



INDIA-CANADA TIES STRENGTHENED- MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICES & PROCUREMENT, ANITA ANAND, AND HIGH COMMISSIONER OF INDIA TO CANADA, AJAY BISARIA, RECEIVE FIRST 500,000 DOSES OF COVISHIELD VACCINE FROM SERUM INSITUTE OF INDIA. (ANITA ANAND/ TWITTER)

Y MEDIA COVID & VACCINE REPORT

HEALTH CANADA APPROVES SINGLE-SHOT JOHNSON & JOHNSON VACCINE, EFFICACY-66.9%

OTTAWA, (IANS) Canada announced its approval of the use of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine, making it the fourth vaccine that can be administered in the country.

"After a thorough, independent review of the evidence, the Department has determined that the vaccine meets Canada's stringent safety, efficacy and quality requirements," Health Canada said in a statement on Friday, Xinhua news agency reported.

The approval is expected to provide a significant boost to Canada's vaccine rollout. Johnson & Johnson's vaccine is widely seen as one of the easiest to administer because it requires only one dose and can be stored for long periods of time at regular refrigerator temperatures.

The US healthcare giant's vaccine is the fourth to be approved in Canada. Earlier, Canada approved the use of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines.

"Canada is the first country to approve four vaccines," said Dr. Supriya Sharma, Health Canada's chief medical advisor, at a press conference Friday morning.

It is approved in Canada for use in individuals aged 18 and older. Canada has been assessing the Johnson & Johnson shot since November 30 last year. It has ordered 10 million doses from Johnson & Johnson with options for up to 28 million more. Most of those shots are expected to arrive by the end of September this year.

| DETAILS ON PAGE 3

- Canada has approved four vaccine candidates till now, namely Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Serum Institute of India's CoviShield, and finally Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
- Every Canadian to receive inoculation by September.
- Ontario aims to have all eligible ontarians receive 1st Covid-19 vaccine shot by June 20.
- President Biden says every american adult will be able to get Covid-19 vaccine by May
- Covid-19 vaccine 2nd dose can be given up to four months after first, National Advisory Committee on Immunization says
- In Ontario, Peel and Toronto region entered the 'grey'- lockdown zone, retails store re-open at 25% capacity
- The Ontario government expects to inoculate up to nine million people between April 2021 and July 2021.
- Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), Canadian Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS) & lockdown support extended until June 5, 2021
- Canada received 500,000 doses of 'CoviShield' vaccine from Serum Institute of India.
- Oxford-Astrazeneca vaccine 'not recommended' for people aged 65 & above; National advisory committee on immunizations
- Pfizer to deliver additional 1.5 Million doses in March: PM Trudeau
- Pfizer to supply 12.8 million doses between April-June
- Canada to receive 8 million doses by March end, 36.5 million doses by June end.



Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX, 5 STATE ELECTION, INDIA: MITHUN CHAKRABORTY JOINS BJP RALLY IN KOLKATA. **| DETAILS ON PAGE 5**

DELHI TO BID FOR 2048 OLYMPICS, SAYS CM KEJRIWAL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said the national capital will bid to get an opportunity to host the Olympics in 2048. Kejriwal announced this while addressing a press conference, stating that the vision for Olympics was incorporated in Delhi's annual budget of 2021-22 presented on Tuesday. Kejriwal said, "We will talk to the Centre in this regard but before that we have prepared for it so that Delhi can be considered one of the venues for Olympics in 2048. To grab this opportunity, we need to develop world-class stadiums, sports clubs, infrastructure regarding sports and also develop Delhi as world-class city to get the attention of the Olympics committee."



ED SEARCHES PUNJAB MLA SUKHPAL KHAIRA PROPERTIES

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday carried out searches at eight locations linked to Punjab Ekta Party ML A Sukhpal Singh Khaira in Chandigarh, Punjab and also at the property of his son-in-law in Delhi in connection with drugs money laundering and fake passport racket case, officials said. An ED official related to the probe told IANS, "Searches are going on since morning on several premises linked to Khaira in Punjab and Chandigarh."

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WHY SOURAV SAID NO TO POLITICAL INNINGS

KOLKATA, (IANS) Former Indian captain and now BCCI president Sourav Ganguly has momentarily refused to open a new innings -- one on the murky pitch of party politics. Belying expectations that he would attend PM Modi's March 7 Brigade Rally in Kolkata and perhaps join the saffron party, Ganguly has informed the BJP high command that his present health condition does not permit the plunge.



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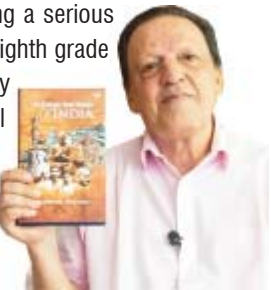
MAN ARRESTED FOR ASSAULT DURING BRAMPTON RALLY

REGION OF PEEL - Investigators from the Criminal Investigation Bureau have arrested a man in relation to an alleged assault during a rally in the City of Brampton. On Sunday, February 28, 2021, at approximately 4:00 p.m., the victim, a 40-year-old woman from Brampton, was in the area of Mississauga Road and Queen Street with her husband driving in a rally. During this time, a man stepped in front of the vehicle.

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'PRESENTING THE TRUE HISTORY OF INDIA A TORTUROUS PROCESS'

NEW DELHI, (IANS) Ever since I began taking a serious interest in history from the time I was in the eighth grade and had yet to turn a teenager, I wondered why the focus was only on two 'eras' - the Mughal and the British. There were references to Ashoka, Chandragupta Maurya and Hyder Ali/Tipu Sultan et al, but these were more in the nature of add-ons rather than to provide a perspective.



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100+ DAYS OF FARMERS' PROTEST: QUESTIONS, DOUBTS, UNCERTAINTY CONTINUE

NEW DELHI, (IANS) It has been more than 100 days since the farmers launched their protest against the three new farms laws at Delhi borders and uncertainty still prevails on how long the agitation will continue. The farmers remain adamant to their demand to rollback these laws but the Central government seems reluctant to accept this.

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COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT BY INDIA HAS 'RESCUED THE WORLD' FROM PANDEMIC, SAYS TOP US SCIENTIST

HOUSTON: The rollout of the Covid-19 vaccines by India in collaboration with leading global institutions has "rescued the world" from the deadly coronavirus and the contributions by the country must not be underestimated, a top American scientist has said. India is called the pharmacy of the world during the Covid-19 pandemic with its vast experience and deep knowledge in medicine.



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o \$3,000 total customer cash purchase incentive is valid on any new 2020 Civic Sedan/2020 Civic Coupe Model when registered and delivered between March 2, 2021 and March 31, 2021. Cash incentive is available for Honda retail customers except who lease or finance through Honda Financial Services (HFS) at a subvented rate of interest offered by Honda as part of a low rate interest program. All advertised lease and finance rates are special rates. Customer cash purchase incentive will be deducted from the negotiated price after taxes. Limited time finance and lease offers available through HFS to qualified retail customers on approved credit. u Made with domestic and imported parts. v Finance example of 2020 Civic Sedan LX CVT: Price is \$22,889, \$0, \$33,686.50 financed at 0.99% APR equals \$65.44 per week for 84 months. Honda Bonus of \$1,250 is included in the payment example. 364 payments required. \$0 down payment required. Cost of borrowing is \$3,334.96 for a total obligation of \$34,938.96. All lease example of 2020 Civic Sedan LX CVT: 0.99% lease APR for 60 months. Weekly payment is \$20.43. Honda Bonus of \$1,250 is included in the payment example. 360 payments required. Cost of borrowing is \$3,609.30. Total lease obligation is \$15,451.80. \$0 down payment, lien registering agent fee and first weekly payment due at lease inception. 100,000 kilometre allowance; charge of \$0.12/km for excess kilometres. o Finance example of 2021 CR-V LX: Price is \$33,828.50, \$33,828.50 financed at 0.99% APR equals \$200.29 per week for 36 months. 156 payments required. \$0 down payment required. Cost of borrowing is \$508.24 for a total obligation of \$34,336.74. s Lease example of 2021 CR-V LX: 0.99% lease APR for 36 months. Weekly payment is \$104.34. Honda Bonus of \$750 is included in the payment example. Total lease obligation is \$18,338.44. \$0 down payment, lien registering agent fee and first weekly payment due at lease inception. 80,000 kilometre allowance; charge of \$0.12/km for excess kilometres. Finance and Lease payments include freight & PDI, tire & environmental fee (\$21), A/C charge (\$300), and OMVIC fee (\$10). All Honda Bonuses will be deducted from the negotiated vehicle price after taxes. For all offers, License, Insurance, PPSA, other taxes (including HST) and excess wear and tear are extra. Taxes payable on full amount of purchase price. Dealer may sell/lease for less. Dealer trade may be necessary. Offers valid between March 2, 2021 and March 31, 2021. Offers and prices subject to change without notice. See OpenRoad Honda for full details.

