds on Capitol Hill and feared that the foot traffic was damaging the grounds. By 1876 Congress and Pres. Ulysses S. Grant passed a law that forbade the practice of egg rolling on Capitol Hill. Some historical records note that the Hayes first opened the White House lawn to egg rolling festivities the following year, in 1877, after a young boy asked President Hayes directly for permission to use the space.

The custom of associating a rabbit or bunny with Easter arose in Protestant areas in Europe in the 17th century but did not become common until the 19th century. The Easter rabbit is said to lay the eggs as well as decorate and hide them. In the United States the Easter rabbit also leaves children baskets with toys and candies on Easter morning. In a way, this was a manifestation of the Protestant rejection of Catholic Easter customs. In some European countries, however, other animals—in Switzerland the cuckoo, in Westphalia the fox—brought the Easter eggs.

At least 36 dead in Taiwan train crash

TAIPEI (TIP): A train derailed in a tunnel in eastern Taiwan on Friday after apparently hitting a truck, with at least 36 dead and 72 injured, as rescuers struggled to reach crushed carriages, the transport ministry said.

The train, travelling to Taitung, came off the rails in a tunnel just north of Hualien causing some carriages to hit the wall of the tunnel, the fire department said in a statement.

"Is everyone out in carriage four?" a lady is heard shouting from inside the tunnel, in images provided by the fire department.

The official Central News Agency said a truck that was "not parked properly" was suspected of sliding into the path of the train. The fire department showed a picture of what appeared to be the truck's wreckage lying next to part of the derailed train.

The front part of the train was situated outside the tunnel, and those in carriages still in the tunnel were being led to safety, Taiwan's railway administration said.

Images of the crash scene show carriages inside the tunnel crumbled and ripped apart from the impact, passengers gathering suitcases and bags in a tilted, derailed carriage and others walking along the tracks littered with wreckage.

The accident occurred at the start of a long weekend for the traditional Tomb Sweeping Day. Taiwan's mountainous east coast is a popular tourist destination. In 2018, 18 people died and 175 were injured when a train derailed in northeastern Taiwan, in the island's worst rail disaster in more than three decades. Reuters

7 convicted in Hong Kong over 2019 pro-democracy protests

HONG KONG (TIP): Seven Hong Kong pro-democracy advocates were convicted on Thursday on charges of organising and participating in an unlawful assembly during massive anti-government protests in 2019 that triggered a crackdown on dissent. The seven include media tycoon and founder of the Apple Daily tabloid Jimmy Lai, as well as 82-year-old Martin Lee, a veteran of the city's democracy movement. Lai had already been held without bail on other charges related to his pro-democracy activities. They were convicted for their involvement in a protest held on August 18, 2019. Organisers said that 1.7 million people marched that day in opposition to a proposed Bill that would have allowed suspects to be extradited to mainland China for trial.

The activists, apart from those who have been remanded in custody on other charges, were granted bail on condition they do not leave Hong Kong and must hand in all their travel documents. AP

Boris Johnson's senior black adviser resigns amid Downing Street tensions

LONDON (TIP): UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's senior-most black adviser, Samuel Kasumu, has stepped down from his post as Special Adviser for Civil Society and Communities, it emerged on Thursday, a day after the release of a controversial government-appointed race review.

Kasumu's resignation will come in effect from May 1 and Downing Street has dismissed as "completely inaccurate" reports that it is linked to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) report, which had concluded that Britain was not a structurally racist nation even though overt racism remained a reality in the country.

It has been claimed that Kasumu's exit was on the cards for some time due to tensions within Downing Street and is not directly linked to the much-criticised report.

"Mr Kasumu has played an incredibly valuable role during his time at No 10," a Downing Street spokesperson said.

"As he previously set out, he will be leaving government in May - this has been his plan for several months and has not changed. Any suggestion that this decision has been made this week or that this is linked to the CRED report is completely inaccurate," the spokesperson said.

Kasumu had previously handed in his resignation in February but went on to retract it. At the time, he had said he wanted to continue work he had been doing fighting misinformation on COVID-19 vaccines with Britain's black



community, with "the view to leaving at the end of May".

However, according to 'The Politico', Kasumu confirmed his decision to leave Downing Street on Tuesday morning, just as the findings of the CRED report were released.

It comes as racial equality campaigners criticised the findings, and the Opposition Labour Party accused the government of downplaying institutional racism.

Labour's shadow equalities secretary Marsha de Cordova called the report "divisive", adding it was "no wonder" the government was "losing the expertise from their team".

"To have your most senior advisor on ethnic minorities quit as you publish a so-called landmark report on race in the UK is telling of how far removed the Tories are from the everyday lived

experiences of Black, Asian and ethnic minority people," she said.

Former equality and human rights commissioner Lord Simon Woolley, who knows Kasumu, said he had been "disheartened" whilst at No 10 Downing Street.

The House of Lords peer, who has also criticised the CRED findings, told the BBC there is a "crisis at No 10 when it comes to acknowledging and dealing with persistent race inequality".

The report has also attracted criticism from unions and charities - all of whom accuse the commission of downplaying the role of wider factors in racial inequalities.

Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock, a member of the commission, said the report was not denying institutional racism existed, but said they had not discovered evidence of it in the areas they had looked. PTI

Serbia's firefighters auction Cristiano Ronaldo's armband to help sick boy

BELGRADE (TIP): The Portugal captain's armband which Cristiano Ronaldo angrily threw on the ground after his goal was incorrectly disallowed in a soccer World Cup qualifier against Serbia at the weekend, was picked up by Djordje Vukicevic, a duty firefighter.

The blue armband with a white letter C was then put up for a charity auction by Vukicevic and his colleagues from Belgrade's firefighting brigade to collect money for the treatment of six-month-old Gavriilo Djurdjevic from Serbia who is suffering from spinal muscular atrophy.

"Ronaldo was agitated (and) he threw the armband, it fell right next to me," Vukicevic told Reuters on Thursday.

On Saturday, the 36-year-old Ronaldo, who plays his club football for Italian champions Juventus, stormed off the pitch and threw down the captain's armband when he was denied a clear



stoppage-time winner in the 2-2 draw in Serbia.

Many Serbians resort to fundraising and humanitarian auctions to collect money for medical treatments abroad when they cannot get adequate treatment at home.

Vukicevic said he was ready to sell any memorabilia he could collect from players to help Gavriilo's parents collect 2.5 million euros (\$2.94 million) for his treatment, but that the armband was a

score.

"The entire crew agreed this (armband) will go for little Gavriilo," he said.

In the village of Cumic, just outside the city of Kragujevac in central Serbia, Gavriilo's mother Nevena said the family had received donations of around 500,000 euros so far. She added that the proceeds from Ronaldo's armband would be a significant contribution. "We could not believe that some people who do not even know us... would take the armband, auction it and help our child," she said.

So far, bidders have offered around six million dinars (\$60,042.03) during the auction on Serbia's Limundo e-commerce platform.

"This captain's armband, which has attracted the most media attention of all armbands ever, can be yours if you join this charity auction and bid," the advertisement says. Reuters

Dutch couples mark 20th anniversary of world's first same-sex marriages

AMSTERDAM (TIP): Twenty years ago, Dutch couple Gert Kasteel and Dolf Pasker made history when they tied the knot in the world's first legally-recognised same-sex wedding in the Netherlands.

They were among four gay couples—three male and one female—to be married shortly after midnight by the mayor of Amsterdam on April 1, 2001.

On Thursday, they celebrated their 20th anniversaries in small groups or at home due to COVID-19 social distancing rules that prevented large gatherings.

"It's nicer to say to other people 'he's my husband, he's my man'," said Dolf, sitting next to Gert as they flipped through an album of photos and newspaper clippings of the wedding, which made headlines worldwide.

"It has helped me to accept myself." All four gay marriages have passed the test of time. One of the men, Frank Wittebrood, died of a heart attack in 2011 at 55.

Those who participated looked back with pride at having made legal history.

"People told me that the Netherlands would be the first and the last country (to pass same-sex marriages), the rest of



the world won't follow you," said Henk Krol, a lawmaker who supported the bill when it passed the Dutch parliament in 2000.

"Almost 30 countries in the world followed the Dutch example," he said.

Most European Union countries, Britain, the United States, Australia,

Mexico and South Africa are among 29 nations to have legalised same-sex marriage since 2001.

"I'm very proud that it's possible," said Gert, who before he could complete his sentence had Dolf jump in and finish it: "that we could play a little part of it. We made history." Reuters

New Zealand businessman guilty of having child abuse images

WELLINGTON (TIP): One of New Zealand's most well-known businessmen pleaded guilty on Thursday to possessing child sex abuse images, including some of children as young as 2.

Ron Brierley's pleas on three charges in an Australian court have sparked a rarely invoked procedure to strip him of the knighthood he received more than 30 years ago.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she was initiating a forfeiture process for the honour, which requires approval from Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

Brierley faces a maximum 10 years in prison when he is sentenced. He was caught with some images in his luggage at the Sydney International Airport in 2019 and authorities later found more at his Sydney home.

One of his guilty pleas relates to photographs of girls as young as 2 in sexually suggestive poses. Another relates to a data storage device found at his home that allegedly contained more than 1,600 images of child abuse.

Brierley's lawyer has disputed the number of images in question, and the two sides have yet to file an agreed set of facts in the Sydney court. A police prosecutor dropped 14 other charges



following Brierley's guilty pleas.

Now 83, Brierley in the 1970s and 80s executed a series of aggressive business maneuvers that grew Brierley Investments Ltd. into one of the nation's largest corporations. His profile had faded somewhat following the 1987 stock market crash, but he continued to make business deals in New Zealand and in his new home of Australia.