Covid-19 vaccine 2nd dose can be given up to four months after first, National Advisory Committee on Immunization says



Canada’s National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends a 4-month interval between doses of COVID-19 vaccines. In a statement, it says, “NACI recommends that in the context of lim-

ited COVID-19 vaccine supply, jurisdictions should maximize the number of individuals benefiting from the first dose of vaccine by extending the interval for the second dose of vaccine to four months,”

'CANADA DOESN'T HAVE TARGET DATE FOR J&J VAX DELIVERIES'

OTTAWA, (IANS) Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that the country still does not have a target date for first deliveries of the Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine because of manufacturing problems. "We have heard in many conversations with Johnson & Johnson that there are challenges around the production of the Janssen vaccine, but we will continue to engage with them, and we look forward to receiving doses as soon as possible," Trudeau said at a press conference here on Tuesday. The vaccine developed by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, a pharmaceutical company headquartered in Belgium's Beerse and owned by US multinational corporation Johnson & Johnson, only requires one shot and does not need ultra-cold storage, reports Xinhua news agency. Canada has been assessing the vaccine since November 30, 2020, and approved the use of it last week, following the emergency use

authorization of vaccines from three producers, namely Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca. The country has pre-ordered 10 million doses of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine. Vaccine deliveries in the country slowed down dramatically in February, but then stepped up this month. Almost 1 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines were delivered last week, and 910,000 doses of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are arriving this week, according to local media reports. As of Tuesday afternoon, more than 1.9 million Canadians had received at least one dose, the reports said. Canada has so far reported 893,518 coronavirus cases and 22,304 deaths, and confirmed 2,663 variant infections.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), Canadian Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS) & lockdown support extended until June 5, 2021

The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Lockdown Support have helped protect millions of Canadian jobs and supported businesses of every size across Canada through the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, announced that the government intends to extend the current rate structures for these subsidies from March 14 to June 5, 2021. Specifically:
* the maximum wage subsidy rate for active employees would remain at 75 per cent;
* the maximum rent subsidy rate would remain at 65 per cent; and
* Lockdown Support would remain at 25 per cent and continue to be provided in addition to the rent subsidy, providing eligible hard-hit businesses with rent support of up to 90 per cent. These extensions would provide certainty and continued support for workers, businesses and other affected organizations in the face of ongoing challenges presented by the pandemic. With regard to furloughed employees, the government intends to continue to align the wage subsidy rate structure with the benefits provided through the Employment Insurance program from March 14 to June 5, 2021. This means employers who qualify for the wage subsidy would be able to continue to claim up to a maximum benefit of \$595 per week per employee to support the remuneration of their furloughed workers. Through the pandemic, applicants have demonstrated revenue declines by comparing revenue to the previous year. Given that we are approaching a full year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government is today announcing that applicants would be able to continue to use a pre-pandemic 2019 reference month, effective for the upcoming periods from March 14 to June 5, 2021.

Quotes
"Workers and businesses have showed incredible resilience over the past year, especially through this difficult winter, and today's announcement makes clear that they can continue to rely on their government to be there for them, every step of the way. With variants in Canada and many regions still under lockdown, we are giving workers and businesses the certainty they need that strong government support will be there to get them through this crisis and ensure they come out strong." The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
"Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and employ millions of hard-working Canadians. Our government introduced comprehensive emergency response programs, including the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and the Lockdown Support, so business owners and their workers have the support they need to bridge through the pandemic. These programs, combined with the incredible resilience of our small businesses, will ensure that we are set up for a strong economic recovery." The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade
Quick Facts
* More than 5 million Canadian employees have had their jobs supported through the wage subsidy with more than \$66 billion paid out in wage subsidies as of February 21, 2021. The rent subsidy provides direct and easy-to-access rent and mortgage interest support until June 2021 for qualifying organizations affected by COVID-19. Since its launch in November 2020, more than 129,000 organizations have been supported with more than \$1.6 billion paid out in rent subsidies as of February 21, 2021. This includes amounts paid out to eligible organizations through Lockdown Support

CANADA DESIGNATES OBSERVANCE DAY FOR COVID DEATHS

OTTAWA, (IANS) The Canadian government announced that it's designating March 11 as National Day of observance to commemorate Covid-19 victims. In a statement on Monday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that it will also signify a reflection on the significant impacts all have felt due to the pandemic, from isolation and unemployment to losing time with friends and families, reports Xinhua news agency. "Early last year, our lives, and the lives of everyone around the world, were forever changed by the emergence of Covid-19," Trudeau said. "Today, one year after the first known death of a Canadian to the disease, we now mourn the tragic loss of more than 22,000 parents, siblings, friends, and loved ones. "During this crisis, Canadians have remained resilient. They have helped neighbours, given to organisations, put signs in their windows to support our health care workers, and lent a hand wherever possible," he said in the statement. Trudeau said all Canadians have experienced sacrifice and loss over the past year. "As we continue to deal with the impacts of the global pandemic, your government will continue to do whatever it takes, for however long it takes, to support you. "We all have a role to play in ending this pandemic, and the crisis is not over yet. In recognition of how far we have come and how far we still have to go," the Prime Minister added.

MAN ARRESTED FOR ASSAULT DURING BRAMPTON RALLY

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The victim exited her vehicle, there was an altercation, and she was assaulted. She did not sustain any injuries. On March 5, 2021, a 27-year-old man from Brampton was arrested and charged with Assault. He is scheduled to attend the Ontario Court of Justice on May 5, 2021, in Brampton. Peel Regional Police is aware of an upcoming rally, and we support the right to peaceful and lawful assembly. However, there will be no tolerance for violence or criminality, all reported incidents will be investigated, and those involved may be charged.

TORONTO, PEEL AND NORTH BAY-PARRY SOUND PUBLIC HEALTH REGIONS RETURNED TO STRENGTHENED COVID-19 RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

TORONTO - The Ontario Government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, has transitioned Toronto, Peel and North Bay Parry Sound District public health regions out of the shut down and into the revised and strengthened COVID-19 Response Framework: KeepingOntario Safe and Open (the "Framework"), with the Stay-at-Homeorder no longer in effect. In addition, seven other public health regions are being moved to new levels in the Framework. Based on a general improvement in trends of key indicators,North Bay Parry Sound District returned to the Framework atthe Red-Control level. Toronto Public Health and Peel Public Health are also making progress, but as their case rates still remain high,they returned to the Framework at the Grey-Lockdown level.Peterborough Public Health, Public Health Sudbury and Districts; andSimcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit entered Red-Control zone. Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit; andTimiskaming Health Unit returned to Orange-Restrict zone. Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit; andRenfrew County and District Health Unit entered Yellow -Protect. All changes are effective Monday, March 8, 2021, at 12:01 a.m.

ONTARIO READY TO ROLLOUT PHASE TWO OF COVID-19 VACCINE DISTRIBUTION PLAN

POPULATIONS ELIGIBLE FOR PHASE TWO COVID-19 VACCINATION IN ONTARIO

TORONTO: The Ontario government is preparing to move into PhaseTwo of its COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan next month, with a focus onvaccinating populations based on age and risk. With vaccine supply stabilizing and over two million dosesof the COVID-19 vaccine expected from the federal government beforethe end of March, the province to enter Phase Two of its vaccine rollout. **Between April 2021 and July 2021, up to nine million Ontarians will be vaccinated. During Phase Two, groups that will receive the vaccine include: Older adults between 60-79 years of age; Individuals with specifichealth conditions and some primary caregivers; People who live andwork in congregate settings and some primary caregivers; People who live inhot spots with high rates of death, hospitalizations and transmission; and, Certainworkers who cannot work from home. “Thanks to the hard work of our health carepartners and frontline heroes, Ontario's vaccine rollout is making a positive difference and helping to save the lives of some of our most vulnerable,” said MinisterElliott**
Who is Eligible in Phase Two?
Health conditions
Individuals with the health conditions listed below will be vaccinated in order of risk, with the highest-risk individuals being vaccinated first, followed by high-risk and at-risk individuals. Patients with these specific health conditions are at increased risk of serious illness and death regardless of age.
Highest-risk (442,000 people):
* Organ transplant recipients
* Hematopoietic stem cell transplant recipients
* People with neurological diseases in which respiratory function may be compromised (e.g., motor neuron disease, myasthenia gravis, multiple sclerosis)
* Haematological malignancy diagnosed less than 1 year ago
* Kidney disease eGFR< 30
High-risk (292,000 people):
* Obesity (BMI > 40)
* Other treatments causing immunosuppression (e.g., chemotherapy, immunity-weakening medications)
* Intellectual or developmental disabilities (e.g., Down Syndrome)
At-risk (2.2 million people):
* Immune deficiencies / autoimmune disorders
* Stroke / cerebrovascular disease
* Dementia
* Diabetes
* Liver disease
* All other cancers
* Respiratory diseases
* Spleen problems
* Heart disease
* Hypertension with end organ damage
* Diagnosis of mental disorder
* Substance use disorders
* Thalassemia
* Pregnancy
* Immunocompromising health conditions
* Other disabilities requiring direct support care in the community

Congregate settings
Congregate settings are among the most significant sources of cases, hospitalizations and deaths linked to COVID-19 outbreaks in Ontario. At-risk staff, essential caregivers and residents are eligible for vaccination during Phase Two (158,000). Caregivers in select congregate care settings will be vaccinated as part of the vaccine rollout in congregate settings.

Essential caregivers
These are primary caregivers to those with highest-risk health conditions; i.e., organ transplant recipients, hematopoietic stem cell transplant recipients, neurological diseases in which respiratory function may be compromised, haematological malignancy diagnosed less than 1 year ago, kidney disease eGFR< 30 (400,000).
Workers who cannot work from home
Workers who cannot work from home in the sectors listed below will be vaccinated in two groups. Within each group, all workers listed will be eligible for vaccination at the same time:First group of workers unable to work remotely (730,000 people) and Remaining workers unable to work remotely (1.4 million people).

Forecasted allocation of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to provinces and territories

Distribution location	1-7 Mar	8-14 Mar	15-21 Mar	22-28 Mar	29 Mar - 4 Apr	5-11 Apr	12-18 Apr
Total forecasted allocations	444,600	444,600	444,600	1,194,570	1,195,740	1,019,070	1,019,070

Forecasted allocation of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to provinces and territories

Distribution location	1-7 Feb	22-28 Feb	8-14 Mar	22-28 Mar
Total forecasted allocations	180,000	168,000	466,800	846,000

VACCINE DELIVERIES TO RAMP-UP IN CANADA (ANITA ANAND/ TWITTER).

THE NEED FOR SPEED: FASTER VACCINE ROLLOUT CRITICAL TO STRONGER RECOVERY



A global economic recovery is in sight but a faster and more effective vaccination rollout across the world is critical, while respecting necessary health and social distancing measures, according to the OECD's latest Interim Economic Outlook. Activity in many sectors has picked up and adapted to pandemic restrictions over recent months. Vaccine deployment, although uneven, is finally gaining momentum and government fiscal stimulus - particularly in the US - is likely to provide a major boost to economic activity. But the pandemic is widening gaps in economic performance between countries and between sectors, increasing social inequalities, particularly affecting vulnerable groups, and risking long-term damage to job prospects and living standards for many people. The Interim Economic Outlook calls for ramping up vaccination, for swifter, more targeted fiscal stimulus to foster output and confidence, and to maintain income support for people and businesses hard hit by the pandemic while preparing the ground for a sustainable recovery.