Business publication NBR lists Brierley as among New Zealand's 100

wealthiest people, with an estimated fortune of 220 million New Zealand dollars (\$153 million).

He has donated an undisclosed amount of money to his former high school, Wellington College. The school said that following the guilty pleas, it has begun removing all signs with Brierley's name on them, which includes a theater and sports field.

The court has not yet set a sentencing date. Brierley's bail conditions require him to live at his home in Sydney's exclusive Point Piper. Upon sentencing, he will be added to the New South Wales state Child Protection Register for at least eight years.

Brierley, who appeared frail at the court and walked with a cane, did not answer questions from reporters about his pleas and his lawyer could not immediately be reached for comment.

Denise Ritchie, a long-time campaigner against sexual violence directed at women and children, said she welcomed Ardern's move to strip Brierley of his knighthood.

"Young lives have been irreparably damaged as a result of this predator's behavior," Ritchie said. "This is an abhorrent trade in the rape and molestation of children that is fueled by male demand." — AP

South Korea ruling party faces local election losses, presaging rocky road for President Moon

SEOUL (TIP): Roiled by property scandals and economic failures, South Korea's liberal ruling party looks set to lose the mayoral offices in the two largest cities, making it harder for President Moon Jae-in to achieve the policy goals of his last year in office.

Tens of millions of South Koreans will begin early voting on Friday to elect mayors of the capital Seoul and the port city of Busan among other local offices up for grab in the April 7 election. The vote comes as Moon and his progressive Democratic Party grapple with plunging approval ratings over runaway home prices, deepening inequality and souring ties with North Korea, which could presage a broader political shift ahead of a presidential election in March.

Latest polls predicted a landslide victory by the main opposition People Power Party in both Seoul and Busan. That would mean the ruling party will lose control over the government of the capital, home to nearly 20% of the country's 52 million population, for the first time in a decade.

A Realmeter survey released on Thursday showed voters in all age groups supported the opposition, with double digit leads among respondents in their 20s, 30s and 60s or older.

"If Moon's party loses, it would be a crushing defeat that would bring a political brain death for him and eliminate any momentum to push ahead with his policy agenda," said Kim Hyung-joon, a political scientist at Myongji University in Seoul.

"It doesn't necessarily mean the opposition candidate will be the next president, but a new political force could emerge even within the ruling camp to keep Moon's group in check and try to differentiate from it."

Moon came to power in 2017, promising to generate jobs and create a level playing field for all Koreans where hardworking people can afford a home and raise a family.

But anger at the perceived failures of his economic policies has wiped out earlier surges in Moon's approval ratings driven by the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, dragging down the numbers to all-time lows in recent weeks. The median home price has soared more than 50% in Seoul since 2017, the fastest pace in the world, according to statistics site Numbeo, despite some 25 rounds of cooling measures. An ongoing investigation into accusations of insider land trading involving employees at a state housing developer, politicians and other officials has added fuel to the public uproar. Moon has also touted progress in inter-Korean relations as his major feat, but North Korea only continues to vent degrading criticism at him while refusing to restart denuclearisation talks with South Korea and the United States. Reuters

India records 81,466 fresh Covid-19 cases in biggest spike of 2021

India has reported 81,466 fresh Covid-19 cases in the biggest spike of 2021. It also saw 50,356 discharges and 469 deaths in the last 24 hours, as per the Union Health Ministry. With this, the total number of cases in India has gone up to 1,23,03,131. Total recoveries are at 1,15,25,039 and the number of active cases is at 6,14,696. India's Covid-19 death toll has reached 1,63,396.

Maharashtra continued to report a massive rise in Covid-19 cases with 43,183 fresh cases detected in the last 24 hours. Mumbai was one of the highest contributors recording 8,646 new coronavirus cases within 24 hours, and 18 deaths. In light of the rising cases, Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar on Thursday hinted at a likely restricted lockdown to be announced.

Meanwhile, India launched COVID19 vaccination for all people aged 45 and above from April 1. Seeking to exponentially expand the countrywide anticoronavirus inoculation drive, the Centre has decided to keep all public and private sector COVID19 vaccination centres (CVCs) operational throughout April, including on gazetted holidays.

1.1mn Britons reported having long Covid symptoms

About 1.1 million Britons have reported having long Covid symptoms, figures from the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed.

Of the 1.1 million people from private households, 674,000 were thought to have symptoms that affected their daily life, with 196,000 estimated to have their ability to undertake everyday tasks limited a lot, Xinhua news agency quoted the ONS as saying on Thursday, April 1.

The ONS survey asked people if they had such symptoms as fatigue, muscle pain, and difficulty concentrating over a four-week period ending March 6.

The latest data include those who were self-reported, rather than clinically diagnosed.

Ben Humberstone, head of Health and Life Events at the ONS, told Sky News that the agency was "surprised" by the numbers, adding that "this isn't like other diseases".

"Two thirds of those with self-reported long Covid told us it's limiting their day-to-day activities so they're not able to do the things they would've been able to do before," Humberstone said.

"And when you think this is most prevalent in people of working ages, that's going to have a real impact on the world of work, childcare and things day to day we take for granted."

Global Covid-19 caseload tops 129.4 mn

WASHINGTON (TIP): The overall number of global Covid-19 cases has surpassed 129.4 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 2.82 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Friday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 129,475,545 and 2,826,018, respectively.

The US is the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 30,538,427 and 553,120, respectively, according to the CSSE.

Brazil follows in the second place with 12,839,844 cases and 325,284 fatalities.

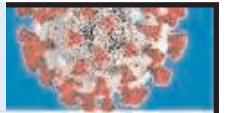
The other countries with more than two million confirmed coronavirus cases are India (12,221,665), France (4,755,779), Russia (4,503,291), the UK (4,364,541), Italy (3,607,083), Turkey (3,357,988), Spain (3,291,394), Germany (2,853,331), Colombia (2,417,826), Argentina (2,363,251), Poland (2,356,970) and Mexico (2,238,887), the CSSE figures showed.

In terms of deaths, Mexico comes in the third place with 203,210 fatalities.

Nations with a death toll of over 50,000 are India (162,927), the UK (127,006), Italy (109,847), Russia (97,594), France (96,106), Germany (76,681), Spain (75,541), Colombia (63,614), Iran (62,759), Argentina (55,941), Poland (53,665), South Africa (52,897) and Peru (52,008).

Source: IANS

TRACKING THE VIRUS



GLOBAL

Cases **129,475,545** | Deaths **2,826,018**

INDIA

Cases **1,23,03,131** | Deaths **1,63,396**



'Pfizer/BioNTech vax highly effective after 6 months'

WASHINGTON (TIP): The ongoing Phase 3 clinical trial of the Pfizer/BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine showed that it remains highly effective for up to six months after the second dose, the two companies announced.

Results from the analysis of 927 confirmed symptomatic coronavirus cases observed in their pivotal Phase 3 study showed the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, BNT162b2, was 91.3 per cent effective against the disease, measured seven days through up to six months after the second dose, Xinhua news agency reported citing a joint statement issued by the companies on Thursday.

The vaccine was 100 per cent effective against severe disease as defined by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and 95.3 per cent effective against severe Covid-19 as defined by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), according to the statement.

Safety data from the Phase 3 study have been collected from more than 12,000 vaccinated participants who have a follow-up time of at least six months after the second dose, demonstrating a favourable safety and tolerability profile, it added. "These data confirm the favorable efficacy and safety profile of our vaccine and position us to submit a Biologics License Application to the US FDA," said Albert Bourla, Chairman and CEO of Pfizer.

"These data also provide the first clinical results that a vaccine can



effectively protect against currently circulating variants, a critical factor to reach herd immunity and end this pandemic for the global population," Ugur Sahin, CEO and co-founder of BioNTech, was quoted as saying in the statement.

The new results came a day after the two companies announced that the vaccine has demonstrated 100 per cent efficacy and robust antibody responses in a trial in adolescents 12 to 15 years of age. The trial enrolled 2,260 adolescents in the age group in the US.

In the trial, 18 cases of Covid-19 were observed in the placebo group versus none in the vaccinated group.

The vaccine elicited SARS-CoV-2-neutralising antibody geometric mean titers (GMTs) of 1,239.5, demonstrating strong immunogenicity in a subset of adolescents one month after the second dose, according to the companies.

The results exceeded those recorded earlier in vaccinated participants aged 16 to 25 years old, according to the trial data.

The two companies plan to submit these data to the FDA and the European Medicines Agency as soon as possible to request expansion of the Emergency Use Authorization and EU Conditional Marketing Authorization for BNT162b2.

Indian American physician Suresh Reddy running for Oak Brook Trustee

CHICAGO (TIP): Dr. Suresh Reddy, immediate past president of American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPIO), has picked up key endorsements as a candidate for a Trustee of Oak Brook, including that of the mayor.

Dr. Reddy is one of the six candidates for trustees for the three openings in the small Illinois town of nearly 10,000 people that goes to the polls on April 6.

"I am grateful to several key leaders of my hometown, Oak Brook," said Dr. Reddy thanking his supporters ahead of the elections in the city about 15 miles west of the Chicago Loop.

Oak Brook Mayor Dr. Gopal Lalmalani and Trustee Moin Saiyed are among those who have endorsed Dr. Reddy's candidacy saying his leadership skills will benefit the residents of the suburban town.

Oak Brook's neighbors include the communities of Villa Park, Elmhurst, Lombard, Oak Brook Terrace, Westchester, Westmont, Clarendon Hills, Downers Grove, and Hinsdale.

Dr. Reddy, who grew up in the suburbs of Hyderabad, Telangana, India, is a financial conservative, who always had a passion for "uniting and bringing people

together," according to a media release.

"It all started during my childhood with bringing neighborhood kids together to play 'gully cricket' and also bringing people together in college to organize events, demonstrations, and educational tours," he says.