"Speed is of the essence," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. "There is no room for complacency. Vaccines must be deployed faster and globally. This will require better international co-operation and co-ordination than we have seen up to now. It is only by doing so that we can focus our attention on building forward better and laying the foundations for a prosperous and lasting recovery for all." The OECD sees global GDP growth at 5.6% this year, an upward revision of more than 1 percentage point since its projection in December 2020, and 4% in 2022. World output is expected to reach pre-pandemic levels by mid-2021 but the pace and duration of the recovery will depend on the race between vaccines and emerging variants of the virus.

The outlook for global growth would be better than currently projected - and approach pre-pandemic projections for activity - if the production and distribution of vaccines accelerates, is better co-ordinated around the world and gets ahead of virus mutations. This would allow containment measures to be relaxed more rapidly. But if vaccination programmes are not fast enough to cut infection rates or if new variants become more widespread and require changes to current vaccines, consumer spending and business confidence would be hit. In the OECD's central scenario, US growth is projected to be 6.5% in 2021, an upward revision of more than 3 percentage points since December, partly reflecting the large-scale fiscal stimulus now planned with a sustained pace of vaccination. This also helps to lift output around the world. In the euro area, where the level of fiscal stimulus is lower and vaccine rollout slower, the Interim Economic Outlook sees GDP rising 3.9%, a 0.3 percentage point upward revision.

Prospects are brighter in the Asian-Pacific region where several countries have effectively contained the virus and where industrial activity has regained dynamism. In China, GDP growth is projected to be 7.8% this year; in Japan 2.7%; in Korea 3.3%; and in Australia 4.5%. The recovery is likely to be more moderate in the emerging market economies of Latin America and Africa amid a resurgence of the virus, slow vaccine deployment and limited scope for additional policy support.

Presenting the Interim Economic Outlook today, OECD Chief Economist Laurence Boone said vaccination programmes and stimulus measures should work hand in hand. "Widespread vaccination of the adult population is the best economic policy available today to get our economies and employment growing again," she said. "If we are at war with the virus then we need to put vaccine production on a war footing, provide the necessary resources and speed up deployment across the world."

PAK ASKS INDIA NOT TO SHY AWAY FROM TALKS

ISLAMABAD, (IANS) Pakistan has reiterated its offer for dialogue and table talks to India, asking it not to shy away from negotiations on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Our only dispute is Kashmir and it can only be resolved through dialogue. Pakistan has never shied away from talks and has always called for peaceful resolution to all outstanding disputes, including the internationally recognized dispute of Jammu and Kashmir," a Foreign Office spokesperson said.

"The principle of negotiations stated that anyone who runs away has a weak position on the negotiating table.

"The way we have been articulating our position shows that we have a position of strength. Let me reiterate that there is no change in Pakistan's principled position on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. "Jammu and Kashmir is an internationally recognised dispute and needs to be resolved in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions that call for a free and impartial plebiscite under the UN auspices," he added.

Pakistan's latest calls for dialogue Echoes with Prime Minister Imran Khan's statement during his visit to Sri Lanka, where he stated that he approached India immediately after coming in power and "explained to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the way forward for the subcontinent is to resolve our differences through dialogue".

"I didn't succeed but I am optimistic that eventually sense will prevail. The only way the subcontinent can tackle poverty is by improv-

ing trade relations," Khan had said.

The Foreign Office spokesperson said that the recent ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan was in line with Islamabad's consistent position.

The DGMO-level hotline contact between India and Pakistan was focused on discussions over the establishment mechanisms of hotline contact on consistent bases.

"While reviewing the situation along the LoC and all other sectors, the two sides agreed to observe all agreements, understandings and ceasefire.

"The agreement will help save Kashmiri lives and alleviate the sufferings of the Kashmiris living along the LoC. Pakistan has consistently underscored the need for implementation of the 2003 ceasefire understanding in letter and spirit for maintenance of peace along the Line of Control and for saving the previous lives of innocent Kashmiris. We have also maintained that escalation along the LoC is a threat to regional peace and security," the spokesperson added.

Tensions between India and Pakistan have severely intensified in the recent past with heavy exchange of firepower along the LoC, specially after the Pulwana terror attack, which led to the Balakot strikes by India and Pakistan's response on February 27, 2019.

However, with the DGMO-level contact and enforcement of ceasefire through mutual agreement, hopes of some positive movement in de-escalation of tensions between the two arch-rivals have gained momentum.

'PRESENTING THE TRUE HISTORY OF INDIA A TORTUROUS PROCESS'

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

The Chola dynasty and the Vijayanagar and Bahamani kingdoms got hardly a passing mention. I learnt more about the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort (at both Delhi and Agra) than about Angkor Wat. Growing up, bits and pieces began falling into place and I wondered when the "true" history of India would come to be written. There have been attempts by various academics and scholars over the years but these have focused only on specific areas instead of looking at the larger whole.

But then, when the "true" story of India's freedom movement is yet to be written, as admitted by economist-politician Jairam Ramesh admitted during a reading about a year on his book on V.K. Krishna Menon, it's quite clear that the road ahead is torturous.

Walking this road once again is Francois Gautier, who for more than four decades has been writing on various aspects of India - eight of them as the correspondent for the Le Figaro newspaper - and who is currently Editor-in-Chief of La Revue de l'Inde, a literary magazine devoted to India published by leading French editor Les Belles Lettres. He is also building a Museum of True Indian History, dedicated to Shivaji, in Pune.

"An Entirely New History of India" (Garuda) is Gautier's fifth on the subject and he spoke with passion during an interview with IANS on what drives him to continue to do so. "Indian history is not written as it happened, because it is mostly recorded by British, who had an interest to show Indians as inferior; example: the Aryan invasion - white people who came from Russia and brought horses, vedas etc. Also, British Sanskrit scholars had a tendency to postdate Indian history.

"Max Muller, the greatest Sanskrit scholar of his time, like any good Christian of the nineteenth century, had read the conclusions of James Ussher, a 17th century Irish theologian, who claimed 'that God created Heaven and Earth on the evening of October 22, 4004 BC'. It was almost a sacrifice to think that Indians, a colonized and inferior people, could have had a civilization well before the time of Christ... Muller thus dated the writing of the Vedas at 1500 BC, while many recent discoveries trace their existence back to at least around 5000 BC," Gautier maintained.

Why is presenting a true account of Indian history such a torturous process? "Because it's a touchy subject: you do something on the Goaquisition (1560-1812 by the Portuguese to enforce Catholic Orthodoxy), Christians are unhappy; you touch upon Arab invasions and their bloodiness and Muslims are unhappy; you speak of vedas and Mother India and dalits go up in arms. Also, the clichés still attached to India in the twenty-first

century are another cause of the scarcity and conventionality of history books on the Indian subcontinent.

"In spite of all the sympathy felt by westerners for Indians, when you mention the word 'India', the first image that comes to their mind is that of poverty and slums. Now, as this book will establish, not only does India have a rich and vast history, but economically, politically and socially it is surpassing China by its democratic and liberal values. Thus, we need to rewrite the history of India," Gautier asserted

Is enough being done to rework the school curricula to present an 'Indian' narrative of the country's history?

"No absolutely not. No government, either Congress or BJP, has dared. The present government is only doing homeopathic changes because of so much resistance," Gautier maintained, holding the 'Brown Sahibs', whom he described as the "descendants" of the British Raj responsible.

"When they took over India, the British set upon establishing an intermediary race of Indians, whom they could entrust with their work at the middle level echelons and who could one day be convenient instruments to rule by proxy or semi-proxy. The tool to shape these 'British clones' was education. In the words of Macaulay, the 'Pope' of British schooling in India: "We must at present do our best to form a class, who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellects."

"Macaulay had very little regard for Hindu culture and education, declaiming that 'all the historical information which can be collected from all the books which have been written in the Sanskrit language, is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England' or that 'Hindus have a literature of small intrinsic value, hardly reconcilable with morality, full of monstrous superstitions'," Gautier maintained.

It seems today, Gautier asserted, that India's Marxist and Muslim intelligentsia could not agree more with Macaulay or with Charles Grant (1746-1823), Chairman of the East India Company, who said: "We cannot avoid recognising in the people of Hindustan a race of men lamentably degenerate and base... governed by malevolent and licentious passions...and sunk in misery by their vices."

"For the dream of Macaulay has come true: nowadays, the greatest adversaries of the 'Indianised and spiritualised education' are the descendants of these Brown Sahibs: the 'secular' politicians, the journalists, the top bureaucrats, in fact the whole Westernised cream of India.

JAN 6 CAPITOL RIOT IS DOMESTIC TERRORISM: FBI CHIEF



WASHINGTON, (IANS) Christopher Wray, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), said that the law enforcement agency classifies the deadly January 6 Capitol riot by former President Donald Trump's supporters as domestic terrorism.

That attack, that siege, was criminal behaviour, plain and simple, and it's behaviour that we, the FBI, view as domestic terrorism," Wray said at a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, Xinhua news agency reported.

Wray said the rioters came from "a variety of backgrounds".

"The attackers on January 6 included a number - and the number keeps growing as we build out our investigations - of what we would call militia violent extremism. And we have had some already arrested who we would put in the category of racially motivated violent extremism, white as well," said Wray.

So far at least 280 people have been arrested with more than 300 charged in the wake of the January 6 attack which interrupted Congress' electoral vote count of the presidential election. Five people died in the attack, including a Capitol police officer.

VIGILANCE PIVOTAL TO THWART HOSTILE ATTEMPTS TO CREATE CHAOS: PAK ARMY CHIEF



KARACHI, (IANS) The Chief of Army Staff (COAS) in Pakistan, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, has called for constant and active vigilance to thwart any attempt to disrupt the efforts by the country's armed forces in rooting out terrorism from the troubled tribal regions of North and South Waziristan. The statement from the Pakistan Army Chief came amid targeted terror attacks, which have alarmed the security forces on the re-emergence of violence in the restive Waziristan region.

"Peace has largely returned to these areas. The hard-earned normalcy will be retained and enhanced through collective efforts of the local population, civil administration and law enforcement agencies," Bajwa said during his interaction with the tribal elders in Mir Ali in North Waziristan. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the military, maintained in a statement that "General Qamar appreciated the tribesmen of their unflinching support and sacrifices in the fight against terrorism".