"Bringing opposing parties to the table for resolving issues has always been my strength since my schooling days."

Not being satisfied with his achievements as a physician and leader of the Diaspora Physicians group, Dr. Reddy says, "I always had a strong passion for bringing a positive outlook and giving back to the community.

"I got involved in several alumni activities and have facilitated to raise funds to build a million-dollar alumni educational center for my Alma Mater."

Dr. Reddy completed his advanced medical training at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center/Harvard Medical School and has stayed on Harvard Faculty for more than a decade.

After serving as Chief of Interventional Neuroradiology at Harvard, Dr. Reddy moved to the Chicago suburb. "Now that I call Oak Brook my home, I would like to contribute and serve my community by participating in

public service," he says.

"My mantra is: If you don't lead, someone else will lead you," says Dr. Reddy on what motivates him to take on yet another challenging role for the betterment of the community.

"If you don't pick the right leader, the wrong leader will pick you, and as my good friend US Congressman Raja (Krishnamoorthi) says, and if you are not on the table, you will be on the menu," he adds.

As part of his community service, Dr. Reddy has facilitated and organized numerous health camps and workshops, with special emphasis on CPR training, obesity prevention in conjunction with Chicago Medical Society.

During the Covid pandemic, he facilitated more than a 100 webinars and health awareness events. He also facilitated honoring of more than 10,000 nurses who work selflessly in the line of duty against Covid in over 100 hospitals in over 40 states including Alaska.

"We would like to continue and strengthen many programs and services the city offers to all sections of the people." Dr. Reddy says committing himself to ensure that Oak Brook lives up to its name as a model village.



Dr. Suresh Reddy is one of the six candidates for trustees for the three openings in the small Illinois town of nearly 10,000 people that goes to the polls on April 6.

"More than ever, fiscal conservatism and wise spending, has become the most important attribute for a financially secure future," he says seeking "a chance to perform my public service with utmost integrity and dignity to the office."

His wife Leela, who was born and raised in Greenville, South Carolina was previously a Director of Network Health Boston, a HMO Health Plan in Boston.

Their son, Rohun is currently doing his MBA and JD at Kellogg School of Management and Pritzker School of Law at Northwestern University.

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Indian IT professionals likely to benefit as Biden lets Trump era H-1B visa ban expire

the US of applicants for several temporary or "non-immigrant" visa categories, including H-1B, arguing that these visas presented a risk to the US labor market during the economic recovery.

On December 31, Trump extended the order to March 31, 2021, noting that an extension was warranted as the pandemic continued to disrupt American lives, and high levels of unemployment and job loss were still presenting serious economic challenges to workers across the US.

Biden did not issue a fresh proclamation for the ban on H-1B visas to continue after March 31.

He had promised to lift the suspension on H-1B visas, saying Trump's immigration policies were cruel.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The expiry of the Trump's proclamation would now result in the issuing of H-1B visas by American diplomatic missions overseas that would result in US companies bringing in

talented technology professionals inside the country.

No new proclamation was issued by Biden till Wednesday midnight, resulting in the automatic end to the ban on issuing of fresh H-1B visas.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the White House would not renew a ban on H-1B, and other work-based visas imposed last year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that is set to expire on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a Republican Senator from Missouri on Wednesday urged Biden to issue a fresh proclamation to continue with the H-1B visa ban.

"I write today to urge you to extend the freeze on temporary foreign worker entries into the United States that, without intervention, will expire today," Senator Josh Hawley wrote in a letter to Biden.

"The presidential proclamation suspending entry of certain temporary workers into the US has protected Americans suffering from the pandemic-induced economic crisis. With millions of struggling Americans out of work - and millions more desperate to make ends meet - now is not the time to open the floodgates to thousands of foreign workers competing with American workers for scarce jobs and resources," he wrote.

PNB fraud: Warrant against Nirav Modi's sister, brother-

in-law kept in abeyance

(NBWs) issued against them, on the grounds that they had turned approvers in the case.

Modi, who is currently lodged in a UK prison, Choksi and others are being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) money laundering case since 2018.

Purvi (47) is a Belgian national, while her husband is a British citizen, and the couple, who are stated to be based abroad, have never joined the probe in the case.

Purvi was arraigned as an accused in the case, where multiple chargesheets have been filed by the ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). (Source: PTI)

Trump enters FB via daughter-in-law's Page, kicked off again

along with a warning that posting further content would result in account limitations.

Donald Trump has been banned from Facebook since the January 6th attack on Capitol Hill.

The independent Facebook Oversight Board is asking the public to submit their feedback on whether the decision by the social network to suspend former US President Donald Trump's accounts for an indefinite period after the Capitol chaos on January 6 was right.



The two Trump posts in question include the one-minute video he posted to his account on January 6 as rioters were still present in the Capitol and backup law enforcement personnel were en route.

Facebook removed the video and took down the post. It later banned Trump from its platform and Instagram for 24 hours and then extended it indefinitely.

Home remedies to deal with pigmentation

We being Indians face a lot of pigmentation especially around the mouth and while we try our best to maintain a proper skincare routine, patchy skin does not seem to find an escape. Hyperpigmentation is a skin issue where a patch of the skin creates more melanin than the rest of the face resulting in patchy skin. While pigmentation can be a result of an underlying medical condition, most patches can be dealt with at home and here are some of the remedies that you can use:

Besan scrub

It is necessary to scrub off the excess dead skin cells and the dry upper layer of the skin for the body to create a new one. This is where homemade scrub can be useful.

All you need:

- 1 tablespoon of besan aka gram flour
- 1 pinch of turmeric
- Cold milk or yoghurt

Directions:

- Mix all the ingredients in a bowl to create a smooth paste.
- Apply it generously on your face and neck and let it sit for 10 minutes.
- Once it's almost dry, scrub off the mask with a damp hand. Make sure to massage off the mask in circular motions and be gentle.
- Once the mask is off, rinse your face with cold water and moisturise after.
- Use this scrubbing technique twice a week to see visible results.

Green tea



Green tea is an ingredient that is filled with antioxidants that help clear out your skin and reduce dark patches.

All you need:

- 2 green tea bags

How to use:

- Steep green tea in hot water for about two minutes and let the tea bags rest aside.
- Once the tea bags are warm enough to touch, use them on problematic areas on your skin.
- Leave it on for about 10 minutes and use this method twice a day to see visible results.
- You can even use the steeped green tea as a natural toner for better results.

Methods to dry flowers to enjoy your favorite blooms year-round

Dry flowers in a press

The process of pressing flowers involves drying flower petals by using either a flower press or a heavy book to press the moisture out of the petals. The best time to press flowers using this method is when they are fresh and dry.

To dry flowers with a heavy book, arrange the flowers between sheets of unbleached paper, and put them inside the pages of the book. This will not only absorb moisture from the flowers, but protect the pages of your book.

Once the book is closed, you can add a heavy item such as a paper weight to apply pressure. Oweh suggests refraining from using textured paper, such as paper towels, that could leave unwanted imprints or breaks in the dried petals.

Air-dry flowers

The air-drying method lets nature do all the work, simply by hanging your blooms.

Use larger bouquets and arrangements for this method, letting them air dry when they are in mid-bloom.

With air-drying, start by securing your bunch of flowers with a piece of string or rubber band and hang them upside down in a cool, dark place with good air circulation.

While this method can take a few weeks depending on the flower, it is the least expensive and less intensive method. Your flowers will be ready as soon as they are dry to the touch and have slightly shriveled and faded in color.

Keep in mind that when arranging your dried flowers, some petals and leaves may crumble or fall. Visualize your arrangement before preparing and be mindful of the flowers' fragility.

To keep your dried flowers pristine and slow down the fading process, Oweh recommends spraying your



flowers with hairspray.

Dry flowers in silica gel

Found in many packaged products, silica gel absorbs and holds water, making it the perfect material to dry flowers in. Drying flowers using silica gel is considered the best method and leaves flowers looking the most realistic, according to Oweh. In this process, it is common to use a variety of fresh, single flowers in full bloom.

Before using this method, gear up with a protective mask and gloves to avoid inhaling the non-toxic silica gel dust and to prevent cleaning silica gel off your hands. The first step is to fill your container with one to two inches of silica gel, then place flowers face up and slowly continue to pour over the flowers, making sure petals do not get flattened.

Source: Business Insider



Kaanji: The Indian pro-biotic drink

In the month of February when you visit the vegetable market, you will see these dark purple color carrots. Fermented in the Sun with water, salt and mustard powder, these carrots make an excellent probiotic drink.

In India it is called Kaanji. It is rich in antioxidants, dietary fibre, vitamin C, potassium & magnesium. It also boosts your digestion thereby boosting your immune system. Kaanji is the miracle health drink. Easy to prepare and full of health benefits. What else one can ask for? All you need is black carrots, Black salt, mustard seeds, red chillies and water. In the absence of Black carrots you can use ¾ part red carrots and ¼ part beetroot for that beautiful colour. But I prefer black carrots any day since they taste good as well as produce a very vibrant colour.

These are all mixed with water and fermented in the Sun for 4 to 5 days. You can strain it after five days and drink immediately or keep it in a fridge. The carrots in the kaanji can be used as pickle and tastes awesome with khichdi or rice. Always use glass or terracotta pots for the fermentation process. The benefit of using terracotta pot is that it will cool in a natural way and there is no need for refrigerating the Kanji. My mother used to make it in a big terracotta pot and keep it in the sun. It is pungent in taste so as a kid I didn't relish it so much. But my mother made it compulsory to drink this because of its health benefits. But as I grew up I started relishing it as well as preparing it myself. It has the balance of sourness and sweetness. So enjoy this super healthy, gut friendly drink. It is like Kamboocha made in your own home.

We need

6 Black Carrots, 2 Tbsp Mustard Powder (rai), 2 Tbsp Black Salt, 1 Tsp Red Chilli Powder or Black pepper powder, 7 glasses of Water

Here We go

- Cut carrots in thin strips.
- In a glass jar drop carrots slices, black salt, red chilli powder, mustard powder.
- Fill with seven to eight glasses of water.
- Cover it with a lid.
- Keep it in the Sun and let it ferment for 4 to 5 days. Stir it daily.
- Strain and Enjoy this gut friendly Kaanji with or without ice.



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Study suggests women are 3 to 6 times more prone to knee injuries

A new study has found that social and not just biological factors are responsible for increased knee injuries among girls and women. The findings of the study were published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. Current approaches to a common and debilitating knee injury that occurs more frequently for women than men have focused for too long on biology at the expense of understanding social factors, said the authors of the study.

Girls and women are said to be between three to six times more likely to suffer an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury, where one of the key ligaments that helps to stabilise the knee joint is damaged.

The devastating injury, which in extreme cases can be career-ending for professional sportspeople, commonly occurs during sports that involve sudden changes in direction (for example basketball, football/soccer, tennis).

The difference in injury rates for men and women has not changed for two decades, but, this might be partly due to how injury prevention and management has been approached to date. Writing in the BJSM the authors argued that much of the focus still centres on biological and hormonal factors, with little attention paid to how sex-based factors are affected by gender and might influence each other.

They suggested that gendered experiences matter in shaping girls' and women's participation in sport



as well as disparities in injury outcomes. They demonstrated how this could play out across the life course with gendered expectations of physical abilities (e.g. 'throw like a girl'), to inequitable access to funding, training, and facilities for women's sport (for example disparities in access to weight training).

Finally, they suggested there may be a difference between post-injury rehabilitation for men and women recovering from an ACL injury. They say that these social and environmental factors play a much bigger role in how sports injuries occur than once thought, and urge that much more attention be given to these topics.

Dr Sheree Bekker from the Department for Health at the University of Bath (UK) explained, "We wanted to unpack the biases and assumptions that we were seeing in research into and practice around sports injuries in girls and women. Specifically, we wanted to challenge the increasingly pervasive idea that this is simply a problem for girls/women because they are inherently prone to injury just because of their female biology. Approaching ACL injury prevention and management from a strictly biological view can propagate sexism in sport with detrimental consequences for girls and women."



Caffeine intake during pregnancy linked to smaller babies

Pregnant women who consumed caffeine as little as half a cup of coffee a day on an average had slightly smaller babies than pregnant women who did not consume caffeinated beverages, a new study revealed.

The study found corresponding reductions in size and lean body mass for infants whose mothers consumed below the 200 milligrams of caffeine per day—about two cups of coffee—believed to increase risks to the fetus.

Smaller birth size can place infants at higher risk of obesity, heart disease and diabetes later in life.

"Until we learn more, our results suggest it might be prudent to limit or forego caffeine-containing beverages during pregnancy," said researcher Katherine L. Grantz from the NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

For the study, published in the JAMA Network Open, A the team analyzed data on more than 2,000 racially and ethnically diverse women at 12 clinical sites who were enrolled from 8 to 13 weeks of pregnancy.

From weeks 10 to 13 of pregnancy, the women provided a blood sample that was later analyzed for caffeine and paraxanthine, a compound produced when caffeine is broken down in the body.

Compared to infants born to women with now or minimal blood levels of caffeine, infants born to women who had the highest blood levels of caffeine at enrollment were an average of 84 grams lighter at birth (about three ounces), were 0.44 centimeters shorter (about .17 inches), and had head circumferences 0.28 centimeters smaller (about 0.11 inches).

Based on the women's own estimates of the beverages they drank, women who consumed about 50 milligrams of caffeine a day (equivalent to a half cup of coffee) had infants 66 grams (about 2.3 ounces) lighter than infants born to non-caffeine consumers. Similarly, infants born to the caffeine consumers also had thigh circumferences 0.32 centimeters smaller (about 0.13 inches).

Pfizer, Moderna vaccines highly effective after first shot in real-world use

COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer Inc with BioNTech SE and Moderna Inc reduced risk of infection by 80 per cent two weeks or more after the first of two shots, according to data from a real-world US study.

The risk of infection fell 90 per cent by two weeks after the second shot, the study of nearly 4,000 US healthcare personnel and first responders found.

The results validate earlier studies that had indicated the vaccines begin to work soon after a first dose, and confirm that they also prevent asymptomatic infections.

Some countries dealing with limited vaccine supplies have pushed back schedules for second doses with the hope of getting some protection to more people. U.S. public health officials, however, continue to recommend two doses be given on the schedule authorized by regulators based on clinical trials.

The study by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) evaluated the vaccines' ability to protect against infection, including infections that did not cause symptoms. Previous clinical trials by the companies evaluated their vaccine's efficacy in preventing illness from COVID-19, but those studies would have missed asymptomatic infections.

The findings from of the real-world use of these messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines also confirm the



efficacy demonstrated in the large controlled clinical trials conducted before they received emergency use authorizations from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The study looked at the effectiveness of the mRNA vaccines among 3,950 participants in six states over a 13-week period from Dec. 14, 2020 to March 13, 2021. About 74% had at least one shot, and tests were conducted weekly to catch any infections without symptoms. *Source: Reuters*

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YouTube experimenting with hiding dislikes to protect creators

Google-owned YouTube has confirmed it is experimenting with hiding dislikes to protect creators and channels from targeted attacks to downvote their videos.

YouTube said in a tweet late on Wednesday that in response to creator feedback around well-being and targeted dislike campaigns, it is testing a few new designs that don't show the public dislike count.

"Creators, you'll still be able to see the exact number of likes and dislikes in YouTube Studio. For viewers, if you're in the experiment, you can still like or dislike a video to share feedback with creators and help tune the recommendations you see on YouTube," the company announced.

Currently, data for both likes and dislikes are available in a creator's individual YouTube Studio page, but only likes will be displayed publicly on a video.

YouTube said it is not testing hiding dislikes on all creators' videos but with a select few to begin with and gather insights.

NASA exchanges data of its Mars mission with India, China

The US space agency NASA has exchanged data of its current Mars mission with its counterparts in China, India, the UAE and the European Space Agency to lower the risk of a collision as their spacecraft were also currently hovering the red planet, a media report said on Wednesday.

The purpose of exchanges was to lower the risk of a collision, as their spacecraft are orbiting the red planet, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported, quoting a NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) statement as saying.

"To assure the safety of our respective missions, NASA is coordinating with the UAE, European Space Agency, Indian Space Research Organisation and the China National Space Administration, all of which have spacecraft in orbit around Mars, to exchange information on our respective Mars missions to ensure the safety of our respective spacecraft," NASA's statement said.

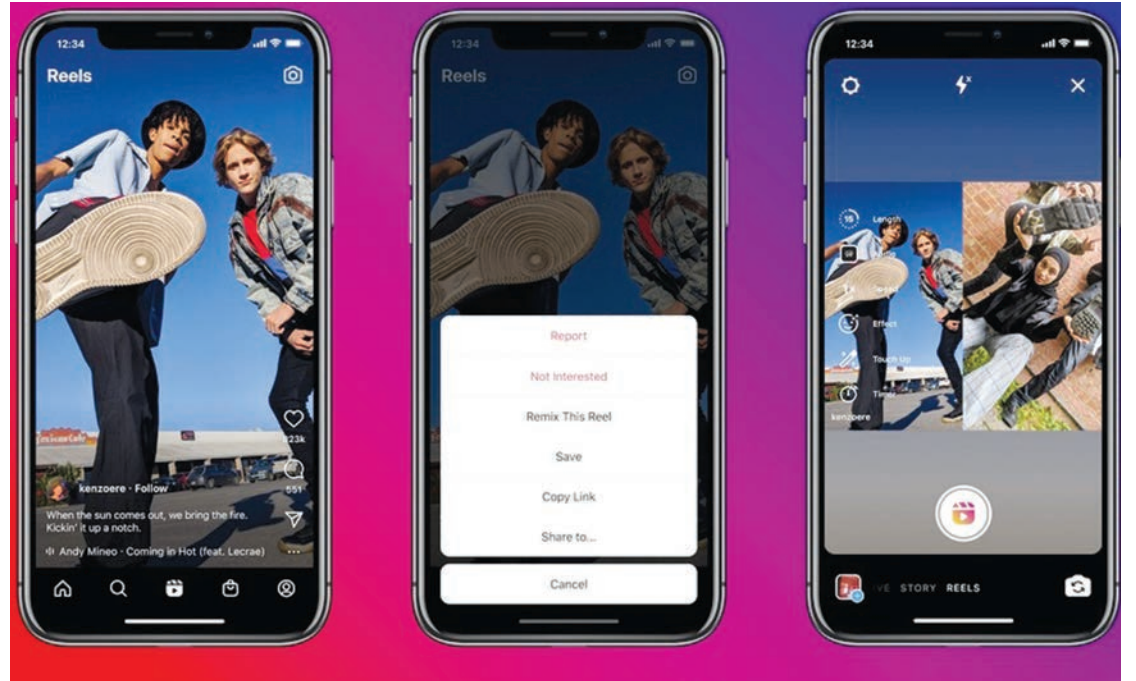
"This limited exchange of information is consistent with customary good practices used to ensure effective communication among satellite operators and spacecraft safety in orbit," the report said.

Instagram launches TikTok Duet-like feature 'Remix' for Reels

Instagram has launched another TikTok-inspired feature to Reels. It now allows users to remix a Reel by pairing their video with other users. It's similar to TikTok Duets which are quite popular on the short video app. Instagram has been testing this feature since October last year allowing select users to experiment with, and it is now available to all globally.