17% OF ALL FOOD AVAILABLE AT CONSUMER LEVEL IS WASTED: UN

NAIROBI, (IANS) An estimated

931 million tonnes of food, or 17 per cent of total food available to consumers in 2019, went into the waste bins of households, retailers, restaurants and other food services, a new UN research said on Thursday. The study was conducted to support global efforts to halve food waste by 2030. The weight roughly equals that of 23 million fully-loaded 40-tonne trucks - bumper-to-bumper - enough to circle the earth seven times. The Food Waste Index Report 2021 from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and partner organisation WRAP looks at food waste that occurs in retail outlets, restaurants and homes - counting both food and inedible parts like bones and shells. The report presents the most comprehensive food waste data collection, analysis and modelling to date, and offers a methodology for countries to measure food waste. A total of 152 food waste data points were identified in 54 countries. The report finds that in nearly every country that has measured food waste, it was substantial, regardless of income level.



INDIA NOT UTILIZING VAX TO FULL CAPACITY: DELHI HC



NEW DELHI, (IANS) The Delhi High Court on Thursday showed apprehensions over non-utilization of coronavirus vaccine to its full capacity by the country, asserting that it is either being donated or sold off to foreign countries rather than being provided to Indians.

Justice Vipin Sanghi made the observations while hearing a suo motu public interest litigation concerning vaccination of judges, court staff and lawyers on priority and for them to be treated as frontline workers so that they could receive it without limitations of their age or physical condition. In the recent phase of the vaccination drive which commenced on March 1, the government is inoculating only those who are over 60 years of age and for people aged 45 and above with specified co-morbid conditions. The priority was first given to the healthcare and frontline workers. Justice Sanghi said, "If the capacity of the two vaccine manufacturers were being utilized to the full and then the restrictions were to be put, it would have been one thing. We should not have the situation where we are not even utilizing the full capacity." His remarks came after Covishield and Covaxin vaccine manufacturers Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India apprised that the capacity to vaccinate the judicial staff is available.

"They have the full capacity to manufacture and supply. We are not utilizing it because of our restricted control approach. We are either donating or selling it off to foreign countries rather than giving it to our own people. It is well settled and the experts are also saying that there should be a sense of urgency in this process of vaccination," the judge said.

Y MEDIA POLITICAL SENSEX- 5 STATE ELECTIONS, INDIA

‘I’m pure Cobra, can kill in one bite’: Mithun



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI WELCOMES FILMSTAR MITHUN CHAKRABORTY.

KOLKATA, (IANS) Bollywood star Mithun Chakraborty, who joined Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s rally in Kolkata on Sunday, referred to himself as a “pure Cobra who can kill in just one bite”. “I am proud to be a Bengali. I know you love my dialogues. This day is like a dream-come-true experience for me,” said Chakraborty, while addressing the mammoth gathering here. Thrilling the huge crowd with popular dialogues from his films, the actor said: “Marbo ekhaney...lash porbay shoshaney (I will thrash you here. Your body will be found at the crematorium).” He also delivered another punch line. “Ami joldhorao noi, bele-borao

noi...ami ekta cobra, ek chobol-ei chhobi (I’m not a harmless snake. I am a pure cobra. One strike and you become a photograph.” Chakraborty arrived at the Brigade Parade Ground at around 12 noon and was welcomed by BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargi and other state BJP leaders. Meanwhile, veteran Trinamool Congress leader and Lok Sabha MP Sougata Roy reacted to Chakraborty joining the BJP camp. Roy said: “Mithun Chakraborty is someone who cannot be trusted”. The 294-member West Bengal Assembly will go to the polls in eight phases between March 27 and April 29. The counting of votes will take place on May 2.

BJP finalises candidates for first 2 phases of Assam polls



NEW DELHI, (IANS) The BJP’s Central Election Committee (CEC) on Thursday evening finalized the names of party candidates for the 86 constituencies in Assam that will go to the polls in the first two phases of Assembly elections on March 27 and April 1. A senior party functionary said that the names of BJP candidates for the seats in Assam that will go to the polls in the first two phases have been finalized. “After discussions, the names have been finalized. Now the party will take a call to announce them. I think by Friday evening, the list final-

ized today will be released,” he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief J.P. Nadda, Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and other CEC members were present at the meeting, which was also attended by the party’s national General Secretary (Organisation) B.L. Santosh. Assam Chief Minister Sarbanand Sonowal, party state in-charge Bajjayant Panda and other senior leaders were also present at the meeting, besides Assam poll in-charge Narendra Singh Tomar and co-in-charge Jitendra Singh.

SHIV SENA OUT OF BENGAL POLLS, TO BACK MAMATA

MUMBAI, (IANS) The Shiv Sena has decided to opt-out of the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections, but the party has decided to ‘wholeheartedly’ support All India Trinamool Congress leader and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, a top official said here on Thursday. Sena MP and Chief Spokesperson Sanjay Raut said that since the West Bengal polls are turning out to be “Didi vs All”, the Shiv Sena has decided not to contest the elections, but will stand in solidarity with her. “Looking at the present scenario, it appears like a ‘Didi vs All’ fight. All M’s – Money, Muscle and Media – are being used against Mamata Didi. We wish her a ‘roaring success’, because we believe she is the real ‘Bengal Tigress’!” said Raut. He said that the decision was taken after discussions with Shiv Sena President and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. However, MVA sources said the move could have been prompted to ensure that there is no division of votes in the West Bengal polls that could damage Trinamool’s prospects vis-a-vis the BJP as the Sena was tentatively planning to contest around 60 seats. As part of its strategy to acquire an all-India presence, in January, the Sena had announced plans to sound the poll bugle in West Bengal where it had contested the 2016 Assembly and 2019 Lok Sabha polls but notched nil in terms of seats. Earlier, the Sena — ruling Maharashtra in alliance with Nationalist Congress Party and the Congress — has contested various elections in different states including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir and Goa besides West Bengal. The saffron party has justified its ventures in other states on grounds that the Bharatiya Janata Party at the Centre has been attempting to destabilize or dethrone Constitutionally-elected governments in all Opposition-ruled states, including Maharashtra and West Bengal. Incidentally, ruling ally NCP President Sharad Pawar has already said he would visit Kolkata to extend support to Mamata Banerjee — as



part of plans to build up a ‘grand alliance’ of national and state opposition parties — before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Similarly, political sources also do not rule out the possibility of a repeat of Maharashtra’s MVA experiment — Sena-NCP-Congress with differing ideologies joining hands — in West Bengal if the eastern state brews up a fractured mandate in the elections, the results of which are expected in early-May. “The unthinkable happened in Maharashtra and it is working smoothly. Anything is possible... even in WB... The MVA is cited as a national example to make states strong,” a senior state leader said guardedly, on the odds with three arch-rivals in West Bengal — Congress, Left Front and Trinamool Congress — hugging each other post-polls to keep the BJP at bay. On its part, the BJP is in a hyper-aggressive mood to capture West Bengal and is leaving no stone unturned to conquer what was a Communist fortress for nearly three decades before Mamata planted the Trinamool flag there 10 years ago. The relations between the Thackeray family and Mamata Banerjee, a former Union Minister, go back several decades. In 2017, Uddhav, 60 and Mamata, 66, had a cordial meeting in Mumbai when the latter had come to invite Indian corporate honchos for the West Bengal Global Investment Summit-2018 held in Kolkata.

100+ DAYS OF FARMERS' PROTEST: QUESTIONS, DOUBTS, UNCERTAINTY CONTINUE

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

In such a situation, it is difficult to predict that how long this fight will last, because in this country, there has been such a movement of farmers that lasted for 44 years. However, the longest struggle of the farmers in the country's history was 'Bijolia Movement' that lasted from 1897 to 1941. If such a movement continues in the era of democracy today, then many governments will change. But on the lines of the Bijolia Movement, the outcome of this agitation of farmers will be awaited, because the struggle of the farmers of Rajasthan proved the power of 'non-violence' before Mahatma Gandhi. The farmers were then struggling to get rid of the burden of unnecessary taxes and now they are not ready to accept the law allows tax-free trade of agri products out of the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC). At that time, the farmers were troubled by the exploitation of the feudal system, now with the new law, they are afraid of increasing the interference of corporate in the agricultural sector. There-

fore, farmers are opposing the new agricultural law. Thousands of farmers are camping at Delhi the borders -- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders -- and their leaders are assuring of non-violent and peaceful movement. However, after the fracas during the violent January 26 tractor rally, the protesters have been made the accused. After the violence, the direction of the peasant movement changed a bit, the leaders of the unions want to take more interest in the mahapanchayats to mobilise the support of the people and decrease the number of protesters at the demonstration sites. However, Harinder Singh Lakhowal, the farmer leader of Punjab and General Secretary of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Lakhowal), told IANS that all this was part of the strategy to carry the movement across the country. He said that to carry on the movement for a long time, some activity along with 'dharna' on the Delhi border is necessary and for the first time after January 26, a major action took place on Saturday.

TRINAMOOL GIVES TICKETS TO 42 MUSLIM CANDIDATES

KOLKATA, (IANS) Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee has given tickets to as many as 42 Muslim candidates out of the 291 seats in which the ruling formation has fielded its candidates for the forthcoming Assembly elections in West Bengal, to be held in eight phases from March 27 to April 29. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has repeatedly attacked the Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress for its ‘appeasement’ politics in the past. Besides giving importance to candidates from the minority community, Banerjee has also given tickets to 50 women candidates, 79 SC nominees and 17 ST candidates. Retired IPS officer and former top cop Humayun Kabir have been fielded from West Midnapore’s Debra constituency, while Siddikullah Chowdhury will be contesting from Monteswar in East Burdwan on a Trinamool ticket. “I’m confident about Trinamool’s win. I joined the party from the police force to save the democratic fabric of Bengal,” Kabir said. On the other hand, a section of Trinamool activists staged an agitation at Bhargar in Kolkata’s adjoining South 24 Parganas district as local Trinamool old gun and ex-MLA Arabul Islam was not given a ticket to contest the Assembly polls. Arabul also broke down in tears in public after the list of candidates was announced on Friday. Md Rezaul Karim will contest from Bhargar on a Trinamool ticket. “It seems that the party does not need me anymore. I have always been with the Trinamool Congress, but that need is now over. I have always tried to stand by the people of Bhargar. Now I will only do what they will ask me to do,” Arabul said. His supporters even set things on fire in the locality and put up road blockades. Arabul himself ransacked his own party office in the area. Similar incidents took place elsewhere too, with dissenting Trinamool activists taking out protest rallies in different districts as soon as the party released its candidates’ list for the high-voltage Assembly polls. One such agitation took place in Amdanga where two-time legislator from the seat, Rafikul Ahmed, was not considered for a ticket. Instead, the ticket was given to an outsider, the agitators claimed. Meanwhile, Banerjee said that as many as 23-24 existing Trinamool legislators were dropped from the candidates’ list owing to their age-related issues and other reasons. Announcements for the remaining three constituencies in Darjeeling have been put on hold as they would be contested by Trinamool allies.