The Instagram Reels remix feature will be enabled by default for any new Reel uploaded. But users who wish to have their older Reels remixed will have to manually enable it. This can be done by tapping on the three dot menu button of the Reel, and choosing "enable remixing".

The steps to remix a Reel are also the same with users having to tap on the menu button, and select "Remix this Reel". A new screen will appear with the original Reel playing on the left side, and the right side showing the new video that will go up. Users can either record a new



With Remix, Instagram users can now pair videos with other users' Reels.

video or choose an existing one from their phone. The editing options are the same for remixing a Reel, and these include adding effects, timer, adjusting the speed, adding audio and more.

As mentioned above, Instagram will enable remixing by default for any new Reel upload. There is an option though to disable remixing, and one can do this by opening Settings > Privacy

> Reels > Enable remixing. Users simply have to toggle off the option to disable remixing their Reels. The feature is now live on Instagram for all users globally on Android and iOS.

Facebook to let you turn off algorithmic ranking in News Feed

Facebook on Wednesday introduced several features to give users more control over their News Feed, including the ability to turn off the feeds algorithmic ranking and display content in order it was posted. The social network said it is making it easier to sort and browse News Feed, giving users more control over what you see.

"Now, you can control your commenting audience for a given public post by choosing from a menu of options ranging from anyone who can see the post to only the people and Pages you tag," the company said in a statement.

The company recently launched 'Favorites', a new tool where the users can control and prioritise posts from the friends and Pages they care about most in News Feed.

By selecting up to 30 friends and Pages to include in Favorites, their posts will appear higher in ranked News Feed and can also be viewed as a separate filter.

People who use Favorites frequently can access it from the Feed Filter Bar, a new menu at the top of News Feed.

Android app users can access the Feed Filter Bar when they scroll up on News Feed. The same functionality will be available in the iOS app in the coming weeks.



LinkedIn working on Clubhouse-like audio networking feature

Inspired by the soaring success of invite-only audio chat app Clubhouse, Microsoft-owned LinkedIn is now working on a similar app for over 740 million members in more than 200 countries.

The leading professional networking platform confirmed the move to TechCrunch, saying that it is working on an audio networking feature.

"We're doing some early tests to create a unique audio experience connected to your professional identity," LinkedIn said in a statement.

"We're looking at how we can bring audio to other parts of LinkedIn such as events and groups, to give our members even more ways to connect to their community," the company said on Tuesday.

According to LinkedIn, it will start beta testing of the new audio chat feature soon.

Alarmed at the growing popularity of Clubhouse, several tech giants have begun to a rival app and Twitter has finally started testing 'Spaces' on Android.

Xiaomi sells Redmi Note 10 series smartphones worth Rs 500 cr

Xiaomi claims that it has managed to sell Redmi Note 10 series smartphones worth Rs 500 crore, within first two weeks of sale across all platforms. The Redmi Note 10 line-up was launched month in India and includes three smartphones Redmi Note 10, Redmi Note 10 Pro and Redmi Note 10 Pro Max. The smartphones are priced between Rs 11,999 and Rs 21,999 for different variants.

Redmi Note 10, Redmi Note 10 Pro and Redmi Note 10 Pro Max went on sale on 16th, 17th and 18th March respectively, across all platforms. All three smartphones were sold within minutes even though few of their variants were not available. The series will once again go on sale in India on April 1 at 12 noon.

The Note 10 Pro Max costs Rs 18,999 for the 6GB RAM and 64GB storage model, while the 6GB RAM and 128GB variant retails for Rs 19,999 and the 8GB RAM and 128GB option is priced at Rs 21,999.



Microsoft wins US\$22 billion US Army contract for augmented reality gear

SAN FRANCISCO (TIP): Microsoft has won a Pentagon contract for augmented reality headgear for soldiers worth US\$21.88 billion over the next decade, the company and the United States military announced on Wednesday (Mar 31).

The headsets, based on the commercially available HoloLens, will make soldiers safer and more effective, according to Microsoft technical fellow Alex Kipman, who developed the device.

The Department of Defense (DOD) said the production agreement is for five years with a renewal option - that could make the contract worth "in excess of US\$21.88 billion" over 10 years, a Pentagon official said in a statement.

Microsoft will rapidly start producing the so-called Integrated Augmentation System under the contract.

The award aims "to deliver next-generation night vision and situational awareness capabilities to the Close Combat Force at the speed of relevance", the Pentagon said.

A head-mounted display used by soldiers for battle and training employs sensors for night and thermal vision in addition to providing data for help in engaging targets and making tactical decisions, officials said.

"The program delivers enhanced situational awareness, enabling information sharing and decision-making in a variety of scenarios," Kipman said in a blog post.

The contract shows that Microsoft can make money from its augmented reality offerings with the military, and likely heralds expanded uses by private businesses as well as consumers, according to Wedbush analyst Dan Ives.

"The second and potentially most important point is this deal just further drills in the narrative that Microsoft is tightening its grip on deals within the DOD and Pentagon," Ives said in a note to investors.

The Pentagon late last year said it was sticking with its decision to award a US\$10 billion cloud computing contract to Microsoft, despite Amazon's claims that former president Donald Trump improperly influenced the



process.

"In a cloud arms race, Microsoft right now has the momentum," Ives said.

The company, based in Redmond, Washington, recently launched a platform called Mesh, in which long-distance coworkers are able to collaborate as if they were in the same room, using augmented reality glasses and cloud computing power.

"One of the easiest ways to think about it is Microsoft Mesh connects the physical and digital worlds, allowing us to transcend the traditional boundaries of space and time," co-creator Simon Skaria said in a video presentation.

Mesh is powered by Azure cloud computing systems that combine data centre processing power with artificial intelligence.

HoloLens headgear, with a US\$3,500 price tag, overlays digital imagery on real-world settings, but the Mesh platform has the potential to be synced to virtual reality gear such as Facebook-owned Oculus as well as smartphones, according to Kipman.

Apple, Google and Facebook are among the tech titans investing in mixed reality.

Microsoft expects outside developers and partners to build applications on Mesh, and is working to integrate it in products such as the Teams virtual collaboration service.

Source: Reuters

US FAA approves design of 737 MAX 8200 variant

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said on Wednesday it had approved the design for the Boeing 737-8200, part of the Boeing 737 MAX series, a necessary step before the U.S. planemaker can begin delivering the airplanes to Ryanair.

The FAA said the 737-8200 incorporates all of the design improvements that were part the 20-month review of the 737 MAX that led to the ungrounding of the MAX in November, more than a year after two fatal crashes killed 346 people.

Ryanair first ordered the 737-8200 plane, which seats 197 passengers, in 2014. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency still must approve the aircraft, a move that could come soon after the FAA approval.

Boeing said Wednesday it would "continue to work with global regulators to safely return the 737-8 and -9 to service. Our teams are also focused on ensuring future members of the 737 family meet all regulatory requirements."



Inflation exceptionally high in India: Moody's

NEW DELHI (TIP): India's inflation is at "uncomfortably high" level, which is an exception among Asian economies, Moody's Analytics said on Tuesday. Higher fuel prices will keep upward pressure on retail inflation and keep the RBI from offering further rate cuts, said Moody's Analytics, a financial intelligence company.

Retail inflation rose to 5% in February, from 4.1% in January. The RBI mainly takes into account retail inflation while deciding on the monetary policy.

Core inflation (which excludes food, fuel and light) was up 5.6% in February, from 5.3% in January, Moody's Analytics said, adding India's inflation is "uncomfortably high".

In its macro roundup, Moody's Analytics said inflation is subdued in most of Asia, and expected to only gradually pick up over 2021 because of rising oil prices and economies starting to reopen. Brent crude has climbed 26% this year at around \$64 per barrel. It was around \$30 per barrel in March 2020, when the Covid crisis was near its peak.

"India and the Philippines are exceptions. In these economies, inflation is above comfort levels, adding to the list of challenges for policymakers," it said.



Government reverses decision to cut small savings rates

NEW DELHI (TIP): The sharp reduction in small savings rates, which was to take effect from April 1, has been withdrawn by the government.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Thursday morning that the "orders issued by oversight shall be withdrawn". The government had on Wednesday cut interest rates on various small savings schemes sharply by 40-110 basis points. The revised rates were to come into effect from April 1 and remain in effect till June 30.

"Interest rates of small savings schemes of GoI (Government of India) shall continue to be at the rates which existed in the last quarter of 2020-2021, ie, rates that prevailed as of March 2021. Orders issued by oversight shall be withdrawn," Sitharaman said in a tweet at 7.54 am.

Small saving rates are linked to yields on benchmark government bonds, which have fallen over the last one year as the Reserve Bank of India cut rates to support the economy. In a circular on Wednesday,



the Finance Ministry said the interest rate on savings deposits has been reduced to 3.5 per cent from 4 per cent for the first quarter of 2021-22. Rates on time deposits were also slashed significantly.

Among the most popular fixed income products, Public Provident Fund (PPF) was to fetch a rate of 6.4 per cent, down from 7.1 per cent earlier. National Savings Certificate (NSC) was to yield 5.9 per cent, down from 6.8 per cent earlier, while rates on the girl child savings scheme Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana would fall to 6.9 per cent from 7.6 per cent earlier.

Shree Ganeshaya Namah



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Chirag Bejan Daruwalla with his father late Bejan Daruwalla

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**WEEKLY HOROSCOPE
April 5 to April 11, 2021**

ARIES : Your relationships will progressively get better this week. Although things will go great for you this week, it won't come as a surprise for you because you have been working really hard to be a better version of yourself as well as putting a lot of effort into every relationship of yours.

TAURUS : You will enjoy a lot of solo time and explore nature this week. Use this time to improve your health both mentally and physically. Go on some hikes you have wanted to go for a while now. If you do not think about your future, your life will feel great this week.

GEMINI : Your health might remain a little upset this week. You can help yourself by maintaining a good diet and focusing on hydrating and nourishing your body which will help you maintain a balance internally. A mix of green vegetables and raw food will give you the energy to go forward. Only focus on eating nutritious food this week and exercise regularly as well.

CANCER : Irrational fights in the family might arise at the beginning of the week, but nothing major that you need to worry about. If you lay low and learn to control your anger and not be impulsive you will be able to calm the situation down and turn things in positively very quickly. You have to be proactive in solving arguments this week.

LEO : Your love life is progressing rapidly. Taking the next step in your relationship will be a good idea this week as luck stands in the support of your sign. Your property disputes that have been stuck for a

long time will be resolved this week as well hence a lot of positive things will happen for you. You need not worry about any obstacles with this dispute as everything will go smoothly.

VIRGO : Your relationship demands you to step up and pull your weight this week. Try to be a better partner this week, try practicing patience, it comes a little hard to you and but you can get there if you try. Being loving and kind is the option you should go for this week because you need to work on being a better person.

LIBRA : You will take some classes you have been wanting to for a while now with your partner today which will bring both of you a lot closer. This emotional availability from your end will make you and your partner feel very secured, satisfied and happy in your relationship. It is easy for your significant other to align with your energies this week.

SCORPIO : Your love life is blossoming this week. You will experience love in abundance this week. You will feel blessed to have your partner this week because you will face a lot of troubles wherein your partner will be your biggest support system through all thick and thin. You will realize today that they are a keeper and you will immediately start planning for your future together this week itself.

SAGITTARIUS : Your energies will be high this week due to planetary alignment in your favor. It is a good week for you to relax and enjoy. If you're single you'll come across many new love interests. Venus is dominant in your sign and will provide you with a lot

of luck in all matters of love.

CAPRICORN : You will be able to get through things that you were stuck at since a long time this week. It will be easy to focus on work and the new prospect this week as the energies align in your favor a lot this week. Learn what works for you in calming your energies this week. This new-found confidence will keep you happy throughout the week. Your love life might be troublesome for you this week. Some unexpected negative behavior from your partner might tick you off at the beginning of this week. This week might also get you slightly overwhelmed but don't lose your focus. Over thinking about the future will harm your current projects.

AQUARIUS : New opportunities will knock on your door this week, and they can really work in your favor in the near future. Try to worship lord Shiva by chanting the mantra 'Om Namah Shivaya' 11 times every day in this week; it will be beneficial for your personal as well as professional life. Your Health might create minor inconveniences this week. Work on improving your health by taking time to hydrate and exercise. Relaxation exercises will help you navigate through the week very well.

PISCES : You will come across some amazing strangers this week. You will experience a great social life this week, which will keep you occupied throughout the week. You will realize this week that you're doing great in your life. Consider that the stars are in your favor the entire week. Great things are coming your way this week.

**BIRTHDAY HOROSCOPE
April 5 to April 11, 2021**

APRIL 5: You might face some drama in your family at the beginning of the day. Although the drama does not include you directly, choosing between two people you love will be difficult for you. You might want to be cautious about foods that you consume today because your health is in a sensitive state and you do not want to mess it up hence try to eat as healthy as you can and also make some time for exercising today.

APRIL 6: You will receive a lot of compliments from your partner, friends and family because you have been working really hard on your business. You will be able to celebrate to the fullest today because your health will be amazing today, you will feel like you're extremely energized and ready to dance the day away today. Although nothing major, delay in seeking help won't allow you to enjoy anything else. Hence seek help and relief as quickly as you can. Take time out to rest and for self-care as well.

APRIL 7: Positive news today will boost your mood and motivate you to move out of your home, socialize and be expressive about your ideas more in your workplace. You will find finances in abundance today. Budget and financial planning will help you manage your finances better. You should focus on improving your savings instead of spending today.

APRIL 8: Today will be fruitful for your profession, but only if you stay focused and do not get distracted by the celebrations around you. You need to be ready for a whole day of work as you have a lot of work piled on. You are in the pink of your health today. Your mood, energy levels and strength are all really high today. You do not need to worry about your health today at all.

APRIL 9: Your relationship which has been stuck at the same stage for a while now will move forward today. You will experience a new sense of being today as your relationship moves forward due to your efforts. You can do this by engaging yourself in some creative work and by shrugging off all negative energies. You also need to keep an account of what and how much you are eating today as chances of

digestive issues are high for you.

APRIL 10: Positive energies are mild for you today. You have been lazy for a while now and the consequences of that are showing up today. While it might seem like a negative thing, it is actually good for you today and it will help you in the long run to be more responsible. You will feel really content and secure in your relationship today. You can rest assured that this is the person you want to spend the rest of your life with and work on being the best partner yourself.

APRIL 11: Everyone that comes across your work will be infatuated with the way you present your work today. Today you will earn yourself a lot of business prospects and finances. You will have a great day at work today and you feel settled financially and emotionally. Keep your diet rich with nutrition and proteins to improve your stamina. You will realize the value of your health and then work hard to maintain it. You might also get some neck and backache today due to poor posture for a long duration of time.

Indian American Rupa Ranga Puttagunta nominated as federal judge

WASHINGTON(TIP): President Joe Biden has announced his intent to nominate Indian American Rupa Ranga Puttagunta as a federal judge among a slate of 11 "trailblazing" judicial nominees reflecting "the full diversity of the American people."

If confirmed by the US Senate, Puttagunta would be the first Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) woman to serve on the US District Court for the District of Columbia, the White House said.

Other "groundbreaking nominees" include three African American women chosen for Circuit Court vacancies and one who would be the first Muslim American federal judge in US history, it said. "This trailblazing slate of nominees draws from the very best and brightest minds of the American legal profession," Biden said.

"Each is deeply qualified and prepared to deliver justice faithfully under our Constitution and impartially to the American people - and together they represent the broad diversity of background, experience, and perspective that makes our nation strong."

"These highly-qualified candidates reflect the president's deeply-held conviction that the federal bench should reflect the full diversity of the American



If confirmed by the US Senate, Puttagunta would be the first Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) woman to serve on the US District Court for the District of Columbia, the White House said.

people - both in background and in professional experience," the White House said.

Puttagunta, nominee for the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, currently serves as an Administrative Judge for the DC Rental Housing Commission. Prior to joining the Commission in 2019, Puttagunta was a solo practitioner from 2013 to 2019, representing indigent criminal defendants in trial and on appeal.

Before opening her own practice, Judge Puttagunta practiced family and appellate law at Delaney McKinney, LLP from 2012 to 2013.

While working on domestic relations matters in private practice, Puttagunta also provided hundreds of hours of pro

bono legal services by volunteering at DC Superior Court's Family Court Self-Help Center and Attorney Negotiator Program and representing victims of domestic violence in DC Superior Court.

Puttagunta began her legal career as a law clerk for Judge William M. Jackson of the DC Superior Court from 2008 to 2010, as well as the Senior Judges of the DC Court of Appeals from 2010 to 2011.

Puttagunta received her JD from Ohio State Moritz College of Law in 2007 and her BA. from Vassar College in 2002.

Among the nominees announced Tuesday Zahid N Quraishi of Pakistani descent, who if confirmed by the Senate would be the first Muslim American federal judge in US history.

Nominee for the US District Court for the District of New Jersey, Quraishi is currently Magistrate Judge in the same court since 2019.

Prior to that Quraishi was a partner at Riker Danzig where he chaired the firm's White Collar Criminal Defense and Investigations Group and served as his firm's first Chief Diversity Officer.

The South Asian Bar Association welcomed the nominations of Puttagunta and Quraishi, tweeting, "We are proud to see Judges Rupa Ranga Puttagunta and Zahid Quraishi on the list" of Biden's judicial nominees.

Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna pushes for USD 10-trillion re-industrialization plan



"What we're saying is, let's at least have consensus on re-industrializing America. That's productive investment", Khanna said.

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna has pushed for a massive USD 10 trillion investment plan over a decade to re-industrialize the country.

On the eve of President Joe Biden unveiling his economic vision, Khanna, in an interview to 'Fox News' on Tuesday, March 30, said there was a need for a massive investment to re-industrialize US.

"What we're saying is, let's at least have consensus on re-industrializing America. That's productive investment," he said. "Up to USD 10 trillion over 10 years to re-industrialize America, so that we're producing batteries here, electric vehicles here, and having critical manufacturing supplies here."

"But I do think that we have to pay for it. I mean, we have to pay for most of it. A start would be to actually collect taxes from those who are evading taxes. Larry Summers has a proposal that, if we just enforced the tax on people who aren't paying tax right now, we could collect up to USD 1.2 trillion in 10 years. So, that's what I would say is the first starting point," he said.

Responding to a question, Khanna said he was completely opposed to a mileage tax or a gas tax.

"That hurts working families. That hurts people in rural America who have to commute long distances. I think it would be tone-deaf to have that kind of a tax," he said.

"What I'm talking about in terms of collecting taxes isn't just going after fraud and abuse. Right now, a lot of business income is not disclosed. If you created a new IRS form that required banks to have the disclosure of input and output in terms of accounts, you would be able to collect a lot more," he added.

Khanna supported Biden's move to raise rates on those making over USD 400,000, and raising top marginal rates on them.

"I would consider a financial transaction tax on speculation. I would rather our money be going to producing batteries. Right now, China is eating our lunch when it comes to lithium-ion battery production. They get all of the cobalt from the Democratic Republic of Congo," he said.