CONG ANNOUNCES 13 CANDIDATES FOR BENGAL, 40 FOR ASSAM POLLS

NEW DELHI, (IANS) The Congress on Saturday announced its first list of candidates for 13 Assembly constituencies in West Bengal and 40 seats in Assam. The 294-member West Bengal Assembly will go to the polls in eight phases from March 27 to April 29, while elections to the 126-member Assam Assembly will be held in three phases from March 27 to April 6. The results will be declared on May 2. The list for West Bengal includes names of five candidates for the first phase and eight candidates for the second phase of polling. As per the list, Sukhdeb Bera will contest from Prathapratima, Indrani Raut from Kakdwip, Manish Bhowmi from Moyna, Shiu Maiti from Bhagwanpur, Manas Kumar Karmahapatra from Egra and Uttam Bnerjee from Balarampur. Earlier in the day, the BJP had also released its first list of 57 candidates for the West Bengal Assembly elections, fielding ex-Trinamool leader Suwendu Adhikari against Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee from the Nandigram Assembly seat. The Congress also announced 40 candidates for the Assam Assembly polls. The party has named Assam Congress chief Ripun Bora from Gohpur, Ram Prasad Sharma from Barchalla and Anuj Kumar Mech from Tezpur. The party has also fielded Bismark Gogoi from Khumtai and Rana Goswami from Jorhat. According to the poll panel, out of the total 126 Assembly seats in Assam, eight are reserved for SC candidates and 16 for ST nominees.

BJP RELEASES 1ST LIST FOR BENGAL POLLS; SUVENDU VS MAMATA IN NANDIGRAM

NEW DELHI, (IANS) The BJP on Saturday announced its first list of 57 candidates for the high octane Assembly elections in West Bengal, which will be held in eight phases from March 27 to April 29. For the prestigious Nandigram Assembly seat in East Midnapore from where West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is contesting, the BJP has fielded her former close aide Suwendu Adhikari. Nandigram is a stronghold of Adhikari, who was elected on a Trinamool ticket from the high profile seat in 2016 before he became a minister in the Mamata Banerjee-led state Cabinet. Adhikari had joined the saffron brigade in December last year. The rebel Trinamool leader had claimed earlier that he will defeat Banerjee by over 50,000 votes. The BJP has fielded former India cricketer Ashok Dinda from the Moyna Assembly constituency in East Midnapore, while ex-IPS officer Bharati Ghosh will contest on a BJP ticket from Debra in West Midnapore. Dinda and Ghosh recently joined the BJP. BJP National General Secretary Arun Singh released the names of the party candidates for 57 Assembly constituencies out of the 60 seats that will go to the polls in the first two phases on March 27 and April 1. “Of the 57 seats, one in Baghmundi has been given to alliance partner All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU),” Singh said. The BJP did not form an alliance with Sudesh Mahto’s AJSU during the Jharkhand Assembly polls in 2019. Singh said that AJSU has supported the party on several occasions and that is why the party has decided to give one seat to it in West Bengal. He further said that names of BJP candidates for three remaining seats going to the polls in the first two phases will be announced soon. The first list of 56 BJP candidates includes six women -- Sunita Singha from Kanthi Uttar, Sonali Murmu from Keshiary (ST), Chandana Bauri from Saltora (SC), Tapashi Mondal from Haldia (SC), Antara Bhattacharya from Pingla and former IPS officer Bharati Ghosh from Debra. Announcing the list, Singh said that a wave of ‘Poribortan’ (change) is clearly visible in West Bengal. “There is a wave of change visible across the state against the misrule, corruption, jungleraj and dictatorship of the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool government,” he said.



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OPINION

IS CHINA MERELY PRESSING THE PAUSE BUTTON?

At the end of the ninth round of Corps Commander level talks between India and China on LAC, the two sides announced their agreement to disengage frontline troops at the southern and northern banks of Pangong Tso Lake in Ladakh in a synchronised manner beginning from February 10. Indian and Chinese troops will be back to their traditional base on the northern bank just west of Finger 3 and east of Finger 8 respectively.

It may be mentioned that it is in the south bank of the lake that Indian forces, in an action in August last year, had gained strategic advantage by occupying certain peaks. This, incidentally, is the area of Spanggur Gap valley where the Chinese had launched the offensive of 1962. The sensitivity and anxiety of China over the position of strength established by India's defence forces could be foreseen. India's stand was that the disengagement process should cover the entire region -- by agreeing to first disengage from the Pangong Tso area only, India has played a cautious hand in testing the Chinese for their bonafides. The agreement stipulates that all the construction done by both sides on the north and south banks of the lake since April 2020 will be removed. It seems President Xi Jinping is weighed down by the enhanced potential of India, after the creation of Ladakh as a Union Territory, to confront China in an area where the latter had built CPEC with heavy investment in PoK -- a territory claimed by India as an integral part of Jammu and Kashmir.

China is never in a hurry to resolve a dispute as it always sought to serve its long range interests and is given to following the strategy of achieving incremental gains without having to fight a 'war'. India would be watching if China is showing a measured initial response only for managing to stall India's military hold in this sensitive segment of LAC so that it could study the shifts, if any, in the 'big picture' around India-China relationship caused by the current geo-political developments and strategise for it. A few things are important in this context. First, India is rightly adopting an approach of putting China on test and going strictly by the current developments in regard to LAC -- with readiness to respond to any situation that could be created by a back slide from the Chinese side. This was the burden of the talk delivered by India's Army chief at Vivekanand International Foundation on February 24. Gen. Naravane, who termed the 'ongoing' disengagement process as a 'win win situation' for both sides, struck a note of caution that it was still 'a long way to go' before de-escalation eventually led to de-induction of rival soldiers and declared that China's salami slicing strategy would not work with India even though it might have got its success in the South China Sea. The stand-off is still continuing at Depsang, Gogra, Hotspring and Demchok. Saying that there is a trust deficit with China, the Army chief gave an assurance that Indian troops will be wary and cautious and keep a close watch on every move happening on both sides of the LAC.

The victory of Joe Biden in the US Presidential election that ended the legacy of the Trump era for both US-China and Indo-US relations, the rise of India's military strength not only in terms of its capacity to take on China at the LAC but also deal with any concerted attempt of the Sino-Pak combine to indulge in aggressiveness on the borders and the diminishing returns for China from its alliance with Pakistan -- a country considered a 'rogue' entity by the international community -- would all be impacting the Chinese calculus. Unlike Donald Trump, who went all out against China on trade, Covid and Indo-Pacific and seemed to have no problem with Putin, President Biden is highly distrustful of Russia but inclined to do business with China on terms that served American interests.

Noticing that the Biden regime in the US was likely to remain preoccupied with matters of human rights and freedom across the globe and that the deep convergence earlier struck between India and Trump Presidency on global security issues might not be fully in play, China might get the sense that the Biden administration would not focus on it if on LAC a willingness on the part of the Chinese to move towards resolution, could be demonstrated. Also, it is a fact that India has in the times of Prime Minister Modi demonstrated its political resolve and worked for prioritisation of defence preparations -- this was evident in the military consolidation quickly carried out by the Indian army in the Ladakh sector for giving an effective response to China's aggressive moves.

China is aware of the reality of India's readiness to retaliate against any misadventure of PLA at LAC anywhere from Ladakh to Arunachal on the one hand and actively join up with multilateral initiatives to check Chinese violations in Indo-Pacific as a part of India's strategy for securing the Indian Ocean, on the other. Alliance with Pakistan has brought little help to China in making any gains internationally beyond the economic advantage it has achieved through CPEC and the Pak silence it has bought on the issue of mistreatment of Muslims in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China. Prime Minister Imran Khan's unmitigated hostility towards India is reflected in his response to the renewal by the two DGMOs of 'cease-fire agreement' with India on LoC last week following a higher level consultation between the two countries. He welcomed the development but used the occasion to demand early fulfilment of the 'right of self determination of the people of Kashmir in accordance with UN resolutions'.

India can keep China on a tight rope on the border and at the same time reserve its right to deal a crippling blow to Pakistan on the question of cross-border terrorism -- notwithstanding an unlikely joint move of these two neighbours against this country, on the borders. Something has to be done also to put a stop to the new threat of Pakistan and China coordinating to aggravate the 'proxy war' against India by covertly fishing in the troubled waters here -- from Punjab to the North-East. Internal security of India was never in need of greater attention than what it requires at present.

Under Prime Minister Modi, India has been served well by a policy framework that did not have any ideological baggage of the past, favoured bilateral relations on the basis of mutual economic and security interests, supported multilateral endeavours for global security and peace, attached special importance to friendship with South-East Asian neighbours and sought a united stand of the democratic world against the new global threat of faith-based terrorism. Having brought up India's status to the position of an influencer in world affairs, Modi has put into operation the much needed policy of making a large country like India self-reliant and self-sufficient in economic and defence spheres.

This is having a sobering effect on China -- as it realised that gaining small territorial advantage locally on the border at the cost of strategic relationship between the two nations would make no sense and that an overhang of legacy of the doctrine of 'two steps forward one step backward' would not work in today's world, particularly in relation to a major power like India. India should handle China judiciously after carefully monitoring its responses at LAC and in other spheres of bilateral relationship. China's unholy alliance with Pakistan is for India a major impediment in moving towards a fruitful India-China relationship and President Xi Jinping can surely see that.