"Don't we want America producing those lithium-ion batteries? Don't we want to be producing the electric vehicles? Don't we want to be producing critical manufacturing supplies? We couldn't even have masks. I mean, in World War II, we armed our entire military," Khanna said.

A Sikh man goes missing in Pakistan

PESHAWAR (TIP): A Sikh man has been missing from northwest Pakistan's Peshawar city since Wednesday, March 31 night and police have arrested three suspects for interrogation, according to officials.

Avinash Singh, in his 20s, went missing from the Gulberg area of Peshawar Cantonment.

His brother Pervinder Singh registered a case in the West Cantonment Police Station.

City police Chief Ahsan Abbas immediately formed an investigation team headed by the Superintendent of Police, Cantonment, Tahir Shah.

The investigation team collected mobile data of the Sikh man and took into custody three suspects for interrogation, according to officials.



Pervinder Singh, brother of the missing young man Avinash Singh, in his twenties, registered a case in the West Cantonment Police Station, Peshawar

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In various Hindu scriptures, we can find some interesting Curses (shraaps) that have been addressed to gods and mortals that apparently changed the course of divine history.

The Curse of Bhrgu



After getting tired of getting whipped by Devas on every occasion, Shukracharya (the Guru of Asuras) went to Shiva for powers that could make his clan invincible. Devas got scared because they knew that if Shiva grants him the wish then the tables would turn. So, they attacked Asuras who were staying at Bhrgu's (Shukracharya's father) ashram. Bhrgu was not present, however, and Shukracharya fled to take shelter. Bhrgu's wife protected the Asuras from Indra and other demigods instead and she left Indra immobile.

The Devas went to Vishnu to seek help and to free Indra. Eventually accepting their request after a major verbal conversation and conflicts, Vishnu went to the Ashram and cut her head with his Sudarshana Chakra.

Bhrgu got angry when he returned to see his wife's head cut-off. So, he cursed Vishnu to be born several times so that he can suffer the pain of worldly life. Then, he resurrected his wife using his power.

The Shraap of Vriddhakshatra



Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son, died after destroying "Chakravayu" single-handedly. Not many know that it was, in fact, Jayadratha who was responsible for his death. Getting angry, Arjuna kept repeating the words:

"Before sunset tomorrow, I shall slay Jayadratha who killed my son. Anyone who comes between me and him shall also be destroyed."

There had been one prediction back in the days that Jayadratha would die a gruesome death in a war where someone will behead him. His father, Vriddhakshatra, thus cursed: "Anyone who causes my son's head to roll on the ground shall have his head gusted into fragments right in the very moment."

As the war went on, Krishna deceived Jayadratha by making him seem that the sun had set. Krishna instructed Arjuna to shoot the arrow in such a way that his head would then land straight in the lap of Vriddhakshatra. When that happened, Vriddhakshatra couldn't face the horror of seeing his son's head on his lap. He let go of the head, and right then, his own head got ruptured into a hundred fragments.

Rishi Kindama's Curse on Pandu

An ace archer, Pandu made an unusual mistake while hunting a deer in the forest. He hit one rishi and his wife instead of the deer. They screamed out loud and Pandu went closer to the place where he hit.

Rishi Kindama in his dying breath cursed Pandu: "If you even think of mating while approaching a woman,

Interesting curses in Hindu scriptures

you will die then and there." In fact, Kindama and his wife were being intimate in the forest when Pandu shot them.

Later on, when Pandu was thinking of getting intimate with his second wife Madri, he died of the curse.

Four Kumaras' curse on Jaya and Vijaya

At Vaikuntha (Vishnu's palace), Jaya and Vijaya were the gatekeepers and true devotees of Vishnu. One day, the four Kumaras – Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, and Sanatkumara – approached them, and as a dutiful doorkeeper, they asked them to leave as the two thought that these four Kumaras were only children trying to create a nuisance for Vishnu.

The four Kumaras got enraged and cursed Jaya and Vijaya to be born as mortals and suffer the life of the mortals.

As Vishnu returned, Jaya and Vijaya pleaded Vishnu to reverse the curse. But Vishnu had his hands tied in this matter; he couldn't reverse this curse. Instead, he said that he could tweak it a little. He told them that they could either live on Earth as true devotees of Vishnu for seven lives or, live as his enemy for just three lives. After that, they could regain their position back at the palace.

Jaya and Vijaya thought that seven lives would be too long of a journey to live away from Vishnu himself. So instead, they chose to live only three lives on earth, but as his enemy. In the Kritya Yuga, these two were born as Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Then in Treta Yuga, they were born again as Ravana and Kumbhakarna. In the third life in Dwapara Yuga, they were born as Dantavakra and Shisupala.

The Shraap of Urvashi



Urvashi was an interesting woman in those days. She wanted to entice Arjuna with a passion so that he could break his exile. Not that she wanted him for herself as what others would do, she instead wanted him to bring shame to the Pandavas, and that would be the way to do it. But Arjuna saw her more like a mother since she was related to Puruva, the ancestor of Pandavas.

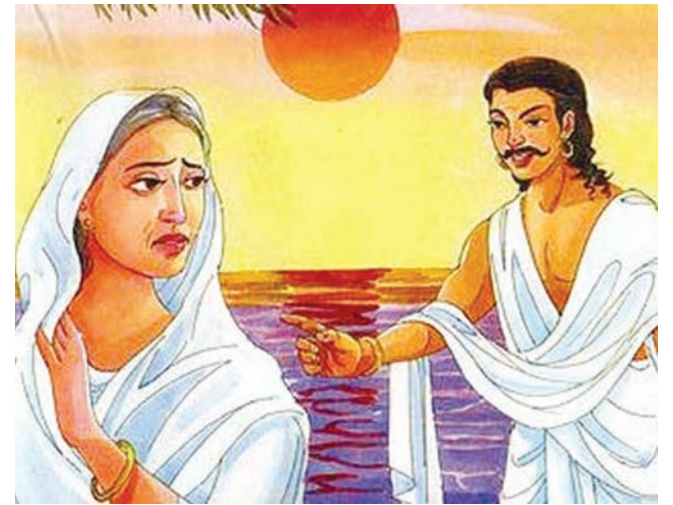
As it was considered to be "adharmic" to reject a "passionate" woman, she had the power to curse Arjuna and she cursed him that he would live the rest of his life as a woman without his manly parts. But Indra appeared and requested her to reduce the curse to just one year. She did so. Arjuna spent the final year of his exile without his man-parts.

The curse of Yudhishtira to all women

Only after the death of Karna, Kunti revealed that he was her son and that he was also the brother of the Pandavas. Pandavas got really angry, but it hit Yudhishtira the most. He thought that Karna should have had the same right as them and that Kunti should not have kept such a big secret from them.

As part of his reaction, he cursed that the entire woman's race would not be able to keep any kind of secret henceforth.

Perhaps, if we believe in this story, this is why the number of events that follow in the mythological and historical contexts has shown that women just spill the beans.



The Curse of Indra

Lord Indra has been known for his mischiefs and also his "passion" for women according to Pauranic scriptures. One time, he assaulted a sage's wife. Getting angry, the sage decided to give Indra what he desired the most – vaginas.

He cursed Indra with thousand vaginas all over his body thinking that anyone seeing him in such condition would not take Indra seriously. Devas begged the sage to lift the curse. He instead changed the vaginas into a thousand eyes.

Other versions of the story claim that he also had a thousand testicles as part of the shraap (curse).

Source: Vedicfeed

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The Golden City Jaisalmer

So named for the yellow sandstone used in most of its buildings, the Golden City of Jaisalmer is an oasis of splendid old architecture that rises from the sand dunes of the Thar Desert. Once a strategic outpost, today the city is filled with splendid old mansions, magnificent gateways, and the massive Jaisalmer Fort—also known as the Golden Fort—a daunting 12th-century structure that rises high above the town.

In addition to its palaces, temples, and fine old homes, the fortress boasts 99 bastions along with massive gates leading to its main courtyard where you'll find the seven-story-tall Maharaja's Palace. Started in the early 1500s and added to by successive rulers right up until the 19th century, the palace offers sections open to the public including areas beautifully decorated with tiles from Italy and China, and intricately carved stone doors, as well as a number of Jain temples dating from the 12th to 16th centuries, each decorated with fine marble and sandstone images, palm-leaf manuscripts, and brightly painted ceilings.

Jaisalmer Fort

This fort is a world heritage site. Forts' walls and grounds include: Four massive gateways through which visitors to the fort must pass, situated along the main approach to the citadel, The Raj Mahal palace, Jain Temples, The Laxminath temple, Numerous Merchant Havelis.

Government Museum

This museum has a unique collection of sculptures from townships of that era of Kairadu and Lodurva of 12th century, marine and wood fossils. It is established by the Department of Archeology with an aim to highlight the diverse tradition, culture of Thar Desert and its heritage.

Nathmal Ji ki Haveli, Salim Singh ki Haveli and Patwon ki Haveli

The construction of this Nathmal Ji ki haveli is done by two brothers who started from two different points at the same time. Elephant carvings on yellow stones, and intricately carved exteriors and interiors are remarkable. A huge statue of an elephant made of yellow sandstones welcomes every tourist and shopper in this Haveli.

Salim Singh Ki Haveli was built in 18th century by Salim Singh. The construction is done with help of the stones that are connected with strong iron rods. The architecture of this mansion is inspired by dancing peacock.

Patwon ki Haveli is the most important and the largest haveli. It is renowned for its ornate wall paintings, intricate yellow sandstone-carved jharokas or balconies, gateways and doorways. The haveli is built using yellow sandstone and the main gateway is brown in colour. The walls also feature beautiful mirror work and several paintings.

Gadisar Lake

Artificial water reservoir, the Gadisar Lake was constructed by the first ruler of Jaisalmer, Raja Rawal Jaisal, It is one of the most famous tourist places in Jaisalmer. The bank of the lake is surrounded by artistically carved Chattris, Temples, Shrines, and Ghats.

Desert National Park

The Desert National Park is an perfect



Longewal War Museum.



Desert National Park.

example of the ecosystem of the Thar Desert. Around 20 % part of park is covered by sand dunes, jagged rocks, dense salt lake bottoms and inter-medial areas. Various species of animals such as black buck, chinkara and desert fox inhabit the Park. The highly endangered Great Indian Bustard, one of the world's heaviest flying birds, can also be seen here. In winter, the park hosts an incredible variety of migratory raptors such as Himalayan and Eurasian Griffon Vultures, Eastern Imperial Eagle, and the Saker Falcon.

KULDHARA

Kuldhara is an abandoned village in the

Jaisalmer located about 18 km from the city by its villagers in the 1800s. It was like the entire town vanished in the course of a single night. It remains a mystery as to how no one saw them leave; in fact, even to this date, no one knows where all of them went either. The village remains uninhabited to the day, in the same state that the villagers had left it, hundreds of years ago. The location has become a major tourist destination as people from all over the world travel here to revel in the mysteries of the past.

Jaisalmer War Museum

The Indian Army has commemorated the sacrifices of their soldiers in a

beautiful display at this war museum, situated at the Jaisalmer military base. This exhibit is primarily to pay respect to all the soldiers who took part and lost their lives in the battle. Located on the Jaisalmer-Jodhpur Highway, the museum has free entry, and holds a very important part of our country's history. A visit to this museum lets you see a number of captured tanks and other memorabilia with many war trophies and vintage equipment, along with tanks, guns, and military vehicles, murals of soldiers who lost their lives in the war, and weapons which were used during the same. You can also watch an interview with Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri who was a crucial part of the Longewala battle.

Longewal War Museum

This is around 130 Kms from Jaisalmer city and This is the spot of the battle of Longewala in 1971 between India and Pakistan, on which the movie "Border" is based. It is also the last point up to which civilians are allowed, just 12 km from Pakistan. There is an audio visual show chronicling the Longewala battle, giving out interesting details of those days. They have the actual battle tanks, jeeps and weapons from the battle displayed over here, both from Indian and Pakistani sides. They have also preserved photos of and after the battle.

Tanot Mata Temple

There are many stories of how during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, Tanot was under heavy attack and shelling. However, none of the shells or bombs fired at the temple exploded. After the war the Pakistani General actually asked his counterpart in India about this incident and on knowing the story of the power of the temple that apparently protected the area he asked to see this place. This request was granted and the Pakistani General actually went to the temple and paid his respects and acknowledged the supernatural happening.

Akal Wood Fossil Park

Akal Wood Fossil Park is a National Geological Monument of India. This Park is a 21-hectare preserved area that lies about 17 km from Jaisalmer, towards Barmer. The petrified wood is indicative of lush forests in a tropical warm and humid climate thriving 180 million years ago. Existence of fossils of gastropod shells also suggest that the region was a sea once upon a time. There are a total of 25 petrified tree trunks along with centuries-old fossils, and right at the entrance, you can also stroke a fossil of an ancient red-wood tree trunk. In the geological area that had only non-flowering trees, an entire forest comprising of huge trees was fossilized.

Amar Sagar Lake

Amar Sagar Lake, located about 7 km towards the western outskirts of Jaisalmer, is a lake cum oasis lying adjacent to the Amar Singh Palace. The palace itself was built in the 17th century. The complex that includes the palace and the lake is also home to several ponds and wells, along with an old temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Numerous figureheads of animals carved in stone surround the lake, and according to legends, these carved figureheads are supposed to be protectors of the royal family.

ICC Cricket Committee approves changes to third umpire protocols, DRS

The ICC Cricket Committee, led by former Indian captain Anil Kumble, on Thursday, April 1, approved three changes to the Decision Review System (DRS) as well as third umpire protocols that had recently come into criticism.

Discussing the current issues being faced in International cricket, the ICC decided that for LBW reviews, the height margin of the Wicket Zone will be lifted to the top of the stumps to ensure the same Umpire's Call margin around the stumps for both height and width.

Additionally, a player will be able to ask the umpire whether a genuine attempt has been made to play the ball before deciding to review an LBW decision.

Also, the 3rd Umpire will check a replay of any short run that has been called and correct any error prior to the next ball being bowled.

New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 65 runs in 3rd T20

Rookie Finn Allen made 71 from 29 balls as New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 65 runs on Thursday, April 1, in the third Twenty20 cricket international, reduced by rain to 10 overs a side.

Allen, who only two matches ago made a golden duck on debut, raced to a half century from 18 balls — the second-fastest by a New Zealander in T20 internationals — as New Zealand made 141-4 after being sent in.

Bangladesh didn't seriously challenge and was bowled out for 76 in 9.3 overs.

Leg-spinner Todd Astle, playing only his fourth T20 international for New Zealand since 2016 and his first in almost 18 months, took 4-13 from the two overs he was allowed. In the reduced match, bowlers were permitted two overs each and the power plays were only three overs.

Rain delayed the start until after 9 p.m., leaving just enough time to cram in a 20-overs match. In its limited form, Thursday's match came down to pure power hitting, which is New Zealand's forte.

Allen put on 85 in an opening stand of just 5.4 overs with Martin Guptill, who made 44 from 19 balls. There were later contributions of 14 from six balls from Glenn Phillips and 11 from six balls from Daryl Mitchell.

Germany suffer first World Cup qualifying loss in 20 years

LONDON (TIP): Germany's first World Cup qualifying loss in 20 years added another blemish to the final months of coach Joachim Loew's 15-year reign in charge of the team.

Germany's 35-match unbeaten run in World Cup qualifying — a streak dating back to 2001 — ended with a stunning 2-1 home loss to North Macedonia on Wednesday that left the team sitting third in its group after three games. It was only the country's third ever loss in qualifying for the World Cup since 1934, the other two coming against Portugal in 1985, when it was West Germany, and the famous 5-1 thrashing by England 20 years ago.

Loew, who led Germany to the 2014 World Cup title, is stepping down as coach after the European Championship. After exiting the World Cup in the group stage in 2018, the Euros could cause the Germans more pain given they are in the same group as reigning champions Portugal and world champions France. In November, they lost 6-0 to Spain for their worst defeat since 1931.

The road to Qatar could be bumpy, too, for Loew's successor. In Group J, Germany have slumped to third place after three games — behind North Macedonia and 99th-ranked Armenia, who beat Romania 3-2 for a third straight win.

Goran Pandev, a 37-year-old striker playing in his 20th year of international football, was part of the North Macedonia team that shocked Germany, scoring the opener in first-half stoppage time.

Ilkay Gundogan equalised from the penalty spot but after Timo Werner



Ilkay Gundogan of Germany looks dejected during the World Cup qualifying match against North Macedonia.

missed a golden chance to put Germany ahead and potentially earn the team a 19th straight World Cup qualifying victory, Eljif Elmas scored the winner for North Macedonia in the 85th at the end of a counterattack.

Kosovo controversy

Europe's other major powers ended the first batch of qualifying games on a successful note, with England, Italy, Spain and France all picking up wins before they switch their focus to the Euros. Spain's 3-1 victory at home to Kosovo attracted attention because of the host country's non-recognition of the visitors, with the Spanish national broadcaster

disregarding normal protocol by not mentioning Kosovo as a country and using lowercase letters for "kos" in its graphics. Spain does not recognise Kosovo's 2008 independence from Serbia.

England beat Poland 2-1 to stay perfect in Group I. Italy's unbeaten run extended to 25 games with a 2-0 win in Lithuania. Italy moved three points ahead of Switzerland atop Group C.

France continued their recovery from an opening-round draw to Ukraine, beating Bosnia-Herzegovina 1-0.

France are four points clear in Group D, with Ukraine in second place on three points after a third straight draw, this time against Kazakhstan. *Source: AP*

Naomi Osaka's 23-match win streak ends against Maria Sakkari

MIAMI (TIP): As Naomi Osaka's 23-match winning streak neared an end, she paused before serving to crane her neck and study the sky, as if seeking intervention from above.

Then she carried on, and so did No. 23-seeded Maria Sakkari, who upset Osaka 6-0, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the Miami Open.

"The more stuff like this happens, the more I'll learn from it," the No. 2-ranked Osaka said.

The defeat was her first since February 2020, and it ended any chance of reclaiming the No. 1 ranking this week from Ash Barty, who is in the semifinals.

Sakkari will next play No. 8-seeded Bianca Andreescu of Canada, who dropped serve eight times but still outlasted unseeded Sara Sorribes Tormo 6-4, 3-6, 6-3.

"I'm super proud of how I handled it tonight, because it wasn't easy," Andreescu said.

"My body was giving out, and then my mind gave out at one point, because I was just thinking about how tired I was." The other women's semifinal Thursday will pit No. 1-seeded Ash Barty against No. 5 Elina Svitolina.

Osaka won her fourth Grand Slam title



at the Australian Open in February, but in five Miami appearances she has never advanced beyond the quarterfinals. She said couldn't get comfortable on the tournament's hard-court surface.

"I felt like I haven't been playing well this whole tournament, like I couldn't find a groove," she said.

Against Sakkari, the only Greek woman ranked in the top 250, Osaka lost 15 consecutive points on her serve to fall

behind and blew a 4-1 lead in the second set. She faced a break point on seven of her eight service games.

"Today's service problems kind of came out of nowhere," Osaka said. "My first serve wasn't going in at all today." Sakkari earned her sixth career win over a top-five opponent. She's still in the tournament only because she saved six match points in the previous round before beating American Jessica Pegula.

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