PAK PM WINS VOTE OF CONFIDENCE,
OPPOSITION LEADERS MANHANDLED
OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT

ISLAMABAD, (IANS) As Prime Minister Imran Khan successfully attained the vote of confidence from the Parliament, members of the opposition leadership, which had boycotted the session, got manhandled by supporters of the ruling party outside Parliament house. Tensions ran high as leaders of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), who were present outside the parliament, were harassed and manhandled by supporters of the ruling party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). During the brawl, shoes were hurled at PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal, while Dr. Musaddiq Malik and Mariyum Aurangzeb were attacked and manhandled. PML-N leaders alleged they were harassed and manhandled by PTI supporters, adding that there was no police or security for their protection. Opposition members of the parliament have condemned the incident. Mohsin Dawar said on Twitter: "Shame on PTI's thugs who attacked @Marriyum_A, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Musadik Malik, @betterpakistan& other PMLN leaders. This takes PTI thuggery to a new high from 2014. It's a dangerous precedent & is taking situation towards direct confrontation. PM should show responsibility."

Former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said, "Such behaviour was reflective of the PTI's tactics. I challenge them to a face off on the road in front of the cameras."

PML-N's Mariyum Aurangzeb also raged at the government saying that there is not prime minister in the country. "There is no prime minister in this country; instead there is a thug, bully and a terrorist. They want to secure a vote of confidence through bullying and terrorism," she said. On the other hand, Ahsan Iqbal, the Prime Minister's focal person for digital media, has denied that his party supporters began the scuffle, stating that it was PML-N leaders, who began the fight.

UNSMOKE CANADA AND
TERRACYCLE TO REDUCE CIGARETTE
WASTE NATIONWIDE

TORONTO- Unsmoke Canada and international recycling leader, TerraCycle are launching a multi-year, community-based recycling partnership to collect and recycle the world's most littered item: cigarette butts.

In Canada, an estimated 8,000 tonnes of cigarette butts are littered each year, the majority within three metres of an ash-tray. Contrary to popular belief, cigarette butts are non-biodegradable and contain filters made from cellulose acetate, which can take up to 15 years to decompose. The free, national UNSMOKE Cigarette Recycling Program will aim to divert hundreds of thousands of butts each month from the ground and landfills. The new partnership builds on the work Unsmoke Canada began in 2019 to combat littering in local communities. A pillar of Unsmoke Canada is to reduce smoking and, consequently, the effect it has on people, on communities and on the environment.

"We want to build a smoke-free future, which is a future without cigarettes. This has an impact not only on people but also on communities and on the environment. This partnership is an example of how we are making tangible and measurable improvements to the problem of cigarette butt littering," said Vasie Papadopoulos, Communications Manager at Rothman's Benson & Hedges Inc., the company which started Unsmoke Canada. "We are looking forward to working with TerraCycle and communities to help clean up and appropriately recycle cigarette litter."

"TerraCycle's cigarette recycling programs have already had great success across Canada," said Tom Szaky, Founder and CEO of TerraCycle. "This partnership with Unsmoke Canada will create even more opportunities for Canadians to dispose of their cigarettes in a responsible way, helping to keep shorelines, sidewalks and communities clean."

To join the UNSMOKE Cigarette Recycling Program, community organizations can sign up on the TerraCycle program page here. For every pound of cigarette waste collected by the program, Unsmoke Canada will donate \$1 to the community group's non-profit or charity of choice.

"The message of Unsmoke Canada is clear - if you don't smoke, don't start. If you smoke, quit. If you don't quit, change," said Papadopoulos. "Unsmoke Canada is committed to a smoke-free future, one without cigarettes. This partnership is about creating a smoke-free and waste-free future."

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CHIEF EDITOR & CEO
yudhvir@southasiandaily.com
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CONTENT EDITORDR. PUSHPINDER BRAR
CONTRIBUTING WRITERSIA LAKHANPAL
REBECCA TANDON
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GTA Home and Condo Sales Reach New Heights for February: Toronto Regional Real Estate Board

TORONTO – Record home sales in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) continued in February as buyers remained confident in their employment situations and took advantage of ultra-low borrowing costs. With multiple buyers continuing to compete for many available listings, double-digit annual price growth was the norm throughout the GTA, with stronger rates of growth in the suburbs surrounding the City of Toronto. GTA REALTORS® reported 10,970 sales through TRREB's MLS® System in February 2021 – a 52.5 per cent increase compared to 7,193 sales reported in February 2020. Looking at all areas of the GTA combined, the condominium apartment segment led the way with a 64 per cent sales increase compared to last year, with similar rates of increase in the '416' and '905' area codes. "It's clear that the historic demand for housing experienced in the second half of last year has carried forward into the first quarter of this year with some similar themes, including the continued popularity of suburban low-rise properties. It's also evident that the supply of listings is not keeping up with demand, which could present an even larger problem once population growth picks up following widespread vaccinations later this year and into 2022," said TRREB President Lisa Patel. The MLS® Home Price Index Composite Benchmark was up by 14.8 per

cent year-over-year in February 2021. Over the same period, the average selling price was up by 14.9 per cent to \$1,045,488. While market conditions were tight throughout the GTA region in February, the detached, semi-detached and townhouse market segments in suburban areas were the drivers of average price growth, with annual rates of increase above 20 per cent in all three cases. "In the absence of a marked uptick in inventory, the current relationship between demand and supply supports continued double-digit average home price growth this year. In addition, if we continue to see growth in condo sales outstrip growth in new condo listings in Toronto, renewed price growth in this market segment is a distinct possibility in the second half of the year," said TRREB Chief Market Analyst Jason Mercer. "The pandemic has not stunted GTA residents' appetite for owning a home. Once the economy opens further and immigration into the GTA resumes, there will be an even greater need for housing supply. Understandably, COVID-19 has been front and centre for policymakers. However, it will be important to build upon the proactive work already started by local and provincial governments to promote the development of a more diverse and affordable housing supply in our region," said TRREB CEO John DiMichele.

ONTARIO LIBERAL LEADER STEVEN DEL DUCA SPEAKS OUT IN SUPPORT OF DUMP TRUCK INDUSTRY

TORONTO- Ontario Liberal Leader Steven Del Duca, who was the longest serving Transportation Minister in a quarter century, has spoken out in support of the Ontario dump truck industry coalition and its dontdumponus.ca campaign.

"During my time as Transportation Minister I became well acquainted with the hard working members of the dump truck industry and while we didn't always agree, we worked together." Says Del Duca. "In fact in 2016 our government signed an agreement calling for joint resolutions on matters related to SPIF and the industry. It's disappointing to see that agreement has not been honoured by Doug Ford and these job killing requirements have been imposed, in the middle of a pandemic, without collaboration, communication or consultation."

The agreement was signed with the involvement of ministry officials, lawyers, the minister's office and industry stakeholders. The SPIF program was put under review.

The SPIF rules in dispute took effect in January 2021 and require dump trucks more than 15 years old to undergo expensive axle retrofits (\$20,000 - \$40,000), operate at significantly reduced loads, or get off the road. The measures (SPIF - Safe Productive Infrastructure Friendly) are designed to reduce road wear and the trucks are regularly inspected for safety.

The SPIF compliant axles are mandatory in trucks manufactured from 2011 on. More than 1000 dump trucks manufactured prior are now deemed non-compliant. The measures apply only to four categories of trucks used mainly in the construction industry. The coalition is asking for the older trucks to be grandfathered for their full life span as other impacted trucks such as cement trucks and fuel trailers have been (20-25 years). Only the dump trucks have not been accommodated.

Aus state rejects plan to quarantine int'l students

CANBERRA, (IANS) A plan to quarantine international students arriving in the Australian state of Tasmania will not go ahead as initially planned, local officials said on Tuesday. New South Wales (NSW) Treasurer Dominic Perrottet told local parliament on Monday that he had been working with officials in Tasmania to devise a deal whereby international students are quarantined in Hobart city, before being moved to NSW. Xinhua news agency reported citing a Sydney Morning Herald report.

The plan was an attempt to get around strict limits on the number of overseas arrivals each Australian jurisdiction can process.

However, Tasmanian Premier Peter Gutwein said in a statement on Tuesday morning that due to public health concerns the deal was no longer being considered.

"The Tasmanian government confirms it has received an approach from the NSW government to quarantine international students on their behalf," Gutwein said.

"At this time, however, we have advised this is not under consideration with our priority remaining the safe management of seasonal workers entering the state and our own international students when public health advice is that it is safe to do so."

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CANADA AND ONTARIO INVEST TO CREATE A COMMUNITY YOUTH HUB AT SOUTH FLETCHER'S SPORTSPLEX IN BRAMPTON

Sonia Sidhu, Member of Parliament for Brampton South, on behalf of the Honourable Catherine McKenna, Federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities; the Honorable PrabmeetSarkaria, Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction and Member of Provincial Parliament for Brampton South, on behalf of the Honourable Laurie Scott, Ontario's Minister of Infrastructure; Amarjot Sandhu, Member of Provincial Parliament for Brampton West; and His Worship Patrick Brown, Mayor of the City of Brampton, announced funding for the rehabilitation of the South Fletcher's Sportsplex to create a new Youth Hub in Brampton.

The Government of Canada is investing \$565,000 in this project through the Community, Culture and Recreation Infrastructure Stream (CCRIS) of the Investing in Canada plan. The Government of Ontario is providing \$470,786 in funding, while the City of Brampton is providing \$376,714 toward this project. The project will create a new Youth Hub by removing multiple small rooms in the South Fletcher's Sportsplex to provide an open concept space conducive to group activities, while maintaining one to three smaller rooms for individual consultation. Once complete, the project will provide Brampton youth with a safe and

accessible space to complete school work, participate in programming and benefit from various resources and services. The creation of the Youth Hub is part of the City of Brampton's Parks and Recreation Master Plan, a renewal plan for Brampton's recreation centres.

All orders of government continue to work together for the people of Ontario to make strategic infrastructure investments in communities across the province when they are needed most.

Quotes

"Investing in recreation centres promotes people's health and well-being and builds inclusiveand sustainable communities where people want to live, work and raise families. The SouthFletcher's Youth Hub will provide Brampton youth of all backgrounds, a safe space to participatein, and benefit from. The diverse range of programs and services offered will also contribute tofuture community development. Canada's infrastruc-ture plan invests in thousands of projects,creates jobs across the coun-try, and builds cleaner, more inclusive communities."

-Sonia Sidhu, Member of Parliament for Brampton South, on behalf of the Honourable CatherineMcKenna, Federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities

Ontario Provides Additional Support for Brampton During COVID-19 Financial relief will help ensure the delivery of critical services and keep capital projects on track

The Ontario government is providing \$14,697,948 to help Brampton address ongoing COVID-19-related operating costs. The new finan-cial relief will help ensure the delivery of critical services during the pandemic and keep capital projects on track. "This much needed additional support funding for the City of Brampton will address ongo-ing COVID-19 related operational costs to ensure the delivery of criti-cal services," said Amarjot Sandhu, Member of Provincial Parlia-ment for Brampton West, "this ensures we keep capital projects on track to maintain stability as we plan for the year ahead." "We know that Brampton needs ongoing operating funding support during the COVID19 pandemic, said PrabmeetSarkaria, Minister of Small Busi-ness and Red Tape Reduction and Member of Provincial Parliamt for Brampton South. "This new financial relief will help ensure the delivery of critical services and keep capital projects on track in the City of Brampton." Today's announcement is part of the province's \$500 million investment to help ensure the stability of Ontario's 444 municipalities as they plan for the year ahead. The funding is being prioritized to help municipalities hardest hit by the pandemic and can be used for things like personal protective equipment, cleaning sup-plies and by-law enforcement. "Our government continues to adapt

and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as it evolves, and we know our municipal partners are on the front lines of this effort - providing the critical services people depend on every day," said Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. "Our municipalities have been clear that they need ongoing operating funding in 2021, and it is important that we step up and provide that support so our municipal partners can continue to deliver the services Ontarians rely on each and every day." This provincial investment builds on the \$1.39 billion in operating funding that was provided to municipal partners through the joint federal-provincial Safe Restart Agreement. The second phase of the Safe Restart Agreement was allocated to all Ontario munici-palities in December, to ensure that no community entered 2021 fac-ing an operating deficit from 2020. "Municipalities are important part-ners in the fight against COVID-19," said Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board. "We know the global pandemic has created significant financial challenges for communi-ties across the province. That's why we have been there with support from the very beginning. I encourage our federal partners to step forward with additional investments as all three governments work together to protect people's health and jobs."

ONTARIO TRAINING PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS FOR LOCAL JOBS IN MISSISSAUGA GOVERNMENT FUNDING WILL SUPPORT TRAINING OF 33 NURSES

Nina Tangri, MPP for Mississauga-Streetsville, announced the Ontariogovernment is connecting workers with good jobs in their communities via the Canada-OntarioJob Grant. Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada in Mississauga is receiving \$171,417.00 tohelp pay for the costs of training 33 participants with National Association of Career Colleges(NACC) certified Personal Support Worker (PSW) training that will allow them to work in acommunity and homecare settings.

The purpose of the Canada Ontario Job Grant is to encourage employers to invest in the skillsof jobseekers and their employees. The program provides direct financial support to employerswho wish to purchase training for their workforce. Employers can choose training that meetstheir workforce needs and identify who they would like to have trained. Training costs areshared between employers and government.

"Personal Support Workers have been at the forefront of our collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic in our community," said MPP Tangri. "This \$171,417 investment will help train 33participants to deliver the high-quality care that Ontarians deserve and expect."The Canada-Ontario Job Grant provides employers up to \$10,000 per worker that takes eligibletraining. For small employers and companies with less than 100 employees, the program cancover up to 83 per cent of the training costs. If they are training and hiring unemployed workersthat coverage can rise to 100 per cent and up to \$15,000 per unemployed worker who receivestraining. Larger companies (100 or more employees) can receive coverage for half of thetraining costs."The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the demand for personal support workers. With anaging population, this demand will only increase with time", said Monte McNaughton, Minister ofLabour, Training and Skills Development. "Our government is helping cover the costs of trainingneeded for PSWs, so we meet the health needs of Ontario residents for years to come and putan end to hallway healthcare."



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SCINDIA COULD HAVE BEEN CM IN CONG BUT NOW BJP BACKBENCHER: RAHUL



THOSE PRESENT AT THE CLOSED-DOOR MEETING OF THE INDIAN YOUTH CONGRESS SAID RAHUL DID MENTION SCINDIA, BUT YOUTH CONGRESS PRESIDENT SRINIVAS B V SAID THE FORMER PARTY CHIEF DID NOT MAKE ANY SUCH REMARKS.

Former Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who left the Congress a year ago, could have become chief minister in the natural course had he stayed in the party but is now relegated to the back benches in the BJP, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is said to have remarked on Monday. Those present at the closed-door meeting of the Indian Youth Congress said Rahul did mention Scindia, but Youth Congress president Srinivas B V said the former party chief did not make any such remarks. Stating that Rahul did not take anybody's name, Srinivas

said, "He only asked us to work hard and not think or be bothered about who is coming into the party and who is leaving.... He told us to fight against the BJP and the RSS, and to not be scared." But sources said Rahul was talking about the virtue of patience and the Congress organisation, and in that context said Scindia could have become the chief minister had he stayed in the party. Rahul is learnt to have said that the BJP will never make Scindia the chief minister, and that he is now a backbencher there.

‘ONE-SIDED, FALSE ASSERTIONS’: INDIA CONDEMNS UK LAWMAKERS’ DEBATE ON FARMERS’ STIR

The High Commission of India in London has condemned a debate among some British lawmakers on an e-petition over the right of peaceful protests and freedom of the press in India amid the ongoing farmers' stir against three New Delhi laws on agricultural reform. The Commission damned the debate, held on Monday evening inside the British parliamentary premises, as "false assertions" in a "distinctly one-sided discussion". "We deeply regret that rather than a balanced debate, false assertions — without substantiation or facts — were made, casting aspersions on the largest functioning democracy in the world and its institutions," the commission said in a statement after the Monday evening debate on an e-petition. The debate was held in response to an e-petition which had crossed the 100,000-signature threshold, required for it to be approved by the House of Commons Petitions Committee. The Indian High Commission made its displeasure known despite the British government earlier reiterating that the three New Delhi laws on agricultural reform were a "domestic matter". The British government also underlined India's importance, saying "India and the UK together work as a force for good in the UN Security Council and bilateral cooperation between the two countries helps fix many global problems". In its statement, the Indian mission also pointed out that foreign media, including British media, had been present and witnessed the events surrounding the farmers' protests in India first-hand and therefore any "question of lack of freedom of the media in India does not arise". It lamented that a false narrative over farmers' protest was sought to be developed even though "the High Commission of India has been, over a period of time, taking care to inform all concerned about the issues raised in the petition." The High Commission said it was compelled to react to the lawmakers' debate due to

the apprehensions cast on India. "The High Commission of India would normally refrain from commenting on an internal discussion involving a small group of Honourable Parliamentarians in a limited quorum," the statement said. "However, when aspersions are cast on India by anyone, irrespective of their claims of friendship and love for India or domestic political compulsions, there is a need to set the record straight," it added. The statement followed a group of around dozen cross-party British MPs debating issues around the alleged "use of force" against protesters opposed to agricultural reforms in India and journalists being targeted while covering the protests. As the British government minister deputed to respond to the debate, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Minister Nigel Adams said the close UK-India relationship did not hinder the UK in any way from raising difficult issues with India, even as he reiterated the government line that agricultural reforms are a "domestic matter" for India. "This is a time of great ambition for the UK's relationship with India. Both governments are working to advance shared priorities across trade and investment, health, sustainability and climate change and defence and security," said Adams. "We are also working with India as a force for good in the UN Security Council and as one of the Prime Minister's [Boris Johnson] guest countries at the G7 summit later this year in June. This cooperation will help us fix global problems and it will strengthen prosperity and wellbeing in India and the UK," he said. "However, whilst this is an exciting time for the UK-India partnership, it does not hinder us from raising difficult issues," the minister said, adding that, "candid discussions" on a range of issues will form part of Boris Johnson's planned visit to India in the coming months.

Covid-19 vaccine rollout by India has 'rescued the world' from pandemic, says top US scientist

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The country is one of the world's biggest drug-makers and an increasing number of countries have already approached it for procuring coronavirus vaccines. Dr Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) in Houston during a recent webinar said that the two mRNA vaccines may not impact the world's low and middle income countries, but India's vaccines, made in collaboration with universities across the world such as BCM and the Oxford University, have "rescued the world" and its contributions must not be underestimated. During the webinar, "Covid-19: Vaccination and Potential Return to Normalcy - If and When" , Dr Hotez, an internationally-recognised physician-scientist in neglected tropical diseases and vaccine development, said that the Covid-19 vaccine rollout is "India's gift" to the world in combating the virus. India's drugs regulator gave emergency use authorisation to Covishield, produced by Pune-based Serum Institute of India after securing licence from British pharma company AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, indigenously developed jointly by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech and Indian Council of Medical Research scientists. The webinar was organised by Indo American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston (IACCGH). "This is something very special and I see it myself because I'm on weekly teleconferences with our colleagues in India, you make a recommendation, and within days it's done and not only done, but it's done well and with incredible rigor and thought and creativity," Dr Hotez said, stressing that he felt compelled to make this statement because "India's huge efforts in combating global pandemic is a story that's not really getting out in the world." Dr Hotez, considered as the authority on vaccinations, is working on an affordable coronavirus vaccine in collaboration with Indian pharmaceutical companies. There is increasing evidence that vaccines not only "interrupt symptomatic illness and keep you out of the hospital" but halts asymptomatic transmission as well. However, the troubling news is that the vaccines work well against the UK B.1.1.7 variant, which is now accelerating across the US, but doesn't work quite as well against the variant coming out of South Africa. It is likely that all the vaccines will require a booster for two reasons: the durability of protection for the

Independence Day panel meets, PM Modi to kick off celebrations on March 12

STRESSING THAT people's participation is at the core of celebrations to mark 75 years of India's independence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Monday that the occasion will be an "opportunity to showcase to the world our achievements since 1947". The Prime Minister was delivering a video address at the first meeting of the national committee to commemorate 75 years of independence with celebrations titled Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav. Modi chaired the meeting that was attended by more than 150 of the committee's 259 members, who gave inputs and suggestions to expand the scope of the celebrations. According to sources, there will be more such meetings in the future where suggestions and inputs will be considered. The aim of the first meeting was to apprise members of the Government's roadmap to kick off the celebrations from Sabarmati on March 12, 75 weeks before India turns 75 on August 15, 2022. On the day, a dedicated website and logo will be unveiled by the Prime Minister. The date also marks the 91st anniversary of the Dandi March, with the inaugural event extending to April 5, which denotes the culmination of the civil disobedience campaign led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930. According to the Government, the members who gave inputs and suggestions included former President Pratibha Patil, former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Congress leader Mallikarjuna Kharge, former Speakers Meira Kumar and Sumitra Mahajan, BJP chief J P Nadda and spiritual scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. "The country will celebrate the occasion of 75 years of independence with grandeur and enthusiasm befitting the historic nature, glory and importance of the occasion," Modi said while praising "new ideas" and "diverse thoughts" from members of the committee. The Prime Minister said that the festival should be one in which the spirit of India's freedom struggle could be experienced all over again. "This festival should embody the glory of Sanatan Bharat and the glow of modern India... (It) should reflect the light of the spirituality of the sages and also the talent and strength of our scientists," he said. According to sources, the Sabarmati event on March 12 will showcase India's achievements of the last 75 years with focus on technological advancements, and provide a framework for the next 25 years when the country turns 100.

Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Organization holds an Interfaith Symposium to commemorate International Women's Day

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association hosted a virtual interfaith event for women on Sunday March 7, 2021, 'Does a Creator Exist' to commemorate International Women's Day and bring together women from all different beliefs for interfaith dialogue. The virtual event was attended by over 200 women as well as dignitaries from Local Vaughan Council and representatives from York Regional Police and the YRDSB. Guest speakers included Laya Witty, a lawyer representing Judaism, Dr. Ragini Sharma representing Hinduism, Reverend Emma Pipes representing Christianity and Dr. Alia Raheem representing Islam. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association is an auxiliary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. This group of women, known as Lajna, are engaged in community service and outreach throughout the year. They have responded to the pandemic by quickly switching to a virtual platform for an event that has been historically held in person at their headquarters in Vaughan, Ontario. Guests appreciated the opportunity to attend the event in a space dedicated to women where different views were shared and thought-provoking talks occurred. Women from the community look forward to this event each year as a basis for spreading peace and love in society and furthering their motto of "Love for All Hatred For None." The Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association looks forward to hosting an in-person event once the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and is honoured that they are able to host this event each year around International Women's Day.

ED SEARCHES PUNJAB MLA SUKHPAL KHAIRA PROPERTIES

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The official said that searches were going on at five locations in Punjab, one in Chandigarh and two locations in Delhi. He said that ED's officials also carried out searches at the residence of Khaira's son-in-law Inder Veer Johal here in Delhi. Sharing the details of the case, the ED official said that the drugs case was registered in Punjab's Fazilka after 1,800 grams of heroin, 24 gold biscuits, two weapons and some live cartridges, some Pakistani SIM cards were recovered. In that case, which was registered by the Punjab Police, conviction has already happened. The official said that Khaira was associated with some of the convicted in this drugs case, and that was the reason why the financial probe agency carried out searches at his premises. Sharing the details of the fake passport racket case, the officer said that in this case also Khaira has been associated with the people named in the case. However, Khaira denied any wrongdoing. His counsel blamed the raid for supporting the ongoing farmers' agitation. Senior advocate R.S. Bains, who reached Khaira's residence, told the media that the raid was conducted to target those supporting the ongoing farmers' agitation against three new agricultural laws. On March 8, Khaira supported the farmers by tweeting, "Our women farmers are our strength. They are sitting in the protest alongside men from last three months as well. They also know that how these laws will affect their lives. Their presence in the protest gives us double power." In 2019, Khaira floated a new regional political outfit, the Punjabi Ekta Party, and vowed to give a clean alternative to the people of the state.

DAY NOT FAR WHEN COUNTRY WILL BE NAMED AFTER MODI: MAMATA

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee on Monday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the day was not far when the country would be named after him. "The Prime Minister has named a stadium after himself. He has put his photographs on Covid-19 vaccination certificates. He has turned the Covid vaccine to Modi vaccine. A day will come when the country will be named after him," Banerjee said after leading a women's day rally from College Square to the Dorina crossing in Esplanade. Actors such as Saayoni Ghosh, Sayantika Banerjee, and June Malia participated in the "Didir Sathe Amra (We are with Didi)" march. Tearing into Modi for questioning women's safety in Bengal — the Prime Minister made such remarks at his Brigade Parade Ground rally in Kolkata on Sunday — Banerjee said, "See what you [BJP] did in UP, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Media reports say that there have been two murders and four rapes on an average daily in Gujarat in the last two years... Ahmedabad and Modi's favourite UP are at the top of the list of incidents of rape in the country." The Chief Minister said, "In Bengal, women are safe even at midnight... But in those states, women are not safe even at 3 pm.... Our women work here."

IN PUNJAB BUDGET AHEAD OF POLL YEAR, FARM LOAN WAIVER, NO NEW TAXES

Ahead of the Assembly election, which is due early next year, Punjab Finance Minister Manpreet Badal Monday presented a "poll oriented" budget for the financial year 2021-22 with an outlay of Rs 1,68,015 crore offering a slew of populist measures while making bulk of its provisions for agriculture, urban development, water resources, health and other sectors. Presenting the last budget of the Congress government, Manpreet dedicated it to the farmers who are protesting against the Centre's three agri laws. While deciding against levying any fresh taxes, Manpreet announced the next phase of the crop loan waiver, with an allocation of Rs 1,712 crore, including Rs 1,186 crore of 1.13 lakh farmers and Rs 526 crore of landless farm workers. Already, the state government has given a debt relief of Rs 4,624 crore to 5.83 lakh small and marginal growers. With an eye to revive the economy affected by the Covid disruption, the finance minister also announced that shops and all commercial establishments will now remain open 24x7. The free power to the farmers will continue as before, Manpreet said, allotting Rs 7,180 crore for the purpose. He informed the House that in the past four years, the Amarinder Singh-led government had provided free power to 14.23 lakh farmers amounting to Rs 23,851 crore. Manpreet said the state government intended to recruit against one lakh vacancies in a phased manner.

WEST BENGAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2021: FIVE MORE TMC MLAS JOIN BJP



In a significant development ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections, five sitting Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLAs and a party candidate who was allotted a seat from Habibpur for upcoming polls joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday. TMC MLAs Sonali Guha, Dipendu Biswas, Rabindranath Bhattacharya, Sital Kumar Sardar and Jatu Lahiri joined the BJP in the presence of West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh, party vice president Mukul Roy and party leader Suvendu Adhikari. Sarala Murmu, TMC leader who was allotted a party ticket to contest from Habibpur, has joined the BJP despite making the fact that her name was mentioned in the candidate list in West Bengal this election season. There has been an

exodus of leaders from TMC to BJP in the last few months in the poll-bound West Bengal. Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday released the list of 291 candidates for the forthcoming Assembly polls. Following this, BJP on Saturday released its first list of 57 candidates for the polls and fielded Adhikari from Nandigram against TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, setting the stage for a high-profile contest from the seat in the state Assembly elections. West Bengal Assembly elections will be held in eight phases starting from March 27 with the final round of voting taking place on April 29. The counting of votes will take place on May 2.

PM NARENDRA MODI SALUTES 'INDOMITABLE NARI SHAKTI' ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Lauding the women of India on the occasion of International Women's Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday (March 8) said it is the government's honour to work towards further empowering women in the country. Using the #NariShakti hashtag, PM Modi tweeted that the country takes immense pride in the many accomplishments of Indian women. "Saluting our indomitable #NariShakti on International Women's Day! India takes pride in the many accomplishments of the women of our nation. It is our Government's honour to be getting the opportunity to work towards furthering women empowerment across a wide range of sectors," PM Modi said. President Ram Nath Kovind also extended his wishes on International Women's Day and said, "On the occasion of International Women's Day, greetings and best wishes to all fellow citizens. Women in our country are setting new records and achievements in various fields. Let us collectively resolve to promote gender justice and eliminate inequality between women and men." The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "Choose To Challenge".

CHINA TALKS PEACE, PARTNERSHIP, PROSPERITY WITH INDIA

NEW DELHI/BEIJING, (IANS) China on Sunday talked peace, partnership and prosperity with India, insisting that it is committed to settling the boundary dispute with New Delhi through dialogue and consultations. After troops of both countries disengaged along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh last month, New Delhi had warned Beijing over a week ago that it was not in the interest of either side to prolong the remaining boundary issues. At his annual press meet, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Sunday said that the right and wrong of what happened in the border area last year are clear, so are the stakes involved. "It again proves initiating confrontation will not solve the problem. Returning to peaceful negotiation is the right way forward," he said. China's position, he said, is very clear. "We are committed to settling the boundary dispute through dialogue and consultations," he said, adding that at the same time the Xi Jinping regime has resolved to safeguard its sovereign rights and interest. The foreign minister said, "China and India are each other's friends and partners and not threats and rivals. Both need to help each other succeed instead of undercutting each other, we should intensify cooperation instead of harbouring suspicion over each other." The boundary dispute, an issue left from history, is not the whole story of the China-India relationship, he said. "It is important that the two sides manage the dispute properly and at the same time expand and enhance cooperation to create enabling conditions for settlement of the issue." Following the disengagement along the LAC in the Pangong Tso area, there has been no progress over other disputes in the Gogra-Hot Springs area, Demchok and Depsang plains. However, on Sunday, Wang said it falls on both sides to solidify existing consensus, strengthen dialogue and communication and improve the various management mechanisms to jointly safeguard peace and tranquillity in the border areas. In the year ahead, he said, Beijing hoped that India will work with China to truly deliver on an important common understanding of the leaders of the two countries that India and China are not threats to each other but opportunities to each other's development. Together, the Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi governments can bring greater benefit to the people of China and India, and make a greater contribution to efforts for an Asian century, the Chinese Foreign Minister said. The China-India relationship, he argued, is essentially about how the world's two largest developing countries get along and pursue development and rejuvenation together, he said that. "As two ancient civilizations next door, and two major emerging economies each with over one billion people, China and India have broad common interests and tremendous potential for cooperation," Wang pointed out.

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